

GLENKIRK CHURCH



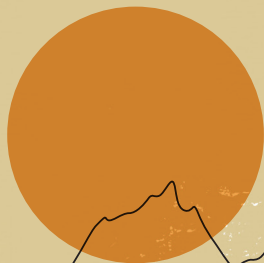
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

SEPTEMBER 11 - 15, 2023

Re-Formed:

Sermon on the Mount



Sermon Series 9/3 - 11/26

MONDAY

Read **Matthew 5:21-22**

God gave His people moral and ceremonial laws to help them love Him with all their hearts and minds (the Law of Moses, Old Testament). By Jesus' time, religious leaders had turned God's Law into a confusing mass of rules. When Jesus talked about a new way to understand the Law, He was pointing back to the Law's original purpose. Jesus is teaching to the very heart of God's people who are a part of the kingdom of God.

Jesus begins by contrasting the teaching of the day (“*You have heard that it was said ...*”) with His kingdom principle (“*But I tell you ...*”) using the sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13). Ever since Sinai, the Jews had known “*you shall not murder.*” But the religious leaders had joined this commandment to Number 35:30, which demanded death for murders, implying that the sixth commandment referred only to the specific act of killing.

But is that all murder is? Suppose a man wants to kill his neighbor/enemy but is stopped by some external circumstance. Is he innocent just because he did not get a chance to follow through? Suppose he was too cowardly to kill but wants to do it. Or he is afraid of getting caught. What if he only hates his enemy or neighbor? Or insults him? Is he still innocent of breaking the law? “No,” Jesus says.

In a human court, the only acts that can be judged and punished are external acts because people can look only at the outward things. They cannot see the heart. But in God's court, Jesus says, "Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment," and "Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (v. 22). These are radical statements!

Jesus teaches that the reality of kingdom life affects both internal heart attitudes and external actions because they are in a systemic relationship with each other. The heart that is properly rooted and built on Jesus will produce good fruit and withstand the storms of life (Matthew 7:20, 25).

QUESTIONS

Have you ever committed a murder? When has anger damaged or adversely affected a relationship that you have? Do you think it is possible to live without anger?

PRAYERS

For Zoe International

Dear God, please cause Your people to rise up and embrace the neediest children who are crying out for help. Please fill us with deep love for children who are alone. We ask that you would place these lonely ones in families. Please work through Your body, the church, to bring healing and restoration to these precious ones.

TUESDAY

Read **Matthew 5:21-26; James 1:19-20**

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” (James 1:19-20)

One of the most important lessons we can learn is to control our response to difficult people and stressful circumstances. All of us can recall a time or two when we said too much, too intensely, and too often. James’ letter gives many insights concerning the power of our words.

Jesus wants our words to reflect kingdom principles regarding our heart responses to our brothers. True disciples not only avoid murder but are transformed so that they do not strip away the personhood and identity of others through anger or defamation (Matthew 5:21-23), and they continually produce reconciliation to offended relationships (vv. 23-26).

When we face someone who is difficult or annoying, our natural response is to try to control. We may try to intimidate, we may run away, or we may appease the person to get the conflict over as quickly as possible. These tactics may work briefly, but they don’t create positive, healthy habits of communication.

In these conversations, we often interrupt to say what we believe needs to be said. We fail to ask for the other person’s point of view

because, if we are honest, we don't want to hear it. It takes only a few seconds for our anger to erupt and then all that's left is picking up the pieces after the relationship is shattered.

James offers a different way: hush up, listen carefully, ask questions, don't jump to conclusions, and put a lid on your anger so that you don't ruin the moment and, perhaps, the relationship. We need to recognize the damage inflicted by our current responses to others and take steps to change. Pray before, during and after difficult or stressful conversations. Relationships thrive on communication, so trust God's Word to guide you to speak from your heart—after listening first!

QUESTIONS

How can James' strategy change your next difficult conversation?

PRAYERS

For Zoe International

Dear God, please bring rescue. Please create paths of escape for the victims of trafficking. Please give them eyes to see these paths and empower them with the courage to run. Bring these precious people to safety by Your mighty hand.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Matthew 5:21-26**

Is anger always bad? No! It is important to recognize what is good about anger. God designed us with a capacity for anger. But all of us are embarrassed by our angry outbursts that leave a trail of hurt and damaged relationships. Many Christians think that anger is always sinful and, therefore, deny and repress it. Becoming angry, in some cases, is the right response to motivating action.

Jesus Himself became angry. The Gospels reveal two episodes when Jesus became angry. The first happened when the Pharisees missed the point of the Law after Jesus' healing on the Sabbath Day (Mark 3:5). The other is when Jesus drives the money changers out of the temple and says, "*My house shall be a house of prayer*" (Matthew 21:12-13).

