

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.