

LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:

Walk Humbly with Your God

Strengthening Your Grip on Purity

Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–5



LET'S BEGIN HERE

“Pleasure is supreme.” . . . “Follow your feelings.” . . . “Do whatever makes you happy.” . . . “Purity? That went out with the Puritans!”

These slogans of our pleasure-obsessed society pulse from the media like a strobe light, mesmerizing us into a state of moral apathy. Sitcoms depict abstinence as fit for only the undesirable or the immature. And advertisements blatantly seduce us into acquiring absolutely everything our hearts desire.

But before we burn the media at the stake, we have some confessing of our own to do. Christianity historically has been the advocate and defender of purity, but that may no longer be the case. When we watch the news and read about current events, the church seems silent. Maybe we have drifted from the call to defend biblical purity.

Far too many Christians have bought into the “pursue pleasure at all costs” philosophy. Marriages are breaking up at almost the same rate inside the church as outside. Christian leaders often create just as much scandal as any movie star. And many churches no longer place holy living at the top of their priority list. But purity, as Paul explained in Romans 6, is a powerful alternative to our culture’s formula for living.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Moral Erosion: A Historical Fact

If Paul were to step into the twenty-first century, he might gawk at our technology, but our depravity wouldn't surprise him a bit. Even though there were no crude talk shows or indecent music videos in Paul's day, he was familiar with immorality. Divorce and homosexuality were widespread in the Roman Empire. That's why Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: to warn them about letting the poison of sexual immorality seep into the church.



Quotable

*If you're a
day old or
60 years old in
Christ,
the command
is the same:
gird your minds
for action.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Moral Purity: An Attainable Goal (1 Thessalonians 4:1–5)

After ministering for only a few weeks among the Thessalonians, Paul had been able to impart to them the life-changing truth of the gospel. But Paul didn't just want to increase his list of converts; he wanted to teach them to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who [had called them] into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to excel in godliness, which would result in closer fellowship with God and more satisfying lives.

3. Moral Correction: A Biblical Mandate (Matthew 18:15–17)

Purity is a conscious choice; it doesn't just happen. But what if a Christian decides to follow his or her passions into an impure lifestyle? Well, that's where *church discipline* comes into play. This phrase conjures up all sorts of images and feelings—sullen-faced legalists, strict conformity to every jot and tittle, and loveless judgment. Unfortunately, these impressions come from an inaccurate, unbalanced understanding of Scripture. God never intended church discipline to be used like a black boot of tyranny. It's actually a last resort, meant to keep the body of Christ pure and healthy. And the purpose of church discipline is always *restoration*!



A CLOSER LOOK

Church Discipline

So what are the steps of church discipline? Jesus outlined this process for us in Matthew 18:15–17:

1. *Go yourself:* If you see a brother or sister in Christ living a lifestyle that is destructive to him or her and potentially harmful to the church, you must lovingly confront that brother or sister in person and in private (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15).
2. *Take someone with you:* If the offender rejects your loving confrontation and continues an impure lifestyle, you must take another Christian with you and try again to talk with the offender. Maybe, when faced with two loving brothers or sisters in Christ, the offender will repent (Matthew 18:16).

Continued on next page



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3. *Tell the church:* If the offender refuses to repent at this point, the impurity must become a matter of public knowledge to the church. This doesn't necessarily mean bringing the person in front of the whole congregation for discipline. Depending on the circumstances, a group of elders or other church officers may handle the problem best (Matthew 18:17).
4. *Treat the offender like a non-Christian:* If step three has no effect, the church must begin to treat the unrepentant offender like a non-Christian (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–7). This person will no longer be welcome at church and definitely cannot take part in the Lord's Supper. The church must break off fellowship with the offender until loneliness and godly sorrow leads the person to repentance. Though this step seems harsh, it worked in the Corinthian church, and the sinning brother was eventually welcomed back into fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:6–8).

Remember: though church discipline can be unpleasant, its ultimate purpose is to purify the body and bring sinning Christians to repentance and back into the community of faith.



