

Adult Lesson Eight

Murder, Inc.

You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13, NRSV).

With the sixth commandment we enter into the shorter commandments. If scholars are correct that the longer commandments show a problem of the Israelites keeping or understanding the commandments, these are noteworthy for their difficulty in being misunderstood. "You shall not murder." There wouldn't seem to be a lot of misinterpretation here. In Hebrew the word that we translate murder applies to any act of violence committed against a person out of anger that results in that person's death. Our legal understanding of murder having a pre-meditated component does not apply to this commandment in Hebrew thought. Whether or not a person planned to kill another when they struck him or her, stabbed him or her, etc., is inconsequential. If anger was the cause and death the result, murder was committed.

To fully understand the reasoning behind this command, we need only go back to the first commandment, to have no other gods before Yahweh. When taking a human life, a person is acting in the stead of God. All life belongs to God, and it is not to be controlled by humans. If a human life is taken in anger, the killer has elevated him- or herself above God.

In the New Testament Jesus comments on this commandment, but moves it back the next logical step. If the heart is angry and full of hatred, murder is more likely to occur. If anger can lead to the taking of life, then the anger must be resolved before it escalates. Jesus said that to hate is as wrong as to murder. Jesus sought to change the heart and in doing so to help the person fulfill the sixth commandment.

OBJECTIVES

- Establish that murder is wrong because only God has the right to take or give life.
- Establish that anger is the precursor to murder.
- Consider that Jesus changes the commandment to include both a person's own anger and the anger others have for him or her.
- Allow the class to commit to God to deal with both their anger and the anger others feel towards them.

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:13
- Genesis 4:1-11
- Matthew 5:21-24
- Matthew 5:43-45

WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of Handout #8.1 for everyone in the class
- Three copies of Handout #8.2, one for each group
- Pencils/pens



Part 1 - But everybody's doin' it

Distribute Handout #8.1. Explain that they have a few minutes to work through the questions. This worksheet is purposefully ridiculous, but it will provide a good launch into the lesson. You may receive questioning glances from members of the class. Ignore these for a while, encouraging them to fill out the questionnaire so that you can move on with the class. Finally, if no one has actually come out and said anything, ask them what the problem is with the worksheet. The probable answer is that it seems to trivialize murder and implies that the class members kill people all the time. Say **You can see that this commandment is a little different from the ones we have studied so far. Although it makes perfect sense to ask "When was the last time you lied?" or "When was the last time you failed to put God first?" it seems odd to ask these same questions about killing someone.** Have the class put away the worksheet, then continue.

Part 2 - Murder in the first (family)

Explain **The word we translate murder from the Hebrew actually refers to any act of violence committed by a person out of anger, malice, or for personal gain that results in death, whether or not death was the intention. It does not apply to killing in war or killing as the punishment for a transgression of the Law. This may seem like an odd question, but why does the Bible say that it's wrong to murder?** (Because we are made in God's image, and life is sacred to God. God gives life, and all life belongs to God. When we kill someone, we are doing something that only God has the right to do.)

Ask **Does anyone remember the first murder committed in the Bible?** (Cain and Abel.) Say **The first story in the Bible after Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden is this story. What does that tell us?** (That this is an extremely dangerous and horrible part of the fall.) Divide the class into three groups and assign each group two questions from Handout #8.2. Give the groups five or six minutes to discuss its questions, then have the designated person share with the rest of the class. During the answers be sure that the following points are made.

- That God is given credit for the creation of life.
- Cain becomes angry, and the anger leads to murder.
- God warns Cain that this sin of anger can consume him if he's not careful.
- The nature of murder is such that it cries out to God to make it right.
- The LORD marked Cain so that he would not be murdered even though he had murdered. A murder does not "fix" another murder.

Say **As you can see, in the story of Cain and Abel anger is the first step toward murder. The same is true in our society today. The FBI reports that in 1999, of the murders committed between people that knew each other (in contrast to drive-by shootings, bombings, etc.), two-thirds resulted directly from arguments. The arguments led to anger, and anger to killing. It is this area that Jesus dealt with in The Sermon on the Mount.**

