

*Heart*

OF THE

**MATTER**





©2022 Central Church, All rights reserved

Contributors: Neil Downey, Haley Wiggers, & Mason Buwalda

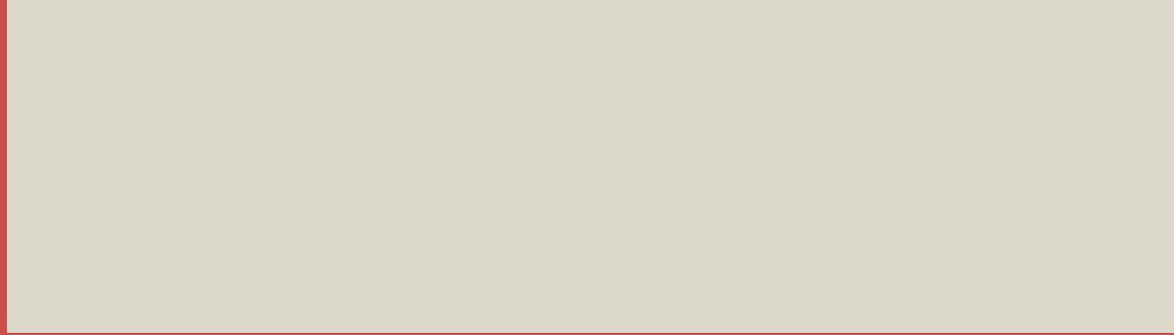
Editorial Assistance: Mike Billeter

Designer: Griffin Veldhuizen

# CONTENTS

<b>USING THIS WORKBOOK</b> (read before 1st meeting) .....	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>SESSION 1:</b> <i>The Heart of the Law (Matthew 5:17-20)</i> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>SESSION 2:</b> <i>The Heart of Murder (Matthew 5:21-26)</i> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>SESSION 3:</b> <i>The Heart of Adultery (Matthew 5:27-30)</i> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>SESSION 4:</b> <i>The Heart of Integrity (Matthew 5:33-37)</i> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>SESSION 5:</b> <i>The Heart of Power (Matthew 5:38-42)</i> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>SESSION 6:</b> <i>The Heart of Love (Matthew 5:43-48)</i> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>APPENDIX:</b> Leader's Guide, LifeGroup Logistics, FAQs, etc .....	<b>55</b>





# USING THIS WORKBOOK



This book is intended to help you encounter spiritual truth, engage with challenging ideas, and experience meaningful community. It contains plenty of group discussion questions, some weekly homework, and room to record prayer requests and answers to prayer.



While it can be beneficial to anyone, this study is designed to be used in the context of a LifeGroup, which is the best place for you to be encouraged and equipped to deepen your faith in Jesus and share His love with your relational world. So if you're reading this right now and you're not in a LifeGroup, find one ASAP at [centralsf.org/lifegroups](https://centralsf.org/lifegroups).

Be sure to take time before your first meeting to familiarize yourself with this format so you can get a sense of where we're heading over the next six sessions.

## OUTLINE OF EACH SESSION

It can be hard for small groups to answer this very basic question: *What do we do when we meet?* That's why we have tried to provide more than enough content and questions for you. Inside this workbook you will find teaching, discussion questions, and even some material for you to explore on your own during the week.

A typical group session for *Heart of the Matter* will include the following:

**SERMON NOTES** - Be sure to take this workbook to Central's weekend services so you can jot down notes from that week's sermon in the "*sermon notes*" section, found on page 70. This will help add to the discussion in your group experience. If you miss the weekend message, Central's sermon archive is available online at [centralsf.org/sermons](https://centralsf.org/sermons) and message podcasts are available on iTunes ([centralsf.org/itunes](https://centralsf.org/itunes)) and Spotify ([centralsf.org/spotify](https://centralsf.org/spotify)).

**CONNECT** - It's essential that we connect with others as we follow God. Relationships are built when we are around trustworthy people with whom we can be real and honest about life. It might be a while before you get to that level, but we encourage you to take the risk and share some of your story with the group. Ideally, for the sake of time, everyone will share no more than a few minutes each.

**WATCH** - Spend a few minutes viewing a brief video introduction from a member of Central's teaching team. Each video is designed to help stimulate thought and conversation.

**LAUNCH** - Read this section aloud to help set up the discussion portion of your time together. This short segment will help introduce the main concept you will be discussing during that particular session.

**EXPLORE & APPLY** - In these sections, you'll read aloud relevant passages of Scripture and use the questions provided to discuss the topic. You'll have an opportunity to go beyond mere Bible study and into practical biblical living, moving from observation and interpretation (the Explore section) to life application (the Apply section). Our hope is that you'll transcend typical Sunday School answers and get a little uncomfortable as you pursue deeper faith. Our prayer is that these questions and discussions will make a tangible difference in your life and, as a result, the lives of people in your relational world. (If you're struggling with any particular question, some suggested answers can be found in section F of the appendix, beginning on page 55.)

**HEART EXAM** - This section is a brief examination of specific topics that require a little more time and attention. By exploring the historical and cultural context, our hope is that you'll gain a better understanding of concepts that are sometimes glazed over in traditional studies of scripture. (Try to carve out a few minutes to read and discuss this section as a group but don't feel pressure to totally "get it" right away. You might have to explore this on your own as part of your weekly review.)



**THIS WEEK** - It's one thing to sit and talk about principles and quite another to put them into practice. Consider this your homework section, giving you something tangible to put into practice the rest of the week, moving you from head knowledge to heart change.

**PRAYER & PRAISE** - Praying together helps us draw closer to God, both individually and as a LifeGroup. Though life can be tough, as we enter His presence with our burdens and requests, He reminds us that we are not alone. Each time you meet, it's important to spend around 10 minutes hearing about the things that are weighing on your hearts or filling your life with joy. Be sure to use the space provided to jot down your group's prayer requests and praises so you can be praying for each other between sessions.

**THE DAILY** - Located at the end of each session, this section provides you with five days of selected scripture passages for each week, relating back to themes from the corresponding passage in Matthew. As you gain a more well-rounded contextual understanding of the topics, you'll be able to more fully engage in group discussion. And you'll get to spend consistent time alone with God.

# Introduction

Matthew, one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, wrote his book in order to persuade his Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised King who was ushering in a new kingdom. In outlining the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Matthew describes how Jesus recruited his first disciples, then began teaching and healing while preaching one main message: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near".<sup>1</sup> And because news about this wonder-working rabbi spread like wildfire, Jesus began to draw crowds from the entire region. It's in this context that He climbed a summit on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee and preached the most important sermon in history. Thirteen centuries prior, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. Now, on a different mountain, the One who was "worthy of more glory than Moses"<sup>2</sup> revealed a new set of principles for the kingdom: one where everyone is welcome, the Law is fulfilled, and hearts are transformed.

If you've been a Christian for a while, you're probably familiar with the first section of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes. In this passage, Jesus describes how people who truly repent will be blessed in the kingdom of heaven. These people—marked by humility, gentleness, mercy, justice, and a desire to be made right with God—are promised rewards in the kingdom.

But what is this kingdom, exactly? When Jesus spoke about "the kingdom of heaven," he wasn't talking about a political agenda imposed upon lowly subjects but a spiritual agenda, inviting willing participants to be transformed at the heart level. And He wasn't merely referring to the distant future or the afterlife; He was describing the invisible (yet very real) presence and power of God in the here and now. Jesus was saying that people who live under the rule and reign of God are directed and empowered by the king to live with extraordinary character and extraordinary purpose. The very heart of kingdom living, the most distinguishing feature of its citizens, is a transformed heart.

Journalist Finley Peter Dunne is often credited with saying that the job of the newspaper is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."<sup>3</sup> This was certainly true of Jesus; people who were poor and downtrodden were drawn to his message of hope and love, while the elite and powerful found his teaching to be incredibly disturbing. As you engage with Scripture over the next several weeks, be open to what Jesus might be inviting you to participate in, challenging you to consider, and calling you to repent of. Get ready to be both comforted and afflicted. And to be changed from the inside out.

**It's time to get to the heart of the matter.**



*Repent*

because the  
kingdom of  
*heaven*  
is near.



# SESSION ONE

THE  
*Heart*  
OF  
THE  
LAW

Matthew 5:17-20



## CONNECT

If your group is new, make some introductions. Allow each person to briefly share:

What do you do with most of your time (work, play, volunteering, etc.)?

What do you hope to get out of this LifeGroup experience?

Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer inviting God to be with you as you meet.

**READ** - If you haven't already, be sure to read the Introduction on page 5.

***WATCH - Session 1 video at [centralsf.org/heart](http://centralsf.org/heart)***

**NOTES FROM VIDEO:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## LAUNCH

“Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws.” - **Plato**<sup>1</sup>

“Learn the rules like a pro so you can break them like an artist.” - **Pablo Picasso**<sup>2</sup>

Laws are important. Without them, a society quickly spirals into a state of anarchy. But to say that we live in a nation of laws would be an understatement. For example, from 1995 to 2016, federal departments, agencies, and commissions enacted a total of 88,899 new rules and regulations while Congress passed “only” 4,312 laws. That’s not to mention the thousands of ordinances implemented on the state and local levels.<sup>3</sup>

Some laws on the books are generally seen as necessary and good. For example, can you name a single person alive today who thinks that outlawing slavery was a bad idea? However, laws about controversial subjects like abortion and gun control have illicited heated debate for generations. And with violence, corruption, addiction, and cruelty still so pervasive, the age-old principle rings true today: rules and regulations don’t have the power to change hearts.

Jesus was born into a culture that had more than its fair share of laws. While most of us are familiar with the Ten Commandments, Israel was actually governed by 613 commands, all found in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament.

The purpose of the Torah was to reveal the nature of God and to set apart a people in order to represent Him to the nations and bless the whole world. Unfortunately, due to their hard hearts, Israel did a poor job of obeying the law, rebelling against God over and over again. So when Jesus came and gave the Great Commandment (to love God and love others), He acknowledged that the Law itself did not bring life: “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets; He shows us what God is like, offers to bless the whole world, and is the true source of new life.

### READ THE PASSAGE: **Matthew 5:17-20**

*17 “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.*

## EXPLORE

If the primary purpose of the Law (the Torah) was to show the world what God is like, why would people think that Jesus had come to abolish it?

How did Jesus actually fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

If verse 18 is true, why do we no longer observe ceremonial law (sacrifice animals, eat kosher food, etc.)?

In the context of this passage, how would you define righteousness?

Who were the scribes and Pharisees? How could anyone have righteousness that surpassed them?

## HEART EXAM INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION

“A Pharisee is a man who does the right thing for the wrong reason.”<sup>5</sup>

*While the Pharisees were mindful to obey the outward and visible commands of God’s law, their righteousness went no deeper than their behavior. Jesus wasn’t interested in mere external conformity. He knows that true righteousness needs to occur at the heart level. It is an internal transformation that we require, and if the inside is right, then the external behaviors will follow.*

*Very often in religious communities, we are content with adherence to external expectations of conduct and give little attention to the inward posture of the heart. As long as a person appears devout, uses the right words, and participates in the right religious activities, we don’t look much deeper. They are often given a pass on their anger, greed, jealousy, bitterness, lust, or bigotry. Such a person might be acceptable in a church today, but Jesus said they are unfit for God’s kingdom. He doesn’t merely desire people who appear good, or even those who do good; He wants people who are good. That kind of inside-out transformation cannot be achieved through laws alone.<sup>6</sup>*

What is the source of this internal transformation? How does a person change at the heart level?



