

Tough Sayings of Jesus

The four Gospels are filled with the words of Jesus – sayings that were remembered and recorded. In fact, it is believed that the first written record of the life of Jesus was a document of the sayings of Jesus that scholars have labeled “The Q Source” and was in circulation long before the Gospels were written down. The writers seemingly drew on this source as they preserved the memory and saving acts of Jesus into permanent form.

For me, the sayings of Jesus are the closest way for me to know Jesus personally. I believe them to be the most accurate record of the ministry of Jesus – what he thought and taught and the words he himself lived by. Some of these words breathe life into our souls with their revelation of a loving God, with the freedom they invite us to enter, with the grace with which they overflow. Other sayings are not so easy to hear – they can be a tough medicine to swallow.

I would like to look at some of these harder sayings and explore the possible meanings they may hold. Many of these ‘tough sayings’ are found in the Sermon on the Mount. Are we to take these words literally or figuratively? Is Jesus after an attitude and heart change or a very literal behavior change? Do the words apply to some situations but not all? In the end, you will have to decide, but I hope the following questions and thoughts will stir deep discussion that will help you draw your own conclusions.

Let us begin this whole journey with Luke 6: 46: “*Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?*” That is the question we are individually being asked by Jesus – is he truly our **Lord** if we don’t believe or act upon his words – even if they are ‘tough sayings’?

After I began this group of studies with my own church women, I started reading the book by Dallas Willard called, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God (1998)* and I am grateful for the insights in that book that have helped shape my understanding of the Sermon on the Mount and the direction of this study. Where quoted, I will simply put (DC pg. ___).

I certainly cannot do justice to all of his wonderful insights and would highly recommend reading the entire book, even though it requires thorough ‘chewing’, but I hope some of the lessons will bring some new understandings.

I pray God’s blessing and protection as we enter this journey together,

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Sayings of Jesus:

1. *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. (Matt. 5:20)*
2. *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca" is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in dangers of the fire of hell. (Matt. 5: 21,22)*
3. *But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in dangers of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother (sister) has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matt 5: 23, 24)*
4. *You have heard it said, "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth", but I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." (Matt. 5: 38 – 42)*
5. *If your right eye causes you to sin, 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 sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your whole body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matt. 5: 29, 30)*
6. *Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you . . (Matt: 7: 1 – 6) Pt. 1*
7. *. do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. (Matt. 7: 1 – 6) Pt. 2*
8. *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matt. 12: 30 – 32)*
9. *Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. (Luke 6: 24 – 26)*
10. *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Luke 12: 51 – 53)*

LESSON #1 – “Right Living and the Kingdom of God”

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. (Matt. 5:20)

Introduction - Evangelical churches are very firm on their belief that we are saved by grace and not by works. This verse appears to be contradictory, especially since our opinion of Pharisees and Sadducees is not very high. The Jewish Leaders worked extremely hard to keep the letter of the law – to be faithful and obedient to the requirements of God. In their efforts to live obediently, they often lost sight of compassion. Jesus says that this law will not pass away – that it must still be fulfilled. Didn't Jesus replace the law with grace?

Questions:

1. What is your initial understanding of Matt. 5: 17 – 20? Why is the Law important to Jesus and what is its connection to righteousness and the kingdom of heaven?
2. How do we become righteous enough to enter the kingdom?

It is important to take a quick look at the Beatitudes at the beginning of Matt. 5 to understand who is blessed and who can receive the gift of the Kingdom. Dallas Willard claims that we have understood the Beatitudes upside down. These are not qualities to strive for – meekness, humility, mercy, purity, peace, etc. Rather, Willard states that it is those who know they are lacking – that come before heaven empty-handed, that God is most able to bless. The poor in spirit – the meek that can't stand up for themselves, those hungry for righteousness, but never achieve it. A new rendition of the Beatitudes might read:

Blessed are the physically repulsive,
 Blessed are those who smell bad,
 The twisted, misshapen, deformed,
 The too big, too little, too loud,
 The bald, the fat and the old
For they are all riotously celebrated in the party of Jesus. (DC pg. 123)

Rather than outwardly appearing like we have it all together – that we get it 'right', Jesus says the kingdom is for those who have a *kingdom heart* – a heart that knows it is deficient and thus depends totally upon God to guide and direct all actions, so Jesus begins working, not on our actions, but our thought-lives. Our thoughts are the truth of who we are. This is where the battle must be won. Our righteousness is to exceed the experts of the Law by understanding the Heart of the Law, not just the letter of it – by understanding the 'why' behind our actions and not simply performing an outward expectation or duty. And therefore, the law will be fulfilled ethically, not just ceremonially.

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1. In what ways did the Pharisees keep the letter of the law regarding the following commands, but missed the heart behind the law:
 - a. Sabbath (Mt. 12: 1 – 13)
 - b. Honoring Parents (Mt. 15)
 - c. Tithing (Luke 21: 1 – 4)
 - d. Fasting (Mt. 9: 14 – 17)
 - e. Cleanliness (Mt. 15)

2. What do you think might be the thought patterns behind these laws that God desires in His beloved? For example, the Sabbath was established for humans for regular, weekly rejuvenation. Therefore, any action which promoted their rest, relief and general well-being was honoring the Sabbath. Jesus healed on the Sabbath – not to bug the Pharisees, but because healing truly honored the day – as does worship.

3. How might your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in these same areas?

4. What part does grace play in developing a “Kingdom Heart”? What is the balance between striving for righteousness and being made righteous before God?

