

Small Group Booklet

10 LIGHTS OF TRUTH

February - March 2018



TEN LIGHTS OF TRUTH:

God's Commandments

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a 40-day period observed by Christians to prepare for Easter. These 40 days mirror the time Jesus spent in the desert after his baptism as he prepared for his ministry. This special time allows us to focus on God, and to reflect on our relationship with our Creator.

For Lent we are inviting you to reflect on the structure and rules that help us to walk in the light of God's way of life. Rules might be hard to adhere to sometimes, but they also give us a sense of order and reassurance, and so keep us safe in community with other people. God gives us a choice: we can either walk in the light of Godly rules for life, or we can follow our own path. Matthew 7:13 reminds us that the easy road is not always the best choice: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many".

The Bible tells of 10 Commandments that were given to Moses and the Israelites by God on Mount Sinai (Genesis 20-23 and 34). Christians have accepted that God gave these rules to the Israelites, and as inheritors of the faith of Jesus, we accept these rules for our own well-being. In essence we choose to believe that the 10 commandments are God's guidelines to keep us from destroying ourselves. Too often we have understood the 10 Commandments as a set of rules to crush us into submission rather than an invitation to living an abundant life. The law is like a spotlight that shows us how to live our lives with the truth. The 10 Commandments inspire us to higher standards of living – enabling us to see what our lives really could look like.

Mark 12:30-31 teaches that the 10 Commandments are all captured in the Great Commandment: "*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*" There is no other commandment greater than these."

When we love God, it is easy to follow his rules: we are then tapping into his inexhaustible source of guidance, comfort and protection. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement reminds us that these commandments are timeless: "*Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind in all ages, as not depending either on time or place, nor on any other circumstances liable to change; but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other*" (Wesley's Sermons, Vol. I, Sermon 25).



Let us note that adhering to the laws themselves doesn't save us. The laws are a reminder of God's expectations of those who follow him. We are saved by his grace, shown in the undeserved love of Jesus. But then our renewed lives need guidance – the kind of guidance that is offered by the 10 Commandments.

We hope that the Bible verses, insights, small group questions and practical daily actions in this study guide will help you to see those things that take your focus off God. May it guide you to follow his light out of the desert into a place of living your life with abundant love, joy and peace.

Pete & Nadja

ALL SCRIPTURE IS FROM THE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION OF THE BIBLE

be the light



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**All of these commandments are captured in the GREAT
COMMANDMENT**



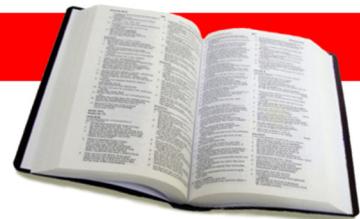
Exodus 20: 1-17 The ten Commandments

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. "You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.



WEEK 1: THERE IS NO OTHER

**Do not worship any other Gods
Do not make any other idols**



Daniel 3: 1-18 Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon..... And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

The Fiery Furnace

...Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O



Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Additional reading: Acts 17:26-31

Insights:



Nebuchadnezzar II, sometimes alternately spelled Nebuchadrezzar, was king of Babylonia from 605 BC until 562 BC. Secular history records Nebuchadnezzar as a brutal, powerful, and ambitious king. He is remembered in the Bible for the conquering of Judah and the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The story above tells how Nebuchadnezzar created a gold statue of himself and required all the people to bow down to it whenever the music played. Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to do so. They were obedient to the First Commandment: *“You shall have no other gods before me”*. This story has been preserved as a challenge to all who follow God to discover that our love for God comes before all else in our lives. There can be no relationship, experience or material thing that we value more than our loyalty to God. Anything we care for more than our obedience to God therefore becomes an idol. In the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego this meant that they had to ask if their lives were more valuable than obeying God. Not many of us are asked such a difficult question.