## APPLY

Is it possible to be a Bible-believing, churchgoing person but still be unrighteous in God's eyes? Explain.

Are you teaching the commands of God to anyone? How well do your actions align with your teaching? In other words, do you practice what you preach?

What is the biggest change you've seen in your own life since coming to faith in Christ?

## THIS WEEK

**READ:** Carve out some time each day to read and reflect on the passages in *The Daily*.

**WATCH:** Take six minutes to watch this video from The Bible Project entitled The Law: [bibleproject.com/explore/video/law](https://www.bibleproject.com/explore/video/law)

**REFLECT:** Ask God to examine your heart and reveal aspects of your character that He wants to change.

Before you leave this meeting, read through the LifeGroup Commitment below. Have each person read a portion out loud. Then have everyone actually sign the agreement in their own books.

## LIFEGROUP COMMITMENT

(Read Aloud)

LifeGroups at Central Church are designed to be safe places where you are cared for and challenged to become more and more like Jesus. Go around the room, each person reading one expectation. Agreeing to these expectations will help everyone get the most out of this group experience.

I commit to participate in **all six sessions** and engage in this community by living out the following:

**MAKE LIFEGROUP A PRIORITY:** I'll prioritize the scheduled group meeting and communicate in advance if I'm going to miss the meeting. I know that inconsistent attendance is one of the major factors that will keep this group from flourishing.

**TAKE OWNERSHIP:** The group will be as good as I make it. I'll share roles within the group and help challenge everyone to grow.

**BE ENGAGED BUT SELF-AWARE:** I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as I can with my perspectives and experiences. I understand some of us are talkers and some are more quiet, so I'll be aware of not dominating the discussion or always leaving the weight of discussion to others.



## PRAY

**FACE CONFLICT:** Community can often be very messy, and conflicts may arise. I'll offer grace to others and won't leave the group over disagreements, realizing God might use conflict to develop my faith in some way I don't currently understand.

**HONOR OTHERS:** I'll accept everyone without judgment. I will model James 1:19, in that I will be quick to listen and slow to speak. I'll listen well and refrain from giving quick answers, simple fixes, or engaging in side conversations.

**VALUE CONFIDENTIALITY:** I will work to make this a safe space for others to take risks in sharing their story and burdens. I will see their honesty as a gift and honor it by safeguarding it. What I hear and say in the group stays in the group. Period.

**MULTIPLICATION:** Recognizing the command to "go and make disciples," I will participate in identifying a potential leader or two in our group OR be actively inviting others to join this group. As the Lord raises up such a leader, we will try to grow this group in such a way that a new group becomes established.

An important element of community is drawing close to God by sharing each other's burdens and lifting them up to God in prayer, along with celebrating each other's praises. Use this space to write down prayer requests and answers to prayer. And be sure to pray for them throughout the week.

---

---

---

---

---

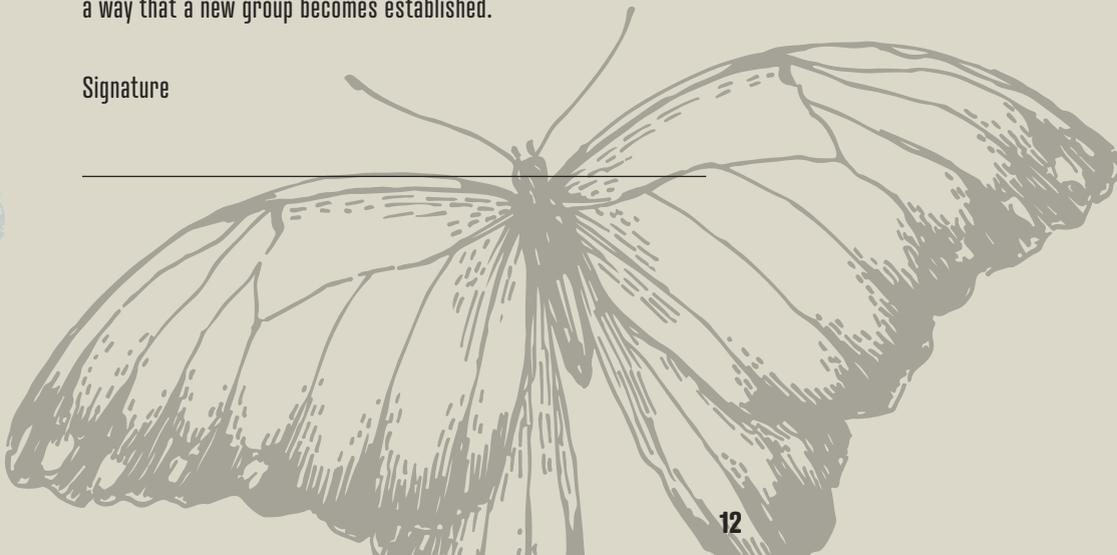
---

---

---

Signature

---



## THE DAILY

Take a few minutes each day to read a passage, using the reflection questions to help navigate your time with God.

### **DAY 1: *Ezekiel 36:22-28***

Even though Israel rebelled against God, He promised that He would change their hearts and use them for his glory. When and how did He do this?

### **DAY 2: *Titus 3:3-7***

According to this passage, what is the role of the Holy Spirit? How has He made a difference in your life?

### **DAY 3: *Romans 3:10-12; 4:13, 5:1-5***

How do these passages explain the source and effects of righteousness? Write it in your own words.

### **DAY 4: *Acts 11:1-18***

How did Peter's experience change his view of the Law?

### **DAY 5: *Matthew 23:1-7***

Jesus had some harsh words for hypocrites. In what areas of your life do you struggle to practice what you preach?





# SESSION TWO

THE

*Heart*

OF

MURDER

Matthew 5:21-26



## CONNECT

For those of you who completed “The Daily” from the last session:  
What was something that stood out to you? Why was it significant?

***WATCH - Session 2 video at [centralsf.org/heart](https://centralsf.org/heart)***

NOTES FROM VIDEO: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## LAUNCH

*Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.*

- **James 1:19-20**

Long before his rise in the Marvel Universe, The Incredible Hulk was popularized by a self-titled CBS television series. In the show, Dr. David Banner (yes, it was David, not Bruce), a scientist who is presumed dead, travels across the country under various identities trying to hide his secret: because of a DNA-altering accident, in times of extreme anger or stress he transforms into a ferocious, green-skinned giant. Over the course of five seasons (1977-1982), Dr. Banner earns a living by working temporary jobs while searching for a way to cure his condition and repeating his catchphrase, “Don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.”<sup>1</sup>

While none of us may literally turn into a huge lime-hued humanoid, we may struggle with controlling our anger. Whatever trips our trigger—feeling disrespected, witnessing injustice, or being wronged in some other way—we all experience various degrees of Hulk-likeness. Some of us just control it (or hide it) better than others.

While our external behavior—like not murdering people—certainly matters, Jesus is more concerned with our internal life. In the previous section of the Sermon on the Mount (verses 17-20), Jesus draws a dividing line between internal, spiritual righteousness and external, superficial self-righteousness. Now He gives examples of how these heart-level commandments play out in our relational

world. Theologian Craig Keener sums up the message well: Jesus essentially says, “Look, if you thought the law was tough, wait till you see this. If you really want to be my disciples, give me your hearts without reservation.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus uses example after example of what it looks like to live in the kingdom with a transformed heart. And He leads off with anger.

### READ THE PASSAGE: **Matthew 5:21-26**

*21 “You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. 22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire. 23 So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you’re on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny.”*

## EXPLORE

According to verse 21, what had the people heard? Was Jesus contradicting this teaching?

Is it possible to avoid anger? If the answer is “no,” does that mean judgment is unavoidable for us?

**Read Ephesians 4:26.** How is it possible to be angry and not sin? What is the difference between sinful anger and righteous anger?

While not describing violence or rage, what emotion/attitude does verse 22 address?

Why does Jesus transition from discussing anger to reconciliation?

Verses 25-26 convey a sense of urgency. Why?

## HEART EXAM CONTEMPT

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus identified anger as the posture of the heart that leads to murder; it is the seed of sin that leads to the most destructive acts, therefore it must be removed from within us. Perhaps you are not an ill-tempered person—maybe you do not fly off the handle or rage when your will is frustrated. A calm demeanor, however, is not necessarily evidence that your heart is right.*

*Jesus spoke about a different, even more virulent form of anger: contempt. His warning about insulting others is often passed over by modern readers as unimportant. That is a serious mistake. The insulting word He used was *raca*, a dismissive term of contempt in His culture that is derived from the sound of clearing spit from one’s throat. This kind of contempt is different than mere anger.*

*Contempt seeks to diminish the inherent value of the other person. It views the other as subhuman, not even worthy of my anger. It excludes the other person from being worthy of care, thought, or dignity.*

*In our culture, it is all too common to devalue those with different political values, ethnic backgrounds, sexuality, economic status, or religious traditions. In fact, many of our political and media leaders build their audiences by doing this. Of course we should be wise and discerning, but we must not allow our loyalty to a certain group or set of ideas to breed contempt for those who disagree with us. Justice Antonin Scalia, who died in 2016, was celebrated by conservatives and dreaded by progressives. Both sides recognized his brilliance and his sharpness of tongue and pen. Yet he was also beloved even by his opponents. It may have been because Scalia held his beliefs without contempt for his opponents. He said, "I attack ideas. I don't attack people. And some very good people have some very bad ideas. And if you can't separate the two, you gotta get another day job." More of us, no matter our beliefs, should emulate his example.<sup>3</sup>*

How do anger and contempt contribute to outrage culture, especially on social media? What does it look like to disagree with someone's ideas without attacking the person?

## APPLY



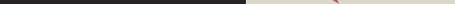
While it may be possible to wield anger righteously, Jesus gives a stern warning about its dangers. How have you justified your anger? How have you allowed it to marinate inside you, fermenting in your heart and mind?



According to kingdom values, reconciliation takes precedence over worship. What would it look like if we took verses 23-24 seriously? How would it affect our weekend services?

Describe a time when you needed to be reconciled with someone. What was it like? How did it end up?





## PRAY

Use this space to write down prayer requests and answers to prayer. And be sure to pray for them throughout the week.

