

L E A D E R G U I D E

SERMON

ON THE

MOUNT

PART ONE





GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS STUDY

We don't want this curriculum to be just another study that you do, we want it to positively impact your life and your walk with Christ. The goal is that you finish this study a different person than when you began. To that end, you'll find three sections in this book:

SERMON NOTES: The sermons each week will serve as your introduction to each topic, therefore faithfully and actively listening to the sermons is vitally important. Use this space to write down any notes that will help you remember the material covered. Jot down any quotes or thoughts that were meaningful to you and any questions that may come up during the sermon.

PERSONAL STUDY: You need to be in the Word yourself outside of your group time. To help you do this, we've provided space for you to record H.E.A.R. journals. The H.E.A.R. journaling method is a way to read the Bible with a life-transforming purpose. The acronym H.E.A.R. stands for Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond. We'll walk through the H.E.A.R. method in detail on the following page.

GROUP STUDY: The group study is where you will take a closer look at the week's passage from a different perspective. This is the time to share any insights you gleaned from the sermon and the time you spent in personal study completing the H.E.A.R. journal. It is recommended that you listen to the sermon and complete the H.E.A.R. journal before you attend the group discussion so that you will be most equipped to contribute to the discussion, which will provide the most benefit for everyone.

Above and beyond all the advice given here, the most important thing that you can do to maximize the effect of this study in your life is to pray for God to enlighten you to the teachings of Jesus and to give you the wisdom and strength to be faithful and obedient to everything you learn. Rely upon the Holy Spirit to make this study relevant and powerful in your life and you will undoubtedly be changed.

H.E.A.R.

HIGHLIGHT - After reading the passage of Scripture, highlight each verse that speaks to you by copying it in the space provided. Write out the passage along with the name of the book and the chapter and verse numbers. If you want to, give the passage a short title to describe it.

EXPLAIN - At this stage you will explain what the text means. By asking some simple questions, with the help of God's Spirit, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Why was this written?

To whom was it originally written?

How does it fit with the verses before and after it?

Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?

What is He intending to communicate through this text?

APPLY - This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, answer a series of questions to uncover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like:

How can this help me?

What does this mean today?

What would the application of this verse look like in my life?

What does this mean to me?

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. You may write a call to action. You may describe how you will be different because of what God has said to you through His Word. You may indicate what you are going to do because of what you have learned. You may respond by writing out a prayer to God. For example, you may ask God to help you to be more loving, or to give you a desire to be more generous in your giving. Keep in mind that this is your response to what you have just read.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you."

[Matthew 7:7]

SERMON

ON THE

MOUNT

An Introduction

ONE. Anger

TWO. Lust

THREE. Divorce & Oaths

FOUR. Retaliation

FIVE. Love Your Enemy

THE GREAT THEME

of the entire Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 is the Kingdom of Heaven, or, the Kingdom of God. Anybody who has repented of their sin and placed their faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross is now part of this Kingdom. We call these Kingdom citizens “Christians.” At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, and as covered in the previous study, Jesus sums up the character of the Christian in what has come to be called the Beatitudes. The Kingdom citizen should be poor in spirit, mournful over their sin, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and joyfully enduring suffering for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:3-12). When these characteristics are faithfully demonstrated, then the Christian’s witness takes on certain aspects of salt and light, preserving the influence of God in the world and revealing the glory of God in the world (v. 13-16). Jesus then explains that the requirement for entrance into this Kingdom is a lifestyle of righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisee’s (v. 17-20), and where we pick up in this study is Jesus’ description of what that lifestyle entails.

To do this, Jesus proceeds to correct the people’s understanding of the law. A phrase that you’ll notice Jesus frequently say is something like this: “You have heard that it was said...but I say...” It is important to understand that Jesus is not overriding the Old Testament law, He is only correcting the people’s understanding of it. The Pharisee’s had been misinterpreting the Old Testament and as a result they were misapplying its teachings. Jesus is correcting this. What you will find in this study is that Jesus, having illustrated for us the lifestyle of the Christian, is unpacking for us various ways in which we now relate to others. In the next study that will follow this one, Jesus will unpack for us various ways that we relate to God.

