

## ANGER MANAGEMENT

### HE SAID WHAT?!

Matthew 5:21-26 // Craig Smith

September 17, 2017

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**CRAIG:** Hey, welcome to Mission Hills. So glad that you're here and before we dive into God's word this morning, I wanna introduce you to a couple. So I'm gonna ask Kip and Pearl Nanninga to come up. Kip was just hired. He just joined our staff here as our new next steps pastor which is basically kind of adult discipleship and his job is to kinda bring alignment between all the different ministries we have because our goal here at Mission Hills is to help people become more like Jesus so they can join him more effectively in his mission in the world. And so Kip's job is to help us create a good pathway for that and keep everything working together. And so they just moved here from Austin, Texas last weekend, and would you give him a warm Mission Hills welcome?

So, we are super excited to have Pearl and Kip and they have five kids and many of the kids are almost as tall as Kip actually if you're just wondering. Some of them are clearly headed in that direction but they're not quite there yet. But we're super excited to have you guys here so welcome. Kip what are you excited about as you contemplate this new chapter of ministry here?

**KIP:** Yeah, thanks, Craig. Yeah. It's great to be here at Mission Hills and to be in Colorado. We've got probably a 100 degree plus weather still in Austin, so to wake up this morning under covers was great, great refreshment. We're excited. When we were driving in on our interview weekend, I looked to my wife and said, "I wonder if we could see the church off 470." She said, "Well, I think that's it right there," and sure enough there was Mission Hills up on the hill. So, what a position you guys have in the city and spiritually what a position Mission Hills has in this city, right? And the other thing I think we're really excited about is, everyone we talked to, kinda doing our homework before we arrived. We talked to former staff, we talked to your former lead pastor, we talked to a lady that works at a business here in the Business Park and even she said, "I don't know what's going on with the church but the place is packed on Sunday. Like, they use our parking lot because there's not enough space." And so, for us to be a part of just a church that's on the move with tremendous momentum and to be just riding that with Craig and Colette has been just tremendous for us. So, that's what we're most excited about. Yep.

**CRAIG:** We're super excited to have you here so, welcome.

**PEARL:** Thank you.

**CRAIG:** Welcome.

**KIP:** Thanks, man.

**CRAIG:** So, I'm sure they'd love to get to know you, so they'll be out in the lobby after the service. He's not hard to spot so feel free to spend a few minutes getting to know them. Hey, so last week we launched this new series called "He Said What" where we're sort of unpacking Jesus' idea that he came to, not to get rid of the Old Testament but to make it possible to fulfill what he said. And what we saw that meant was that, that he makes possible the kind of life that the Old Testament is intended to point us towards. And what we saw is the kind of life that God's calling us to live, to typify. It isn't a life that's primarily based on just checking off the boxes. It's not just about following the rules because the kind of people that God wants us to be, we can't become just by following the rules. It's entirely possible to follow all the rules and yet still be really far from God.

So, the reality is that conforming to the rules doesn't transform the kind of people we are. And it's kind of a central truth from last time. Conforming to the rules doesn't transform the kind of people that we are, but Jesus can. And Jesus came to make us



into the kind of people the Old Testament Law is pointing us towards, which I think naturally raises a question which is, “Okay, if that’s what Jesus is doing, do I have any part to play? Is this something God just does entirely? Do I just let it happen? Or is there some part that I have to play in this process?” And what we’re gonna be seeing over the next few weeks is six examples that Jesus gives us of Old Testament Laws which help us to understand the kind of people God’s causing us to become, but also begins to tell us what it looks like to sort of cooperate with that transforming work in our lives.

So, if you have your Bible, I’d love to have you join with me in Matthew, chapter five. We’re gonna be picking up where we left off in verse 21. And what Jesus does in this first example is, it’s probably the clearest example of the kind of pattern that He’s gonna be using throughout the rest of the series. He starts off with a pretty familiar command. You don’t have to spend much time in church to know what He’s talking about. Here He says this. He says, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder.’” Anybody here going, “Wait, murder is not okay?” Well, yeah. We all know that. When He says,

“You’ve heard long ago it was said, ‘You shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’” There’s gonna be consequences. “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.” ( Matthew 5:21-22a)

What Jesus does here is He begins a pattern and He’s gonna follow the same pattern kind of throughout this section of the Gospel of Matthew. The first thing that he does in this pattern every time, is **He clarifies the spirit of the Law**. It’s the first part. He clarifies the spirit of the Law. In other words, He forces us to go beyond the surface and to start looking at, “What are the principles? What’s the heartbeat behind this particular commandment?” And He does it the same way every time. He starts by saying, “You’ve heard it said,” and then He mentions an Old Testament Law. And then He says, “But I tell you,” and then He gives a new commandment that, honestly, it ups the standard. It raises the bar really high.