The Law and the Prophets had been twisted around to authorize an oppressive, though religious, social order that put glittering humans – the rich, the educated, the “well-born”, the popular, the powerful, and so on – in possession of God. Jesus’ proclamation clearly dumped them out of their privileged position and raised ordinary people with no human qualifications into the divine fellowship by faith in Jesus. . . . Jesus actually knows how to enable people to be good, and he brings his knowledge to bear upon life as it really is, not some intellectualized and sanctified version thereof. He knows that people deeply hunger to be good but cannot find their way. (DC pg. 127,129-30)

1. Are there any ways that you count on your upbringing (Christian roots) to save you? Do you ever consider your personal wealth or status a blessing of God because you’re a Christian? Do you every consider Canada a blessed nation because it is “Christian”?
2. Are there any areas in your own life in which you tend to be legalistic?
3. Are there areas where you are non-conformist and even rebellious against the ‘status quo’?
4. Would you have made a good Pharisee?
5. In what area of growth would Jesus challenge you regarding your own righteousness? Do you have thought patterns that need changing?

A Kingdom heart: Jesus doesn’t want us to just ‘follow the rules’, he requires that our hearts are set on doing what is good and right for ourselves and those around us. Our goodness must exceed the rules as next week we will see. We are not good because we “Do not murder”. There is much more to relationship!

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LESSON #2: “Be Angry and Sin not”

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, “Raca” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in dangers of the fire of hell. (Matt. 5: 21,22)

There is a lot of modern psychology regarding human emotions and how we deal with them. It is generally agreed that it is important to express one’s emotions for healthy emotional balance. Anger is a human emotion that must be expressed but what a healthy response to anger?

Anger is also one of the seven deadly sins and there is no dispute that it is part of the sickness of our society today. Road rage, domestic violence, vandalism, bullying are some of the symptoms of this huge, unresolved issue. It appears there is little problem expressing our anger. But where is it all stemming from? Why are we such angry people?

1. What situations seem to bring about an angry response from you? What is your typical way of expressing anger –Do you vent or stuff? Do you go on a verbal tirade or give the silent treatment? What do you feel physically when you get angry?
2. Has anger affected the well being of your family in any way?
3. Has anger affected the health of your church in any way?

It is important to understand what anger is. It is the smoke detector or alarm system, warning your body of impending danger. The danger may be real or only perceived, but the alarm system cannot tell the difference. For example, if the smoke detector goes off in your house because you burned the toast, you will simply clear the smoke and get the alarm off as quickly as possible. If it goes off because there is a fire in your home, you react accordingly and get yourself to safety – either fight the fire, or flee the situation. The smoke detector isn’t the issue, the fire is.

We tend to try to put out the alarm system (anger) before we discern what the threat is. What belief system has been violated within us that causes an angry reaction? How do I feel threatened? Am I in physical danger? Is my sense of justice being violated? Am I being criticized or verbally abused or am I perceiving another’s words incorrectly because of my own lack of self esteem?

“Don’t let the sun go down on your anger” is a strong call to identify and analyze the threat that is signaled by our angry response and deal with it firmly and immediately. Allowing the smoke detector to ring and ring and ring, while never looking for the smoke is a futile endeavor. This is what rage is. Individuals feel constantly angry and they vent that anger continually, but the venting never solves any problem and the venting itself becomes the problem. The most

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important question to ask is “Why am I angry”. And the answer is never, “Because you *made* me angry”. No one can **make** you angry – it is your own alarm system and the delicacy of its sensor.

1. **What is your value detector sensitized to?** For example, if you value the good use of time, being with someone who makes you late will bring about anger – your time value system has been violated. If you value fairness and equality, anything you perceive as being unfair will bring a response of anger. If stewardship is a strong value, then wastefulness will bring a reaction. **What is important to you – what are your values?**
2. **Does the reaction fit the crime?** Does a small infringement upon your value bring about a huge *5 alarm* response or a mild stirring of emotion? Overreacting to an incident may be evidence that you have unresolved issues that keep being triggered. Storehouse anger is an injury or injustice that has not been dealt with – think of it as a fishhook that will catch on the slightest thing and open the whole emotional storehouse all over again.
3. **Is the threat real or perceived?** Has your value system really been violated, or did you misinterpret another’s actions or words? For example, children may get angry because parents denies them the opportunity to go to an event. A value system has been violated for the children – their right to some freedom at their age and their trustworthiness. Were they denied the event because their parents don’t trust them or because the parents fear for their safety? There will be more anger if the children perceive they are not trusted, even though for the parents, it is strictly a matter of safety.
4. **Fight or flight response.** Once you have identified what value is being violated and to what degree, you can choose to either remove the threat or remove yourself from the situation, or accept the consequence of no action. BUT, the alarm must be turned off. Don’t go to bed with ringing in your ears!

Exercise: Think of one instance in the last couple of weeks that brought on angry feelings. What was the situation? What value do you feel was being violated? Was your anger appropriate to the violation? What might you have done to address and remove the threat? How long did it take the anger to dissipate after the issue was dealt with? Could you have dealt with it more effectively if you had better understood what issues were going on within you?

A kingdom heart: Anger is the root of much evil. Murder is the extreme, but there is a progression of ill will towards another that can begin with unresolved anger that is anchored in the heart. A kingdom heart cares first about the other person and seeks restitution. Next week we will look at the progression from anger to contempt to malice – what it really means to call someone a fool.

LESSON #3: Name calling is a dangerous game!

