

Bible Studies for Life: Distinct in My Relationships

January 28, 2016

- The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Feb. 14 focuses on Matthew 5:27-32.

In eighth grade, our coach conditioned us with wind sprints. These were 40-yard dashes we ran at the end of practice. That's right, after giving everything we had in practice, the coach wanted to squeeze every last ounce of energy we had out of us. To be honest, I must admit I never made it the full 40 yards. My wind sprints were more like 38-yard dashes, not the full 40 yards. I cut the wind sprints short. Easing up for those last two yards was tolerable to me.

For the most part, people are good. You're good. I'm good. Still, the temptation to cut our morals short exists. It's ever before us. We're good and pure almost all of the time, and then we cut something short just like the last two yards on my wind sprints. To be distinct in our Christian walk, we will maintain purity in our relationships 100 percent of the time.

Practice purity in your sexual conduct (Matthew 5:27-30)

The command "You shall not commit adultery" seems clear enough. If I don't have sexual relations with a person outside of marriage, then I'm obedient to this command.

Jesus moved beyond the simple legalism of the commandment. As in the Matthew 5:21-22 concerning murder and hatred, Jesus directed his comments to the heart or spirit of the Old Testament law.

The ultimate application of the intent of this command focuses on how one

treats and thinks of the opposite sex. In today's culture, the way men treat women needs to be addressed, for in general, women are more vulnerable in our society.

Sexual sin is a problem in our society, whether the sex is consensual or not. The same problem exists in our churches. No church should think that they are immune to such sin.

Sexual sin begins in lustful thoughts, just as murder begins with hateful thoughts. Control your thoughts in order to control your actions and your emotions that drive your actions.

Jesus said lust is committing adultery. He wasn't adding an extra burden to the law but was clarifying the law. Lust is antithetical to true love. It betrays others with thoughts. These thoughts begin to erode the health of our relationships, especially our marriages, and cause harm. Truly there is no such thing as a private sin committed in one's thoughts. The sins in our minds come out eventually in words and in actions.

The way to combat the problem of sexual sin is to maintain a healthy view of relationships with others particularly in regard to sexual relations. God's ideal not only should be taught as the best way, but also celebrated as the best way. Sex, whether in thought or deed, is meant for marriage and should be celebrated.

Maintain faithfulness in marriage (Matthew 5:31-32)

So much has been written and said about these verses on divorce in an effort to glean the truth Jesus taught. So much baggage comes along with the topic of divorce that discerning the truth Jesus meant can be difficult to ascertain.

Some truths appear to be self-evident in Scripture concerning divorce. First, divorce is not a goal people wish to achieve. I've never met a child in

third grade who looks forward to divorcing a spouse some day.

Second, divorce has negative consequences. Of course, there may be negative consequences for remaining married. I'm not disputing that. Still, the fact that divorce has negative consequences stands. An example is financial consequences. Both husband and wife experience financial hardship during and after a divorce. Women seem to face a disproportionately harder financial hardship after the divorce.

Third, divorce is an option too quickly taken. Marriage is hard work. Good marriages are hard work. I've said digging a ditch with a hand shovel is easier than making a marriage work. The difference is after digging a ditch, one just has a hole in the ground. After the work of marriage is done, a beautiful and wonderful relationship has flourished.

Unfortunately, many today have found a way to avoid divorce. These couples decide to live together outside of marriage. This way, they don't need a divorce to end the relationship. Of course, this violates the verses we just discussed (Matthew 5:27-30). These couples have merely traded one tragic situation for another.

The solution comes, at least in part, by focusing on successful marriages. Couples who remain married in a vibrant and growing relationship enjoy the depths of intimacy that only come with time. The goal of a happy marriage is well known, and added to goal of a happy marriage should be the goal of a long marriage. The success of long marriages will show the shallowness of living together on the one hand and of divorcing quickly on the other hand.

Looking back on my football career, I'm well aware of my limitations as an athlete. I was never going to be a superstar. Now, as I recall those dreaded wind sprints, I recognize that I didn't give my all. I didn't give 100 percent. I only gave 38 of 40 yards. In regard to sexual purity and purity in our

relationships, we need to give those extra two yards, always. Then, we'll all be superstars on God's playing field.