However, we could be asked questions about the importance of our personal comfort, our financial security, our children, success in our work, pride in our achievements, or even our carefully crafted individuality. Note that God doesn’t ask us to not love or enjoy life! What is being commanded is that we love God first before everything else. This is not because God has a fragile ego that cannot cope with our other distractions. Rather, the fact is that when we find something else more important than our Creator we create our own fiery furnace: the things we idolize turn on us demanding more attention and can thus become self-destructive. For this reason we are reminded by the Second Commandment: *“You shall not bow down to them or serve them”*. This law is given to help us live life free from the addiction to those things that distract us from the deepest spiritual truths that sustain our lives.

The commandment to love God above all else provides perspective for everything else. When we see our relationship with the world around us through our experience of the love that God has for us – we will gain a true perspective. Our constant human search for value in the eyes of other people through the acquisition of possessions, or through the acclaim of people, is stilled in the face of the love of God. The truth is that this world can

only provide a shadow of the experience of love: it is the love of our Creator that fills us up completely. Therefore let us celebrate the God who promises “steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Gen 20:6).



Psalm 127: 1-2 “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sheep.”

Let's talk about it

Q: What is your reaction to the story of Nebuchadnezzar? Please share.

Q: Name some of the “Golden Idols” that are erected in our 21st Century world.

Q: How are you scoring on putting God first above all else (on a scale from 1 to 10)? What is your biggest stumbling block? What can you do to lessen your dependence on earthly things and relationships, and increase your dependence on God? Please share – and give one another courage rather than judgement in this conversation.



Sunday: Meditate on the scripture passages provided and discern God’s message for you today.

Monday: Give up television and screens for the day – spend time with God.

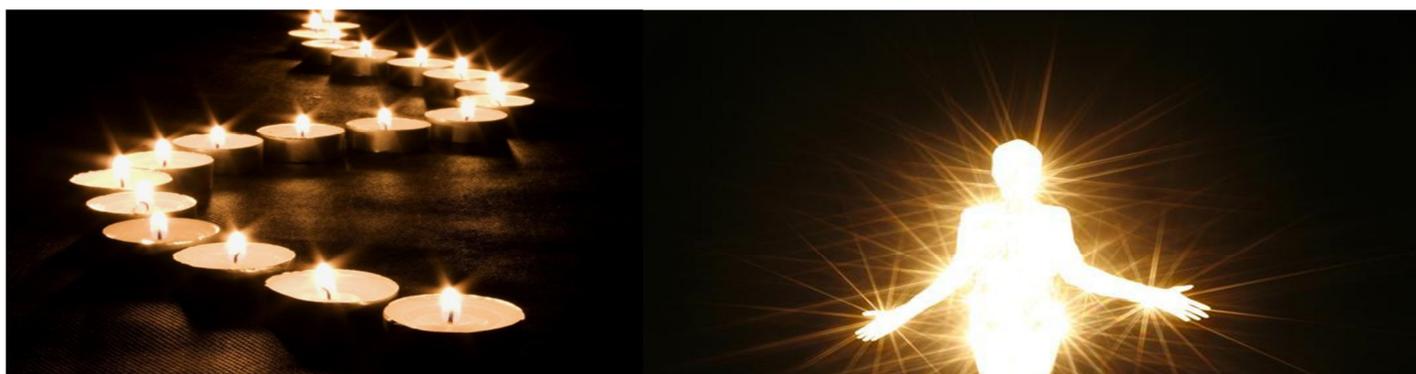
Tuesday: No snacks between meals today or fast certain meals—pray instead.

Wednesday: Write a prayer to God that expresses your desire to draw close to him.

Thursday: Have an honest conversation with God, let go of any preconceived ideas of how you should approach him – just be.

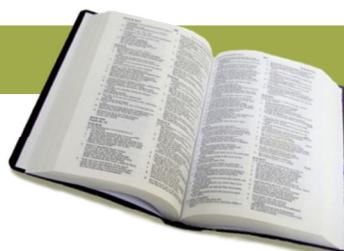
Friday: Go without one of the following today: cigarettes, alcohol, shopping, gossiping and or chocolate, replace it with prayer.

