

Feb 12/23 – Small Group (Leader's Guide)

Read Matthew 5:33-37

1. What was the hypocrisy and the dangers of the rabbinic tradition that had developed around oath-taking that Jesus denounced?

The religious teachers focused on the kinds of oaths that were used to make vows rather than about the vows themselves. The tradition gave wiggle room for people to back out of their promises, or to be excused or justified in not fulfilling their vows, depending on the class of oaths they've used. This is hypocritical as it promotes a form of religiosity that encourages lying, deception, and capriciousness.

2. Jesus repudiates the rabbinic tradition and teaches His followers to not swear at all. What did Jesus mean by this? Are Christians permitted to take oaths or not?

Jesus did not mean to never swear at all. He Himself testified under oath by the high priest before the Jewish Supreme Court that He is God's Son. Rather, Jesus meant for His followers to be always speaking truth as though never needing to take oaths at all. Christians would never need to rely on oaths because they are always speaking truthfully and plainly. But, if for others to believe and be assured of Christians' words, they can take oaths for the sake of the other.

3. Let our yes be yes. How can we as a community of Christians help one another to press into our affirmations, commitments, vows, and promises? For example, in marriage vows (not only for the couple but for the people who witnessed those vows), or in our baptism vows as a church, or in our pacts and maintenance of friendships.

Allow people to share from their own experience, stories, or suggestions. One practical way is for us to ask one another the hard and personal questions: how is your marriage going? How are you doing with your relationship with God? How are your friendships? Are you connecting with people in church?

4. Let our no be no. How can we as a community of Christians help one another to press into our denunciations, our stance against evil, immorality, and injustice, our setting and respecting clear boundaries of one another?

Allow people to share from their own experience, stories, or suggestions. One practical way is for us to be open to get into hard conversations about hard and controversial topics. The key is to have these conversations in trusting, humble, and open-minded relationships where there is no judgement or condemnation. We can then talk about hard social, moral, political, and religious issues that may have people disagreeing, as long as we are not ultimately divided.