

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 1

thursday | prayer

| Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you be salt and light. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Please purify me, Lord, mold me, fill me with Yourself, use me. Banish all the forces of evil from me, destroy them, vanquish them, so that I can be healthy and do good deeds."

friday | application

- | Have a spiritual conversation. Better yet, have a spiritual conversation with a non-believer.

saturday | journaling

| Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:13-16.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:13-16

monday | devotional

For two years I ran a homeless ministry. This week a man I knew from that ministry died. His name was Mike and he never liked me.

I never had a negative interaction with Mike. The only times I talked to him I was serving him food or giving him clothes. Mike didn't dislike me because of anything I had done to him personally (I don't think); Mike disliked me because I was a Christian and he assumed I was a hypocrite.

Mike's attitude towards me was indicative of how many of my homeless friends thought about Christians. They were leery of us. Sadly, this seems to be true of many, not just people without homes. Some of these negative connotations are unwarranted, but some are earned because we haven't taken Jesus' words in Matthew 5:13-16 seriously.

Salt and light are two items that would be hard to live without. As modern Americans we take both for granted, but their importance is far reaching. We use salt for flavor, to preserve (check the nutrition facts on a frozen food box), and in some places, to help ice on the roads melt faster. Life would cease to exist without sunlight. But consider how different our lives would be without light bulbs. We wouldn't be able to drive at night, our streets would feel less safe, and most businesses would shut down after dusk. Salt and light greatly benefit us.

Jesus' point is simple: Christians are to be a positive force in the world. Understanding this truth is easy, living it out is hard.

John R.W. Stott makes a distinction in Jesus' metaphor. He says that salt refers to moral preservation and light refers to the good works of a Christian. In other words, we are to live morally exemplary lives (avoid sin and increase virtue) and be agents of positive action.

American culture has moved away from Christian morality. This is sad and scary. It also begs the question, why? As Christians we believe in the existence of evil. Satan exists. "The world" is a term used throughout the New Testament to describe the underlying nature of a fallen creation that is fundamentally against God, and thus, Christianity. Obviously the existence of evil plays a major role in the deterioration of American morality, but perhaps something else is at play. Perhaps American morality has been spoiled because Christians have not helped preserve it.

41% of Christians now believe that morality is relative to the individual. Entire denominations are giving up a biblical, godly morality. And Christians who hold to a Christian morality seem to be cowering away from interacting with a changing country.

Stott says:

"Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars; our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into meat, to stop it going bad. And when society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad...where is the salt?"

Jesus says something similar in our passage about being light, doing good works: "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Too much of modern American Christianity has become about avoiding bad - avoiding sin. We are called to more than this; we are called to do God-glorifying works.

In the book Church History in Plain Language, author Bruce Shelley explains reasons for the incredible post-apostolic early growth of Christianity despite culture's negative bias against it. He says, "The practical expression of Christian love was probably among the most powerful causes of Christian success...Christian love found expression in the care of the poor, of widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prisons, or to those committed to a living death in the mines, and in acts of compassion during a famine, earthquake, or war." This is light.

As stated above, Christians are to live morally exemplary lives and be agents of positive action. This is what Jesus is calling us to, and this calling is a lens through which we must analyze our lives.

Perhaps if we will live as salt and light we will see incredible growth of Christianity again. Perhaps if we live morally exemplary lives and become agents of positive actions, people like Mike will start to think good things about Christians.

Reflect on this: How must my life change if I am going to be salt and light to the world?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read these comments write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:13-16.

Stuart Weber, "The entire sermon, including the Beatitudes before and the many teachings after, shows us how to live as "salt and light" in the world as representatives of another kingdom."

"Salt was one of the earliest of all preservatives and was a valued commodity in the ancient world."

"Salt was used as a figure of speech in the ancient world of sparkling conversation, speech dotted with witty or clever remarks."

"Don't miss a the key principle in Jesus' metaphors of salt and light. Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven impact society because they are different (not weird or bizarre but distinct) from the Kingdom of this World."

The Greek word for "loses its saltiness" is *moraino* which can mean "to become foolish."

Albert Barnes, "In eastern countries, however, the salt used was impure, or mingled with vegetable or earthy substances, so that it might lose the whole of its saltiness, and a considerable quantity of earthy matter remain. This was good for nothing, except that it was used to place in paths, or walks, as we use gravel."

World is often used in the New Testament to describe the self-centered, godless value system and morals of fallen mankind.

wednesday | questions

1. What can you do to increase your saltiness (see commentary)? What is to be gained from being more salty?

2. What is one thing you are doing to be more of a positive influence in the world?

3. What fears do you have about being more obvious in following Jesus? Is there anyone who inspires you to overcome those fears?

4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 2

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you correctly interact with His law: Here's a prayer to get you started: "Go before us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, in all our doings with Thy gracious inspiration, and further us with Thy continual help, that every prayer and work of ours may begin from Thee, and by Thee be duly ended. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

friday | application

Find a section in the Old Testament that connects to the life of Jesus. Better yet, find an Old Testament promise that is fulfilled in Jesus.

Hint: Google "prophecies fulfilled by Jesus."

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:17-20.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-20

monday | devotional

Two key themes emerge in Matthew 5:17-20. The first is Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament. When Jesus used the phrases "Law" and "The Prophets" he spoke of the entirety of the Old Testament. Thus, this passage offers a glimpse of Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament. Understanding this relationship has huge implications for our understanding of the New Testament's relationship to the Old Testament as a whole and how Christians should interact with the Old Testament.