But the reason that He does that is to force us to deal with the spirit of the Law, to ask questions about, “Okay, what’s this Law really about? What is this Law pointing me towards as the kind of person that God is interested in me becoming?” Now, here, obviously, He’s using the example of murder. He says, “You’ve heard it said, ‘You shall not murder,’” and then there’s a judgment for that, “But I say the same judgment is gonna come on people who are angry with others, who are angry with others.” And the reason He’s doing that is that He’s trying to force us to deal with the spirit of this Law behind the spirit of, that’s behind this Law against murdering.

When He says, you know, murder is not really the only thing I’m concerned about. Because the reality is this, is that murder is just the final stop on a path of unrighteous anger. Murder is just the final stop on a path of unrighteous anger, and He’s not gonna be content if we just, like, pull up short of that final stop. He wants us to back up and go, “I don’t really want you on this road at all, this road of unrighteous anger.” Now, I say unrighteous anger because there is such a thing as righteous anger. We know that because the Bible clearly says that God gets angry. And we know God is good and we know that He gets anger so there must be such a thing as good anger.

And if we think biblically about anger, well one of these we realize is that anger is really, it’s just, it’s kind of the passionate discontent that we feel when what should be isn’t. Does that make sense? That’s what anger is in general terms. It’s the passionate discontent we feel when what should be isn’t. When we look at something we go, “This is not the way it should be,” and we’re not okay with just leaving it there. We feel a passionate discontent when what should be isn’t. I’ve got some friends who work in Asia and they’re passionate, discontent, their anger is for women who are caught in the sex trafficking industry, and they’re looking to rescue those women.

It’s a dangerous ministry. It’s a very difficult ministry and they wouldn’t be doing it if they didn’t feel a passionate discontent. They’re not just kinda looking around at sex trafficking and going, “Yeah, that’s not ideal.” No, they’re passionately discontent. They’re angry about it. And anger can be a good thing when it’s righteous because it’s what drives us to make things right. It’s



what drives us to keep evil from persisting and prevailing. The problem is that anger often goes off the rails and it becomes unrighteous. And in fact, most of us are probably more familiar with unrighteous anger and I think anger gets unrighteous. Anger is sinful when it's mis-motivated, mis-directed or mis-applied. Mis-motivated, mis-directed, mis-applied.

See, sometimes we get angry about things we really have no right to get angry about. We think, "Well, that's not the way it should be," but there's no particular reason why it shouldn't be that way. You know, maybe you didn't get the promotion that you thought you should have, you know, somebody else did and so you're angry about that or it can be trivial stuff. For me, honestly, every time I hit I-25 in the afternoon. So here's what I think should be. I know that on a really good day where traffic signs probably I can get home in 22 minutes. So when I hit the highway I'm like 22 minutes, that's what should be. And I never make it home in 22 minutes, not in the afternoon. It's more like 32 minutes, 42 minutes. And I begin to feel this passionate discontent that I should be home in 22 minutes. But you see what's happening is, I'm confusing what I want with what should be and we often do that. Very easy to confuse what we want with what we should be. That's mis-motivated anger.

There's also mis-directed anger. There's anger that sometimes comes because we were angry at the wrong people or angry at the people who aren't really responsible for the problem. We even have a phrase in English, we say, "Don't shoot the messenger." In other words, don't get mad at the person who brings you bad news if they're not responsible for it, doesn't do any good to get mad at them and yet, like, we often struggle with this, right? You know? When we get mistreated at work and we go home we take it out on our spouse. We get mistreated at school and we come home and we take it out on our brothers or sisters or the dog. Not the cat because the cat will get you back but the dog... You see, we're not really upset with them but that's the people who feel our anger. Those are the people who actually have it directed at them.

