

LENT LESSONS 2026 WEEK 5

MARCH 15, 2026

Lesson 26: “Do Not Be Conformed” — Righteousness in a Culture of Pressure

MAIN TEXT: Romans 12:2

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Romans 12 marks a major transition in Paul’s epistle. For eleven chapters he has unfolded the great doctrines of redemption—human sin, justification by faith, union with Christ, and the mercy of God revealed in the gospel. Beginning in chapter twelve, Paul turns from doctrinal foundation to the life that must grow from it. Theology must eventually become lived obedience.

Paul begins by warning believers about a subtle but powerful force shaping human life: the influence of the present age. “Do not be conformed to this world,” he writes. The verb translated “conformed” (*syschēmatizesthe*) describes being pressed into an outward mold. The “world,” expressed by the term *aiōn*, refers not merely to the physical creation but to the value system of the present age—an organized pattern of thinking that operates independently of God.

Christians therefore live within a cultural environment that constantly seeks to shape their thinking, desires, and moral judgments. Conformity often occurs gradually and unconsciously, which is why Paul calls believers to intentional resistance. Instead of being molded by the age, they are commanded to “be transformed.”

The word translated “transformed” (*metamorphousthe*) is the same root used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus. It refers to an inward change that becomes outwardly visible. Paul explains that this transformation occurs through “the renewing of the mind.” The term *anakainōsis* suggests *renovation—an inner restructuring of perception and judgment*. The Spirit renews the believer’s understanding so that life is evaluated according to God’s truth rather than cultural assumptions.

Within the Wesleyan–Holiness and Pentecostal traditions, this renewal of the mind has long been recognized as central to sanctification. John Wesley spoke of holiness as the gradual restoration of the mind of Christ within the believer. The Spirit illuminates Scripture, exposes cultural compromise, and strengthens the will to obey.

Practices such as fasting and prayer assist this process by interrupting the patterns through which the present age often shapes desire. When believers deny immediate appetite and seek God’s presence, the Spirit clarifies the difference between cultural expectation and divine will. The renewed mind becomes capable of discerning what Paul calls “the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

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BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 1)

The opening chapter of Daniel places the young prophet in one of the most intense environments of cultural pressure recorded in Scripture. Following the conquest of Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that promising young men from the royal and noble families of Judah be taken to Babylon to be trained for service in the imperial court (Daniel 1:3–5). Daniel, along with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, suddenly found themselves immersed in a foreign world designed to reshape their identity.

The Babylonian strategy was deliberate. These young captives were educated in the language and literature of the Chaldeans, immersed in the intellectual traditions of the empire, and even given new names that honored Babylonian deities (Daniel 1:6–7). Their daily food came from the king’s table, further symbolizing their assimilation into Babylonian culture. Everything about their training sought to detach them from their covenant identity and re-form them as servants of the empire.

Yet in the midst of this pressure, Daniel made a decisive choice. Scripture records, “Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8, NASB). The phrase “made up his mind” reflects settled resolve. Daniel’s resistance was not impulsive rebellion but a deliberate commitment to remain faithful to the God of Israel.

Notably, Daniel resisted with wisdom and humility. Rather than provoking open conflict, he respectfully requested permission to follow a different dietary practice. God honored this faithfulness. The text says, “God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials” (Daniel 1:9). After a brief testing period, Daniel and his companions were found to be healthier and wiser than the others in the royal training program.

The story does not end there. Later chapters reveal increasing pressure to abandon their faith: the command to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (Daniel 3) and the decree forbidding prayer to anyone but the king (Daniel 6). Yet Daniel and his companions remained steadfast.

Their lives demonstrate that righteousness in a hostile culture requires more than momentary courage; it requires sustained faithfulness. Daniel’s example shows that believers can live within powerful cultural systems without surrendering their allegiance to God. Through humility, wisdom, and dependence upon the Lord, Daniel remained faithful—and God used that faithfulness to reveal His power even in the heart of Babylon.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

During the early centuries of Christianity, believers frequently faced pressure to conform to the religious practices of the Roman Empire. One striking example is **Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69–155)**, a disciple of the apostle John. When Roman authorities demanded that he burn incense to

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the emperor and renounce Christ, Polycarp refused. According to the ancient account *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, he declared, “Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” His refusal to conform ultimately led to his martyrdom, but his witness strengthened the faith of the early church.

