

Day 1

January 20



Pray | For greater depth of understanding of scripture

YOU'LL UNDERSTAND WHEN you're older.

There are moments in the life of a parent that are vastly underrated. One of these moments is when we have the opportunity to use a line on our kids that we hated hearing when we were young, such as: “You’ll understand when you’re older.” The beauty of it is that we get to completely frustrate and annoy the child while saying something that’s absolutely true! Each of us has childhood experiences that we can look back on now with a greater depth and breadth of understanding. The original experience hasn’t changed – it is a true event that took place – but with age and wisdom, we may have a better understanding of the motives of the people involved, or the complexities of the event, so that the memory is filled in, added to, and completed. This is similar to what Jesus meant when he said he had not come to “...abolish the Law or the Prophets,” but to “...fulfill them” (Matt 5:17).



Read | Matthew 5:17; Isaiah 53:3-5



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

“The Law and the Prophets” refers to all Scripture that was available to Jesus’ followers – what we now know as the books of the Old Testament. Jesus says he did not come to undermine or nullify the O.T., but to fulfill it. What do you think he means by ‘fulfill’? For help in understanding how Jesus fulfills the O.T., consider taking the Story of God class at Five Oaks.

Jesus says he is the fulfillment of Old Testament scripture and he quotes O.T. verses often during his ministry. If we don’t spend time reading the O.T., we won’t have a true understanding of Jesus’ words or of God’s plan for our salvation. If you have put most of your focus on reading New Testament scripture, consider making a plan for delving into the books of the O.T. What might be some other reasons to read and study the O.T.?

The Bible is not an easy read. We can spend a lifetime studying its pages and still be confused by certain stories and verses. Whether you have a lot of Bible knowledge or only a little, take the time now to praise God for drawing you closer to him every time you read his Word. How has reading the Bible impacted your faith journey so far?

Day 2

January 21



Pray | Thank God for being trustworthy to keep his promises

TRUSTWORTHY.

Trustworthy seems like a word we should use sparingly. Maybe we deem a newspaper trustworthy until a story turns out to be false. We might call a minister trustworthy and then discover he has stolen money from the church. We might entrust our kids to the care of a teacher and discover he has abused them. In a fallen world, trustworthy is a standard that is difficult to maintain. Thankfully, we can hold in our hands the true meaning of trustworthiness - the Holy Bible. Every word carries the full authority of God; every story has meaning, every prophecy will be fulfilled, even to the smallest detail. Jesus is making this point in Matthew 5:18 and implies it every time he quotes Scripture.



Read | Matthew 5:18; Isaiah 55:10-11; 2 Timothy 3:16



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

God is trustworthy to keep his promises – he will do everything he says he will do. There may be times in our life when it doesn't feel like God is keeping his promises to us. What are some ways you can combat this feeling and hold on to the truth of Scripture?

Paul calls Scripture 'God-breathed' in 2 Timothy 3:16. What does this description mean to you? Does it add to or change in any way your view of the accuracy or inerrancy of the Bible?

Having multiple copies of the Bible in your home or seeing it under every seat at church can make the Bible seem commonplace instead of sacred. What are some ways we can be reminded that the Bible is the very Word of the Almighty God, revealed to us?

Day 3

January 22



Pray | Confess your sins, no matter how small they seem

IT ALL LOOKS like garbage.

Have you ever ranked the Ten Commandments? Secretly, of course – maybe only in your head. Because, seriously, why would lying even be on the same list as murder? Everybody lies. And what’s wrong with wanting your neighbor’s new car as long as you don’t actually steal it? We’re talking about things bad people do and go to jail for versus stuff that even normal, decent people sometimes do. The problem is, all of it is sin – jail or no jail. You can rank it in your head but when you present your case to a perfectly holy God, it all looks like garbage to him. Your tiny fib is no worse -- and no better -- than the next person’s adultery. We might try to convince ourselves that some sins aren’t as big of a deal to God as others, but it isn’t true. They all separate us from him.



