

# How do we know how to live

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[0:00] How do we know how to live? That is in one sense my question for today.! How do we know how to live?! What does Jesus demand of us?

And if we're honest, probably many of us live just like our neighbours. Our life might not look super different to those who are around us, but Jesus calls us to much more.

And my message for you today in one sentence is this. Jesus knows best. Obey him. Jesus knows best. Obey him.

Let me read to you. This is Matthew chapter 5. Picking up where we got to last time. It's Jesus who is talking. So it's from verse 17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota nor a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

[1:09] Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and you then come and offer your gift.

Come to terms quickly with your accuser when you're going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you've paid the last penny.

[2:25] You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away, for it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away, for it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the grounds of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

[3:37] And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no. Anything more than this comes from evil. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, excuse me, I forgot the mic was there, turn to him the other also, and if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your, excuse me, take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

[4:51] Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect. This is the word of the Lord.

Yeah, very muted on that one, because you really wish it didn't say any of that. Okay. It's quite a long section of scripture that frankly we could do an entire, we could do a whole term, getting through what does this mean by each of these instructions, and what does it involve, and what doesn't it.

So I am inevitably going to skim over things that you're like, but what does that mean? So forgive me. But if we think about where I started, this is talking about the law, it's talking about the law and the property, it means what we would call the Old Testament.

And sometimes people claim that the New Testament is kind of softer than the Old, or maybe it's more flexible, or it's sort of, that doesn't really count anymore, the Old Testament, you don't have to worry about that.

Jesus says that's not true. He says he did not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. But what he wants to do, and what he's doing through these series of teaching that I read out, is showing us, as it were, the deeper meaning of the law.

[6:03] He's saying this is what it always meant. And calling us to do that deeper meaning. And Jesus knows best, and we should obey him.

And in fact, his demands are not lower, but higher. Did you notice that? In verse 20 he says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. So these are the guys at the time who were very serious about the Old Testament, about the law, and they're like, you must do this. In fact, they introduced lots of extra laws to, in their minds, help people do it. Now Jesus gets, they are one of his primary enemies. He gets incredibly cross at them, very often.

But they wanted to take the Bible seriously. And he says, unless your righteousness exceeds theirs. And he said, the problem is they don't really understand what it means. Unless your righteousness exceeds theirs, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

He is calling us to higher demands. He says, your whole life should look very different from those around you.

[7:11] And what I'm going to attempt to do in the not that large amount of time that I have left is just telling, he gives us, this is where these five or six commands, I mean there's six, but the last two seem to come as a pair, which you could definitely do five sermons on.

I'm going to focus on a couple of them. And one of the things that he's doing is he's teaching the people he's talking to to understand the second table of the Ten Commandments. So Ten Commandments comes in two fives, external, well, sort of towards God and then towards others, on both sides of a tablet, two fives.

And he's going through the second five. Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, and don't cover.

That's actually the way he's structured it. A couple of them you might go, wait, that one's that one? Yes, Jesus is, in fact, the Deuteronomy makes exactly the same pairings that Jesus makes here. But he wants us to understand what's going on.

And he goes through, for almost all of them, these same three steps. He says, you have heard it said. And then he quotes the Old Testament. He never contradicts it. He quotes something from the Old Testament.

[8:20] You've heard it said this. And he isn't saying that's wrong. He says, yes, that's true. And then he says, I say to you, which is interesting, so he's saying, well, I'm on the same level as the one who spoke that.

I mean, he is the one who spoke that, but he's not quite claiming that yet. But I say to you. And then what he does is he describes some of the internal dynamics that lead to that breaking, that

command.

And then he offers his own command, which is usually a way of keeping yourself from falling into that internal dynamic that breaks that command.

You'll see what I mean when we walk through. We're going to certainly look at the first two in some detail. But the way I would put it, and the way I would summarize all of these, is this.

What is Jesus saying? We're going to say, Jesus knows best, obey him. What is he saying about all these different ethical commands that he's giving? He's saying this. Don't feed the troll. Did you spark that?

[9:19] No, your face is like, I don't know what you're talking about. Don't feed the troll. Now, if you've been on the internet at all, you know that's good advice. You shouldn't feed the trolls. They just talk more. But essentially, there's a monster in your heart, if you like.

Think of it as a little troll sound of the bridge. If you feed it, it grows. If you feed the thing in your heart, it grows into big, visible sins. And Jesus wants us to both identify what does the troll look like that grows into murder or adultery or the others.

But then he's like, and then, don't feed it. And then he gives a command that helps his people to not feed that thing. And we should be aware of this dynamic in ourselves.

We, you know, we, depends how well you know yourself. Sometimes we're just surprised by our own sin. But the better you learn yourself, the more you're like, well, I can see where it came from. Maybe it felt inevitable like watching a steam train very slowly approach.