As followers of Jesus our attitudes should reflect his. For many Christians this isn't the case when it comes to the Old Testament. Jesus could not have been more clear, he did "not come to abolish the Law or The Prophets," but these words are often ignored. Many Christians "abolish" the Old Testament in their theology, and many more do it in their neglect. It takes no study or background information to understand that Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17-20 show the lasting importance of the Old Testament.

But how is the Old Testament important? To answer this question it is good to focus on a key word from this passage: "fulfill." Jesus' relationship to the law is one of fulfillment. The Greek word that the NIV translates "fulfill" can also be defined as "to fill or to make full." While these definitions are not vastly different than the NIV's translation, they do offer us a better word picture. We can all visualize something being filled up.

With this in mind, I think it is helpful to view the Old Testament as a gas gauge. A gas gauge doesn't make a car go, but instead tells us how much gas we have and how much we need. Likewise the Old Testament pointed to what humanity had - a loving creator who made us in his image, but also a sin problem that separated us from him—and what humanity needed—a savior.

My first car was a 1965 Ford Mustang. It looked great on the outside, but didn't work well on the inside. One of its many problems was a faulty gas gauge. When my mom first bought me the car it hovered around a quarter tank no matter how much gas was actually in the car. Because I knew this, I always made sure to have gas in the tank. But one day after I had gone to the gas station, the gas gauge went up. It was fixed...or so I thought. Not long after this I was driving down the road with a gas gauge showing half a tank and my car stopped; I was out of gas. The gas gauge wasn't fixed at all. I needed a new one.

Many treat the Old Testament like a broken gas gauge. It is true that until the coming of Jesus the gas gauge never registered full, but according to Matthew 5:17-20 this wasn't because it was broken, but instead because it was pointing to our need for something that would make us full; it was pointing to our need for Jesus. A gas gauge shouldn't be removed because the tank isn't full. The Old Testament shouldn't be cast aside because it couldn't provide all that we needed for life, but instead it should be held onto because it is essential for understanding Jesus and all that He accomplished for us.

But how did Jesus fulfill the Old Testament? For one, he never broke any of the laws. He was completely obedient to the commands of God. His fulfillment of The Law goes beyond this. He also filled the gas tank by being the realization of the promises made in the Old Testament. Both of these aspects of filling The Law connect to another part of this passage.

There is a second key theme in these verses, righteousness. The most basic meaning of this word, as used during biblical times, is "right relationship." It could be used of a good relationship between a husband and wife, child and parent, or friends. In our context it is used for a right/good relationship between people and God.

At the end of this passage Jesus says an amazing thing, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." What makes this statement staggering is that the Pharisees (an ultra strict religious group) and teachers of the law had rules upon rules upon rules to help them live in obedience to The Law and The Prophets. Not many people could live up to their incredible standards of piety. To live more righteously than them was virtually impossible, so what was Jesus point? Nobody can make it into Heaven? No. His point was this: You can't fulfill The Law, only he can.

Just as having a working gas gauge will never take away your need for gas, striving to perfectly live out the commands laid forth in the Old Testament will never gain you a right relationship with God...you will fail. A right relationship with God can only be had through Jesus because he fulfilled the Old Testament, and by his death and resurrection, offered forgiveness for all the ways we fell short of fulfilling it ourselves.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20 explain Jesus' relationship to the The Law and help us to have a proper perspective of the Old Testament. We shouldn't look for our righteousness in obedience to it, but we shouldn't neglect it either. Instead, we should value the Old Testament for how it helps us understand God and points us to our need for Jesus.

Reflect on this: How do you typically view the Old Testament?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read these comments write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:17-20.

Charles Spurgeon, "The life, work, and words of Christ are not an emendation of the Old Testament, or an abrogation of it. It stands fast and firm, fulfilled, carried to perfection, filled to the full in Christ."

"Fulfill" translates as Greek word meaning, "be completely filled indicating a completed state."

Carl Henry, "'What He [Christ] criticizes is not the law itself but contemporary formulations of the law.'

"Generally, 'the Law' refers to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT. More generally however, the law can mean a wide variety of things – a commandment, a principle, an instruction, etc."

"Greatness in the Kingdom of heaven will not be based on one's gifts but upon how one handles the word of God."

"Righteousness" means "being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified being or in accordance with what God requires) is the quality of being upright."

William Barclay, "In many ways the Pharisees were the best people in the whole country. There were never more than 6,000 of them; they were what was known as a chaburah, or brotherhood. They entered into this brotherhood by taking a pledge in front of three witnesses that they would spend all their lives observing every detail of the scribal law."

wednesday | questions

1. Name three ways Jesus fulfilled The Law and The Prophets.
2. Read Romans 3:23-26. How does this help with understanding Matthew 5:20?
3. In what ways have you embraced legalism? In what ways have you embraced immorality?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 3

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you to remove anger. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Loving Lord I confess that there is much bitterness and anger in my heart and I come to You knowing that there is nothing that I can do to rid myself of this suffocating handicap in my life. Search me within Lord and expose all that is not pleasing in Your sight and help me to find a closure to the deep rooted anger which seems to be rooted in a deep-seated un-forgiveness.