But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in dangers of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother (sister) has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matt 5: 23, 24)

When we legitimately feel anger and deal appropriately with it, we restore the relationship with the person (object) of our anger. Anger does not become a weapon with which to hurt another, but an alert that something is out of sorts that needs to be rectified and thus a tool for rebuilding community. Anger is an emotion of caring. That is a good thing. But what happens when anger moves toward **contempt**?

The Aramaic term, 'raca' was current in Jesus' day to express contempt for someone and to mark him or her as contemptible. It may have originated from the sound one makes to collect spittle from the throat in order to spit. In anger, I might want to hurt you. In contempt, you are not worth consideration one way or the other. We can be angry at someone without denying their worth. But contempt makes it easier for to hurt them. . . . Our verbal arsenal is loaded with contemptuous terms, some with sexual, racial or cultural bearing, others just personally degrading. They should never be uttered. (DC pg. 151-2)

1. In Matt. 5: 21 - 22 what is the progression of punishment Jesus describes. What is the punishment for being angry? For saying "raca"? For saying "you fool". Why is Jesus so hard on these behaviors of name calling?
2. What are some of the words used today to label others as 'different' or to devalue them?
3. Think of the word, "enemy". With that label, what behaviors do we give license to? What about the words, "terrorist", "criminal", "pervert". How have these labels dehumanized another and changed our behavior from how we would treat someone we label 'friend'?
4. Is there any good reason to label another person? Did Jesus ever label anyone with a diminishing word?
5. Within the church, we also use labels. "Conservative", "Liberal", "Born Again", "Fundamentalist", "Heathen", "Heretic", "Evangelical" to signify those we approve of and those we don't. How do these words affect how we feel about people? How do they bring division into the church?

A radio program on prison guards discussed their attitudes and behaviors at home versus at work. Since it is very unnatural to cage a human being, the guards have to de-humanize the prisoners in order to effectively do their job. They become two different people at home and at work and this can cause much stress and an unhealthy, fractured existence. How could this information shed any light on the events concerning the treatment of Iraqi prisoners?

6. What are some alternatives? How would Jesus want us to deal with these difficult issues of our day? What is the kingdom heart attitude that Jesus desires from his followers?

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Jesus notes one stage further in the progression of internal evil that may be there without murder occurring. “You Fool!” said with that combination of freezing contempt and withering anger is an expression of **malice**.

“Fool” no longer captures the strength of Jesus’ teaching here. We use it to discredit the value of what that person might say or do by calling their words or actions “foolish”. Biblically, a fool was someone who was willfully perverted, rebellious, knowingly wicked to his own harm. “*A fool doesn’t care about understanding, but only in displaying his own heart: (Prov. 18:2) “Like a dog that re-eats its own vomit, a fool repeats his folly over and over. (Prov. 26:11)*

To brand someone “fool” in this biblical sense was a violation of the soul so devastating, of such great harm, that, as Jesus saw it, it would justify consigning the offender to the smoldering garbage dump of human existence, “gehenna”. It combines all that is evil in anger as well as in contempt. It is not possible for people with such attitudes toward others to live in the movements of God’s kingdom, for they are totally out of harmony with it. (DC pg. 154)

Jesus is giving us a revelation of the preciousness of human beings. He means to reveal the value of persons. Merely not killing someone misses the heart of it all – the Kingdom Heart. Jesus is not making new laws – three more “Thou shalt not . . .” NO! Jesus works much more deeply at the source of our actions and requires transformation of our hearts. When we treasure those around us and see them as God’s creatures designed for his eternal purposes, our language will reflect such a heart. “He that loves has fulfilled the law”, says Paul. (Rom 13:8

THEREFORE – that wonderful word of Scripture that moves us forward to the next action we need to take. *Therefore . . . go and be reconciled to your brother.*

To get the full impact of this illustration, we have to imagine ourselves being married or baptized or ordained . . . In the midst of the proceedings, we walk out to seek reconciliation with someone who isn’t even there. Realizing how important it is for his soul to find release, and pained by the break between yourself and him, you stop the ritual. You walk out of it to find him and make up. That illustrates the positive goodness of the kingdom heart. “Behold, I would have mercy and not sacrifice.” Hos. 6:6 (DC. Pg 156)

A Kingdom Heart: Just think of what the quality of life and character must be in a person who would routinely interrupt sacred rituals to pursue reconciliation with a fellow human being. What kind of thought life, what feeling tones and moods, what habits of body and mind, what kinds of deliberations and choices would you find in such a person? A person may reject your efforts at reconciliation – that is not your responsibility. Taking the first step is.

Next week we will study further how we are to treat those whom we call “enemy”.

LESSON #4 - "How Much Can a Person Take?"

You have heard it said, "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth", but I tell you; do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matt. 5: 38 – 42)

"There's no shame in fighting back when the cause is right"

"What cause would that be?" I ask.

"The one that allows people the freedom of being who they want to be. There are those who'll do anything to rob us of that freedom- that's something that doesn't change no matter what world you're in. We can't ever let them win."

"So you're condoning violence?"

He shakes his head. "No. But we have the right to defend ourselves when violence is done to us."

This just confuses me. "Don't that make us no better'n them?" I ask.

"Turning the other cheek only lets them win."

"Yeah, but I thought a good person was supposed to learn to forgive."

"You have to be alive to be able to forgive," he tells me.

(Excerpt taken from "The Onion Girl" by Charles de Lint, 2001 – pg. 488)

Which philosophy are you most comfortable with? With Jesus' teaching that we are to turn the other cheek or the world view expressed by this author – that we have not only the right but the duty to defend ourselves? Is it an either - or?