---

---

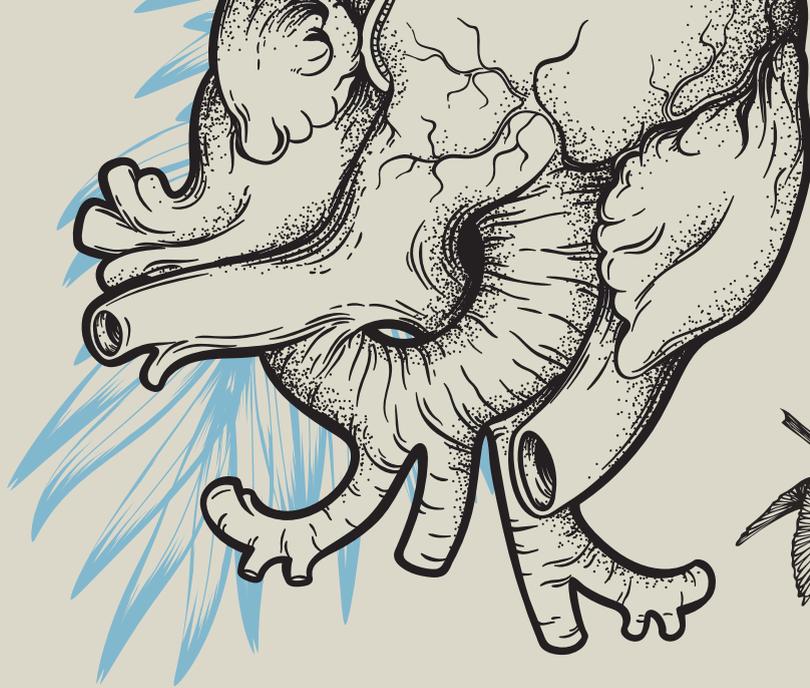
---

---

---

---

---



## THIS WEEK

**READ:** The Daily

**MEMORIZE:** James 1:19-20

**PRACTICE:** As you engage with people in conversation or on social media, pray for each person you disagree with, recognizing that they are made in the image of God.

## THE DAILY

### **DAY 1: Galatians 5:16-24**

Letting the Holy Spirit transform and replace our desires is what makes it possible to overcome our patterns of sin. What steps do you need to take to allow Him to guide you each day?

### **DAY 2: Psalm 37:8-9**

This Psalm contrasts anger with putting your faith in God. How does putting our trust and hope in the Lord stop our sinful anger?

### **DAY 3: Romans 12:14-21**

What would it look like in your life to bless those who curse you, to feed your enemy, and leave righteous anger to God?

### **DAY 4: Ephesians 4:26-27**

If we hold onto our anger and let it control us, we will find ourselves further from God. What control does anger have over you that you need to let go of today?

### **DAY 5: Proverbs 15:18; 22:24**

Anger is not just an individual problem, it also impacts those around you. Likewise, being patient and cool-tempered also shapes those around you. How can you influence those around you for good?



# SESSION THREE

THE  
*Heart*  
OF  
ADULTERY

Matthew 5:27-30



## CONNECT

What is your favorite movie and why?

***WATCH - Session 3 video at [centralsf.org/heart](https://centralsf.org/heart)***

NOTES FROM VIDEO:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## LAUNCH

In 2009, University of Montreal sociologist Simon Louis Lajeunesse set out to conduct a study examining the effects of pornography on the sexual attitudes of men. “We started our research seeking men in their twenties who had never consumed pornography,” said the researcher. “We couldn’t find any.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, more than a decade later, it doesn’t take a PhD to understand that pornography is prevalent in our culture. Here are some enlightening statistics:

*1 in 5 mobile searches are for pornography.*

*Most teens and young adults believe that not recycling is worse than viewing pornography.*

*64% of Christian men say they watch porn at least once a month.*

*(And to prove that pornography is not just a problem for men) The world’s most popular porn website recently reported a 35% increase in female visitors.<sup>2</sup>*

But the ultimate issue behind these grim numbers isn’t pornography itself. The problem isn’t porn. The problem is lust.

This same principle is applied by Jesus when talking about adultery in Matthew 5: 27-30. Just like Jesus’ initial kingdom-living example about murder, here He seeks to go beyond the face value to a deeper level of intention. What Jesus prohibited was not as overt as formulating a plan to seduce a neighbor’s wife, nor was it something as benign as merely looking at a woman. What Jesus called attention

to was the mental act of lusting after her. The heart of murder is anger and the heart of adultery is lust.

The Greek version of the Old Testament uses the term for lust (epithymeō) when forbidding people to covet a neighbor’s house, wife, or other possessions (Exodus 20:17). Therefore lust is a form of greed: the desire to possess what belongs to somebody else.<sup>3</sup> Throughout most of history, women have been regarded as property to be possessed, as objects to be enjoyed and discarded, or as seductresses to be avoided. However, in the ministry of Jesus and the subsequent fellowship of the church, women were treated with dignity and welcomed as sisters. These were true kingdom values.

Lust is the opposite of true love: **lust dehumanizes another person as an object of passion, while love values and respects another person and seeks their well-being.** And when we view people—especially fellow believers—as members of our spiritual family, we are less likely to look at them with lustful intent.

### READ THE PASSAGE: **Matthew 5:27-30**

27 “You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery.  
28 But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

## EXPLORE

Is Jesus' discussion of anger and contempt related (in any way) to his discussion of adultery? Why or why not?

Why is lust at the heart of adultery? Aren't there more important factors?

Are we to take verses 29-30 literally? If not, then what point was Jesus trying to make by using this level of exaggeration?

## HEART EXAM

### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY LUST?

*In case you haven't noticed, we live in a sex-saturated society. The church has tended to offer two responses to this fact: condemnation or accommodation. Condemnation is both a simplification and often an overreaction. It merely says, "Sexual*

*immorality is bad." This posture seeks to protect Christians from the cultural idolatry of desire, but it often does more harm than good because it offers no healthy, alternative model of sexuality for us to follow.*

*Accommodation, on the other hand, affirms the cultural narrative that desires cannot be controlled, that we are all rudderless ships being carried along by sexual currents far beyond our power to resist. As access to sexually explicit material has multiplied, so has the accommodation viewpoint within the church.*

*Both condemnation and accommodation assume we are passive victims of desire, and both place all of the blame for our struggle "out there" in the culture, but Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount offer a more nuanced view. He said, "Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The translation is important. Some English versions omit the word "intent," which has led some to think that looking at any woman, at any time, and in any manner is sinful or automatically leads to lustful thoughts. In truth, lust is a choice. It is something we intend. If chosen frequently enough, it can become a compulsive response that bypasses our conscious will, but it does not begin that way.*

*Jesus does not condemn sexual desires even when those desires are provoked by unexpected or unwelcome temptations, and He does not place the blame for lust on women, the culture, or any other external force. Rather, He warns about the deformation that happens when we deliberately engage our will in the pursuit of lust.<sup>4</sup>*

**If the root of lust is within me, then what is the solution?**

## APPLY

In our culture, lust can be a tricky subject for an application section, especially if you're new to a particular group setting. With that in mind, if you are in a co-ed group, it might be helpful to divide by gender for the remainder of the session to talk about real-life struggles and pray for each other.

Paul wrote these words to the church in Galatia:

*Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, we must also keep in step with the Spirit. - Galatians 5:24-25*

In what ways can you crucify the flesh daily?

How are you keeping in step with the Spirit?

Jesus used exaggeration (gouging out eyes, cutting off hands) to instruct us to take sin seriously. To what lengths have you gone in order to avoid sin and/or temptation?

## PRAY

If appropriate, make the focus of this prayer time related to this session.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## THIS WEEK

**READ:** The Daily

**MEMORIZE:** *Galatians 5:24-25* or *1 Corinthians 10:13*

**PRACTICE:** Pay attention to the things that cause your mind to wander. Ask God how He wants you to love Him with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. If you're struggling with lust, talk to a trusted, Godly person (like a mentor or pastor) who can direct you to sources of health and freedom.

## THE DAILY

### **DAY 1: 2 Timothy 2:22**

An effective way to stop a bad habit is by replacing it with another habit and by surrounding yourself with support. What new, healthy habit can you form to replace a bad one? Who can encourage you to follow through?

### **DAY 2: James 1:13-15**

We often blame others for our own sin. What does it look like to take ownership of your sin and how does that help you overcome temptation?

### **DAY 3: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20**

Sexual sin and lust is often very private and individual. It is tempting to say "it's not hurting anyone." How is sexual sin harmful to yourself and what does it look like to honor yourself instead?

### **DAY 4: Romans 8:12-14**

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can overcome temptation. What does it look like to let the Spirit put to death our sinful nature?

### **DAY 5: Colossians 3:1-5**

In baptism, we profess that we share in Christ's death and resurrection. What does it look like to die to this life and be raised with Christ to a new life?

*\*\*\* If you've been reading ahead, you may have noticed that our study doesn't cover Jesus' teaching on divorce in verses 31-32. That's on purpose: we'll be doing a deeper dive into the topic of divorce in an upcoming sermon at a later date. So we're not ignoring the topic. In fact, just the opposite. Stay tuned...*



# SESSION FOUR

THE

*Heart*

OF

INTEGRITY

Matthew 5:33-37



## CONNECT

Have you ever been on a jury? What was it like?

*WATCH - Session 4 video at [centralsf.org/heart](https://centralsf.org/heart)*

NOTES FROM VIDEO: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## LAUNCH

“Oaths are a poor substitute for integrity.” - **Craig Keener**<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who has watched a courtroom drama knows the scene: a witness is called to the stand, places her hand on a Bible, and is asked, “Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” Once she says, “I do,” that witness is testifying “under oath” and, if later found to have lied while giving testimony, can be charged with the crime of perjury.

Taking oaths is a tradition older than many of the stories in the Bible. In the Old Testament there are many examples of people taking oaths, calling on God as a witness to say, “What I am saying to you is true.” Especially in a culture with no writing, one needed to know, “Are these cows yours to sell?” or “How do I know you won’t kill me?” Read this passage from Exodus:

*When someone delivers to another a donkey, ox, sheep, or any other animal for safekeeping, and it dies or is injured or is carried off, without anyone seeing it, an oath before the Lord shall decide between the two of them that the one has not laid hands on the property of the other; the owner shall accept the oath, and no restitution shall be made. - Exodus 22:10-11*

An oath was not only acceptable but expected in Jewish culture and religion. It’s calling on someone or something higher than me to guarantee that what I am saying is the truth, and being willing to accept the punishment from God if I don’t uphold my word. In the Jewish tradition, they were increasingly careful about not saying

God’s name, so they started the practice of swearing by holy things in order to not have to speak God’s name so often. So you wouldn’t just say, “By God, this is true...” but “By the throne of God, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, this is true.” When Jesus said not to swear by any of those things, He meant it’s impossible to swear by those things because God is sovereign over them anyway, so you best not make an oath at all.

Jesus came into this culture, and desired that instead of using an oath—an outside source or guide—to keep us truthful, our hearts would be bent toward truth, integrity, and consistency. He wanted our hearts to desire truthfulness so much that oaths were irrelevant because we were always living in truth.

This goes beyond just spouting what we believe to be truth by quoting scripture at others, or making a true statement and letting the chips fall where they may. (“It’s not my fault that you can’t handle the truth!”) **Jesus wants our values to align with how we actually live.** For example, if I am a person who values kindness, I live this out by listening, speaking truth in love, being generous, and acting with respect.

Too often, however, we don’t actually want to live out those values, especially with people we don’t like, or disagree with, or those we consider our enemies (more on loving your enemies later). If I claim to value kindness but don’t act kindly, I am breaking my oath by not being a person of integrity and truth. I am not living in a way that Jesus would desire.

## READ THE PASSAGE: **Matthew 5:33-37**

*33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord. 34 But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. 36 Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. 37 But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one.*

## EXPLORE

Let's get into the weeds. Read the following passages about oaths and put them into your own words:

**Leviticus 19:11-12** —

**Numbers 30:1-2** —

**Deuteronomy 23:21-23** —

Why would Jesus instruct people to not take an oath at all?

Why is it important for Christians to keep their word?

