



## Living the Golden Rule By Being Just, Kind and Humble

### A Five-Week Daily Study and Devotion Guide

**Theme: Be Just. Be Kind. Be Humble.**

Micah 6:8 provides for us not only a picture of what God requires of us but also provides for us a roadmap toward building the kingdom of Heaven here on this earth. This five-week daily devotion guide centers on how this one passage of scripture can inform our faith. This passage of Scripture can also be seen clearly through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. One cannot learn about or follow Jesus and not see the importance of justice, humility, mercy, and love. It was evident throughout his entire life, and should be for his followers as well.

In an increasingly polarized world, using the Micah 6:8 lens helps us discover our commonality, and challenges us to find ways to demonstrate love to all those whom we encounter, our families, our friends, our neighbors, and particularly to those with whom we differ. This helps us explore what it means to love one another while valuing our differences.

#### Guiding Scripture: Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.

#### Weekly Focus:

- Week 1: Justice: A Shared Moral Vision
- Week 2: The Power of Kindness
- Week 3: The Power of Humility
- Week 4: Being One
- Week 5: Malice Toward None, Charity for All

#### Implementation:

The daily devotions were originally created to support the sermon series "What God Requires" during the 2022 Kindness Campaign, but have been slightly modified to support the Do Unto Others campaign in 2024. You can see the original sermons [here](#).

Each daily guide (Monday - Saturday) includes scriptures, contexting, reflection questions and a prayer. The guide can be used by individuals as a personal devotion and/or by groups who can go deeper into conversations about the scripture readings and reflection questions.

# Justice: A Shared Moral Vision

## Day 1: Not ritual, but justice, faithful love and humility

**Scripture:** Micah 6:6-8

**Context:** The prophet Micah defied the kingdom of Judah's urge to practice religious ritual and "conspicuous consumption" side-by-side. On God's behalf, he urged an altered agenda: "Do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God." Resurrection serves the same God as Micah. One of our goals, notably in our BE campaign, is to "address injustices and build bridges of healing" today. Like Micah, we believe weekly pious rituals matter less than treating people justly every day.

### Reflection:

- Micah kept ironically proposing bigger and bigger sacrifices in verses 6-7 to try to please God. He ended with child sacrifice, a ghastly practice some Israelites may have adopted (cf. 2 Kings 17:15-17). What do the three divine requirements Micah listed tell you about what God is like? "To walk" was the Hebrew way to identify a person's lifestyle. In what ways does your lifestyle reflect your choice to be the person your God calls you to be?
- In what ways do your culture and community fall short of doing justice, embracing faithful love and walking humbly with God? Scholar Gary Smith said, "Micah's delineation of God's requirements... includes no negative statements about what is forbidden to the Israelites. It presents a positive case of what God thinks is best for humankind." \* How can you actively move yourself, your family, your workplace and community toward God's best for humankind?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, my goal is to walk justly, kindly and humbly with you. Lead and guide me into the newness of life that you died and rose again to offer me. Amen.

\* Gary V. Smith, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, p. 555.

## Day 2: God's call for justice

**Scripture:** Psalm 82:1-4

**Context:** Hebrews used some ideas from neighboring nations, like that of a council of gods. But Israel said the one true God presided with angels or heavenly spirits as lesser (cf. also Job 1:6). To tell an Israelite orphan or widow "God helps those who help themselves" would have made no sense. With no legal or social status, and no powerful male on their side, those widows or orphans had no way to "help themselves." Psalm 82 made it clear that God cared strongly about helping those who were helpless.

### Reflection:

- Psalm 82 represented a whole strand of Israelite worship. For example, Psalm 146:9 sang the praises of "The LORD: who protects immigrants, who helps orphans and widows." But God usually acts through people, through us, to accomplish divine purposes. In what ways, big and small, can you partner with God in carrying out God's wish for justice and rescue to take place on earth?
- In what parts of life do the words of Psalm 82 speak most clearly to your heart: "Give justice to the lowly and the orphan; maintain the right of the poor and the destitute! Rescue the lowly and the needy. Deliver them from the power of the wicked"? Has there ever been a time when you found help and freedom from a situation in which you felt helpless? For whom can you be God's instrument to help those who cannot help themselves?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you embodied God's love for me. Now you call me to embody your love as I deal with other people, even people I may not like, may even fear. Grow your love in my heart. Amen.

## Day 3: Let justice roll down

**Scripture:** Amos 5:21-24

### Context:

On God's behalf, the prophet Amos urged his people not to trust religious rituals, but to "let justice roll down like waters." Pastor Ginger Gaines-Cirelli said, "God doesn't say, love me with your mind alone, thinking Goddish thoughts....God doesn't say only love me with your praiseworthy feelings surrounded by...no one that challenges you to stretch yourself.... the call is to love with all we've got, with SOUL, with our deepest wholeness and essence and humanity...that which connects us to our neighbor." \*

### Reflection:

- How can you be alert for opportunities in everyday activities like your work, leisure activities, shopping and other pursuits to make choices that bring about righteousness and justice? What risks or costs might you face to make those choices? To what extent are you willing to act consistently for justice and righteousness?
- Amos itemized God's charges against Israel: "They have sold the innocent for silver, and those in need for a pair of sandals. They crush the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way" (Amos 2:6-7). If Amos wrote today, not in 700 B.C., what issues do you think he might list for our culture? How can you be an active change agent whose words and actions move our society toward God's ideal of justice and righteousness?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, from Kansas and Missouri to Haiti, Malawi and beyond, there are hungry children and desperate people facing injustice. They are all your people—help me to care about them as much as you do. Amen.

\* From Pastor Cirelli's Oct. 25, 2020 sermon at Foundry United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C. Full sermon available at <https://www.foundryumc.org/archive/fearless-generosity-for-such-a-time-as-this>.