Part #3 - Stop praying and DO something

Read or ask someone to read Matthew 5:21-24. Ask **How does Jesus change the emphasis in this passage?** (He moves the cause for judgment from the action to the state of the heart from which the action comes. Not only is murder wrong, but the anger that leads to murder is wrong as well.) Explain **Jesus knows that the real problem is in the heart of the person, so this is where he concentrates. In the Jewish religion, offering a sacrifice was the way of praying and worshipping. What does Jesus say you are to do if you remember that someone is angry with you as you enter worship?** (Leave your sacrifice and go to reconcile yourself to the other person.) **In doing this, are you being your brother's or sister's keeper?** (Yes. They are the ones who are angry and therefore are in danger of judgment. The life you save, however, may be your own. Every person is so important to God that he charges each of us to look out for each other. Not only are we to refrain from hate, we are to take care of the problem if we know someone is angry with us.) **We don't sacrifice today. What would be a contemporary reading of this teaching of Jesus?** (If you are doing your devotions and you remember that someone is angry with you, quit praying and give him or her a call. After you have made up, go back to your prayer time.) **This bitterness of heart can destroy us. Although it may not lead us to kill someone else, it could kill us.**

Part #4 - Am I my brother's keeper?

Jesus brings this idea of being your brother's or sister's keeper to completion later in **The Sermon on the Mount**. Have someone read Matthew 5:43-45. Ask **What is this verse asking of us?** (That we love all people, even those who hate us.) **How hard is this?** (It is impossible without God's help.) **Do you think that this is possible even with God's help?** (Yes. We know we serve a loving God. A loving God would not ask us to do that which was impossible.) **Why do you think that God asks us to love all people?** (Because he loves all, no matter what we have done to him. We are to reflect God to our world, so we should love those he loves.)

Have your class bring out Handout #8.1 that was distributed at the beginning of class. Say **We have learned that God equates hatred or anger with murder. In light of this, read over the questions, but substituting hate or anger for murder. The questions may not be quite as clear, but it will be easy to catch the jest of the issue. If these two things are the same to God, why do these questions suddenly seem to be appropriate to us when they seemed so inappropriate when we were talking about murder?** As a final exercise, have the people examine question six which asks who they would like to kill. Instead have them consider if there is anyone that they hate or that hates them. Encourage them to write down the names that come to mind. Ask **In light of this lesson, how will you respond to this list and these people?** Ask them to make a commitment to God to take care of these areas before meeting for the next class period and to write what they are going to do on the back of the paper.

Close in prayer, being careful to allow a time for personal prayer in which the people can consider how they will respond to the people on their lists.

Murderer Profile

The FBI estimates that in 1999 there were 15,533 murders committed in the U.S. In light of this, answer the following questions.

- 1) When was the last time you killed someone?
 - a) Last week
 - b) Last month
 - c) Last year
 - d) I don't recall the last time that I killed someone!

- 2) When I have committed a murder I generally...
 - a) ... pray about it right then.
 - b) ... go and talk to my pastor about what I should do.
 - c) ... start by reading scripture. That's always a good place to start.
 - d) ... I can't recall what I usually do, but I'm sure I do something.

- 3) If I knew that my husband or wife regularly committed murder, I would...
 - a) ... confront them about it. Some things are too important to let go.
 - b) ... pray that God would convict them about it, but say nothing.
 - c) ... talk to my minister for advice as to how to approach the subject.
 - d) ... do nothing. Some things are between a person and God.

- 4) When you heard that today we would be talking about murder, what is the first thing that came to mind?
 - a) Give me a break, not this subject again!!
 - b) When are we going to talk about a subject that matters to me?
 - c) Is this an adult class or did I stumble into VBS?!?
 - d) Finally, I kept wondering when we would deal with this!

- 5) When I take time to consider the sixth commandment (murder), I think...
 - a) ... I guess that's a good general rule to live by.
 - b) ... why can't the Bible be more realistic in its expectations?
 - c) ... what does an occasional murder really hurt?
 - d) ... I don't take time to consider this commandment.

- 6) Finally, list the five people that you would most like to kill right now and decide to pray for these people this week!!

Genesis 4:1-16

Group #1

After reading Genesis 4:1-16, answer the following two questions and choose someone to give your answers to the entire class.

- 1) To whom does Eve give credit for producing life?

- 2) How did Cain initially react to the rejection of his sacrifice?

Group #2

After reading Genesis 4:1-16, answer the following two questions and choose someone to give your answers to the entire class.

- 1) When God saw that Cain was angry, how did he describe sin?

- 2) When God asked Cain where his brother was, what was Cain's response?

Group #3

After reading Genesis 4:1-16, answer the following two questions and choose someone to give your answers to the entire class.

- 1) How did God say that he was aware of Abel's death?

- 2) Why did God put a mark on Cain? Was that necessary?