The Christian community has divided on the various ideologies of war and peace. Some faith communities are pacifists, holding literally to the teaching of non-retaliation. Others support the concept of the 'just war', that we are called to oppose evil and stand against it, even if it means to go against the 6th commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". Pacifism often sounds like 'sitting back and doing nothing' in the face of injustice but in truth, it is a very pro-active way to identify and confront injustice. It is to literally be 'peacemakers', not simply 'peacekeepers'. Pacifists have also been accused of sitting back and letting others do their dirty work, counting on others to defend their freedoms. The purpose of this study is not to sway you toward any ideology of peace, but to hopefully discover what Jesus wants a Kingdom Heart to do when confronted by evil.

The law was given in the OT so that there would be a balance of justice. Because of the hardness of people's hearts, they would accelerate their vengeance, and bring greater harm than was done to them. Eye for an eye justice became an eye plus a tooth which only accelerated the cycle of violence. The courts were set up to handle disputes – judgment was sought through the courts and punishment was measured. Vengeance was not to be carried out by a personal vendetta.

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One possible interpretation might be that Jesus saying ‘do not strike back, but let the courts handle it.’?

A right cheek slap would be a backhanded slap which was insulting and very offensive. Another potential understanding might be to not return the insult. In fact, be willing to take another insult – for their words mean nothing to your integrity. You need not get defensive. This is not referring to an outright physical attack.

A third interpretation is that defending yourself is different from defending loved ones. If someone strikes you – you may be able to bear the hurt and in the name of peace, try to walk away or stand up to take more, but refuse to strike back. BUT, if someone strikes your loved one – are you not obligated to defend them and stand up for them? Defend the weak and oppose injustice seems to be another Biblical teaching.

1. How have you understood “turn the other cheek” and how have you lived by your understanding?
2. Has any part of this saying of Jesus been hard for you to accept?
3. Does turning your cheek set a person up to be a door mat to be trodden upon and conquered?
4. Which interpretation offers a new perspective that you haven’t thought of before and does it affirm what you always believed or offer another alternative?
5. What is your personal instinctive action to one who has hurt you?

It is easy to get philosophical on how we handle this passage and look at it from either a global perspective of, “is war right or wrong” or from an extreme personal perspective of “what if someone breaks into my house and tries to rape my child”. The key to Jesus’ comments is really to look at your own personal thought pattern and ask, “Do I want to retaliate when someone hurts me or insults me? Is it my natural instinct to want to hurt back?” This is truly the heart of the matter. Jesus says it is a terrible thing to insult someone – so say ‘Raca” or call them a fool. But, if someone insults you – calls you a fool, or strikes you with the back of their hand, how are you to handle it?????

A Kingdom Heart does not retaliate against personal injury or insult. We must change our thought patterns. It is a natural instinct to strike back, to swear back, to be angry back, to hurt back at least as hard as we have been hurt – but too often even harder. **A kingdom heart always (and I mean *always* – even in the face of personal hurt) wants the best for the other person.** How can I help them be all God desires them to be? What is going on inside them that make them want to hurt me? What might I have done to provoke them? This is a pattern of love that must be imbedded within each one claiming to be like Christ – one of his. And we might be called to drastic measures to ensure it is so . . .

LESSON #5 - “Extreme Makeovers”

If your right eye causes you to sin, 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 sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your whole body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matt. 5: 29, 30)

I don't know anyone who takes this passage literally – and so we won't even go there. We have been talking about looking at the thought patterns of how we live our lives in order to develop a Kingdom heart. What is the message of Jesus in these very strong words?

These verses are in the context of dealing with lust – looking at an “object” and desiring it for your own personal “use”. These verses are not only aimed at men, as much as we'd like them to take note of it. The words speak to us all. To lust is to objectify a person. They become less than a beloved child of God to be cared for and nurtured, and instead, become some **thing** to be used to quench a desire within. We can also lust after many things that are exactly that – things, believing that it will fulfill us and instead, leave us emptier.

1. What are some traps that women fall into that could be classified as lust?
2. Think about the most popular women's magazines. What are we feeding our eyes upon that lead to unhealthy desires? What about TV programs? Shopping Malls?
3. Did you ever consider that even women lust after the perfect woman's body? We may not desire it sexually – but we long to look like the perfect “10” cover girl. How does this visual lusting lead to unhealthy behavior?
4. Women may be less vulnerable to visually lusting after a man and falling into an affair, but can be more emotionally vulnerable to the same trap. What are some emotional longings-turned-lustings that may lead a woman into an immoral relationship?
5. Read Job 31: 1 – 12. Job is considered by some to be the oldest book of the Bible. The concept of feeding our eyes has been around for a long time and Job understood the heart matter! Jesus' teaching is not new, but as always, he takes it to a new place.
6. “Adultery of the Heart” – vs. 28 is any act you would commit if you knew you wouldn't get caught. In other words, it is not a conviction of wrongness in your soul, but fear of being found out that keeps you from sin. This is not good enough, according to Jesus. Is there anything you think you might do if you knew you wouldn't get caught? This signals a belief system that needs healing. Take this area to prayer.