Centuries later, the same spirit of resistance to cultural compromise appeared among the **English Puritans** of the seventeenth century. Leaders such as **John Owen**, a theologian and pastor, argued that believers must resist the moral patterns of society and pursue what he called the “mortification of sin.” Owen taught that the Christian life requires constant renewal of the mind through Scripture so that the believer’s thinking is shaped by God rather than by the world.

The Moravian movement in the eighteenth century demonstrated a similar commitment to distinct Christian living. The Moravian community at **Herrnhut**, under the leadership of **Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf**, cultivated disciplined spiritual life through prayer, Scripture reading, and communal accountability. Their pursuit of holiness produced one of the most remarkable missionary movements in Christian history.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify areas where cultural values shape your thinking.
2. Fast from media that subtly forms compromise.
3. Renew your mind through daily Scripture immersion.
4. Pray for Spirit discernment.
5. Practice obedience even when unpopular.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Holy God, I confess that I have absorbed patterns from this age without discernment. I have allowed culture to shape conviction. Renew my mind. Transform my thinking. I depend upon Your Spirit to expose subtle conformity and empower holy distinction. Let fasting weaken worldly influence and strengthen eternal perspective. Form Christ within me. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Daniel 1–6 — Faithfulness in exile.
- Ephesians 4:17–24 — Renewed mind.
- Colossians 2:8 — Beware philosophy.
- 1 John 2:15–17 — Do not love the world.
- Matthew 5:13–16 — Salt and light.

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Lesson 27: “Put to Death” — Radical Righteousness by the Spirit

MAIN TEXT: Colossians 3:1–10

“Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality...”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Colossians 3 begins with a reminder of the believer’s new identity. “If you have been raised with Christ,” Paul writes, grounding Christian ethics in participation in Christ’s resurrection life. The moral commands that follow do not arise from legalism but from union with the risen Lord.

Because believers share in Christ’s resurrection, their orientation must change. Paul urges them to “seek the things above,” meaning that their values and priorities must now be shaped by the reign of Christ rather than by earthly impulses. This new identity requires decisive moral action.

Paul therefore commands believers to “put to death” the practices that once governed them. The verb *nekrosate* is deliberately strong. It does not suggest gradual trimming of sin but decisive rejection. Paul names specific behaviors—sexual immorality, impurity, greed, and destructive passions—because holiness must address concrete practices rather than vague spiritual intentions.

Pentecostal-Holiness theology has historically emphasized this decisive break with sin. Early revival preaching insisted that the Spirit empowers believers not merely to feel conviction but to act upon it. As Paul explains elsewhere, “If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). Mortification of sin is therefore not human willpower alone; it is cooperation with the Spirit’s transforming power.

Fasting assists believers in this work because it weakens the dominance of bodily impulse and reminds the soul that obedience to Christ must govern every desire. The old self is laid aside and replaced by the “new self,” which Paul describes as being renewed according to the image of its Creator. Christian righteousness therefore reflects the restoration of God’s image within the believer.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)

The Gospel of Luke records one of the most vivid examples of repentance producing visible change in the life of a sinner. As Jesus passed through the city of Jericho, a man named Zacchaeus sought to see Him. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was “a chief tax collector, and he was rich” (Luke 19:2, NASB). In the Roman system of taxation, tax collectors were widely despised. They often collected more than required and kept the excess for themselves. Zacchaeus therefore stood not only as a wealthy man, but as one whose prosperity had likely been built upon the financial oppression of his own people.

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Yet something within Zacchaeus compelled him to see Jesus. Because he was short in stature and the crowds were large, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree along the road where Jesus was passing (Luke 19:4). This action alone suggests urgency and humility. A man of wealth and status in that culture would rarely behave in such a public and undignified way, yet Zacchaeus was determined to see the one about whom he had heard so much.

