

## Challenging Lifestyles Session 3

*Matthew 5:17-20 – How to Understand the Old Testament*

**Resource:** 'Challenging Lifestyles' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 3

**Timing:** 40-50 minutes, leading into ministry

**Buzz groups:** Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

**Illustrations:** Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

**Focus:** Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

**Icebreaker:** The Pharaohs of Egypt were buried with their treasures (sometimes with their household staff too)! What (or who!) would you choose to be buried with?

### Introduction

Recap last time on *How to Change the World Around You*

Introduce this week on *How to Understand the Old Testament*

Key Point: we need to get Jesus' understanding of the Old Testament (OT).

The OT is great literature but is difficult too, e.g. multiple wars, multiple wives, multiple sacrifices!

Some only use the New Testament (NT), like Maricion the 2<sup>nd</sup>C heretic, who split the NT/OT Gods. Many say that the God of the OT seems cruel and vindictive, seemingly so different to Jesus. But Jesus' own attitude to the OT was very different and very positive!

At times OT hard to understand, but like a crossword we start with easy clues, like...

Key Verse: (v.17) '*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have...come ...to fulfil them.*' [NB. "law and prophets" is Biblical shorthand for the OT].

Also see what Jesus said to his disciples on the Road to Emmaus: "*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said concerning himself... "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* (Luke 24:27)

So with all this in mind, how can we begin to understand the OT?

### 1. Get to know the person

The Point: Jesus fulfils God's story.

Matthew 1:1-17 is a scheme of OT history as "his story" – a story in search of an ending – Jesus. OT theologian Chris Wright writes "The deeper you go into understanding the Old Testament, the closer you come to the heart of Jesus."

Jesus is the lens we use to see the OT. We're in the dark without Jesus' illumination of the OT. St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "The new is in the old concealed. The old is in the new revealed".

Illustrate: Numbers 19:1-8 is pretty incomprehensible until we read Hebrews 9:13-15 and 10:1,3.

Application: Browse through the gospel of Matthew and make a note of each time he explicitly references an OT text in talking about Jesus' identity and purpose.

**Buzzgroups:** [Depending on knowledge-level of group] (1) What is your favourite part of the OT, and what do you understand it saying about Jesus?; or (2) share with each other some more specific examples you know of the NT explaining the OT.

## 2. Enjoy the promises

The Point: Jesus fulfils God's promise. A core theme of Matthew, e.g. 1:22; 2:5; 2:17; 2:25; 4:14.

Prophecy is more like a promise than a prediction and Testament means 'covenant', or 'promise'. So all the OT prophecies come together into one promise, a new covenant, Jesus. They are all fulfilled in him and therefore fully available to us through him!  
*'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.'* (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Illustration: Tell a personal story about a promise you made to a friend or loved one, which you later fulfilled far above their expectation. Explain that's like Jesus' fulfilment – far more than literal.

**Buzzgroups:** Try to name some of the "promises God has made" that are "yes" to us in Christ. Briefly feedback some ideas into the main group (may identify some contentious ones (e.g. healing, prosperity) that you can pick up later in the ministry time.

## 3. Live it out in practice

The Point: Chapters 5-7 of Matthew is Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount", which follows the pattern of the OT laws given after the Exodus. It's about how to understand and live these OT Laws *now*.

1. So we study Jesus' teaching to see what the (3 categories of) OT law really means:  
 (i) Ceremonial Law for Temple sacrifices, etc – the NT says this is over as Jesus has finished it  
 (ii) Civil Law given to Ancient Israel – the principles still apply even though the specifics do not  
 (iii) General Commandments – Jesus doesn't remove, but shows their true meaning (e.g. "do not murder" or "do not commit adultery").

2. Look at Jesus' life as an example of how to understand and live out the OT laws.

3. Experience the results of Jesus' death and resurrection in order to live it out in practice. We can't fulfil the OT law, but Jesus already has – in fact much more than this. Jesus' makes us right with God as a gift, and shows us how to live right lives (Romans 3:21-22). We don't do this on our own, but receive the Holy Spirit to help (Romans 8:3-4, RSV if possible)

## Conclusion

Jesus didn't reject the OT, but endorsed it, interpreted it for us, and showed us how to live it out. "The NT is not itself a Bible; Christ is the key to the central contents of the OT, but at the same time it is the OT which provides the clue to Christ." (Chris Wright). Christ is alive today and sends his Spirit to help us understand and live a full Bible-based life.

## Ideas for Ministry

- Stand for prayer. Read aloud Proverbs 2:1-9 or 3:1-6. Lead a time of open prayer for wisdom in understanding the OT, how Jesus fulfils it, and how to live it out
- Jesus is the promise of God. Being "in Christ" is to live in God's "yes". Pairs pray for one another for the areas of life where they're struggling, frustrated or hurt. Pray for one another to experience the full, free and effective lives that God wants for us.