## Day 4: Jesus' "more important matters" begin with justice

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:23-27

### Context:

There were genuinely good Pharisees (e.g. Gamaliel in Acts 5:33-39). But sadly, as scholar N. T. Wright said, "There were many, probably the majority, who went along for the ride, or particularly for the political agenda the Pharisees adopted.... when it came to the actual spiritual and moral struggle to make the inside of the house match the outside, they hadn't even begun." \* It was to them, eager to look good outwardly while ignoring justice, peace and faith, that Jesus spoke so prophetically.

### Reflection:

- Scholar William Barclay reviewed some of the actions Jesus deplored: "The Pharisees...were so meticulous about tithes that they would tithe even one clump of mint; yet these same men could be guilty of injustice; could be hard and arrogant and cruel, forgetting the claims of mercy; could take oaths and pledges and promises with the deliberate intention of evading them, forgetting fidelity." \*\* What are some of the ways that same attitude can express itself today?
- People whitewashed tombs to warn pilgrims (e.g. for Passover) not to defile themselves by touching a tomb. Jesus said no matter how good it looked it was still a tomb. "Jesus speaks of whitewash as a beautifying agent to conceal corruption (Ezekiel 13:10-15; 22:28). The Pharisees, who emphasized ritual purity, look good on the outside but whoever approaches them becomes impure." \*\*\* How does that apply to trying to look good to others when you really aren't?

**Prayer:** Lord God, I always check my clothes and my hair in the mirror to make sure I look good. Make me a person who is even more interested in being good than in looking good. Amen.

\* Wright, N.T., *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28 (The New Testament for Everyone)* (pp. 106-107). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

\*\* William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 2, Chapters 11-28 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 294.

\*\*\* Comment on Matthew 23:27 in NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## Day 5: Live in the light of “goodness, justice and truth”

**Scripture:** Ephesians 5:8-11

**Context:** The spiritual contrast of “darkness” with “light” finds its roots in a typical human reaction to the presence or absence of physical light. People who want to do something wrong, something they are ashamed to have others see them doing, usually choose to do them in darkness if they possibly can. Ephesians expressed confidence that, living in God’s grace and power, Christ followers do not need to fear the prospect of God’s light illuminating “everything” about our lives.

### Reflection:

- Verse 8 did not say, as we might expect, something like “You belong to the light.” It used a stronger phrase: “Now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” What is the source of the light that shines from your life in your best moments? Can you recall one or more times when you realized Christ’s light shining through you had brightened another life?
- What are some of the attitudes or behaviors (even if you’ve always been a Christian) in which God has moved your life from darkness to light? Ephesians 6:14 spoke of having “justice as your breastplate.” How can you intentionally “test” the parts of your life, as verse 10 suggested, to discern the way of living most pleasing to God? How can you trust God’s leading, not just human instincts or wisdom, to shape your life into a life of justice?

**Prayer:** God, creator of light, keep illuminating the darkest corners of my life. Keep guiding me as I test habits and practices, seeking to live every day as a child of your light. Amen.

## Day 6: Good news for the lowly and hungry

**Scripture:** Luke 1:51-53, Luke 4:16-21

**Context:** Mary’s song showed that the effects of John’s and Jesus’ births went far beyond two happy rural families. Pastor Adam Hamilton said many of us “fail to realize how subversive, even revolutionary, Mary’s song really was... Mary’s words should make us uncomfortable. They point to a concern God has for the poor, and a sense that the rich have received theirs already... We have the obligation and calling to be used by God to ‘fill the hungry with good things.’” \* Jesus shared his mother’s sense of his mission. Invited to read in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, he chose Isaiah’s promise of hope for the lowliest groups in his society, and then announced to the congregation that he fulfilled Isaiah’s scripture.

### Reflection:

John’s gospel said (cf. John 1:1-3, 14) Jesus was the power behind all of the calls to justice by Israel’s prophets (e.g. Amos 5:24), psalmists (e.g. Psalm 82:1-4) and wisdom writers (e.g. Proverbs 31:8-9). So it wasn’t startling that when Mary rejoiced that her child would fulfill God’s promise to bring justice to an unjust world, she echoed the song the prophet Samuel’s mother sang in 1 Samuel 2:3-5, 8. Nor was it surprising that Jesus’ half-brother James, whose letter we just studied, echoed the need to live out God’s concern for the poor in a world that has always struggled to live justly (cf. James 2:1-5). In what ways are you rich or powerful? In what ways “lowly” or “hungry”? Are you willing to accept help in any areas where your life may be “lowly”? Does Mary’s song move you to actively use the ways you are rich and/or powerful to lighten the burdens of the lowly and hungry, not just to further enhance your own wealth and power?

**Prayer:** Lord God, I don’t want you to have to pull me down or send me away empty-handed. Give me the wisdom to share what I have, not to hoard it just for myself. Amen.

\* Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: A Season of Reflections*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, pp. 87-90.

# The Power of Kindness

## Day 1: Kindness begins with God

**Scripture:** Psalm 18:46-50

**Context:** As with many other positive qualities, the Bible did not say kindness springs automatically out of the human heart's generous impulses. Psalm 18 praised God's kindness to David, using the multi-layered Hebrew word *hesed*. Modern English versions often use a phrase like "faithful love" to render *hesed* when it speaks of God, while often choosing "kindness" to express *hesed*'s meaning when it's about how people act (as in Micah 6:8). \* As in today's text, in Psalm 90:14-17 kindness begins with God.

### Reflection:

- We often discuss our "legacy," sometimes making it sound (and perhaps thinking) as if the legacy is solely the result of our own work. The psalmists, on the other hand, always sought to give God the praise, whether for a victory in battle or in reflecting on the results of a long life. "With God's help, there is the possibility of something enduring amid the reality of the shortness of human life." \*\* Have you ever asked God's divine kindness to be a major force shaping your legacy? Will you?
- God showed David "faithful love" or "kindness" (Hebrew *hesed*)—but not just David. Galatians 3:26 said we are "all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus." God offers that same loving kindness to everyone who chooses to be his child. What does it mean to your faith to know God values you as much as the writer of Psalm 18? In what ways has God "rescued" you over the course of your life, from both outer and inner "enemies"?

**Prayer:** Lord God, it's easy for me to forget that, often quietly and unobtrusively, you are always with me. Enable me to remember and value your kind presence shaping and guiding me. Amen.

\* Based on notes on Psalm 18:50 by Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reayburn in *A Handbook on the Book of Psalms*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1991, p. 53.

\*\* J. Clinton McCann, Jr., study note on Psalm 90:17 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 942 OT.

## Day 2: God's kindness reflected by his servant David

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 4:4, 9:1-13

**Context:** Israel's King David was close friends with Jonathan, son of King Saul. Jonathan said, "The two of us made a solemn pledge in the LORD's name when we said, 'The LORD is witness between us and between our descendants forever'" (1 Samuel 20:42). Those were not just nice words. David, secure as king (after a struggle with Saul's "house"—cf. 2 Samuel 3:1), asked, "Is there anyone from Saul's family still alive that I could show faithful love for Jonathan's sake?" In fact, there was.

### Reflection:

- A new ruler or boss (then or now) often aims to get rid of anyone who was loyal to a former leader. Mephibosheth, King Saul's grandson, with limited mobility due to a childhood accident, likely lived in hiding. David used the Hebrew word *hesed* (that key word that expressed God's deep covenant love and kindness) three times for what he wanted to show Jonathan's remaining son. What does seeing how David kept his promise to Jonathan tell you about the value he attached to kindness?
- Don't you wonder what went through Mephibosheth's mind when he got the news that King David had summoned him to appear? Many preachers have observed that David's act in extending *hesed* to Jonathan's son is an early image of what God gave all of us in Jesus. What feelings does the prospect of facing God after your earthly life ends trigger in you? God offers divine kindness to all of us; only you can choose to refuse it. Please don't!

**Prayer:** Ruler of the cosmos, I see a dim reflection of you in the loving kindness your servant David showed. Teach me how to trust your *hesed* toward me, and to extend it to others as David did. Amen.

## Day 3: Wisdom and prophecy calling for kindness

**Scripture:** Proverbs 21:21, Zechariah 7:9-10

**Context:** We can think kindness means relatively “small” actions like baking a few extra cookies to take to a neighbor’s house. Well, yes, but it takes in much more. The sages of Hebrew wisdom grouped kindness with “big” ideas like life, righteousness and honor. And the prophet Zechariah, in a passage that addressed the question of whether Israel should resume certain rituals after their return from exile, instead linked kindness to the justice issues that our study focused on last week.

### Reflection:

- Zechariah reminded Israel that “devout faith is demonstrated, not in rote ritual, but in rendering ‘true judgments, ...kindness and mercy’ (verse 9). We are to act on behalf of the powerless in our world, taking particular care not to do harm to widows, orphans, aliens and the poor.” \* How does your heart respond to Zechariah’s prophetic call to extend “kindness” beyond the easiest people to reach to those who may need it the most?
- Proverbs 21:21, like Micah 6:8 (our memory verse for this BE campaign) used the sweeping Hebrew word *hesed* in its sense of kindness toward others. “The two qualities righteousness and kindness sum up a good life.” “Those who pursue” means anyone who “shows or tries to show the two qualities referred to.” \*\* How does Proverbs’ wisdom here match up with your list of what makes for a “good life”? How intentionally do you “pursue” righteousness and kindness?

**Prayer:** Creator God, I’m often busy figuring out “the good life” for myself, with only my own pleasure as the major guideline. Show me, day by day, how to live in ways that pursue righteousness and kindness. Amen.

\* Rebekah Close LeMon, study note on Zechariah 7:3-10 in *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, p. 1373.

\*\* William D. Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, comments on Proverbs 21:21 in *A Handbook on Proverbs*. New York: United Bible Societies, p. 453.

## Day 4: Jesus on how we should treat others

**Scripture:** Luke 6:27-36

**Context:** Jesus taught his followers how to live with his peace and joy. Yet he realized that not all would be willing to accept what he taught: “I say to you who are willing to hear.” The types of behavior Jesus described are not natural to any of us. We only move toward Jesus’ kind of open, fear-free life as we allow the Holy Spirit to reshape our natural impulses to grow the fruit of kindness in our lives. (cf. also Matthew 5:44-45)

### Reflection:

- Jesus gave specific examples, not to set up new, onerous rules for us, but to show in practice the spirit in which he called us to live. As *The Message* put Luke 6:30, “If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.” \* When has someone touched your life for the better by living kindly and generously? When have you found the joy of extending kindness to someone else?
- Luke linked the Golden Rule (“Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you”—verse 31) to Jesus’ words about how to treat enemies. In what relationships do you find it hardest for you to treat others as you’d wish them to treat you? How can Jesus’ teaching help you discern how to live out the Golden Rule in ways that bless others while you maintain healthy boundaries and self-care?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, pray for those who mistreat me? Love my enemies? You did it, but you were—well, you. I’m willing to listen to your teaching, and to learn your ways. Amen.

\* From Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*. NavPress, 1993-2002.

## Day 5: Paul's grateful amazement at God's kindness

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 1:12-16, 2 Timothy 2:23-25

**Context:** The apostle Paul looked back on the days when, as an angry young Pharisee named Saul, he proudly persecuted and killed Christians (Acts 7:57-8:1, 9:1-2). Despite that, he said, Christ's favor, love and faithfulness had "poured all over me." He maintained a lifelong sense of wonder and gratitude for the way God's kindness had reshaped his life focus at a time when he was fighting against God. And one way he expressed that was urging everyone he worked with to show kindness

### Reflection:

- The letters to Timothy echoed Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:27-28, which we read yesterday: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you." Acting like that is not natural to any of us. In what ways can you allow the Holy Spirit to reshape your natural impulses to grow the fruit of kindness toward all people in your life?
- Jesus asked, "If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matthew 5:46-47). Kindness to people who are kind to you is just good manners. But "kind toward all people"? That only grows, over time, as the Holy Spirit's godly presence shapes you. In what ways has Jesus made you kinder than you used to be?

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit! Grow kindness in me, not as wimpy emotionalism to please those I like, but as hard-edged, practical determination to live a life that reflects my Lord Jesus' way of treating people even as he worked to defeat evil with good. Amen.

## Day 6: The kindness "family" of qualities

**Scripture:** Colossians 3:12-13

**Context:** Nowhere in Scripture will you find, "Treat your neighbors with kindness, unless their beliefs differ from yours." Implicit in Paul's instructions was the understanding that we are to treat all people with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We are, in fact, to love all people. Yes, this becomes more complicated when people's fundamental beliefs are not the same as yours, especially if they do not treat you in these ways. Rather than looking at this as a problem and trying to "fix" them, Paul said (cf. especially Romans 14:1-15:7) that gives us a way to love extravagantly, working to find unity in unexpected places. In today's world, we have the chance to do that in digital spaces as well as in the more personal settings Paul no doubt had in mind.

### Reflection:

- Paul wrote in Romans 14:19, "So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up." Why is this harder when people's beliefs are different than yours? What is one concrete thing you can do this week that builds up another person, especially a person with whom you differ? What principles can guide you in deciding when loving your neighbor is more valuable than winning an argument? John Wesley, Methodism's founder, said in a sermon titled "A Catholic Spirit," "Even though a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without doubt, we may." \* How did Paul's teachings in today's passages shape Wesley's theology? Is there someone in your life with whom you do not think alike, yet you need to love alike?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give me clarity about my daily need for your forgiving, empowering grace to nurture and grow me. And grow me into a person who makes kindness and forgiveness central to my rhythm of life. Amen.

\* To read Wesley's entire sermon, "A Catholic Spirit" edited into modern English, [click here](#).

## Week 3: The Power of Humility

### Day 1: God honors the humble

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6-10, 1 Peter 5:5-6

**Context:** Proverbs was the outstanding example of what we call “wisdom writing.” Hebrew sages, who traced their beginnings back to the reign of Israel’s King Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 5:12), studied and collected concise sayings, pearls of wisdom about good ways to live a life pleasing to God. One of those very short sayings (Proverbs 3:34) was so simple and powerful that both James and Peter later quoted it in their letters to early Christians.

#### Reflection:

- Scholar John Goldingay wrote, “You could say these early chapters of Proverbs are about trust in wisdom, not trust in Yahweh, but the wisdom they urge is Yahweh’s wisdom. Paying attention to wisdom is Proverbs’ equivalent to paying attention to Yahweh. Moses speaks of paying attention to Torah and the Prophets speak of paying attention to Yahweh’s word, and they are all referring to the same thing.”\* What sources of insight most help and inspire you to trust God’s wisdom?
- Proverbs’ phrase “shows favor” has strong overtones that may have made it especially appealing to the two apostles who quoted it. “Shows favor” is literally ‘gives grace,’ which means he is kind, gracious, good.”\*\* What do you believe might incline God to extend grace more readily to a humble person rather than to an arrogant, pushy, entitled person?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, preserve me from the error of “being proud of my humility.” Help me genuinely recognize my need for your favor and wisdom and ask you for them with a genuinely humble heart. Amen.

\* John Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p. 18.

### Day 2: It’s wise to be humble

**Scripture:** Proverbs 11:2, 16:19, 29:23

**Context:** Proverbs 11:2 is particularly worth our attention this week because of its connection with our memory verse for this series. “The word rendered humble is used only here. Its verb form is used in Micah 6:8 ‘to walk humbly with your God.’ Humble or ‘modest’ refers here to a person who does not overestimate himself or herself, that is, does not pretend to be more important than he or she is.”\* But the word used in the other two proverbs also “means ‘humble’ or ‘lowly,’ the opposite of ‘proud’ or ‘arrogant.’”\*\*

#### Reflection:

- “When pride comes, so does shame”? Jesus told a parable to show one way that could happen (cf. Luke 14:7-11). If a man proudly assumes that he must have the best seat at a feast (in Jesus’ day no woman would have done this), he might feel shame if the host asked him to give it up for a more honored guest. Take a lower seat, said Jesus—if you’re moved up, there’s no shame. Was that just about “image management,” or Jesus’ direction on the best way to live?
- Most of the Old Testament world, and on to Jesus’ day, saw humility as a weakness. “Plutarch wrote a self-help book that might crack bestseller lists in our day: *How to Praise Yourself Inoffensively*. A classic example of the genre is *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*, written by Emperor Caesar Augustus himself...with copies distributed throughout the empire.”\*\*\* How did the wisdom of Proverbs (and Micah) point to a totally counter-cultural set of attitudes and actions?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, it’s hard when I don’t think the people around me value me as highly as I deserve. Weave into my psyche the reminder that you honor the humble. Amen.

\* William D. Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, comments on Proverbs 11:2 in *A Handbook on Proverbs*. New York: United Bible Societies, p. 241.

\*\* *Ibid.*, p. 356

\*\*\* Ortberg, John, *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.



## Day 3: The temple God most wants: a humble spirit

**Scripture:** Isaiah 66:1-2

**Context:** Chapter 66 is the last chapter in the book of Isaiah, ending a section that clearly spoke to the spiritual issues the Israelite people faced after their exile in Babylon ended. One important task for them was to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Haggai 1:7-8). But the prophet reminded them that God didn't need the Temple; they did. As they came to worship, God was watching to see if they brought a spirit that humbly recognized their daily need of God, not a spirit of proud self-sufficiency.

### Reflection:

- The central problem [Isaiah] has identified in the human race is that of self-exaltation. We try to solve the basic problem of our extreme fragility, both physically and psychologically, by lifting ourselves up in order to gain power." \* Any applause we can generate from other humans is temporary and conditional. How have you learned, in your approach to worship, to move beyond "What will they think?" to "What will God see in me?" as your driving question?
- "Naturalist William Beebe told of President Teddy Roosevelt. The two searched the sky for a star-like spot near the lower left corner of the Great Square of Pegasus. Roosevelt would recite: "That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun." Then Roosevelt said, 'Now I think we are small enough!'" \*\* What helps you see yourself the "right" size before God?

**Prayer:** Lord God, as I worship and serve, keep me aware that my call is to reflect your great love and kindness, not to outshine you. Let your glory humble and uplift me every day. Amen.

\* John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, p. 694.

\*\* Found at <https://bible.org/illustration/now-we-are-small-enough>.

## Day 4: How a humble king arrived

**Scripture:** Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 21:5

**Context:** Isaiah wrote of Israel's hope that God would send a faithful heir of David's royal line to rule forever (cf. 1 Kings 9:3-5, Isaiah 9:2-7). Zechariah 9:9, which Matthew cited in Matthew 21:4-5, distinguished a king on a donkey, who came in peace (cf. 1 Kings 1:31-35), from a conqueror's war horses. With Rome's military power ostentatiously displayed around Jerusalem (especially at Passover time), Jesus deliberately followed Zechariah's "template" to show himself as a humble king.

### Reflection:

- Jesus came to Jerusalem like a king arriving, but one who came in peace. Why did that make "the chief priests and legal experts" angry? Some Israelites profited from the status quo with Rome. "The aristocratic priests belonged to Jerusalem's wealthy ruling class.... they probably also have political objections." \* Many wanted a military king like David who led Israel to victories in war. But Jesus' followers praised a gentle "Son of David" who said to love your enemies. Do you?
- It's unlikely that those who shouted that Jesus was the "Son of David" analyzed the theological fine points that title might imply. When the "proper" religious authorities objected to the shouting and to its implications, Jesus said he valued people's joy. We say our journey is "to know, love and serve God." How can you think clearly and precisely to "know God" without losing the ability to "love God" through joyful expressions of praise like those as he rode into Jerusalem?

**Prayer:** Lord, Jesus, help me learn and understand all I can about your saving life, death and resurrection while retaining the capacity to simply cry with joy, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 220539-220542). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## Day 5: Jesus' humbling answer to the "greatest" question

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:3, 5, 18:1-4

**Context:** When the disciples asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus called a little child to sit among them as his answer. Our world and culture tend to value children more highly than the culture Jesus lived in, but we'd still be unlikely, left to our natural impulses, to answer a "greatest" question as Jesus did. And we'd surely struggle to regard as "blessed" or "happy" (the language Jesus used could support both meanings) those he mentioned in Matthew 5.

### Reflection:

- In the "beatitudes," Jesus would have used an Aramaic phrase that meant a supreme gift from God, a joy not reliant on good circumstances or fortune. Scholar N. T. Wright said, "In our world, still, most people think wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble [and others]." \* Do Jesus' words in any way ring true for you? Do you wish you had the "blessedness" he offered to the hopeless and humble?
- Jesus often drew on the prophets who came before him. "As verses 3–4 are based on Isaiah 61, so verse 5 finds its background in Psalm 37:11....The meek (or "humble") of this verse and the "poor" of verse 3 are the same people viewed from a different perspective. In fact, in the language of Jesus the word could hardly be distinguished from 'poor.'" \*\* Do you believe the relative prosperity almost all of us in the U.S. have makes it easier or harder to experience Jesus' blessing on the humble.

**Prayer:** King Jesus, you could have dazzled us. Instead, you came to an obscure village, lived among ordinary working folk, and served instead of demanding your rights. Help me learn deep inside from your model of humble service. Amen.

\* N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 37.

\*\* Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, comment on Matthew 5:5 in *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, p. 110.

## Day 6: What it looks like to truly be God

**Scripture:** Philippians 2:5-8

**Context:** History says the city of Philippi was full of retired Roman military men. Ask them to name a great leader and they'd have named Alexander the Great, the Greek general who conquered nearly all the known world, or the Roman Emperor Augustus who used force to end a civil war in the empire and bring a type of "peace" by suppressing any who disagreed with him. Yet "[Jesus] was the reality, and Alexander and Augustus were the caricature. [Jesus] is what true global sovereignty looked like." \* Paul urged the Philippians to be like Jesus (the Christ = anointed one), a vastly different kind of king. "Instead of using his position to gain things for himself, Christ used it to give to others." \*\*.

### Reflection:

- Jesus "did not consider being equal with God something to exploit" (verse 6). Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "Who arrogantly grasped at the chance to be 'like God, knowing good and evil'? Why, Adam in Genesis 3." Jesus, who was God, showed "what it really meant to be divine.... the true meaning of who God is. He is the God of self-giving love." \* Paul urged the Philippians to "adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus." Are you willing to even think about adopting that attitude? Verse 7 then said Jesus "emptied himself." In Greek grammar, the "himself" meant "'he was glad to...,' or 'he was willing to give up all he had.'" "Emptied" didn't mean Jesus stopped being God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). As God, he didn't have an ego need for any "rank of dignity and glory." He took "the form of a slave," and died on a cross. \*\*\* Would you admire Jesus more if he'd strutted around asking, "Do you know who I am?" and seeking applause? Why or why not?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I call you Lord, not despite your humble, serving life and death, but because of it. As I worship you, send your Spirit to grow more of your self-giving love in my heart. Amen.

\* Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (The New Testament for Everyone)* (p. 101-103). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

\*\* Jerry L. Sumney, study note on Philippians 2:6 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 377 NT.

\*\*\* Greek insights from I-Jin Loh and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1977, pp. 59-60.

## Week 4: Being One

### Day 1: Jesus prayed for his followers (including you)

**Scripture:** John 17:6, 10-11, 18-21

**Context:** John 17 showed Jesus in prayer. His earthly ministry was over, the cross hours away. He asked God to “glorify” him—through the cross, not in typical human ways! He prayed, not for his own well-being but for his followers. He asked God to empower “those who believe in me because of their word”—in other words, for Christians through the ages, including you. He prayed that they would be, not identical, but “one”: “I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (verse 21).

#### Reflection:

- In John 17:14, Jesus said, a bit surprisingly, that his followers “don’t belong to this world” any more than he did. In what ways are you most interested in, and attentive to, this world? In what areas of life do you most sense your energy and focus shifting to God’s Kingdom, both in God’s mission in this world and in the hope of eternity beyond this world that God offers?
- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Imagine some great figure of the past...who you respect and admire. Imagine historians have just found...a letter from the great man. And imagine that it was talking about—you! How would you feel? That is how you should feel as you read verse 20. Jesus is talking about you. And me.” \* Jesus was sure his kingdom would defeat the world’s hatred, and in time reach you. How does your heart respond when you realize Jesus prayed for you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, make me a living, breathing answer to your prayer. I open my heart to the work of your Holy Spirit. Guide me as I seek to share your love and grace with everyone I meet. Amen.

\* Wright, N.T., *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21 (The New Testament for Everyone)* (p. 97). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

### Day 2: Blessing “all the families of the earth”

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-3, Jeremiah 29:1-7

**Context:** God promised Abraham “I will make of you a great nation” and “a land I will show you.” That can tempt human nature to think, “God likes me more than anyone else!” But God called Abraham and his heirs to share their blessing widely: “All the families of earth will be blessed because of you.” Even after Babylon’s brutal capture of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah urged the Israelite exiles to pray for the prosperity and peace—of Babylon! As defeated exiles, he urged them to love their neighbors.

#### Reflection:

- Just before Abraham’s story, Genesis 11:1-9 told the story of the Tower of Babel. Scholar Theodore Hiebert wrote, “The text itself emphasizes the human wish to preserve one common culture (11:1-4). This wish comes into conflict with God’s aim to create a new world with different cultures (11:5-9).” \* Too often people see difference as a threat, something to hate and resist. What (if anything) has helped you learn to value diversity in the human family God created?
- Jeremiah called exiled Israelites to be generous—and smart. “People aren’t being urged to seek the welfare of their own city but to commit themselves to a city where they don’t belong and that they think they’ll soon leave. They’re to seek the welfare of the city where they’re forced to live because their own welfare is tied up with that city.” \*\* How does the prophet’s message point to why God calls you and your church family to better love your neighbors, even the difficult ones?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you wanted Abraham to care about blessing “all the families of earth.” Plant that kind of heart in me, too, as one of Abraham’s spiritual descendants. Amen.

\* Theodore Hiebert, study note on Genesis 11:1-9 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 200T. Explored in depth in Dr. Hiebert’s book *The Beginning of Difference: Discovering Identity in God’s Diverse World*. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2019.

\*\* John Goldingay, *Jeremiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 145.

## Day 3: Love: from God to us and on to others

**Scripture:** 1 John 4:16-21

**Context:** Some people fear that “righteous” people are not loving, that following Jesus makes you critical and unloving. That was not the apostle John’s view! John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, preached a sermon on April 21, 1777 that quoted John and invited all Christ-followers, “Let us provoke all men, not to enmity and contention, but to love and good works; always remembering those deep words... ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him!’” \*

### Reflection:

- Why would John say, “Perfect love drives out fear”? 1 John 4:20 said, “Those who say, ‘I love God’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars.” Do you agree that it is often fear that leads us to hate other people? Why would hating others block any genuine love for God? Can you think of practical ways to let God’s perfect love move you in the direction of acting in love toward “others,” even if you think they deserve fear and distrust rather than love?
- “‘God is love’... touches on everything, from the individual-psychological to the radically communal... Love and God go together; hate and God do not (4:20); fear and God do not (4:18).” \*\* Have you ever experienced a situation in which as you learned to love another person your fear of that person decreased and even disappeared? In what ways has following Christ made you and your relationships more loving?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you embodied God’s love for me. Now you call me to embody your love as I deal with other people, even people I may not like, may even fear. Grow your love in my heart. Amen.

\* From Wesley’s sermon “On Laying The Foundation Of The New Chapel, Near The City-Road, London” at <http://www.godrules.net/library/wsermons/wsermons132.htm>.

\*\* Jaime Clark-Soles note on 1 John 4:16-20 in *The CEB Women’s Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p. 1562.

## Day 4: Words without actions can’t “love your neighbor”

**Scripture:** Romans 13:8-10

**Context:** Paul sent this letter to Roman house churches (there were no big cathedrals in his day). Some were mainly Jewish, others mostly Gentile. Their standards of “righteousness” varied (cf. Romans 14:1-15:13). It was easy for them to criticize each other. Paul said the purpose of God’s law or rules is to help us love. “Love doesn’t do anything wrong to a neighbor” was a big challenge to people who disagreed. It was (and is) vital, because “Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law.”

### Reflection:

- Paul spoke to differences over relatively minor issues (that seemed major to those who felt strongly about them). How do you think some of them might have initially reacted to the idea that “Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law”? Do you know anyone who is genuinely loving, but in some parts of life acts in ways that you think miss the mark? Do you believe Paul was right, or was he too soft on “law breakers”?
- How might it have altered ugly religious conflicts (e.g., the Salem witch trials, the Inquisition) if Christians had always aimed to fulfill the law by loving? How can you stand for truths that matter to you without acting in unloving ways toward those who disagree? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in the inner qualities (that may not come naturally) that help you live out the law of love.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, “love is what fulfills the Law” sometimes feels too easy to me. Until, that is, I try to do it—then I realize how high and hard a standard that is. Teach me how to love the way that you love. Amen.

## Day 5: Those unexpected “neighbors”

**Scripture:** Luke 10:25-37, John 4:27-40

**Context:** The ethnic hatred between Samaritans and Jews was based on centuries of distrust. But Jesus saw them as “neighbors.” He told a parable about a Samaritan’s far-reaching mercy to relieve a Jewish person’s suffering. Jesus’ call was “go and do likewise”—offer profuse, practical mercy that costs something. In the hostile territory of Samaria, Jesus modeled a key spiritual vision for his disciples. “Open your eyes,” he said, “and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest” (verse 35).

### Reflection:

- Jesus used religious officials (priest, Levite) to represent those who claim a relationship with God, yet don’t act on it. Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you the priest or Levite? Are you the Samaritan, from a group the priest and Levite looked down on? Do you feel battered and helpless? Jesus called us to become like “the one who demonstrated mercy.” How do you (or could you) act on your relationship with God by offering compassion and healing?
- Jesus’ disciples were “shocked” to see him talking to the outcast Samaritan woman at the well. \* They might have understood him shaming her about her racial or moral inferiority. But he offered her “living water” (John 4:10) and told her he was the Messiah everyone hoped for (John 4:26). In short, he treated her like any other human being worthy of love and care. How can Jesus’ example upgrade the way you treat and relate to any “Samaritan women” you encounter?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, teach me anew this week to recognize and value your image in myself, and in all the people, male and female, happy and hurting, who cross my path. Amen.

## Day 6: Love: the key to the greatest commandments

**Scripture:** Matthew 22:36-40

**Context:** Jewish rabbis debated: were all commandments equal or were some greater than others? Asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus chose not one but two. The first was Deuteronomy 6:4: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.” But he added Leviticus 19:18: “You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Psychologists today identify the inner mechanism that made it so important to include “as you love yourself” by noting that our “superego” is the inner “critic” that leads too many of us to hate ourselves. If we hate ourselves, we surely will find it hard to love our neighbor. Jesus said the point of all other truths is to lead us to love God and neighbor more fully. God wants us to show contagious love to all we know.

### Reflection:

- Jesus said every key Bible principle, all the truths we know about what God wants, “depend” on the two commands he quoted. What do you believe made these two commands so central in Jesus’ thinking, teaching, and living? Can you recall any time when some belief you held led you to be less loving toward God or some of your neighbors, maybe without even realizing it? That second command can be challenging. Loving others the way we love ourselves is rooted in how God loves us—never giving up, no matter what. Our humanity makes it hard for us to love ourselves or others with God’s unwarranted, unhesitating love. But God calls us to move toward that, for our own sake and the sake of others. What has stopped you or made it hard for you to love yourself or someone else persistently? How might you love more fully?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, thank you for loving me unconditionally. Help me to recognize the times in my life when I need to relentlessly extend your love to those around me. Amen.

## Week 5: Malice Toward None, Charity for All

### Day 1: Listening: essential for living with humility

**Scripture:** James 1:19-22, 4:11-12

**Context:** Author Stephen Covey said, "The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply." \* That's not a recent issue. Romans, Jews and Samaritans blamed each other for conflict without trying to understand, and we still do today. But James called Christ-followers to "be quick to listen." He asked, bluntly, "You who judge your neighbor, who are you?" Only God (not us), he said, "is able to save and to destroy."

#### Reflection:

- Political foes said Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt (3/4 of Mount Rushmore!) were horrible, evil people. Pastor Hamilton said, "Does the Lord give us an exemption from practicing the Scriptures when it comes to our political leaders ...and others with whom we disagree?... This does not mean we are not to practice discernment, nor...remain silent in the face of wrongdoing. Yet we can make known our disagreements with others while doing so in love and with respect for the other." \*\* Can you disagree in loving, respectful ways? Why or why not?
- When you find yourself with sharply negative feelings about a political candidate or elected winner, do you ever look inside and ask, "Have I tried to listen to understand that person's position? What inside me feels threatened or frightened by this person?" In what ways can James encourage you to show more Christ-like justice, kindness and humility toward those with different views?

**Prayer:** Lord of life, help me tame my tongue, and the inner insecurities that so often set my tongue off. Help me to respond to the grace you give me by living ever more faithfully. Amen.

\* In an article titled "Active Listening Skills" by Dianne Grande, Ph.D. found at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-it-together/202006/active-listening-skills>. The whole article is clear, practical and worth reviewing.

\*\* Hamilton, Adam, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White* (p. 22). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

### Day 2: Avoid words that can kill

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:21-22, 43-48

**Context:** Election Day is coming up, and emotions are running high. Jesus showed the spiritual danger of despising other people and holding them in contempt rather than loving them. The Bible did not say "hate your enemy," but some rabbis thought it did: "A command to hate enemies, while taught by some contemporary Jewish sects, was not explicit in Scripture, but extrapolated from pious examples there (Psalm 31:6; 119:113; 139:21)."

\* But Jesus stressed God's love to both "the evil and the good."

#### Reflection:

- Jesus saw "Romans insulting Jews, Samaritans attacking Jews, Jews fighting back, different Jewish parties insulting and attacking each other. .... Jesus...shows...a blueprint for a way of being fully, genuinely, gloriously human.... Every time you decide to let your anger smoulder on inside you, you are becoming a little less than fully human." \*\* When have you seen deep inner anger reduce someone's ability (even yours) to be fully human?
- We might call a friend "idiot" or "fool" when we're just kidding. But not in Jesus' day (and at times today, our "kidding" can turn hurtful). The Aramaic and Greek words Jesus cited could destroy a person's reputation and label them as subhuman. What kinds of words and ideas do we use today (in politics, but not only there) to create the same effect? How is that kind of thinking and speech the direct opposite of just, kind and humble?

**Prayer:** -Lord Jesus, teach me how to love all the people you love, as hard as that feels. Help me to love because your love has changed me inwardly. Amen.

\* NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 219237-219240). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

\*\* Wright, N.T., *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (The New Testament for Everyone)* (pp. 42-44). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

## Day 3: Use discernment, but don't "judge"

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:1-6

**Context:** Jesus knew we humans are quick to judge others. He also knew we tend to overlook or excuse similar (or even worse) things in ourselves or people we support. That pattern is destructive and hurtful in workplaces or families. When taken into the realm of politics, it often seems to go on steroids. Has there ever been a time when a political figure you disagree with came under fire, and you sadly realized, "The side I favor has done similar (or even worse) things"?

### Reflection:

- "Don't judge" did not mean "Don't have opinions," much less "don't vote." It did mean "Don't hold those who reach different conclusions in contempt." In 2020, the two main Utah candidates for governor filmed a TV ad together, modeling respect and unity regardless of the outcome. (Click here to see that historic—and much too rare—ad.) If candidates can do that, how can their backers (including you) follow suit, and love even your neighbor who votes differently?
- Of course, Jesus' words applied not just to politics but to all relationships. Think about all the family or friend relationships you have. Is it possible for two people to care deeply about each other's well-being, and yet come to different conclusions about the best way to address issues that arise? Can they work together toward solutions without doubting each other's honesty or motives?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as our nation prepares to vote, please rid my spirit of contempt and judgment. Remind me that people, in my nation or my family circle, who disagree with me aren't necessarily dishonest, and are always worthy of love. Amen.

## Day 4: Cursing others "just shouldn't be"

**Scripture:** James 3:4-10

**Context:** James saw the bad effect of certain types of speech as directly opposite to the saving effect of the Spirit-inspired speech on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). "There are two kinds of fire: one is the fire that is from above, namely the Holy Spirit that purifies and illuminates (Acts 2:2, 3); the other fire comes from below, namely from the devil, and it sets human passions on fire." \* "Hell" was literally "Gehenna," Jerusalem's ever-burning garbage dump.

### Reflection:

- "Let slip the wrong word at the wrong moment and a precious relationship can be spoilt for ever. A promise can be broken. A bad impression can be given which can never be repaired. No wonder the Psalmist prayed that God would place a sentry in front of his mouth, to check on everything that was coming out (Psalm 141:3)." \*\* When have you seen or felt careless (or malicious) words damaging a valued relationship?
- But, Wright noted, "it is more serious even than that [and especially in an election season]... We know only too well, from the way the media eagerly trip up politicians and other public figures, that one word out of place can ruin a career or bring down a government. One unwise remark, reported and circulated on the Internet, can cause riots the other side of the world." \*\*\* How can James' words help you think twice before hitting send on that text message?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, sometimes those who disagree with me bug me so much that I wonder "where they came from." Remind me that they, like me, ultimately came from your creative heart, and help me to see them (and treat them) as you do. Amen.

\* I-Jin Loh and Howard A. Hatton, comment on James 3:6 in *A Handbook on the Letter from James*. New York: United Bible Societies, p. 112.

\*\* Wright, N. T., *Early Christian Letters for Everyone (The New Testament for Everyone)* (p. 21). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

\*\*\* Wright, N. T., *Early Christian Letters for Everyone (The New Testament for Everyone)* (pp. 21-22). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

## Day 5: Truth telling “for building up the community”

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Context: We’ve seen, in personal and public life, what happens when people use words to tear down community and set people against one another. Ephesians 4 made it clear that we cannot possibly think God enjoys such words and thoughts. As both this election campaign and the focused part of our BE campaign move toward their end, fix firmly in your mind and heart a resolve to “only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community,” not just politically but in all ways.

Reflection:

- Pastor Hamilton used an ironic but truthful chapter title to name a sad fact we all know happens: “When Christians are Unchristian.” \* Ephesians 4:32 said our ideal is to treat one another “in the same way God forgave you in Christ.” Have you learned ways to “be angry without sinning” (verse 26)? What steps can help you grow a character strong enough to treat others as God treats you?
- Scholar William Barclay wrote, “Paul...tells us to be kind (chrēstos). The Greeks defined this quality as the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbour’s affairs as it does of its own. He tells us to forgive others as God forgave us. In one sentence, Paul lays down the law of personal relationships—that we should treat others as Jesus Christ has treated us.” \*\* In which areas are you closest to living out that standard? In which do you see the most room for growth?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, give me the courage to speak truth in love, the humility to say I’m sorry when I’m wrong and the heart to forgive others who admit a wrong. Amen.

\* Adam Hamilton, *When Christians Get It Wrong*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010 and 2013, chapter 1.

\*\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 160.

## Day 6: Agape—even (maybe especially) in politics!

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

**Context:** Imagine reading these verses at the start of every political rally or commercial. (That’s not possible, of course, in our religiously diverse country, but for a moment imagine we could do it without implicitly favoring any one faith.) How might it change the tone of our politics? Duke professor E. P. Sanders wrote, “The Corinthians fell short with respect to love of one another, as his discussion of their meetings indicates. There were factions.... Paul rose to the occasion by writing 1 Corinthians 13. If he had written nothing else, his fame would be deserved.”

\* Scholar N. T. Wright clarified the depth of Paul’s thought. “The description Paul gives in verses 4–7 is not an account of what Hollywood means by ‘love’.... Paul has in mind something which, though like our other loves in some ways, goes as far beyond them as sunlight goes beyond candles or electric light. Look closely for a moment at the type of person he describes in verses 4–7. This passage describes someone doing and being things which in the eyes of the world would be rubbish.” \*\*

Reflection:

- One last time (for now), review the BE Campaign memory verse. With that clearly in mind, follow Wright’s suggestion as to how to best weave the principle of agape into all of your life, including your politics: “Perhaps the best thing to do with a passage like this is to take it slowly, a line at a time, and to reflect on at least three things: first, ways in which we see this quality in Jesus himself; second, ways in which we see it (or more likely, alas, don’t see it) in ourselves; and third, ways in which, if we were like that, it would work out in practice.... It should always be done in prayer.... this life is within reach of each one of us; because it is the life of Jesus, the life inspired by the spirit, the life which is our birthright within the Messiah’s body.” \*\*\*

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to BE the kind of person you call me to be—and I’m not, not yet, not fully. I open my heart and invite your Spirit to continue changing me from the inside out. Amen.

\* Sanders, E. P., *Paul: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)* (p. 122). OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.

\*\* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians (The New Testament for Everyone)* (p. 172). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

\*\*\* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians (The New Testament for Everyone)* (pp. 174-175). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.