Saturday: Put your cell phone away for the day (or parts of it) – spend time with God.



WEEK 2: A HOLY LIFE

Do not misuse the name of God
Keep the Sabbath Holy

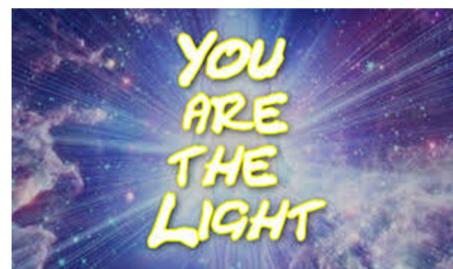


Mark 2:23-28 Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath: One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Matthew 12:9-14 A man with a withered hand: He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Additional reading: **James 2:14-17**

Insights:

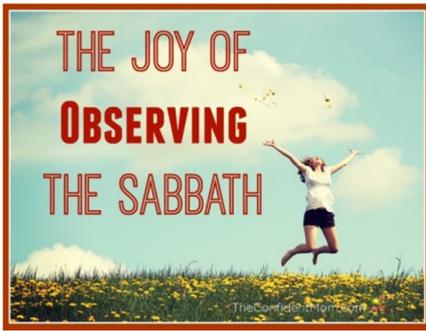


The Sabbath is an opportunity for people to pause their lives for religious observance: Muslims observe Friday as their Holy Day, Jews observe Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening, and most Christians observe Sabbath on a Sunday. Many people have spent time arguing about the correct way to observe this day. The story of Jesus and his disciples (above) is an example of such a dispute.

The Pharisees had 39 categories of actions that may never be done on the Sabbath based on their interpretation of the law and Jewish custom. Harvesting was one of those forbidden actions, as the Ten Commandments prohibited work on the Sabbath. So when the disciples picked at the ears of corn it was condemned by the religious leaders as “work”. It was very important to the Pharisees to adhere to the letter of the law, as they believed that this demonstrated purity of faith. In the same way, when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath he was “working”.

In this instance the Pharisees were so distracted by a random picking of ears of corn that they could not see that walking in the fields enjoying the beauty of the day brought the disciples closer to God. And these same temple leaders saw only a man with a withered hand who must be prevented from entering the temple because he was “defective”. They were blind to the fact that the healing action of Jesus enabled him to worship God. Sadly, the religious leaders of Jesus’ world were so obsessed with religious law that they missed the purpose of the law – which was to set people free to worship God. This is then the essence of the Commandment: “*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain*”. Too many people think that this has to do with words of blasphemy – using the name of

Jesus/God as an expressive expletive. It is far more than this. The Pharisees in the above story responded to the presence of God at work by distorting it with rules that ultimately betrayed the love of God. This is “taking the name of God in vain”. They used their position as religious leaders to make pronouncements in the name of God that had nothing to do with the love of God at all. Maybe there is a challenge for us as well: like the Pharisees we too can get so wrapped in all the obligations of our faith that we forget to do what our hearts prompt us to do – to respond to the love God.



Sadly there are some who seek to profit from the name of God. There are people who sell products that promise God’s blessing – such as holy water or blessed towels or blessed salt. This is blasphemy; this is using the name of Jesus for personal enrichment; this is taking the name of God in vain!

Another form of blasphemy is when people who claim to be followers of Jesus do things that completely betray the teachings of Jesus. An example is when Christian preachers supported racism and Apartheid in the name of God. Another example is when preachers claim God’s anointing on a political leader who is known for his sexual sin, or personal corruption. This denial of the moral values of God “takes the name of the Lord in vain”.