In this study, Jesus discusses several weighty matters: anger, lust, adultery, divorce, etc. I want to warn you against closing yourself off from discussing these issues. They are deep, they are heavy, and for some of us they may be very painful to discuss. But I would encourage you to open yourself up to Jesus’ teaching and to take seriously what He has to say. At no point in this study are you meant to feel any undue condemnation or guilt. If you’ve repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ, then you stand before God completely innocent of every sin you’ve ever committed or ever will commit. Take heed of God’s promise of forgiveness and hold fast to the hope that you have in Christ.

But notice that I said you aren’t meant to feel any undue condemnation or guilt. If you’ve never repented of your sin and placed your faith in Christ, then a lot of what Jesus has to say in this study just may bring you a place of guilt and shame. Do not run from this; instead, run to the cross. It is at the cross where you will find that Christ absorbed all the wrath, condemnation, and guilt due to you for your sin and died in your place. Repent of your sins, place your trust in Christ, and call upon Him to save you. He is faithful.

I pray that this study will be a blessing to you. It has truly been a labor of love to be able to prepare this and present it to you. My hope is that the truths contained in these pages will propel you into a deeper relationship with Christ and that you will walk away from this study with a renewed sincerity of faith, a more robust understanding of your role as a Kingdom citizen, and a more beautiful picture of who Jesus is.

Kris Sinclair

Worship & Discipleship Pastor, FBCnl

ONE

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

[MATTHEW 5:21-26]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 5:21-26]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: Anger in our hearts is just as liable to punishment as the sin of murder, but not all anger is sinful. When we are angry about the same things that God is angry about, we are reflecting the nature of God. But when we are angry for selfish reasons, we are completely missing the heart of God and we render our worship to Him less sincere.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.

Often when people try to defend their inherent goodness, they make a statement like “Hey, I haven’t killed anyone!” But according to Jesus, even harboring anger in your heart towards someone is reason enough to face the same punishment as a murderer. The prohibition against murder in the Old Testament was taught by the Pharisees to extend only to actual murder, so Jesus corrected the teaching of the Pharisees by declaring that it prohibited all causeless anger in the heart, but it also prohibited something else:



READ MATTHEW 5:22. In addition to harboring anger internally, what else does Jesus say will make one liable to punishment?

Jesus takes the directive to its logical end by also condemning any outward expression of anger. If being angry with someone in your heart is a sin, then it only makes sense that to “insult your brother” and say to him “you fool!” is also a sin. Here we see the genius behind Jesus’ teaching. He shows us that the commandment not to murder is designed to reveal to us the source of our murdering, which is anger. But then he points out to us that murder is not the only product of anger, so are insults and harsh words. He starts with the extreme expression, takes it to the source, and then shows that every expression in between is also just as bad.

But is all anger sinful?



READ EPHESIANS 4:26. Paul tells the Ephesians to be angry and not sin. How is that possible?

Discuss this statement: “Anger is a by-product of love.” Is this true or false? If it is true, how can it be? If it is false, why is it?

Anger doesn't just spring up out of nowhere as some spontaneous emotion. There is always something that causes our anger and usually it comes when someone or something poses some form of threat to something that we love. For example, you might get angry when drivers speed down the street that your kids play on. This anger is right because the reckless driver is posing an unnecessary threat to your children. Your love for your children and your concern for their well-being is the source of your anger against the driver.

What other instances can you think of where anger might be justified?

Not only does Paul teach us that anger can be justified, but we also see Jesus Himself exhibit bouts of anger:

READ MATTHEW 21:12-13

MARK 3:3-6

MATTHEW 23:17

We know that Jesus never sinned (1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5), so these bouts of anger were not wrong for Jesus. But at the same time, we know that “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

Is there an inconsistency here? How can we reconcile JAMES 1:20 with Jesus' actions and Paul's teaching that we can be angry and not sin?

D.A. Carson provides incredible insight here:

"Indeed there is a place for burning with anger at sin and injustice. Our problem is that we burn with indignation and anger, not at sin and injustice, but at offense to ourselves. In none of the cases in which Jesus became angry was his personal ego wrapped up in the issue...Let us admit it—by and large we are quick to be angry when we are personally affronted and offended, and slow to be angry when sin and injustice multiply in other areas."