Forgive me Lord for the pain for I know my anger has hurt so many people – yet I realize that my sin of anger is directed against You and it is against You alone that I have sinned in this way."

friday | application

| Make a list of personal strategies for dealing with anger.

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:21-26.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Matthew 5:21-26

monday | devotional

I have an old acquaintance who is in prison for murder. He's been in prison since 1999 and has a scheduled release date in 2030. We will be almost 50 years old then.

I hadn't seen this acquaintance for many years before he was arrested, but if you could go back and ask me about him in middle school, I'd tell you he was people. What happened? Honestly, I don't know the details, but in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives a glimpse into where it might have started.

Before we turn to Jesus' sermon it is important to look at one of the first passages in the Bible. In Genesis 4 we are introduced to brothers named Cain and Abel. Perhaps you know their story. As you read it now notice the question God asked Cain (I've italicized it for you).

"Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, '*Why are you angry?* Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.' Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him."

Cain is mainly known for the action of murdering his brother, but before he did this, God called into question his anger. If Cain would have removed his anger he wouldn't have killed his brother. Without anger there would have been no murder.

In Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus says, "... anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment." Without the backdrop of Genesis 4 we might chalk this up to hyperbole. But when we consider how God connected anger and murder in the story of Cain and Abel, the meaning of Jesus' words become more clear: If we allow anger to remain, we run the risk of doing things that will get us punished.

What follows explains this further. Jesus points to two things we might do out of anger, calling people "raca" or "fool." These two words are closely related to two childish putdowns we use in English, "dummy" and "moron." If you're over the age of 12 you probably haven't used these words in a while, but perhaps you've said things out of anger that make people feel stupid or devalued—this is what Jesus has in mind. Saying mean things to people is a natural effect of anger and puts you at a greater risk of judgment.

1 John 3:15 helps us see how this progression might continue, "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer..." Why? Perpetual anger leads to hatred and hatred manifests itself in a desire to have something cease to exist. The term "hate crime" illustrates this well. A hate crime is a crime, usually violent, committed by the perpetrator because of a bias against a specific group of people. Hate crimes are often motivated by a desire to devalue, or even remove, those in that group through intimidating them into a different way of thinking/living or killing them. These crimes are not thought up in a day, but motivated by years of deep seated anger against a group of people.

So here's the biblical progression: Anger leads to hatred and hatred leads to murder. Thus, allowing anger to remain puts you at risk of doing things you might currently find unthinkable.

I don't expect most who are reading this to run a major risk of committing murder, but if we don't heed Jesus' warnings, it will lead to bad things. I have only ever hated one person. I'll spare you the details, but it came from a prolonged and deep anger, and was connected to me saying and acting in ways that are embarrassing to think back on. I acted in ways that I never thought possible; anger is dangerous.

So what is the application of all this? Simply stated, stop being angry. Paul's words in Ephesians 4:26-27 are important here. He says, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Anger happens. When it strikes, avoid sinning. Even when you are mad avoid slander, gossip, quarreling, fighting...and murder.

Beyond not just sinning in your anger, Ephesians 4:26-27 shows us that we shouldn't let anger last. If we do, we give the devil a foothold—pretty scary. The phrase "let the sun go down" shouldn't be taken literally—you might get angry at night. Instead this phrase calls us to get rid of our anger. We shouldn't hold onto it. We shouldn't let it linger. We should remove it. Man, I wish I could go back in time and tell my acquaintance that now lives in a state penitentiary to stop the anger.

Anger is the first step in a progression that leads to judgment. Don't sin in your anger, and better yet, get rid of your anger as soon as you can.

Reflect on this: How is anger currently affecting your decisions?

*Need help knowing how to get rid of anger? Make sure to watch or listen to the sermon that corresponds with this sheet and consider checking out the series Quiet Wrath (Wilsonville.Church/QuietWrath).

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:21-26.

"You have heard suggests that the multitudes listening had for the most part not studied the Law of Moses for themselves but had only heard the teaching on the Law, most likely from the scribes and Pharisees."

"...the danger of anger was that it was expressive of a murderous intent in the heart and such a one was in danger of the judgment."

"Raca" was an insult meaning, "senseless, empty headed man, worthless..."

"Jesus' point is that anger and hatred affect our relationship to God. As long as there is internal sin, outward acts of worship are not acceptable to God."

"Be reconciled" refers to being "restored to normal relations or harmony with someone."

John MacArthur, ""Obviously we cannot change another person's heart or attitude, but our desire and effort should be to close the breach as much as is possible from our side..."

wednesday | questions

1. Read James 1:13. What does anger reveal about our relationship with God?

2. What are the things that most cause you to be angry? What truths can help you find peace in those moments?

3. Is there anyone you need to be reconciled with? What would help the attempt for reconciliation go well?

4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 4

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you overcome sin. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Dear Jesus, I know that every perfect gift, and especially that of chastity, depends on the power of Your providence. Without You a mere creature can do nothing. Therefore, I beg You to defend by Your grace the chastity and purity of my body and soul. And if I have ever imagined or sensed anything that could stain my chastity and purity, blot it out, Supreme Lord of my powers, that I may advance with a pure heart in Your love and service, offering myself on the most pure altar of Your divinity all the days of my life. Amen."

friday | application

| Remove something from your life that causes temptation. Better yet, remove two things from your life that cause temptation.