Some devout believers have taken this passage to mean that they should never take an oath of any kind, including the Pledge of Allegiance, a sworn testimony in court, or an oath of office. What do you think of this interpretation?

How might this passage contribute to our understanding of the kind of lives Jesus calls us to live as His followers?

## HEART EXAM

### “YOU HAVE HEARD...”

*Look at Jesus’ repeated formula: “You have heard that it was said...But I say to you...” Seems clear enough, right? You have heard what Moses said—you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, and so on—but I have something new and/or different to say. Moses was great, but I am greater. The old has become obsolete and is ready to disappear; the new has come. The law of liberty. The law of love. The law of Christ. But this is why context matters.*

*Earlier in the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus refers to scripture, He uses the term “it is written” (Matt 4:4, 7, 10). Later in the book, he will incredulously ask the scribes and Pharisees “Have you not read...?” (Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31). He will command them to go and learn what the Scripture says (Matt 9:13, 12:7). He will accuse them of setting aside (relaxing) the word of God for the sake of their oral tradition (Matt 15:3, 6). He will curse them for not entering the kingdom (Matt 23:13) and for missing the point of the law (Matt 23:23-24).*

*So, [in Chapter 5], Jesus is not quoting the Old Testament laws to correct them in some way. He is quoting what these people have heard their teachers say about the Old Testament laws. He is quoting those who have, in fact, relaxed the commands. Those who teach others to do the same. Those who abolish what God has required of them. Those whose righteousness is like the scribes and Pharisees. . . Actually, we have much reason to believe he is quoting the scribes and Pharisees themselves.<sup>2</sup>*

When have you believed something that you later discovered was based on mere tradition or a misinterpretation?

What are some factors that could influence a Bible teacher’s biblical interpretation and communication?

Do you trust everything you hear from your favorite preachers? Why or why not?

## APPLY

Have you ever verbally committed to do something that you later failed to do? Describe why/how it happened.

What do you think keeps us from upholding commitments or promises?

Think of a time when you weren't able to uphold a commitment or promise, even if it was a small one. What area of your life did this fall under? Is that a pattern? What does that tell you about your heart posture in that area of your life?

What would you say are the things you value most? Do you value them because you want to live them out or expect them of others? Is there consistency in what you say you value and how you actually live your life?

## PRAY

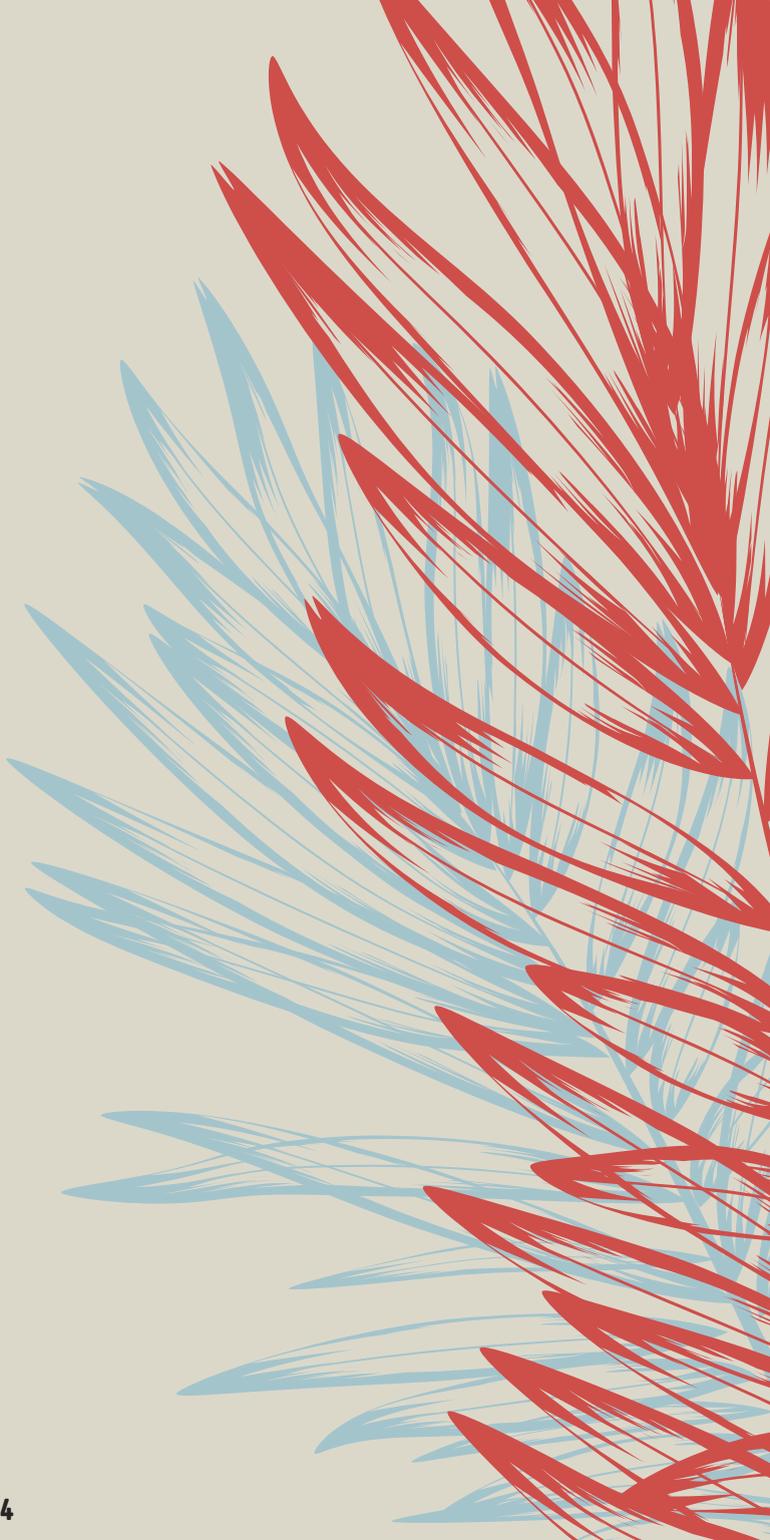
Use this space to write down prayer requests and answers to prayer. And be sure to pray for them throughout the week.

---

---

---

---



## THIS WEEK

**READ:** The Daily

**MEMORIZE:** Hebrews 10:23

**PRACTICE:** As you go about your week, keep track of the promises you encounter in your world. Who is making them? Why do they seem to be making them? What are the ramifications if they can't be kept?

## THE DAILY

**DAY 1: Exodus 20:7**

What does it mean to misuse something? What is the right way to use God's name?

**DAY 2: Leviticus 19:12**

The word "name" is not just a reference to what someone is called. It also carries the power of the person's reputation. How does swearing falsely on God's name bring shame to his name?

**DAY 3: Joshua 23:14**

Scripture is full of God's promises to his people. How does it impact your relationship with God to know that he has never failed to keep a promise?

**DAY 4: Numbers 30:1-2**

Moses reminded the Israelites that a vow to the LORD is a very serious thing. Have you ever encountered someone who was constantly making promises that they did not take seriously? How did that impact their reputation?

**DAY 5: Deuteronomy 7:9, 23:21-23**

Covenant is a biblical word that means "agreement" or "promise." Scripture is full of reminders that God is faithful to keep his covenant. How has God's faithfulness been proven in your life?





# SESSION FIVE

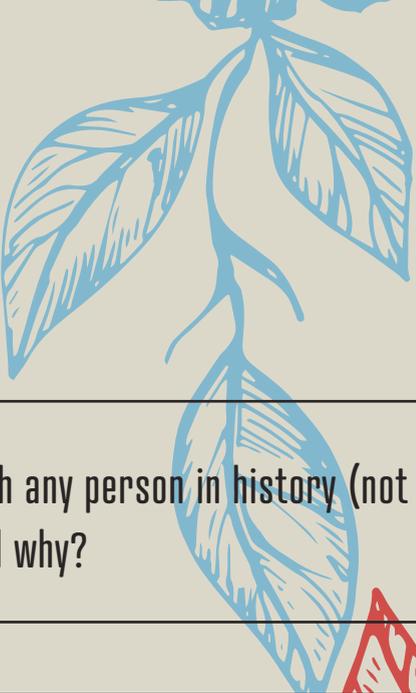
THE

*Heart*

OF

POWER

Matthew 5:38-42



## CONNECT

If you could have dinner with any person in history (not including Jesus), who would it be and why?

***WATCH - Session 5 video at [centralsf.org/heart](https://centralsf.org/heart)***

NOTES FROM VIDEO: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## LAUNCH

One of the best gangster movies of all time is *The Untouchables*, the 1987 movie set in Prohibition-era Chicago. Perhaps the defining line of the entire film is the advice police officer Jim Malone gives to his protégé, Eliot Ness: “He pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That’s the Chicago way!”<sup>1</sup>

The premise of this tactic of “upping the ante” is that your opponent will either back down or get seriously hurt (or even killed). Either way, you win. You have the power. But that is not the way of Jesus.

For decades, a growing number of Christians dedicated to preserving religious liberty have described themselves as being on the front lines of the conflict for the soul of our nation. They promote their mission with militaristic and power-based language, prescribing various battle plans for winning the Culture War: by whatever means necessary, elect favorable politicians who will enact favorable legislation and appoint favorable judges who will help us gain more and more political power. Then our country will finally be one where God (or, at least, the concept of traditional Judeo-Christian values) is honored. But, this is not the way of Jesus.

Power has been described as “the prerogative to control what happens—it is to have the coercive force to make others yield to one’s wishes, even against their will.”<sup>2</sup> Scripture tells us that Jesus emptied Himself of power and took on the very nature of a servant in order to save the world through sacrificial love.<sup>3</sup> He had

all kinds of opportunities to use power to accomplish His purposes, but He chose a harder way: refusing to retaliate, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and sacrificing for the good of others.

**These upside down values—humility over honor, generosity over greed, servanthood over selfishness—are foundational to kingdom living and are only possible with a renewed heart.** And they are the primary way that people are drawn to the God who makes this heart change possible.

People cannot be coerced into loving and serving Jesus. As we’ve already stated, as important as good laws are, they don’t have the power to change hearts. When Jesus called his followers “salt” and “light” He was calling us to be attractive, to be winsome. He called us not as combatants struggling for power in a Culture War, but as representatives of His kingdom, inviting others to be fellow citizens.

### READ THE PASSAGE: **Matthew 5:38-42**

*38 “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. 39 But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”*

## EXPLORE

Compare the passage you just read with Deuteronomy 19:16-21. What was the original intent of the law?

How do you think the teachers of the Law were wrongly applying the principle of “an eye for an eye?”

People generally default to self-preservation. How is this incompatible with Jesus’ instruction to not resist an evildoer?

What is accomplished by turning the other cheek? What is risked?

Why do people struggle to follow Jesus’ command to give to the beggar and not refuse the borrower?