The reason that James doesn't conflict with Paul in his teaching on anger is because he says that the "anger of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God." It is the anger of God that we are supposed to imitate. And God is angry at injustice and sin, both of which are affronts to His holiness. Our anger is rarely ever directed at the same things that God's anger is.

READ VERSES 23 AND 24. Why is reconciliation given the priority over worship?

Jesus is insisting here that it is far more important to be reconciled to someone who has a dispute with you than to even bring your offering to God. Acting religiously despite being involved in an ongoing conflict with another person renders your actions as hypocritical and a sham. In today's terms, we would say to forget the Sunday morning service and go pursue peace with your brother, then come and worship with us. Again, I'll quote Carson: "Men love to substitute ceremony for integrity, purity, and love; but Jesus will have none of it."



Is there any unrighteous anger in your life that you need to repent of?

Is there a lack of righteous anger in your life that you need to repent of?

Is there anybody that you need to make amends with before the next worship service?

TWO

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

[MATTHEW 5:27-30]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 5:27-30]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: We must take drastic measures to combat the sin of lust, or else we run the risk of proving that we don't truly know the Lord.

NOTE: If you have a mixed group, we would prefer you separate into groups of men and women for this discussion.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



How prevalent do you think the sin of lust is in the world? How prevalent do you believe it is in the church? Why do you think this is the case?

One needs only to look at the recent headlines from the last year to see how prevalent the sins of adultery and lust are in the world. Our culture has almost completely disregarded this commandment and there is a growing acceptance of lustful behavior that is being propagated by a society that teaches that sexual fulfillment is the pinnacle of human existence. Our movies, music, and even our commercials are all laced with themes of infidelity and lust. Pornography is free, abundant, and easy to access. Sadly, the stronghold of lust has infiltrated the church as well. Countless church leaders have fallen into the sin of adultery, disqualifying them from ministry and bringing reproach upon Christ and His church. And countless, untold numbers of laypeople in the church, both men and women, struggle with this sin daily. The sin of lust is eating the church alive.

Do you agree with this analysis of the church? What can we do about this problem?



READ MATTHEW 5:27-30 and ask this question: “Which one of us is not guilty of committing adultery?”

According to Jesus, anyone who has entertained a lustful intent in his or her heart is guilty of the sin of adultery. What a sobering statement! If that is the case, then is **anyone** clean before God in matters of sexual fidelity? Just as we saw last week, that the heart-source of murder, anger, is what condemns a person, so also it is the heart-source of adultery, lust, that Jesus is addressing here. What Jesus is prohibiting can essentially be boiled down to covetousness; desiring something that is not yours, in this case, another person.

Discuss this statement by John Owen: “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

In verses 29 and 30, Jesus minces no words about how we should deal with the sin of lust. “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.” Jesus addresses the eye because it is with our eyes that we see and lust. “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” Jesus considers the hand as an active part of lust probably because lust is a kind of theft, robbing the subject of innocence and true passion, and robbing the object of dignity and respect. Is Jesus being literal in this prescription? Certainly not, for He is speaking in hyperbole—He’s exaggerating the issue to make a point: we must deal drastically with our sin. Whatever stumbling blocks lie in our path that cause us to fall into the sin of lust, we must forcibly remove.

READ ROMANS 8:10-17. What reasons does Paul give as to why we should “put to death the deeds of the body?”

Notice that Jesus says the person who doesn't gouge out his eye or sever his hand is thrown into hell. The person who refuses to fight against sin is someone who has surrendered to sin, therefore they are not repenting and they are not living out of a sanctifying faith in Christ. Christ's warning is severe, but it is much needed today. Unrepentance will send you to hell, and that is exactly why sin must be taken so seriously. John Owen's command is true; we must be actively involved in killing our sin, or it will be killing us.

What are some stumbling blocks in our lives that cause us to fall into the sin of lust? What drastic measures can we take to minimize this threat?

