



Week 6: Love In Community

Day 1 - 1 Peter 3:8-17

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For

“Those who desire to love life

and to see good days,

let them keep their tongues from evil

and their lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good;

let them seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,

and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and respect. Maintain a good conscience so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.

Understanding the Reading:

As Christians, we say that we live in an “upside-down Kingdom.” That is, we live in a way that is totally opposite of the ways of the world. The values we uphold stand in stark contrast to the norms and expectations of the world around us. By worldly standards, the first is first. By Jesus’ standards, the last is first. By worldly standards, evil is repaid with evil. By Jesus’ standards, evil is repaid with kindness.

It may be our natural instinct to harm someone that brings harm to us, but Peter tells us in this passage that we are called to a higher standard as Christians. Peter reminds us that our allegiance is rooted in the sacrificial love exemplified by Jesus Christ. The love of Jesus refuses to be constrained by reciprocity; instead, it is focused on grace and forgiveness. Peter invites us to embrace a total

paradigm shift – to defy the gravitational pull of retaliation and vengeance, instead choosing the path of grace and forgiveness.

Unfortunately, there is no magic switch that flips when we become Christians. That means we still have to fight the human, worldly urge to repay evil with evil. But when we do, we are rewarded with a loving community that far exceeds any kind of community we could have put together on our own.

Questions for reflection:

1. What is your natural inclination: to repay evil with evil or with a blessing? Why?
2. What does it mean to work for peace?

Day 2 - 1 Peter 4:1-6

¹ Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), ² so as to live for the rest of your time in the flesh no longer by human desires but by the will of God. ³ You have already spent enough time in doing what the gentiles like to do, living in debauchery, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. ⁵ But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

Understanding the Reading:

One of my more troubling traits is my desire to flaunt the rules. The signs that say “do not touch” beckon me to just get a little feel of the forbidden surface so that I might discover why the rule is there. (I usually discover that the paint is wet!) As I have grown older, that defiant streak has faded a bit, but it is still latent beneath the surface. So as I continue to come across the word “obedience” in 1 Peter, it feels stifling. It seems like obedience tells us not to think for ourselves and to be automatons who simply do what we are told to do.

That is not Peter’s intention at all. This passage isn’t a “read the rules in the Bible, don’t ask questions, just do what it says” approach. Instead, when Peter speaks of being obedient to God’s will, he is speaking of an inner transformation that leads to an outer one. We are called on to “arm ourselves with the same intention” as Jesus. Our old desires are crucified and replaced with the mind of Christ within us. I am reminded of Philippians 2, in which Paul says we are to “have the same attitude as Christ Jesus” and then Paul goes on to describe Jesus’ humility and servanthood.

This inner metamorphosis births a new set of desires within us—desires that are in harmony with the will of God. It is those desires that guide us to give up the former way of life, and it is those desires to which we are obedient.

Questions for reflection:

1. How do you react to the word obedience?
2. How have you embraced the tension between your personal desires and the desire to conform to God’s will?
3. In what way do you think you have “armed yourself” with the mind of Christ, and how has that shown up in your desires and behavior?

Day 3 - 1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹ Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Understanding the Reading:

We can see in the first verse (“be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers”) how important that Peter believes that prayer is for undergirding our faith and giving us strength in the face of what is to come. When we’re in any kind of relationship – whether it is romantic or a friendship – we certainly find it easier to talk and share our feelings when we maintain open lines of communication. If we let our regular communication fall by the wayside, it is harder to start it back up. And it becomes exponentially harder to ask for help. The same goes for God. When we are disciplined (regular) in our prayer, we are better able to handle whatever happens because we are able to lean on God.

So often, we think of spiritual disciplines, like prayer, as things that we do on our own. Spiritual disciplines enhance our personal relationship with God. But in this passage, Peter is also reminding folks that the communal bonds of love and hospitality are critical to our Christian faith. In fact, sacrificial love and hospitality are the ways that Christians as a community are known in the midst of the secular world that puts “me” first.

