

WEEK 12 (November 1-7) Sermon on the Mount— “Pursuit of Peace”
(Matthew 5:21-26)

Starting the Conversation

We often approach religious life and pursuit of God with the question of how to behave. Yet, Jesus issues a much deeper and more challenging question—“Who am I becoming?” Jesus highlights a fundamental truth. A person may be able to control outward behavior for a season, but the condition of the heart reveals the true character and state of a person. Such is the case with anger. While we may be able to prevent ourselves from taking violent action, revenge, or retribution, unchecked anger and bitterness can still erode relationships and personal character. It can prevent us from thriving and experiencing joy. It also has the potential of becoming a barrier between us and God. Jesus issues a stern warning and call to deal with that which lies inside the heart and to extend grace to others that we might have healing both without and within.

Let’s Read Matthew 5:21-22

Leader: As Jesus often does, he raises the bar on how we would define holiness and calls us to examine not just our actions, but our hearts towards each other. Here Jesus says that anger, insults, cursing someone and name-calling is subject to the same judgement as murder. *(As a note, if reading in the NIV – Raca means “you good for nothing” or “idiot” in Aramaic).*

- Why do you think Jesus is more after our hearts than our behavior?
- Do you truly believe anger and insults are as extreme of an offense as murder? Why do you think God sees them as worthy of the same judgement?
- Can you identify any times or situations where you are prone to get angry? Think backwards from that moment, are there any preventative measures you could take to help prevent the temptation?
- Read Ephesians 4:26-27: We will all experience anger, but as believers, we can shrink the time between the anger we feel and the forgiveness we offer – How could this transform your life as you practice this truth?

Let’s Read Matthew 5:23-26

Leader: Jesus also highlights the importance of swift reconciliation once you have recognized your offense – even before bringing your offering to God. Reconciliation is messy and restoration is not always available, but we can choose to live with a humble and forgiving heart no matter the circumstances. We can ask the Lord to show us our offenses and be bold in our obedience to reconcile swiftly. And ultimately, let that repentant heart bring us closer to the Lord, trusting His forgiveness.

- What would you say makes reconciliation difficult and messy?
- Why do we often procrastinate hard conversations or asking for forgiveness? Is there any reconciliation you are procrastinating now?
- How do you think holding onto anger, bitterness or pride impacts your relationship with God?
- The Lord desires for us to be reconciled with each other, even before receiving an offering – what does this tell us about how God views and values our relationships with one another? What does this show us about what God truly desires from us? *(See Hosea 6:6, Psalm 51:16-17, & 1 Samuel 15:22 for additional insight)*

Closing—

- Examine how you may have caused someone else to be angry. How can you be bold and pursue reconciliation in that relationship? Likewise, where are you angry? Ask the Lord to give you a heart of swift forgiveness and grace.
- Imagine a world without anger or insults and a world of quick reconciliation – how can you bring that heaven-like picture down to earth through your own actions and heart posture this week?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for how You call us to a holy and heavenly standard – even in our anger. Help us to surrender where we are angry and help us to be bold in reconciliation where we have caused anger. Continue to transform our hearts to flee all anger, insults and cursing and instead be filled with love, grace and encouragement for one another. In Jesus’ name. Amen.