

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF JESUS

A Harmony Of the Gospels

A Daily Devotional Study Guide - Book 1



“Divorce Is Adultery”

Study: Matthew 5:31-32

Reading: Matthew 19:1-12, I Corinthians 7:10-16

Memory: Psalm 51:18

There are several things in the Christian life that are difficult to balance. One of the toughest things is to balance the love for the sinner, and at the same time, stand up boldly against the sin. For instance, the Bible clearly teaches that homosexuality is wrong and we need to declare what God says. Yet, at the same time, we need to love those involved in the homosexual lifestyle and seek to help them out of the trap they are in. The same is true of the sin of adultery. It needs to be denounced from the pulpit, yet, when a person does sin that way, they need to see the love and mercy of God attempting to restore them to spiritual health.

Today, we are going to read how Jesus addressed the sin of divorce and declared it was adultery, yet did not equate it to an unpardonable sin.

What Does the Bible Say?

The next issue of the law that Jesus dealt with was that of divorce. Though God hates divorce, the Law made provisions for it when necessary. The religious leaders of that day took the law to the extreme. They were willing to divorce their wives for any cause and were free to do so, greatly undermining God’s plan for the family. Jesus shored up this command by describing how all divorce was sin except in the case of sexual immorality. The point that Jesus was attempting to make was that divorce should not be viewed as an easy out. Marriage was sacred and special to God and He desired His children to stick with the covenants they had made. Jesus did give one exception to divorce and that was in the case where a spouse was unfaithful. This “exception clause” has been a source of great debate among scholars and Bible teachers. Many good, godly men have weighed in on this verse and topic and many of them come to different conclusions. Though arguments on both sides are convincing, I believe that the verse should be taken just as written. It fully appears to me that God states that the person who divorces another because of their unfaithfulness does not commit adultery. I also believe that they are free to remarry. That being said, I think one of the main reasons that people don’t like the “exception

clause” is because it provides a way out of a marriage for those looking for a way out. They fear that if this is taught, it takes too light a view on marriage. The point that Jesus was making here was a much stricter view on marriage than had been taught by the religious leaders and it is clear through this passage and others in Scripture that divorce should not be entered into lightly (vs 31-32).

By the way, Jesus did not encourage divorce or say it must take place if a spouse is unfaithful. The general attitude of Scripture on this subject is grace and mercy towards the offending spouse in an attempt to win them back. Practically speaking, if a spouse chooses to commit adultery, normally both parties are at fault. The reason a spouse normally gets involved in another relationship is because their needs are not being met at home. Spiritual restoration should always be the priority in any marriage. When both husband and wife are seeking the Lord, there should be no reason for a divorce to have to take place.

How Does this Apply to Me?

What is your view of marriage? God desires your marriage to be a covenant relationship that will last for your lifetime. He desires you to be committed to your spouse and battle through all the storms of life that come your way. He does not take divorce lightly and does not want you to take it lightly either. At the same time, you must remember that divorce is not an unforgivable sin. If a person has been divorced and has even acted out of the will of God and sinned, that sin can be forgiven, that person can be restored. You must also realize that Jesus allowed divorce to take place in the case of an unfaithful spouse. I do not think this should be automatic though. If a spouse has been unfaithful, there should be every attempt to restore the relationship. If this is not possible, then divorce is sometimes inevitable. This does not lessen the sacredness of marriage, but should intensify it. It doesn't treat divorce as a small issue but as a last resort in a situation where one has strayed from the Lord or never knew Him in the first place. Divorce should never be encouraged, but only entered into after great times of prayer and multiple attempts of restoration.

Suggestions for Prayer

- * Thank God for the sacredness of marriage.
- * Ask God to help you view marriage with the highest respect.
- * Praise God because He knows what is best for you.

What Scripture did Jesus quote (vs 31)?

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

What did the Old Testament law allow (vs 1)?

What condition was given for a man choosing to divorce (vs 1)?

What scenario is presented in verse 2?

What two scenarios are presented in verse 3?

