



GPS GUIDE Grow, Pray, Serve Guide for Weekly Reflection

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

October 27, 2024 *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*

Do Unto Others

Proverbs 14:15 (MSG), John 3:3, 16 (CEB) and Matthew 25:34-36 (CEB)

Citizens of two realms

MONDAY 10.28.24 Matthew 22:15-21

Jesus's enemies laid a political trap for him. Jesus' response ("Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God") said both earthly and divine allegiances are important. Similar tensions between faith and earthly citizenship often arise. N.T. Wright noted, "Jesus' answer... redefines the meaning of God's kingdom." * Your allegiance to God calls you to live out the Golden Rule in the civic realm, avoiding "black and white" thinking and treating others with respect and kindness.

- Jesus distinguished between obligations to earthly authorities and to God. He knew the balance between heavenly and earthly citizenship is sometimes complex. You may meet times when your spiritual values conflict with civic expectations. How do you evaluate these dual responsibilities? How can your loyalty to the Golden Rule as a citizen of Jesus' kingdom help you navigate such situations more effectively?
- Jesus' response turned the tables on those trying to trap him, demonstrating wisdom in dealing with opposition. Like Jesus, others may sometimes test or challenge your beliefs and values. Can you recall a recent interaction where you felt your faith was being tested or questioned? How might Jesus' approach of thoughtfully responding with wisdom and grace, rather than defensiveness, change the way you handle similar situations in the future?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me to a clear sense of what my loyalty to you and your kingdom asks of me. Help me to respect earthly authorities, but never more highly than I respect your authority. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 94.

Cursing others “just shouldn’t be”

TUESDAY 10.29.24 James 3:4-10

James applied the Golden Rule’s values to the tongue’s power with vivid metaphors. The first readers (likely Jewish Christians) would find this teaching’s roots in Jewish wisdom writing. You may struggle to control your speech, with the complexity of digital contact added. Pastor Adam Hamilton asked, "Does the Lord give us an exemption from practicing the Scriptures when it comes to our political leaders, those who hold office, and others with whom we disagree? Are we allowed to lay aside the Golden Rule?" *

- James compared the tongue to a small rudder steering a large ship or the place a forest fire starts. “The flames of hell” didn’t evoke a Dante-esque medieval image, but was about “Gehenna,” the ever-burning garbage dump in Jerusalem. Can you recall a recent situation where your words had a significant impact, either positive or negative? How could applying the Golden Rule to your speech transform your interactions?
- James noted the inconsistency of using our tongues to both praise God and curse people made in God's image. “The basis for not cursing another person is because they are in God’s image and likeness. To curse a human being is, in effect, to curse God.” ** How might consciously viewing others as bearers of God's image change the way you speak to or about them? What practical steps could you take to ensure your words consistently reflect kindness and respect?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes I wonder where those who disagree with me “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.

* Hamilton, Adam, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*, (p. 22). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition. ** Patrick J. Hartin, study note on James 3:9 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 458 NT.

God’s kingdom reaching out to all nations

WEDNESDAY 10.30.24 Isaiah 42:5-7; 49:6; 56:3-8

The prophet most mainline scholars call Second Isaiah opposed his contemporaries' narrow view of God's favor and shared a universal message of hope. Including diverse people is often still an issue. John Goldingay wrote, "God's purpose was always to bless the whole world through Israel." * That vision led to Jesus' Golden Rule, urging you to treat all people, of any background, with the same respect and kindness you desire. God's kingdom reaches out to everyone. Jesus invited you to do the same.

- Isaiah said God's salvation extends to all nations, not just Israel. This challenged many Israelites' exclusive mindset. Like them, you likely meet people from diverse backgrounds or beliefs. How do you typically respond to those who are different from you? Can you recall an interaction where you struggled to be inclusive? How might embracing God's vision of a universal kingdom change your approach to building relationships with people from different cultures or faiths?

- God promised to gather and welcome outcasts and foreigners into God's house of prayer. This radical inclusion challenged some ancient (and modern) social norms. Too many people and groups feel marginalized or excluded in our world. How do you feel about those on the fringes of your social circles? Can you think of a specific way you could reach out to someone who might feel like an outsider in your community? How would this align with living out the Golden Rule?

Prayer: O God, your prophet was emphatic about your desire to include "all peoples" in your house of prayer. I'm thankful to be included. Help me rejoice in including others, too, in your family. Amen.

* John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 178.