But I can see where it came from inside of me. I can see that dynamic. It's like, and actually, if I'd been aware, I could have stopped it. What does he mean?

[10:28] Well, what does he say? You have heard it said to those of old, you shall not murder. And whoever murders should be liable to judgment. And we all think, yes, this seems like a good idea. I would not like anyone to kill me.

But he says, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. And whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. Remember, he says, you fool will be liable to the hell of fire.

What's he saying? Murder grows from anger. That's his point. Now, I think if we're not reading carefully, we can think he's saying don't be angry. He's not saying don't be angry.

How do we know he's not saying don't be angry? Well, the Bible says in multiple times, be angry and do not sin. You find that in Ephesians 4 and you find that in Psalm 4.

Be angry and do not sin. That's quite difficult but it must be possible. Be angry and do not sin. And if we look at Jesus himself, we see occasionally he gets quite angry about particular things.

[11:31] There is something called righteous anger. And, intriguingly, when he says whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire and we think it feels quite mild actually, even that just above it, whoever insults his brother, the Greek is whoever calls his brother a blockhead.

And again, you're like, oh, it's not that mean as it goes. You're probably thinking some words in my head even if I'm not supposed to say them in church. Sure, don't. But, Jesus uses those exact words in Matthew's gospel about some of his opponents.

He calls the Pharisees fools. Straight to their face and so you think, okay, so when he's saying he doesn't literally, he cannot literally mean if you say the words you fool because he himself does it. So what's he talking about? He's talking about the fact that anger doesn't stay put. Anger is a hungry little troll that lives under the bridge of your heart.

Anger will grow until it turns into a visible sin like murder. That's his point. He's like, if you let, if you feed anger, you will end up killing someone.

[12:44] And you think, I don't know that I will. But you will end up with an outburst of some sort into a visible sin that may not be physical, it might be words that you say, but it will burst out of you if you feed anger.

So what do you do? What does he say to do? He says, if you're offering your gift at the altar and they remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.

first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Okay. His command is reconcile. How do you fix this problem and feed, stop feeding this anger?

He says, reconcile. I think what is particularly surprising is he's talking about your anger and this is if your brother has something against you. So what's his point?

His point is that we want to feed our anger but instead what we have to learn to do, it's hardly easy, certainly not an example for you, but it's flip the thing and instead go, where have I sinned?

[13:56] Where do I need to go and apologise? Where do I need to go and do something first? You might be like, I'm primarily in the wrong here, sure. But what did you do wrong?

What can you do about it? And even if it's not that, and he's like, you're just feeding your anger, that anger will start to spill out in numerous ways.

And so his command is, deal with the consequences of what you've done depending on how far you've let it get down the track. If the troll under the bridge, if you fed him lots, he's got quite big, there might be quite a lot of consequences to deal with, but deal with them.

Go and ask for forgiveness from whoever it is that you need to ask forgiveness from. And just as a kind of partial comment, actually, if the person doesn't know that you're angry with them, going to ask forgiveness is not going to help anybody.

I don't know if you've ever seen this in churches, but people do it because they think, oh, I'm very cross with them. And they're like, no, that's not a Christian thing, and I'm going to go and tell them that I forgive them, but they have no idea that they've wounded you in the first place.

[15:03] What you're doing now is not helpful. It might be helpful to go and say, you know, when you said that what I heard was this and that hurt me, that might be a helpful conversation to have.

That might be very sensible, but it doesn't help you to go and say, I forgive you, very crossly, about, clearly you're not, about the person who has no idea that they've hurt you, but forgive where you need to.

That might be a thing you need to do internally, it might be a thing you need to go and tell someone about, depending on what the situation is. Undo the gossip, by which I mean, if you've gone and told other people about the fact that you're very cross with this person about this, well, that's gossip, that's also a sin, go and undo it.

You should talk to the person that you're cross with. Make restitution. If you've done something that is wrong, make it right. Find a way to make it right. That's the kind of, Jesus is giving an example of that in the command he gives, but find a way to make it right.

And don't defend your honor. This is what, all that stuff in verse 25 and 26, when he's like, come to terms quickly when you're going to court. He's like, don't defend your honor. You might be like, I could defend myself here, you know, I wasn't totally in the wrong.

[16:09] Probably not. Very few things are that clean cut. All sinners, almost no human, pretty much every human interaction contains people sinning against each other. You probably have in the room this morning.

I imagine I have. I'm not currently aware of it, and that is often our problem, but I probably have. So we try to learn to not defend ourselves, not defend our honor, not stand up and be like, I have rights.

Sure. But Jesus says, kill the cycle, kill the beast in your heart. Stop feeding the thing. Find a way to end it.