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:27-30.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5:27-30

monday | devotional

My senior year of high school I had my first serious girlfriend. In the spring of that year, just before graduation, I felt a need to confess to her that I had lusted after others. I don't offer this as relationship advice, but something incredible came from the decision. The evening after I had made this confession, I was home in my room and God spoke to my heart. His message was this: While I had wronged my girlfriend, my sins were truly against him. That night I felt the weight of my sin (not just the lust, but all of it) more strongly than I have ever felt it. I also felt something else as strongly as I've ever, God's incredibly amazing grace.

That night I spent hours weeping on my floor because of the conviction that I had done so much evil, but Jesus had suffered the penalty for all of it. In those hours my life was changed forever. I know God can work in a lot of ways, but from my perspective, I wouldn't be a pastor writing this devotional if it wasn't for that night when God made me feel the weight of my sin and his grace.

Ministry wasn't the only byproduct of that night. My love of God was intensified, my passion for praising him grew immensely, and sinful things seemed far less attractive. One of the sins that seemed far less attractive was lust. I'd be lying if I said I never lusted again or that all my desires for lust went away, but I can honestly say that my relationship with lust was changed in those moments when I wept on my floor. Why? Because my heart was changed.

In the past lust would have been almost impossible to quantify, but the advent of internet pornography has given us data. The data is bleak, suggesting that the world has a major lust problem. Look at these stats from fightthenewdrug.com (a great website for help with this issue):

1. 35% of all internet downloads are pornography-related.
2. Pornography sites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon, & Twitter combined each month.
3. 64% of young people, ages 13–24, actively seek out pornography weekly or more often.
4. In 2016 alone, more than 4,599,000,000 hours of pornography were consumed on the world's largest porn site.

What makes this lust problem even more staggering is that much of culture embraces it as a positive. Data shows us something different:

1. A study of 14- to 19-year-olds found that females who consumed pornographic videos were at a significantly greater likelihood of being victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault.
2. A 2015 meta-analysis of 22 studies from seven countries found that internationally the consumption of pornography was significantly associated with increases in verbal and physical aggression, among males and females alike.
3. People who admit to having extramarital affairs were over 300% more likely to admit consuming porn than those who have never had an affair, according to a 2004 study in Social Science Quarterly.

This data is scary. Dr. Gary Brooks, a psychologist who has worked with porn addicts for the last 30 years, gives us more insight, "Any time [a person] spends much time with the usual pornography usage cycle, it can't help but be a depressing, demeaning, self-loathing kind of experience." Pornography usage is not only connected to depression, but also social isolation and mental anxiety.

The data points above are interesting for many reasons, but one is this: Lust is bad for people, but they can't stop doing it. Like any addiction, knowing that something is bad for you is not usually enough incentive to stop. Everyone knows that smoking cigarettes is bad for a person's health, but lots of people still smoke them. Stopping something that makes you feel good takes more than scientific evidence that it is unhealthy. What does it take? It takes a change of heart.

I have a sugar addiction. I know it is bad for me and I'm always trying to stop eating sugar. For a while my wife kept a note on her phone with dates of when I said, "I'm never eating sugar again." In the last year or so I've done much better at reducing my sugar intake. What helped? Definitely not more information about its ill affects on my health. Instead, it was a thought I had when I was putting my daughter to bed one night. My daughter is 3 years old and I am 35. As I lay next to her I was calculating how old I would be if she had children at the same age as me. And then I had a staggering thought, if I don't eat healthier, I may not be able to play with my grandkids. I've been eating much healthier ever since because a desire to play with my grandkids someday is greater than a desire for a cookie (most of the time).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is turning righteousness inside out. He wants us to see that a changed life comes from a changed heart - we can't just try to follow a set of rules, it won't work. How does this apply to lust? Avoiding lust isn't just about trying harder. We avoid lust by trying harder because our hearts have been changed.

What must change about our hearts to cause us to remove lust from our lives? We must desperately desire to faithfully serve Jesus and to treat others with the same sacrificial love he has given us. I had to shed a lot of tears, but I'm grateful God has helped my heart grow in these ways.

Consider this: Am I striving to faithfully serve Jesus and treat people like he would?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:27-30.

"According to Jewish law, adultery referred to sexual intercourse with the wife or the betrothed of a Jew and it was condemned because it was in essence "taking" another man's wife and thus was considered illicit use of that man's property!"

The word for "lust" (*blepo*) is in the present tense. "The idea is that what may have begun as a glance, becomes a gaze!"

William Barclay (on lust), "...if anyone looks at a woman in such a way as deliberately to awaken within himself the forbidden desire for her."

David Guzik, "The act of adultery is far worse than adultery in the heart. Jesus' point is not to say they are the same things, but to say they are both sin, and both prohibited by the command against adultery."

Oswald Chambers, "We cannot think anything without the thought having its consequence."

The word translated "stumble" is *skandalizo* which has its root in a word that "refers to stick in a trap on which the bait is placed and which springs up and shuts the trap at the touch of the careless, unwary animal."

Charles Spurgeon, "Give up the dearest, choicest, and apparently most needful thing, if it leads you into sin."

wednesday | questions

1. What have you seen lost because of lust?

2. Jesus takes the removal of sin seriously in this passage. How does your treatment of sin compare?

3. What should you remove, or have you removed, from your life to help you avoid sin? What would be, or has been, gained?