- 1.
- 2.

What was the man not allowed to do with his former wife (vs 4)?

What is the reason that is given (vs 4)?

Why do you think this is described as an abomination (vs 4)?

****As with other parts of the Old Testament law, it is hard for us to understand the full reasoning behind this being an abomination. The full extent of this command is not repeated in the New Testament and it appears, as with other parts of the law, that God wanted them to seriously consider matters before acting on emotions.*

Matthew 5:32

What did Jesus say a man was committing if he divorced his wife?

What did Jesus say was an exception (vs 32)?

Why do you think He presented this exception?

Who else was committing adultery (vs 32)?

Why is it hard to view things this way in our society today?

Why do you think it is easy for us to overlook this part of the instructions that Jesus gave?

What does this reveal about the view that Jesus had of marriage?

“Oaths & Revenge”

Study: Matthew 5:34-42

Reading: Romans 12:9-21, Ephesians 4:21-32

Memory: Psalm 51:18

I occasionally like to watch shows like “48 Hours” or “Dateline” and many of them have to do with criminal investigations. One common theme that often runs through the shows is the need for the offended party to “get justice.” When the interviews are made, it often becomes clear that their form of “justice” is much more revenge and a desire to see the offender suffer. Hatred and anger often spew out of the offended parties mouths and it seems that one of the things they live for is attempting to bring the most hurt to the person or people who have hurt them.

Though this is a common, fleshly reaction that we see all around us, today we are going to see how this is not the biblical way. We will see that God does declare the need to punish, but not for personal revenge.

What Does the Bible Say?

The Old Testament law stated that men should follow through on commitments when they had taken an oath. God emphasized over and over the importance of keeping commitments. This was especially true when they used the name of the Lord in their oath to guarantee that they would fulfill their commitment. Jesus didn’t lessen this law, but strengthened it by declaring that men should not have to swear by anything if they faithfully keep their word. Apparently, the religious leaders of the day were very good at committing to things, but backing out and excusing themselves for many different reasons. Some of the things they took oaths by were heaven, earth, Jerusalem or even their own heads. They would not swear by God because they would be afraid of great judgment if they backed out, but instead, they swore by these other things so that they could break their commitment if needed. Jesus was not against taking oaths but was against the breaking of oaths (vs 34-36).

The point that Jesus was making was simple. He wanted His followers to be trusted and counted on. When they said they would or wouldn’t do something, He wanted that to be enough. There was no need to swear by things to attempt to avoid judgment for broken oaths because a simple “Yes” or “No” should be all that needed to be said (vs 37).

In the Old Testament, God commanded that people pay for their crimes against another. If they did something that caused the loss of an eye or tooth, the person who harmed the other would lose their eye or tooth as well. Jesus was not negating the need for punishment with His instruction about this but was removing the need for personal revenge. Many people had taken this commandment about justice and used it for personal retaliation rather than for the reason it was given, to help keep law and order. Punishment should be handed out for crimes, but done in the proper way and not out of personal hatred (vs 38).

The way that Jesus declared was the way of love toward others. He declared that if someone slaps you on the right cheek, you should give them the other cheek to slap as well. If someone wanted to sue you for your shirt, you should give them your coat also. If you were asked to carry a pack for one mile, you should go above and beyond and carry it for two. Jesus was not promoting that anyone be a punching bag for a bully but rather to return love when hatred and anger is dished out to them. Instead of having to stand up for their rights, Jesus wanted His followers to give out love to those who mistreated them. Scripture is very clear that God wants us to stand up for those who are oppressed and being mistreated, but in this passage Jesus is speaking out against retaliating with anger when someone does something to hurt you (vs 39-42).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you keep your word? Are you known as a person who can be trusted when you say you will do something? Do people have to remind you of things you said you would do because you have failed to do them? One of the best ways that you can be a testimony of Christ is to keep your word and be a person who can be trusted and counted on. This is easier for some personalities than others, but regardless of what personality you have, the command is still the same. Take time to examine how trustworthy you are and let God show you areas of your life where you are not letting your “yes” mean “yes” and your “no” mean “no.”