When Jesus reached the place, He stopped, looked up, and addressed him directly: “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). The crowd reacted with criticism, murmuring that Jesus had gone to lodge with a sinner. Yet in that moment of encounter, something remarkable occurred within Zacchaeus. Standing before the Lord, he declared openly: “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much” (Luke 19:8).

Zacchaeus’ response reveals that genuine repentance does not remain merely internal or emotional. It produces concrete change. His promise to restore what he had taken reflects the biblical principle of restitution found in the Law of Moses, where theft or fraud required repayment with added compensation (cf. Exodus 22). Zacchaeus therefore moved beyond confession to tangible repair of the harm his sin had caused.

Jesus immediately affirmed the reality of this transformation: “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9–10). The evidence of Zacchaeus’ salvation was not merely his words but the visible fruit of repentance.

This account illustrates an enduring principle of the Christian life. When the Spirit convicts the heart and a sinner truly encounters Christ, repentance expresses itself through action. Grace not only forgives sin; it restores integrity, repairs injustice, and redirects a life toward righteousness.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The call to decisive repentance and moral transformation has appeared repeatedly throughout Christian history. During the Protestant Reformation, **Martin Luther (1483–1546)** insisted that repentance must shape the entire Christian life. His first of the Ninety-Five Theses declared that the believer’s life should be one of continual turning from sin and returning to God.

The **Puritan pastor Richard Baxter (1615–1691)** pressed this principle even further. In his classic work *The Reformed Pastor*, Baxter warned that genuine conversion must produce visible moral reform. He urged believers to abandon dishonest practices, repair damaged relationships, and pursue holiness with seriousness.

In the nineteenth century, the **Holiness Movement** continued this emphasis on moral transformation. **Phoebe Palmer**, one of the movement’s most influential leaders, taught that

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believers must surrender completely to God so that the Spirit can cleanse the heart and empower holy living. Her ministry influenced thousands of Christians across North America and Europe.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify specific sins requiring decisive action.
2. Remove access to sinful practices.
3. Seek Spirit power daily.
4. Practice restitution where necessary.
5. Fast when cravings intensify.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Lord of Resurrection, I confess that I have tolerated sins that You command me to put to death. Grant me holy resolve. Strengthen me by Your Spirit. I depend upon You to mortify what dishonors You and to renew what reflects You. Let this fast reinforce decisive obedience. Clothe me in the new self. Amen.”

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Lesson 28: Fire on the Tongue — Righteous Speech in a Corrupt Age

MAIN TEXT: James 3:5–10

“So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

James addresses communities of believers navigating hardship, social tension, and internal conflict. In this context he turns attention to one of the most powerful yet often overlooked instruments of human behavior: the tongue.

Using vivid imagery, James compares speech to the small bit that guides a powerful horse, the rudder that directs a massive ship, and the spark that ignites an entire forest. These images demonstrate that small instruments can produce enormous consequences. The tongue may be physically small, but it possesses the power to shape relationships, communities, and even spiritual environments.

James describes the tongue as “a fire, the very world of unrighteousness.” Words carry moral weight. Speech can encourage faith, proclaim truth, and build community, yet it can also destroy reputations, fracture fellowship, and spread bitterness. James’s warning is theological: human speech participates either in God’s work of life or in forces of destruction.

The deepest contradiction appears in verse nine. With the same tongue believers bless God and curse people who are made in the image of God. James grounds righteous speech in the doctrine of the imago Dei. Because every person bears God’s image, speech directed toward others reflects one’s attitude toward God Himself.

Pentecostal spirituality uniquely emphasizes the tongue as an instrument of divine praise and proclamation. At Pentecost the Spirit filled believers so that their speech magnified the works of God. Yet Spirit-empowered speech must extend beyond moments of worship into daily conversation. Fasting and prayer help discipline impulsive speech and cultivate a heart from which words of grace can flow.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Isaiah’s Cleansed Lips (Isaiah 6:5–7)

The prophet Isaiah’s call to ministry begins not with confidence but with a profound awareness of his own unworthiness before the holiness of God. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah received a vision of the Lord seated upon a high and exalted throne, with the train of His robe filling the temple (Isaiah 6:1, NASB). Seraphim stood above Him, calling to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). The overwhelming majesty of this scene shook the very foundations of the temple and filled the house with smoke.