Jesus was clearly angry, yet He was also sinless. Therefore, being angry is not always sinful. Righteous anger consists of getting angry at the things that anger God, and then seeking to do something to correct the wrong God's way. We ought to be angry at social injustices, child abuse, fraud, deception, bullying, and neglect. It is right to become angry at social injustice; this motivates us to work towards change.

How do you determine if your anger is righteous? By looking for the motives and deciding what anger stems from. For example, Jonah was incredibly angry that God did not destroy the city of Nineveh.

So, God asked him: “*Have you any right to be angry?*” (Jonah 4:1-4). Jesus mentioned similar anger in the conclusion of the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Those who were hired early in the day were angry with the landowner because he paid those who worked only one hour the same pay as those who worked all day. Were they angry because God was generous (Matthew 20:15)?

A lot of anger derives from improper motives: selfishness, jealousy, and pride. No one is entirely free from anger, so give yourself grace as you seek to bring your anger under Jesus’ control.

QUESTIONS

Why did God make anger possible? Describe a time when you felt your anger was righteous.

PRAYERS

For Zoe International

Any method God wants to use to free victims of trafficking is a good one—compassion, fear of reprisal, attentive neighbors, law enforcement. Holy and all-powerful God, we pray for rescue by any means at all. We cry out to You to free the slaves—in our country and around the world. You alone are able.

THURSDAY

Read **Hebrews 12:14-15**

I had a friend in college who had a small business where she purchased dried roots to use as dyes for fabric that she would turn into scarves and shawls. She then sold these items for money to pay for textbooks. She loved grinding the roots and mixing them with oils and warned me of the danger of misusing the dye and its terrible consequences and resultant stain. Bitterness is like a misused dye as it colors how we look at life, and it stains every relationship. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to pursue peace in every relationship and to be careful so that a “*root of bitterness*” (12:15) won’t cause problems.

People who are bitter feel that they have every right to their feelings and perspectives. They have been wronged in some way and feel like victims. God doesn’t promise protection from every hurt we experience, but He doesn’t want our anger and hurt to fester into bitterness and ruin every aspect of our lives. Hebrews tells us that when someone is bitter “*many become defiled,*” (12:15) not just the bitter person but everyone else near that person. The stains of the dye permeate every thread of the fabric.

Bitter people look for fights. Do you know anyone who claims they don’t look for fights but thrives on the adrenaline produced by intense disagreements? Instead, God wants us to stop this process before it

starts—to pursue peace with all people. When they hurt us, we are to forgive them quickly.

QUESTIONS

What does it mean to pursue peace with someone you disagree with or someone who harbors ill will? How can you overcome bitterness?

PRAYERS

For Zoe International

Father, we come boldly to Your throne of grace and thank You that You have made available to us Your wisdom and Your discernment. Guide and direct us in this battle against darkness. May we have Your battle strategy to combat and overcome the enemy so that the captives may be set free.

FRIDAY

Read **Ephesians 4:31-32; Colossians 3:8**

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32)

All of us live on an emotional watershed, a turning point that changes the direction of your life. On the one side, if anger builds and festers, it turns to resentment and bitterness, souring every relationship. On the other side, if forgiveness becomes a way of life, we grow in love, compassion, and a deeper appreciation for God’s forgiveness of our own sins.

No matter how much we’ve been hurt, and no matter how much we’ve used our resentment to give us a sense of identity, we can experience a great exchange, one that will revolutionize our lives! The key, Paul explains, is to focus first on the great forgiveness we’ve experienced in Christ. The more deeply we grasp our sinfulness and God’s grace, the more we’ll be able and willing to forgive those who hurt us.

God’s grace can melt our resentment, cool our tongues, and replace our anger with love. It doesn’t mean the wound did not happen or that it doesn’t hurt, but it means we choose to focus on God’s grace instead of our wounds, and we live a life in joyful thankfulness instead of demanding justice.

Living on the watershed side of forgiveness, love and kindness is a decision and a process. We recognize the damage that resentment causes and we choose to forgive. But if the wound is deep, God often takes us through layers of pain, grief, and forgiveness until the vat of bitterness is drained dry.

Jesus tells us what to do when we do become angry or when we know we have done something wrong to someone else. We must make the wrong right, being reconciled to our brother (Matthew 5:24-25); and we must make things right immediately, even before we worship God (vv. 23-24). The right actions will restore our joy in our relationship with our brother and sister.

Bitterness is serious business. It is like a cancer that can't be tolerated, or it will kill us. And it's contagious.

QUESTIONS

Whom do you know who has exchanged anger and resentment for forgiveness and love? Are there some people in your life with whom you've harbored some anger and resentment? If so, begin the exchange.

PRAYERS

For Zoe International

We pray a hedge of protection around those who battle on the frontlines against human trafficking. Thank You, Father, that You are faithful to strengthen and protect these from the Evil One. We ask that You would contend against those who contend against these frontline warriors and that You would protect these warriors from all deception.



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