## HEART EXAM

---

### LITERALLY VS. SERIOUSLY

*We don’t have to take all the words of Jesus literally in order to take them seriously. (Before you get out your torches and pitchforks, read the next few paragraphs.)*

*Jesus was the best communicator of all time, choosing the perfect rhetorical form in each circumstance He ever encountered in order to convey truth. But it’s up to us to be good students of Scripture so we can discern what He meant by what He said in each instance.*

*Jesus occasionally used euphemisms in order to soften the harsh reality of certain situations: Knowing that Lazarus was dead, Jesus told the disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus sometimes utilized sarcasm to point out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. For example, when they picked up rocks to kill him, he asked them, “I have shown you many good things my Father sent me to do. Which one are you going to stone me for?”<sup>5</sup> And, of course, Jesus often employed metaphors to more clearly explain his character and purpose, referring to*

himself as “the door,”<sup>6</sup> “the bread of life,”<sup>7</sup> “the good shepherd,”<sup>8</sup> and “the true vine.”<sup>9</sup> The point is, in using these types of speech, Jesus spoke the truth but didn’t intend his original audience to take him literally.

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used hyperbole—exaggerated statements—to capture the attention and challenge the assumptions of his audience. And while it’s obvious that Matthew 5:29-30 are hyperbolic (we’re not incorporating eye gouging or amputation into our discipleship programs), interpreting verses 40-42 gets more difficult. Does Jesus actually expect us to turn the other cheek, give up our clothing, go the extra mile, and give to anyone who asks? If we took these commands literally, we’d be bruised, naked, tired, and broke.*

*So what is Jesus trying to convey here? In keeping with the theme of the rest of his sermon, He seems to be imploring us to go against what comes naturally (looking out for ourselves) and to live differently (putting others first). When we are treated unfairly, we should trust God so much that we leave our vindication with him. By not retaliating, by displaying kindness and generosity, we let our light shine and our Father gets the glory.<sup>10</sup>*

What are the implications of taking every word of Jesus literally? How can we know which of His words to take literally? Practically speaking, how can we take His words seriously if we don’t take them literally?

## APPLY

One of the most impactful movements of the last 100 years was Martin Luther King’s non-violence approach to civil rights. Why do you think it was effective? How did this movement display the principles of Matthew 5:38-42?

Our call to self-sacrificial love must override our instinct for retaliation. Share an example of when you’ve shown restraint and practiced non-retaliation or non-resistance.

Who is the most generous person you know? What is the source of their generosity? What are the effects?

## PRAY

Use this space to write down prayer requests and answers to prayer. And be sure to pray for them throughout the week.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## THIS WEEK

**READ:** The Daily

**MEMORIZE:** Matthew 5:14-16

**PRACTICE:** Look for ways you can live out the values of God's kingdom by practicing radical generosity, radical forgiveness, or radical restraint.

## THE DAILY

### **DAY 1: Romans 12:17-19**

When we are wronged, wanting justice (or payback) is natural. What does it look like to live honorably and trust God to bring justice?

### **DAY 2: Philippians 2:3-11**

Scripture invites us to move beyond ourselves and our selfishness. How can you shift your focus from yourself towards others and be a servant like Christ?

### **DAY 3: James 2:14-17**

Genuine faith and love will always lead to action. How can you put your faith into action this week? How can you serve others?

### **DAY 4: 1 John 3:16-18**

Jesus' life is the perfect example of love. What does it look like for us to love like Jesus does?

### **DAY 5: Matthew 20:26-28**

Jesus' example of servant leadership was a surprise to many of those who were waiting for the Messiah. How can serving others be an effective form of leadership in the church and in the world?





# SESSION SIX

THE  
*Heart*  
OF  
LOVE

Matthew 5:43-48

## CONNECT

This is the last session of *Heart of the Matter*. If you haven't already, use this time to discuss your next steps as a group. Are you going to keep meeting? If so, how often and what are you going to cover? If not, what are some other options for people who want to try another long-term LifeGroup? (Questions or concerns? We're here to help: [centralsf.org/lifegroups](http://centralsf.org/lifegroups))

***WATCH - Session 6 video at [centralsf.org/heart](http://centralsf.org/heart)***

NOTES FROM VIDEO: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## LAUNCH

Some people are easy to love. Babies are cute. When you're dating or newly married, loving that special someone seems natural. (In the words of Minnie Ripperton, "Lovin' you is easy 'cause you're beautiful.") And how can you not love Grandma, who welcomes you into her home with her famous chocolate chip cookies?

On the other hand, there are plenty of people who seem rather unlovable; there is nothing attractive or admirable about them, they treat you with disrespect or disgust, they either consider themselves better than you or assume that you're too good for them. These people are hard to love. But that's where this truth comes into play:

**Love isn't based on feelings but is an act of the will.** And when we are unable to love someone in our own strength, we must love them by faith, asking the Lord to love that person through us.

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman who was imprisoned for helping Jews hide from the Nazis, lost most of her family in a concentration camp. She was a deeply committed Christian and, when the war was over, went on to deliver speeches on God's grace and forgiveness. After a speaking engagement at a church in Germany, one of her former prison guards approached her and asked for her forgiveness. Only by asking Jesus to love the man through her was she able to truly forgive. Corrie recalled, "For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus commands us to pray for those who persecute us so that we don't marinate in bitterness and resentment. To love someone is to seek what is good for them and that is best practiced through

prayer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it well: "I can no longer condemn or hate [people] for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me."<sup>2</sup>

## READ THE PASSAGE: **Matthew 5:43-48**

43 "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

## EXPLORE

*Nowhere in scripture does it say to hate your enemy, so this must have been a case of inference, assuming that to love your neighbor meant that the inverse was also true. What are some other bad inferences that people might make from scripture? (Need some ideas? Refer to page 67.)*

What is the best definition or description of love that you've heard?

Read Romans 5:7-10. How does knowing that we were once enemies of God change your perspective on loving your enemies?

How does praying for our enemies make it easier to love them?

What does Jesus mean by "be perfect?" How is this possible?

## HEART EXAM

### BE PERFECT

(This segment is longer than usual. Don't skip it. It's worth your time.)

*[There is] a problem that vexes every thoughtful Christian, namely, the huge gap between life as it should be and life as it is. New Testament passages, most notably the Sermon on the Mount, spell out lofty ethical ideals: give to everyone who asks you, love your enemies, welcome persecution. But these ideals inevitably shatter against the grim reality of actual human behavior.*

*In my profession, I experience a constant, unresolvable tension over this issue. As a journalist, I observe up close the spectacular and petty failures of Christian leaders. And when I turn to more personal concerns, I find that I write about the spiritual disciplines far better than I practice them. What Christian has not felt a similar twang of dissonance? We are called to strive for ideals that we know will never be attained...*

*There is only one way for any of us to resolve the tension between the high ideals of the gospel and the grim reality of ourselves: to accept that we will never measure up, but that we do not have to. We are judged by the righteousness of the Christ who lives within, not our own...*

*In his response to the rich young ruler, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, in his comments about divorce, money, or any other moral issue, Jesus never lowered God's ideal. "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," He said. "Love the Lord your God with*

*all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” No one—not Tolstoy, not Francis of Assisi, not Mother Teresa—has completely fulfilled those commands.*

*Yet the same Jesus tenderly offered absolute grace. Jesus forgave an adulteress, a thief on the cross, a disciple who had denied ever knowing him. He tapped that traitorous disciple, Peter, to found his church, and for the next advance, turned to a man named Saul, who had made his mark persecuting Christians. Grace is absolute, inflexible, all-encompassing. It extends even to the people who nailed Jesus to the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” were among the last words He spoke on earth.*

*I read passages such as the Sermon on the Mount with a different spirit now than in my adolescence. Jesus did not proclaim these exalted words so that we would furrow our brows in despair over our failure to achieve perfection. He proclaimed them to impart to us God’s ideal toward which we should never stop striving, but also to show that none of us will ever reach that ideal. The Sermon on the Mount forces us to recognize the great distance between God and us, and any attempt to reduce that distance by somehow moderating its demands misses the point altogether.*

*The worst tragedy would be to turn the Sermon on the Mount into another form of legalism; it should rather put an end to all legalism. Legalism like the Pharisees’ will always fail, not because it is too strict, but because it is not strict enough. Thunderously, inarguably, the Sermon on the Mount decrees that before God we all stand on level ground: murderers and temper-throwers, adulterers and lusters, thieves and coveters. We are all desperate, and that is, in fact, the only state appropriate to a human being who wants to know God. Having fallen from the absolute ideal, we have nowhere to land but in the safety net of absolute grace.<sup>3</sup>*

Do you tend to default toward legalism or grace? How does this affect your understanding of teachings like the Sermon on the Mount?

## APPLY

Who in your relational world is hardest to love? (Possible examples: an inconsiderate in-law, a strong-willed child, a demanding boss.)

How might God be calling you to love that person?

Without naming names, do you have any personal enemies? What about cultural enemies? What makes them your enemy? Do they also consider you an enemy?

How can you tangibly show love to people who oppose you, mistreat you, or hate you?

Now that we're nearing the end of our study, re-read Matthew 5:20. How has your understanding of righteousness changed over the course of this study?

## PRAY

Use this space to write down prayer requests and answers to prayer. And be sure to pray for them throughout the week.