4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 5

thursday | prayer

Spend 10 minutes praying for marriages. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Heavenly Father, Help us treasure the gift of marriage that reflects the love of Christ for the Church, where the self-giving love of husband and wife unites them more perfectly and cooperates in your plan for new life created in your image. Help us support men and women in their vocation of marriage, especially in difficult times when they join their sufferings to the Cross. In our society where divorce is a normality, help us uphold the institution of marriage."

friday | application

If you are married, write an encouraging note to your spouse.

If you aren't married, write an encouraging note to a couple you know.

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 5:31-32

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:31-32.

monday | devotional

In college I took quite a few psychology and counseling classes. As part of one of those classes I was assigned the task of making a genogram. A genogram is basically a family tree that pertains pertinent information for a person's mental health. After making my personal genograph there was something on my chart that left a lasting impression on me. My family tree was filled with divorce. Almost everyone I am close to, even those who have now been remarried for a long time, went through a divorce at some point in their lives. This wasn't surprising information, I already knew it, but looking at it on paper had a profound impact.

Many years ago (like 2007), when I was preaching on Matthew 5:27-30 to our youth group, I tried to find the divorce rate. I thought it would be easy. You've probably heard the stat thrown around that 50% of marriages end in divorce. From what I can tell, this stat isn't true. The real truth is that it is difficult to quantify the divorce rate and people do it in different ways. But if numbers don't tell the story, stories do. It is genuinely surprising to me when I meet someone around my age that doesn't come from a divorced home. The Wall Street Journal seems to confirm that feeling:

"Every generation has its life-defining moments. If you want to find out what it was for a member of the Greatest Generation, you ask: 'Where were you on D-Day?' For baby boomers, the questions are: 'Where were you when Kennedy was shot?' or 'What were you doing when Nixon resigned? For much of my generation—Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980—there is only one question: 'When did your parents get divorced?' Our lives have been framed by the answer. Ask us. We remember everything."

I don't remember everything, I was three when my parents got divorced, but I do remember all of the consequences.. I remember going from place to place on holidays, I remember the new boyfriends, I remember the pain of leaving my dad's house after the weekend, I remember the custody battle. I remember tension. I remember sadness. Even though it was the only life I knew, I knew it wasn't the way life should be.

College provided me with another unique opportunity. As part of my Pastoral Studies program I had to serve a certain amount of ministry hours at my church. At that time I attended a large church, with a big budget, and a full staff. The church was gracious about trying to find me things to do, but just didn't need me for much. I have no idea how it came up, but there was a divorce recovery class and someone suggested I help facilitate it. Looking back it seems like such a strange idea, a 20 year-old unmarried kid helping women (it was all women) recover from the pain of their divorce. But God can turn ideas that seem crazy, even retrospectively, into life changing experiences. The women in that class were mourning and they were scared their kids would be irreparably damaged. But there I was, a child hurt by divorce, but by God's grace, not devastated by it.

My point in sharing all this is not to make anyone feel guilty. Instead, it is to illustrate that divorce sucks. Like I said, almost everyone I'm close to has been divorced, and they'd tell you the same thing. It leaves a wake of negative consequence. It ruins Christmas.

So, what do we do? Many in my generation are just giving up on marriage. For the first time in our nations history fewer people are married than un married. The marriage rate of Millennials may drop to 70%—Baby Boomers had a 91% rate. There is nothing wrong with not getting married. The Apostle Paul declared this emphatically. But if we do choose to get married, how do we avoid divorce?

Many are turning to cohabitation in hopes that it will help them better gauge compatibility. Cohabitation has increased near 900% over the last 50 years. Two-thirds of couples married in 2012 lived together before they were married. This plan doesn't lower a couple's chances of divorce. In fact, it increases their chance of divorce by 33%.

So, what should we do? We should heed the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:5, where he says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one flesh." The goal of our marriages shouldn't just be to make them last; the goal of our marriages should be a deeply unified relationship. We should be aiming for all that God wants us to have in our relationships—peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, etc. What can you do to move your marriage toward this? What can you do to help another married couple be more unified? One answer to both of these questions is prayer.

Less than 1% of couples who pray together 20 minutes per week get divorced. Prayer is one of the most intimate and unifying activities two people can do together. I had a professor who's plan for discipleship was simply to pray with them. In prayer you hear another person's fears, failures, passions, hopes, and dreams. If you want to have a good marriage, pray.

Consider this: How would your marriage improve if you prayed with your spouse 20 minutes a week?

Not married, consider this? Whose marriages can you spend 20 minutes a week praying for?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:31-32.

Jesus is quoting, in part, from Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

"Sexual immorality" translates the Greek word *proneia* which is "the most general Greek word for illicit sexual intercourse."

William Barclay, "To all intents and purposes a woman could not divorce her husband for any reason, and a man could divorce his wife for any cause at all."

J.I. Packer, "This Law was supposed to deter divorce rather than encourage it since it required a "writing of divorce", executed in public."

William Barclay, "There is no time in history when the marriage bond stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Christianity first came into this world. At that time the world was in danger of witnessing the almost total break-up of marriage and the collapse of the home..."

In Matthew 19:1-11 Jesus more fully discusses the topic of divorce.

"Note that Jesus is not saying immorality must lead to divorce, only that it may."

wednesday | questions

1. Read Genesis 2:20b-25. What are some ways that God's formation of marriage make the meaning of this passage clearer and stronger?
2. In which ways do your views of marriage and divorce align with Jesus? In which ways do they not?
3. If you're married, what can you do to strengthen unity with your spouse (besides prayer)? If you'd like to be married, what can you do now to strengthen that unity when you do get married? If you're not married (or planning on it), what can you do to help strengthen the unity of a married couple you know?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 6

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you be a person of your word. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will. All that I have and cherish Thou hast given me. I surrender it all to be guided by Thy will. Thy grace and Thy love are wealth enough for me. Give me these Lord Jesus and I ask for nothing more. Amen."

friday | application

| Commit to something good that you've been wishy washy about.

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:33-37.

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33-37

monday | devotional

I need a new car and I hate it. I'll spend the next couple of weeks researching cars to find the perfect balance of cheap, reliable, and functional for our families needs. This is how it always goes.

This time though, needing a new car is not just a hassle, but a true source of frustration. Three weeks ago I took my car to a mechanic because it was smoking and stalling out when idling. The mechanic told us it would be around \$1,200 to get everything fixed. My car (or ex-car) was old, but I liked it. I had second thoughts about paying such a big expense on an old car, but I did it anyway.

Last week my car started to smoke again. I took it back to the mechanic and they told me it was a different problem that probably meant I needed a new engine. These problems, the mechanic tells me, might have been caused by the previous problems. As you can imagine, I'm frustrated. It would have been great for the mechanic to tell me that the problems I just spent \$1,200 to fix might have caused other issues. I'll tell you one thing, I will never go back to this particular mechanic again.

What bothers me more is that I don't know if they are lying to me. For all I know, they simply messed up and it messed up my car. I'll never know, but my natural instinct is to believe the worst about this mechanic—or almost any mechanic. It is sad that we have an entire industry that we distrust.

This devotional isn't about mechanics. They are not alone in being distrusted. We definitely don't trust politicians, something that has been true for a long time. People don't trust pastors, CEOs, the news, or almost anyone for that matter. We now live in a nation of distrust. Distrust didn't arrive out of nowhere, it has come by way of dishonesty.

It seems that the more our nation rejects the God of the Bible, the more it rejects the importance of honesty. My grandfather's generation took very seriously their word; there was a time when a handshake could be trusted. Grant R. Osborne, in The Life Application Commentary, says, "When each person's word is honest, we are liberated to trust each other freely." I think it is deeply disturbing how far this idea is from the reality that modern Americans feel. We can't trust handshakes; we can't even trust contracts.

The less honest our nation becomes, the more opportunity Christians have to be salt and light. Jesus' words in our passage are more about honesty and less about oaths. His foremost point is not that we shouldn't avoid contractual agreements, affidavits, or sworn testimony. Instead, he is showing Christians that they should be so utterly truthful that none of those things truly matter. As author and theologian A.M. Hunter says, "Oaths arise because men are so often liars." The words of a Christian should be undeniably trustworthy.

Sadly though, Christians have not taken Jesus' call to complete and utter honesty seriously. Perhaps this imperative has been buried by what Christians consider greater sins, or perhaps, too many "Christians" just don't care what Jesus has to say. We may avoid outright lies (although I have known many Christians, at least by name, who constantly lie), but we aren't utterly truthful. Consider the words of Jen Wilkins in her article titled "Don't Roll Your Eyes at Lies." She says, "In my inbox was an invitation to an event that I did not want to attend. The host, sensing the RSVPs were coming in a little light, had asked the invitees their reasons for not wanting to come. I crafted a response about how my family already had plans that weekend and how sorry I was to have to miss. This was a lie."

This story feels convictingly familiar. In scenarios such as this we might avoid an outright lie by quickly scheduling something during the event, but we aren't being truthful. Instead, we work to be just honest enough to appease our consciences while still avoiding the real truth. This is not what Jesus had in mind.

Another type of dishonesty might be more common in Christian circles than reading the Bible. We don't follow through on our commitments. This plays out in a variety of ways, but one of the most frequent is that we "bail." In her article "Thou Shall Not Bail," Jen Pollock Michel tells of running into an old friend and planning to meet together for coffee. She then says, "I bailed. 'Today has run away from me,' I texted the day before, 'and I don't think I have time tomorrow for coffee. I'm sorry, because I'd love to see you.' It was true that I had gotten unexpectedly busy and hadn't originally factored an additional half hour of driving into my week. It was also true that I counted on the solidity of our friendship to survive my one-off flakiness." In the rest of the article, an article you should read, she contemplates the morality of this decision. She concludes by saying, "As I ponder on God's promises, I can't help but wonder: What simple witness might we, the church, offer to the world by speaking a reliable yes?"

Jesus' point in Matthew 5:33-37 is that we should be completely truthful. We shouldn't lie. We shouldn't taint the truth. We should hold to our commitments. When a Christian speaks, their words should be trustworthy. When you speak, you should be trustworthy...even if you're a mechanic.

Consider this: Are you being completely and utterly honest? Should people fully trust your words?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:33-37.

"Fulfill" translates the Greek word apodidomi meaning, "...to pay or give back, implying a debt. This word carries the idea of obligation and responsibility for something that is not optional."

"In this example of manipulation of truth by the scribes and Pharisees, they (illogically) reasoned that swearing by the temple, did not obligate one to fulfill their vow, but swearing by the gold of the temple, obligated them to fulfill the vow."

"Oath—A solemn affirmation accompanied by an appeal to the Supreme Being."

"Vow—A promise made to God of doing some good thing or abstaining from some lawful enjoyment, under the influence of gratitude for divine goodness, of imminent danger, the apprehension of future evils, or the desire of future blessings."