A Final Thought: Some have argued that the true day of worship is a Saturday, because this is the Biblical Sabbath. They are of course right – the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday. But Christians have chosen to make our Sabbath on the day of Resurrection. We worship on a Sunday morning (the First day of the week) because this is the day that the risen Jesus met his disciples. However, there are many people who work on a Sunday – and we are grateful for the police, the emergency service and other essential services who do so! Such people then need to find another moment for their own personal Sabbath, in order to be refreshed by the Spirit of God. The object of Sabbath is to give us space to allow the holiness of God to seep into our souls. The Sabbath offers us space to pause in our busy lives and respond to God. As Jesus says: “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*”

Once we allow the Spirit of God to direct us, then we will want to worship God, not just once a week, but every moment of every day. Every day ought to have Sabbath space for us to be reminded of God. A holy life does not only happen on a Sunday: it is living every moment of our lives with purpose, in grace, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit. When we recognize the presence of God, and live in relationship with Jesus, we receive his power - the power to live a Holy light-filled life.



Psalm 18:28 “*You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning: my God turns darkness into light.*”

Let's talk about it

Q: Which one of last week's daily activities challenged you the most? Why was it difficult for you?

Q: What does it mean to you to keep the Sabbath holy? Which activities are acceptable to do on this day? Share with your group.

Q: Do you connect and talk to God all the time or do you only spare him a thought on occasion? Has the amount of time spent with God impacted your life in any way? Please share.

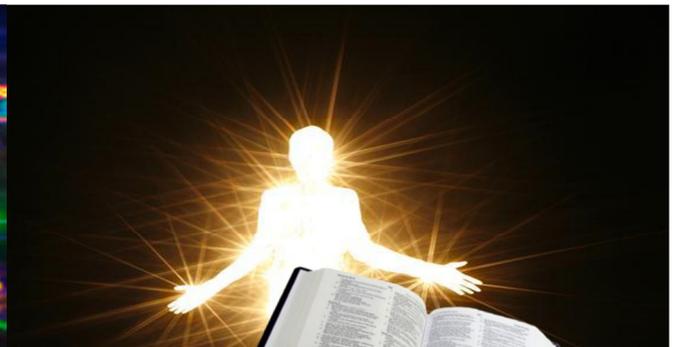
Q: Think about your relationship with God. What thoughts run through your mind when you read *James 2:14-17 Faith without works is dead*.

LET'S
DO SOMETHING
ABOUT IT

Sunday: Draw close to God all day – seek his presence with intention and determination through everything you do. Make it a HOLY DAY!

Monday - Saturday: Start a journal and record how you feel for the next 6 days: Write your prayers to God, list all your concerns and/or everything that you are grateful for.

On the last day – look back at what you have written. You have recorded your precious moments with God. We often forget them and journaling them keeps us focused and recovers what we have lost. (It helps us to tell our own story better, as you recorded its unfolding and recognized the repetitions of themes and the hand of God in seemingly unrelated events).



WEEK 3: HONOUR PARENTS

Honour your father and mother

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Romans 13:1-10 Submission to the Authorities Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed.



Fulfilling the law through love Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Insights:

The Bible tells that we have been given charge of the earth to protect and love it (Genesis 1:28 and 2:15). This authority, however, is a delegated authority. God is the final authority. God is in charge of Governments, the Church, Leaders, our families, and you and me. As noted by Paul in his letter to the Romans Ch. 13 (above): *For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* God is the one who gives us our authority, and all human governance is ultimately accountable to God.

All authority is designed for our blessing and protection. We all need direction and boundaries as we tackle this journey of life. Discipline and rules help society function. A culture cannot thrive when there is no respect for authority. But, says St Paul, all authority is to reflect God: “*be imitators of God, as beloved children*”. Our families are the first authority we get to know as we grow up, as our parents or caretakers are generally the ones that instill our values from an early age. God trusts parents to protect, love and empower children. In the light of this, the commandment for children to honour their parents, because parents are the representatives of God’s love in the home.

When parents do it well, children respond with love, but when parents fail to fulfill their responsibilities, their children start to distrust them, and to react out of fear rather than love. For this reason St Paul warns parents: “*do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*”. Our families should teach us that we surrender to God because we love him, not because we fear him. It is a response to a loving invitation not a forced imposition.

