

A wooden cross is positioned on the left side of the frame, set against a vibrant blue background. A bright light source, possibly the sun or moon, is partially obscured by the cross's vertical beam, creating a lens flare effect. The background is filled with a dense, swirling pattern of fine, light-colored lines, giving it a textured, almost ethereal appearance. The overall mood is serene and spiritual.

Walk in the Upright Way:  
The God of the Better Choice

Matthew 5:21-37 opens the section of the Sermon on Mount sometimes called the “Antitheses” (5:21-48).

Antithesis... a person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else: as in "love is the antithesis of selfishness"

The title “Antitheses,” though, is not well-suited for describing the function of this portion of the text.

As the preceding passage of Christ's sermon on the mount (5:17-20) illustrated, Jesus has the highest praise for the Mosaic law.

What Christ demonstrates in His dying on the cross, His life lived fully, His teachings, etc. are that Christ came to provide a bridge for those of us who cannot make the choice to remain away from sin.

The collection of teachings that spans today's passage covers several topics:

murder and judgment (5:21-26),

adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32),

and vow-making (5:33-37).

This diverse collection of teachings could appear like a mismatched assortment of sayings that otherwise do not clearly seem to connect with one another, but they do

Especially in light of our previous readings from Deuteronomy, Psalm 119 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter.

All of these passages deal with “choice”

Deuteronomy 30:15 demonstrates God’s command to His people, “See I set before you today life and prosperity death and destruction.”

God speaks through Deuteronomy what He has said all along to a pained humanity, and to the people of God.

If you keep your heart stayed on me, and you are obedient there will be blessings

If you do not, there are consequences to your actions.

Each of these individual teachings can be understood under a larger understanding of upholding trust and compassion within human community if we all would simply obey God's teachings.

The better our relationship with God is, the better our relationship to other people.

Our Gospel passage begins with the most egregious example of severed trust: the ending of another human's life with murder.

By starting at such an extreme example, Jesus then begins to pave the way for people to follow him through a progression of increasingly smaller infractions against others within one's community.



Jesus begins with the point that everyone pretty much can agree.

Thou shalt not kill.

Everyone knows that commandment, and most people would look at a breaking of that commandment to be a horrible event.

Within our own lives we have each witnessed and are now witnessing to the calls and cries of those grieving deaths from needless gun violence, and war.

To take another life is to essentially set yourself outside of the understanding that in a larger community, called humanity, the lives of human beings are precious.

If we are believers in Christ, there is even the hope that someone with a heart so cruel can be changed as long as there is life left in their body.

It's a pretty basic understanding that moves throughout humanity.

Life has importance.

So in each example that Jesus gives in this section of His sermon, Jesus notes the minimal requirement of the law before articulating an ethic that exceeds that most basic obligation.

In each case, this ethic appears to be informed by the values of trust and compassion within community.

After beginning with murder (5:21-26) and then moving to adultery (5:27-30), Jesus' introduction of a set of instructions regarding divorce (5:31-32) takes that understanding to the next level.

It's best to honor the covenant that was given to the community that two shall now become one life.

And that life as one is important.

So much so that we should not only honor that within our own marriages, but we should honor the commitment other couples have made to one another.

Jesus does not leave the matter here.

Jesus then moves on to suggest in 5:37 that one's "yes" be "yes" (5:37)

An encouragement to ensure that one's spoken word is so authentic and so in line with one's intentions that it brings us to the heart of the sermon of Jesus.

Jesus is calling for his audience to demonstrate the highest possible level of trustworthiness and integrity, not only in their dealings with other humans, but also in their dealings with God.

Everything we do in this life comes the point of choice.



There is a better or good or Godly way to do things.

And there are things that are the exact opposite.

How do we keep the commands of God, live out the way that Jesus instructed, and become the people that are worthy to have the Spirit of God dwell within us?




How do we bring a little of God's blessings into our daily steps?

## FIRST POINT

Our Psalmist in Psalm 119 says our walk should match our talk.

Verse 1 and 2 of Psalm 119: Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek Him with all their heart.”

We begin by reminding ourselves that this is God’s will for our lives.



God knows our shortcomings and our failures.

God also knows our sins and our weaknesses and although God forgives us when we take to Him our burden of sin, He still asks us to stay in the Word.

Not because He needs it, but because we do.

We need to be reminded that life is hard and the path to sin is slippery.

The Psalmist of 119 tells us first to remember what our lives would look like if we stayed connected to God.

“Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart – they do no wrong but follow his ways.”

The Psalmist calls us to remember that God “laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.” (4)

We stay connected to God as we in verse 7 and 8 instructs “I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. I will obey your decrees.”

We simply cannot obey what we do not know.

## SECOND POINT

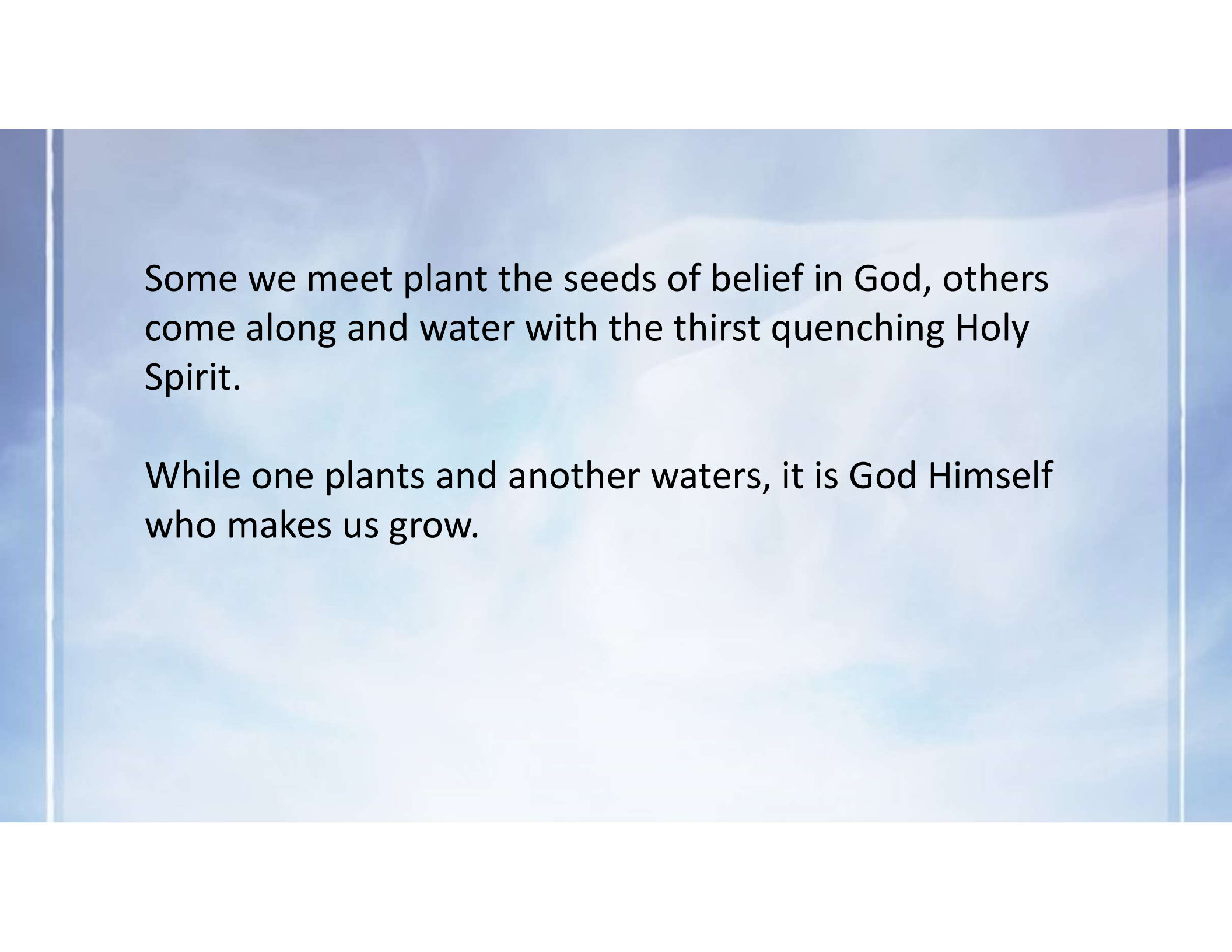
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3 reminds us in the words of Paul, that there are some areas in which we are still babes in Christ.

But there comes a day when we have to grow to fully formed spiritually aware saints of God and followers of the Lord.

Our second point is that we must choose to grow in the Lord.

Each person that we encounter in the Body of Christ has something to offer us in terms of fellowship and learning of God.





Some we meet plant the seeds of belief in God, others come along and water with the thirst quenching Holy Spirit.

While one plants and another waters, it is God Himself who makes us grow.

God has taken the time to place people in your path who will plant and water. We must do all we can to remain those well-watered fruits of the vine of heaven.

1 Cor 3:9 calls us “co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building”

“The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.” (8)

God has many names for the people of the Church.

The Body of Christ, family, Brothers and Sisters, God's building, God's field, children of God, Co-workers in the vineyard of faith, helpers in the harvest.

We can live into none of that if our relationship with God and His people are not given attention and time deserving of a blessing from Almighty God.

## THIRD AND FINAL POINT

We have to remain in God in such a way that the better choice of God's presenting to us is easy to see by our spiritual eyes.

There is a lot at stake Deuteronomy tells us.

God tells us there are blessings and curses set before us.

**“...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life...”**

When these words were spoken by God, His people were in the midst of wandering in the wilderness.

They had been brought out of Egypt.

God was reminding them of the journey Moses had led them on.

They had learned a hard lesson as they complained against the manna that had literally been fed from the Hand of God.

As they had journeyed with Moses they needed a reminder that their God had not left them, but was with them every step of the way. They needed instructions that served as a reminder that the journey would be worth it.

Being connected to God, learning His words, adhering to His teachings and clinging to His presence would bless not only them but their generations of offspring well into the future.

Christ came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

His death and resurrection that we will turn our hearts and minds to in the weeks after Ash Wednesday show us how much we have available to us if we choose the God of the better choice and walk in His way.



As the church, we are called to focus on what God's Kingdom requires, what it blesses, and how the Church is to live out its distinct calling to be the body of Christ.

Moses reminds the people of their covenant to worship God along and to walk in the ways of the Lord in our Old Testament reading.

Paul in 1 Corinthians helps the congregation at Corinth to understand and reframe its views of leadership particularly in relation to understanding the gift of growth that comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus begins to move his followers from their assumptions about God and towards God Himself.

The teaching of Jesus confront us with choices. Just as was done through the prophets and all through the teachings of the Old Testament.

Every choice carry's its own consequences but if we choose the Lord we are blessed.

Jesus calls us to choose the practices that will bring God glory and honor.

I leave you with the words from Deuteronomy

**God has ..”set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life...”**

AMEN.