"The Jews divided oaths into two classes, those which were absolutely binding and those which were not. Any oath which contained the name of God was absolutely binding; any oath which succeeded in evading the name of God was held not to be binding. The result was that if a man swore by the name of God in any form, he would rigidly keep that oath; but if he swore by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by his head, he felt quite free to break that oath."

Dwight Pentecost, "Let your character, your reputation for honesty, your word be so obviously true and undefiled and without duplicity, that no man would think it necessary to put you under an oath because he suspects you are of deception..."

William Barclay, "One of the strange things about the Sermon on the Mount is the number of occasions when Jesus was recalling to the Jews that which they already knew. The Jewish teachers had always insisted on the paramount obligation of telling the truth."

wednesday | questions

1. Read 1 Peter 3:10-12. Why do you think truthfulness is so important to God?
2. This passage is about being honest and taking promises seriously. In what ways does our culture contrast Jesus' teachings here?
3. In what areas of life do you struggle to follow through on what you say you'll do?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 7

thursday | prayer

| Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you respond to mistreatment in a godly way. Here's a prayer to get you started:
"Lord, help me to imitate Your great mercy and forgiveness. Help me to forgive those who have hurt me and help me to rise
above any injustice I encounter. Jesus, I trust in You."

friday | application

| Do a favor for someone; do more than they expect. Even better, do a favor for someone that you think has wronged you.

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Matthew 5:38-42

saturday | journaling

| Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:38-42.

monday | devotional

In 1 Peter 2:21-24 Jesus is placed before us as an example to be followed when we suffer at the hands of others. It says, “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”

It isn't just the example of Jesus life that calls us to respond in a certain way to those who wrong us, it is also his teaching. In our passage, Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, *do not resist an evil person*” (italics added).

Jesus' point in our passage isn't to tell us self-defense is bad, it isn't to tell us to be doormats for hurtful people to walk all over, and it isn't to speak to the idea of the justness of war. Instead, Jesus' point is calling us to respond to those who hurt us with grace and love for their good. This is exactly the example he sets as described in 1 Peter 2:21-24. When people unjustly wronged Jesus, He did not sin, he did not retaliate, he trusted God, and he made an incredible sacrifice for the good of the very people who hurt him.

We probably won't be called to die for others. So, how do we actually live out the example of Jesus when responding to those who wrong us? The examples that follow in Matthew 5, of turning the cheek, going the extra mile, giving the extra clothing, and lending freely, are telling. They give us a glimpse into how we can live out the principle Jesus' has set forth by his words and example.

These tangible examples show us that this call isn't to have positive feelings towards the hurtful person; it is a call to do something that benefits the other persons' life. Unlike Jesus, we probably won't have to lay down our lives. But we can bless people who have hurt us. If someone steals your parking spot at Starbucks, pay for their coffee. If someone says something hurtful to you, write them a card telling them some things you appreciate about them. If your boss asks you to stay an extra hour at work, stay two extra hours to get the project done. If your friend forgot your birthday, make a big deal out of their birthday. Jesus isn't calling us to forgive and forget. He's calling us to tangibly show people love when they have wronged us for their good.

In my sermon Sunday I told the story of Corrie Ten Boom offering forgiveness to a guard from the concentration camp where she was held during the Holocaust — the same concentration camp her sister had died in. This story takes place just after she gave a speech at a church in Munich. I think it is appropriate to end this devotional with the fuller version of that story, as told by Eric Metaxas:

“At the close of the service, a balding man in a gray overcoat stepped forward to greet her. Corrie froze. She knew this man well; he'd been one of the most vicious guards at Ravensbrück, one who had mocked the women prisoners as they showered. ‘It came back with a rush,’ she wrote, ‘the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man.’

And now he was pushing his hand out to shake hers, and saying:

‘A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!’

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course — how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.

‘You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,’ he was saying. ‘I was a guard there... But since that time,’ he went on, ‘I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein’ — again the hand came out —‘will you forgive me?’

And I stood there — I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven — and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

The soldier stood there expectantly, waiting for Corrie to shake his hand. She ‘wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us.’

Standing there before the former S.S. man, Corrie remembered that forgiveness is an act of the will — not an emotion. ‘Jesus, help me!’ she prayed. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’

Corrie thrust out her hand.

And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart.’

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.”

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:38-42.

“Without a doubt, this section (Mt 5:38-48) has been one of the most misinterpreted and consequently misapplied sections of the entire Sermon. For example, some have appealed to these passages to justify their call for Christians be veritable ‘doormats.’”

The Old Testament Law of reciprocity (see Deuteronomy 19), “specifies in context that it is to be carried out by the judges and civil authorities of Israel. It is true, that an injured party might be allowed to inflict the actual punishment, but even in these situations it was the civil body that had the responsibility to try and sentence the guilty one.”

“Jesus does not teach Christians are not to resist evil. What He forbids is that Christians do not seek to retaliate in personal relationships, which is what the Pharisees were teaching.”

IVP Background Commentary, “The blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult in the ancient Near East. The clothing in the verse refers to the outer and inner cloak, respectively; the poorest of people (like the average peasant in Egypt) might have only one of each...”

Kent Hughes, “Notice that Jesus specifically mentions “the right cheek,” which tells us he is describing a backhanded slap (since most people are right-handed, this is surely what Jesus had in mind). According to rabbinic law, to hit someone with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as hitting him with the flat of the hand.”