Do you tend to respond to those who mistreat you with anger, or do you shower them with love? The natural human reaction when you are hurt is to hurt the one who has hurt you. This can be excused as “justice,” but if you are out for personal revenge, it is sin. Yes, justice does need to take place when crimes occur, but you should not pursue it in a vengeful way. Rather, you need to show love to those who hurt you. This is often very difficult, but can be done through the power of the Word.

What command was Jesus referring to in verse 33?

Why did God give this command?

****This command was recorded in Leviticus 19:12 and was in the context of laws that were given to help one display love towards another.*

What type of oaths did Jesus tell them not to make (vs 34)?

****I once had a long discussion and disagreement with a man who said that Jesus was against any oaths and used this passage as his support. According to his view, I shouldn't have taken a wedding vow since it was an oath.*

Why did Jesus give a list of all the types of oaths that should not be made (vs 34-35)?

****As mentioned in the commentary section, these appear to be different levels of commitment when oaths were being made.*

Why weren't they to take an oath by heaven (vs 34)?

Why weren't they to take an oath by earthly things (vs 35)?

Why weren't they to take an oath by their heads (vs 36)?

What do you think Jesus meant by describing how you can't make a hair white or black (vs 36)?

****Jesus was presenting that though they had no control over what color of hair they had on their heads, they did have control over the ability to keep their word.*

What did Jesus say you need to do instead of making oaths (vs 37)?

Why is it hard to follow this instruction?

What are areas in your life where you find it difficult to follow through on your commitments? How can you change this?

“True Love”

Study: Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:32-36

Reading: Leviticus 19:9-18, Romans 12:9-21

Memory: Psalm 51:18

When I play hockey in my league, occasionally there are times where opponents will purposely do things to hurt me, like elbow me in the face when the ref is not looking or whack me in the leg with their stick. Actions like this are normally done out of frustration after I have taken the puck away from them or played tough defense against them. When I get hit illegally it is not always easy to take, especially when the ref does not see it. Though my first response may be retaliation, I know Scripture well enough to know that God wants me to respond differently than my flesh desires to respond.

Today, we are going to see how real love is tough, but with the power of God we can love others who don't love us in return. It is very easy to be kind to those who are kind to you, but much, much harder to be kind, loving and merciful to those who do things to hurt you.

What Does the Bible Say?

Though the previous “you have heard that it was said” statements were direct quotes from the Old Testament, the one we will look at today is only a half direct quote. No, Jesus did not make a mistake in His quote, but he was stating how the religious leaders of the day taught. Leviticus 19:18 states, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” The religious leaders took this to mean they were to love their fellow Israelites (which they often did a poor job of doing) and hate those who were not Israelites (Matthew 5:43).

The way that Jesus described for His followers to live was much different than the way the religious leaders had taught. Jesus instructed His followers have a love for their neighbors and their enemies. We as followers of Christ today are commanded to pray for our enemies and those who would seek to do us harm. Luke adds a little more info about this statement of Jesus by declaring that we need to bless those who do things to hurt us. He also quoted Jesus as saying that we need to be willing to turn the other cheek and suffer for the sake of righteousness. If others want to

take something from us, we are to let them have it without demanding it back in return. As we have read previously, this does need to be tempered with other Scriptural principles, but the point Jesus was making was to love above all else even if it means that you will have to suffer for it. We also need to be willing to love others the same way that we ourselves want to be loved (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-31).