John Piper has an acrostic (**ANTHEM**) that he uses to help him fight against lust. Take the time to consider each of these items and to read the corresponding Scriptures:

A “**AVOID**,” as much as is possible and reasonable, the sights and situations that arouse unfitting desire. (2 Timothy 2:22; Romans 13:14)

N **SAY “NO”** to every lustful thought within five seconds. (James 4:7)

T “**TURN**” the mind forcefully toward Christ as a superior satisfaction, seeing lust as a deceitful desire that will not ultimately satisfy you. (Ephesians 4:22; 1 Peter 1:14; Proverbs 7:22)

H “**HOLD**” the promise and the pleasure of Christ firmly in your mind until it pushes the other images out. (Hebrews 12:2; cf. Matthew 11:12 for how hard we should fight in this step)

E “**ENJOY**” a superior satisfaction in Christ. (Psalm 90:14)

M “**MOVE**” into a useful activity away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors. (Romans 12:11; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Titus 2:14)

Training your mind to go through this process will help you to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). But don’t forget that ultimately, this is a battle of the heart. If you are continually given to this sin and you can’t seem to escape it, try to consider what it is in your heart that causes you to long for something or someone that is not yours. Why are you not content? In any case, when you give in to the temptation to lust, the first and only appropriate response is repentance. You must renew again your commitment to Christ and put yourself in a posture of surrender before the Lord. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9). Confess your sin to the Lord, plead with Him to create a clean heart within you (Psalm 51:10), and continue to fight.



What do you need to do to fight against the sin of lust?

THREE

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

[MATTHEW 5:31-37]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 5:31-37]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: Marriage is sacred because it is a symbol of the covenant between Christ and the church. Divorce is a distortion of this symbol and therefore God hates it.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



Why do you think the Bible speaks so strongly about divorce?



READ EPHESIANS 5:22-33. Why is it that marriage should be held in high regard by the Church? What is it designed by God to symbolize?

Naturally flowing from a conversation on lust and adultery, Jesus proceeds to discuss and correct His audience's understanding of divorce. Even today, the topic of divorce and remarriage is hard to come to a definite conclusion on and you will find people have many different interpretations about exactly what the Bible teaches. But in this conversation, Jesus couldn't be more clear about the point that He is trying to make. The Pharisee's had been teaching that someone could divorce their spouse for any reason they wanted if they gave them a certificate of divorce. But Jesus clarified that the only acceptable reason before God to constitute a divorce is sexual immorality on behalf of either spouse.

READ MATTHEW 19:3-9. What is the reason that Jesus gives as to why a husband and wife should not be separated?

What is the reason that Jesus gives as to why Moses permitted divorce?

In addressing the Pharisee's concerns, Jesus takes them back to the very beginning, showing them that God's intention was never to allow divorce. There was no allowance made for divorce when God instituted marriage. It was only because of the hardness of men's hearts that divorce ever came into the picture, and even after that, God declared that divorce is something that he hates (Malachi 2:16). In both the instances in Matthew, the only exception that Jesus gives to allow divorce is sexual immorality. But elsewhere in Scripture, the apostle Paul explains that there is another situation that allows grounds for divorce.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:12-15. In verse 15, what is the additional reason that Paul gives for allowing a husband and wife to divorce?

Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse is an additional reason why divorce may be permitted. But in both instances of adultery and desertion, it should be made known that divorce is **allowable**, it is not **commanded**. Obviously in both situations, the Lord's will is that there be reconciliation and healing. Resolution between the husband and wife is what results in the most joy for us and the most glory for God. We cannot deny that reconciliation is what God has initiated with us every time that we've deserted Him to go worship false idols, and if marriage is supposed to be a symbol of the relationship between Christ and His church, then a husband and wife who can work to resolve matters of infidelity and abandonment can more prominently display to the world a picture of God's mercy and faithfulness to us. Just as Paul told Timothy, "God is faithful, even when we are faithless, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:13 AGAIN. Why do you think Paul says that God's faithfulness is based on His inability to "deny himself?"

READ NUMBERS 23:19.