---

---

---

---

---

---

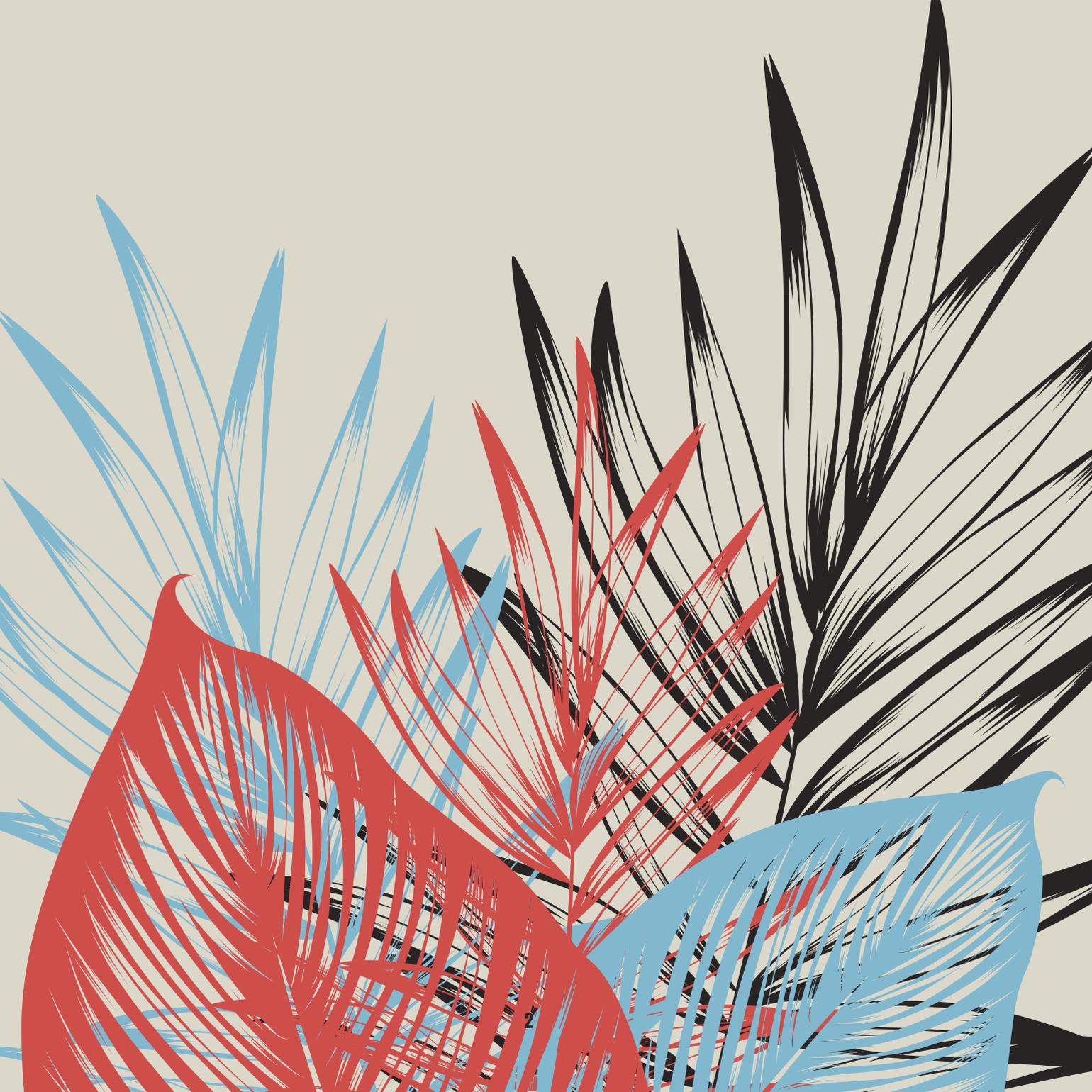
---

---

---

---





## THIS WEEK

**READ:** The Daily

**MEMORIZE:** Review the memory verses from the last five sessions.

**PRACTICE:** Ask God how you can tangibly show love to people who might see you as an enemy.

## THE DAILY

### **DAY 1: *Colossians 1:13-14, 21-22***

The command for us to love our enemies is rooted in God's example of love towards us. How does knowing God's continued love toward us—even though we ourselves still sin—invite us to love those who sin against us?

### **DAY 2: *1 Peter 3:8-9***

Sympathy is an invitation to understand someone else's situation. How does having sympathy for your enemy invite love over hate?

### **DAY 3: *Luke 23:33-34***

What does Jesus' prayer on the cross for his enemies reveal about God? What does it reveal about the people he is praying for?

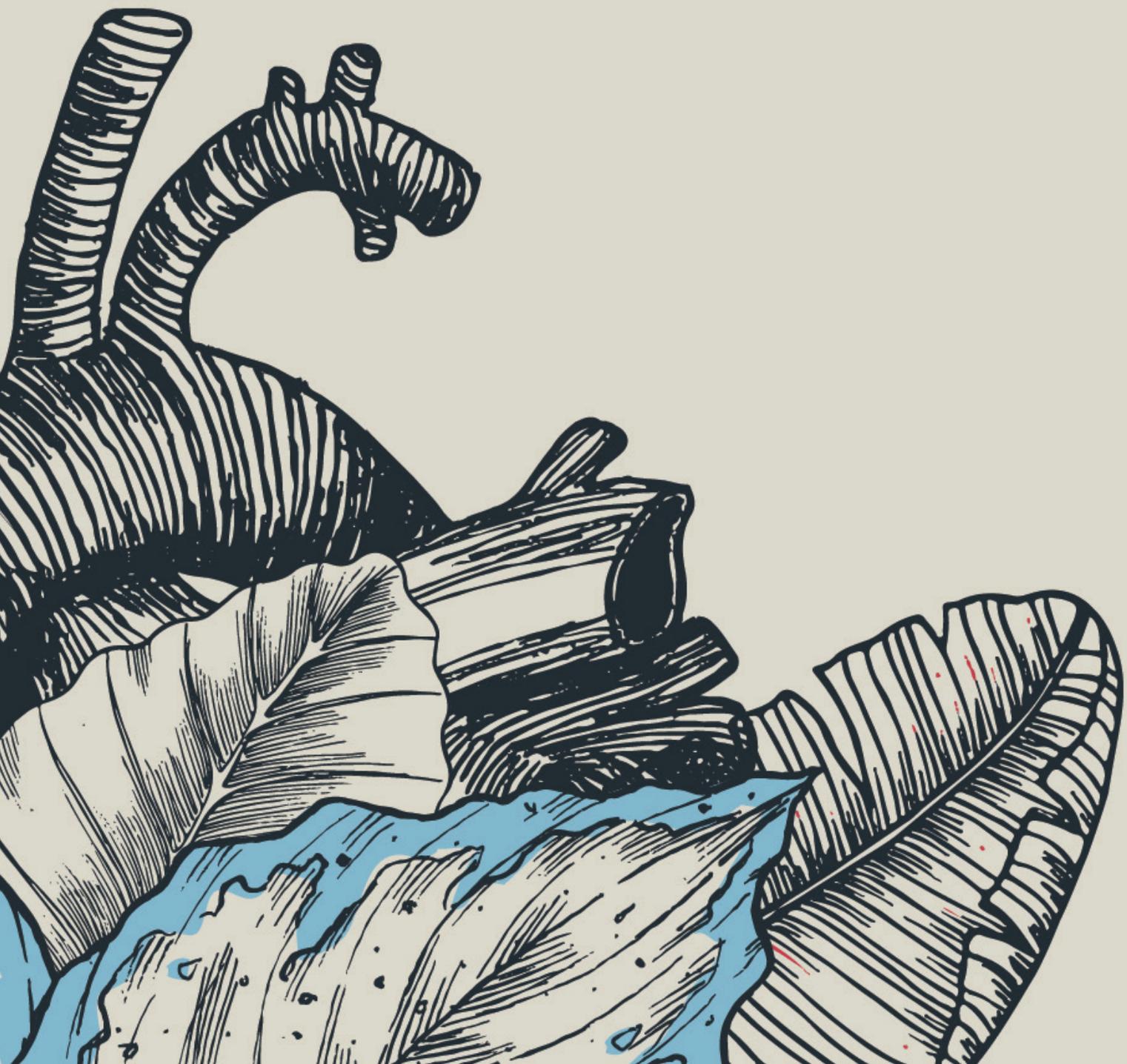
### **DAY 4: *1 John 4:7-12***

People can be vessels of God's love. Have you ever experienced God's love through another person or group? How can you share God's love with others?

### **DAY 5: *1 John 4:18-21***

Which "hard to love" person might God be calling you to love? How can you tangibly display love to this person?





# Appendix

## A. WORKS CITED

### INTRODUCTION

1. Matthew 4:17
2. Hebrews 3:3
3. [pulitzer.org/article/voice-underdog-and-underprivileged](https://www.pulitzer.org/article/voice-underdog-and-underprivileged)

### SESSION 1

1. [brainyquote.com/quotes/plato\\_161536](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/plato_161536)
2. [quoteency.com/pablo-picasso-quotes](https://www.quoteency.com/pablo-picasso-quotes)
3. [forbes.com/sites/waynecrews/2017/08/15/how-many-rules-and-regulations-do-federal-agencies-issue/?sh=591f04071e64](https://www.forbes.com/sites/waynecrews/2017/08/15/how-many-rules-and-regulations-do-federal-agencies-issue/?sh=591f04071e64)
4. John 5:39
5. Eliot, T.S. (1938). *Murder in the Cathedral*. New York: Faber and Faber.
6. Jethani, Skye. (2020). *What if Jesus was Serious?: A visual guide to the teachings of Jesus we love to ignore*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

### SESSION 2

1. [imdb.com/title/tt0077031/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077031/)
2. Keener, Craig S. (1997). *Matthew, vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
3. Jethani, Skye. (2020). *What if Jesus was Serious?: A visual guide to the teachings of Jesus we love to ignore*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

### SESSION 3

1. [dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2261377/Porn-study-scrapped-researchers-failed-ANY-20-males-hadn-t-watched-it.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2261377/Porn-study-scrapped-researchers-failed-ANY-20-males-hadn-t-watched-it.html)
2. [covenanteyes.com/pornstats/](https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/)
3. Levine, Amy-Jill. (2020). *Sermon on the mount: A beginner's guide to the kingdom of heaven*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
4. Jethani, Skye. (2020). *What if Jesus was Serious?: A visual guide to the teachings of Jesus we love to ignore*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

### SESSION 4

1. Keener, Craig S. (1997). *Matthew, vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
2. [knowableword.com/2018/07/27/context-matters-you-have-heard-that-it-was-said-but-i-say-to-you/](https://www.knowableword.com/2018/07/27/context-matters-you-have-heard-that-it-was-said-but-i-say-to-you/)

### SESSION 5

1. [imdb.com/title/tt0094226/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094226/)
2. Campolo, Tony. (2014). *Choose Love Not Power: How to right the world's wrongs from a place of weakness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
3. Philippians 2:7-8
4. John 11:11
5. John 10:32
6. John 10:9
7. John 6:35
8. John 10:14
9. John 15:11
10. Matthew 5:16

## SESSION 6

1. [guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-forgiveness](http://guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-forgiveness)
2. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. (1954). *Life Together: The classic exploration of Christian community*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.
3. Yancey, Philip. (1995). *Be Ye Perfect, More or Less: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and the impossible Sermon on the Mount*. Christianity Today.
4. Lewis, C.S. (1943). *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan.

## B. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus gave the Great Commission:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

- Matthew 28:18-20

Since these were His parting words, it would seem that making disciples is of great importance to Jesus. So, for over 2000 years, the church has been trying to figure out how to do this effectively.

According to a recent study, one of the key predictors of spiritual maturity is participation in a small group. Real transformational discipleship involves moving from sitting in rows (during a weekend service) where you are simply in proximity to one another, to sitting in circles, being in community with one another.

That’s why we value meaningful community. As you are with others, you can give and receive encouragement, wisdom, and accountability to let God work in you and through you. You become a disciple who not only loves and follows Jesus, but also wants to share his love with others.

## C. WHAT IS A LIFEGROUP?

A LifeGroup is a Christ-centered group of 8-15 people committed to gather together regularly in an environment of grace and truth to become more like Jesus.

### A BRIEF EXPLANATION

**Christ-centered:** The gospel is at the heart of who we are and what we do, knowing that we’re more broken than we care to admit but more loved by God than we can imagine.

**8-15 people:** Healthy things grow. A group should always be looking to grow in depth, intimacy, maturity, and number. Once it reaches more than 15 people, the group typically seeks to multiply into two groups of 8 in order to have the capacity to involve more people.

**Gather regularly:** Relationships take quality and quantity time. Meeting weekly (or at least three times per month) helps foster a sense of community.

**Grace & truth:** Truth gives us the understanding we need to live the Christian life. Grace provides the acceptance and encouragement we need to keep on going. Truth lets people know where you stand. Grace lets people know that you love them.

**More like Jesus:** Sanctification is a process where we are becoming who God intended—displaying spiritual fruit, doing what Jesus did, and sharing his love with your relational world.

## D. LEADING FOR THE FIRST TIME

Facilitating a group is not nearly as difficult as you may fear it is. No one is expecting you to be a spiritual giant. This workbook is designed so that you can come alongside one another as co-learners. This can be as simple as opening your home, reading Scripture and questions aloud, playing a video, and having a conversation from the heart. Trust us, after your first meeting, you'll find that your group will fall into a familiar rhythm and this whole process will become less daunting.

Be sure to use the workbook as a guide, not a straitjacket. If the group responds to the lesson in an unexpected but honest way, go with that. If you think of a better question than the one in the lesson, ask it! Your group has the freedom to ask the questions that the Spirit is prompting. Sometimes those can lead to the most useful discussions of all.