God doesn't just choose to love and bless those who love Him in return, but He gives rain to both His children and His enemies. Loving those who love you in return is very easy to do, but it is much harder to love those who return evil unto you. Jesus specifically dealt with the way that the tax collectors and Gentiles were treated. The Jews were taught to avoid them and not even talk to them, but Jesus expressed that all men were to be treated with love. The people were challenged to be willing to lend to those who might not be able to pay them back because it was those people who could often use the most help. When God's children love in this way, they are displaying the character of God. God gives to those who don't deserve it (not that anyone really deserves anything of God) and He is kind to those who are ungrateful and full of evil. In Luke, we are told to be merciful, just like God is merciful. Matthew says that we are to be "perfect" which appears to be the same teaching in Luke on following the example of the perfect love of our fathers to those who do evil against us (Matthew 5:45-48, Luke 6:32-36).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Are you merciful as God is merciful? The obvious answer is "No," but are you striving to be like God in the way that you love others? It is far easier to talk about this kind of love than it is to practice it. This is because you are a very selfish person, all of us are, and you will naturally live life for yourself. This is why you are commanded to love others because it does not come naturally. It is easy to love those who treat you with love, but it is much harder to love those who don't love you in return. Everyone can love those who love them, but you need the power of God to help you love those who do evil to you in return. As you read yesterday, this doesn't mean that you put yourself in the position of a door mat to let others walk all over you, but it does mean that you are willing to be taken advantage of at times in order to display the love of Christ. Take time today to ask God to reveal any areas of your life where you are not loving others. Ask Him to help give you the strength and the power to love others the same way that He chooses to love you.

What Old Testament instruction was Jesus quoting (vs 43)?

Why do you think Jesus mentioned "hate your enemy" if that is not actually in the Old Testament?

****This is how the religious leaders interpreted that law so it appears that Jesus was just using their version.*

What did Jesus say your attitude should be towards your enemy (vs 44)?

Who should you pray for (vs 44)?

Why is this very hard to do?

Who would you say are your enemies?

Do you pray for them and show love to them? If not, why not? If you do, explain how you do this?

What do we display when we show love to those who are our enemies (vs 45)?

How does God show love to all men (vs 45)?

What question did Jesus ask in verse 46? Why do you think He asked this question?

How is it easy to love those who love you in return?

What do the Gentiles do (vs 47)?

What do you think verse 48 means?

****I have heard this verse used in many different ways and I have even attempted to explain it, perhaps wrongly at times. When you see the parallel verse in Luke 6:36, it seems best to take this verse as choosing to love others like God loves them. No, you will never be perfect as God, but you should make it your goal to love and care for others like God does.*

Why is showing mercy to others so important?

“To Be Seen of Men”

Study: Matthew 6:1-6

Reading: I Peter 5:1-7, Matthew 23:1-33

Memory: Psalm 51:18

When I first started pastoring in Wisconsin, I was talking to a man who described how the local Catholic church published the giving records of those who attended. I was shocked that a church would actually do this, but when I was studying the history of the Baptist church I was pastoring, I realized that we had done the same thing for many years in our history. This was done on a yearly basis for a time and was also done for special projects. Though I wasn't alive then and don't know the motives behind what was done, I do have some great biblical concerns with that method.

Today, we will see how Jesus taught about the humble attitude we should have when we give of our finances.

What Does the Bible Say?

One of the greatest temptations that all men face is living their lives to be seen by others. What others think is vitally important to all of us and we are told to be concerned with how others view us as we reflect Christ. At the same time, it is very easy to get caught in the trap of doing what we do so others will glorify us. This is especially true in the area of worship and service to God. It is easy to want others to see how great we are spiritually so we often put on a false front or do things for the praise of men rather than for the glory of God. This does not mean that we sit and think of ways to specifically impress others, but it is something that we can easily do without realizing it. When we do things for the praise of men, we will not be gaining eternal rewards since our reward will come in the form of praise by others. This does not mean that all praise of men is bad, but if that is the purpose for why we are doing what we are doing, we miss the whole point of religious activity (vs 1).

Practical examples of serving for the praise of men were given by Jesus and would have been directed at the whole false religious system of that day. Jesus told them when they gave to the poor not to do it in a way that would be noticed by others. The religious leaders would give to the poor, but they made sure that all those around were watching or did it in times

where there would be large crowds so they would be noticed. Jesus told His followers that when they gave, they were not to let their right hand know what their left hand was doing. Obviously, Jesus wasn't being literal in this statement, but declaring that your giving should be done with great privacy. Giving should be done only with a whole heart of love to God and not to be noticed by others. When you give privately, it is God who will reward you openly (vs 2-4).