The reason Paul says that God is faithful even when we are faithless is because God does not base His faithfulness to us upon our faithfulness to Him, but upon His own promises to us. It is His word that is at stake. He has said that He will do it, so He will. No matter what. This is very hard for us to understand in a culture that teaches that loyalty should only be extended to those who exhibit it towards us. We do not follow Christ's command to "do unto others as [we] would have them do unto [us]." Instead, we've created our own Golden Rule—we "do unto others as they have done unto us."

Which leads us to the next point in the discussion and is another reason why we should seek to preserve our marriages rather than to dissolve them: covenant. Marriage between a man and a wife is a divinely instituted covenant (Matthew 19:6). A covenant is an oath that two parties enter into in which each party promises to pursue the good of the other. And what Jesus has to teach us about oaths is very pertinent to this matter.

READ MATTHEW 5:33-37.

Jesus first begins by overriding the Pharisee's teaching and saying that an oath shouldn't be taken at all. Now, to be clear, the Old Testament did not prohibit people from taking oaths, in fact it encouraged it (Deuteronomy 10:20; Numbers 30:2). These oaths were taken to encourage truthfulness. God Himself made a promise to mankind and then sealed that promise with an oath (Hebrews 6:17). But what was happening in this situation was that the Pharisees had developed a very complicated code as to what was considered an oath and what wasn't. In fact, it is recorded in the Jewish code of law called the **Mishna** that if you swear by Jerusalem, then you are not bound by your vow. But if you swear **toward** Jerusalem, then you are liable to fulfill everything you've spoken. The Pharisee's had added to God's law in a way that made the matter of oaths very confusing. So rather than trying to clarify, Jesus just did away with the system altogether.

Read again the list of things that Jesus says you shouldn't swear by and the reason why he says you shouldn't. Do you notice any kind of pattern here?

Jesus first says that we shouldn't swear by heaven, because it's the throne of God. God has absolute authority over heaven as the seat of His reign. Next he says that we shouldn't swear by the earth because it is God's footstool. Again, this is showing God has absolute authority over the earth. Then Jesus forbids swearing by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great King, and the King has absolute authority over His city. Finally, Jesus prohibits swearing by your own head "for you cannot make one hair white or black," meaning that you don't have any authority over your own head, but God does.

The obvious point that Jesus is trying to make is that God has absolute authority over everything, including your life, and including your words. If we are going to live our lives in the way that the Beatitudes describe, then our life will be surrendered to the authority of God, which makes every word that we utter submitted to the authority of the Lord. There is no need for swearing or for oaths; we can simply let our 'yes' be 'yes' and our 'no' be 'no.'

With this understanding of oaths and covenants, what does this say about the importance of keeping wedding vows and trying at all costs to avoid divorce?

When we decide to make a covenant with someone and supplement the "yes" of engagement with the "I do" of marriage, we are making a very strong commitment of faithfulness to the other person. We make this commitment before God and before the world who, whether they know it or not, is viewing a dramatic reenactment of the story of Christ and His bride. A story in which the King has set out to secure the most good for His bride and to win the most glory for Himself. By being faithful to our marriage vows, we are agreeing with God that faithfulness is for our greatest good and His greatest glory. And when our marriages persevere even through severe trials and tribulations, we are declaring to the world one of the most Gospel-saturated truths that exists, that "God is faithful, even when we are faithless" (2 Timothy 2:13).



Close the lesson by praying for and encouraging those in your group who may have been hurt by the pain of divorce. If need be, comfort them with the following truths:

If you've experienced a divorce, you may be feeling the weight of it right now. It's true that divorce is a gross mischaracterization of the relationship between Christ and the church, but the same is true for any sin that we commit, therefore we are all guilty of this. The amazing thing about the Gospel is that no matter what we do in our lives that doesn't adequately reflect a life that's been changed by it, that doesn't nullify the reality of it. A picture of Christ and the church that's been marred by divorce does not alter the reality that Christ has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. Nor does divorce prevent us from experiencing the fullness of Christ's love for us.

If you've been through an unbiblical divorce and have since remarried, that doesn't annul the current marriage that you are in. God considers the marriage that you are in as a binding, valid marriage. You now have another opportunity to live out the reality of the Gospel in this marriage. Be faithful and persevere, God will give you strength to endure this; for your joy and for His glory.