I mean, I don't know if you can see it or not, but I actually have some marks on top of my head because I was working in my basement that I had a plumbing leak and somehow in the process of doing something, I, like, stood up to fast and I hit a corner and like it really hurt a lot. And the thing is, like, it was my fault but I found myself like looking around for somebody to get mad at. It's like, "Who can I... There's no one here." And the ceiling is just so unsatisfying to get mad at the ceiling. But you see there's this very natural but it's a sinful tendency to blame other people for the things that were upset about. That's sinful anger. Anger can also be mis-applied. You can be angry about an entirely legitimate thing and you can even have your anger directed at the right people but the way you do it isn't healthy. The way you do it actually causes more problems than it solves.

I mean, I don't know what it is for you but for me my natural tendency is to raise my voice. You know, I have to really work on that. I have this tendency to get louder which is interesting because it's never worked. Like, I have never solved the problem by getting louder. There's not been a single time that I've been in a conflict with somebody and I'm just trying to help them understand how they're wrong and how they're misunderstanding something and I've tried several times, they're just not getting it and I'm like, "Oh, you know what I'm missing? I need to say it louder." That has never ever accomplished... Nobody's ever gotten here. Listen to me get loud at me, like, "Oh, that's what you're saying. Okay." Man, if you just got louder sooner we could've just... okay That just never happens, because that's mis-applied anger but that's my tendency and you know, the question's, you know, "What's your tendency?"

But here's the thing. Whether we're talking about mis-motivated, mis-directed or mis-applied, all unrighteous anger, all sinful anger really boils down to one key thing. There's one thing in common. And that is that all unrighteous anger involves devaluing others. All unrighteous anger involves devaluing others. It means, looking at other human beings and basically treating them as though they don't have value. They don't have worth. They're not as important. They're not as significant. They're not as valuable. And murder is the ultimate example of that. Right? Murder is the ultimate example of looking at another human being and say, "Your life means nothing. It has no value, so I don't mind taking it if it gets me what I want." And by the way, murder is different than killing. The commandment is not, "Thou shalt not kill." The command is, "Thou shalt not murder." And then the concept behind that word is the idea of taking someone else's life for personal gain. Maybe if it's only personal gain of, like, "I don't want them around." Like, "Their very presence, their very existence upsets me." But murder is about getting rid of somebody else for personal gain. Murder is the ultimate example of looking at another human being and saying, "You don't matter."



But the thing is that murder is not the only way that we devalue people. So Jesus goes on and He says this. This is “again,” meaning in the same way although I’ve told you...I’ve just told you that, you know, you’ve heard no murder but I’m saying anger is the same part of the package, the same problem. Then he goes and says,

“Again, I say, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’” which basically means something like idiot, “brother or sister, ‘You idiot,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Matthew 5:22b)

You see what Jesus is doing? He’s forcing us to wrestle with the spirit behind the Law. He’s clarifying the spirit behind the Law. He says, “Yeah, you’ve heard about the murder but, you know, murder’s just the last stop on a road of unrighteous anger. But even unrighteous anger isn’t the real problem. The real problem is this tendency that we have to look at other human beings and go, “You don’t matter. You don’t count.” And these words are great examples of that. To call somebody an idiot, to call somebody a fool is to say, “Listen, you’re valueless. You’re worthless.”

The problem is that, like, we look at the command not to murder, we go, “I think I could pull this one off.” You maybe have a specific person in mind. You think, “I’m pretty sure I can keep from actually murdering them.” But Jesus doesn’t leave “well enough” alone, right? He begins to go, “Now, the anger is the problem.” You’re like, “Yeah, that’s getting harder,” and then it’s not even the anger. It’s just this tendency to devalue people using words and labels and, “Oh, okay. That’s getting as difficult.” You need to understand, God doesn’t want us to just not follow that road all the way to murder, God wants us on an entirely different road. What God is saying here is that He wants us to be people who live in constant respect of the value of other human beings. He wants people to believe in the constant respect of the value of other human beings.