One principle that comes from this saying of Jesus is that we need to remove the temptation. If cutting out our eye seems extreme, then to quit buying magazines should be a very easy solution. **Are you willing to change your thought patterns toward beauty and material possessions by giving up that which feeds the desires?**

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Could you quit window shopping knowing it is really ‘window lusting’; give up harlequin-type romance novels that feed emotional lust; or quit buying magazines ‘just for the articles’. Advertising makes up 40% of most magazines which feeds the eyes. Most of us will say, “It isn’t that bad – I just enjoy seeing the new fashions, looking at home renovations and the latest colors. Reading fluffy romance just relaxes me and its fun. I’ve got it under control” Yeah – right! The more you look, the more you want. That is a fact! But we must go one step further in truly understanding this saying of Jesus. We might be willing to change behavior that hurts ourselves, but this is really speaking about behaviors which hurt another person by treating him or her less than a person. It still is dealing with the subject matter of insult and contempt from the previous verses.

It is the natural tendency of humanity to protect one’s self. It is better to hurt another than to be hurt ourselves. Jesus challenges this instinct. Instead, he says it is much better to hurt yourself than to risk hurting another. Better to lose a hand than for that hand to strike another person. Better to lose an eye, than for that eye to demoralize a person.

1. What are the implications of this teaching – that it is better to be hurt ourselves than to hurt another? In what ways might this apply to women? What kind of words do we use that hurt another in order to protect ourselves?
2. What are some areas of our lives that we try to protect? For example, how do we protect our reputation or our dignity? How do we protect our feelings? Our careers? What kind of actions might we take that could cause hurt while we try to preserve ourselves?
3. *“It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”* Jesus is teaching us that we are either feeding or protecting that which has no eternal value. He isn’t teaching that we might be handless in Heaven - he’s teaching that you don’t need your body in heaven. Injuring another beloved of God has eternal ramifications. Protecting your physical well being has no lasting value at all. Lusting after things for the body is temporal and fruitless. But building a Kingdom heart is building for the future that will last for eternity.

A Kingdom Heart places the highest value on the protection of another, not the protection of the self. It desires first and foremost to feed and nurture another, not to feed one’s own appetite at the expense of another. Survival of the fittest is man’s biggest lie. Truth is the salvation of all – even ‘the least of these’.

To be fit for the kingdom is to be the kind of person whose feet, eyes, hands, heart and all the rest simply walk within the good policy that he or she has adopted because of the knowledge that it is good and right. (DC pg 160)

LESSON #6 “Planks and Sawdust”

Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you . . . do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. (Matt. 7: 1 – 6)

Confused? I am. Jesus warns us not to judge others because it may come back to haunt us – or be used against us. But in the next breath, he’s telling us to use our judgment to discern who is a ‘pig’ and unworthy of our pearls and who isn’t. This seems very contradictory. This week we’ll look at part 1 – Judge not. Next week we will study verses 6 – 7.

Read all of Matthew 7: 1 - 6

1. How would you define the difference between a judging attitude and a discerning attitude?
2. When is it inappropriate and harmful to judge another? When might it be a necessary thing to judge another? Are we called to pass moral judgment upon another? How do we respond to the issue of, for example: homosexuality without being judgmental?
3. When is our judgment of such moral issues hypocritical as Jesus declares in verse 5?

Dallas Willard points out how the attitude of condemnation plays into this discussion. Too often judging is actually blaming and condemning.

We have great confidence in the power of condemnation to ‘straighten others out’. And if that fails, should we not at least make clear that we are on the side of right – no small matter itself.

But what is it, exactly, that we do when we condemn someone? When we condemn another, we really communicate that he or she is, in some deep and just possibly irredeemable way, bad – bad as a whole, and to be rejected. In our eyes the condemned is among the discards of human life. He or she is not acceptable. We sentence that person to exclusion. . . to correct another without making this happen requires great spiritual and personal maturity. . . (DC pg 218)

A condemning attitude is contradictory to the Kingdom heart which seeks to see everyone as the beloved of God. Dallas takes Galatians 6:1 as the model for how we correct those who are in sin. Read it carefully and then discover the four principles for correction that Dallas identifies:

1. We don’t undertake to correct unless we are absolutely certain of the sin. If there is any lack of clarity, assume the sin did not occur.
2. Correction is reserved for those who live and work in a divine power not their own. That power is wise and loving beyond anything we will ever be. Only a certain kind of life puts us in a position to ‘correct’ another.

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3. Correction is not a matter of ‘hammering out their wrongness’ and hammering in what’s going to happen to them if they don’t change their ways. It is a matter of restoration – of bringing them back to the life God intended for them.
4. Only correct another with the knowledge that you could very well do the same thing, or even worse. This totally removes any sense of self-righteousness or superiority. Feel the ‘weight’ of the burden a person feels when trapped in sin.

With these guidelines, would you want the job of correcting another? It reminds us how important it is to build relationships of love and understanding before we take the role of critic and judge!

1. Did you grow up in a home where correction was given lovingly without condemnation or did you experience a sense of unworthiness and shame when you were disciplined? Can you remember an incident when you felt condemned for your actions? How did you respond and how did it help you deal with your behavior?
2. How have you dealt with your own children when you see them going in a harmful direction? Does your own home carry a spirit of condemnation or a spirit of acceptance and love? Can you recall a time when you were gently and lovingly corrected? What was the effect of that experience?
3. Condemnation, blame and shame become the saddle of self perception that we wear. They never seem to go away. Shame is a debilitating characteristic for any child of Christ. “Now there is no CONDEMNATION”. Read Romans 8: 1- 2 and before Christ, name the areas of shame you have felt burdened with that have held you back from fullness of life and freedom in Christ. Receive the forgiveness that is already yours. It may be helpful to physically burn a piece of paper with the shame written upon it so that you can visually see it go up in smoke!
4. Recognize how you must never put that kind of burden upon another by condemning their actions or labeling their sin. Discrimination is a form of condemnation – a label to **separate** one from another when the Kingdom calls us to **identify** with one another. What are ways we can work toward building connections with those we ‘disapprove of’?

