



## **GPS GUIDE Grow, Pray, Serve Guide for Weekly Reflection**

(adapted from United Methodist Church of the Resurrection resources: sharechurch.com)

### **October 20 *Is Christian Nationalism Christian?***

Scripture: Matthew 4:8-10 (CEB) and Matthew 20:25-28 (CEB)

#### **Blessing “all the families of the earth”**

##### **MONDAY, 10/21/24 Genesis 12:1-3, Jeremiah 29:1-7**

God's call to Abram and Jeremiah's message to the exiles revealed a divine plan that always reached beyond any one nation. Abram's blessings were not just for himself, but to bless all nations. Similarly, Jeremiah told the exiles to seek the welfare of their captors' city. "God's purpose was to bless the whole world through Israel," \* because God's love transcends man-made national boundaries. Like Jesus'

Golden Rule, these texts invite you to be an agent of God's blessing to all people. • God called Abram to leave his homeland and become a blessing to all peoples. This radical

command disrupted Abram's comfortable life for a greater purpose. In our interconnected world, God calls us too to think beyond our immediate circles. How might God be calling you to step out of your comfort zone to bless others? What fears or hesitations do you have about reaching out to people different from you? How can Jesus' Golden Rule guide you in this?

- Jeremiah called Israel's exiles to be both smart and generous. "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 can the prophet's message lead you and your church family to consider how better to "do unto others"?

**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.

\* John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1. IVP Academic, 2015, p. 203.

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

## God challenged Jonah's nationalism

### TUESDAY 10.22.24 Jonah 4:1-11

The book of Jonah revealed a God whose concern extended far beyond national boundaries. Jonah's anger at God's mercy toward Nineveh reflected his narrow nationalism. Like Jonah, we humans often struggle with the idea of God showing grace to those we see as enemies. The Hebrew Scriptures didn't include this story to endorse Jonah's attitude. God's closing challenge to the angry prophet showed that "Jonah is about God's compassion for all peoples." \*

- Jonah was angry that God showed mercy to the Ninevites, Israel's enemies. His reaction showed his belief that God should limit divine love to Jonah's nation. Today we often encounter people with different beliefs or backgrounds. Is there any person or group of people you'd rather see God "zap" than see them repent? How can embracing God's inclusive love help you better live out Jesus' Golden Rule in your daily interactions?
- Jonah quickly cared for something that benefited him, and God used that plant to teach Jonah about compassion. God highlighted the contrast between Jonah's self-interest and God's wide reaching concern for all people. Do you ever find a similar contrast between your personal concerns and God's broader perspective? How might adopting God's compassionate view change the way you treat those who are different from you or even oppose you?

**Prayer:** Lord God, sometimes, like Jonah, I wish you'd hate people I hate. But you call me to change my attitude, not yours. Guide and lead me as I wrestle with that change of spirit. Amen. \* John

Goldingay, *For Everyone Bible Study Guides: Isaiah*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 111.

## Claiming superiority and power is not Christian

### WEDNESDAY 10.23.24 Mark 10:35-45, Matthew 23:11-12

James and John thought it wise to seek the top jobs in the earthly political kingdom they expected Jesus to set up. Jesus didn't just say they should use proper channels. He said human status-seeking utterly missed what his kingdom is about. As he said serving others is the path to greatness in his kingdom, "Jesus is redefining power itself." \* Like the Golden Rule, he called you to consider others' needs before your own rather than setting yourself, your nation or your faith above all others. • "To liberate many people" is from the Greek *lutron*, often rendered "ransom." Taking the "ransom"

idea too literally (e.g., "Who did he pay it to?") misses the point. Scholar William Barclay said, "This saying of Jesus is a simple, pictorial way of saying that it cost the life of Jesus to bring [humans] back from their sin into the love of God. It means the cost of our salvation was the Cross of Christ."

\*\* How does Jesus' choice to serve you, to win you to God's love, speak to your heart?

- Jesus was probably applying [Isaiah 53](#) to himself in Mark 10:45 (he also did that in [Luke 22:37](#)). "God's power is at its greatest not in his destruction of the wicked but in his taking all the wickedness of the earth into himself and giving back love." \*\*\* How might Jesus' model of servant

leadership shape your approach to settings in which you can lead or influence others? Can you choose a specific way to lead or influence this week that aligns with Jesus' Golden Rule?

