

### Matthew 5:27-30

Lust has to be one of the favorite and most comfortable topics for any man. I know I was super excited when I won out on the opportunity to write this devotional.

Seriously, now. Statistics on extramarital affairs in our culture would show that it's difficult enough for us to remain faithful to our spouses in that most basic sense. If I'm standing on the hillside that day, I'm probably tempted to raise my hand for a few questions: "Jesus, we can't get the first part right. Why the need to raise the standard even higher? Are you just being mean? Are you gloating about how far we are from your holiness? And why is committing adultery in my *heart* such a big deal? No damage done, right?"

Perhaps the reason that adultery in the heart is a big deal is that causes us to treat people as objects to possess and use for our own satisfaction. This is a long way away from self-giving love. And self-giving love is the **ONLY** way that people are treated in the Kingdom of God.

Training ourselves to think of others as objects will, at best, block us from considering how we can love and serve them. At worst, it can eventually lead us to act out on our selfish fantasies and cause all kinds of hell for ourselves and those around us.

The sexual application is obvious. But what about the social? Do you see another person as someone you can serve, or do you see him or her as someone who will bring you up a rung on the social ladder? Is this new person at school, the office, at church, a child of God in need of friends on the spiritual journey, or is he a potential sale for your struggling business? Is this poor person someone who needs to know that she's loved, or is she an opportunity to earn service points from God? Is this co-worker a person who needs to know that he's also invited into a life of purpose in Christ, or is he a potential convert to our religion? Jesus must speak to every way that we don't see precious human beings, but problems or projects.

Now to the gouging and cutting off of limbs. Back to standing on the hillside: "Woah, Jesus! You're getting a little carried away." Now I've never known anyone to gouge out his or her eye. But I confess that I can't deny that Jesus is serious; he makes his words about how we hold each other in our hearts impossible to take lightly.

As we study through the Sermon on the Mount, I'm trying to remember that Jesus is not giving me new laws, but rather teaching me how things are in the coming Kingdom of God. And Jesus is inviting me to follow him and start to live out the Kingdom realities now. As a follower of Jesus, my life can bring a little more of heaven to earth moment-by-moment, day-by-day. And any thing, any system, any mentality, any practice or habit that tries to make any man or woman around me a mere thing to be used, emptied or discarded must be gotten rid of, because God wants for me more than anything, self-giving love in my heart.

*"Father, help me to see people as you see them. Not as objects to possess or status symbols to achieve, but as dearly loved children. Please call to my mind right now the people with whom my associations are less than loving. Purify my motives in these relationships. I confess that I've treated your children poorly. I've used others, yet I know I have been hurt when I've discovered that I've been used. Forgive me, and change me. All of me, from the heart, outward. Thank you for inviting me to follow you even though I'm still far from perfect. Amen!"*

Stephen Claybrook, Worship Pastor

**“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”**

**“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28-31)**

Jesus says that it all hangs on loving God and loving others with the same energy and preference that you used to give only to your self. It was a great question, but a world changing answer.

But Jesus says something that non-Jewish ears easily miss. Before he gets to the part about loving God with all heart, soul, mind and strength- which is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5, he quotes verse 4: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This was and is called the Shema to the dedicated Jew. Shema, translated “listen” or “hear”, is a prayer recited 3 times a day from before the time of Christ till today. It’s importance comes from the fact that it reminds the faithful that, not only is there but one God in the Universe, but that He is one. One in the Hebrew language is “ekhad”. It’s not just the number one; it means a unified whole. It speaks to God and His integrity, His strength, His wholeness and trustworthiness. Interestingly, “ekhad” is the same word used to describe Adam and Eve becoming “one flesh”.

A Unified whole.

When Jesus, and the scriptures in various places denounce divorce- it’s not the cold rejection of people regardless of their circumstances. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) but never says anything about hating divorcees. In fact, much the opposite, as the Bible is full of assurances that God loves us, and comforts the hurting. He hates divorce for all the reasons we want Him to- it’s tears people, families, friends, extended families, reunions, churches, businesses, holidays, neighborhoods, photo albums, memories, hopes, pasts, presents and futures apart. Why would we want God, if He is love and is our Father, to feel any other way? He hates what it does to His kids. And then, there is another element...

Marriage is supposed to be a picture of God and His people. A man and a woman put the intimate closeness of God and the church on display for the world to see. Many of the metaphors, from covenants to God’s jealousy have to do with the image of a man and his wife. So, when a man and woman divorce, it tears *ekhad* into two. This is a false representation of what God is like. So, God not only hates the pain divorce causes us, but also because it obscures the picture of Himself that marriage is intended to paint.