As we grow up we learn to accept other authorities in our lives too: authorities like the church and the government. St Paul reminds us that such authorities are “*God's servant for your good*”. Again – all authority represents God on earth, and as such “*one must be in*

subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience...for the authorities are ministers of God”.

This of course begs the question: what must we do when those in authority do not represent the teaching and values of Jesus? It is easy to accept their authority when we feel protected, and respect the values they hold, but our trust and respect are challenged when they do not behave according to Godly expectations. The sad fact is that there are parents, church leaders and civic leaders who abuse their power. We hear of preachers and government leaders who think they are beyond criticism or reproach. We are aware of ungodly leaders who are caught in compromising positions and accused of corruption or the abuse of power.

It would seem that there are two responses: **the First** is to remind those in authority of their responsibility to represent God. This can be in the form of prayer for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-3); this can also be in conversation with those in authority – such as when Jesus engaged Pontius Pilate (John 18 & 19); we can challenge corrupt authority in terms of the law: St Paul used Roman law to challenge his arrest and trial (Acts 25:11). And there are occasions when corrupt, ungodly rulers must be resisted – such as when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to obey King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:16). **The Second** response is to create our own Godly light. This is difficult if have been unjustly treated. But our lives, community and church life should reflect God’s love. We then honour our mother and father and other authority with God’s love, submitting to one another out of reverence for God. We become the light in the darkness by following the example of Jesus.



Romans 13:8 *“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”*

Let's talk about it

Q: David “Skip” Prichard says: **“Servant leaders lead with others in mind”**. He provides 9 points to describe good authority. Examine the list below and discuss these elements of leadership: How do you fare?

1. Values and seek out diverse opinions.
2. Cultivates a culture of trust.
3. Develops other leaders.
4. Helps people with life issues.
5. Encourages.
6. Sells instead of tells.
7. Thinks you, not me.
8. Thinks long term.
9. Acts with humility. (www.skipprichard.com)

All of us are leaders in some way – we all have influence in our own areas of life. Looking at the list above, do you lead with others in mind? Discuss with the group any aspect of servant leadership that resonates with you.

- Do you respect the opinion and feelings of those in authority?

- Do you treat your parents with dignity and respect?
- Are you the champion of your people at work? Always looking for ways to advance them.
- Do you allow others to find their own answers to life with encouragement and love?

Q: Our experiences of family life differ from person to person. Some of us have enjoyed the blessing of being raised in a loving home, others have not. We all carry our experience of the authority of our parents into our expectations of authority.

1. How has your experience of your parents shaped your idea of God?
2. Do you think it had an influence on how you see authority today? Is there some base belief you need to change to walk better in the light?



Sunday: Meditate on the scripture passages and discern God’s message for you today.

Monday: Forgive - your parents or any other authority figure that have harmed you – pray for them by name.

Tuesday: Make a list of all the avenues where you encounter rules daily and how this benefits you and others (traffic rules, designated parking...). Thank God for rules and order and ask him for help if you struggle with any of them.

Wednesday: Think of something that would bless a colleague at work or a close friend and give it to them.

Thursday: Spend the day listening to others; do not give your opinion once!

Friday: Serve someone with love that you have authority/power over that would not expect it.

Saturday: Make a meal or snack for your parents or for someone whose children are far away and write a loving note to accompany it, expressing your appreciation for their role in your life.



WEEK 4: CONTROL YOUR KILLER INSTINCTS

Do not murder
Do not commit adultery



John 8: 1-11

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher,

this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Matthew 5:21-22 Murder

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his sibling will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his sibling will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Matthew 5:27-28 Lust

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Insights:

Murder: is the unlawful killing of one human being by another. Life is a sacred gift that each person receives from our Creator. As such we have no right to take away from another what God has deemed to be good for them.