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Confronted with such holiness, Isaiah immediately became aware of his own moral condition. He cried out, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). Significantly, Isaiah identifies the problem not merely as general sinfulness but specifically as “unclean lips.” As a prophet—one called to speak God’s word—Isaiah recognized that even his speech required purification before he could serve as the Lord’s messenger.

In response to this confession, one of the seraphim flew to him carrying a burning coal taken from the altar with tongs. The altar symbolized the place of sacrifice, where atonement was made for sin. The seraph touched Isaiah’s mouth with the coal and declared, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven” (Isaiah 6:7). The act signified divine cleansing. Before Isaiah could be entrusted with the proclamation of God’s word, the Lord first purified the very instrument through which that word would be spoken.

Only after this cleansing does the commission follow. When the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Isaiah responds with readiness: “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). The order is significant. Purification precedes commission. The prophet’s willingness to serve emerges only after God has dealt with the impurity he confessed.

This passage illustrates an enduring principle in the life of God’s servants. Those who speak for the Lord must themselves undergo purification. Ministry is not sustained merely by enthusiasm or talent but by a heart and tongue that have been touched by God’s cleansing grace. When the Spirit sanctifies the inner life, speech itself becomes an instrument through which God’s truth can be faithfully proclaimed.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian teachers have long recognized that the tongue possesses extraordinary moral power. In the early church, **John Chrysostom (c. 347–407)** frequently preached about the dangers of gossip and slander. In his homilies he warned believers that careless words could destroy communities just as surely as physical violence.

During the Reformation era, **John Calvin** emphasized the importance of disciplined speech within Christian community. In Geneva he established pastoral oversight structures that encouraged believers to avoid slander, profanity, and destructive criticism, recognizing that speech could either strengthen or fracture the church.

Among missionary movements, **David Brainerd (1718–1747)** demonstrated the power of sanctified speech. While ministering among Native American tribes in the American colonies, Brainerd’s humble and gentle words, combined with deep spiritual devotion, produced remarkable conversions. His journals later inspired generations of missionaries.

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LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Fast from careless or negative speech.
2. Confess recent harmful words.
3. Memorize James 3:9–10.
4. Practice deliberate encouragement.
5. Ask the Spirit to sanctify your tongue daily.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Holy God, I confess that my words have wounded, exaggerated, complained, and judged. Cleanse my lips. Purify my speech. I depend upon Your Spirit to bridle my tongue and fill my mouth with praise. Let fasting expose impatience and refine my words. May blessing, not destruction, flow from my lips. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Proverbs 18:21 — Power of life and death in the tongue.
- Matthew 12:36–37 — Account for every careless word.
- Ephesians 4:29 — Speech that builds up.
- Colossians 4:6 — Speech seasoned with grace.
- Psalm 141:3 — Set a guard over my mouth.

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Lesson 29: Integrity in Secret — Righteousness Before the Father

MAIN TEXT: Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

“Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Within the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses three central religious practices of Jewish devotion: giving, praying, and fasting. These acts were widely respected expressions of piety, yet Jesus exposes the danger that can corrupt them—performing righteousness for the approval of others.

Jesus warns His listeners not to practice righteousness “to be noticed by people.” The Greek term implies theatrical display. Religion can become performance when the desire for recognition replaces devotion to God.

Instead, Jesus repeatedly directs attention to the Father “who sees in secret.” This emphasis reveals something profound about Christian righteousness: its true audience is God alone. Authentic devotion arises from relationship rather than reputation.

The repetition of the word “Father” throughout this passage highlights the relational dimension of spiritual life. Believers practice righteousness not to earn divine favor but because they belong to God’s family. Secret devotion strengthens this relationship and produces integrity that sustains public witness.

Throughout church history, spiritual leaders have emphasized the necessity of private devotion. John Wesley’s disciplined habits of prayer, Scripture reading, and fasting formed the foundation of his public ministry. Early Pentecostal revivalists likewise testified that the power displayed in public gatherings was sustained by hours of hidden prayer.