Never forget the righteousness that you have before God is not your own, it is Christ's. God's disposition towards you is not one of anger and disappointment, but instead He looks at you and is well-pleased. You do not have to bear the shame of a divorce; Christ bore that for you. You do not have to feel condemnation for having a divorce; Christ felt that for you. Rest in the glorious truth that Christ has perfectly fulfilled all righteousness on your behalf and you are free to pursue Him with all your might.

FOUR

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

[MATTHEW 5:38-42]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 5:38-42]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: Vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will repay, therefore as followers of Christ, we can lay down our rights and our freedoms for the sake of others whenever we are attacked or insulted, having been set free from the need to defend or justify ourselves.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



John Stott says that this section of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is "the most admired and most resented." Why do you think this is the case?

The concept of justice is an important one in the Bible and is addressed in many places, but most notably it is recounted by Jesus here. Jesus is referring to several places in the Old Testament where the law of *lex talionis* (eye for an eye) was prescribed by God for the people of Israel (Exodus 21:22-24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). But like all the other teachings that Jesus has corrected so far in this sermon, the Pharisees had corrupted this principle as well. The initial law in the Old Testament was given to the Jewish people to practice corporately as a nation, not as individuals. The principle of eye for an eye served as a restrictive measure to prevent unnecessary bloodshed and warfare. For example, if someone cuts off your hand and you retaliate by cutting off the assailant's head, then the violence has been escalated and the newly deceased's family/tribe may feel the need for retribution. In this case, there is no end to the violence. But if a punishment of like kind is administered, then the matter is settled and no more violence need take place. But the Pharisees had begun to teach that this law applied to any matter whatsoever, even personal conflicts.

What goes wrong whenever we try to apply the principle of “eye for an eye” to personal matters? Why would this not be recommended by the Lord?

After this law began to be applied in the personal arena, it lost all its restrictive purpose and became used primarily as a justification for revenge. Thus, this law was being misapplied by the Pharisees where instead of prohibiting violence and bloodshed, it was being used to foster hatred, division, and vengeance. So rather than seeking recompense, Jesus concludes that we should “not resist the one who is evil.”



What does the Bible have to say about vengeance and retaliation? (SEE ROMANS 12:19 AND DEUTERONOMY 32:35)

After looking at these verses it's easy to understand Jesus' clarification to “not resist the one who is evil.” Vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will repay. This is the Christian's hope and assurance of justice. We need not take matters into our own hands. The assurance that God will defend us allows us to lay down our rights and surrender our freedoms for the sake of others. To be sure, it is only our own rights that we should surrender and we should actively defend the rights of others. Jesus' command to not resist the evil one does not mean that we shouldn't interfere if we see someone being attacked or bullied. One of the Christian's primary duties here on Earth is to defend those who cannot defend themselves (Proverbs 31:8).

There are several rights that Jesus calls us to give up:

V. 39: “But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

In the particular culture Jesus was speaking into, a slap on the cheek was considered a gross insult. The follower of Jesus should be prepared to take another slap rather than retaliate.

Have you ever experienced or witnessed an insult or an assault in which the you/the victim didn't retaliate?

V. 40: “And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”

Read Exodus 22:26-27. In Jewish culture, a cloak was considered an inalienable possession. It was inhumane to take somebodys cloak. But Christ urges His followers to lay down even the rights that they are entitled to by law.

How can you see a situation like this happening today?

V. 41: “And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

At the time that Jesus said this, a Roman soldier could legally command you to carry his equipment for him if he so pleased. Jesus followers should give up their time and convenience and be willing to do more than what is asked of them.

In what ways can we “go the extra mile?”

V. 42: “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Here Jesus says the Christian should surrender the right to his own money and possessions. We are not to be unwise in who we lend to (cf. Proverbs 11:15; 17:18; 22:26), but just as Jesus refutes the attitude that says “What’s been done to me should be done to you!”, he also refutes the stingy, penny-pinching attitude that says “I earned this. You should have to earn it as well.”

How can we live out this teaching of generosity today?