Let me think about this. If I were to tell you and maybe you told me that you’re thinking about moving and so you asked, you know, I understand you live in Castle Rock, “What’s Castle Rock like?” And I said, “Well, Castle Rock’s awesome.” “Why is it awesome?” “We don’t murder each other. It’s excellent.” You’d be like, “Okay, that’s good but like what else is true? I mean, what else is life in Castle Rock like?” So I go, “Well, let’s see. There’s a lot of random beatings actually. It happens a lot and there’s a lot of racism, a lot of prejudice. People yell at you constantly just for all kinds of random things. So, yeah, I mean, that definitely happens.” Like, you’re not gonna go, “This sounds like the place I wanna be.”

I mean, not murdering, that’s a good start. But like a community that treats each other like that, that’s not a place you wanna be part of and God’s kind of saying the same thing. You’ve heard it said, “Don’t murder,” but let’s take a step back. I’m saying this unrighteous anger, that’s an issue you need to deal with but anger itself is really, it’s about devaluing people. What God’s saying is, “I want you to become the kind of people who live in constant awareness of the value of the human beings.” That’s the first thing He’s doing. He’s clarifying the spirit of the Law. It’s not the only thing He’s doing.

The second thing He’s doing, you might already begin to feel a little bit naturally because you go, “Okay, I can probably avoid murdering somebody but the rest of this stuff, this sounds harder. This sounds way harder.” In fact, honestly, living in constant awareness of the value of other human beings, I don’t know that I can do that. And that’s kind of the other thing that Jesus is doing. He’s really showing us, “You can’t. Not on your own. Not without some kind of a fundamental change happening inside you.”

The second thing that Jesus really does and he does it consistently throughout this passage in the Gospel of Matthew is that he demonstrates that the spirit of the Law that He helps us understand, **He demonstrates that the spirit of the Law is impossible without transformation.** He demonstrates the spirit of the Law is impossible without transformation. See, our tendency is to take what Jesus says here just make it it’s just another additional couple of rules, right? I mean, we got rule number one, “Don’t murder.” Okay, rule number two is, “Don’t get angry.” Yeah, it’s harder. Rule number three is, “Don’t call them idiots.” Rule number four is, “Don’t call them fools.” All right, four rules.



The moment that we turn what Jesus said here into additional rules to be checked off is the moment that we missed the heartbeat of what He's saying. He's calling us to an approach to life that, honestly, it's impossible without some kind of inner transformation happening. Check this out. This is gonna mess you up a little bit. Jesus said very clearly here, "Anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'You fool,' is in danger of the fire of hell." Like, I think we can all agree that's serious language, right? This is a big deal. He says, "Anybody who calls another human being a fool is in danger of the fire of hell."

And yet, in Matthew 23:17, Jesus looks at a group of religious leaders and he calls them, "You blind fools." It's the word. He calls them, "You blind fools." So, on the one hand, He says, "Hey, if you call another human being a fool, if you devalue them in that way, you're in danger of the fire hell," and then He calls, not just one person but all group of people, the exact same word. So, is Jesus a hypocrite? Anybody wanna go with that one? How about this, is Jesus in danger of eternal damnation? Anybody wanna go with that one? No.

So how is it that Jesus can say, "You can't think about other people like this. You can't use these kind of words," and yet He can? Why is it we can't do what He does. And the answer is because we're not like Jesus. Jesus is different in a way that we're not yet. Think about it like this. How many of you, when you were kids, you were told, "Don't talk to strangers." Right? Yeah, pretty good rule. How many of you were told, "Don't talk to strangers," by parents who talk to strangers every single day of their lives. Were they hypocrites? No, they were mature. They were mature.

See, the reason you tell a small child, "Don't talk to strangers," is because you're trying to keep them out of dangerous situations, right? I mean, that's the heartbeat behind it. Don't get yourself into dangerous situations. The problem is that small children aren't really capable of discerning dangerous situations from non-dangerous ones, and so you just kinda give them the rule, "Don't talk to strangers." But as you grow, as you mature, as you transform, you get to the point where you're able to discern what is a dangerous situation, what's not a dangerous situation. It allows you to live in a way that it's not always conforming to, you know, the specific rule but certainly to the principle of it. And I would argue the same kind of thing is going on here. Jesus is, "Listen, when you're looking around, you're calling people fools, what's happening in you is you're devaluing them."