Fasting, when practiced in humility, deepens this secret fellowship with God. It strips away the desire for external recognition and focuses the heart upon the presence of the Father.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Nathaniel Under the Fig Tree (John 1:47–50)

The Gospel of John records a brief yet profound encounter between Jesus and a man named Nathanael, revealing how God sees and honors righteousness practiced in secret. Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip, who had just become convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah. At first Nathanael responded with skepticism, asking, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46, NASB). Yet Philip simply invited him to come and see for himself.

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As Nathanael approached, Jesus made an unexpected declaration about him. Looking at him, Jesus said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” (John 1:47). This statement carried deep meaning. The phrase “no deceit” recalls the story of Jacob, whose name had long been associated with cunning and deception (Genesis 27). By contrast, Jesus recognized Nathanael as a man of sincere character—one whose heart sought God with honesty rather than hypocrisy.

Surprised by such a statement from someone he had never met, Nathanael asked, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:48). In Jewish culture, sitting under a fig tree was often associated with meditation on Scripture and quiet prayer. Jesus’ words suggest that Nathanael had been engaged in a private moment of reflection or devotion, unseen by others yet fully known to God.

The realization that Jesus had observed this hidden moment profoundly moved Nathanael. He immediately confessed, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel” (John 1:49). Jesus then responded that Nathanael would see even greater things, promising that he would witness the unfolding revelation of God’s glory.

This brief encounter illustrates an important spiritual principle: righteousness practiced in secret is never hidden from God. Acts of devotion that may go unnoticed by others—moments of prayer, reflection, and sincere seeking of God—are fully seen by the Lord. Often it is precisely this hidden faithfulness that prepares a believer for public affirmation and participation in God’s larger purposes.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Hidden devotion has often formed the foundation of powerful public ministry. **Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)**, a medieval monk and theologian, emphasized contemplative prayer as the heart of Christian life. Bernard taught that authentic service flows from deep communion with God cultivated in quiet devotion.

Similarly, the German theologian **Johann Arndt (1555–1621)** emphasized inner piety in his influential book *True Christianity*. Arndt argued that genuine faith is nourished in the hidden life of prayer rather than in outward religious display.

In the eighteenth century, **Susanna Wesley** modeled this principle within her own household. Despite raising a large family under difficult circumstances, she maintained disciplined personal prayer and spiritual instruction for her children. Her quiet influence shaped the spiritual formation of John and Charles Wesley and indirectly helped ignite the Methodist revival.

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LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Evaluate motives behind spiritual activity.
2. Fast privately without announcement.
3. Increase secret prayer time.
4. Avoid broadcasting personal devotion.
5. Seek God's approval above public affirmation.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Father who sees in secret, Forgive my desire for recognition. I have practiced righteousness with divided motives. Purify my intentions. I depend upon Your Spirit to align my private life with public confession. Let fasting deepen hidden devotion. Reward me with Your presence rather than applause. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Psalm 139:1–12 — God who sees in secret.
- 1 Samuel 16:7 — The Lord looks at the heart.
- Hebrews 4:12–13 — All things laid bare.
- Matthew 23:25–28 — Clean inside first.
- Galatians 1:10 — Seeking God's approval.

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Lesson 30: Righteousness in Relationships — Living Peaceably and Purely

MAIN TEXT: Romans 12:17–21

“Never repay evil for evil to anyone... If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

In the closing section of Romans 12, Paul applies the transforming power of the gospel to interpersonal relationships. Christian righteousness cannot remain abstract; it must shape the way believers respond to hostility, conflict, and injustice.

Paul begins with a prohibition: “Never repay evil for evil.” The natural human impulse seeks retaliation, yet the gospel calls believers to a different pattern. Because Christ absorbed evil without responding in vengeance, His followers must reflect the same spirit.

Paul urges believers to pursue what is honorable “in the sight of all.” Christian conduct should display integrity that even observers outside the faith can recognize as upright. This visible righteousness becomes a powerful witness to the transforming power of the gospel.

The command to live at peace “so far as it depends on you” acknowledges that reconciliation involves more than one party. Nevertheless, believers are responsible for pursuing peace wherever possible. Pride, resentment, and revenge must yield to humility and grace.

Pentecostal-Holiness spirituality has long emphasized that the Spirit’s fruit—love, patience, and self-control—must govern relationships. Fasting and prayer expose hidden pride and soften the heart toward reconciliation. Through such disciplines the believer learns to overcome evil not with retaliation but with persistent goodness.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: David and Saul (1 Samuel 24)

One of the clearest demonstrations of righteous restraint in Scripture appears in David’s encounter with King Saul in the wilderness of En Gedi. By this time Saul had repeatedly attempted to kill David out of jealousy and fear. Though David had served the king faithfully—playing music to soothe his troubled spirit and fighting bravely for Israel—Saul’s hostility had forced David to flee and live as a fugitive among the caves and wilderness strongholds of Judah (1 Samuel 23–24).

During this period Saul pursued David with a large contingent of soldiers. In a remarkable turn of events, Saul unknowingly entered the very cave where David and his men were hiding. To David’s companions, the situation appeared providential. They whispered that this was the moment God had delivered Saul into David’s hands (1 Samuel 24:4). From a human perspective,

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the opportunity seemed obvious: David could remove his enemy and secure the throne that God had already promised him.

David quietly approached Saul but did not harm him. Instead, he cut off the edge of Saul's robe without the king noticing. Yet even this small act troubled David's conscience. Scripture records that "David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe" (1 Samuel 24:5, NASB). He then restrained his men from attacking the king and declared, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:6).

David recognized that Saul, despite his failures, still occupied a position established by God. Rather than seizing power through violence or retaliation, David chose to entrust justice to the Lord. When Saul later left the cave, David revealed the piece of the robe he had cut and appealed to Saul's conscience, demonstrating that he had no intention of harming him.

This episode reveals a profound spiritual principle. Righteousness is often demonstrated not through dramatic action but through disciplined restraint. David possessed both the opportunity and the justification—by human reasoning—to eliminate his enemy. Yet he refused to take matters into his own hands. His restraint reflected deep trust in God's sovereignty and timing. By refusing retaliation, David demonstrated that true faith rests not in human control but in the justice of God.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian responses to injustice have often revealed the transformative power of the gospel. In the early church, believers such as **Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)** wrote defenses of the faith that called Christians to respond to persecution with patience rather than violence.

During the seventeenth century, the Quaker leader **George Fox** taught that followers of Christ must overcome hatred with peace. Fox insisted that believers should demonstrate the character of Christ even toward their persecutors.

In the modern missionary era, **Adoniram Judson (1788–1850)** demonstrated extraordinary perseverance. Imprisoned and tortured during his ministry in Burma, Judson refused to abandon his calling. His patient endurance eventually led to the establishment of a strong Burmese Christian community.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify unresolved conflicts.
2. Fast while praying for reconciliation.
3. Initiate peace where possible.
4. Release vengeance to God.
5. Practice intentional kindness.

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PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Prince of Peace, I confess that I have repaid hurt with hurt and defended pride instead of righteousness. Humble my spirit. I depend upon Your Spirit to produce patience, gentleness, and self-control. Let fasting weaken resentment and strengthen forgiveness.

Teach me to overcome evil with good. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Matthew 5:44 — Love your enemies.
- Proverbs 20:22 — Wait for the Lord.
- Romans 14:19 — Pursue peace.
- Ephesians 4:31–32 — Forgive as Christ forgave.
- Hebrews 12:14 — Pursue peace with all.

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Lesson 31: Guarding the Eyes — Righteousness in Thought and Imagination

MAIN TEXT: Matthew 5:27–30

“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 for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deepens the moral vision of the law by addressing the inner source of sin. The commandment against adultery prohibited a specific act, yet Jesus directs attention to the desire that gives birth to that act.

The phrase “looks at a woman with lust” describes intentional contemplation that cultivates desire. Jesus therefore identifies the heart as the origin of moral failure. In biblical anthropology the heart represents the center of thought, will, and affection. Sin begins there long before it appears in outward behavior.

Jesus’s strong imagery—tearing out the eye or cutting off the hand—uses hyperbole to emphasize the seriousness of sin. His point is not literal mutilation but decisive action. Anything that repeatedly leads the believer toward sin must be removed.