A Kingdom Heart: Dallas Willard says that a spirit of condemnation **is** the board in our own eye. We cannot *help* another if we cannot see the other. We must not look upon the behaviors of another, and cast judgment only upon those actions. We must see the person with the eyes of Jesus. Take the board out – take out the spirit of condemnation so that you can truly look at your brother or sister in love. Once you do, the urge to condemn will fade to dust and the desire to build one another up in love will rule the heart.

LESSON #7 - “Who’s Calling Who a Pig?”

“. . . do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matt. 7: 1 – 6)

The long-standard use of this verse is directly opposed to the spirit of Jesus and his teachings. That use suggests that we may have certain wonderful treasures, of truth and service perhaps, that we could give to others. Perhaps the treasure is the very gospel itself. But there are some who are not *worthy* of those treasures. WE have to watch for such people. Normally they are thought of as people who will not accept our treasure or would not use it rightly. They are the “pigs” and “dogs” in question. And we are not to waste our good things on these worthless or evil people. So goes the standard reading of verse six. (DC pg 228)

1. Do you agree with Dallas Willard? Is this the way you have understood these verses – that some people are not worthy of the treasures we have to offer?
2. What are some other ways you have considered these verses? What have you defined as ‘the treasure’ that we must not lightly give away?
3. What might be some illustrations of “pigs” and “dogs” – those for which giving the treasure would be a waste of time?

I feel that the former interpretation of this tough saying of Jesus has contributed to the Christian community casting judgment upon the unsaved. It almost gave us license to deem some people unworthy. If they have rejected our message of salvation, then they were just swine anyway. We didn’t do anything wrong. It isn’t our fault that they can’t see a good thing when it is before them. I know for myself, I have used this verse in my mind to justify my actions or to ‘write someone off’. There is no point wasting my time.

However, Dallas Willard opened my eyes to another understanding that has truly been a breath of fresh air and release for me. He explains it this way:

The problem with pearls for pigs is not that the pigs are not worthy. It is not the worthiness that is in question here at all, but the helpfulness. Pigs cannot digest pearls, cannot nourish themselves upon them. Likewise for a dog with a Bible or a crucifix. The dog cannot eat it. The reason these animals will finally “turn and rend you,” when you one day step up to them with another load of Bibles or pearls, is that *you* at least are edible. Anyone who has ever had serious responsibilities of caring for animals will understand immediately what Jesus is saying.

What a picture this is of our efforts to correct and control others by pouring our good things, often truly precious things, upon them – things that they nevertheless simply cannot ingest and use to nourish themselves. Often we do not even listen to them. We “know without listening. Jesus saw it going on around him all the time as we do today. And the outcome is usually exactly the same as with the pig and the dog. Our good intentions make little difference. The needy person will finally become angry and attack us. The point is not the waste of the “pearl” but that the person given the pearl is not helped. (DC pg 229)

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1. What are some examples of where we offer something to someone that in no way is helpful to them at that time?
2. In what ways do we push pearls of wisdom upon our children that are not helpful or useful to the child – or viewed as irrelevant?
3. How might we force our religion upon others or upon the young, even though it makes no sense to them at the time?
4. Another way to think of this is offering ‘wise solutions’ before ever hearing the real problem. How have you tried to fix a problem before really understanding it and offered a treasure box of advice upon deaf ears?

Read Matthew 7: 7 – 12

“Ask and you will receive”. We best understand these words in the context of prayer – knowing that our true needs will always be met by God through Jesus. In this context, however, Jesus is actually speaking about community and relationship. Just as we are not to give advice without first listening to the heart of another, we must not assume that others will automatically know our needs.

Request is at the heart of community. Asking is indeed the great law of the spiritual world through which things are accomplished in cooperation with God and yet in harmony with the freedom and worth of every individual.

When I ask someone to do or be or give something, I place myself vulnerably before them, and entrust myself to them. A request by its very nature unites. A demand, by contrast, immediately separates. Asking requires us to go through the freedom of the person asked. We acknowledge that the other person can say no and we accept that response. We do not punish the other for saying no. But most times, they do not say no, and so by asking we shall receive - by knocking, the door will open.

How beautiful it is to see relationships in which asking and receiving are a joyful and loving way of life. Often we see those who cherish one another playfully trying to out give the other. That is how relationship should be. Intimacy is found in the freedom to ask another for what we need. Asking reveals humility, vulnerability and interdependency. Asking is the foundation of a trust-based relationship. The heart of a community beats to a rhythm of asking and giving - making needs known or meeting needs as seen or discovered.

1. Are you better at giving than receiving? How often are you willing to ask another for help or to meet a certain need you are feeling.

A Kingdom Heart holds another’s heart in high esteem. Never presuming to know what the other needs, it patiently listens to that heart, even beyond words that might be spoken, without judgment or condemnation. It patiently knocks on the door of that heart for it to be opened willingly rather than barging in. A kingdom heart is willing both to ask for its own needs and to open up to receive.

LESSON #8 “Blinded by the Light”

He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matt. 12: 30 – 32)

I have never been comfortable with these verses. I don't like to think that there is anything that God would not forgive. It raises so many confusing issues such as what is the 'unforgivable sin' and why is the Spirit ranked higher than Jesus referring to the 'Son of Man' reference.