In fact, that is what's behind all of his commands, really. He's like, these things turn into cycles. Find a way to end them. Do the thing that ends it. Do the thing inside yourself that ends it rather than perpetuates it, whatever it is.

So not don't be angry, but don't feed your anger. On that rare occasion, it's rarer than we'd like, that we have righteous anger. Great, go and do a good thing with it, but be angry and do not sin.

[17:24] For big trolls grow. And then it gets much worse. And it's exactly the same pattern when we turn to lust and adultery. So he says, you've heard it said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you, so that's the command, don't commit adultery.

It's there in the Ten Commandments, don't do it, bad idea. And by this he means sexual activity outside of the union of marriage, or I suppose particularly sexual activity when you are married, there are different words in the Bible for otherwise, but sexual union belongs within the covenant of marriage as a good gift from God to point to deep theological truths about the way he loves his church.

And so he says, keep it there. It's a wonderful gift. But he says that adultery grows from lust, but I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So that phrase lustful intent, it kind of implies not, what would be the right term, not sort of the spark of attraction, but the thing that you do immediately next.

So your eyes might well catch somebody and think, oh, they're attractive, but then do you feed that thing? Or indeed, looking on a woman with the intent of lusting after her, is the description he's giving, rather than your eyes catching and then moving on.

[18:49] Don't feed it. And if anyone here thinks, I find that very difficult, I tend to look, what can you do practically?

Well, Jesus gives them some advice in a minute that we'll look at. My advice to you would be, prayer and lust do not coexist well in your heart. Pray for the person that your eyes have caught on. I think you will find that quite helpful. If you find yourself, you find your eyes following, it tends to be men, but not always. If you find your eyes following someone, think, okay, now I need to pray for them. Commit yourself to it.

Pray that the Lord would meet them and that he would rescue them and save them. You'll find that there's something quite surprising in your heart and will lead to a different sort of love towards the person. sin. But what does Jesus command?

So he says, well, adultery grows from lust. And this one we find much more obvious. We sort of think, yes, okay, that probably is how it works. He says, if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

[19:57] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. Okay? Does he literally mean tear out your eye or chop off your hand? No.

But is the principle the same? Yes. So let's get super practical. If you are looking at pornographic material with your eye, you need to, in some fashion, tear your eye out and throw it away.

If you are masturbating with your hand, you need, in some fashion, to cut off your hand. What does he mean? Remove these things. Remove the stimulus. That might mean you need to throw away your smartphone.

That might mean you need to not have internet access in your house. You're like, oh, that sounds very radical. Well, maybe. But Jesus says, get as radical as the idea of cutting off your hand is in order to stop this, if this is a thing that you struggle with.

And it's pernicious, and lots of people in the room will, and everyone will think I'm the only one here, but it is horrific and very addictive and rewrites your brain chemistry in such a way that it captures people, mostly men, but increasingly women as well.

[21:02] They look different, but do the thing that you need to do. If you're like, actually, the problem is when I'm with that thing in that place. Well, then don't be with that thing in that place.

Like, mate, if it's just, oh, actually, my phone needs to live downstairs in my house. Okay, great, do that. Like, do the radical thing that's going to, Jesus' point is, run away. That's his point.

Run away from sin. So, like, what is the thing that is causing me to fall into this pattern? He's like, well, you're feeding a troll. Stop feeding it. How are you going to stop feeding it? Run away. It's notable that this command is directly addressed to men.

That's probably not super surprising. Like I say, it's not only men who fall into lustful patterns. But the reason it's particularly notable is in Jesus' day, women were entirely blamed for men's lust.

And Jesus is deeply unusual in his day by saying that is not how it works. men's hearts are their own fault. And that's important that we understand that.

[22:11] It's like, yes, sure, modesty is a biblical pattern, and we're not particularly talking about that today, and it's got more to do with the heart and the out and all the rest of it, sure. But men's hearts are their own fault. So don't you, if you struggle with this, don't you dare blame the women that you lust after.

it's entirely your fault. Of course, it can be a real trap. I have, I, there, I have, I've walked with many men through this over the years.

It can be very difficult to get out of. It's pernicious. Talk to someone. And if someone talks to you about it, meet them with compassion, not judgment, but then move towards practically where are you going to cut off your hand?

What's the thing that you can do to, you know, throw away your phone, whatever it might be? Okay. I don't have lots of time, so I am going to now start to skate over some things that you're like, but I wanted to know about that.

So Jesus teaches on divorce. He teaches again on divorce in Matthew 19, so forgive me. We're going to do it when we get there. He then talks about oaths, which can seem very esoteric and alien to us.

[23:30] Essentially, the point is tell the truth. When it gets down to it, the point is tell the truth. And then he talks two things about retaliation, this thing about knife and iron, this thing about love your enemies.