If you approach each meeting with prayer and a little preparation, you will find this guidebook easy to use. Know that you are not alone on this journey; as a church we want to support you and your group along the way. Feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you have regarding your group. You can email Central's Community Life Pastor at [neil.downey@centralsf.org](mailto:neil.downey@centralsf.org) or just call the church office at **(605) 336-3378**.

## HERE ARE A FEW TIPS FOR YOU AS YOU GET READY FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING:

**Lead with hospitality:** Creating a warm and welcoming environment is the first step of hosting a group. Who doesn't like the idea that someone is expecting them? Keep in mind that for many people, the thought of going to someone's house to have a "spiritual conversation" can be intimidating. It can trigger all kinds of insecurities. Be mindful of this in all your interactions with your group. From email communication to the way you greet them at the door, a warm and welcoming environment will go a long way toward easing their fears.

**Learn names quickly:** It's ok to use name tags! For new groups, it's especially hard to remember the flood of new names that come rushing at you and you are embarrassed to ask once you get to week three! So, for this six-week journey, have name tags available to deepen connection within the group.

**Start with Introductions:** Especially for week one, hearing stories trumps getting through content. So take time to go around the circle and have everyone introduce himself or herself. Share some of the raw data from their life (family, occupation, etc.) but also include one significant thing about their life that would be good for the group to know about them.

**Group Commitment:** The key to getting off on the right foot with your group is to appropriately discuss and set expectations. Before you dive into the week one content, you will read through the Group Commitment on page 11 and have an opportunity to lay out clear expectations.

## E. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ***When should I reach out for help from the Spiritual Development Team?***

Anytime you want! Sincerely, we want to hear from you! Don't feel like it has to be something big or really important to contact us. We love to be a sounding board for you. Call us early. Call us often.

**Neil Downey**     *neil.downey@centralsf.org*

**Haley Wiggers**     *haley.wiggers@centralsf.org*

**Mike Carr**     *mike.carr@centralsf.org*

### ***Is it okay to invite someone to the group who is not a Central attendee?***

The short answer is, of course! If the person does not have a home church or doesn't yet have a relationship with Jesus, a group can be a great 'on-ramp' to the Christian faith while providing a good connection to the local church. Joining a group also provides a way to get to know other church members on a deeper level and develop new relationships with neighbors in your area. If the person has a home church, ideally they would get connected in their own church, however, there are times when it may be appropriate to make an exception.

### ***What should we do if a member misses a meeting (or several)?***

Define mutual expectations early on with the Group Pact. If attendance becomes an issue with someone in the group, address it

with them in person, not via email. Again, in this type of situation, err on the side of grace. Be in a place emotionally where you are more saddened that you didn't get to see the person at your meeting than you are frustrated that they didn't show up. Encourage them that they are a valuable member of the group with good things to contribute.

### ***How long will this group meet?***

Your commitment to this group is through the duration of the six-week series. We certainly hope and pray that your group will continue to meet well beyond the length of this campaign, but we are structuring this campaign so that people who have always been hesitant about getting connected to a group will be able to experience authentic Christ-centered community.

At the end of this study, each group member may decide if he or she wants to continue on for another study. Some groups may launch relationships for years to come. Others might be stepping-stones into another group experience. Either way, enjoy giving it a try for six weeks and appreciate the journey.

If your group decides to continue meeting, you should decide as a group what the next study should be. There are several good ideas for resources at [centralsf.org/lifegroups](http://centralsf.org/lifegroups). If you're having trouble deciding, contact us for help.

### ***How often should we meet?***

During this series, groups meet every week. After the campaign, we recommend that LifeGroups meet three weeks a month and take the

fourth week off. This works with busy schedules while also helping to maintain a sense of community. We need an occasional break, but we also need to be intentional with one another.

Some groups choose to meet every other week. One of the challenges of meeting every other week is that if someone misses, it will be a month since you have met with them. Therefore, groups that meet every other week will need to be intentional about looking for additional ways to build a sense of community.

### ***What if this group is not working for us?***

You're not alone! This could be the result of a personality conflict, life stage difference, geographical distance, or any number of things. Relax. Pray for God's direction, and at the end of this six-week study, decide whether to continue with this group or find another. You don't typically buy the first car you look at or marry the first person you date, and the same goes with a group. However, don't bail out before the six weeks are up—God might have something to teach you. Also, don't run from conflict or prejudge people before you have given them a chance. God is still working in their lives, too!

### ***Who is the leader?***

Most groups have an official leader. But ideally, the group will mature and members will rotate the leadership of meetings. We have discovered that healthy groups rotate hosts or leaders and homes on a regular basis. This model ensures that all members grow, give their unique contribution, and develop their gifts. This workbook and the Holy Spirit can keep things on track even when

you rotate leaders. Christ has promised to be in your midst as you gather. Ultimately, God is your leader each step of the way. (Yeah, it sounds a little cheesy, but it really is true.)

### ***How do we handle the childcare needs in our group?***

Very carefully. Seriously, this can be a sensitive issue. We suggest you empower the group to openly brainstorm solutions. You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. Our favorite approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room and to share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the kids in a different part of the house. This way, parents don't have to be away from their children all evening when their children are too young to be left at home.

A second option is to use one home for the kids and a second home for the adults. This works extremely well if the homes are within a few blocks of each other. A final option is to make your own arrangements for childcare. No matter what decision the group makes, the best approach is to dialogue openly about solutions.

## F. DISCUSSION GUIDE (THE ANSWERS)

\*\*\*Before each session, familiarize yourself with the passage, the main concepts, and the questions. If your group gets stumped or seems to go off track, the following might help keep them moving in the right direction.\*\*\*

### SESSION 1 - The Heart of the Law

#### EXPLORE

**If the primary purpose of the Law was to show the world what God is like, why would people think that Jesus had come to “abolish the Law or the Prophets?”**

*Although this passage occurs early in his ministry, Matthew 4:17 and 23 says that Jesus was traveling all over the region teaching, preaching, and healing. So it’s likely that He’d already had some run-ins with the religious establishment (similar to the one recorded in Matthew 12:1-8) that could have been interpreted as disregarding the Law. Even the first section of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) could have been misconstrued by those in power as Jesus trying to destroy the Law.*

**How did Jesus fulfill the Law?**

*Fulfillment doesn’t mean to throw away but to complete. Jesus essentially says “I’m what the Scriptures have been pointing toward.”*

**If verse 18 is true, why do we no longer observe ceremonial law (sacrifice animals, eat kosher food, etc.)?**

*These laws were given to ancient Israel in their cultural setting. The purpose of the ceremonial laws was to set Israel apart from the other nations and keep them away from things that symbolized death and/or moral corruption. Jesus fulfilled the law, imparting his holiness on us. And now, when we read the laws, we can see God’s wisdom and trust that his Spirit will guide us to follow that wisdom, as we learn to love God and our neighbor.*

**In the context of this passage, how would you define righteousness?**

*When Jesus spoke of righteousness, he meant living our lives in accordance with God’s will. But He was referring to a righteousness of the heart, one that is a result of being changed by God and lived out in our daily actions.*

**Who were the scribes and Pharisees? How could anyone have righteousness that surpassed them?**

*The scribes were a professional group in Judaism that copied the law of Moses and interpreted it, especially in legal cases. (Essentially they were lawyers.) The Pharisees were a religious sect that followed the whole written and oral law and prided themselves on their obedience. Jesus’ explanation of righteousness was to move people’s thinking from action to motive. Since the Great Commandment is to love God and to love your neighbor, a person is only “righteous” if his motives rest in love. And this righteousness is actually a gift from God, accomplished through the finished work of Christ.*

## HEART EXAM: INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION

**What is the source of this internal transformation?**

**How does a person change at the heart level?**

*The Holy Spirit enables us to experience a genuine new spiritual life, the love of God, and the assurance of being his child. When we yield control to him, He directs and empowers us to be obedient to God and produces Spiritual fruit in our lives.*

## APPLY

**Is it possible to be a Bible-believing, churchgoing person but still be unrighteous in God's eyes? Explain.**

*This question addresses the nature of faith. A person can intellectually agree with the Bible or have an emotional experience at church but still not repent of their sin and trust Jesus to forgive them and make them a new creation.*

**Are you teaching the commands of God to anyone? How well do your actions align with your teaching? In other words, do you practice what you preach?**

*Allow several people to share. Just pay attention to time constraints.*

**What is the biggest change you've seen in your own life since coming to faith in Christ?**

*Allow several people to share. Just pay attention to time constraints.*

Reminder: Be sure to read the LifeGroup commitment before the end of the session.

## SESSION 2 - The Heart of Murder

### EXPLORE

**According to verse 21, what had the people heard? Was Jesus contradicting this teaching?**

*Jesus is referring to the 6th Commandment (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17). He wasn't contradicting this command, but expanding it. He was essentially saying, "You understand the Law to mean this, but I'm offering a fuller explanation."*

**Is it possible to avoid anger? If the answer is "no," does that mean judgment is unavoidable for us?**

*While anger is a common human emotion, it can lead to all kinds of horrible thoughts, words, and actions. Jesus was again trying to focus at the heart level, moving deeper than mere actions.*

**Read Ephesians 4:26. How is it possible to be angry and not sin? What is the difference between sinful anger and righteous anger?**

*While anger is sometimes justified, it can be so dangerous and destructive that we need to manage it carefully. Jesus communicated his anger by remedying the issue. We are to utilize our anger to discover constructive ways to solve a problem as opposed to destroying or tearing down individuals.*

**While not describing violence or rage, what emotion/attitude does verse 22 address?**

*This verse seems to address disgust or contempt.*

**Why does Jesus transition from discussing anger to reconciliation?**

*Our anger is most often directed at people, causing division and strife in relationships. And because our relationship with God is partly contingent on how we treat others, it's important to live in harmony with one another.*

**Verses 25-26 convey a sense of urgency. Why?**

*Jesus emphasizes the importance of maintaining healthy relationships and restoring damaged ones. Religious activity without relational purity is pointless.*

## **HEART EXAM: CONTEMPT**

**How do anger and contempt contribute to outrage culture, especially on social media? What does it look like to disagree with someone's ideas without attacking the person?**

*This question is not intended to be a gripe session or an opportunity to point fingers, but an honest assessment of just how nasty our interactions can be when we let anger control us. Be sure to gather more than one thought about how to engage with differing ideas in an appropriate, Christlike manner.*

## **APPLY**

**While it may be possible to wield anger righteously, Jesus gives a stern warning about its dangers. How have you justified your anger? How have you allowed it to marinate inside you, fermenting in your heart and mind?**

*Allow for vulnerability without getting into the gory details.*

**According to kingdom values, reconciliation takes precedence over worship. What would it look like if we took verses 23-24 seriously? How would it affect our weekend services?**

*Use your imagination: Would people actually stop on their way to church and attempt to reconcile before walking in the building?*

**Describe a time when you needed to be reconciled with someone. What was it like? How did it end up?**

*This is almost the end of the session, so don't let time get away from you on this one.*

## SESSION 3 - The Heart of Adultery

### EXPLORE

**Is Jesus' discussion of anger and contempt related (in any way) to his discussion of adultery? Why or why not?**

*Similarly, Jesus is pointing out that the law is not simply about our actions, but it is also about our hearts. The passage on adultery is different from the one on anger in that it focuses on the individual's self-control and heart whereas the passage on anger is focused on restoring community.*