Holiness traditions within Christianity have consistently emphasized purity of heart. John Wesley described sanctification as the cleansing of inward desire so that love for God becomes the ruling affection of the soul. Pentecostal spirituality likewise affirms that the Holy Spirit empowers believers to guard both imagination and behavior.

Fasting assists this vigilance by weakening the dominance of physical appetite and strengthening spiritual awareness. As the believer’s attention turns toward God, the imagination itself becomes disciplined under the lordship of Christ.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

The account of David and Bathsheba provides one of the most sobering examples in Scripture of how sin develops when temptation is allowed to mature. The narrative begins during a season when kings normally went out to war, yet David remained in Jerusalem while his army was in the field (2 Samuel 11:1). One evening the king arose from his couch and walked upon the roof of his house. From that vantage point he saw a woman bathing, and the text notes that “the woman was very beautiful in appearance” (2 Samuel 11:2, NASB).

At this moment the story introduces a crucial sequence. David saw the woman, but he did not turn away. Instead, he inquired about her identity. The servants informed him that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David’s own loyal soldiers (2 Samuel 11:3).

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Despite this knowledge, David sent messengers and had her brought to him. What began as a momentary glance developed into inquiry and then into deliberate action.

The progression reveals how temptation often unfolds. Sin rarely appears fully formed. It grows step by step when the heart allows imagination and desire to linger upon what should be rejected. In contrast to Joseph, who fled immediately when confronted with temptation in Egypt (Genesis 39:12), David allowed the moment to continue until desire overcame judgment.

The consequences were severe. Bathsheba became pregnant, and David attempted to conceal the matter by recalling Uriah from battle. When that effort failed, David arranged for Uriah to be placed in the most dangerous part of the battlefield, leading to his death (2 Samuel 11:14–17). What began as a private act of lust ultimately led to deception, abuse of authority, and the loss of innocent life.

God later confronted David through the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12). David confessed his sin and received forgiveness, yet the consequences of his actions unfolded painfully within his household for years to come. The story therefore illustrates a crucial spiritual lesson: righteousness must interrupt temptation early. When sinful desire is confronted immediately—before imagination takes hold—the believer avoids the destructive chain of events that follows when temptation is allowed to grow.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian thinkers have long warned about the dangers of unchecked imagination. **Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395)** taught that spiritual growth involves disciplining the inner life so that thoughts and desires align with God’s purposes.

Later, the Puritan writer **John Bunyan (1628–1688)** vividly described the battle for the human mind in his allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bunyan portrayed the Christian life as a journey filled with temptations that attempt to capture the heart and imagination.

In the nineteenth century, the holiness preacher **Hannah Whitall Smith** emphasized the importance of guarding the inner life. In her influential book *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, she encouraged believers to surrender their thoughts and desires to God so that the Spirit might transform the heart.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify visual patterns that fuel impurity.
2. Remove access where necessary.
3. Fast from digital or media triggers.
4. Memorize Matthew 5:8.
5. Invite Spirit accountability over thought-life.

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PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

Holy Lord, I confess that I have allowed my eyes to wander and my imagination to dwell where it should not. Create purity within me. I depend upon Your Spirit to guard my mind and discipline my attention. Let fasting retrain my desires and restore holy focus.

Blessed are the pure in heart — make me one of them. Amen.

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Psalm 101:3 — Setting no worthless thing before my eyes.
- Philippians 4:8 — Think on what is pure.
- Job 31 — Covenant with the eyes.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3–7 — Sanctification and purity.
- 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 — Taking thoughts captive.

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MARCH 21, 2026

Lesson 32: Glorify God in Your Body — Righteous Stewardship of Flesh and Strength

MAIN TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you...? For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Paul addresses the Corinthian believers within a culture marked by moral permissiveness. Some had attempted to separate spiritual experience from bodily conduct, assuming that physical behavior carried little spiritual significance. Paul responds by presenting a profound theological truth: the believer’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament the temple represented the dwelling place of God’s presence among His people. Paul now applies this sacred imagery to the life of the individual believer. Through the indwelling Spirit, God’s presence inhabits the physical life of the Christian.