Why should we do this? Why should we give up our rights and maintain a quiet and peaceful spirit amidst opposition?

Personal self-sacrifice was the path that our savior walked Himself. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And if laying down our lives is the greatest form of love we can show, then to some degree, laying down certain aspects of our quality of life for others is a means of showing love as well. Also by not retaliating, we are making a statement that our defense and justification does not come from ourselves but from God. "When reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

Remember the example of Christ:

- Jesus did not revile or threaten others (1 Peter 2:23)
- Jesus did not defend Himself before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:12-14)
- Jesus did not resist the thieves who cast lots for His garments (Matthew 27:35)
- Jesus did not refuse to bear the shame of carrying His own cross (John 19:17)

The law of *lex talionis* is a principle that is regarded by the entire world as something that is just and fair. Civilizations and societies around the world, no matter how developed, usually embrace some form of this principle. It appeals to our innate desire for justice. But if there is anything that we have learned so far in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it's that followers of Jesus hold to counter-cultural values that make us distinct from the world, and it is this distinction that causes the world to lend an ear to what we have to say. **In the Beatitudes, Jesus showed us that the truly godly person is merciful, seeks peace, and rejoices when persecuted. When we behave in such a distinct way, the world takes notice and we can witness to the hope that we have.** Our hope is not in our physical safety and comfort, our confidence is not in our possessions, and we do not rely upon the laws of this world to protect us. Infringing upon any of these is not a threat to us, because our hope is in Christ who will one day put an end to all injustice, our confidence is in God who will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus, and our reliance is upon the Lord who will enact vengeance on our behalf.



Has there been a situation in your life where you have sought retaliation against another person? Was that person able to see Christ in you because of that? What will you do to correct this? When the opportunity for retaliation comes up again, how will you reflect Christ in that situation?

APPENDIX: Use the question below to expand conversation if you need to, or to provide an answer if the question comes up in discussion.

Do you think that this teaching of “not resisting the one who is evil” applies also to police officers and soldiers? Why or why not? What biblical support can you provide for your answer?

We should note here that there is a slight, but very important variation in the language that Jesus used to address His hearers in this portion of the message. This doesn't come across in the English because we do not have a clearly equivalent way of expressing it, but in the previous teachings, each time Jesus spoke “You have heard that it was said,” ‘You’ is plural. But in this passage, ‘you’ is singular:

“But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone whole sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Jesus is speaking here about personal relationships and attitudes. Other New Testament teaching supports the government's use of the sword to enact retribution as this is the reason God has allowed and instituted government (Romans 13:4). Remember, the Old Testament law of eye for an eye was not meant to be used by individuals, but the state. The Pharisee's had wrongly been applying this law to personal matters, so what Jesus is correcting is how to handle personal matters.

FIVE

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

[MATTHEW 5:43-48]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 5:43-48]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: When we show love to our enemies, we are aligning ourselves with the character of God, distinguishing ourselves from the rest of the world, and proving the truthfulness of the Gospel.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



Ask, “Is there someone in your life who has hurt you deeply? Is there any way that you can love that person?”

Then spend a moment in prayer, asking for God to help us understand, receive, and live out Jesus’ teaching in this passage.

After considering personal abuse and sacrifice last week, it makes sense that Jesus would then approach the broader question of hatred and love. The Pharisees were teaching the people that they should love their neighbor and hate their enemy. Again, the Pharisees were teaching wrongly. Love for your neighbor certainly finds its origin in Old Testament teaching (Leviticus 19:18), but nowhere is it recorded that we should hate our enemies.

Another mistake that the Pharisees were making is that they were trying to limit who all was designated as a “neighbor.” In fact, Jesus was asked to define who exactly was considered a neighbor. The answer that he gave was very counter-cultural at the time.



READ LUKE 10:29-37. According to this parable, who is considered our neighbor?

So Jesus shows us that our neighbor is anybody that we may come across where we are in a position to help. Already Jesus is expanding the number of people that His followers are obligated to love. It's not just those who live on the same block as us, but anybody that we encounter in the daily course of our lives without regard for race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or religion. And Jesus didn't stop there either, He went even further and commanded that not only should we love everyone that we come across, but we should even love those who are our enemies (v.44).