And I get that. Some of you may remember a few weeks ago when we were in James, I said, you know, I realized a couple years ago that when I'm in traffic, which is like the number one challenge to my, like, growth in maturity as a believer, when I'm in traffic and people are doing stuff that's not ideal, I used to just go, "Oh you, moron. Oh you, idiot." But I realized that wasn't good because I was actually beginning to devalue them even in my own head and heart and so, I opted for another option which was to start saying, "That was bold. She's really bold." And a lot of you grabbed a hold of that. I've had a lot of conversations where people have said, "I do that now." It's not just my idea that he said, "Yeah, I called, like, 12 people bold before I got here this morning."

Okay. It's a start anyway. So Jesus says, "You can't call people fools without devaluing them because you're not like me yet." And yet Jesus seems to be able to separate the use of a word from the process of devaluing them as people. And we know that Jesus didn't devalue them as people, right? We know that Jesus didn't look at the people He was talking to and say, "You have no worth. You have no significance. You have no value." We know that because He died for them. He might have called them fools but He valued them so much that He was willing to pour out his blood to save them.

The problem is, we're not like Jesus. For us, those words, they signal something about the way that we're thinking about them. So what Jesus is doing again is He starts off by, he clarifies the spirit of the Law but then He begins to show us, "Listen, you can't. **You can't live out the spirit of the Law without transformation.**" Something has to happen to you. You have to mature. You have to grow. And the good news is that's exactly what God wants to do for us. This is exactly what God is committed to doing in us. He's committed to growing us. He's committed to maturing us. He's committed to transforming us so that we are like Jesus.



When we give our lives to Jesus, one of the first things that happens is the Holy Spirit comes in our lives and begins to change us from the inside out so that we do begin to grow and get transformed. We become the kind of people that Jesus pointing us towards. That's the good news. The bad news is we can get in the way of it. We can get in the way of that transformation. We can't accomplish it on our own. Only God can actually transform us from the inside out, but we can get in the way of that transformation. And so, you know, I think a lot of us find, like, it doesn't feel like the transformation's going very fast.

Anybody here feel like you're being transformed into the image of Christ at a breakneck pace? You just can't believe how close to Jesus you've become, like, almost overnight. Anybody? No. Most of us feel quite the opposite, right? We feel like I can sense it and I see it in places in my life and yet I really feel like, I feel like the progress should be faster. Hey, so, what's going on? Is it that God's not powerful enough to transform us? No. Is it that, you know, He's not really committed to the process of transforming us? No. What's happening is that we resist the transforming process.

Several years ago, I was excited when my kids got old enough, they had to start rock climbing with us again. My wife and I used to do a lot of rock climbing. We had kids. It got really hard to do and so, it was really kind of a fun time when they got to be old enough. And we started them as quickly as possible when they could be out there climbing with us but we, you know, we put them on the rock and at certain points, you know, we realized, "Okay, they got weak, little arms and like they can't do a pull-up." And there are times that they'd be on a route that, you know, and realize you're not gonna be able to make this next move because it basically involves a pull-up and you can't do that. And so, I realized, you know, here's the great thing, you know, I've got the rope and the rope goes up to a carabineer and down to them, if I just haul back on that rope, I could just, like, pull them up the face. It was awesome.

Like, in other words, I could make them move in ways that they couldn't. I could move them forward. But I realized that it was much harder to do when they were resisting. It was much harder to move them when they were holding onto the rock and wouldn't let go. Maybe they're terrified or something else. Now, if I pushed hard enough I could but the chances are I was gonna do some damage to them. And I think it happens in the same way that God says, "Listen, I'm gonna transform you. Yeah, obeying the spirit of the Law, living in this way, it's not possible in your own but I'm gonna change you. I'm gonna make it possible and I'm the only one who can but listen, if you're gonna resist me, the progress is gonna be a lot slower."

And I realized we climb with my kids, there are basically three things that had to happen for us to begin to cooperating with each other in this transformation, and I think they apply to the way that we cooperate with what God is doing in our transforming. And the first thing you have to do is you have to stop resisting. You have to stop resisting which means that you've got to let go of the things that are keeping you chained to wherever you are in this process. We're dealing here with anger and devaluing people so, one thing we have to do is, we have to recognize, like, what am I holding? Maybe it's a hurt. Maybe you've been deeply hurt and legitimately, deeply hurt and you're not willing to let that go. You're not willing to forgive.

