

From the Heart

[Matthew 5:21-37](#)

Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, contains many regulations and commandments about specific details of everyday life. Jesus' followers sought to discover what it meant to apply these teachings in new situations. Applying a traditional rabbinic method – "You have heard it said...but I say..." – Jesus addresses the difficult topics of daily life and deepens their meaning for an ethical life. As he discusses anger (vv. 21–26), adultery (vv. 27–30), divorce (vv. 31–32), and true speech (vv. 33–37), Jesus tells his audience not just how to act but how to be – be in the image of God.

On first hearing, the rules Jesus sets out seem like stricter replacements for the commandments given in Deuteronomy. At a closer look, they deconstruct actions of murder, retribution, betrayal, abandonment, and lying into symptoms of our hard-heartedness and refusal to be reconciled to each other. In holding up the vision of each person with hearts reconciled to God and one another, Jesus claims personhood for all parties involved. The judged and the judge are not bound in the past but together are liable for the justice and reconciliation of the future. Condemnation of adultery – thought as well as deed – challenges our tendency to treat others as objects rather than as subjects. This idea, along with coming down on the accepted practice of men divorcing their wives, furthers Jesus' campaign for the equal personhood of women.

The lesson on oath-taking seeks not merely to rid an antiquated practice but to open our eyes to the insidiousness of self-interest. We are either too concerned with being liked or accepted or so unconcerned with the hearer of our words and the receiver of our pledges and vows that we do not take care in speaking words that are true or in making sure they stay true.

Life is full of opportunities, especially for those living in an industrialized and technological society. Still, options aren't the same as the choices we make that change the course of our lives.

People chain pattern

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Big Ideas

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Today's Bible Reading

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Additional Bible Readings

[Deuteronomy 30:15–20](#)

[Psalm 119:1–8](#)

[1 Corinthians 3:1–9](#)

**Explorer of our hearts,
discerner of our souls,
we invite you into the
depths of our
struggles.**

**We open the
locked doors. With
words of love and
boldness of truth, we
ask you to knock on
the hardest places of
our hearts and soften
them so we may love
you and love our
neighbours. Amen.**