Adultery: is sexual contact between a married person and a person who is not their spouse. Sexual intimacy is given by God to deepen the relationship of a marriage. As such, choosing to engage in sexual activity with someone who is married steals intimacy from another marriage.

In both of the above, we access our ‘killer-instincts’: these are the powerful emotions that drive our actions and lead us into destructive behaviour. Driven by these unfettered emotions we will find ways of rationalizing our behaviour, thus giving ourselves permission to act in ways that satisfy our emotional drives.

The story in John Chapter 8 provides fascinating insight into the way people allowed their ‘killer instincts’ to rationalize the rules. The rules are clear: “*You shall not murder. “You shall not commit adultery”*”. The scribes and the Pharisees knew the law, but managed to find a way to adapt the law so that it allowed them to break one law (murder) in order to uphold the other (adultery). Sadly the commandments are often deemed to be negotiable: for example, while we all agree that we should not kill, we have created categories of actions that allow us to legally kill someone: we might begin with avenging a murder, but soon move to allowing execution for dealing in drugs, for changing religious views, and for sexual crimes such as adultery. Basically we tend to suggest that is not murder if the whole community decides it is permissible to kill someone. Similarly we find ways of excusing adultery: it is not really adultery if it was “just a flirting at the office party”, or if it was just a

“friendship with benefits”. Some people avoid facing God’s law on adultery by claiming that it is permissible to be Polyamorous, or to be a Swinger.

Jesus understands our attempts to find a way around the Ten Commandments. For this reason he says that a Godly life is not a matter of keeping the rules. Instead, a truly spiritual life is rooted in the thoughts and motives that drive us. Jesus teaches that when we guard our thinking, we will have a better chance at regulating our actions. That is why Jesus reminds us that adultery begins with “looking with lustful intent” (Matthew 5:27-28). When I pay attention to my lustful thoughts, I will be better able to manage my adulterous actions. In the same way Jesus suggests that we pay attention to our angry thoughts before they lead us to commit murder. God therefore put boundaries in place to help us live love-filled lives. God is not out to spoil our fun. He wants a responsive people that can control their emotions, rather than be controlled by them. Rules ultimately save us from ourselves.

A Concluding (very brief) thought on The Death Penalty: Some people justify state-sanctioned killing of people on the basis of some Old Testament texts. It is challenging to realize that Jesus resisted this idea. Although the Old Testament permits the execution of someone who commits adultery, Jesus argued instead for the woman to get a second chance: “*go and sin no more*” offers possibility of repentance and new life. While execution allows us to satisfy our need for revenge, it offers no opportunity for a person to turn their lives around. The additional, very disturbing thought, is the fact that people can be wrongly convicted, because judges and juries are not perfect. The execution of a person cannot be undone if a judicial mistake is made. This is starkly reflected in the life of Jesus – *who was executed although he was innocent*. For these reasons most of the Christian world has rejected the death penalty as an appropriate punishment.



John 10:4 “*He goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*”

Let's talk about it

Q: What brought you joy this week? Please share.

Q: What is the dominant emotion that rules your most important relationship: resentment, anger, bitterness, joy, peace? How does it affect your relationship? Share with the group.

Q: Is there a relationship in your life where your killer instincts (uncontrolled emotions) have caused a breakdown? What is stopping you from fixing it? Share with the group.

Q: Are there circumstances when murder or adultery can be excused?

LET'S
DO SOMETHING
ABOUT IT

Sunday: Meditate on the scripture passages and discern God’s message for you today.

Monday: Identify all negative emotions and replace them with positive ones.

Tuesday: Go to the concordance of your bible - look for the emotion that you are feeling, and look for bible verses that address it.

Wednesday: Memorise one of the verses you read yesterday.

Thursday: Ask a significant person with whom you have conflict at present: “What am I not hearing you say”?

Friday: Sit quietly with God and listen with him to your emotions. Are you comfortable with them?

Saturday: Pray for those by name, who are going through relational difficulty.