Read | [Matthew 5:19](#); [Isaiah 59:2](#); [James 2:10-11](#)



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

People are adept at justifying their thoughts and actions, even when perfectly aware they are in the wrong. One way we do this is by telling ourselves “everyone else does it, too.” Can you remember a time you’ve used this excuse? What do you think God’s response would be?

The word for ‘break’ in Matthew 5:19 can also be translated as ‘relax,’ as in relaxing God’s standards. For instance, we might decide that when God said do not lie, that means we can leave out important parts of the truth. Can you think of any ways in which you might be lowering God’s standards in your life? Ask God for help in recognizing this.

Seeing our own sins as minimal compared to someone else’s sin can be easy to do. Unfortunately, this comparison quickly leads to pride and self-righteousness. What can you do to guard against falling into this trap?

Day 4
January 23



Pray | Confess to God your need for him

AN IMPOSSIBLE STANDARD

What if you were told that the only way to get to heaven is to be humbler than Mother Theresa, smarter than Albert Einstein, kinder than Mr. Rogers, and a better artist than Michelangelo? You'd probably throw up your hands in defeat and pack your summer clothes for an eternal vacation with Satan. This might be a bit like what Jesus' followers thought when he told them they had to be more righteous than the 'Pharisees and the teachers of the Law' to get into the kingdom of heaven. More righteous than the people that have spent their entire lives studying Scripture and carefully following its commands? Impossible! And that's exactly the point – it's an impossible standard for us to reach on our own. We need help.



Read | Matthew 5:20; Romans 3:21-24



Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

When his followers heard Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:20, they did not have the knowledge of Paul's words in Romans 3. Take a moment to imagine how they must have felt hearing Jesus' words. How does Matthew 5:20 begin to lay the groundwork for Jesus' death and resurrection?

Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for all of our sins – past, present, and future. We can rest in the knowledge of this. Jesus also asks us to live like he did – an impossible standard. This is why we still need God every day and every hour. What parts of your life are you trying to do on your own? Are you willing to turn it all over to God?

Jesus' words in Matthew 5:20 serve as a wake-up call to his followers that no one is 'righteous' enough on their own. We need to accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to make us right with God. Have you accepted his gift of grace or are you still trying to be good enough on your own? If you want to know how to receive grace, ask a pastor or trusted Christian friend today!

Day 5

January 24



Pray | For God to grow your love for him and others

CHECKLIST RELIGION

Who doesn't love checking items off a list? It feels good to cross off a 'to-do' and bask in a moment of accomplishment; every check mark is like a friend saying, 'You rock!' Stick to the list and life will be perfect: eat your vegetables – check; go for a run – check; say 'I love you' to the spouse – check. What happens, though, when the list becomes your life? When you care more about the check mark than what you're doing and why?

Checklists have value, of course – but they are only a measurement of outward behavior. They don't measure what's happening in your heart. This is what the Pharisees didn't understand. They followed all the rules, checked all the items off the list for everyone to see, and completely lost the meaning of it all. They were more concerned about the outward measurement than the inward transformation.



Read | Matthew 5:17-20



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Every Christian has the potential to become like a Pharisee when we start checking items off of our Spiritual list: prayer – check, Bible reading – check, weekly church service – check. What are some ways you can guard against turning your faith journey into a 'to-do' list?

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus sets the stage for a rebuke of the Pharisees. He's telling them (and us) that shallow, external obedience with the intent of earning righteousness on your own is useless. He's already done the work for us; his desire for us is an inward transformation – that we would grow in our love for him and others and our life will bear the fruit of that love. Do you love God? How are you showing him your love?

These days, it seems as though everyone has a very long checklist. 'Busy' is the word we hear most often when we ask others about their life. Will you make a commitment this week to set aside the checklist and take time out to connect with someone you haven't seen for a while and show them love?

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®)*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. ® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.