

6-SESSION
BIBLE STUDY



Session 4: Leader's Guide

DISTINCT

LIVING ABOVE THE NORM



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SESSION 4

DISTINCT IN MY RELATIONSHIPS

The Point: Hold on to purity at all costs.

The Passage: Matthew 5:27-32

The Setting: The passage for this session addresses the Seventh Commandment, “Do not commit adultery.” As with so much of the direction God had given His people over the years, efforts had been made to limit the scope of God’s intention, focusing on outward actions only. As Jesus spoke of adultery, and its corollary divorce, He held up the exalted view of marriage that God had set forth for His people.

QUESTION #1

When was the last time you couldn’t hear yourself think?

Optional activity: Transition between Question 1 and “The Bible Meets Life” by encouraging group members to spend 30 seconds in complete silence. Instruct everyone to put down their books, phones, and so on. Ask them to close their eyes and simply listen to the silence for half a minute.

Note: When finished, be sure to ask group members how they felt during this “moment of silence.” Encourage them to share what they were thinking and what emotions they experienced.

Video Summary. Faithfulness and purity have been a wonder to our culture, but it should be our norm. Purity is a battle that is waged in our hearts. Jesus calls us to sexual purity, both physically and mentally. It’s not just a call to purity in terms of our actions, but in our very being. It’s a call for absolute agreement in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Ultimately, temptation is not about our ability to say no. It’s about what we believe to be true about God.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 4. THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- Michael says, “Ultimately, temptation is not about your ability to say no. It’s about what you believe to be true about God. ... Do you believe that God really loves you or do you believe He is holding something back from you?” Spend some time talking as a group about how what you believe to be true about the character of God impacts your ability to live distinct in your relationships.

THE POINT

Choose actions and attitudes that are blessed by God.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The world's quietest room is at Orfield Laboratories in Minneapolis, MN. It's a chamber built with double walls of concrete and insulated steel covered by 3.3-foot thick acoustic fiberglass wedges. It's said that a person can hear his or her own beating heart, gurgling stomach, and even pulsing inner ear.

Most people can't take the silence for more than 30 minutes.

Our lives are filled with "noise," and we're often comfortable with that. But busy, noisy lives can keep us from hearing the truth of what's inside us. Greed, selfishness, lust, and a host of other things are hiding in our hearts.

When we recognize the dual threat of both the internal and the external, we see the gravity of God's call to live pure lives. It's not just a call to purity in terms of our actions, but in our very being. It's a call for absolute agreement in our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD MATTHEW 5:27-32.

Response: What's your initial reaction to these verses?

- What do you like about the text?
- What new application do you hope to receive about God's call to live pure lives?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 5:27-32

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery.²⁸ But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is

better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell!
³¹ “It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.³² But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

A written notice of divorce (v. 31)—The Greek word translated here originally carried the sense of abandonment of property; then, in Jewish circles, the term acquired the meaning of a certificate of divorce given to a woman so she could remarry without charge of adultery.

Matthew 5:27-30

There’s no doubt about it: sex is a powerful force in today’s world. “Sex sells.” But why?

The answer is that sex was designed to be the most pure, the most uninhibited, and the most unashamed kind of intimacy imaginable. God intended it to be an act in which a person is both known and fully knows another person without shame, holding nothing back. But, like everything else in the world, sex has been corrupted. Instead of serving as an expression of love and intimacy, sex has become a tool for personal gratification at the expense of another human being.

QUESTION #2

What are the dividing lines between “pure” and “impure” in today’ s world?

The goal here is to help group members consider how modern culture defines and influences our beliefs and actions related to purity.

Optional follow-up: What are the dividing lines between “pure” and “impure” in Scripture?

That brings us to the topic of purity. In Matthew 5, Jesus taught that true purity isn’t just a matter of abstaining from sinful sex; it’s a condition of the heart that must be corrected.

He called us to engage in the fight for purity at any cost. In verses 29-30, He gave us a battle plan for pursuing that kind of purity:

- **Identify the source.** Jesus told us to root out the source of impurity. His vivid illustrations involved the eyes and the hand, but we might think about temptation in terms of other sources. Are you tempted by images you see on your computer or television? Does a certain relationship or habit trouble you? Do you struggle during a period of time you have to spend alone?
- **Deal ruthlessly with the temptation.** According to Jesus, if our eye causes us to sin, we should gouge it out. If it's our hand, we should cut it off. Though that might sound extreme, the reason is simple: When you consider what's at stake, you'll do whatever it takes to protect your purity. When you consider that these patterns of behavior, if left unchecked, cause you to fall under God's judgment, then you'll start taking them a little more seriously.

QUESTION #3

How can we be ruthless in resisting impurity without being judgmental and condemning?

The goal here is to help group members consider how modern culture has influenced our beliefs about relationships and how we can live in a way that is so distinct that others take notice.

