



**grow. pray. study.**

**May 19, 2019 *Building Strong and Beautiful Families* “Respect, Selfless Love and Grace”**

Scripture: Ephesians 5:2, 3-4, 21, 24-25, 28

Live your life with love, following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us... Sexual immorality, and any kind of impurity or greed, shouldn't even be mentioned among you, which is right for holy persons. Obscene language, silly talk, or vulgar jokes aren't acceptable for believers. Instead, there should be thanksgiving... submit to each other out of respect for Christ... Wives submit to their husbands in everything like the church submits to Christ. As for husbands, love your wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her... That's how husbands ought to love their wives.

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

**Qualities that build enduring love**

**MONDAY 5.20.19 Ephesians 4:29-5:4**

This passage lists key qualities that destroy relationships, and others that heal them. Treating one another in un-Christlike ways (“bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil”) greatly damages relationships. On the other hand, letting Christ change your life from the inside out opens you to bearing fruits like compassion, kindness and a forgiving heart. God works through these qualities to strengthen (and heal when needed) to our relationships.

- The earliest archetypal Hebrew story about what went wrong in our world said, in [Genesis 3:8-19](#), that as soon as humans failed to follow God's ways, they denied responsibility and blamed their partner (and others). So Ephesians urged its readers to let God grow them into better partners before looking at others. Choose one area from today's reading to grow in (e.g. putting aside anger, being more loving, forgiving, gentle or pure). Commit to daily ask God to guide your growth in that area.
- Today's reading is not just about how we behave outwardly. It didn't say, “Behave nicely toward others—no matter how much you despise them inside.” God offered to transform us inwardly, in ways our outward behavior will then reflect. How can you open yourself to allow the Holy Spirit to shape you into a person who can more fully live out the call to be “kind, compassionate, and forgiving”?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help me not to hide from or rationalize anger or bitterness you make me aware of inside myself. Do your transforming work in me, shaping me into a good relationship partner. Amen.

**Judgment and contempt = relationship destroyers**

**TUESDAY 5.21.19 Matthew 7:1-6**

When one person regularly judges another as “inferior” or “wrong,” that hurts any friendship. The same attitudes can do even more damage to closer relationships. It is important for us to address why we feel a need to criticize and judge a relationship partner, and “First take the log out of your eye”! (At the same time, verse 6 made it clear that Jesus did not call anyone to be a naïve victim in an abusive relationship.)

- It's not what you have in common with your mate, date or friends that usually causes conflict. It's the differences. What differences particularly “get your goat”? Do you have a balanced view of the other

person, seeing their strengths as well as flaws? If you've fallen into what many counselors call "negative focus" (ignoring genuine strengths to see only the flaws), what steps can you take to get the relationship back on track?

- Jesus used a hyperbolic image (the log in your eye) to remind his hearers that "we all have faults, and so we all need mercy. Recognizing our own failings makes us more forgiving toward others." \* How can honest self-evaluation, and openness to hearing what bothers your partner or friend, help build a relationship that makes both of you stronger, rather than tearing each other down?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, keep me healthily aware of my strengths while still being able to "take the log out of [my] eye" before trying to correct or "improve" my partner and friends. Amen.

\* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 7:3-5 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 17 NT.

## The "Golden Rule" for relationships

### WEDNESDAY 5.22.19 Matthew 7:9-14

In this passage, Jesus summed up the big ideas he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, including God's wisdom about human relationships. He had told his hearers to love their enemies, be honest, show mercy, and more. Those were not separate, individual rules, from which we could choose which to follow. They expressed the great principle of treating others as God treats us, and as we wish others would treat us.

- In law, business or politics we often hear the idea that we should treat people according to what they deserve. Sometimes we bring the same idea to marriage. Jesus spoke of treating people as God treats us—with grace and generosity, rooted in self-giving love. What good things can happen in a marriage and a home if love and grace replace "deserving" to guide us in mutual love and sharing?
- Sometimes people think the "Golden Rule" was just a 'nice,' surface-y social motto. But Jesus added, "The gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it" (verse 14). What people or conditions make it hardest for you to treat others as you'd like them to treat you? What are some ways you have proactively sought to treat others in "Golden Rule" fashion? How easy or hard was that for you to do?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help me to live less in "demand" mode, and more in line with your teaching. Help my "default setting" be to treat others the way I wish they'd treat me. Amen.

## A strong foundation for relationships

### THURSDAY 5.23.19 Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus ended his Sermon on the Mount with this image of two builders. They both built houses during the dry season, when the *wadis* of Palestine, like arroyos in the American Southwest, looked safe and harmless. When the storms came, they washed the house built on sand away. The wise person thought ahead and built a house on a foundation that would endure.

- Some marriages (or other relationships) look fine. Then something (illness, job loss, a poor choice) shakes the foundation, and shatters the relationship, at times beyond repair. Whether you're married, dating or single, it will rain in your life eventually. What are you doing daily to build a character and a quality of relationship(s) that will be able to weather life's storms?
- "Some other Jewish teachers told a similar parable, with a major difference: In their story, the foundational rock in their parables was the Torah, God's law (Abot de Rabbi Nathan 24A). Here Jesus' teaching holds the same role as God's message in the traditional parable." \* Jesus implicitly made his teaching central to knowing God (teaching "with authority"—[Matthew 7:29](#)). Are you willing to take

Jesus' teaching in this week's GPS readings as vital to your understanding of what God calls you to in relationships?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me durably, dependably, forever. Guide me in building my life on the principles of your kingdom, so that my life and relationships can withstand any earthly storm. Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 219378-219380). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## Following Christ's model of self-giving love

### FRIDAY 5.24.19 Ephesians 5:18-33

Today these verses at first tend to make us wince inwardly. (People too often read verse 22 all by itself, which greatly distorts the passage's meaning.) Paul used a common Greek and Roman form of writing about family relationships called a "Household Code." But he adapted it in ways that strikingly altered its message. "Traditional household codes instructed male heads of households how to rule; Paul instructs husbands here only how to love self-sacrificially." \* Read in full, this passage set a high standard of mutual love and respect for both marriage partners.

- How does the call for a husband to love his wife "just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her" speak to you? Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "Paul...insists that the husband should take as his role model, not the typical bossy or bullying male of the modern, or indeed the ancient, stereotype, but Jesus himself...If husbands—not least Christian husbands!—had even attempted to live up to this wonderful ideal, there would be a lot less grumbling about bossy or bullying men." \*\* How did this image challenge husbands to act if they needed to give up some of their own comfort or power to bless their wife?
- In spots the New Testament used some familiar cultural language, but unlike the Greco/Roman culture's pattern, it didn't speak to only one relationship partner. Ephesians 5:21 said, "Submit to each other." "Submission" was a mutual duty, not something only one partner gave while the other took. (The same was true, by the way, for parents and children.) When have you seen a healthy marriage built on mutual "submission"?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you walked among us as genuine love incarnate. Help me understand love in ways beyond the sentimentalism my culture often confuses with love. Let your love be a robust force making every life I touch better. Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 268561-268562). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

\*\* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 67-68.

## God's Spirit creates loving relationships

### SATURDAY 5.25.19 Galatians 5:22-26, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, 13

In Galatians, the apostle Paul named some qualities God offered to grow in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 13, after discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit in chapter 12, he listed traits of the love that we must have to use any of the Spirit's gifts as God intended. Who wouldn't want those qualities in a spouse, a date, a friend or a co-worker? Yet it's hard to live these ideals fully in this life. Paul knew that: "We know in part," he went on to write in 1 Corinthians 13:9. But the ideals we aim for matter. As one teacher said, "Ideals are like stars. You may not be able to reach them, but you can set your course by them."

- Reflect on the qualities Paul listed in today's two passages. Which of them most appeal to you, and seem to come most naturally? In which, if any, of your day-to-day relationships are you able to readily and easily live out most of the things Paul listed? In which relationships is it a struggle to show these qualities, even with gritted teeth? What marriage(s) have you seen that seemed to come close to living

out these ideals? What intentional choices and positive actions helped those couples live into mutual support and respect? How do you believe the qualities with which you struggle would deepen and enrich your closest relationships?

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, plant your fruit in my heart, and teach me how to be good soil in which that fruit can flourish. Let me be a person who gifts others with love, joy and peace. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Many people struggle with change, sometimes even fear it. As a family, name the four seasons, then invite each person to share what they like and dislike about each one. For example, the summer brings about more free time, but often high heat. The winter offers snow for sledding and snowball fights, but unsafe driving conditions. Take a moment to imagine what life would be like if you only experienced one season every day, all year long. What would you like about that? What would you miss? Remind one another that even though change can be difficult, we can often find good in the new experience or situation. Read Lamentations 3:22-23 and Hebrews 13:8 aloud, then thank God for being faithful through all of life's changes. Pray for a heart and mind open to positive and healthy change.

**Prayer Requests** – [cor.org/prayer](http://cor.org/prayer) *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Kim Pisano and family on the death of Marvin Wycoff, father, 5/9/2019

Julie Marx and family on the death of TJ Ayres, brother, 5/9/2019

Debi Roberson and family on the death of Stephen Barenkamp, brother, 5/13/2019

The family of Dennis Courser who died 5/14/2019

Betty Jury and family on the death of Jack Jury, husband, 5/15/2019