

## Patrol Your Pleasures

Leader's Guide

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*What does Jesus think of fun?*

*When asked to give an adjective that describes Jesus of Nazareth, what comes to mind? How many of you instantly thought of the word fun? Not too many, I imagine, and that's too bad. There is simply no way to closely read the gospels, or human nature, and not conclude that Jesus Christ lived with a spirit of joy, humor, and warmth that caused others to genuinely enjoy themselves. But as humans, we have skewed this idea in every way.*

Scripture: [Matthew 5:27–30](#)

Based On: "No Wonder They Crucified Him," sermon series by Daniel Meyer, [PreachingToday.com](#).



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### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.**

Have you ever known children to throng around someone who wasn't fun? Yet the Bible mentions that Jesus welcomed kids. Have you ever known a bunch of men who'd voluntarily leave their jobs and families to go road tripping with somebody who was miserable to be around? Yet that is precisely what fishermen like Peter, government workers like Matthew, and political activists like Judas were willing to do for the chance to be with Jesus. Women like Mary and Martha kept the light on in their home, just hoping Jesus might drop by. Burned-out businessmen like Zaccheus climbed trees in hope of meeting him.

People found the teaching of Jesus "fun" to listen to. He regaled people with marvelous images of camels grunting to get themselves through needle eyes, and old women scavenging under tables looking for lost coins.

Christ's teaching was filled with humor, satire, and irony; his vision of God and his kingdom was jammed with joy. Jesus described God as an amazing dad who's willing to forgive unbelievably stupid acts by his kids, and even by criminals, when they come to their senses. Jesus pictured the kingdom of God as a place where people's tears were dried and replaced by singing, where there was rejoicing over people being found or coming home, and where banquet tables were overflowing and more and more chairs kept being hauled out of the closet so that anyone who was willing to accept his invitation would be sure to find a place.

The first miracle Jesus ever did was to change water into wine so a wedding party could go on. One of the last things he did for his disciples was to host a final Passover feast, tell his friends how eagerly he'd desired to share that meal with them, and then speak of his hope that they might know his joy.

You can say a lot about Jesus. You can call him the sacrificing Savior who gave his life to save the world. You can call him the greatest teacher who ever lived. You can regard him as the most brilliant ethicist this world has ever known. You can name him Son of God and God in human flesh. And you'd be right on every count.

But there's one thing you can't say. If you know what ordinary people are drawn to, and what the gospels say about Jesus, you can't conclude that Jesus was some kind of killjoy, some kind of red-faced prude, some sort of sponsor for a pinch-lipped, Church-Lady religion.

It's important to remember this because it helps us understand why he so bugged the Pharisees, some of the most conservative religionists of his day. They looked at this life-affirming, joy-producing, freedom-celebrating aspect of Jesus' nature and said: That just can't be God speaking.



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They looked at the way Jesus embraced ordinary, imperfect people and thought: That just can't be God acting.

They listened to Christ's critique of their way of life and the radical claims he made about himself, and they said: We've just got to get rid of this guy.

### Discussion Questions:

[Q] What do you think of the idea of Jesus being fun? Do you think that's true? Why or why not?

[Q] Daniel Meyer says that "Christ's teaching was filled with humor, satire, and irony" and gives some examples. Can you think of some other examples?

[Q] Why do Christ's followers often become such killjoys?

[Q] How might fun and holiness go together? When might they part ways?

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: Sometimes Jesus is not much fun.

It's important to understand that Jesus is fun even when he doesn't sound like any fun. There are times when he says things that, frankly, smash up against our sense of freedom and fulfillment. There are moments when Jesus looks us right in the eye and says: You've got to learn to patrol your pleasures. Read Matthew 5:27–30.

This word he speaks to us in Matthew 5 is one of those times. Generally we're okay with this commandment at its start. Most couples going over their wedding vows do not say, "Um, we were hoping we could leave a multiple partners option in there someplace." When Jesus says: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery,'" a few of us wince because we know we've failed badly; but virtually all of us get, in principle, the importance of faithfulness to one partner.

It's the sentence that follows that is so much harder to take. Jesus says, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Wow. Is Jesus really saying what it sounds like he is saying? Is he saying that even a little fantasizing is not okay? What could be wrong with a little derriere staring if we're committed to

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not touching? What's so bad about looking at an explicit magazine or website image so long as we're not actually breaking our commitment to our marriage?

Carry the idea out further, because it isn't just sexual connections after which we lust, is it? Suppose we get the notion that we're not supposed to be owned by things, and that we're meant to be wise stewards of our resources. So, is there really a problem with a little lusting after the things we see in catalogs and shopping malls, so long as we don't actually pull out the credit card? Suppose we honestly want to take better care of our bodies so that they'll be healthy temples in which to continue God's mission for us in life. Is there really any problem if we just browse the refrigerator or candy aisle? What could be wrong with this kind of innocent fun?

**[Q]** Why do you think Jesus gave us such a hard, and seemingly impossible, command (v. 28)? How does he expect us to carry it out? Give practical ideas.

**[Q]** How does such a command square with Jesus not being a killjoy?

**[Q]** Why does Jesus always focus on the heart rather than just our outward actions?

**[Q]** Which of the following lusts do you most need to discipline your mind against?

- Sex
- Finances
- Prestige
- Success
- Food
- Other

### Teaching Point Two: There is a battle for the human heart.

To understand this passage, we must comprehend what the Bible says about how the battle for the human heart is won or lost. Dallas Willard points out that, so far as the Bible describes it, the human "heart" (or "will") is the executive center of our lives. The writer of Proverbs says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." A spiritually healthy heart pumps out choices and conduct that influence all your external relationships and activities for the better. When your heart is healthy, you will be a better husband or wife, parent, friend, or coworker.