**Prayer:** O God, you do not want me to hate myself. But you also don't want me to be so proud of myself that I try to take credit for what I can only do through your power. Keep me humble. Amen.

\* N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, p. 144.

\*\* William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 259.

\*\*\* T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, ed. *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 222.

## Jesus' radical model of true greatness

### THURSDAY 10.24.24 Matthew 5:38-42, John 13:12-15

Living in a land under Roman military occupation, Jesus offered a radical model of non-violence and humble service. His teaching and actions were stunningly counter-intuitive (and still are for many today, including too many who claim to be "Christian.") Philip Yancey wrote, "Jesus' life and teachings present a radically different approach to power." \* Jesus spoke and acted out the Golden Rule, responding to others with unexpected grace and generosity and calling his followers to do the same. • Jesus set aside

the Biblical law of proportional revenge ([Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and](#)

[Deuteronomy 19:21](#)), saying "turn the other cheek." This wasn't about weakness, but about meeting hostility in a way that upheld human dignity without escalating violence. Jesus knew that hatred or revenge just create more of the same. How might applying Jesus' teaching change your response when wronged or insulted? How could unexpected kindness lead to better outcomes?

- Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Doing a task usually reserved for the lowest servants modeled true greatness through humble service. Pastor Hamilton homed in on the main spiritual question this story asked: "Jesus wanted to make sure his disciples got it. The story in John 13 encourages us to ask this question: Are you—am I—worried about who appears to be the greatest, or are we focused on humbly serving others?" \*\* What's your answer? How has it changed over time?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, teach me how to seek forgiveness from others, how to offer it even to enemies—and how to do both in healthy ways that heal, rather than suppressing, my pain and hurt. Amen.

\* Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995, p. 205.

\*\* Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p.96.)

## Love doesn't lower "standards"—it IS the standard

### FRIDAY 10.25.24 Romans 13:8-10

Paul sent this letter to Roman house churches (there were no big Christian cathedrals in his time). Some house churches 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, he said, isn't just one command among many, but the essence of all God's instructions. "Love is not a 'soft' option, but the hardest thing of all." \* • Paul said love fulfills the entire law. This simplified the complex religious rules he had learned in

his youth into one guiding principle. You may often face situations where multiple ethical principles seem to conflict. How might focusing on love as the ultimate standard change your approach to difficult decisions? Can you think of a recent situation where prioritizing love would have led you to act differently? How would this align you with Jesus' Golden Rule?

• How might ugly religious episodes (e.g., the Inquisition, Salem witch trials) have been different if Christians had trusted love to fulfill the law? How can you stand for truths that matter without being unloving toward those who disagree? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow the inner qualities (they may not come naturally) that help you live out the law of love. What practical steps could you take to more fully embody the "love your neighbor" principle in your family, workplace, or community?

**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.

\* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 89.

## God's standard: "Kind, compassionate, forgiving"

### SATURDAY 10.26.24 Ephesians 4:29-5:2

Across our country and around the world, we see the result of words that tear down community and set people against one another. Our "Do Unto Others" campaign is particularly timely because the nation has a general election next month. Our aim is to follow Ephesians 4:29: "Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community." Treating one another in un-Christlike ways ("bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil") damages and often destroys relationships. Letting Christ change your life from the inside out opens you to growing qualities like compassion, kindness, and a forgiving heart. God works through these qualities to strengthen (and heal when needed) our relationships, even (maybe especially) in a heated election season.

• Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "People... enslaved to anger and malice may think they are 'free' to 'be themselves', but they are in bondage." \* When have you said hurtful words, and then wondered, "Why did I say that?" What helps you understand your feelings better, so you don't blurt out

damaging words? Before you forward that e-mail, or post that tart response on social media, are you willing to ask, “Does this give grace? Does it build up? Can I picture Jesus sending this?” Today’s reading didn’t say, “Behave nicely to others—no matter how much you despise them inside.” “Paul sums up his advice. He tells us to be kind (*chrēstos*). The Greeks defined this quality as the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbor’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 what area(s) of life do you most want to live that way?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, when you make me aware of anger or bitterness inside myself, help me not to hide from or rationalize that. Do your transforming work in me, shaping a life worthy of my calling. Amen.

\* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 56). \*\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 160.