Jesus presented the same idea about prayer. The religious leaders would stand on the street corner and pray out loud so that others would see them and exalt them for their great spirituality. Jesus insisted that instead of this, they should go to their house and pray in their closets. Again, Jesus wasn't being fully literal with this phrase, but was giving the idea that you should pray in a place where people won't see you. This does not mean that all prayer has to be spoken that way. We see several examples by Jesus Himself and by many New Testament believers who prayed in public, but the key to the teaching of Jesus was the purpose behind the prayer. Prayer was to be directed to God and not done for the praise of men (vs 5-6).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you do what you do for the praise of men or for the praise of God? There are many areas where you can be controlled by men rather than God without even realizing it. This could be the way that you dress, what you choose to eat, where you choose to go and many other daily things of life. The ones specifically mentioned by Jesus here can be a struggle in your life as well. When it comes to giving, you need to be very cautious that you do it for God and God alone. This does not mean that you can't claim your giving for tax breaks or even receive honor when you give something, but you must not give for those reasons. This means that when you give, you should give it with no strings attached. When you give, you should do it privately and not let others know what you are doing. This goes beyond financial gifts and extends to acts of love and service towards others. This is why James said that true religion involved visiting the fatherless and widows (1:27). Those were the lowly people of that day who could not praise you publicly or give you anything in return. Everything that you do should be done for the glory of God and not yourself. True religion is not what you do on the outside, but comes from a heart to worship and serve God without regard for the praise of men. Ask God to help you see your true motives for giving to Him and to others.

What did Jesus tell us to be aware of (vs 1)?

Why do you think this is something that all men need to be aware of?

What are ways that you have found yourself practicing righteousness so that you could be seen by others?

How can you avoid doing things just to be seen and noticed? How can you make sure you are doing it for God?

What did Jesus say about the reward for doing things to be recognized by others (vs 1)?

Why is a heavenly reward a good motivator?

What should you not do when you give to the needy (vs 2)?

****You probably wouldn't even know how to play a trumpet, but the principle of what Jesus was saying is powerful. A trumpet was blown to bring attention to something. This could be done in a variety of ways today, but the point Jesus was making is that your giving should not be done with any fanfare.*

What did Jesus call those who sought the praise of men (vs 2)?

What did Jesus say about their reward (vs 2)?

What did Jesus say you should do when you give to the needy (vs 3)?

What do you think He meant by this (vs 3-4)?

What does God see (vs 4)?

What did the religious leaders love to do when they prayed (vs 5)?

How did Jesus say you should pray (vs 6)?

What point was Jesus making?

Why is it good to realize what God rewards us for?

“How to Pray”

Study: Matthew 6:7-15

Reading: Luke 11:1-13, John 17

Memory: Psalm 51:18

What Does the Bible Say?

Jesus had started His teaching on prayer in verse five when He declared that prayer should not be a show but was meant to be a sincere communication between man and God. He continued by declaring that prayer does not have to be a long drawn out process full of repetition. The pagan religions of that day often gave long prayers to their false gods but repeated themselves many times in their prayers to make their prayers longer. The natural assumption was that the longer they prayed, the more likely their prayers would be heard. Jesus declared that prayers to God do not need to be repetitious in order to get God's attention or even to inform Him of what is needed. God already knows what we need before we ask, but He wants us to simply ask (vs 7-8).

A sample prayer was then given by Jesus which today is called, “The Lord's Prayer.” That description is somewhat misleading since I would describe John 17 as “The Lord's Prayer”. The one given here in Matthew 6 is just an example of things that we should be praying for and how to pray. It shows us that prayer does not have to be long and drawn out, and this prayer was not meant to become a vain repetition as some denominations have made it today. Jesus started out this prayer with praise to God. The statement, “hallowed be your name” was teaching that beginning a prayer with praise (here expressing the holiness of God), is a great way to start out a prayer. Many of the recorded prayers in the Bible, Old and New Testament, begin with praise, and this praise sets the tone for the prayer (vs 9).