“Roman law gave a Roman soldier the right to conscript civilians to carry their burdens for one mile (and only for one mile), the equivalent of a Roman mile, slightly shorter than the modern mile. The purpose of this law was to relieve the soldier but it was extremely inconvenient to citizen pressed into service. To add “insult to injury” those carrying the soldiers equipment or weapons were the very ones the Romans were oppressing!”

Jesus “is calling for genuine generosity that originates in a new heart, which is counter to our nature tendency toward possessiveness.”

wednesday | questions

1. Read 1 Peter 3:10-12. Why do you think truthfulness is so important to God?

2. This passage is about being honest and taking promises seriously. In what ways does our culture contrast Jesus' teachings here?

3. In what areas of life do you struggle to follow through on what you say you'll do?

4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 8

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you love your enemies. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Lord Jesus, you are gracious, merciful, and kind. Set me free from my prejudice and intolerance towards those I find disagreeable, and widen my heart to love and to do good even to those who wish me harm or evil."

friday | application

Pray for someone (or some group) that you consider enemies or opponents. Even better, do something kind for someone you consider an enemy or opponent.

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:43-48.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48

monday | devotional

"Many have learned to offer the other cheek, but do not know how to love him by whom they were struck." - Augustine

Sports have always been a big part of my life. In middle school my AAU team played over 70 games a year. We traveled to Portland almost every weekend during the basketball season to play in tournaments. At these tournaments we would see many of the same teams from week to week. They say that familiarity breeds contempt. For me it is more accurately, familiar competition breeds disdain.

Through the years of seeing the same competition over and over I developed a strong dislike of certain players on certain teams. Frankly, I'm wired this way. If someone isn't on my side, especially when it comes to competitive sports, I view them as against me. A teammate of mine in middle school (and later high school) wasn't wired this way at all. He'd hangout with people from the other teams, even have them spend the night at his house. It has been almost 20 years and just last month I gave him a hard time about it—I was partly joking. In high school my girlfriend said to me, "If you ever look at me like you look at players on the other team, I will break up with you." Yikes.

We live in a society that has taken my attitude about people on other teams and applied it to almost every walk of life. Far too many treat those of a different gender, nationality, race, political party, or religion, as enemies. Sadly, this has trickled into American Christianity. Far too many Christians have taken us against them mentality. People may not say they hate the opposition, but they sure act like it. This stands in stark contrast to Jesus' parable that is usually called The Good Samaritan.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus is responding to a question by an expert of the law. The expert is having a conversation that starts with him asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the law says and the man responds by saying love God and love people. Jesus declares him right, but for some reason that man isn't satisfied. Luke 10:29 says, "But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" Jesus responds with the parable and his words are instructive for our passage. He says:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:30-36).

The answer to Jesus' final question is obvious, the Samaritan was the neighbor. There is a lot to say about this parable, but the important thing to understand is that Jesus shows us that loving our neighbors isn't about loving those who live next to us, who think like us, or who are on our side (whatever side that might be). Loving our neighbors is about loving whoever is right in front of us.

In Matthew 5:44 Jesus tells his followers to, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." This is not dissimilar to the words Paul would later offer in Romans 12:18-20 (which is partially a quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22), it says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.'

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

In a culture that has become increasingly divisive, Christians have a unique opportunity to be different. Instead of finding more and more enemies to hate based on smaller and smaller differences, we should strive to see everyone as a neighbor. And because they're our neighbors, we ought to bless, love, and pray for them. This is what Jesus is calling us to, but even more, this is what Jesus did for us. While we were still in utter opposition to him, he died for us. Romans 5:10 says, "...while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..." As followers of Jesus we should try to be Jesus-like. We probably won't have to die for our enemies, but at least we can make small sacrifices for them—sacrifices of kindness, care, love, forgiveness, and prayer.

I've outgrown my disdain for those I compete against. I think it is time for Christians in our country to outgrow their disdain for those that are against us. We must resist evil, but persist in loving people who do evil.

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:43-48.

"Love" (*agapao*), "describes an unconditional, sacrificial love, which ultimately is the love that God is (1Jn 4:8,16) and that God demonstrates..."

Loving your enemies requires "self denial."

"Jesus has set the bar very high for us. If the torture of crucifixion did not prevent our Lord from praying for His enemies, what insult, injury, enmity, pain, cruel word, etc from our persecutors should silence our prayer?!"

Tax collectors "the revenue officers or toll collectors who were considered to be disloyal Jews hired by the Romans to tax fellow Jews for personal profit and as a result this group became symbolic of the worst kind of people..."

"Reward" "refers to rewards which God bestows for the moral quality of an action, such rewards most often to be bestowed in eternity future."

AT Robertson explains that "perfect" "comes from telos, end, goal, limit. Here it is the goal set before us, the absolute standard of our Heavenly Father. The word is used also for relative perfection as of adults compared with children."

John MacArthur, "Because God is perfect, those who are truly his children will move on in the direction of his perfect standard. If you are stalled, or if you are slipping in the opposite direction, it is right that you examine yourself."

wednesday | questions

1. In what ways does our culture embrace the idea of hating our enemies?
2. Who do you consider your enemies?
3. Read Romans 5:9-11. In what ways can you more fully align your attitude those who oppose you with God's attitude towards those who sinned against him?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.