So what happens is you're holding on to this thing that's got you chained to where you are, you know, and it affects the way, not only you do with the person who hurt you but it affects lots of other relationships. Or maybe it's just anger. Maybe anger is a shield for you that, "As long as I'm angry then nobody else can get in and hurt me," and so, I'm holding on to my anger. I'm holding on to my lack of forgiveness. Maybe it's habitual ways of devaluing people. Maybe it's the language that you use. Maybe it's just the way you think about people, but what is it that we hold on to? Because we're not willing to let it go, we're resisting God's transforming work.

That's the first step, is to stop resisting. The second step is to get pointed in the right direction. See, when my girls thought that, you know, the right direction needed to go was over there, over there, it was a lot harder to move them. When they understood, "Okay, oh, we're going from here to there," it became much, much easier to move them along. And God calls us to do the same thing. He calls us to understand what direction we need to be moving. Really, that's kind of what's going on and in this whole passage. He says, "Listen, it's not just about not murdering. It's not just about not being angry. It's really about this whole way



of devaluing people.” He says the direction you need to be going is, you’re aiming towards becoming the kind of person who lives constantly in the awareness of the value of other people. That’s the direction. We could point in the right direction. That’s what He’s doing. He’s helping us to point in the right direction.

And then the third thing is that we actually start moving in that same direction. You know, my girls would often find themselves in positions they couldn’t make the move on their own, but it was so much easier, it was so much faster when they at least pulled the right direction. And what happened was the momentum that I was giving him got magnified by their efforts. Or, you know, if you don’t like rock climbing, think about this. Maybe you remember when you’re a little kid and you walked between mom and dad and they had one hand and you take these little steps and they swing you big time. Man, I missed that. That was the best. I don’t have any people in my life that are large enough to do that for me, but I wish there were because I love that sensation that I just make a little bit of effort and yet it gets magnified and has huge progress.

Listen, only the Holy Spirit can actually transform us. Only the Holy Spirit can actually change who we are from the inside out, but when we’re not resisting and when we’re pointing the right direction and when we’re trying to move in that same direction with them, what happens is the momentum gets magnified. And really, what Jesus does next is, He allows us to begin to figure out what it looks like to make those moves in the right direction. As I said, there’s three things that Jesus does in this passage and in all the other passages we’ll see throughout the series.

The first one is that he clarifies the spirit of the Law. The second one is He demonstrates that the spirit of the Law is impossible apart from transformation. **The third thing he does is He gives us practical ways to begin cooperating with His transforming work in our life.** He gives us very practical ways to begin cooperating to take those little steps that then the Holy Spirit magnifies. And so what Jesus does next is He gives those practical examples. He says this, He says therefore,

“If you are offering your gift at the altar and you there remember that your brother or your sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar and first go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift.”  
(Matthew 5:23-24)

This is a practical example. And what He’s saying, basically, is that, “Listen, you find yourself going to worship and you realize as you’re going to worship, ‘You know what? I’ve got a relationship that’s broken. I’ve got a relationship that’s in need of healing. It needs reconciliation, you know? I’m at fault in this. I’m responsible for this.’” He says, “Listen, stop. Go take care of that person before you come to worship,” which is really an interesting statement, isn’t it? Because we tend to go, “Well, go to worship first.” I mean, because God’s most important, you know? Give God his time and then deal with me but Jesus says, “No.” This is how much God cares about your relationships. He says, “I want you to reconcile those relationships before you even come to me.”

And actually what He says here is pretty radical because what He says is, “Listen.” You know, if you’re going to the altar, if you’re going to the temple and the only place that you could do that in ancient Israel was in Jerusalem but interesting enough, He’s talking to a group of people here that we’re in a place called Galilee. Galilee was about a week’s travel from Jerusalem. So the situation He paints is, basically, so you’re in Galilee and you get your animal for your sacrifice and worship and you travel for a week and you get to Jerusalem and as you’re about to finally put your animal on the altar, you have your worship experience, you realize, “Huh. You know what? I’ve got a broken relationship back home.” He says, “You know, I just leave the animal there, go home travel another week back to Galilee and make it right. And only after you’ve made it right, then travel for another week back to Jerusalem and offer your sacrifice. And then you got another week home.”

This just turned into a month’s process. And I think the people in His audience would’ve gone, “Okay, that seems a little bit extreme.” But what Jesus is saying is, this is how important your relationships are to God. This is how important it is, how you treat other human beings. What He’s really saying is this. He’s saying, “Really valuing others means sacrificing in order to restore relationships.” He’s describing a situation with a tremendous amount of sacrifice. It’s costly to fix that relationship, but He’s saying that really valuing others in the way that God’s calling us to, it means sacrificing in order to restore relationships.



So, since you wanna cooperate with the work that I'm doing in you, you need to come to the place where you're willing to make sacrifices to restore relationships. He goes on and He says, verse 25, He says,

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you're still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you've paid the last penny.” (Matthew 5:25-26)

And really, He's saying kind of the same thing here. He's saying, “Listen.” Here's another situation where somebody has something against you. They, you know, this is a legal thing, you know? But they've got a legal case against you. And what He's saying is, “Listen, it's gonna get worked out one way or the other but there's two very different ways you can work it out. You can resist doing anything about it, you can let them haul you to the court and then you'll be handed over the officer and so on and so forth. It's gonna get taken care of eventually, but that's not what I'm looking for.” He says, “When you realize somebody has against something against you before you go down that road, you stop it. You stop that process short. You go and you make it right.” And He says, “And I want you to do it quickly. As quickly as you realize that somebody has something against you, make it right.”

I was talking to a couple a few years ago. They were in some counseling. Their marriage was really struggling. And, as we were talking and I was trying to understand something about their situation, I asked the question. I said, “Well, you know, helped me understand, like, you know, when you apologize for something, like, you know, how quickly does that happen? You know, like, do you let it drag on?” So I said, “You know, give me an example. When was the last time you said you're sorry?” And the husband went, “Yeah, it's been about six months.” And I was just looking for, like, one of the recent examples. So I said, “I'm not thumbing something big. Like the latest, last time you said the words ‘I'm sorry.’” He said, “Yeah, it's been about six months.” It's like, I said it three times to my wife before I got here this morning. I said, “That can't be right.” And so I looked at her and I said, “Is it really been six months since he said he was sorry for anything?” She did, “Yeah.” And I kinda looked at her. I was kinda commiserating. She goes, “Well, it's been about nine months for me.”

Okay. That's a great example of a couple who didn't take this principle to mind. They weren't quick to make things right. They just let them fester. And the thing is that, when these things fester, they end up taking and costing a far higher price. So Jesus says, “Be quick to make it right.” See, in this process of being willing to sacrifice in order to bring reconciliation. In this willingness to say, you know, “I'm not gonna let things sit. I'm not gonna let things be idle. I'm gonna be quick to make it right,” what he's saying is you get to cooperate with the work that God is doing in your life. This is how we begin to cooperate with it. This is just a couple of examples but you understand the principle here. Because at the end of the day He says, “I'm not just looking for people who don't murder each other. I'm not just looking for people who stop it before it gets to the ultimate conclusion.” He says, “I want people who don't even walk this road. I want people who are on an entirely different path. A path of...”

Well, what's the opposite of murder? I think our natural tendency to go, “I guess the opposite of murder is not murder.” It's not. The opposite of murder is not not murder. The opposite of murder is sacrificial love. You see that? You see that's what Jesus is drawing us towards here? Listen, murder sacrifices other for self but love, the kind of love that God is pointing us towards, the kind of love that God is extending to us, the kind of love that God is calling us to emulate in our relations with others, love sacrifices itself for others. And maybe more than anything else is, what this passage boils down to today. Murder sacrifices others for self, but love sacrifices self for others. These are the people God is calling us to be. And I realize that's hard.

Three questions connected to those three steps of cooperating with the work that God is doing in us to make us into those kinds of people. If the first step is stop resisting, then the question we need to wrestle with is, what are my habitual ways of devaluing others? What are my habitual ways of devaluing others? Maybe its language for you. Maybe it's terms of endearments that are nothing like endearing. Maybe its language. Maybe it's anger that you're holding on to. Maybe it's an anger you're holding on to from a legitimate hurt but that anger is spilling over into every relationship.



**What are your habitual ways of devaluing other people?** Identify them and then go, “God, I need to let go with that.” And you may need to do at that point is, you need to pray that the Holy Spirit would just pry your fingers off with that thing that’s got you locked in that place. That’s the first step. Identify those habitual ways of devaluing others. The second one, if the second step is to get pointed in the right direction, then the second step is to ask this question, **“What’s one relationship that I have that needs reconciling?”** And I invite you to listen to the Holy Spirit right now, as you ask the question, “What’s one relationship that I have that needs reconciling?”

That’s how we orient ourselves in the direction that God’s moving us. “Okay, God, that’s...you want me to deal with that one, okay. I’m pointed in the right direction.” And then we go, “God, I can’t be the person you’re calling me to be. I can’t do that. I can’t be everything that Jesus is pointing me towards here.” Jesus says, “I know, but you could point the right direction. I’m gonna work this transforming life. I just want you to cooperate with me.” And so, step three is, start moving in the same direction. And so, the question then is, what’s one sacrificial step that I can take to move towards reconciliation in that relationship? Maybe it’s that you say you’re sorry. Maybe you’re here and you’re realizing, you know, “I don’t say that. I’m really, really slow to say I’m sorry.” Maybe you need to say you’re sorry. Maybe that’s your sacrificial stuff. Because it takes swallowing pride. It takes a price. Maybe that’s your step.

Maybe it’s to make a phone call to end the silence that a relationship has been festering under for four months or even years because nobody is willing to take the step of humility to reach out and maybe you don’t even remember what it’s all about anymore. Or maybe, like, “Oh yes I do.” Exactly what it’s about in which case your sacrificial step is to go, “You know what? I’m not gonna keep valuing that thing I’m upset about more than I value that person.”

**What’s one sacrificial step that God’s calling you to take?** And understand, what Jesus is calling us to is hard but Jesus doesn’t call us to do something that He isn’t willing to do himself. In fact, Jesus is the ultimate example of sacrificial love. So, on the night before He went to the cross for us, and remember, the only reason He went to the cross was because He valued us, not because He needed us. And it certainly wasn’t because we had done everything necessary to love Him back. In spite of our sins, in spite of our brokenness, in spite of our running from God and spitting in His face, God was willing to send His own son to the cross in our place.

So the night before He went to the cross in our place, He gathered his friends and He broke the bread and He held it up and He said, “This is my body, it’s broken for you. This is my sacrificial love. So, often as you eat it, I want you to remember what I’ve shown you.” The same way he took the cup and He said, “This is my blood. It’s poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” The ultimate act of sacrificial love in order to bring restoration, in order to bring reconciliation. So this is the new agreement between God and man. As often as you drink of it, remember. And so we remember the sacrificial love of Jesus. We understand He’s not calling us to love others in a way that’s any different from the love that He’s already demonstrated to us first. He’s just asking us cooperate with Him, in the way that we work and pursue relationship with other people.

In a few minutes, the ushers are going to pass off the pieces of bread and the cups. And if you, if you’re a Christian, if you have given your life to Jesus, if you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, we don’t care if you’re a member here or regular attender, we’re glad that you’re here. We invite you to participate in this family meal. But as the elements come around, I encourage you to take them and just spend a few moments reflecting on the kind of sacrificial love that God showed to us. And remembering He’s not calling us to do anything He has not already done for us, at a cost that is far greater than any we could ever pay, as we seek to live towards others in the way that He has loved us. Could you pray with me?

Jesus, this is a hard truth. Not murdering, not so hard. Not getting angry, a little bit harder. But living in a way that constantly values others even when living in that way causes us to make sacrifices, that it costs us, that’s hard. And we ask that you move in us, that you transform us, you turn us in the kind of people who are able to do that because we’re not able to do it on our own. But we thank you that you have demonstrated exactly this kind of love for us. A love that paid the ultimate price. So, Lord, we



remember your sacrifice for us and we ask that you would move on us and cause us to stop resisting you, to get pointed in the right direction with our relationships and to start moving in this direction that you are moving us towards, in this direction that you've already demonstrated for us. In Jesus name. Amen.  
do exactly that. In Jesus' name. Amen.