The next phrase, “thy kingdom come” was an expression of purpose and reason for living. It was to express a desire for God's reign to be established on this earth and for Him to fulfill the promises that He had made about the future hope of man. It also expresses that the person offering the prayer is desiring to live for more than this temporal life has to offer. Jesus then followed that by saying, “Thy will be done.” This revealed how our prayers should not be offered to seek our wills and desires, but should be given in submission to the will of the One who has

created us. The next part of prayer that Jesus sampled had to do with the importance of relying upon Him for daily needs. Though God has promised to meet the daily needs of His followers, this expression in prayer is declaring how much we need Him to do as He says He will do (vs 10).

Jesus then moved on to forgiveness as He described how men need to ask forgiveness for their sins. He also added that we should ask forgiveness from God on the same level that we forgive others. This part of prayer dealt with our relationship with men and with God, revealing that if our relationship with men wasn't right, neither would our relationship with God be fully right. He clarified this point in verses 14 & 15, reminding us that forgiveness of others was absolutely necessary if we wanted God to forgive us (vs 11-12, 14-15).

As part of the sample prayer, Jesus also told us to pray for God to deliver us from temptation. We should have a desire to avoid the areas that will drag us away from Him and entice us to sin. Much sin could be avoided in the lives of believers if we would choose to put ourselves in the right place and avoid going to places where sin could take place. It is really a prayer for God to help us keep our eyes open to the dangers and pitfalls of this life and to avoid them before we are ever tempted to yield to sin (vs 13).

How Does this Apply to Me?

What is your prayer life like? Is it dull and repetitious or is it real and vibrant? Are you meaningful in how you pray? Though Jesus expressed in this passage that you do not have to offer long drawn out prayers, He also expressed the great need for prayer. Prayer is to be a constant in the life of the believer, this could include both long and short prayers. Prayer is simply a conversation between you and God, a part of your relationship. Just as you would with those who are close to you, there are times when you have a one minute conversation and other times when your conversation lasts for hours. The prayer given here is just a sampling of things that you should pray for. It is not meant to be the only prayer you pray. It just gives you an idea of things that should be a part of your prayer life. When it comes to prayer, Jesus is teaching that quality is much more important than quantity, but the reality of any relationship is that quality will lead to more quantity. Even if you are a strong believer you can find yourself becoming repetitious when you pray. Prayer is a great discipline, but sometimes it is easy to make prayer more than it should be. A simple conversation with your Father.

What are you not to do when you pray (vs 7)?

Why did the Gentiles give long, repetitious prayers (vs 7)?

What are ways that you have seen Christians fall into the traps of giving long, repetitious prayers?

Why do you think a person thinks that they will have a better chance of having their prayers answered, the longer their prayers are?

What did Jesus say you should not be like (vs 8)?

What does God know (vs 8)?

What should we begin our prayers with (vs 9)?

Why do you think praise is an important part of prayer?

Why do you think we should pray for God's will to be done (vs 10)?

****This is the submission part of prayer where you are submitting to the plan and will of God.*

What should we ask God for (vs 11)?

Why do you think we should ask God for it if He already told us that He would provide?

Why is asking God for forgiveness so important (vs 12)?

What does verse 12 reveal about the importance of having a right relationship with both man and God?

Why is it important that we ask God to help deliver us from evil (vs 13)?

What profound statement did Jesus make about forgiveness (vs 14)?

What will God not do if you are not willing to do the same for others (vs 15)?