LET'S LIVE IT

Before we begin to think that purification only applies to those involved in obvious, public sin, we need to remember that we *all* need God to do His purifying work in our lives. That's why Jesus died for us. His blood makes us pure in God's sight. The Holy Spirit and God's Word help us to live in purity each day. Sure, we will all fail. But through Christ, we will always receive forgiveness and restoration.

What temptations are you most susceptible to? What lifestyle changes should you make to avoid those lures? Take some time this week to meditate on 1 John 1:9 and to thank God for His grace.



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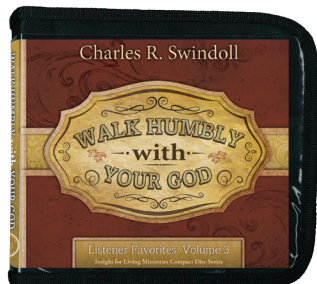
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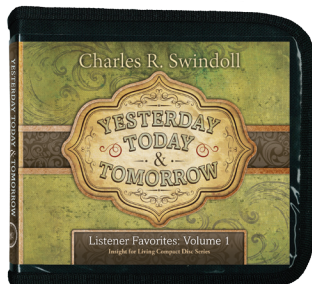
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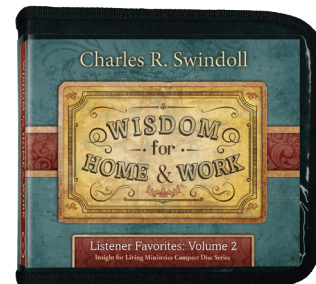
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LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:

Walk Humbly with Your God

Simplicity Starts from Within

Matthew 5:17–26



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Though centuries have passed since He spoke them, Jesus' words remain just as penetrating as when they first fell on the ears of His original audiences. Because He alone spoke with anointed authority, people were amazed as they listened and ultimately became changed individuals.

Christ's teachings continue to bring about powerful transformation and arouse the attention of all who study them. Nothing Jesus stated was ever more profound than His Sermon on the Mount. With searching wisdom, He peeled back the externals of hypocritical religion and addressed the issues that really matter. In the section of Scripture we'll examine in this message, Jesus discussed the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law.

At the heart of Jesus' instruction is righteousness—the state of having sufficient grounds to stand before a holy God.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Authority of Scripture

Authority involves the ability to command obedience. Jesus possessed the authority to compel obedience because He was God in the flesh. In the same way, the Bible compels its readers to obey because it is the Word of God.

The authority of Scripture is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith because without it, we are all left to distinguish right from wrong by ourselves.



Quotable

*We cannot
be right with
God if we
aren't right
with others.*

Take the first step.

It's your move.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:

Walk Humbly with Your God

Simplicity Starts from Within

Matthew 5:17–26

2. The Fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17–26)

Jesus taught with authority, a stark contrast to the prophets before and the apostles after who spoke in the name of the Lord or in the name of Jesus.

Such teaching raised questions about Jesus' relationship to the Law. If Jesus taught with authority, then was the Law still authoritative? Did the words to Moses pass away with the coming of Jesus and the church, or were they still maintained? And what about for followers of Jesus; would the Law carry authority for them as well?

Three truths emerge from this passage. Jesus honored the Law and lived under its authority. Jesus calls Christians to a life lived in obedience to God and His Word. We cannot be right with God until we are right with our fellow human beings.



LET'S LIVE IT

We can adopt these three guidelines as we seek to implement in our lives the lessons of this passage:

- *The principles of Scripture go deeper than the externals.* Christianity is not just about a change of behavior, though it is partly that. Following Christ will continually mature us throughout this life, ending with complete transformation and new life inside and out in the next life.
- *The potential of anger is greater than words.* It's difficult to quantify how badly our words can impact others. When we speak in anger, we can do a kind of lasting damage that leads to the death of joy, hope, and love in the lives of others.
- *The power of reconciliation is stronger than revenge.* When we humble ourselves in order to reconcile with someone who has been angry with us, we create an opportunity to bring renewal into the world.



