

## No buts

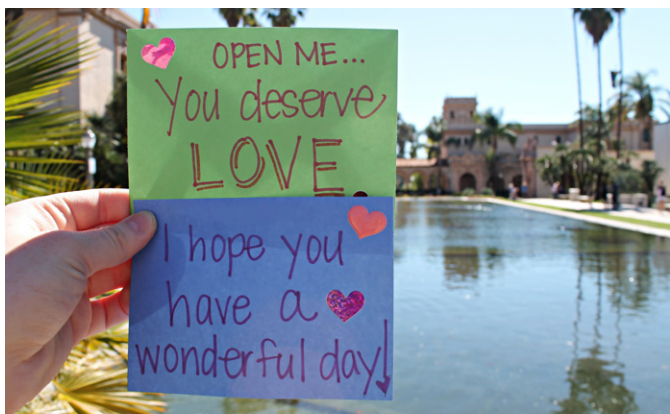
### Matthew 5.21-37

Jesus expands on laws about murder, adultery, divorce and oaths by challenging his hearers to think beyond their actions and words to the motivations that led to them. Keeping the law is meaningless if the attitude of your heart betrays you, he explains.

Now read **Matthew 5.21-37** see p.2 for text.

### A note on the passage

This passage is not trying to heap more rules and laws onto us but, rather, encourages us to examine our interior attitudes and choices. We are challenged to consider whether our actions and our thoughts are in line with what we say we believe.



If no one knows or sees or even benefits when you do the right things, are they still worth doing?

## HEART ART

As this week includes Valentine's Day, use a heart shape to consider how you reflect God's heart. Fold a large piece of paper or card in half and draw a half heart shape around the fold. Cut it out so that you have two symmetrical sides. On one half, paint images or ideas that you associate with God's heart. While the paint is still wet, fold the heart over and open it out so that one half is a reflection of the other. Ask God to help you reflect God's love this week.



You will need a small box or cleaned-out margarine tub with a lid. Decorate your box and make a slot in the top. Label it as the 'but box'. Whenever you or anyone in your family (or workplace if you are feeling brave!) makes an excuse as to why something wasn't done the way it should (especially if the word 'but' is used as part of that excuse), put a donation in the 'but box'. At the end of the week, talk together about whether this has been an effective way to think about integrity – and choose a charity to send the donations to.



### Positive words game

Jesus' words challenge what we say to people, especially in the heat of the moment. Pause to think about any positive things that you have said to someone today (or they to you). Choose one of these words for a partner to guess. The guesser uses letter tiles (or letters on card) to write a word and you say if any of the letters are in the correct place (or not). Keep guessing until you are correct and then swap roles. Have you learnt any new positive words that you can use tomorrow?

## Keep watch

What does 'integrity' actually mean? Look in a dictionary and make a list of all its different meanings. When you are watching, reading or listening to the news this week, look out for people who display integrity. Thank God for everyone you see who behaves in this way. If possible, why not write to them to thank them for behaving with integrity. Look out, also, for those who don't behave with integrity and pray for them (and write to them too if you are feeling brave!).



The Lectio 365 Daily Prayer app includes an evening prayer which asks God to 'shine a light on the shadows of my motivations'. At the end of each day, use this brief prayer to help you examine your day and ask yourself 'Why?' Why did I say that? Why did I do that? How could I do it differently next time? What is worth doing again? How would Jesus have acted? Allow your answers to lead you into confession and prayer.

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

**J**esus spoke to the people about being careful with their thoughts and feelings, as well as their actions. He helped them to see that saying things that are not true, or thinking things that are unfair, or breaking promises, still does wrong to other people. Thoughts and choices can be wrong, as well as actions.

Jesus said, 'You know that the people of God were given this Law, "You shall not murder." But I tell you that if you are angry with someone, you will face judgement. If you call them a fool, you will risk separation from God. Be reconciled and make friends again quickly. If you don't, it will be as if you are thrown into prison for owing money. You will not get out until you have paid the last penny.'

He also said, 'You know that the Law says: "You shall not break your marriage." But I tell you that people who have thoughts of desire for someone they are not married to have already broken their marriage in their hearts. Some people are too quick to end their marriage. Anyone who gets divorced, except for unfaithfulness, causes their marriage

to break; and whoever marries a divorced person breaks the previous marriage.'

Jesus also said, 'Promises are important and should be kept, but you don't need to show off to prove that you are telling the truth. Don't say that something is true, promising on your own life or your own head, for you can't make one hair white or black. Let your "Yes" mean "Yes" and your "No" mean "No"; claiming any more comes from hiding something, or not telling the truth.'

Matthew 5.21-37



### Did you know?

- It's not just our actions we need to consider but also the things we think about.
- It's easy to get cross but sometimes we might say or do something we shouldn't. Jesus is explaining that we need to make friends with others.

## Matthew 5.21-37 (NRSV)

'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

'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 lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and

throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to 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 anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

'Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." But I say to you, Do not swear 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. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'