

## 21 Days of Dwelling

### Following Jesus Through the Sermon on the Mount

#### Introduction

**Matthew 5:1-2** Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them.

What does it really mean to be a disciple of Jesus? We don't have to wonder. He told us in His own words. The above verse begins the famous Sermon on the Mount. While delivering the best sermon of all time, Jesus lays out for His followers exactly what it means to be His disciple.

Join us for the next 21 days as we go through The Sermon on the Mount together and grow in our discipleship journey. Here are a few guidelines to remember each day so that you get the most out of this time:

#### 1. **Set aside time**

Don't just power through the reading to check it off your list. Set aside a good chunk of time to really focus on the Lord. Remember, you're spending time with your Father, who loves you dearly. Give Him time to speak and commune with you.

#### 2. **Ask for the Holy Spirit's help**

Before you begin each section, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Ask Him to reveal truths to you through His word. Ask Him to also reveal truths to you about your own heart. Believe that He wants to direct you.

#### 3. **Reflect on what you read**

At the end of each section, there will be some questions to ponder as well as space to write your own reflections. As we reflect on the word, we will be using the following format:

**Scripture** – What specific verse stood out to you?

**Observation** – Why did you take notice of it? What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you about this verse?

**Application** – What is the Holy Spirit asking YOU to do to apply this verse to your daily living?

**Prayer** – Write out a prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to enable you to live this verse out in the ways He is asking you to.

#### **4. Memorize**

Finally, take the verse that the Holy Spirit highlighted to you and write it on a note card or sticky note. Carry it with you all day or all week, meditating on it, living it and memorizing it. Won't it be great to have several scriptures memorized at the end of the next 21 days?

Are you ready for day one? Let's get started!

## Day 1

**Matthew 5:3-12** <sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup>Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup>Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup>Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

When something was said and then recorded in writing over 2000 years ago, it tends to become familiar. We've heard it a lot. When something becomes familiar, it can lose its potency. When Jesus said things like “blessed are those who mourn” or “blessed are the poor in spirit” it was shocking and counter to what everyone listening thought of as a blessed life. If we take away the familiarity of these words, we will have to admit that they are quite illogical to us as well.

I'll be honest. I don't feel blessed when I am mourning something. I certainly don't feel blessed when someone is insulting me because I am a follower of Christ. I might feel angry, hurt, vengeful, but blessed? Nope. Feeling blessed in those circumstances is not my natural reaction.

I **feel** blessed when things are going well. I **feel** blessed when people give me showers of compliments. I **feel** blessed when I'm walking in riches instead of want. Even showing mercy doesn't naturally **feel** like a blessing since mercy is undeserved

favor. Meaning, someone did me wrong and giving them favor anyway is a blessing. Whew, we're just getting started and Jesus' words are already hard to swallow.

I want to add #blessed to a picture of my new car, #blessed to my new job or #blessed to a picture of my smiling, happy family around me.

Typically, if I have a day characterized by this portion of scripture, I'm in tears and begging people to pray for me. I'm not telling my friends that my day is blessed. But what if I did? What if I allowed Jesus to flip the script and instead of judging circumstances according to my feelings, I viewed them through His words. If I really believed Jesus, I might say something like this instead:

Spent the morning weeping and mourning over a sin in my heart that the Holy Spirit revealed to me. #blessed

A family member isn't speaking to me because I am a follower of Christ. #blessed

Someone slandered me today because I believe in the truth of scripture. #blessed

I'm showing mercy to someone who stabbed me in the back. #blessed

What if I actually viewed those things as blessings? God isn't simply trying to shock us with words that are counter cultural. We really are blessed when these things are happening to us **because we're becoming more like Jesus**. And when Jesus says that our reward will be great in Heaven, He means it. There will be real rewards in Heaven, and they will blow away earthly rewards. Those rewards are not a given. We won't get them just because. They will be based on what we do.

Scripture tells us of two future judgements, The Great White Throne Judgement and The Judgement Seat of Christ (also known as the Bema Seat Judgement). Revelation 20:11-15 talks of the future Great White Throne judgement where The Book of Life is opened and those whose names are written in the book are saved. Those who repented of sin, placed their trust in Christ for salvation and became followers of Jesus are in The Book of Life. This is where those who will spend eternity with God on the New Earth are separated from those who will spend eternity apart from God.

The next judgement is The Judgement Seat of Christ which is only for Christians.