The foundation of Jesus' kingdom

THURSDAY 10.31.24 Jeremiah 31:31-34, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25

The prophet Jeremiah said God would create a new, intimate bond with His people, a covenant written on hearts. The apostle Paul, in the earliest written account of the Lord's Supper, shared Jesus' promise that his sacrifice set up this covenant. This profoundly shifted how people understood and related to God. You're invited into this same deep connection! Scholar N.T. Wright said, "The new covenant... transforms people from within." * This inner relationship with God enables you to live out the Golden Rule.

- Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant where God's law would be written on people's hearts, not just on stone tablets. This internal transformation changes how we relate to God and others. Where do you see evidence of God's law written on your heart in daily life? How does this internal guidance influence your decisions and interactions? Can you recall a time when this "heart knowledge" helped you respond with kindness or compassion?
- Paul reported Jesus' words at the Last Supper, establishing the new covenant. This act redefined the relationship between God and God's people. When you take part in communion, how does it shape your understanding of God's love and forgiveness? How might regularly recalling Jesus' sacrifice change your approach to forgiving others or showing grace in difficult relationships? Can you identify what makes it hardest for you to extend the same grace you've received?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want your love and goodness to fill me all the time. I'm not always there yet, so keep me growing in remembering and expressing your love authentically. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*. New York: HarperOne, 2016, p. 257.

Jesus' kingdom: not from this world

FRIDAY 11.1.24 John 18:33-40

Pontius Pilate, a hardened, cruel Roman career politician, found himself facing a prisoner unlike any he had ever met. He'd seen lots of anger and defiance and lots of fear, but this calm sense that Jesus, not Pilate, had the ultimate authority—no, he'd never seen that. Jaded as he was, he still wondered if something otherworldly was at work and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?" ([John 19:7-11](#))

- British scholar William Barclay wrote of John 18, "[Jesus] makes it quite clear that he claims to be a king and equally clear that his kingdom is not based on force but is a kingdom in the hearts of [people]. He would never deny that he aimed at conquest, but it was the conquest of love." * To Pilate, the Jewish leaders, and at times even to his disciples, Jesus' aim looked unlikely and naïve. Did Jesus accomplish "the conquest of love" in our world? Has he conquered your heart?
- To human eyes, it seemed simple: Pilate stood for all of Rome's power and "legal" authority. Yet it wasn't that simple. "What's true of Jesus himself is equally true of his kingdom: it's not from this world, but from above (see [John 8:23](#)).... *Authority*: echoes John 10:18, 'I have the right [authority] to give it up, and I have the right [authority] to take it up again.' Jesus' claim and Pilate's are on a collision course." ** How do you accept or resist Jesus' life-changing authority?

Prayer: Lord of all, you came to testify to the truth, including the truth about who you are and where you came from. I believe you, and I worship and follow you. Amen.

A vision for this world and the next

SATURDAY 11.2.24 Philippians 2:3-7

As you read this GPS, Election Day is next Tuesday. (You may have already voted. If not, don't forget!) Sadly, you aren't hearing very many political messages that embody the spirit of the Bible verses we read today. We know Roman emperors clung to the title "Lord" with ruthless violence. But the early Christians boldly said Jesus was the true "Lord," and not despite being humble, loving and gracious but **because** he embodied those qualities. Contrasting Rome's military might against Jesus and his seemingly naïve followers, the contest looked absurdly uneven. Oh, it was—but 2,000 years of history show that it was Jesus and his love, not ruthless Caesar with his legions, who had the unstoppable power. Pastor Hamilton suggested we ought to remember that every election day:

"[Paul] wrote [Philippians 2:3-7] as a challenge to individual Christians. They strike me as capturing God's heart for America, and as a great starting point for a new way forward." * • The early Christian hymn the apostle Paul quoted said Jesus "emptied himself...by becoming like

human beings." And not even like a powerful, wealthy human being. "Christ's status before the incarnation was so high that becoming human is compared here to accepting the position of a slave." ** Do you recoil from that kind of humbling path for your life, or do you sense the freedom and power of it? How does reflecting on what Jesus did in coming to earth deepen your sense of what it means to want to "be like Jesus"? Scholar H. C. Hewlett said, "Humility is the recognition of our true littleness as those dependent utterly on God." *** That's quite different from yielding

outwardly while being irate inside about someone else “winning” or depriving you of a treasured “perk.” How can the kind of deep humility that Jesus modeled open your heart to God’s love? How can it clear away inner barriers that may block you from “doing unto others”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you chose to save me rather than preserve your own comfort or dignity. Help me to have your attitude in my daily life. Amen.

* Hamilton, Adam, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White* (p. 225). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition. ** Jerry L. Sumney, study note on Philippians 2:7 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 377 NT. *** H. C. Hewlett, comment on Philippians 2:3 in F. F. Bruce, general editor, *New International Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.