1. How have you understood these words of Jesus? What are some of the things that have been labeled the “unforgivable sin” throughout our church history?
2. Discuss with each other your own understandings of the Trinity and how you feel comfortable with it or uncomfortable. Share some illustrations or images that help you grasp its reality.
3. Read the context of these verses by reading Matthew 12: 22 – 37. Who is Jesus addressing? What is the issue they are debating?
4. The question surrounding the whole passage is, “Can good works come from bad people?” What is your answer to this question?

The Pharisees have been attributing to Satan the work of the Spirit and have been doing so, not out of ignorance or unbelief, but by consciously disputing the undisputable. In this sense, they were blaspheming the Spirit.

What is the distinction between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Spirit?

- a. Some commentators claim it to be the difference between pre-baptism and post-baptism. In other words, rejecting truth out of ignorance versus rejecting truth out of knowledge. I remember being told that if you were a Christian and had received Christ as your Savior, and then rejected that salvation, your sin was unforgivable because you rejected a grace you had already experienced. You KNEW BETTER. Rejecting Christ before he has become your savior is not unforgivable – it is even understandable. Rejecting his love after experiencing it is inconceivable.
- b. Some commentators refer to it as the rejection of God's work rather than the rejection of the historical Jesus. Jesus is saying, “fine if you don't recognize me as the Messiah, but you are not rejecting me – you're rejecting the work of God in your midst – the very God you claim to worship”. It is consciously denying what you know is right and good. It is not a hierarchy within the Trinity – that the Spirit is higher than the Son – but the willful rejection of the obvious evidence of God's presence.

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- c. If you fear you have committed the unforgivable sin, you probably have not. Blasphemers show no fear of God but literally laugh in the face of 'danger' – no respect of for the presence and power of God. There is no acknowledgement of the Spirit of God.
- d. Some define the unforgivable sin as the unrepentant sin. God will forgive any repentant heart, but when, in essence, people deliberately and knowingly turns their backs on God, God respects that choice. The Pharisees in our story spent their lives studying the law and the prophets but when they witnessed their fulfillment, they turned their back and called the work of God satanic. There is no repentance in their hearts – only hardness.

Luke 11:20 – “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”

What a beautiful phrase, “the finger of God”. It is translated “Spirit of God” in Matthew. The sin that God can't forgive is to deny the finger of God at work before your very eyes. It is not rejecting Jesus, but rejecting God's work in and through Jesus.

If some people looked at the relief which Jesus was bringing to bodies and minds of men and women and maintained that he was doing so with the help of their great spiritual oppressor, the prince of demons, then their eyes were so tightly closed to the light that for them light had become darkness and good had become evil. The light is there for those who will accept it, but if some refuse the light, where else can they hope to receive illumination? (Hard Sayings of the Bible: Kaiser, Davids, Bruce, Brauch. IVP Press 1996. pg 415)

Our passage in Matthew went on to say that you shall know a tree by its fruit, not by its label. If we believe certain people are not Christians, and yet we recognize the goodness of God coming forth as fruit from their lives, we must be very careful not to condemn or judge them as unsaved. You can't pick an apple from a lemon tree.

1. Think of times when you have been in danger of hardening your heart to God's presence in someone's life because he or she did not fit your definition of a saved person. Are you willing to rethink your judgment and look again for the finger of God in their lives?

A Kingdom Heart: must be open to seeing God's hand or finger working in life around us, in perhaps the most unlikely of situations by the most unsuspecting people. Again, we must be so careful of our brands and labels regarding people of different denominations or even religions. We must guard against the hardening of our hearts when we are surprised by healing and hope being generated from sources we are uncomfortable with. Ultimately, all goodness must glorify God and draw his children to him. If it does that, we best open our eyes and see the light.

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LESSON #9: “Woe is Me!”

Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. (Luke 6: 24 – 26)

These verses in Luke are an expansion of the Beatitudes found in Matthew and need to be considered as part of the same discourse. Blessed are the poor . . . woe to the rich.

Before we go any further, you must admit you are rich. If you think you are talking about someone else – the people with the huge house, motor home and Mercedes down the street, then you will miss the Word of God being spoken to you. If you live in North America and have a roof over your head, you are wealthy by the world’s standards. If you have three square meals a day, you are counted as rich. If you have disposable income for recreation and entertainment, you are counted among the world’s most fortunate.

1. Do you agree with this statement that we are the rich? Do you identify more with the wealthy or do you feel an affinity with the poor?

Read James 5: 1 – 6. If possible, read it also in The Message. James, the brother of Jesus, takes many of the themes from the Sermon on the Mount and parallel’s them in his book. You may want to read it through some time with that thought in mind.

James outlines five areas where the wealthy need to take note and check their conscience. Let’s check our own hearts to see what is abiding there.

A. The uselessness of wealth. *“Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.”* The problem may not be the material goods themselves, but the value you place on those goods.

1. How important are the things to you? What do you sacrifice in quality of living in order to obtain more wealth?
2. What are you willing to do to protect the goods that are yours? Honestly – how important is your stuff to you? This is the question of the heart. It is not, how much quantity of material goods do I have, but how do I regard what I do have and what am I willing to do to have it.

B. The Hoarding of Wealth: The second question the rich must ask is, “Have I ever walked by a person in need because I wanted to keep what I have?”

1. Is there a time you turned down a need because there wasn’t enough to go around? Have you not shared because you really wanted it all to yourself?

2. How do you decide what is enough? What is the difference between hoarding your wealth and building up a reasonable savings for the future? Which requires trusting God and which relies on your discriminative spending? The Message reads, *“You thought you were piling up wealth. What you were piling up was judgment”*.