And he says in verse 39, do not resist the one who is evil, but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, I won't do it again, but allow them to slap on the other two. And again, in much the same way, you're like, hang on, didn't Jesus resist evil?

Much like, well, didn't he get angry on occasions? Surely there must be occasions that's right to resist evil. The phrase can be translated, do not resist evil by any means.

And to some extent, that seems to fit what he's saying a bit better, because his point is you do resist evil, but only with good. Only by doing good. You don't resist evil in a way that perpetuates a cycle of violence.

So he starts by quoting a famous law from the Old Testament, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, which sounds barbaric to us perhaps, but was introduced to cut a cycle of vengeance.

[24:37] That was the point of the law, was to say you may only take an eye if they've taken your eye. You can't kill them. That was the point of the law, was to say no more. to stop ongoing cycles of violence.

And Jesus says, since the point is to stop ongoing cycles of violence, go further and stop them. If they hit you on one cheek, he's like, off for the other. And we think, this sounds crazy.

But what's his point? His point is that if someone hits you, and mostly we're not talking about physical violence here, but if someone hits you, the law would say, well, you may strike them back once. It's fair, right?

It's an appropriate amount of revenge. But Jesus is saying, you could. But what you're going to do is you're going to perpetuate a cycle because they're going to hit you again, aren't they? And this might not escalate, but it will continue.

He said, instead, if you turn the other cheek, what you do is you stop yourself being a victim and you take power. Because you actually say, go on then. And you force the other person to be in this position where they're like, oh.

[25:44] Do I want to hit you again? And they might not. Done. And if they do, well, it's still done. Because what you've done is you've given your right to revenge to them, and you're like, well, now the thing's done.

Now, this sounds strange to us because we don't live in a kind of honor-shame revenge culture. But Jesus' point is, take the initiative to end the cycle.

If the thing is kind of perpetuating, tit for tat, find a way to break the cycle. Don't feed the troll. The troll wants you to go back. So find a way to stop it.

And indeed, then, he goes on to tell us to love our enemies, which I have no time to say anything about other than to say, of course, that means you should have enemies.

We find that strange. But you should, and you do. And the devil hates you. And you possibly have many more enemies than that. But you then need to respond to them with love. You do them good.

[26:50] You do them good. Those who hate you, those who hate the faith, those who want you to fail, you do them good, where the opportunity arises. And you end the cycle. Now, you could say so much more about that.

Actually, there's sorts of political questions, too, that I'm not going to attempt to answer. I just want us to end on this thought. Jesus said he fulfilled the law for us. That means many things, but it definitely means this.

He did not murder those who deserved it. Or defend himself himself. Did those Roman soldiers who attacked and nailed him onto a beam of wood deserve death? Yes.

He did not cheat on his wife, the church. Nor did he divorce his wife despite her adultery. I don't know, again, not a theme I've got time to pick up on, but the Old Testament is very clear that we, as the church, are an adulterous wife.

We fail the Lord all the time, but he is faithful to us. He did not divorce his wife. He told the truth. He did not retaliate. When struck, he turned his cheek and broke the cycle, and Jesus loved his enemies.

[28:02] Who were his enemies? You were. That's what the Bible tells us. Anyone who's come to faith, you were an enemy of God, and he loved you into relationship with him.

So Jesus knows best. best. Obey him. Go have the band. The reason you can obey him is because he's gone ahead of you and gifted you his Holy Spirit.

None of this is easy stuff. It's not like, oh, okay, I'll just, I know, I get it. I'll just break the cycle. It doesn't really work like that. We're in patterns, and it's difficult, and you usually have to talk to someone about it, and you certainly need the help of the Lord, and it often takes this kind of gradual thing over a long period of time.

But he knows best, so obey him. Even on the things that we're like, surely he didn't mean that. Well, if that's what he said, obey him.

Even on the things that we think, surely that's really outdated, and it's just not how the modern world works. Well, if that's what he said, obey him. Jesus knows best.

[29:12] Why don't we stand together, if you're able? I'll briefly pray, and then we'll sing. Lord Jesus, we come to you in one sense soberly, because we think, I don't know if I can live this way.

I don't know if my heart's actually like that. If I'm honest, there's quite a lot of trolls under quite a lot of bridges, and I keep throwing them food. And yet we come to you knowing that when we come to you, all we bring to the party is our sin, that we turn up at the door with big old sacks of rubbish, and you say, just put them down, and in you come, and you welcome us with grace upon grace upon grace.

We also know, Lord, that your disposition towards us is not primarily a pointed finger, but open arms. And you say, come. And you love us into goodness.

And so we ask, Holy Spirit, that you would come, yeah, and provoke us and prick our consciences and show us where we need to repent and show us where we need to live differently, but also that you would flood our hearts with grace to know that we're loved anyway.

Thank you, Lord. Amen.