“Treasures in Heaven”

Study: Matthew 6:16-21

Reading: I Timothy 6:1-12. Colossians 3:1-7

Memory: Psalm 51:18

Though I know it would never work because it would become pharisaical, I often thought that church members should have a certain number of votes based on the financial percentage of their income which they gave to the church. After all, Jesus says that your heart will be where your treasure is. The thought behind this would be that those who give a higher percentage of their income to the church will often have a greater heart for the direction of the church. In reality, I don't know how much our individual church members give because that is to be between them and God, but the thought is interesting because it does challenge us to think about where we are storing our treasures.

Today, we are going to see how Jesus challenged us not to do things to impress others, but to give freely to Him and therefore store up treasures in heaven.

What Does the Bible Say?

Jesus gave one final rebuke to the religious leaders concerning outward appearances by declaring how true followers of God should not fast to be seen of others. It was very common for the Pharisees to fast twice a week. When they did fast, it was often done to impress others and they walked around with sad faces, drawing attention to the fact that they were fasting that day. They made it seem that one day without food (normally from 6 p.m. the night before until 6:00 p.m. that night) would cause them to be in physical anguish. After all, if no one could see they were suffering for God, why would they bother to suffer?

The challenge that Jesus gave was for those who chose to fast to do it privately without letting anyone know. Doing things to draw attention on the outside and earn the praise of men was very frivolous because the rewards were short term and quickly faded. On the other hand, when a person chose to fast to please God and did not make it known to men, they were earning their rewards with God. Serving God in secret would earn open rewards from Him, while serving God in the open to be seen of men would only result in the praise of men here on earth (vs 16-18).

Moving on to a new point, Jesus challenged His followers to lay up rewards in heaven rather than storing riches upon the earth. He described how a person's heart will be where their money was and that if they put all of their money in earthly investments, their mind would be on earthly things. Jesus reminded them that nothing on this earth really lasts, but it gets old and corrupt, while the rewards earned for godliness would last for all eternity. Jesus was not saying that we should give everything that we have and not hold onto any earthly possessions. He was not saying that we should avoid savings accounts and putting money aside for the future. The importance of saving and investing are mentioned several places in Scripture and several Bible characters were wealthy men and women who used their wealth for the glory of God. What He is saying is that our desire should not be to gain earthly wealth, but to invest in heavenly treasure (vs 19-21).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Have you ever fasted? Sadly, this is something that most believers have never attempted to do so these verses are hard to apply. Fasting is never commanded or required but was often used for times of special devotion or commitment to God. Fasting was especially practiced when facing a great trial or having to make a major decision. The Jews were required to fast on the Day of Atonement, but other than that, they fasted during times of great uncertainty, normally when an enemy would attack and they were facing great destruction. Fasting should be a part of the life of a believer, specifically when facing important decisions or when really seeking wisdom or understanding from God. When you do fast, you should not fast to be seen of men, but fasting should be done privately.

Where is your heart at? I have often said, “Show me your checkbook and I will show you where your heart is at!” Though this is not always accurate, from the teaching of Jesus found here you can see that there is great truth to this. Take time today to examine what you are living for. Choose to live for God and invest in His cause so that you can store up treasures that will last for eternity.

Thought for the day

What are you not to look like when you fast (vs 16)?

Have you ever fasted? Why or why not?

What did the religious leaders do when they fasted (vs 16)? Why did they do this?

What did Jesus say about their reward (vs 16)?

What are you supposed to do when you fast (vs 17)?

Why are you supposed to look like normal when you fast (vs 18)?

What phrase in verse 18 did Jesus repeat many times? What was His point?

Where are you not to lay up treasure (vs 19)?

What happens to earthly treasures?

Where are we supposed to build up treasures (vs 20)?

How do we build up treasures in heaven?

What are the differences between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures (vs 19-20)?

How do you think you build up heavenly treasures?

What did Jesus say about your heart (vs 21)?

What point do you think Jesus was making?

Why is it important to realize that what you spend your money on reveals where your heart is?

Take a look at your credit card bill or your banking account. What do the things your money goes to reveal about what you like and don't like?

****Obviously, you will need basics like food, housing, clothing, but take time to take a close look to see what role generosity plays in your giving.*

Memory Verses

Psalms 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem;