

**LESSON 3: PROMISES**

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

**1. LEADER PREPARATION****LESSON OVERVIEW**

Our society says we're entitled to change our minds, even if we made a promise to someone. But in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us against breaking our vows and compromising our integrity. "You've heard" that lying is wrong, Jesus says, but lacking integrity in our promises is just as sinful. In this lesson, students will see how Jesus challenges not only our concept of a "promise" but also the integrity of our hearts.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

- 1. WHAT:** Students have heard that lying is wrong, but Jesus says making an exaggerated promise to someone is just as bad.
- 2. WHY:** Jesus expands our understanding of sin to include anything that goes against his patterns of integrity.
- 3. HOW:** Students will consider their personal integrity by exploring how Jesus compares exaggerated promises to lying.

**PRIMARY SCRIPTURE**

Matthew 5:33-37

**SECONDARY SCRIPTURE**

James 5:12

**TEACHING PREP**

**LEADER  
TIP**

**Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.**

**Read Matthew 5:33-37.**

In this passage, part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges our understanding of making and breaking promises. Jesus isn't against oaths as much as he is against false motives. Telling the truth and being people of integrity are what matter most.

Because God is on his throne (verse 34), hearing everything we say, there's no need to invoke his name in our promises. Instead, Jesus says we are to focus on being truthful in all our interactions, knowing that God witnesses them all.

“Human cultures developed oaths because people could not trust their neighbors without calling an avenging deity to witness,” writes Bible scholar Craig Keener. “But those who recognize that God witnesses every word must speak and act from integrity of heart that transcends such formalities.”

NOTE: Verses 31-32, where Jesus teaches about divorce, form a bridge between Jesus’ teachings on adultery and lust (verses 27-30) and this section about keeping promises. For more background about Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, see the “Teaching Prep” section in Lesson 1 of this series.

## **THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]**

### **TEXTS OR TWEETS**

**Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.**

- How valuable is your word? Come explore the high cost of breaking a promise.
- Do you ever tell people you’ll do something but then you don’t? This week’s lesson will help us become people of greater integrity.

### **PARENT EMAIL**

**Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.**

Dear parents,

We’re continuing a series that compares what culture tells us and what Jesus tells us. This week, we explored Matthew 5:33-37, where Jesus challenges our assumptions about making and breaking promises. Most people realize it’s wrong to break a vow, but students talked about how Jesus considers exaggerated promises just as sinful.

Throughout the week ahead, please try to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. These discussion-starter questions can help you launch a conversation:

- Why do people often make promises they can’t or don’t intend to keep?
- Think of a time someone broke a promise to you. What was that like?
- What does it mean to have integrity? Why is it important that our words and actions are consistent?
- How can this lesson help you in your current and future relationships?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students and our ministry. Have a great week!

**LESSON 3: PROMISES****2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER  
TIP**

For each group of four students, you'll need some paper and pens for the opening activity.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Have students form groups of four. From each group, ask one person to be a political candidate who's trying to get elected. Inform the other people in each group that they're campaign supporters for their candidate.

Give each group some paper and pens, and instruct them to write a speech with a few incredibly grand promises. Explain that the goal is to get people to vote for your candidate. Encourage the students to be funny and bold in their promises.

Next, have candidates take turns giving their bold speeches, emphasizing the ridiculous promises they'll keep once in office. Afterward, you can take a vote for the candidate who made the most outrageous promises. Make this activity fun and lighthearted.

**VARIATION:** If students want to continue, you can ask for a rebuttal from each candidate prior to the vote. In the rebuttal, students can spontaneously try to make grander promises, one-upping the other candidates.

**ASK:**

- *Why do people often vote for candidates who make the biggest promises?*
- *Are you generally surprised or not surprised when politicians and other people who make big promises let us down? Why?*
- *In what other areas besides politics do people tend to make—and break—big promises?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *It's fairly easy to make promises but not always easy to keep them. In our attempt to win over people, we often say things we can't back up. Let's see what Jesus says about the importance of integrity.*

## TEACHING POINTS



Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 5:33-37 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Today's reading is another piece of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which contains many of his important teachings. Let's look closely at what Jesus says about making and breaking promises.*

### 1. WE'VE HEARD THAT BREAKING PROMISES IS WRONG

#### ASK:

- *Why is it so hard to keep our vows or promises?*
- *Why do you think Jesus tells us not to make vows?*
- *When you give someone your word, is it your track record great, mediocre, or poor? To what extent will you go—or not go—to be true to your word?*
- *Do you think it's less serious to break your word to another person than to make a vow to God and then break it? Why or why not?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Most people in our culture would agree that it's wrong to break a serious promise we've made to someone. But Jesus challenges the lack of integrity in our hearts long before we ever break a promise.*

### 2. JESUS SAYS MAKING EXAGGERATED PROMISES IS JUST AS BAD AS BREAKING PROMISES

#### ASK:

- *Look at verses 34-36. Why might people add these words to their promises?*
- *What sorts of "add-ons" do people use today to make their promises sound more convincing?*
- *Think of a time when you exaggerated a promise. What did you hope to accomplish? How did the situation turn out?*
- *Why does Jesus say it's wrong to exaggerate a promise like this?*
- *How do exaggerated promises affect people's relationships?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Compared to the first two lessons in this series, where we discussed murder and adultery, the topic of breaking a promise might not seem like a big deal. But Jesus takes the integrity of our hearts quite seriously.*

### 3. JESUS CHALLENGES US TO BE PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY IN EVERYTHING WE SAY AND DO

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *In this section of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges us to be people whose simple, straightforward words can be trusted. This shows that we're trying to follow Jesus by living lives of integrity.*

#### ASK:

- Look at verse 37. Why is this a good truth to live by?
- Who do you know who has lived like this? Describe that person and his or her impact on you.
- At the end of verse 37, Jesus says an exaggerated promise reveals that something is wrong. What do you suppose he means?
- How did Jesus back up his promises?
- How can speaking honestly and with integrity improve our lives and our relationships with God and with other people?

#### EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



#### ASK:

- Read James 5:12. What does a “simple yes or no” look like in real life? Try to think of some real-life examples of when you’ve made a simple, honest promise.
- In our culture today, why is it so difficult to be honest with our words?
- What oaths might you be asked to take, and how can you handle those situations by living according to Jesus’ intentions?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

#### LIVING IT OUT

#### ASK:

- What exaggerated or bad promises have you made that you need to straighten out?
- What good, well-intentioned promises do you still need to follow up on?
- In the future, how can you avoid the temptation of making—and breaking—exaggerated promises?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *People who live Jesus-centered lives stand apart from the exaggerations and twisted promises that our society often condones. Let’s encourage one another to be people of integrity in our words and actions.*



Ask students to each find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection. Consider praying together as a group or asking if any students would like prayer from the rest of the group.

## SUMMARY



LEADER  
TIP

Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

## FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

*"Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned" (James 5:12).*