- **Replace the temptation with something better.** Don't focus on not thinking impure thoughts; focus instead on something better. Find something constructive to do for the kingdom with your time. Fill the void left by temptation with something more—something better—and soon you won't have to invest the mental energy to not think about whatever it was that caused you to struggle. It's been replaced.

SEEKING SOURCE

As sojourners in the modern world, we all face temptation from time to time. Highlight the words below that represent major sources of temptation in your life.

| | | | | | |
|------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------|----------|
| Television | Relationships | Isolation | Possessions | Popularity | Internet |
| Control | Loneliness | Peer Pressure | Credit | Power | Pride |

What's one step can take this week to distance yourself from one of the temptation sources you circled above?

Matthew 5:31-32

God created our bodies, and He gave us our human needs and desires as integral parts of those bodies. God also gave us good and right avenues to fulfill those desires. Sin happens when we seek to satisfy a God-given desire through an unholy avenue. Instead of turning to the God-given avenues of fulfilling those desires, we turn to whatever is easiest. Or most convenient. Or the least costly.

In verse 31, Jesus brought marriage into His discussion of purity. Marriage is the physical and spiritual union between a man and a woman for a lifetime; it is the one and only way God has given us to express and fulfill sexual desire.

Unfortunately, marriage—like sex—has fallen under the shadow of sin. God intended the marriage covenant to be a reflection of the covenant He makes with His own people and, therefore, to be unbroken. Because of sin, however, marriages have failed to live up to God's standard.

In verse 31, Jesus quoted from the Old Testament law (see Deut. 24:1). In this particular law, a man was required to produce a divorce certificate instead of just arbitrarily deciding he didn't want to be married anymore. This provision was instituted to provide legal protection for the divorced woman, since women had few rights in that culture and little ability to provide for themselves. Without this stipulation, a man could threaten to divorce his wife and leave her destitute

QUESTION #4

Whom do you look to as a model of faithfulness?

Even though the law was designed to protect women, the rabbis and religious leaders of Jesus' day had distorted this law to allow divorce for even minor complaints. What was designed to be good was being used to abuse.

QUESTION #5

How do we love God and love others in a culture of divorce?

Jesus called us back to the sacred nature of marriage. He did give one exception, however. Divorce may be permitted if a spouse is unfaithful to the marriage. That doesn't mean Jesus condones divorce; in fact, it means the opposite. God loves and values marriage highly as a covenant relationship. A marriage can be ended only if someone is unfaithful. Faithfulness is so important that, if violated, God will allow a covenant that was established before Him to be ended. What can we learn from these verses? Jesus is telling us to hold onto marriage. Commit to it. Don't run, but stay faithful. Keep the following in mind:

- **Marriage is difficult.** Marriage is difficult because we confront the depth of our selfishness. When we truly have to put someone else's needs ahead of our own, we discover where our commitments lie.
- **Marriage is supported.** No couple faces the challenges of marriage alone. God is with us, and God is for us. He is pro-marriage. In fact, He's so much in favor of marriage that He chose the relationship between a husband and a wife to represent His own relationship with His people (see Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2; 22:17).
- **Marriage is an opportunity for growth.** God uses difficulties within marriage to make us more like Jesus. Marriage, the most intimate relationship, is the ideal place to display and practice the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23).

"It is human to err. It is devilish to remain willfully in error."

~ St Augustine ~

GOING DEEPER: What are some specific obstacles that hinder you from demonstrating more grace and integrity in your reactions to others? (You may talk about other current issues such as LGBT)

Sharing stories is a great way to grow as a group. This question creates an environment for sharing based on the personal experiences of group members.

Optional follow-up: What actions can you take this week to remove these obstacles? Be specific.

LIVE IT OUT

Holding on to purity isn't always easy, but it's always valuable. Consider the following suggestions for seeking purity this week:

- **Replace.** What is one way you are spending your time that is not contributing to your personal purity? Look for something to replace it this week.
- **Serve.** Consider a practical way you can serve your spouse this week. For example, intentionally do the one thing around the house your spouse doesn't enjoy doing.
- **Talk.** Begin the process of accountability by letting your guard down with someone you trust. Initiate a conversation with that person and share one way in which you are struggling to hold on to purity at all costs.

You don't have to settle for the world's standard of purity and faithfulness. God has something more. Go after it.

Challenge: Life is about reactions. Things will happen this week you have absolutely no control over, no matter how well you plan. The question is: Will you practice grace and integrity when others make demands of you? Or will you hold tightly to your rights and privileges?

Commit to spending time in prayer every morning this week asking the Lord to equip and prepare you for what your day holds. Ask Him to help you welcome interruptions and reflect Him in your reaction.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to give each of you strength and wisdom to react in grace and integrity to the demands and interruptions in your lives.

My Thoughts