WEEK 5: RESPECT OTHERS

Do not steal, Do not lie, Do not covet

Mark 7:20-30

And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Matthew 6:19-24 Lay up treasures in heaven

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! “No one can serve two masters, for either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Insights:

Jesus gives us a satisfaction index test for our lives: “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”. He says that we are able to test the level of our contentment with life by looking at what fills our heart. This comes immediately after the invitation to love our enemies (Matt 5:43-48) and to share our possessions with the needy (Matt 6:1-4). In essence Jesus teaches that our hearts will be full when we learn to love people who cannot reward our love in return – our enemies and the poor.

Sadly, most of us believe that our hearts are filled, not by giving away, but by getting. We spend our time and energy planning ways to increase our possessions, our popularity and our power. And when we cannot do this by our own sweat, we look to taking from our neighbour. What begins with wishing that we had what our neighbour has (*covet*), we scheme of ways to get it (*lie*) followed with actually taking it (*steal*).



All of this rooted in our own brokenness: when we refuse to receive the love of God, we instead believe that our empty hearts will only be full if we possess what our neighbour has.

The fact is that what we have will never be enough. We desire the money, power and success that appear to validate others. We believe we deserve what others have. But envy and greed are extremely destructive emotions that will leave us exhausted and friendless.

It isn't inherently wrong to want things, as desire helps us set goals. However, when we pursue them obsessively, we start believing that they are necessary to our very existence. The truth is that most things we pursue obsessively will be at the cost of something else – most often at the cost of our relationships with others. When God said to put him first, it was for our own benefit, as he understood how obsessions can control us and in the end destroy us.

Envy corrupts our motives, thoughts and actions. We focus all our energy on what we don't have, without seeing what we have. It starts to affect our health and well-being; it robs us of peace and steals our joy. We become slaves to the things we want, and in the process we become blind to the things that God wants for our lives.

For this reason God puts boundaries in place to help us to choose and trust God for our needs: Do not covet the possessions of another person; do not lie about another person; do not steal the possessions of another person.

Accept yourself, and what you have, with gratitude. Develop a thankful heart. Learn to give with joy to others. Keep earthly achievements in eternal perspective by setting your heart on heavenly treasures.



"Use what you have for others. A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (Prov. 14:30).

Let's talk about it

Q: Do you always tell the truth? Why or why not?

Q: Tick which one of the following statements pertains to you:

- I work hard so that I can look good.
- I have no problem spreading a negative rumour about someone if it is true.
- I put up a front with certain people in order to look good.
- I hide my feelings of inferiority.

- I want to be successful at all cost.
- I complain a lot if I am not being treated fairly.
- I have a very critical nature.
- I need to be recognized for my achievements.
- I love sharing what I do and what I have achieved in life.
- I feel good or bad about myself depending on my performance.
- I find it hard to compliment others.

If you have answered yes to most of these you may be having troubles with envy even if you have not recognized it as such. How do you feel about the result? (Taken from an articles about Les Carter's book *Mind over Emotions*).

Q: We all want to be recognized, add value in this life. How do we know that our goals are too competitive, that they are going to be realized at the cost of our souls? Discuss with your group.



Sunday: Meditate on the scripture passages and discern God's message for you today.

Monday: Donate something you treasure to church/a charity.

Tuesday: Complement someone who doesn't expect it (sincerely).

Wednesday: Clean up a mess that someone else has made (without complaining).

Thursday: Send a specific Bible verse of encouragement to 5 people (it's personal – so pray about it first).

Friday: Be vulnerable with a safe person in your life – show the real you – tell part of your story.

Saturday: Pray for good things to happen to someone who has been unkind to you (be specific if you can).

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This book was produced and printed by the Grace of God, and with contributions from:

Nadja Atkinson & Pete Grassow – Co-Writers,

Kerry Wetton – Cover design, Carol Roodt – Proofreader

Bendi Jabulani Mashinini – Printer.

Bryanston Methodist Church, February/March 2018