**2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before The Judgement Seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

**1 Corinthians 3:11-15** <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

This scripture views our actions like building materials. Our actions that are motivated by things like pride, selfish ambition, greed & jealousy will be burned up and will not last even when those actions look like they are for God. Those actions motivated by the work of the Holy Spirit making us meek, merciful, repentant, pure, hungry for righteousness & steady under persecution will produce building materials that can withstand the fire.

The more we walk, act, speak, love, react and think like Jesus, the more we will actually see with spiritual eyes and live like people who are blessed when our circumstances might make us feel the opposite. There are real rewards that will be given out for those who show that their works can withstand the testing of fire.

**Colossians 3:23** Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the lord Christ you are serving.

**1 Corinthians 9:25** Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Do you recognize any circumstance happening in your life right now that, according to this scripture, you should view as a blessing? Take some time and thank God for that blessing.

2. How would you rephrase, in your own words, your circumstances to reflect that they are truly blessings?

### **Now Let's SOAP**

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 2

**Matthew 5:13-16** <sup>13</sup>“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.

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

In John 17, Jesus talks about His disciples being in the world but “out” of it. We’re here in the world but we’re different. Instead of being like everyone else, we function as salt and light in the world.

I LOVE salt! Jeff is often aghast over how much salt I pour on my food. The thing about salt is that it makes the natural taste of the food really shine. Salt doesn’t make my French fries or broccoli taste like salt, it makes my French fries and broccoli taste like the absolute best versions of themselves.

Salt doesn’t only bring out the best in something. We still use it to preserve foods, but especially prior to refrigeration, salt was vital to food preservation. It kept decay away.

So, what did Jesus mean by calling His followers salt? We make individuals and society better and we hold back decay.

Have you ever had someone act differently around you because they know that you are a Christian? Maybe they watch their language a little closer or even have a greater awareness of sin in their own life. That’s being salt. In society, when we uphold the truths of God’s word against a world that wants to create its own morality, we are acting as salt and holding back decay. We don’t do it in a proud or judgmental way. We do it in the grace and humility of Christ.

**Colossians 4:5-6** Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Now let's talk about light. What does light do? It drives away darkness and allows people to see clearly. You may not realize it but your good deeds, done in the power of the Holy Spirit, create light that is spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness. When you walk in obedience to the Lord, even when it's hard, that is light that drives back darkness.

**John 1:4-5 In Him (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Since the Spirit of Christ lives within us, we shine that same light as we live in this dark world. That is why it is vital that we remember that though we are in this world, we are different. We do not join in with the darkness, rather by being light, we drive it away so that others can see the truth of the gospel clearly. They may not like what they see. They may even want to run back to the darkness. But our job is to continue to be light.

**1 Peter 4:3-6 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do (darkness) – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regards to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.**

**Ephesians 5:8-16 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. That is why it is said: "wake up sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be careful then how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.**

**2 Corinthians 6:14-16 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?**



Now let's bring it all together. As followers of Jesus, we should look different than the world around us. We don't talk the same. We don't enjoy the same entertainment. We steward our money differently. We spend our time serving instead of on self. We are salt and light. But if someone loves darkness and decay that will rub them wrong way. That's ok. We don't have to work it all out, that's God's job. Our job is to simply keep being salt and light. By being salt and light we are dispelling darkness and slowing the decay of the world around us.

There are times, especially when our light and salt irritate people, that we are tempted to tone it down a little, not be so salty or hide that light under a bowl so we can fit in a little better. That's when we remind ourselves of yesterday's verse. When people reject us or persecute us because we are salt and light, we are blessed.

One more thing about salt and light. One grain of salt is not that effective. One light in the darkness doesn't travel very far. We often hear people claim that simply being a Christian means that they are the Church. This is not true. We are different parts joined together to create The Body. A thumb all by itself is not the body and it's not very effective. It is only The Body when it is joined with all the other parts. We are the church only when we are together. When we combine all our grains of salt and all our lights in unity, the Church becomes an effective army to drive out darkness and slow down the decay in the society around us.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to do a heart check. Am I being salt and light to the world around me or am I more comfortable looking and acting like they do?
2. What areas do I need to grow in to be more effective as salt and light?

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

### Day 3

**Matthew 5:17-20** <sup>7</sup>“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. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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.

In **Psalm 119:97**, the Psalmist declares, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” Jesus also loved the law. We can sometimes forget that because He had so many confrontations with the Pharisees, where they accused Him of breaking the law. The law of God was always good. It set a standard of holiness for an unholy people.