The Bible teaches that the health of our spiritual heart is influenced primarily through two arteries: our reason and our emotions. The Bible pictures the destruction of the human heart as coming from the invasion of ideas, images, and impulses that clog our reason and corrupt our emotions to the point where the health of our heart is severely compromised.

The preeminent example, of course, is the story of the Fall. Read Genesis 3:1–7.

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First, the serpent attacks the artery of reason: You can't really trust God. He's making demands of you that are unreasonable. He just wants to keep everything for himself.

Then the serpent attacks the artery of Eve's emotions. First, reason is compromised: "You can't trust God." Then the emotions are breached: "That forbidden fruit would sure taste good. It's desirable." And then the heart fails; the will falls. Genesis says that Eve "took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." Another poet put it this way: "Who's there?' I cried, 'A little tiny sin.' 'Enter,' I said. And all hell came in."

**[Q]** Give an example of how Satan has attacked you through reason (you can't really trust God—he's making unreasonable demands).

**[Q]** Give an example of how Satan has attacked you through your emotions (you won't be happy unless you have this forbidden thing).

**[Q]** How can we learn to recognize and combat such attacks?

**[Q]** In what way does "all hell come in" when we let in a "little tiny sin"?

### Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** *To help us recognize Satan's attacks.*

**Activity:** *Explain how Satan might tempt the following people to sin through their reason and emotions.*

- *Janine has overspent her credit cards, but she would really like to get a nice gift for her friend's wedding.*
- *Thomas has checked out a few X-rated websites, but he hasn't actually entered them.*
- *Melody, who is working to help put her husband through seminary, is ashamed of her shabby furniture.*
- *Curt, who is married with three children, has been offered a promotion at work that will involve traveling most of the year.*

*Now explain how each of these people could resist the temptation to sin.*

### Teaching Point Three: Victory is won at the perimeter.

Many of us have tasted hell in places, and count as good friends people who've lived there. One person shares his insights, gained from years of struggling against the pull of pornography, the habit of lusting and fantasizing about other women, and finally the full-blown heart attack of adultery.



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He says that the battle for the human heart, and all the health or horror that flows from it, must be waged at the perimeter of our lives. You can't retreat into the sanctuary of comparative righteousness, telling yourself: *At least I'm not like so-and-so, or, At least I haven't done such-and-such yet.* You've got to post guards at the perimeter of your life. You've got to patrol even what appear to be innocent pleasures.

This is exactly what Jesus is saying to us in Matthew 5. On the surface of it, Christ's words sound absolutely draconian: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." Jesus isn't advocating self-mutilation here. An early church father named Origen took Jesus' words at face value and literally castrated himself, only to discover that he still had challenges with lust. Origen came to realize that what Jesus really was saying is that if we are serious about having healthy hearts, then we have to be willing to take extreme, even drastic, measures to control what our eyes dwell upon and what our hands take hold of.

Few things so affect our reason and emotions as what our eyes fix upon and our hands touch. If your eyes and hands are working for God and you, they will keep potentially dangerous ideas and images from crawling their way so deep into your camp that they conquer your heart. If your eyes and hands are failing in that function, says Jesus—if those intended sentries are actually bringing the enemy in—what measures are you going to take to redeploy them?

Doug Weiss, one of the nation's leading experts on handling compulsion and addictions, suggests that people struggling in this area wear a rubber band around their wrist. When you find your eye or your hands straying in the direction of trouble, he advocates pulling back on the rubber band a good long distance and giving it a snap. One friend who uses that technique says: "Believe me, the pain that is produced by doing that makes me completely forget about the pleasures I was contemplating!"

The desert fathers of ancient Christianity called this technique the "mortification of the flesh." It can certainly be taken too far, as Origen found out, but what are the measures that we will use to guard the reason and emotions that influence our hearts? Perhaps it means throwing out the catalogs and turning off the advertisements, so that our hearts aren't being invaded by desires for more things. Maybe it means not even turning on the television when we're away on business, because of the desires it will feed. Possibly we should turn off the morning radio programs because of the incredibly crass and cruel way people speak of others.

What are the measures you take to patrol the pleasures offered at the perimeter of your life? Maybe even more helpful, what are the ideas and images that you are replacing the destructive ones with? That's the function of the spiritual disciplines recommended in the first study of this series. The disciplines offer us a way to gainfully deploy our reason and emotions in a manner that builds the strength and health of our heart. Read Philippians 4:8–9.

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**[Q]** How can we do the things Paul mentions in these verses? What habits might we need to change in order to do that?

**[Q]** Explain what it means that the victory is won at the perimeter.

- What perimeters need to be guarded in your life?

**[Q]** What spiritual disciplines might help you with this?

**[Q]** Have you been able to implement any of the spiritual disciplines mentioned in the first study? Why or why not?

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Maybe we're not really all that interested in peace. A titillated, adrenaline-rushed life feels better. Perhaps we're not all that motivated to pursue a life that is noble, pure, lovely, or admirable. A life like everyone else's is fine with us. The apostle James says: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). But maybe we'd just like forgiveness for our obsessions, not healing.

Then let's just keep doing what we've been doing with our eyes and our hands. And while we're at it, look at that guy Jesus over there. Can you believe his nerve in saying what he's saying—telling us to patrol our pleasures? Let's just crucify him.

**Action Point:** Do you just want forgiveness rather than healing for your obsessions? If so, ask the group to pray for you in this regard. If you truly want healing but don't know how to get it, ask the group for prayer and support.

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon

