



# 2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: March 9<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: March 8<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus



March 9

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Last week, Daniel preached about living in community as the called out people of God. We are to live and relate to one another in a way that glorifies God and demonstrates concern and dedication to the well-being of others. God clearly cares about the dignity and value of human life as we are created in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). As image bearers, we are to protect one another from our positions of authority, leadership, headship, and influence.

Truly and biblically caring for people includes caring enough to do what God says is sincerely best for them. This entails measures of discipline, punishment, and restitution for wrongs done. Another way of saying this is, that as order is established in community, it must include consequences for the choices that people make. This does not in any way eliminate precious grace extended at times to people who may deserve punishment, but it does mean that, in most cases, we must believe that corrective and appropriate discipline is an act of mature and committed love to the well-being of another person.

As we begin this week of “points to ponder,” we will look at the obvious wisdom that God provides and the exhortation to be vigilant in exercising discipline, punishment, and making it clear to people that consistent and clear consequences are part of God’s love and care for humanity. As His people, we are to administer His will, knowing that it is best and the means to a stable, safe, and responsible society.

In contrast, it should be painfully clear to all of us that the way the society in which we live and the culture that has been fostered is miles off course. We currently live in a nation in which responsibility for our actions is completely ignored, denied, or shifted. We see children being raised in homes where there is little to no real, corrective, helpful, and loving discipline, there is virtually no respect for authority, and the parents seem convinced that the world’s way is right. Parents seem lost, fooled, and hopeless in regard to a better way of raising their children.

Criminals are being released from jail and prisons, if they ever actually go, the law enforcement officials are labeled the bad guys, and any deterrents against crime are so weak and toothless that no one is afraid of consequences. We see it in our schools, streets, and in our governments. Friends, it does not have to be this way. God has given us all that we need to establish, order, and conduct responsible, fair, and profitable living among the people. The wisdom necessary for loving, responsible, and godly living is found in the very Word of God. The Bible tells us how to do it (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

March 10

### Hebrews 12:5-6,10

Joe Rigney wrote a book entitled, The Sin of Empathy. It happens to be the one we have been using for our Pastor's Book Club gatherings for the past few months. Rigney does a masterful job, in my opinion, of helping us see that faithful compassion should lead us to lean into the suffering of others, but that we must refuse to be steered by the manipulation of others or even the pain they are experiencing. I am predominantly speaking of the "pain" incurred by poor choices, criminal activity, or just plain old sin.

Exodus 20-21 reveals God's desire for His people to essentially relate to one another as He relates to us. We are to love and by this we demonstrate that we are disciples of Christ (John 13:35). It truly is safe to say that love for one another, especially the body of Christ, is the badge of discipleship. The challenge that we face in our culture today is the question of who defines *love*? As believers, we must insist on a biblical definition of the subject.

You see, love is an essential part of being a Christian, but as Rigney says, "Love is not to override all other obligations of a Christian's life." Another way of saying this is that we must not surrender the truth, God's truth, out of a misguided compassion for the hurting. This is what Rigney would call the sin of empathy. When empathy or "love" begins to be the end all be all, it seizes to be good and becomes a god. Do you see how some parents have allowed "love" to override other obligations in how they raise their children? The parent who can't say no because little Johnny will be sad or throw a fit is missing a major and vital lesson in parenting.

What makes empathy not a sin is when it is guided and limited by our desire for transformation in the hurting person's life. Do you understand? We should get involved in other people's lives when wisdom dictates that we do. But we must step in hoping that we can speak God's truth into their situation, apply biblical wisdom, and walk with this person while they reorient their lives to Christ, hold onto genuine faith, or seek to improve their circumstances so as to get out of their mess or pain. All the while you are leaning into their suffering, we must not lie or deny God's Word.

The entire 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Exodus is all about consequences for bad choices and sin and making restitution to whomever has been hurt by the offender's actions. Again, we can be certain that God's wisdom demonstrated in this chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, God desires to protect the innocent, the weak, the poor or needy for their own good because they too were created in His image and have intrinsic value as His image bearers. The other point is that people be deterred from sinning, understand they will be held responsible for their actions, and that they might be shaped to grow into productive, mature adults within the community of God's people. In other words, discipline, expectations, and consequences, both good and bad, are for the good of the one "screwing up."

March 11

**Proverbs 13:24**

I wonder what people in our society would think if we were given the opportunity to show them what God says is just and fair considering various crimes. In the first 4 verses, Moses is giving the people God's laws and punishment related to basic theft. What do you do with someone who steals? Don't fail to see that these are applications of the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal." Even though the examples given all relate to stealing animals, we must remember that this was a primary source of wealth for people in the ancient world. We can apply these biblical principles to any type of property. I have to scrape bark off this tree when I go by it. God is here implying that people do in fact have a basic right to own property; thus, the principles of socialism are diametrically opposed to biblical Christianity.

If an ox was stolen, not only would the family lose the value of the ox but would also lose the ability to perform the work the ox was doing. This would be similar to someone stealing a man's tools and leaving him in a situation in which he could not work. Not only did he lose his tools, but he also lost work and therefore income. Compensation was to be made for the item stolen and the impact on the person's life going forward. This makes perfect sense. Judge Judy would say that punitive damages were justified as well.

We also have cases of negligence covered in this chapter(vv.5-6). Even if the incident were an accident, the offended party still deserved restitution in the eyes of God. God expects us to take full responsibility for our actions. Whether it was theft, negligence, or property being damaged that was loaned or put under someone's watch care, God made provisions for appropriate consequences for one's actions and the restitution of what was lost. Common sense plays a part in what God is doing here because every possible scenario is not covered but the basic principles will apply across the board.

Keep in mind that much of this is God's way of teaching His people how to live in community. These laws, often thought of as burdensome by many in our society, are meant to protect, are sensible, and for our benefit. When these laws were enacted and enforced, harmony was the outcome for the community. It may be overlooked but it should not be, that these laws actually provide some safeguard for the one committing the crime or offense. In many nations, thieves or law breakers would simply be put to death. God was making a way for punishment but fair punishment that would rightly fit the offense.

As we close today, I want to remind you again of the sad reality that we face today in our communities because people choose to ignore and disobey God's rules for conduct. If we would live under His authority and in accordance with His laws and wise principles, this would indeed be a taste of heaven. But alas, sin abounds, God is ignored, societies crumble, and we all suffer. I am so thankful that the church will not be defeated, that we have reason for hope, and that we hear the call of God to share the gospel. Jesus is our only hope and He is enough.

March 12

**Matthew 5:23; Luke 19:1-9**

I recently thought about the admonition of the Lord in Matthew 5:23. There He said, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift." The principle here is that to be right with God, we need to make things right with another. This means fixing what you've broken and mending fences where you can.

We are provided an excellent example of this in the gospel of Luke. In the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter, Jesus tells the story of meeting and saving Zacchaeus. You recall that he was a chief tax collector and because of his fraud and misuse of his office, was a rich man (v. 2). We can surmise that God was calling Zacchaeus unto Himself because there was a curiosity within him that drew him to want to see Jesus as he walked through town (vv. 3-4). The Bible tells us that Jesus saw him up in the sycamore tree and called him down. He then invited himself to Zac's house and subsequently lead him to salvation.

You might ask how we know that Zacchaeus was saved? Well, Jesus says so Himself in verse 9 and we see the change of heart and nature in Zacchaeus demonstrated by his desire and willingness to make right what was wrong in his life and to make restitution to those from whom he had stolen (v. 8). He welcomed Jesus into his house and into his heart.

Last week in my Sunday night class on missions and evangelism, I talked about the need to repent as a part of our response to the gospel in faith. We used the word to turn as a way to describe a repentant heart. A person is going in one direction away from Christ and turns to walk in the opposite direction towards Christ by faith. In other words, when we are living our lives in rebellion to God and His Word, when we are lost in our sin, we must exercise faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross AND turn (repent) from our old lifestyle and walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Did Zacchaeus do this?

The answer is clearly yes, he did. He was born again and immediately sought to use his resources differently. Whereas before he was selfish and greedy, now we find him giving half of what he had to the poor. On top of that, he seeks to make restitution to all he had robbed. Just like you see in Exodus 22, Zacchaeus was willing to give back to the people four times what he had stolen from them. The book of Leviticus actually only requires that you pay back what was stolen plus an additional one-fifth (Lev. 6:4-5).

Seeing Jesus in His beauty helped Zacchaeus see himself in all of his sin. His heart was forever changed in the light of the Lord Jesus and the evidence followed. He was not satisfied with meeting the basic requirements of the law. He was moved to do all that he could in response to the amazing grace given to him by Christ. After considering all that Jesus has done for us dear ones, don't you at least think that we should give back what we've taken and restore what we've broken?

March 13

**Hebrews 13:4**

If you are like most of us and if we are being honest, reading the laws found in Exodus and Leviticus can be a tedious and boring task. It feels that way because the laws seem so foreign to us and not applicable. We need to read the laws of God not looking necessarily for what we should or should not do, but instead to look for the character of God. The Old Testament laws reveal the character of God. We come to see the Lawgiver and are slowly transformed into His likeness.

As we learn more about God, it becomes clearer as to how we are to live for His glory. For example, in verses 16 and 17, we learn that sex is to be reserved for marriage. This is not a case of rape. It should be understood that the young man “seduces” only in the sense that he is encouraging it and doing his best to make her want to as well. Notice that this happens before they are married. Picture in your mind a young couple today who have dated for a while and then end up giving in to the temptation of premarital sex.

Now, even if the young couple considers getting married, the father, in this instance, still has the right to refuse the young man’s desire to marry his daughter. He may understand that the premarital sex was wrong, but so would it be if his daughter were to marry this guy. The young man needed to understand that if he chose to have sex with this young lady, the potential cost would be quite high. Sex was to be reserved for marriage and when it was not, there was a price to pay.

This law and ones like it, were designed to promote and foster godly patterns of courtship, marriage, and sexual relations – in that order! The idea is that if you are thinking of sex with another person, you better be thinking of marriage. Sex is for marriage and not personal pleasure. Single men are called to sexual purity and bear the responsibility before God for misconduct. This does not mean women are completely free of guilt but with headship comes responsibility; ask Adam. This may seem archaic in our culture today, but a man of God should be trusted to preserve his own purity as well as that of women in his life. When a man fails in this arena, he causes serious damage and God will hold him accountable, and there are consequences to which he should be held.

Oh, by the way, I think it is important here to note as well that obviously the act of sexual intercourse did not establish marriage. A couple can’t just say, “We are married in the eyes of God.” If they were to be married, they needed the father’s blessing and to adhere to the laws of the land. Keep in mind church family what I said above. This law is certainly applicable to people, and it is also intended to reveal the character of God. He is holy, pure, and righteous and He wants us to live in that way in regard to our sexuality.

March 14

### **1 Corinthians 5:12-14**

Let's take a moment today to address whether we should kill witches. I hope you immediately know that I am kidding. In verses 18-20, we are given three strange crimes that demand capital punishment as the judgment against them. The three crimes are witchcraft (sorcery), having sex with animals (bestiality), and old-fashioned idol worship. These three sins seem crazy, ridiculous, and even embarrassing. I mean goodness gracious, did God really have to tell people they shouldn't have sex with the cows or sheep? Believe it or not, the answer is yes. It was necessary then and it is still necessary today. Perversion and the wickedness of the human heart is deeper than we can imagine (Jer. 17:9).

Did you know that over one half a million people in the US claim to be Wiccans. This is a group who claim they are witches. Sorcery is alive and well as you surely have seen sister Sophie's palm reading sign on rte. 460. Even bestiality, such a vile sin, is alluded to in such Disney movies as Aladdin and was mentioned in a Time magazine article by a celebrity wanting to include it in pornographic movies. Of course, idol worship is obvious. Once again, these things are so terribly egregious because God is God alone and is pure and good. We must not violate His image in us by acting like animals. He is the One true God and He alone deserves our worship.

Now, does this mean that we should put people to death who commit such acts? I would argue the answer is a resounding no. God was developing a people functioning under a theocratic governing system and who would function at the time under the Mosaic covenant. By theocratic I simply mean that the priests rule in the name of God under the rule of God solely based on the Word of God. It was the system of government from Moses to the New Covenant established by Jesus (1 Cor. 11:25).

I mention this only to say that we should not operate today as if we are still a theocracy. We live under the New Covenant which is a better one according to the book of Hebrews (Heb. 8:6). Under the New Covenant there are new "documents", namely the New Testament in which we understand that the covenant applies to the people of God and not to the state. This does not mean that we should be okay with witchcraft, but it does mean that we are not to run around reenacting the Salem witch trials. Paul wrote to the Corinthians these words, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you" (1 Cor. 5:12-14).

Friend, today we are to utilize church discipline for those who are inside the church. Proper punishment is excommunication not death at the hands of the church. Those who do not belong to the family of God do not fall under the churches responsibility to discipline or punish. We are called to elect folks who we believe will carry out the laws of the land in a just, honest, and fair way, but we do not execute such judgment ourselves. We have said it before - You must keep in mind under which covenant the people you are reading about are operating.

March 15

**Exodus 34:6; Leviticus 19:34**

The Bible is clear in its teaching that God is merciful, gracious, compassionate, and patient (Ex. 34:6). As we move through the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Exodus, we see this truth as well demonstrated through His laws protecting what could be seen as the weakest members of our society. We read of His desire for us to relate to strangers or immigrants, widows, and orphans with His character traits on display through us. Remember that these laws reveal His character. This is how God has related to us and how He expects us to represent Him to others.

We are to deal with sojourners in a kind way because we are to remember that we were exiles whom the Lord showed mercy and grace to. Friends, I know the debates and feelings about illegal immigration in our country are heated. People have strong feelings based predominantly on your media outlet's spin in communicating "truth" to you. I am not arguing from a political stance today but from a Christian one. I also want you to know that I do support our laws for proper and legal entry into our nation. I also know that the subject and circumstances are often far more complex than many may realize.

My point to ponder today is that regardless of how a person ended up here, we are obligated by our Savior to be Christlike in our dealings with them. We have a responsibility to love people with an eye on sharing the love of Christ with them in hopes that they will be saved. The Bible says, "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:34). Our love should flow from a deep personal experience of God's saving work in our own lives.

God also wanted His people to look after, with compassion, widows and orphans. By the way, a widow that the church is responsible for is defined in 1 Timothy 5:9-16. These segments of our population could have trouble surviving and God cared for them and wanted us too as well. If we claim to follow God, then we must show His compassion by caring for strangers, widows, and orphans. This is His heart! "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18).

We have an amazing opportunity to reach the world by loving people the way God does. We must work hard not to get caught up in the frenzy of politics and forget our first commission as Christians. We are to love God and love people! I hope that we would take advantage of the opportunities to build bridges with sojourners among us so that Jesus could walk across that bridge into their hearts. It is what Paul did with Onesimus recorded in the book of Philemon. Paul knew the law but still he dealt with and related to Onesimus as a human being in need of the gospel and kindness.