The difficulty with the law is not that the commands of God are not good. The difficulty is, as with everything else, it can be corrupted by our sinful nature. How do we corrupt the commands of God?

1. We follow the letter, not the heart.

We look for ways to keep from breaking God’s commands without leaning into love for them. We do the bare minimum.

Often, we wonder how close we can get to the line of sin without crossing it. That’s the wrong perspective. Our perspective should be focused on how close we can get to Jesus. The closer we are to Jesus the further we are from sin.

The goal of being a disciple of Jesus is not to avoid sin. The goal is to know Jesus, recognize His voice and emulate Him. For sure, as we do that, we will avoid sin more and more, but if our idea of following Jesus is simply keeping ourselves from doing the Bible’s lists of “don’ts” we will constantly struggle. It’s like trying to run a race with no food or water. We just don’t have the nourishment needed to finish the race and “powering through” won’t cut it.

Both our avoidance of sin and our good deeds must come from a constant, vibrant relationship with Christ.

**John 15: 1-5 I (Jesus) am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

**<sup>5</sup>“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**

We all want to keep ourselves from sin and do good works for the Lord. The way to accomplishing those goals is not to try harder, it is to get closer to the One who gives us the power to do them.

## 2. We “make it better.”

We add our own rules to insulate the commands of God and treat our rules as just as important, if not more important than the original law. Then we impose our made up “improvements” on others.

This is what the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were doing. They created multiple rules around the laws of God, which were burdensome for people to follow, then treated their traditions and rules as equal to God’s law.

**Matthew 23:1-4 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: <sup>2</sup>“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup>So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup>They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.**

We still do this today. God is a very personal Father. He wants to prune you and speak to you. He will do that in a way that is different from the way He prunes and speaks to His other children. The Bible gives us a framework of sins every human being is to avoid. For example, things like murder, gossip & sexual immorality, are wrong for all of us. However, since God knows us intimately, He may convict us of something we need to deal with that isn’t sin for someone else.

Several years ago, I noticed that I always became discontent after going to the mall. I would come home pining for the furniture I saw at Restoration Hardware or the clothes I saw at Nordstrom, neither of which I could afford. One day the Lord revealed to me that I was really dealing with a heart of greed, and a lack of gratitude. Going to the mall fed those sins and I saw the evidence in my discontentment when I came home. I could no longer enjoy His blessings to me because I was coveting other things. So, I asked for forgiveness, stopped going to the mall and began to thank God for my sofa, my jeans, my curtains, all the things He had graciously provided for me.

Now if I had taken what the Lord convicted me of and imposed it on others, I would have been tying up burdens for them that they couldn't carry. If I told my friends that they were in sin by going to Macy's and they needed to stop, I would have been wrong. Staying away from the mall was a safety net to keep me from sinning but not everyone needs that same safety net. I would have been in sin if I disobeyed God's directions to me but that doesn't mean that someone else needed to follow those particular directions.

So how do we avoid these two errors? We need to have a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Honestly, the people's hearts must have sunk when they heard this. The Pharisees were viewed as the pinnacle of righteousness. It was already almost impossible to follow all their rules. How could their righteousness be surpassed?

**Romans 10:4 Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**

Those of us who are in Christ have the privilege of a righteousness given to us that we could never earn. That truth should cause us to rest in the grace & mercy of God while at the same time, listen and obey the voice of God when He is wanting to refine us.

**Hebrews 10:14 <sup>14</sup> For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**

We can have peace in our perfection in Christ even as the Holy Spirit is still working on making us holy.

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. Do you view your Christian walk as a daily task of trying to avoid sin and do good deeds? If so, take some time right now to ask the Holy Spirit to change your perspective. Ask Him to give you a desire to know Christ and delight in Him.
2. Now, from the safety of the righteousness of Christ, ask the Holy Spirit if there are any areas He wants to refine in you. Listen to what He says and ask Him for specific ways to partner with Him to walk in greater holiness.

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 4

**Matthew 5:21-26** <sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,<sup>[a]</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister<sup>[b][c]</sup> will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’<sup>[d]</sup> is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. <sup>23</sup> “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> “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. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Remember yesterday’s devotion about our righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law? Remember how we talked about valuing the heart of God more than the “dos and don’ts.” Remember we learned that we needed to rest in the righteousness of Christ while still allowing the Holy Spirit to convict and refine us?

For the next six day’s devotions, we are going to see Jesus showing us what that looks like in different areas of our lives. Each time we see Jesus say, “you have heard it said,” He is referring to the teachings of the law and He is raising the bar. He makes it clear that He is not only interested in us not murdering someone, but His real focus is what’s in our heart. Let’s jump into unpacking today’s scripture!

We would all agree that it’s a good thing to not murder but, Jesus knows that an action like murder doesn’t start with murder. It starts with something ugly and cancerous growing in our heart that, when it’s not dealt with, leads to disaster. This is what Jesus criticized the Pharisees for. They made sure they looked good on the outside but didn’t take care of the cancer growing on the inside.

**Matthew 23:27** **Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.**

According to Jesus, not murdering someone is not good enough. He tells us that if we carry anger toward someone, have contempt (“raca” is a term for contempt) for



someone or speak insults to someone, we are in danger of judgement and the fires of hell. Please take a moment to read over that one more time. Jesus is serious. This is where it gets really hard because we have all been guilty of these things.

Jeff and I have been in ministry for over 35 years, and I have to tell you, Christians have an anger, contempt and resentment problem. Those things show up in our actions and the careless words we say to and about one another. To make sure we are free from these things, we need to let the Holy Spirit pinpoint the circumstances and people that cause our anger to rise up. We are going to practice what we have already learned and rest in the grace and mercy of Christ, while we, at the same time, take His words seriously and let Him deal with our anger, contempt and the careless words we speak about others.

Whenever you have 2 or more human beings together on a regular basis, someone will do or say something that causes anger in another. So how do we, as disciples of Jesus, deal with that anger?

**Ephesians 4:26-27 In your anger do not sin”<sup>[a]</sup>: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.**

First, we have to realize why it is so important to deal with our anger the right way. It is natural for us to feel anger rise up in us when we are wronged. But, if we don't stop it there, if we coddle that anger, mull it over, allow it to grow, we “give the devil a foothold.” What does that mean? It means that we allow the enemy an access point in our lives. Don't minimize the danger of that. This means that you have given permission, by your anger, to allow demonic activity in an area of your life. Do you think those dark forces will be satisfied to simply stay in one spot? Nope, they will seek more and more access to more and more areas of your life. That anger will turn to contempt. That contempt will begin to spew out of your mouth and the damage to you and others will grow.

**James 3:7-10 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

**<sup>9</sup>With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup>Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.**

**Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.**

Once we take the words of scripture seriously and admit that this is something we should not take lightly, we must take action immediately. We must humbly go to the one who injured us and attempt to reconcile. That's hard. Because it's hard, our tendency is to either tell our side of the story to everyone who will listen or to cut and run to the church down the street where we don't have to see that person anymore. Neither of those things bring glory to God or grow us more into the image of Christ.

The good news is, when we take the courageous step to go and talk it out with someone who has made us angry, we grow, mature and produce righteousness in our lives.

**James 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.**

So, what happens if, trying our best, we can't bring reconciliation to that relationship? We leave that person to the Lord, pray for them keep ourselves from sinning against them.

**Romans 12:17-19 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> 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,"<sup>[a]</sup> says the Lord.**

### Questions for Reflection

1. Ask the Holy Spirit if you are harboring anger towards anyone. If so, is this someone you can safely contact? Send a text or email asking to get together.
2. Think about someone who has hurt you. Say a prayer for the Lord to move and work in their life.

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

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## Day 5

**Matthew 5:27-32** You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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. It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>32</sup> 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.

Again, Jesus raises the bar. It’s not good enough to just not be unfaithful to your husband or wife. What’s in your heart? As disciples of Jesus, we are to have sexual thoughts about our husband or wife only, anything else is lust. What is lust? In this scripture the Greek word has the meaning to desire or covet something that is forbidden. And, just to be clear, this scripture is not exclusively to men.

God is kind, generous and gracious so He has given us the gift of marriage. Marriage comes with a lot of great perks! God takes marriage seriously.

**Ephesians 5:25-33** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing<sup>[a]</sup> her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

There are several beautiful, amazing, supernatural things that happen when a man and woman make a marriage covenant before God.

1. They become one

2. They learn lessons of sacrificial love
3. They are a picture in the natural of the spiritual relationship between Christ and His Church

Because of the importance of marriage and the life-long commitment of the covenant, God gives married couples, only, the gift of sex.

