

6-SESSION
BIBLE STUDY

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE

Session 5: Member's Guide

DISTINCT

LIVING ABOVE THE NORM



MICHAEL KELLEY

 LifeWay
Biblical Solutions for Life

SESSION 5

DISTINCT IN MY REACTION

QUESTION #1

When have you felt like you were organized and on top of things?

THE POINT

Practice grace and integrity when others make demands of you.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Some of us live according to “to-do” lists. Time management folks tell us these are a great way to keep track of and prioritize the things we need to accomplish. The blessing of such a “to-do” list is that you have a target to shoot for. The curse of a “to-do” list is that it can remind you of what you didn’t get accomplished—or what remains to be finished.

Unfinished “to-do” lists happen a lot. That’s not because the tasks weren’t important. It’s because things pop up every day you simply didn’t anticipate.

Interruptions.

We can’t stop the interruptions or demands other people make in our lives. But how we react to those interruptions is completely in our hands. Jesus is concerned about our reactions. Why? Because the ways we react in irritating situations will—or won’t—show us to be distinctly Christian. Jesus calls us to a standard that is consistent, honest, and filled with grace.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 5:33-42

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.³⁴ But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God’s throne;³⁵ or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King.³⁶ Neither should you swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black.³⁷ But let your word ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one.³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.³⁹ But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.⁴⁰ As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well.⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

His footstool (v. 35)—When used literally, this term refers to an actual footstool (see Jas. 2:3). Here, the term is used figuratively—God has no need of a place to rest His feet. Thus, it represents the earth’s complete submission to God.

Swear by your head (v. 36)—It was a custom to guarantee the truthfulness of a statement by swearing or taking an oath by invoking God or some substitute for God; here, “your head” is that substitute.

Matthew 5:33-37

We’ve all felt the pain of a broken commitment or word. And we’ve all had our own share of failed commitments to others. It hurts in both directions.

As we continue with the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus pushing us to examine our integrity through the lens of our words and the promises we make. The Old Testament law repeatedly commanded people to keep their word and be absolutely truthful (see Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23). But by the time of Jesus, people

were making distinctions in their promises and oaths: some were super serious, others were not so serious.

If someone made a promise using God's name, he was bringing God into the promise; thus, it became a serious promise he must keep. But if someone simply gave her own word on a matter, it was considered much less serious. Jesus made the point that God is always involved when a person gives his or her word. Whenever we make a promise, we are doing so in the presence of God.

Here are two things worth remembering:

- Be careful what you commit to. Many of us have a tendency to overcommit ourselves. We may have the best of intentions, but at some point we have to develop the discipline of saying no.
- Keep your word when you give it. God honors the person "who keeps his word whatever the cost" (Ps. 15:4). Unforeseen circumstances can pop up that make it difficult to keep some promises. Even when it hurts to do so, however, the one who keeps his promises pleases God.

QUESTION #2

What motivates us to say, "I promise?"

Matthew 5:38-39

The Old Testament records this "eye for an eye" law three times (see Ex. 21:23-24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). But God's intention was to limit vengeance, not give license to it. The law was meant to make sure that conflict didn't escalate, but was kept within specific boundaries. Furthermore, the wronged individual was never to seek justice or vengeance on his own. Instead, the law served as a guide for judges as they decided appropriate punishments through court proceedings.

Jesus, however, reordered our thinking. He told us we are not to retaliate when we are humiliated or insulted.

QUESTION #3

What are some practical ways to turn the other cheek in today's culture?

Because we're born with the inclination of self-defense and retaliation, we are fighting against our sinful human nature when we follow Jesus in this distinct way. In other words, we must choose to deny ourselves in order to obey Jesus' commands.

- We deny our rights. People usually believe they have something coming to them when they're wronged. Yet Jesus called us to deny our "rights." We are to follow Him on the road of forgiveness and self-denial.
- We deny our entitlement. Closely akin to our rights is a sense of entitlement. Something rises up inside us that says, "I deserve better." But any feeling of entitlement fails to recognize that all we are truly entitled to is death and hell. We experience God's mercy and forgiveness because of His grace, not because we are entitled to them

QUESTION #4

When do we cross the line between turning the other cheek and living as a victim?

- **We deny our pride.** Often the worst part of what we experience at the hand of someone else is the blow to our ego. We feel humiliated and our pride is offended. We must let go of our inflated ego and release our pride in favor of following Jesus on the path of humility (see Phil. 2:5-8).

Matthew 5:40-42

As if it weren't enough to say we should not seek revenge when someone does us wrong, Jesus went the extra mile in His teaching. He said we should do the same thing—go the extra mile—even for those who want to take advantage of us. According to Jesus, we should overwhelm such people with kindness.

We tend to think about obedience in terms of minimums. What's the minimum amount of stuff I have to do to get by? That kind of attitude shows a heart out of touch with the grace God has lavished on us. Jesus' point is that we shouldn't focus on the minimum; instead, we should focus on how we can be a blessing to others.

To go the extra mile—above and beyond—takes more than willpower. It takes faith. We need to believe three things to go the extra mile:

- Believe God will provide. Going the extra mile is costly. It could be a coat; it could be some money; it could be our time. It will cost us something. We must believe in a God who will provide the coat, the money, or the time that we've given up for the sake of someone else.
- Believe God will rectify. When we give sacrificially for the sake of someone else, we might be tempted to treat it like a loan. We shouldn't. Much in the same way that we don't seek revenge because we believe God will set everything right in the end, we can freely go the extra mile without the expectation of payback. Trust in God, who knows what we've done.
- Believe God will redeem. What if we go the extra mile and nothing happens? What if the person doesn't recognize our gift or what it cost us? We might be tempted to become bitter and resentful, or to wish we never made the effort in the first place. But God redeems. Though it might seem like a waste at first, we trust God in His wisdom and power to redeem what we've done for His good purposes.

QUESTION #5

How do we prepare ourselves now to respond well when others make demands of us?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Jesus' command to go the extra mile is countercultural in today's society. How would you respond to a friend or family member who made the following claims? Choose one

"I have to look out for myself first and foremost, because no one else will."

"I have every right to be happy. I deserve it."

LIVE IT OUT

You're going to be caught off guard this week; how will you respond? Here are some ways to be distinct in your reactions:

- Keep your word. What is one commitment you've made that you wish you hadn't? Recommit yourself to keeping your word even though it's going to hurt.
- Pray. Is one relationship particularly difficult for you right now? Pray and ask God to bless that person this week. Even better, write a note and let the person know you've been praying for him or her.
- Go the extra mile. Think back over the past month. Have you missed any opportunities to do good for someone, an occasion when you chose to do the minimum? Go back and do something extra for that person this week.

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

My thoughts