**Why is lust at the heart of adultery? Aren't there more important factors?**

*The selfishness of lust makes it impossible to be content with what you have. Lust drives someone to pursue more and take more for oneself which naturally leads to compromising your own purity and your relationship with others.*

**Are we to take verses 29-30 literally? If not, then what point was Jesus trying to make by using this level of exaggeration?**

*These verses are not to be taken literally; God does not want us to harm our own bodies. However, when we continue on in sin, we do an even greater harm to our bodies. Jesus' exaggeration highlights just how important it is that we recognize our sin and take extreme measures to reorient ourselves with God and his loving commandments.*

## HEART EXAM: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY LUST?

**If the root of lust is within me, then what is the solution?**

*The solution is heart transformation. This is done through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and our willingness to submit to the Spirit's guidance. If people want more discussion or additional resources, refer them to Appendix section.*

### APPLY

**In what ways can you crucify the flesh daily?**

*Some examples include: forming new habits that replace habits that feed our sin, sharing our struggles with accountability partners so that we are reminded of God's grace and the reality of our continued sin, and sacrificing our comfort and desires for the sake of being made more like Christ.*

**How are you keeping in step with the Spirit?**

*Give people time to share. Be attentive to time constraints.*

**Jesus used exaggeration (gouging out eyes, cutting off hands) to instruct us to take sin seriously. To what lengths have you gone in order to avoid sin and/or temptation?**

*Give people time to share. Be attentive to time constraints. If someone goes into too much detail, feel free to redirect.*

## SESSION 4: The Heart of Integrity

### EXPLORE

Let's get into the weeds. Read the following passages about oaths and put them into your own words:

*Leviticus 19:11-12 — Don't steal, lie, or violate my name.*

*Numbers 30:1-2 — When you make a vow, you have to fulfill it.*

*Deuteronomy 23:21-23 — If you make a vow, God expects you to fulfill it. Don't put it off.*

**Why would Jesus instruct people to not take an oath at all?**

*Deuteronomy 23:22 seems to imply that not keeping your word doesn't get you in trouble as long as you didn't make a vow—kind of like saying, "I'll do this" but not getting around to it is understandable, as opposed to breaking a promise. But Jesus is saying that you should be a person of your word no matter what. Promises or pledges, ("I swear on my mother's grave") shouldn't be necessary if you're a person of character. Your word should be your bond.*

**Why is it important for Christians to keep their word?**

*If we aren't people who can be trusted to tell the truth about common, everyday things, why should people believe us when we make outlandish statements like, "Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose from the dead to forgive your sins and make you right with God?"*

Some devout believers have taken this passage to mean that they should never take an oath of any kind, including the Pledge of Allegiance, a sworn testimony in court, or an oath of office. What do you think of this interpretation?

*This is an overapplication of the passage. If we fully carried out this line of thinking, we wouldn't even exchange wedding vows.*

**How might this passage contribute to our understanding of the kind of lives Jesus calls us to live as his followers?**

*Focus on heart change and character: virtues like integrity and wisdom are primarily a result of the Spirit at work in our lives, not just trying hard.*

**HEART OF THE MATTER: "YOU HAVE HEARD..."**

**Have you believed something that you later discovered was based on mere tradition or a misinterpretation?**

*Examples might include*

*God helps those who help themselves.*

*God will never give you more than you can handle.*

*(When somebody dies) Heaven gained another angel today.*

*To thine own self be true.*

*Everything happens for a reason.*

### What are some factors that could influence a Bible teacher's biblical interpretation and communication?

*Plenty of things could influence what a teacher says, including family upbringing, traumatic experiences, source of news media/entertainment, etc.*

### Do you trust everything you hear from your favorite preachers? Why or why not?

*If people answer this in the affirmative, try to play devil's advocate. For example, "Is Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ infallible? Do you think he might ever misinterpret something? How would you know if he did?"*

## APPLY

### What do you think keeps us from upholding commitments or promises?

*Some possible answers: procrastination, forgetfulness, unforeseen circumstances, or a change of priorities.*

### Think of a time when you weren't able to uphold a commitment or promise, even if it was a small one. What area of your life did this fall under? Is that a pattern? What does that tell you about your heart posture in that area of your life?

*Answers could vary from the mundane to the shocking. Be prepared to move on quickly if necessary.*

### What would you say are the things you value most? Do you value them because you want to live them out or expect them of others? Is there consistency in what you say you value and how you live your life?

*This requires a level of self-awareness and vulnerability. Don't allow people to beat themselves up. Be sure to extend encouragement and grace.*

## SESSION 5: The Heart of Power

### EXPLORE

#### Compare the passage you just read with Deuteronomy 19:16-21. What was the original intent of the law?

*The original intent was to be a deterrent against false accusations. If found to be a liar, the plaintiff would have done to him what he intended to inflict upon the defendant.*

#### How do you think the teachers of the Law were wrongly applying the principle of "an eye for an eye?"

*It's possible that they were using it to be malicious and cruel instead of letting the punishment fit the crime.*

#### People generally default to self-preservation. How is this incompatible with Jesus' instruction to not resist an evildoer?

*Jesus modeled a life of service, sacrifice, and others-centeredness. Instead of self-preservation, He didn't resist evildoers when we willingly went to the cross. (Like a lamb to the slaughter, He was silent.)*

**What is accomplished by turning the other cheek? What is risked?**

*You risk getting hit on the other cheek. What is accomplished is a demonstration of nonviolence, meekness, and divine self-control that can make people take notice.*

**Why do people struggle to follow Jesus' command to give to the beggar and not refuse the borrower?**

*In general, selfishness. Specifically, there could be an underlying lack of trust in God's provision.*

## **HEART EXAM: LITERALLY VS. SERIOUSLY?**

**What are the implications of taking every word of Jesus literally? How can we know which of His words to take literally? Practically speaking, how can we take His words seriously if we don't take them literally?**

*We have to be good students of Scripture, knowing the context (genre, audience, etc.) of each passage that causes us concern. And if we know someone is using exaggeration, sarcasm or any other form of rhetoric, we can still take heed to the heart of their message.*

## **APPLY**

**One of the most impactful movements of the last 100 years was Martin Luther King's non-violence approach to civil rights. Why do you think it was effective? How did this movement display the principles of Matthew 5:38-42?**

*MLK's commitment to nonviolence was Christlike. African-American protesters didn't resist arrest, didn't fight back, didn't lash out in anger. They let the world see the atrocities committed against them and eventually won in the court of public opinion.*

**Our call to self-sacrificial love must override our instinct for retaliation. Share an example of when you've shown restraint and practiced non-retaliation or non-resistance.**

*Pay attention to time.*

**Who is the most generous person you know? What is the source of their generosity? What are the effects?**

*This could be inspiring. Maybe come up with a list of ways to tangibly show generosity (with time, talent, and treasure) in the immediate future.*

## SESSION 6: The Heart of Love

### EXPLORE

Nowhere in Scripture does it say to hate your enemy, so this must have been a case of inference, assuming that to love your neighbor meant that the inverse was also true. What are some other bad inferences that people might make from scripture?

*There are a lot of possible short-sighted or foolish inferences, including:*

- > “Go and make disciples” means “Any other ministry task is unimportant if it doesn’t accomplish this task.”
- > “God hates divorce” means “God hates anyone who gets divorced.”
- > “All scripture is God-breathed” means “All other sources of truth are illegitimate.”

**What is the best definition or description of love that you’ve heard?**

*Again, tons of possible answers here, including passages like 1 Corinthians 13 or 1 John 3.*

**Read Romans 5:7-10. How does knowing that we were once enemies of God change your perspective on loving your enemies?**

*It should give us compassion and empathy, realizing we were once in their shoes.*

**How does praying for our enemies make it easier to love them?**

*It’s really hard to hate somebody if you’re praying for them.*

**What does Jesus mean by “be perfect?” How is this possible?**

*Some people may emphasize “positional perfection” meaning the righteousness given to us by Christ’s death. When God looks at us, He sees his perfect Son. Others might talk about how perfection is a goal; we make progress toward Christlikeness (sanctification) but will only be perfect when we see God face to face in eternity.*

### HEART EXAM: BE PERFECT

**Do you tend to default toward legalism or grace? How does this affect your understanding of teachings like the Sermon on the Mount?**

*If time allows, make this one an all-play.*

### APPLY

**Who in your relational world is hardest to love? (Possible examples: an inconsiderate in-law, a strong-willed child, a demanding boss.) How might God be calling you to love that person?**

*Remind people to be considerate of people’s privacy on this question.*

Without naming names, do you have any personal enemies? What about cultural enemies? What makes them your enemy? Do they also consider you an enemy?

*This could be interesting. Handle with care.*

How can you tangibly show love to people who oppose you, mistreat you, or hate you?

*The easiest step is to pray for them. It's hard to resent someone if you're genuinely praying for them. But other means of extending an olive branch could take some courage.*

Now that we're nearing the end of our study, re-read Matthew 5:20. How has your understanding of righteousness changed over the course of this study?

*Reminder: true righteousness is not just about behavior but about what God is doing to your heart and soul.*

## G. LIFEGROUP CALENDAR

Planning can help ensure the greatest participation at every meeting. At the end of each meeting, review this calendar. Be sure to include a regular rotation of host homes/leaders, and don't forget birthdays, socials, church events, holidays, and mission/ministry projects.

### SESSION 2

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ HOST: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

### SESSION 3

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ HOST: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

### SESSION 4

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ HOST: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

### SESSION 5

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ HOST: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

### SESSION 6

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ HOST: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

## H. LIFEGROUP CONTACT INFORMATION

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

## J. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### GOSPEL

*This is the Gospel: How a deep understanding of the good news helps you share the love of Jesus*

[centralsf.org/ministries/lifegroups/#gospel-curriculum](https://centralsf.org/ministries/lifegroups/#gospel-curriculum)

#### *The Gospel-Centered Life*

[christianbook.com/gospel-centered-study-guide-leaders-notes/robert-thune/9781942572916/pd/572929?event=ESRCG](https://christianbook.com/gospel-centered-study-guide-leaders-notes/robert-thune/9781942572916/pd/572929?event=ESRCG)

#### **Bible Project video: *Gospel***

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/euangelion-gospel/](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/euangelion-gospel/)

### HOLY SPIRIT

#### *Satisfied?*

[cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/satisfied.html](https://cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/satisfied.html)

#### *Thirsty Devotional & Small Group Study*

[crustore.org/product/thirsty/](https://crustore.org/product/thirsty/)  
[www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/bible-studies/thirsty.html](https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/bible-studies/thirsty.html)

#### **Bible Project Video: *Holy Spirit***

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/holy-spirit/>

### THE LAW

#### *Free: A Study in Galatians*

[centralsf.org/ministries/lifegroups/free/](https://centralsf.org/ministries/lifegroups/free/)

#### **Bible Project video: *The Law***

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/law/](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/law/)

#### **Bible Project video: *Biblical Law***

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/reading-biblical-law/](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/reading-biblical-law/)

















**CENTRAL CHURCH**

3102 W. Ralph Rogers Rd.

Sioux Falls, SD 57108

*centralsf.org*