

How have you got on with having one day of the week which is really a 'Sabbath Rest'? On which day or even perhaps half-day, is it feasible? What are your Sundays like?

This week's verses about putting the Beatitudes into practice finds Jesus tackling one of the most uncomfortable of human emotions to talk about: lust Read Matthew 5: 27-30. Q: How do we feel after reading these verses?

1. Why do we need to talk about lust?

- Surely this is a private matter and not anyone else's business? But we saw last week that Jesus' challenge with anger is to deal with angry intention in the heart, not just with violent action. Lust is also a heart matter. Learning to live without it will involve understanding what Jesus meant and talking it through.
- We need to be honest: nobody is perfect, we are human, we are all weak and we all lack self-control.

2. Jesus' Teaching on Living without Lust.

- **Verse 27.** He starts by quoting the sixth commandment to His Jewish audience: 'Do not commit adultery'.
Q: What do you think was going through His listeners' minds when they heard that?
- **Verse 28.** He answers their thoughts: '...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her **in his heart**'. It is the intention that is all-important. Jesus says 'Don't look, think or touch'.
- It seems an impossible standard until we find that the Greek word translated 'lust' is *epithumia* which is 'to intentionally objectify another person for our own satisfaction'. This is more than feeling attraction.
- God created us as sexual beings who feel attraction (the first 'look') but if we go beyond that to wanting to explore more intimately, that is *epithumia*. *Epithumia* is the second 'look' which doesn't value the person made in God's image but just values the owner of a body, a personality or a character which 'I want for myself'. *Epithumia* is the voice in our head which says the 'grass is greener on the other side of the fence'. Gratification might be sought through multiple partners, marital infidelity, pornography, books, films or TV shows or by fantasising about the perfect wife or husband or the ideal boy or girlfriend.
- **Verses 29-30.** The prevailing notion was that sin resides in the offending part of the body: the eye was seen as the organ through which we are tempted and the hand committed the sin. So Jesus uses a rhetorical device called *reductio ad absurdum* to reduce that argument to its logical absurdity. Getting rid of hand or eye is absurd, it is the heart which needs changing.

3. Dealing with Epithumia.

- Be real before God and acknowledge our failings. **Read Ephesians 5:11.**
 - Jesus has already paid the price for every time we have desired someone else, had a 2nd 3rd Look.
 - Jesus death and resurrection has given Him the victory over our sin: we don't have to live in a prison of our private failings. When we're honest with God there is always forgiveness in Jesus.
- We all struggle with this but we are the Church and we are here to help each other. Let us intentionally create an environment of safety, honesty and vulnerability with people we can trust to hold us to account. Join a small group where these things can be shared and read St Paul's advice in **1 Timothy 5: 1 – 2**.
- Hold onto the love of God our Father and spend time with Him so that all other desires fall into the background. Be overwhelmed by the love of God for us that was so great he sent His Son to die for us.
- **Psalms 23:1-2** tells us the Good news that the grass is greener! God has better and more beautiful things in store for us which He offers, not by demanding we keep a set of rules, but by following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep and will lead us to green grass and still waters.

Soul Training Exercise: The Forty-eight-hour media Fast.

1. JBS quotes Rob Bell on page 95 who says life is not about toning down our desires but about channelling them and using them in the life God has for us. Until we are grateful for that life we will always be craving another: lust is a hunger for perfection, only to be found in God's Kingdom.
2. He suggests we start to free ourselves from the junk we are subjected to with a 48-hr fast from: internet, television, newspapers & mags, radio, video games, iPods, mp3 players & stereos.
3. There are lots of ideas for what to do instead on pages 100-101 of 'The Good and beautiful Life' by James Bryan Smith & more questions in Chapter 5 and on pages 232-234.