This reality carries profound ethical implications. “You are not your own,” Paul writes, reminding believers that redemption involves transfer of ownership. Christ has purchased His people through His sacrificial death. Their bodies therefore belong to Him.

Pentecostal theology strongly emphasizes the bodily dimension of spiritual life. Worship involves lifted hands, kneeling, and physical expressions of praise. Yet such embodied devotion must be matched by embodied righteousness. The same body that worships must also reflect holiness in daily conduct.

Fasting reinforces this understanding by placing bodily appetite under spiritual discipline. It reminds believers that the body is not governed by impulse but consecrated to the service of God.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Samson’s Failure (Judges 13–16)

The life of Samson stands as one of the most striking examples in Scripture of how divine empowerment can be undermined by spiritual carelessness. From the beginning, Samson’s life was marked by extraordinary calling. Before his birth, an angel of the LORD appeared to his mother and announced that the child would be a Nazirite set apart to God from the womb. He would begin to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines (Judges 13:3–5). As part of this consecration, Samson was to live under Nazirite vows, symbolized most visibly by the uncut hair that marked his life as devoted to God.

As Samson grew, the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in remarkable ways. The book of Judges records moments when divine strength enabled him to perform feats far beyond ordinary human ability. He tore apart a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:6), struck down Philistine

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enemies in battle, and repeatedly displayed supernatural power that demonstrated God's presence upon his life.

Yet alongside this empowerment, the narrative reveals a troubling pattern. Samson repeatedly ignored the spiritual discipline that should have accompanied his calling. He pursued relationships that compromised his devotion, showed little regard for the boundaries associated with his Nazirite vow, and allowed personal desire to guide his decisions. Over time these repeated indulgences dulled his spiritual sensitivity.

The turning point came in Samson's relationship with Delilah. Pressured by the Philistines to discover the secret of his strength, Delilah repeatedly coaxed Samson until he finally revealed that his uncut hair symbolized the consecration of his life to God (Judges 16:17). While Samson slept, his hair was cut, and the Philistines seized him. Scripture records a chilling sentence: when Samson rose to confront them, "he did not know that the LORD had departed from him" (Judges 16:20, NASB).

This moment reveals the tragic consequence of long-term spiritual neglect. Samson still assumed that the power he had once experienced would remain available, yet the presence that empowered him had withdrawn. The man who once terrified armies was captured, blinded, and forced into humiliation.

Samson's story therefore offers a sobering lesson. Spiritual gifts and divine empowerment do not replace the need for disciplined obedience. The Spirit's anointing must be joined to righteous stewardship of one's life and calling. When power is separated from holiness, strength eventually collapses.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian theology has long affirmed that the body belongs to God. **Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202)** defended the goodness of the physical body against early heresies that viewed matter as evil. He argued that redemption includes the restoration of the whole person.

In the medieval church, **Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)** emphasized that bodily discipline supports spiritual devotion. For Aquinas, virtues such as temperance and self-control allowed believers to direct their physical lives toward God's purposes.

During the nineteenth century, the missionary **Hudson Taylor (1832–1905)** demonstrated remarkable bodily discipline while serving in China. His life of simplicity, sacrifice, and endurance allowed him to establish the China Inland Mission, which brought the gospel to thousands.

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LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Examine habits affecting bodily holiness.
2. Fast from substances or patterns that weaken discipline.
3. Exercise stewardship over sleep, diet, and energy.
4. Pray for Spirit strength against addiction.
5. View your body as sacred trust.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Indwelling Holy Spirit, Forgive me for treating my body casually. I have forgotten that I am not my own. Sanctify my appetites. Strengthen my discipline. I depend upon You to help me glorify God in flesh and strength. Let fasting retrain my body under Your lordship. Make me a vessel fit for holy use. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Romans 12:1 — Present your bodies a living sacrifice.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 — Sanctified wholly.
- 2 Timothy 2:21 — Vessel fit for use.
- Hebrews 12:11 — Discipline yields righteousness.
- 1 Peter 1:18–19 — Bought with precious blood.