**1 Corinthians 7:1-9** Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” <sup>2</sup> But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. <sup>3</sup> The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. <sup>5</sup> Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. <sup>6</sup> I say this as a concession, not as a command. <sup>7</sup> I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. <sup>8</sup> Now to the unmarried<sup>[a]</sup> and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

God also points out the beauty in singleness. Paul’s desire was for everyone to have the gift of being happily single as he was. In his view, this made you able to be more devoted to the Lord.

**1 Corinthians 7:32-35** I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— <sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

So, there is beauty and purpose in both marriage and singleness. However, sex is reserved for marriage only. Jesus tells us that crossing the boundary of sexual sin is not only in the act of sex, but in the thoughts we have, whether single or married,

towards another. If we find ourselves lusting after someone, meaning we want forbidden relations with another person, according to Jesus, we need to take drastic action. We need to cut off or gouge out what is causing us to sin. How do we do that?

We stop watching that show.

We stop going to that place.

We stop visiting that website.

We stop reading those romance novels.

We stop sleeping with that person.

We stop messaging that person.

We bring in others to hold us accountable.

We get married.

We change jobs.

We give our passwords to our spouse.

But most of all, we dwell with Christ and draw near to Him. Remember, you can't just depend on your will power. You rest in His grace as you, at the same time, allow the Holy Spirit to work on your sin. But just because we have the gift of grace, we do not use that to keep sinning. Continuing to sin, when we know we shouldn't, allows the enemy access to areas of our lives and that is a dangerous thing. That's why Jesus is so emphatic about cutting off what is causing you to sin.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Remember that the Holy Spirit loves you and when He points out sin, it is for your good. Be honest with yourself and Him right now. Ask Him to reveal any areas that you are operating in lust. Now ask Him for a specific plan to deal your lust. Thank Him for revealing truth to you and ask Him for the strength to follow through.
2. Now think about anything the Lord has asked you to remove. What can you replace it with that will bring glory to God?

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 6

**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.’<sup>34</sup> But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.<sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

In this portion of scripture, Jesus isn’t talking about swearing or using curse words. He is talking about honesty and following through on your word. The Pharisees would use tricks to keep from fulfilling their word. Instead of swearing an oath to God, they would swear an oath to Jerusalem or heaven. In their minds, that oath wasn’t as serious if they broke it.

However, Jesus strips this thinking down to the simplicity of being a person of your word. If you say you will do something, you do it. He continues to have harsh words for those who don’t obey this scripture. Over promising and not following through, according to Jesus, come from the evil one. Why? Because at its root is a desire to look good but not the commitment to do something we may not want to do, have changed our minds about or won’t receive any accolades for. We want the credit and admiration for the good deed without having to actually do it.

**Proverbs 25:14** Like clouds and wind without rain  
is one who boasts of gifts never given.

Later in the book of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable to the Pharisees.

**Matthew 21:28-32** What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

<sup>29</sup> “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.<sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax



**collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.**

Jesus values what you actually do over the boasts that you make.

**James 3:5-6 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. <sup>6</sup>The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.**

We need to be people who consider carefully what we say and commit to. Then we need to be people who keep our word even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient. Psalm 15 is a great portion of scripture for us to meditate on.

**Psalm 15 Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?**

**Who may live on your holy mountain?**

**<sup>2</sup>The one whose walk is blameless,  
who does what is righteous,  
who speaks the truth from their heart;**

**<sup>3</sup>whose tongue utters no slander,  
who does no wrong to a neighbor,  
and casts no slur on others;**

**<sup>4</sup>who despises a vile person  
but honors those who fear the Lord;  
who keeps an oath even when it hurts,  
and does not change their mind;**

**<sup>5</sup>who lends money to the poor without interest;  
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.**

**Whoever does these things  
will never be shaken.**

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Do you over commit and under deliver? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal why you struggle in this area. Ask Him to give you the courage to be a person of your word.
2. Do you hold back from committing to something because you are selfish with your time? Maybe you don't over commit but instead refuse to commit to things because you don't want to follow through. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a heart of generosity with your time. Now ask Him to give you a specific area to give a "yes" to.

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

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## **Day 7**

### **Time to go to church!!**

Remember on Day 2 when we talked about salt and light? One grain of salt doesn't do much. One light, by itself, can only go so far. But salt and light gathered with other grains of salt and lights has a mighty impact.

Today, go to church and gather with the rest of the body. Make a commitment to make it to church every Sunday. Prepare your heart by listening to worship music while you get ready and drive. Come early to join us in prayer before service. Ask the Holy Spirit to move this morning in your life and the lives of others.