

Week Two: *True-to-Life Approach*
Matthew 12:1-14

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. If you wanted to serve God the best you could—right now—what would be the most God-honoring, holy thing you could do?
2. Now think about your answer: did it involve withdrawing from the world around you (such as studying the Bible or praying), or was it more about engaging with the world around you (such as volunteering to care for needy people, doing an act of kindness)?
3. How might a Buddhist or Catholic monk have answered this question? Would they think it's holier to focus on God or to focus on the world?
4. Read Philippians 2:1-8. What act of Jesus Christ is Paul describing?
5. How did Jesus answer the question of what's most pleasing to God? Was it holiest for Him to stay in heaven with God the Father, or to come to earth to help us? How should we understand God's choice?
6. God prioritizes the needs of people over staying separate and unsullied. How does God's choice impact our own understanding of the best ways we have to please Him? What are the holiest kinds of things we can do?
7. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you see the holiest ways you can serve the needs of those around you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Here's a classic ethics question: what if you had to break the law to do something good for someone else? For example, would you steal a loaf of bread if you had no other way to feed your family?
9. A Lutheran pastor in World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was faced with an ethical dilemma:
“During this time, Bonhoeffer was teaching pastors in an underground seminary, Finkenwalde (the government had banned him from teaching openly). But after the seminary was discovered and closed, the Confessing Church became increasingly reluctant to speak out against Hitler, and moral opposition proved increasingly ineffective, so Bonhoeffer began to change his strategy. To this point he had been a pacifist, and he had tried to oppose the Nazis through religious action and moral persuasion. Now he signed up with the German secret service (to serve as a double agent—while traveling to church conferences over Europe, he was supposed to be collecting information about the places he visited, but he was, instead, trying to help Jews escape Nazi oppression). Bonhoeffer also became a part of a plot to overthrow, and later to assassinate, Hitler.”
Do you think Bonhoeffer, a pastor and Christian leader, violated God's law (that we should not murder)? Why or why not?

10. Read Matthew 12:1-2. What act of Jesus' disciples offended the Pharisees? Why?
11. At this time, people simply thought of Jesus as a holy man. What conundrum did holy people—who respected the Sabbath—now have to wrestle with?
12. “Resting on the Sabbath” had been a moral law for thousands of years, but now Jesus' people seemed to be disregarding it! What is an example of a moral issue in our culture today that some believers no longer seem to respect or defend? (If you struggle to think of something, check your Facebook page!)
13. We haven't gotten to the end of the story, but you can guess that Jesus will probably explain some nuance to the law that changes how a faithful person interprets it. Think of the issue you identified above: what are some nuances that could explain how a faithful believer might change how they interpret it? If you struggle with this question, why don't you find someone you know who holds an opposite position from yours and ask them to share, while you simply—and only—listen.
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray and ask God to show you His heart behind the moral laws He gave us. Ask Him for humility and an openness to learn more about His laws, unlike the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Let's speculate about intent for a moment. Why do you think God might have made a law that says, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15)? What's the point of such a law? How does it benefit humanity?
16. Let's try another one. Why might God command, “Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material” (Leviticus 19:19)? What is the benefit of such a law?
17. The first question was probably easier to answer than the second, wasn't it? Now read Matthew 12:1-4. After you've read it, ask yourself: “What is the point of God's law to ‘remember the Sabbath’ (Exodus 20:8-11)?”
18. The Pharisees only ever paid attention to the “what” of God's law. They never bothered to ask about the “why”. But Jesus gives them a hint through His example of David and the sacred bread. Read 1 Samuel 21:1-6. What choice did Ahimelech the priest face?
19. What is the “what” of the law of sacred bread? (See Leviticus 24:5-9.) Why did Ahimelech choose to honor?
20. As Christians who stand for God's moral law, how important is it that we understand the “why” behind the law before we enforce the “what”? Think of some of the moral controversies facing us today (immigration, sexual morality, freedom, poverty, sanctity of life): what “whys” might be getting lost in the discussion?

21. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to reveal to you His why's. Ask Him to help you have discernment as you sift through the best way to honor the intent of God's laws, and not merely the letter.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. How to honor the Sabbath has been a controversial subject for thousands of years. Do you think it breaks God's law to work on the Sabbath? Why or why not?

23. Read Numbers 15:30-36. How fair do you think this story is?

24. Now read Matthew 12:1-8. Keeping in mind Numbers 15, how justified do you think the Pharisees feel in their reaction to the disciples' actions? Weren't they right in their traditional understanding of the law?

25. A Lutheran pastor cautioned that sometimes Christians "can be right wrongly," but we need to figure out how to be "right rightly." In your own words, what do you think this means?

26. On what contentious issues of today would you say that Christians are "right wrongly"?

27. Now take a moment to get personal. Are there any interactions or positions where you think you were right, but maybe you still didn't handle it the way you should've? What are those? How can you change your actions, even when you know you're "right"?

28. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that God will show you the difference between winning the argument (being right) and winning the person (being righteous).

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. When you make a rule in your household, why do you think your children should obey it?

30. Your answer likely fell into one of two camps: "Because I said so," or "Because it's good for them." Which camp do you think God's moral laws fall in?

31. As a refresher, skim Matthew 12:1-8. What is Jesus' final point and conclusion (vs. 8)? Is this a "because I said so" camp, or a "because it's good for you" camp?

32. Now read a different account of the same story in Mark 2:23-28. It's a very similar summary, but with one extra line. What is it? (Hint: see verse 27). How does this line change the motivations behind Jesus' interpretation of Sabbath law?

33. How does this truth change how you see God's heart for you? Why does God make rules that you should follow?

34. How does this truth change the way we should talk about God's moral law with other people?

35. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you radically reorient around His heart for you (and others) and not simply His rules for you (and others).