Letting love cover a multitude of sins (v. 8) is a truly sacrificial act of love. Love that covers a multitude of sins allows us to offer grace to one another. That phrase shouldn’t be read as a hall pass to overlook abuse or consistent bad behavior, and this isn’t about staying in a toxic relationship. But it is a reminder to us not to hold every offense against one another and it is a call to respond in love.

To be clear - we’re not talking about a sentimental love here, or love by any warped way the world tries to portray or convince us is love - we are talking about the love most fully revealed in Jesus, whose ultimate act of love covered the multitude of our sins. That is the key here. Peter isn’t saying we can do this on our own power. He’s saying it’s only possible because of what God in Christ has done for us. And when we are in relationship with Jesus, he teaches us how to deeply, “fervently” love others in a way that is healthy and reflective of his grace.

Questions for reflection:

1. Can you think of a time when you needed to rely on someone, but you hesitated to reach out because you had let your communication falter? Has the same happened with God?
2. If you need to, spend some time today re-opening the lines of communication with God. Tell God what is on your heart, whether it is something really small or something really big.
3. In which relationship do you need to let love cover a multitude of sins?

Day 4 - 1 Peter 5:1-5

*¹ Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you ² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it, not for sordid gain but eagerly. ³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. ⁵ In the same way, you who are younger must be subject to the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for
"God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble."*

Understanding the Reading:

Sometime in our lives, many of us will step into some kind of leadership position. Folks may jockey for leadership as they intentionally take the next step toward leading; other times, and maybe this is most of the time, folks are pushed into a role because no one else cares enough to do the work. Peter was in that second category of leader-by-surprise. He didn't set out to be Jesus' rock, but Jesus saw the gift within him and called it out of him, and when there was no else to lead the Jesus movement because no one else cared enough to step up, he stepped up. He rose to the occasion because no one else would. Leaders aren't born of genetics; they're born of necessity.

The two leadership qualities that stick out the most in this passage are humility and obedience. If you're going to be a leader, says Peter, you must be humble as Jesus was humble. Humility must become the very shape of your leadership.

Your leadership must be obedient to a higher authority, to the God who called you into this mess in the first place. You do not work for yourself. You work for a calling, and God will hold you accountable to how you pursued that calling. Plus, says Peter, think of all the other leaders working for God's Kingdom. Don't let them down. They're counting on you. If just one of you fails to be obedient, then God's mission in the world is a little weaker.

Questions for reflection:

1. What gift is God calling out of you?
2. What leadership role are you saying no to right now but you might need to reconsider?
3. How could your leadership look more like Jesus' as a servant?

Day 5 - 1 Peter 5:6-11

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

Understanding the Reading:

Anxiety is a universal human experience, rooted in both our finite nature and the unpredictability of life. From the stress of daily responsibilities to the weighty concerns of sickness, finances, and relationships, we are all susceptible to the grip of anxiety. It's a burden that can consume our thoughts and rob us of peace.

In the midst of this, Peter offers us the opportunity to cast our cares on God. This act of surrender is not a sign of weakness but a demonstration of faith. It is an acknowledgment that we are not meant to bear our burdens alone. The solution to worry is rooted entirely in who God is to us and what we believe about God. When we really trust in God's character, we are better able to release our worries and anxieties because we know just how loving and caring God is.

Questions for reflection:

1. What are some common sources of anxiety or worry in your life? How do these worries impact your relationship with God and others?
2. How do you typically approach your anxieties? Do you tend to try to handle them on your own, or are you comfortable entrusting them to God?
3. What spiritual disciplines or practices have been helpful for you in surrendering your worries to God's care?

Video Questions:

1. What are some ways you live completely opposite of the way the world lives?
2. What challenges come with living in an upside down kingdom?
3. Have you ever suffered for doing right? What is your response to it?
4. How do you repay evil? With evil or kindness?
5. When have you been in a situation in which you should have let love cover a multitude of sins, but chose not to? How did it go?
6. Is it easy or hard for you to resist keeping score?
7. What are the internal controls you use to get back on track when you find that you have been keeping score?
8. What are the things that you don't want to give up in order to love sacrificially? What are some practical steps you could take to love more sacrificially?
9. What is your biggest takeaway from this week?

Prayer requests and other notes: