

Merciful

This is a verb. That is, it is a doing word. It is compassion in action. But it is *undeserved* compassion in action. Christ says that if we sow mercy, we will reap mercy.

9. To whom in particular does God expect us to be merciful?

(Note Matthew 6:14-15)

Purity

We *can* hide from men what we *can not* hide from God. God knows our hearts (1Sam. 16:7; Mat. 9:4; John 2:24-25)

10. How is Matthew 5:8 similar to Psalm 139:23?

Peace Making

All of these conditions for God's blessing, reflect His character. God is the God who gives peace. He expects us to reflect His peace. He delights in those who make peace (Prov. 16:7).

11. What is the motivation of those who do not make peace according to Proverbs 10:12?

Responding To Persecution

The early disciples had an interesting way of dealing with persecution: *they rejoiced!* (Acts 5:41).

12. Note the kind of persecution that Christ is referring to in verses 10-12. Despite such harsh treatment, what did He also tell us to do? (Mat. 5:44)

Do you still want God's blessing? These are high standards, but Christ wants us to live up to them with His help. *Amen.*

LIVING DIFFERENTLY

Part One

This study series on the Beatitudes is designed to show us how Christ expects us to live. Nicky Gumble has written on the Beatitudes in his book "Challenging Lifestyles". He refers to them as the most challenging pursuit any person can engage in. He makes mention of the incredibly high standard that they set. As we study these, let's remind ourselves that we can not possibly attain to these standards without God's help (Gal. 2:20).

1. Living in the blessing of God
2. Called to be different
3. The value of Law
4. Controlling anger
5. Avoiding immorality
6. Honest to God

LIVING IN THE BLESSING OF GOD

Read Matthew 5:1-12

To be blessed means to be *well off, happy, and fortunate*. It is a state of well being that brings with it peace, contentment, and the knowledge that God is in control. It is something that all strive for. And even though some find wealth and fame, they never find or enjoy God's blessing. Yet, discovering and enjoying God's blessing is not a secret! God's Word has revealed it already.

1. What was the first thing that God did to mankind after He created them? (Gen. 1:22)
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Some people believe that once God created mankind He left them to fend for themselves. But this first act of God towards mankind shows that God wants to be actively involved with His people by _____ them.

2. What kind of lifestyle will *not* bring the blessing of God according to Proverbs 3:33?
-

To be evil or wicked in this sense is to live without regard for God even though what He requires is known. To live wrongly is bad, but to live that way while knowing it is wrong is very bad!

3. What kind of person will enjoy the blessing of God? (Prov. 28:20) _____

What Jesus Had To Say...

If living a *good* life brings the blessing of God, how do we know if we are living a life that is good enough? While the Pharisees had established a long list of regulations for living a good life, Jesus came and made several short statements that simultaneously surpassed the standards of these Pharisaic regulations, and, yet cut right to the centre of the human heart in simplicity.

Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

4. What is the first thing that is necessary to receiving the blessing of God based on what Jesus said here, and also found in Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10, 23?
-

“Poor” in this sense is *bankrupt with no possibility of even making one payment on the interest*. Jesus said that we need to recognise this as

our true spiritual and moral condition. We need to come to God and acknowledge that we have failed to meet His standards.

5. What is the promise of Scripture to all those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty, confess it to God, and repent? (1Jn. 1:9; Prov. 28:13)
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Mourning Over Our Spiritual Condition

Once we recognise the true condition of our hearts, we will be moved to sorrow and grief.

6. Without Christ in our lives, how are we described? (Ephesians 2:1) _____

Being Meek (and Mild Mannered)

Jesus said that there was blessing in being, *quiet, well-mannered, and humble*. This is what *meek* means. The same Greek word is used to describe Christ in Matthew 21:5.

7. Peter tells women not to devote themselves to outward beauty, but to be committed to inward beauty. How does he describe the kind of inner beauty that a woman should have? (1Pt. 3:3-4)
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Hungering For Righteousness

Some people like to know how much they can get away with. As far as the things of God are concerned, they are minimalists. They only want to do the minimum. But this does not command the blessing of God.

8. The same Greek word is used in Mat. 4:2, as is used in 5:6. How does it describe Christ, and what does this tell us about the real meaning of what Christ was saying?
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Taking a Broader Outlook

We live in a very individualistic society to the point that we think it is **the** way that all people should live. Our society applauds individualism. But at the root of individualism is selfishness. Jesus wants us to take a broader outlook and think about others.

Christians have been blaming the meat (of society) for going rotten when the preserving salt has been taken out of it, and the house for getting darker when the light has been removed.

John Stott, "Issues Facing Christians", *Marshall Pickering*, 1984

8. What do you think John Stott means by this statement?
-

Being Light

We are called to reflect the light of Christ in our lives.

9. Why did Jesus say we should do this? (Matthew 5:16)
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Our light is to be our *good works*. Our good works should shine so clearly before the world that not only will many of their arguments be silenced, they will actually glorify God because of what they see! (Note John 3:21; Romans 13:3; Eph. 2:10; 1Tim. 5:25; Titus 2:14; 3:8; Heb. 10:24).

Our acts of devotion to God should be private (praying, fasting, giving), as Christ taught, but our good works should be evident to all.

Amen.

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CALLED TO BE DIFFERENT

Read Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus expects the lives of His people to be an influence on society. While we can not legislate righteousness, we can encourage or discourage it by what we tolerate as acceptable. If the church tolerates wickedness in society, its witness is then nullified. Even worse still, if it tolerates it within its own ranks, it ceases to be ambassadors of the Light.

Being Salt

(Mat 5:13 Living Bible) "You are the world's seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless."

Salt in ancient times was used for several purposes. It was used (i) for preserving meat, (ii) as an antiseptic, (iii) in compost heaps, (iv) in cattle fodder, and (v) to symbolise covenant and sacrifice. The salt in the times of Christ was harvested from the Dead Sea. Unlike our modern salt, the salt from the Dead Sea also contained other minerals. People could simply collect this rock salt from the shores of the Dead Sea. But they would have known that the salt on the outer parts of the shore was less salty than the fresh stuff a little further in. If someone collected the older salt from the outer parts of the shore line, there was a chance that its saltiness had gone altogether.

1. In this case, what was this kind of *unsalty* salt good for, according to Jesus? (Mat. 5:13; Luke 14:34-35)
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Just as the salt on the outer parts of the Sea shore soon lost its saltiness, so to Christians lose their effectiveness when they are cut off from their source of saltiness.

2. Salt also served as a symbol of sacrifice and covenant (Num. 18:19) because *pure* salt never breaks down naturally, and neither should our covenants. When we became a Christian, we were not only joined to the LORD but we were also joined to something/one else. According to Mark 9:50, who or what were we also joined to?
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3. How does being "the salt of the earth" relate to how we relate to each other? (Note John 13:35; 17:22)
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4. What happens to the Church's witness when it is *not* at peace with each other? (Note Ps. 133)
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Becoming Salty

All of the sacrifices and offerings of the Old Testament were required to be seasoned with salt (Lev. 2:13). The salt was to remind the worshiper that they were fulfilling the covenant they had made with God.

5. According to Mark 9:49, what is it that makes us salty? (Note that the NKJV or KJV are not good renderings of this verse)
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Jesus said that His disciples would be salted/seasoned/purified with fire (note Mat. 3:11; Heb. 12:29; 1Peter 1:7). God wants us to be a purified, clean people.

6. What does God expect us to do in Romans 12:1, and how does this relate to becoming salty?
-

Jesus said that if any of His disciples were not walking purely, they were not *salty*, and as such they would be trampled upon by the world out of disrespect for their witness.

We are to be as different from the world as salt is different to the meat or vegetables that it seasons.

7. In what ways can we be like salt to the world?
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There is something very wrong with our society. We only have to open our newspapers to see a nation torn apart by strife. There is an increasing level of violence and other criminal activity. We see the breakdown of family life cutting across every background, with all the tragic consequences that follow for parents and children alike. The sanctity of human life is under threat with increasing abortion and the desire for 'mercy-killing'. Traditional bases for morality are no longer accepted...What are we to do? We have a choice. Either we can sit back...Or we can look to 'the broader concerns of humanity'.

(Nicky Gumble, "Challenging Lifestyle", Kingsway, pgs 24-25)

The Purpose of the Law

There seems to be two catch-cries of our modern era: *if it feels good, do it* and *it's OK if it doesn't hurt anyone*. What does our society use to determine its moral standards? How do we as Christians know what is right and wrong?

8. How does Paul say we can know what is wrong (or sin) according to Romans 7:7?
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The Moral Law (Ten Commandments) shows us what God's standards are. We are now left without question as to what God thinks is right and wrong.

9. Just because Christianity has moral laws, does this mean it is not a religion of love or grace? Discuss.
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We have all broken God's law. The fact that we stand condemned with what Charles Spurgeon described as "*ten great canons of God's law loaded and aimed at us*" forces us to realise that we have all sinned and can not save ourselves. This is why we need a Saviour!

10. We are not saved by keeping the law. It serves to show us that we have sinned. What should all sinners do? (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:13)
-

Amen.

LIVING DIFFERENTLY

Part Three

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THE VALUE OF LAW

Read Matthew 5:17-20

Some people thought that Jesus was starting a new religion. They thought that He would abolish the laws of Moses and institute some new laws. But Jesus said that He didn't want people to think like this. He was not coming to interrupt the plan of God, He was coming to continue it. As such, the laws of Moses (the Ten Commandments) are a part of Christ's Kingdom.

Yet there is some confusion among Christians today about the difference between *Law* and *Legalism*. Jesus upheld God's Law, but He was against legalism.

Laws provide boundaries that are like walls. When we live within these boundaries, we are secure because those same boundaries protect and safeguard us. We are not trapped by these law-boundaries, rather we are given new freedom. Jesus endorsed the Law of God, but condemned legalism.

The Essence of the Law

(Mat 23:23 NKJV) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

What is the difference between the Old and New Testaments? Marcion, who lived during the second century AD, said that Christianity was a religion of love not law. He rejected the Old Testament as being irrelevant to the Christian, and carefully filtered out much of the New Testament's references to Law. Eventually the church rejected Marcion as a heretic in 144 AD. How should we respond to Marcion's arguments that Christianity is a religion of love not law?

1. Jesus wants us to minister His Word, but not in a legalistic way. Why is this according to 2Cor. 3:6?

The Pharisees had invented thousands of extra laws to keep people from breaking God's laws. They never really understood the essence of God's Law.

2. How did Jesus sum up the essence of the Law? (Mat. 22:36-40)

Nicky Gumble says that many Christians believe like the little boy who referred to the Old Testament as the time before God became a Christian!

3. According to Malachi 3:6a and Hebrews 13:8, has God changed?

The Old Testament contains four types of Law.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| 1. Food laws | 3. Civil laws |
| 2. Ceremonial laws | 4. Moral laws |

4. Three of these categories of law are no longer binding. Based on these references, which laws are not binding?
 Acts 10:10-16 _____
 Heb. 7:26-28 _____
 Titus 3:1 _____

The civil laws that governed Israel are not binding on the Christian, but the Bible tells us that we should obey the laws of *our* land.

5. According to Colossians 2:14 what did Christ do to these laws when He died on the Cross? (Note Col. 2:16-17)

6. Match the following laws from the Old to the New Testaments:

Old Testament

New Testament

Ex. 20:3

Heb. 10:25; Mk. 2:27-28

Ex 20:4-6

1Cor. 6:9; 10:7

Ex 20:7

1Cor. 8:6; Rev. 22:9

Ex 20:8-11

Eph. 6:2

Ex 20:12

Col. 3:8; 1Tim. 1:20;

Ex 20:13

Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:19

Ex 20:14

Rom. 2:21; Eph 4:28

Ex 20:15

James 2:11

Ex 20:16

Romans 7:7; 13:9

Ex. 20:17

Col. 3:9

7. Is it correct to say that Christianity is a just a religion of love without any laws?

Resolving The Cause of Anger

Christ views anger as murderous. It is therefore a very serious sin and should be remedied at any cost. Christ's first instruction about how to deal with anger is not to the one who is angry.

9. Who is Christ addressing in Matthew 5:23-24?
-

We also observe that Christ is talking about a dispute between people in the same "church". Unresolved disputes between people in churches is deadly to the spiritual life of a church.

10. What *advice* does Christ give to someone involved in a legal dispute with another party? (Mat. 5:25-26)
-

"A lean settlement is better than a fat lawsuit!"
C.H. Spurgeon

Reconciliation is Christ's answer to anger. Anger needs to be dealt with "quickly" by being reconciled to those we have angered or those we are angry against. This demands forgiveness.

Envy is the little brother of anger. When we are envious about someone else's good fortune, it can actually be a mild case of anger.

11. We now know that the emotions of person dramatically affect their physical health. According to the Bible, what does envy to a person? (Prov. 14:30)
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If envy can eat away at a person, how much more does the full blown emotion of anger and unforgiveness? Dealing with anger involves- (i) care with our words, (ii) taking quick action, (iii) seeking to be reconciled with those we have angered, and (iv) forgiving those who have angered us.

Amen.

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Part Four

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CONTROLLING ANGER

Read Matthew 5:21-26

Anger can be good. There are some things that we should all get angry about. Positive anger can actually be a motivating force in our lives. Martin Luther said, "When I am angry I can write, pray and preach well, for ten my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding sharpened, and all mundane vexations and temptations depart."

But there are more times when we should *not* get angry. Knowing when to get angry, and when to control it, will make us a better person. We shall observe what Jesus taught about anger, and what Jesus demonstrated about anger and see how these two aspects paint a balanced picture of how we should control anger.

WHAT IS ANGER

The kind of anger that Jesus is talking about is one that is a selfish, consuming, lingering, emotional state of hatred. It is usually the kind that is directed toward others. It is an anger that refuses to go away, and continually seeks revenge. Jesus said that this kind of anger was wrong.

1. How is this kind of anger contrasted to the kind of anger that Jesus displayed in the temple? (Jn. 2:15)

There is a kind of anger that is short term, motivating, and can achieve good. It's the kind of anger that drives marathon runners on to finish a race, or mountaineers to climb a mountain, or a football coach to spur his losing team onto a victory. It is also a factor in godly people doing exploits for God (Ps. 4:4). This kind of anger is usually directed inward. Anger that is aimed at someone else, has as its goal: *revenge*.

2. What can the kind of anger that Christ is warning us against lead to? (Matt 5:22)
-
3. What always precedes murder according to this same verse?
-

Therefore, this kind of anger is as much a sin as murder!

4. How does this compare with 1Jn. 3:15?
-

YOU HAVE RIGHTS?

"You have the right to be angry!" This seems to be an accepted statement in our society.

5. When do you usually get angry (the kind that Jesus is now referring to)?
-

When Jesus made the whip and drove out the money changers from the Temple, it was *righteous* anger that He was displaying. He wasn't angry because His pride, feelings, ego, or rights had been violated. He was upset on behalf of God. Some of the "rights" that the world refers to are pure expressions of selfishness and pride. As Christians we are called to lay down these kind of rights.

HOW ANGER BEGINS TO EXPRESS ITSELF

6. What is our first reaction to someone who provokes us to anger? Note what Christ said in Matthew 5:22.
-

Jesus said that to call someone an insulting name, in anger, is to risk God's judgment. Christ gave two examples of what we would have to consider very tame insults: *raca* (empty head) [an insult against someone's intelligence], and *fool* [an insult against someone's character]. Not only have I called people by worse names than these, I've been called by worse names than these!

7. What is the point to Christ using two relatively tame insulting names to illustrate how anger is initially expressed?
-

Angry words fuel the flames of anger. The first thing to do in controlling anger is to guard our mouths! We need to develop into people who don't just spout out the first thing that comes into our minds.

8. How does James 3:2 describe a person who can control their tongue?
-

GOD AND DIVORCE

The same God who says that He hates divorce, also knows the pain of having His bride commit adultery, and this resulting in divorce (Jer. 3:8). It is also the same God that gave Israel laws regarding divorce (Deut. 24). So God is not out of touch with the reality of a sin contaminated world gone mad. But neither does He lower His standards. Marriage is good, and can be the nearest thing to heaven-on-earth when a couple puts into practice the principles of God's Word (eg. Eph. 5:21-33).

9. What are some of the cause of marital breakdown?
-

AVOIDING DIVORCE

Jesus has sternly warned about becoming involved with another person other than your spouse. "Involvement" is usually a gradual thing. It begins with innocent time spent alone with a person. Adultery doesn't just happen. It is the result of gradual compromise.

10. What kind of initially innocent situations should be avoided by two people of the opposite sex who aren't married? (Note the KJV 1Thess. 5:22; and 2Tim. 2:22)
-

Some simple tips on strengthening a marriage are -

1. Spend _____ together.
2. _____ to each other.
3. Affirm your _____ for each other.
4. _____ to God together, and for each other.

Amen.

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AVOIDING IMMORALITY

Read Matthew 5:27-32

We are all created by God to be in relationships with others. When God created Adam, He said it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). There is an ache in every human heart whenever we are subjected to periods of loneliness. This is because it is not natural. God wants to bless our relationships with others. He has consequently designed that all our relationships are governed by healthy parameters. In this way mankind can enjoy relationships with each other that can reflect the love of God.

But there is one type of relationship that God has designed to be very special. It is so special that it carries with it tremendous privileges. And as with any privilege, there are also certain responsibilities. Yet the fruit of sin upon relationships is the destruction of healthy relationships.

In the report on Suicide Prevention to the Victorian Premier (1997), sexual abuse, and dysfunctional family relationships are noted as among the highest reasons for suicide in Australia. Sin has wrought havoc on how God has intended intimate relationships to be made healthy, and Jesus had something to say about that!

THE ESSENCE OF ADULTERY

The marriage relationship is the highest relationship that two people can enter into. It was designed by God. And, just as man was created in the image of God, so marriage reflects the unity that the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) enjoys.

1. What was God’s original intention for those who were married? (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:3-6)

It is highly debatable whether God has a perfect partner destined for each of us. But there is no real debate at all, that when we marry, we have been joined to the person that God intends for us to be with *until death do we part*. Some Christians have got married, become dissatisfied with their partner and reasoned that perhaps they were not *meant* to marry that person in the first place. With this thinking they have justified themselves for wanting a divorce, or even committing adultery.

2. Is adultery ever acceptable? (note Ex. 20:14)

What Jesus Had To Say...

3. How did Jesus lift the stakes in the way adultery was defined? (Matthew 5:28)

The New Century Version renders that verse as -

But I tell you that if anyone looks at a woman and wants to sin sexually with her, in his mind he has already done that sin with the woman.

The Greek word translated as “look” means *to long for, to set the heart upon*. It is a looking that has developed into fantasizing.

4. What are we told to dwell on in our minds? (Phil. 4:8)

The mind is very powerful thing. Some estimate that we only ever use 10% of its capacity. And what a dangerous 10% that can be! What we look upon, affects the way we think. What we think about affects the way we act. On the one hand TV & Movie executives tell us that violent and immoral TV show or movie scenes don’t affect the behaviour of anyone. And on the other hand they sell advertising for millions of dollars to companies who know that what people look at does affect the way they think and the way they behave!

5. What did Jesus say would be the consequence of our bodies being used for immorality? (Mat. 5:29)

6. What warning does the Book of Revelation give us about the consequences of immorality? (Rev. 21:8)

7. What does Hebrews 13:4 tell us about how God feels about marriage?

8. How does God feel about divorce? (Malachi 2:16?)



- 6. Note the characteristics of a godly person as described in Psalm 15. How many of the things there deal with integrity?

To be Christian is to be honest. Christians should not use expressions like *“Just let me be honest with you for a moment”*, or *“...to tell you the truth...”*

- 7. How does God feel about people lying? (NB. Prov. 6:16-17; Rev. 21:8)

- 8. Is lying simply a matter of saying the wrong things? (1Jn. 4:20)

There is hope for those who have fallen into lifestyle of deceit. It is something that needs to be confessed (James 5:16), then renounced (turn your back on it). God’s promise is that He will wash us clean from such a lifestyle (1Jn 1:6-9). It is then up to us to walk in the truth (Jn. 8:32).

Amen.

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HONEST TO GOD

Read Matthew 5:33-37

No one likes being lied to. We especially don’t like it when we are lied to by those we ordinarily trust. One day my son came into the house and Kim asked him what he had been doing. He said that he hadn’t been doing anything. She asked him whether he had touched Daddy’s motorbike. He said “no”. Then Kim told him to go and look in the mirror. Around his lips was the black soot of a motorbike exhaust pipe! While that episode of attempted deception may be humorous, there are times when deception can be deadly.

We all know that the Law says not to lie. But the danger that Christians face is that they strive to be technically correct, while they actually end up being deceptive. We must be careful with expressions like, “Drop in anytime”, or “If there’s anything I can do for you, just let me know”.

Jesus set the highest standards of honesty for His followers, and He still wants us to be honest to God (and to men).

REPRESENTING THE TRUTH

There are many words that spring to mind when we describe God. Words like: *holy, awesome, omniscient, omnipresent, and just*. Strangely the word “honest” doesn’t seem to feature very often when describing God.

1. What does Hebrews 6:18 say that makes God so different from any person?

What God says, He means. Nothing He says is meant to give any other impression than the truth. We know that He has commanded us not to lie (Ex. 20:16). But human nature loves to go to the outer limits of we can get away with. So we end telling things to other people, that while not “lying” the truth has been misrepresented. This is done by pastors, when they meet together and tell each other how they and their churches are going. It is done by congregational members to their pastors, when the pastor asks how they are going with the Lord, prayer and Bible reading. It is done by Christians when they sing songs to God. It is done by parents to their children. And it is definitely done by children to parents.

2. “If you don’t eat your crusts, your hair won’t grow curly!” “If you’re a good girl this year, Santa might come at Christmas and give you that toy you’ve been wanting”. What are some forms of *deception*, not out and out lies, that parents often tell their children?

Can we live in this world, so full of deception and falsehood, and live a life of integrity and honesty before both God and man?

What Jesus Had To Say...

Firstly, Jesus said that we should be honest with our intentions (5:33).

3. What does Deuteronomy 23:21-23 caution? (Eccl. 5:4-5)

Making promises or oaths is unnecessary for the Christian (James 5:12).

4. According to Jesus in Mat. 5:37, why is this so?

There are times when making a vow is valid. These times are associated with the making of a covenant. This was usually a life long agreement, that carried certain penalties if it was broken.

5. When we came to Christ, you made a vow to Him. What does the Bible say we should do about that vow? (Ps. 50:14)

When Yongi Cho was becoming a Christian, he was suffering from tuberculosis. He made a vow to God that if God healed him of his TB he would become a preacher. God did heal him. But Cho went on to medical school to train as a doctor, until one day he started coughing up blood... And the rest is history.

CHRISTIANS ARE HONEST

Imagine if we lived in the kind of world that Jesus is prescribing. A world where there was no murder (because people didn’t even get angry with each other), no adultery (because people didn’t lust immorally), and no deception! In this kind of world there would be no need for police, locks, prisons, courts, or contracts!