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LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:
Walk Humbly with Your God
Simplicity Starts from Within
Matthew 5:17–26

Have you been relying on externals? Consider a few areas in your life where the image of goodness has outweighed the substance of goodness, and record them below.



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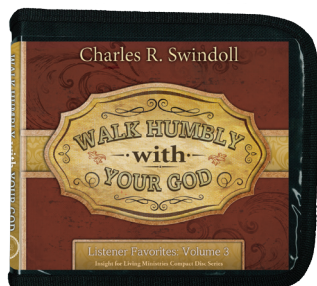
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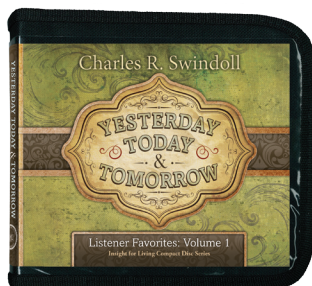
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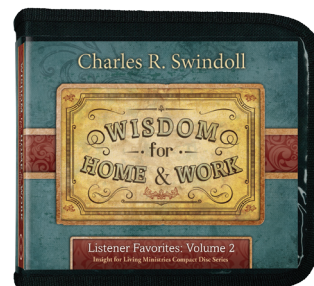
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LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:

Walk Humbly with Your God

What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've all heard it said that we never stand taller than when we kneel before God. But what actually happens when we offer our prayers and petitions to God? Does He change His mind? Can we alter His plan or reverse His course? If not, then why pray? In this message, we zoom in on Abraham's passionate intercession on behalf of Lot and his family in the face of the imminent destruction of Sodom. By analyzing Abraham's prayer, we can understand the struggle that occurs between petition (*what* we ask for) and desire (*why* we ask) and gain insight into the important role prayer plays in our lives. As we do, we'll learn to pray with confidence before the throne of grace.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Two Major Ingredients in Most Prayers

According to James 4:2–3, there are two ingredients in prayer: the *petition* (the request itself) and the *desire* (the reason for asking). The petition is *what* we ask for; the desire is *why* we ask for it.

2. Four Ways God Responds to Our Prayers

When he approached God with his request in Genesis 18:22–26, Abraham had no idea how the Lord would answer in this particular situation. Likewise, we cannot know exactly how God will respond when we pray. However, as we reflect on various prayers throughout Scripture, we see four ways the Lord responds to humans' petitions and desires.

- Petition: "Yes" . . . Desire: "No."
- Petition: "No" . . . Desire: "Yes"



Quotable

*You're seldom
more Christlike
than when
you have strength
under control.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Walk Humbly with Your God

What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

- Petition: “Yes” . . . Desire: “Yes”
- Petition: “No” . . . Desire: “No”



LET’S LIVE IT

Abraham’s life was a life of prayer. Through his example and our reflection on the Bible’s teaching on prayer, we learn that we may experience three possible answers to any prayer.

1. God can (and often does) say yes!
2. God can (and often does) say no!
3. God can (and often does) say wait!



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What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

Recall a time when God said yes! to your prayer in just the way you petitioned. Describe this experience in the space below as a constant reminder that God often does answer when you call on Him.



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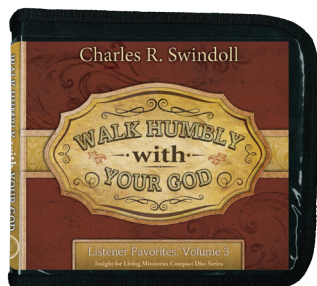
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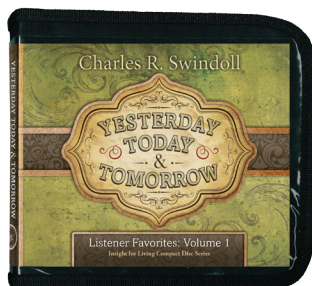
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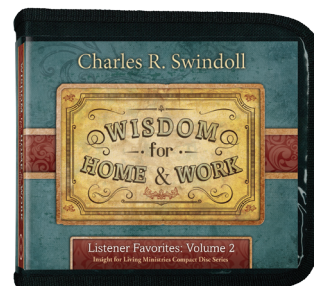
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LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:

Walk Humbly with Your God

The Qualities of Simple Faith

Matthew 5:1–12



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We can read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in fifteen minutes or less. No teacher or preacher has ever packed more truth into such a brief period of time. For centuries, these words from Matthew's gospel have been scrutinized by millions of Bible students, authors, pastors, and missionaries. Yet, no one has even come close to exhausting Jesus' message.