Divorce has often been the *scarlet letter* in the church. But this is not so with God. God loves and grieves for that which happens to us out of our control, and forgives that which we’ve broken and have no power to go back and make right. God’s grace is just that big. Those of us with divorce in our past must accept the love and acceptance of God, because it’s ours to receive. Those of us with marriage in our present or future must remember that marriage is just that important; a living, observable representation of the entire, world-changing summary of the Bible: Self-giving Love.

*“God, in all my relationships, may I display your heart. Help me hold marriage sacred. May I understand, whether for myself or for others, that you hate everything that lies about you, about the life you intend, and hurts your children. May I encourage others that are married around me to remember that they are one with their spouse, and that they represent You, who are One.”*

Steve Daugherty, Teaching Pastor

# week three

**Wednesday**

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Read the following passage slowly, highlighting, underlining, circling, noting and drawing connecting lines between sentences, as you feel pressed to do so. May the reality that John discloses in this brief passage give you a completely different kind of day.

“My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God.

My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love!

This is how we know we're living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He's given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we've seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God's Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.

God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.

We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first. If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.”

(1 John 4:7-21 “The Message” translation)

**“What most people need to learn in life is how to love people and use things instead of using people and loving things.”** (Unknown)

Spend some today going through these questions and doing the hard work of taking time to actually answer them. Then, listen for God to direct you to live differently, if even radically differently, based on what you discover in your honest assessment of how much of your life is about loving people.

- What are 2 or 3 ways in which the world and culture around us turn people into things?
- What are the ways in which your job depends on you seeing people as things?
- What are the ways in which you treat your spouse, or someone you are close to, as a thing?
- What are the ways you treat strangers (especially ones that look or act a certain way) as things?
- If you have children, what are the ways that you treat them as things?
- What adjustments do the words of Jesus in the scriptures direct you to make, based on the answers above? (You may want to reference Matthew 5:1-37, as covered in the Color series to this point, to reflect on your response)
- What needs to change in your heart (or perhaps, better put, “be removed from your heart”) for you to begin to allow the Spirit of Christ to shape your view and love of others?
- Who (or what) put whatever it is in your heart that sees “people as things”, there in the first place? What do you think it might take to begin to allow God to eliminate this lie from your heart?
- Based on your above answer, who can you tell this to? Who can go with you into the process of removing the sinful paradigm that turns people into things to be used and/or discarded, and in its place put the other-centered love of Christ?

Decide to contact them today. You cannot be transformed alone. God likely wants to surround you with people that help you become a “kingdom person”. How will you contact this person, or these people, today (perhaps they are in your LifeGroup; perhaps you have only talked with them about spiritual things before, but have never taken it this far; someone else in your life that is pursuing Christ; etc ....) and ask them to become part of what God is doing in your heart?

Spend some time praying this to your Father in Heaven:

**“My Father, who is in heaven; your name and reputation is sacred. Your Kingdom come, your will be done, in my heart as it is in yours. Help me today with what my heart needs, regardless of the comfort or discomfort it brings. Forgive me all the ways that I have sinned against you and others, as I surely forgive those that have disappointed and hurt me. Lead me away from anything that may tempt me, and rescue me from evil and self-centeredness because I am often too blind to see it until after the fact. I cannot do this based on will power; I can only do this in utter, humbling dependence upon the Spirit of Christ himself. So I ask and pray in his name. Amen.”**

“But dad, you promised”.

That’s something that I told myself I would never hear my 3 kids say. Probably because my childhood was filled with saying it to my own father.

But I have heard it. Numerous times. And my response always has a carefully crafted excuse.

“Dad has some work I have to finish up”. “As soon as I get back from this business trip”. “It looks like it’s going to rain so we better try again next time”.

It’s always something.

What really hit me between the eyes is the common thread that runs through these passages in Matthew. Sure Jesus is discussing adultery, divorce and oaths. But what is woven throughout is integrity.

Jesus is challenging the Pharisee’s perverted view of the Law in regards to adultery, divorce and oaths and provides his followers with its intended meaning which is contrary to the legalistic standards which was being taught.

Before coming on staff at Crosspointe, I spent 22 years in corporate America. There I learned a phrase that has stuck with me and I continue to use it today.

“Say To Do ratio”. Simply put if your “Say” is more than your “Do”, you are making promises that you can’t keep. On the flip side if your “Do” is more than your “Say”, maybe you under promised so you could look better than you really are.

Saying one thing and doing another is disrespectful and manipulative. Is this the Kingdom life that Jesus wants from us? I think He sums it up best by closing with “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

**“Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do”** Deuteronomy 23:23a

*“God, I can never be you. But I can remind others of you. That’s what I long to be and do- a living statue of your character. Help me to become the kind of person that people know they can lean on and trust. Help me be the kind of person that, the closer people inspect my life, the **more** of you they find- not less. And as such, help me be a person that helps people understand where our ultimate trust and confidence can and should be placed; Christ. I pray in his name. Amen.”*