



GPS GUIDE Grow, Pray, Serve Guide for Weekly Reflection
(adapted from United Methodist Church of the Resurrection resources: sharechurch.com)

Listen and avoid judging others

MONDAY 10.14.24 James 1:19-22, 4:11-12

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.”

- It’s a fact: political foes called Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt (3/4 of Mount Rushmore!) bad people who’d wreck America. Pastor Hamilton asked, “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... in love and with respect for the other.” ** Can you disagree in loving, civil ways? Why or why not?
- When you have strongly negative thoughts about a candidate (or elected winner), do you ever look inward and ask, “Have I listened to understand? What in me feels threatened or frightened by this person?” James 4:11-12 warned against speaking ill of others or judging them. God alone is the ultimate Judge. Our role is to show love, not judgment. How can you resist the urge to judge and instead show love and encouragement in your interactions this week?

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 out the Golden Rule ever more fully. 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.

Use discernment but don’t “judge”

TUESDAY 10.15.24 Matthew 7:1-6

Jesus knew we humans are quick to judge others. Verse 6 showed that “don’t judge” did not mean “give up discernment.” But Jesus knew we tend to overlook or excuse similar (or even worse) actions by ourselves or people we favor. That is divisive and hurtful in workplaces or families. Carried into

politics, it often seems goes on steroids. Have you ever applauded as a political figure you dislike was criticized, and then reluctantly realized, “The side I favor has done similar (or maybe worse) things”? • “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 candidates for governor of Utah 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 only 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 nears this year's elections, please rid my spirit of contempt and judgment. Remind me that people who disagree with me, in my nation or my family circle, aren't automatically dishonest, and are always worthy of love. Amen.

Politics always involves “neighbors”

WEDNESDAY 10.16.24 Luke 10:25-37

Hatred and distrust between Israelites and next-door Samaritans went back at least 500 years, to Israel's return from exile in Babylon (cf. [Ezra 4:1-5](#)). Yet Jesus saw “those people” 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. It wasn't just talk. In hostile Samaritan territory, Jesus modeled treating them as neighbors for his disciples (cf. [John 4:27-40](#)).

- 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” people you encounter?
- Later, as Jesus' ordered (cf. [Acts 1:7-8](#)), the apostle Phillip preached in Samaria. If any doubt was left (and it was), God's Holy Spirit accepted Samaritans like everyone else (cf. [Acts 8:4-8, 14-17](#)). Then Peter baptized Roman soldiers, and told upset Christians, “If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God's way?” ([Acts 11:17](#)) Can you welcome anyone who wants to be part of God's human family, however different from you?

Prayer: Lord God, you made many different trees, flowers, birds, and horses. Forgive me for ever sinfully imagining that somehow you only made and loved humans who were a lot like me. Amen.

* [Click here](#) to see a 5-minute clip from the superb 2003 film *The Gospel of John* (using the text of John from *The Good News Bible*) which brings the story in John 4 alive.

Jesus: kind even to occupying soldiers

THURSDAY 10.17.24 Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 18:15-17

A Roman “centurion,” a foreign invader, commanded 100 soldiers. He held military authority but saw Jesus as a healing authority. Matthew didn’t explain it, but the Roman sensed that Jesus’ kindness and power to heal crossed all human limits. Jesus was kind to children, which may not seem strange to us but was. “In the ancient, status-ordered world, children were at the bottom of the ladder. In both Greek and Latin, the words for children meant ‘not speaking’; children lacked the dignity of reason.” * •

Jesus’ kindness crossed many boundaries. Just before the story of the Roman centurion, Matthew told of Jesus touching “untouchable” lepers with healing (cf. [Matthew 8:1-4](#)). In the gospels, we often see Jesus’ disciples surprised (and at times upset) by his willingness to cross boundaries. ** Social shunning still happens in 2024 based on race, age, gender, socio-economic or educational level, religion, sexual orientation, disability, personal quirks, or looks. Oh, yes—also political beliefs! How is God calling you to live up to Jesus’ example in touching the leper today?

- Too often, Christians focus their ministry to God’s world either just on spiritual changes (eternal salvation through Jesus) or else just on social changes (making the broken conditions of life in our world better). Jesus clearly did **both**. How can studying Jesus’ pattern of ministry help you avoid trying to make a false choice between spiritual and social action?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were a healer whether the illness and its healing were physical or spiritual. I sometimes need both, and so does the world around me. Grow me into a servant who lives out your holistic mission. Amen.

* Ortberg, John, *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus* (p. 24). HarperCollins Christian Publishing. Kindle Edition.

** “Miroslav Volf [Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), cf. chap. 1] noted that the tendency to exclude the other, which religious leaders in Jesus’ day often regarded as great *virtue*, was regarded by Jesus as great *sin*. This often surprised the disciples.” From Ortberg, John, *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus* (p. 94). HarperCollins Christian Publishing. Kindle Edition.

The vital center of Jesus’ mission

FRIDAY 10.18.24 John 13:34-35, 15:9-12, Colossians 3:12-14

In an occupied, politically tense nation, Jesus lived, and taught his followers to live, the Greek word “*agape*”—tough, persistent love. “God does not merely tolerate sinners: he loves them.... God for all his ability to punish and for all his own spotless purity does not regard sinners with aversion, but... with the costly love we see in the cross where Jesus died to save them.” * Christians believe Jesus

showed that God loves you and that God’s love is an example that changes your life for the better. • Jesus began John 15:9 with ten key words: “**As** the Father loved me, I too have loved you.” As the

moon reflects the sun's light, our love for others reflects God's love for us. In what practical ways do you live out your commitment to love God and others? To what extent are you able to view self-giving, not self-gratification, as key to the kind of love that makes life genuinely worth living?

- Jesus' and Paul's teachings in today's passages shaped John Wesley, Methodism's founder. He asked in a sermon, "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." * Is there someone in your life who thinks differently from you, yet you need to "love alike"?

Prayer: O Lord, help me increasingly to love, not as an outward disguise to hide my anger or pain, but from my heart as your love overflows and bubbles out of me to bless others. Amen. * To read Wesley's sermon "A Catholic Spirit", edited into modern English, [click here](#).

Agape—even (maybe especially) in politics!

SATURDAY 10.19.24 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Imagine reading these verses at the start of every political rally or commercial. (That wouldn't work, of course, in our religiously diverse country, but imagine for a moment 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." **

- Our ["Do Unto Others" campaign](#) offers yard signs, T-shirts, buttons and billboards with the message, "Do Unto Others as you would have them do unto you" (based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:12). In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul offered another version of the same teaching. N. T. Wright suggested a way we weave the principle of *agape* (self-giving love) into all of life, even 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." *** Prayerfully try that this week.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, my goal is 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.