Our hope in this study is to glean a few fresh, practical insights that will enable us to stay on course in living lives that are distinctively different. For as we shall be periodically reminded, the underlying challenge of this sermon is: *be different!* With this primary theme woven throughout, it's no surprise that our Lord began His famous sermon with a list of character qualities unheard of in a dog-eat-dog society.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Initial Observations of Jesus' Sermon (Matthew 5:1–2)

When approaching a sermon like this, it helps to glean some context about the setting and delivery of the message. How something is delivered is often just as important as the actual content and words of the speaker. In bringing context to the Sermon on the Mount, we can better understand the thrust of Jesus' message.

In particular, we can observe four interesting qualities about Jesus' most famous sermon. First, He delivered it outside, not inside. Second, He sat down instead of standing up. Third, He "taught" rather than "preached." And fourth, He blessed them rather than rebuked them.



Quotable

*How marvelous
to call on the Lord,
for His glory,
make known
your petition,
and then wait
on Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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LISTENER FAVORITES, VOLUME 3:

Walk Humbly with Your God

The Qualities of Simple Faith

Matthew 5:1–12

2. Fresh Examination of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12)

Understanding this passage of Scripture requires us to ask and answer two general questions before analyzing the specific beatitudes.

First, what does it mean to be blessed? Second, are the blessings of the Beatitudes available to us today?

We can claim the blessings of the Beatitudes today, even if we know that these blessings will fully arrive only in the future. That Jesus spoke in the present tense regarding possession of the kingdom (Matthew 5:3, 10) suggests that even the Lord expected that there were those whom He considered part of God's kingdom in the present, even though His kingdom had not yet come completely.

We have to recognize that the blessings of all the Beatitudes have not yet been fully inaugurated. The full comfort of God has yet to come to the mourners of this world, though many have received God's comfort in some measure. Therefore, as we think about these blessings, we should see them as available in part in the present and available in full when Jesus returns to inaugurate the fullness of His kingdom.



LET'S LIVE IT

We can take two practical steps in making the Beatitudes more of a reality in our lives:

- *Apply one beatitude per day.* Trying to make all of the Beatitudes a reality in your life *right now* is probably not realistic. So instead, take them one at a time. Over time, the Beatitudes will become more of a reality in your life.
- *Start noticing the contrast between the world's message and Christ's philosophy.* See the world around you through the lens of the Beatitudes, so you can avoid those common pitfalls where the world doesn't measure up to the truth of Christ's teaching.



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Matthew 5:1–12

How do you think an increased practice of the Beatitudes would change your life? Pick one or two beatitudes and be specific.



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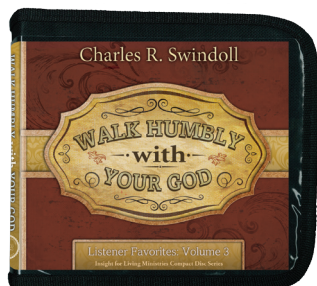
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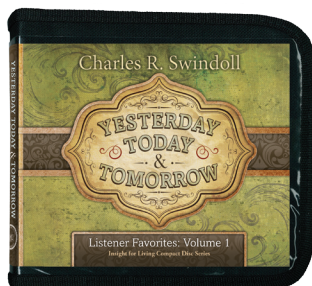
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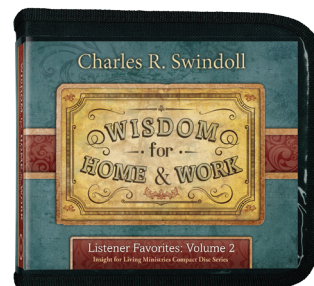
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