Why do you think Jesus says we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?

Jesus grounds the basis for why we should love our enemies on the fact that our Heavenly Father has done the same exact thing.

God "makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good." What do you think this means in regards to how God treats sinners?

God is graciously longsuffering with those who reject Him (and those who receive Him as well!). The idea that God makes the sun rise upon them shows that God allows them to experience life day after day. He gives to every person the very breath that allows them to live (Acts 17:25). Every sinner deserves to die because of what they've done, but God withholds this punishment in hopes that many will come to know Him (2 Peter 3:9). His mercies are new every morning, even for those who are evil (Lamentations 3:22-23).

God "sends rain on the just and the unjust." What does this mean and how do we see the evidence of this in our world?

The illustration of God sending rain on the just as well as the unjust is meant to show that God graciously allows worldly blessing to fall upon even those who deny Him (Acts 14:17). We see this everywhere. Those who reject Christ as Lord are still able to flourish in the world, whether it be financially or relationally. God does not withhold comfort and pleasure from those who refuse to acknowledge Him.

We see this standard kept for us perfectly in the life of Christ. **READ MARK 15:39.** What all do you think the Centurion witnessed to be able to make that kind of profession?

The Centurion had probably been aware of Jesus and had heard talk about Him, but had probably never actually encountered Him until that day. The first time that the Roman guard had interacted with Christ was the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here's what the guard would have witnessed:

LUKE 22:47-53. – Jesus heals the ear of the soldier come to arrest him, and forbids any violence towards His enemies.

LUKE 23:1-5 – Jesus did not retaliate against those who brought false charges against Him, even after Pilate had declared Him innocent.

LUKE 23:26-31 – Despite being flogged and beaten and during the carrying His own cross, Jesus loves the people enough to warn them of what is to come.

LUKE 23:32-34 – After being flogged, beaten, stripped naked, and nailed to a cross, Jesus pleads with the Father to forgive His enemies.

LUKE 23:39-43 – Despite being in immense pain, Jesus extends love and forgiveness to the thief next to him on the cross, who had previously rejected him.

Jesus said that if we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, then we will be sons of the Father. By loving our enemies, we are emulating the same character of God. It is easy to see from just these few examples how the Roman Centurion concluded that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus was different precisely because of the way that He loved. He stood out from the rest of humanity and caused people to take notice of Him. In just half a day, the centurion would have seen several instances of Jesus' love being expressed toward those who hated Him, proving He was a son of the Father (cf. John 13:35). It's this kind of distinctiveness that Jesus calls us to.

READ MATTHEW 5:46-47. Jesus says that if we only love those who love us we are no better than a tax collector. What do you know about tax collectors? Why were they so despised?

In Jesus' day, the entire known world was controlled by the Romans. The way the Romans maintained peace throughout their kingdom was to maintain a very large standing army. This army was brutal in the way that they treated civilians. To pay this army, the Roman government asked for volunteers to collect taxes from all the Roman citizens, but to avoid conflicts of interest, Roman soldiers weren't allowed to do the collecting themselves. This meant that many of the tax collectors in Jesus' day were Jewish volunteers who agreed to do the work. The only way the tax collectors got paid was to collect an amount above their quota and then keep the remainder. So in essence, tax collectors were viewed as thieving traitors who exploiting their own kinsman to support a brutal occupying force that ransacked their villages, raped their women, and plundered their property.

In verses 46-47, Jesus is making the point that a failure to love our enemies makes us exactly like everyone else. When there is nothing distinct about our lifestyle then the world will assume that there is nothing distinct about our message. Refusing to love our enemies puts us in the same camp as tax collectors and Gentiles. This is why it is so important for us to grasp this; the Gospel is at stake. The Centurion's profession was based upon the short slice of Jesus' life that he witnessed. For a lot of the people in our lives, we have the benefit of living an entire life before them. What message will our lives convey?



Think again of the person who has hurt you the most.
Are they worthy of having the Gospel lived out for them?

What can you do to take steps towards loving this person?

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