

ELEVATE: Living Life At The Highest Level

Session #3: Powerful Purity

Session Intro: One of the most common questions I am asked in Youth Ministry is: “How far can I go in this particular area before it is a sin?” We’ve all been asked a few of those questions before. “How many beers can I drink at a party before it is a sin?” “How far can I go with my girlfriend before it is a sin?” “How disgusting can the lyrics of my favourite CD be before it is a sin to listen to it?” These types of questions demonstrate our tendency as Christians to want to live at the outer limits of the Kingdom. Jesus wants to take us deeper; into the inner Sanctum of Abundant Life! In Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus starts at the outer boundaries (The 10 Commandments) and He leads us on a journey into the inner places of God’s Character where we discover a powerful purity that characterizes the best of Abundant Living.

Session Objective: The objective of this session is to get students focused on the true character of God revealed in the teaching and person of Jesus and to use that understanding to develop purity principals for abundant living. In simple terms, we want to have students stop asking: “How far can I go?” and get them asking: “What is the best way to live?”

Minimum Prep: Read through the entire session outline. Prepare an environment where discussion can occur. You will also need an overhead projector and a dry erase marker.

Extended Prep: The main learning activity in this session is a mapping exercise designed to help students identify the outer limits, the connecting pathways and the inner core of Kingdom Life. It can be done on an overhead projector but if you have more time and imagination then consider creating a floor map with art and visual enhancements. You could have students build the Kingdom components out of LEGO even. Get creative! You’ll have more fun and your students will learn more.

Session Outline

Leader Preamble:

Have you ever gone for a walk through your neighbourhood when all of a sudden you hear a dog barking and you turn around and it is jumping up and down and scratching at the fence that is keeping it inside? Most dogs spend an awful lot of time working the boundaries and wishing they could get out into the bigger world and pee on all the trees and bark at all the people they see. I think a lot of Christians are just like that. Now I'm not saying that most Christians pee on trees or sniff at people's.... Well whatever, but I am saying that an awful lot of Christians spend an awful lot of time working the boundaries of Kingdom Life.

You see God laid down some outer markers called the 10 Commandments. Now a lot of people just role their eyes and say: "Ok, here we go with all the rules!" whenever you mention the 10 Commandments, but that's just because they don't understand what the 10 Commandments are. They are not a chain keeping you away from good stuff, they are property markers indicating the limits of the Abundant Life God wants each of us to enjoy. God said "Thou shalt not commit murder" because Abundant Life is better when we are not all stabbing each other in the heart with sharp swords. God said: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" because by and large, people get very angry when you have an affair with their husband or wife, and angry people often pick up sharp swords and stab other people with them. One commandment kind of leads to the other, and all together they mark out some limits to how life should be lived. I think we'd all agree that a world without murder, theft, cheating and lying would be a pretty good place. That's what they 10 Commandments are about: Life the way it was meant to be lived.

But Jesus was able to do more than just give us the outer limits. Jesus, you remember, promised us that He was the Key to Abundant Life. Remember, He said: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"? Well, He delivered on that promise. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes us on a journey past the outer markers deep into the inner core of Kingdom Life. He shows us the true character of God and He promises that if we try and live like that, we will find ourselves enjoying Abundant Life.

So tonight, we are going to try and create some lifestyle pathways that lead from the fence line into the Inner Core of Abundant Life. We are going to mark the pathways and the inner core in smaller groups, but let's first try and identify the 10 outer markers.

(Leaders: This is when you stop your introduction and begin testing them on their knowledge of the 10 Commandments. Use Appendix #2 which has the blank boxes for this part. Appendix #1 is your cheat sheet. It has the answers written in. Put their answers in the correct boxes as it will help explain the connecting laws that Jesus works from.

(I.e. it's important to put 'No false vows' between the Commandment: 'Do not take the Lord's Name in Vain' and 'No false witness' because they relate and explain one another.) If you have done the extended prep, you might be building labels for LEGO outposts rather than filling in boxes on an overhead, but the same instructions apply. Once you have completed the testing and labelling of the boundary, split them up into groups for the rest of the exercise.