C. The practice of Injustice: It is one thing to live well due to personal hard effort and wise judgment. It is another thing to gain from the labor of others. *“The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Almighty”*.

1. How should Christians respond to injustices in the workplace? Is there a way to bring equity to pay scales?
2. Would you be willing to pay fair market value for your purchases in order to support laborers in third world countries?
3. Are you aware of any ways we benefit on the back of other’s labors?

D. Personal over-indulgence: *“You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.* Feasting is fine when there is enough to go around but self indulgence when there are those without is a horrible crime before God.

Which philosophy do you live by?

- “There is only a limited amount of goods in the world. If someone has collected more, someone will go without.”
- “Wealth is limitless and all can be rich if they would just work hard enough.”
- Is there a third way to think about this issue? How does a kingdom heart regard the treasures of this world? *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof – the earth and those who dwell therein”* What are some principles of good stewardship that could guard against over-indulgence?

E. Actual Oppression of the Poor. *“You have condemned and murdered innocent men”*.

1. Can you think of any ways that we might be part of the oppression of the poor? Do we support governments that help the rich more than the poor? Is this willful oppression in order to maintain our own standard of living?
2. Are there some practices or policies that you are aware of that keep the poor, poor? How should a kingdom heart respond to these?

A Kingdom heart: *Where your treasure is, that is where you heart dwells.* Jesus doesn’t necessarily call for us to become poor. He calls us to take heed of the cost of wealth. So much time and energy goes toward keeping and maintaining a certain standard of “living” that we lose sight of the meaning and purpose of **life**. When it comes to money, do we truly love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves?

LESSON #10 “Family Values”

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. (Luke 12: 51 – 53)

No saying comes across tougher than this one. We can begin to grasp the other sayings because they come from a heart of love. Our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees if we operate from a consistent foundation of love – dealing with our anger, getting rid of contempt and malice in our hearts – treating enemies as friends and striving to do what is best for all concerned. We do not judge or condemn others, or label any child of God unworthy, nor do we attempt to control or correct them with wisdom or advice without first listening to their heart and understanding their true needs. We have seen how grievous it is to deny the goodness and presence of God around us and to call God by the name of Satan is unforgivable. To place things above people is to be left for eternity with nothing. Though the standards seem exceedingly high, they are at least the high standards of unconditional love.

These verses do not sound loving at all. Did Jesus, the Prince of Peace not come to bring peace? Did he not come to promote family values; to bring unity and harmony to our world? Why is Jesus so harsh with this pronouncement?

Usually the context of a passage is helpful to bring understanding. This passage is placed between Jesus’ warning to be watchful and ready for his return, and to read the signs of the times so as to not be caught off guard. Verse 57 is key to my understanding, where Jesus asks, “Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right?”

This statement summarizes the lessons and saying of Jesus that we have been studying over the last 10 weeks. Jesus gives us a key to being his disciples – to learn to think for ourselves, to judge what is right in God’s sight and to act accordingly. It is not to follow convention or accepted practices of the world. It is not to follow man-made laws which are really just minimum guides for social behavior, but to go beyond ourselves and into the shoes of another.

There is a cost to such living. The price of moving beyond social norms may mean leaving some people behind. It may mean being misunderstood by friends and families. It may mean be becoming the target of ridicule or anger because of your refusal to go along with the status quo.

I hear Jesus saying that He did not come to bring peace at all costs – he was not willing to compromise on his values for the sake of soothing the conscience of others. He was willing to be misunderstood by his family – to be called insane by his own brothers. He was willing to be rejected by his family religion and had no qualms about breaking the laws, if a greater law was at stake.

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1. Can you think of times when you might have compromised truth in order to keep the peace?
2. Do you handle conflict very well or do you tend to avoid it at all costs. Has this tendency harmed some relationship more than helped it?
3. Look back over the last nine lessons of this study. If you were to take seriously the call of Jesus to live with a Kingdom Heart, what area of your life would you need to change the most?
4. If you followed the words of Jesus as literally as possible, how might it affect your family relationships?
5. Can you identify any losses that could possibly happen if you worked toward changing your thought patterns to be more like Christ?
6. Can you identify what you would gain in doing that?
7. Is there any area of your life where you need to trust your own conscience and judgment rather than rely on the influence of others?

In my own experience, I have felt at times troubled by some of the traditional teachings of Christianity. Not the foundational doctrines of our faith, but some of the ways these beliefs have been practiced within the church. By going with my own conscience, it has occasionally placed me apart from my Christian community. My personal sense of integrity as directed by the Holy Spirit and guided by Scripture allows me to do no other. Even though it has been difficult at times, I have known a greater sense of peace.

Jesus wants his followers to be guided by their hearts and minds – if their hearts and minds are guided by the Holy Spirit. We are not to count the cost. We are not to compromise truth. We are not to look left or right but straight into the eyes of our mentor, Jesus. That is where our strength lies to do what seems to be the impossible, but truly is possible and even demanded of us.

If we trust what Jesus said out of his own direct consciousness of God, we shall share his belief in the future life. This belief is supported by the reasoning that a God of infinite love would not create finite persons and then drop them out of existence when the potentialities of their nature, including their awareness of himself, have only just begun to be realized. (DC pg 388)

A Kingdom Heart takes seriously these days on earth as a training ground for much more life to come. It may seem fleeting, but it is incredibly important to live each day learning how to dwell within the Kingdom of God. As stewards of this world and of each other, we live knowing that the Master could return at any moment and we want to be ready – ready to participate in the growth explosion of His kingdom as full fledged members. May be truly “doers of the Word, and not hearers only.”

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