N.B. Sharp students will immediately recognize that not all of the Laws that Jesus clarified are actual 10 Commandments. This would be a good time to tell them something like: "The Rabbis taught that the 10 Commandments were the core of the Old Testament and that all the rest was sequel, application and commentary". As such, Jesus is drawing from some of the laws that were commonly understood applications of the 10 Commandments. You will need to draw some connecting "fence" between the outposts to help them visualize this. For example, Jesus quoted a law saying: 'You shall not make false vows'. That is not one of the 10 Commandments but it does tie together the spirit of two of the 10 Commandments: 'Do not bear false witness', and 'Do not take the Lord's name in vain'. For a sample of how this should be done see Appendix 1.

Small Group Preparations:

Divide the students into Small Groups. It would be ideal to have 5 small groups (because Jesus provides 5 pathways) so that each one can tackle one of the connecting pathways. If you have a smaller group, then adjust accordingly.

Small Group Questions:

For this activity each small group is assigned at least one of the connecting pathways found in Matthew 5:21-48 between the fence line and the inner core of Abundant Life. Your fence line will begin with words of Jesus that sound like this: "You have heard it said 'Thou shalt not murder' but ..." That's your fence line statement. Write down your fence line statement in the space below.

Leader Note: You should provide each of the groups with one of the five fence line statements of Jesus provided in Matthew 5:21-48. They are as follows:

- 1. Thou shalt not murder*
- 2. Thou shalt not commit adultery*
- 3. Thou shalt not make false vows (verse 33)*
- 4. An eye for an eye (verse 38)*
- 5. Love your neighbour (verse 43)*

Fence line statement: You have heard it said: _____.

1. **Jesus marks out a connecting pathway that gets us started on the journey from the outer marker to the inner core of what Abundant Life will look like. For your fence line and pathway finish this sentence three times:**

“To get further down the path towards the inner core of Abundant Life we will want to”

i.

ii.

iii.

Leader Help: For example, for the Adultery pathway Jesus said things like: Looking with lust upon a woman is the same as committing adultery. If your eye causes you to stumble, cut it out. Therefore, your sentences might be 1: Be careful about what I let my eyes look at. 2: Be careful what I fantasize about. 3: Take extreme measures to guard my purity. Those would be three things you could do to progress in the journey along the path from fence line to the inner core of abundant life.

2. **Your second job is to begin dreaming about what Life would look like if we all travelled down this path. You are making dream statements about what Abundant Life looks like. Think of it as the target zone for your particular pathway. Try and come up with three dream statements.**

Finish this sentence three times: The Inner Core of Abundant Life would be a place where ...

i.

ii.

iii.

Leader help: For example, for the pathway that starts with ‘Thou shalt not murder’, your dream statements might look like this: The Inner Core of Abundant Life would be a place where all human life is precious. It would be a place where everyone valued relationships over personal ambitions. It would be a place where our differences would not create hostility between us.

Be prepared to share your findings with the rest of your group.

Lesson Debrief:

After you have completed the Small Group exercise gather the students back into a large group and have them practice and apply the teaching of Jesus to other areas. Jesus basically called on us to move away from the fence line and to travel deeper into Abundant Life. Let's practice that by using 'Core Language'. You might say the following:

Leader Say: Tonight we've talked about moving away from the fence line of the Kingdom where the question is: "How far can I go until I am in sin?" That is the question the 10 Commandments and the connecting laws answer. "You can go this far but no further. You can't kill a person, you can't lie or steal etc." But Jesus wants us to go deeper and to discover the true heart of God that will help us experience and live Abundant Life. We looked tonight at 5 pathways that He led us down so that we could get deeper into the world of Abundant Life. Let's practice applying that idea to some other areas of our lives as well. I'll give you a fence line question and you turn it around into a connecting pathway that leads deeper into abundant life.

#1: How far can I go with my girlfriend before it is a sin? (Fence Line question)

Now you turn it around for me. (Sample: What are some ways I could treat my girlfriend that would honour her as a child of God and a precious human soul?)

*#2: Can I cheat a little bit on my taxes since I pay so much anyway?
Turn it around for me.*

*#3: How much swearing can be in the lyrics of a song before it is sinful?
Turn it around.*

Keep doing that until they get it.

Leader Note: Contact Rob McAlpine at compass@baptist.ca or Paul Carter – paul@lpsc.ca with any thoughts or questions suggestions.

Comments and Feedback:

Leader Note: This is your place each week to record significant sharing or growth in the lives of your students for subsequent follow up. You can also use this space to provide feedback on the material. All suggestions are welcome.

Please see the following handout. You have permission to reproduce these handouts for your group.