

"What is hateful to yourself do not to someone else." - Rabbi Hillel (55 BC – 10AD)

"What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others." – Confucius (551-479 BCE)

"What you shun enduring yourself, attempt not to impose on others." – Epictetus (1st century Greek philosopher)

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." – Jesus

Similar statements had been made before. In fact, many philosophies and religions have had their own versions of the "Golden Rule."

But there's an interesting twist in Jesus' version. Rather than settling for teaching us to *refrain* from treating someone poorly, he's more concerned with teaching us how to love.

"Don't do what you don't want done to you" is one thing, but "Do to others what you wish they'd do to you" is very different.

Mom always says, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."

Maybe Jesus would say, "Say something nice."

It's the difference between, "Don't join in when the demeaning jokes start up about that particular person," and "Risk your reputation to spend some time getting to know him."

I'm reminded of Jesus' words earlier in the sermon that Jonathan taught through a few weeks ago: "You've heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-44) To refrain from sinking to the level of those who treat you maliciously is a good first step, but Jesus is always calling us to the higher level of self-sacrificial love.

Prayerfully consider all your different relationships.

Allow God, by His Spirit, to choose one for you to focus on.

Regardless of how they actually do treat you, ask yourself "How do I wish they would treat me?"

Now, consider how you can treat them this way.

Is it hard? Yes. Sometimes excruciating. Sacrifice always is.

"Jesus, your way is hard. How did you have the courage to sacrifice yourself for a world that didn't love you? Give me the courage to take the step that You're asking me to take. I don't have the will or the strength on my own, so I'm relying on Your Spirit to empower me. Thank you for believing in me. Amen."

week eight

Tuesday

"Do not judge from mere appearances; for the light laughter that bubbles on the lip often mantles over the depths of sadness, and the serious look may be the sober veil that covers a divine peace and joy. The bosom can ache beneath diamond brooches; and many a blithe heart dances under coarse wool." Edwin Hubbel Chapin (1814 ~ 1880)

"The most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellent man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 ~ 1930)

"Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity, nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well-fed." Herman Melville (1819 ~ 1891)

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." Jesus Christ (John 7:24)

How humbling it would be to suddenly have the whole story on someone you have judged as presently "below standard". How quieting it would be to suddenly have the whole fabric of some person's or some group's life and decisions to consider, after you had spent so many years casually determining "all they needed to *just do*".

Can you name him? The person that you roll your eyes, justify hating, would love to have a shot at correcting; can you name her. Does the group have a name, a title, a banner they wave.

Ask God this morning to give you his heart for them. Not just "truth" about them. But love. Love without truth is a heinous evil. Ask God to deal with you according to who he is, so that you can turn and give his love to all others.

week eight

Wednesday

Recently God helped me to see *color* in such a vivid a way. A way that I never thought was possible.

I went to see some friends that I've known and loved my whole life for the first time in fifteen years. Upon arriving, I knew and was expecting something to be different with one particular friend, I just didn't appreciate the impact it would have on me. Fifteen years ago when I embraced this friend, she was a she. A month ago when I embraced that same friend, she was a he, and an open homosexual.

My whole life growing up in church and going through Bible College, the issue of homosexuality and transgenderism was so black and white... The implication was often that God loves straights, and practicing homosexuals are out of luck. And that's all so easy to judge and live with- until an "issue" becomes a "person". Especially one you know and love.

I began talking and catching up with my friend. *Color* started setting in for me when we discussed how Christians had behaved and spoken so negatively toward my friend once the lifestyle had been fully embraced. The people supposed to represent and provide the most love weren't being described by love at all. It was so heart wrenching for me to hear because for so many years I was that "Christian" he so painfully described. All that was going through my mind after hearing the pain and hurt in his voice was that *Christ loves you as much as he loves me and those other "Christians" out there.*

I am confident that my friend has embraced a lifestyle that God did not intend. But, with love being the command of God toward me, as well as checking my own eye for a "log", I can easily say that none of us are living or acting out the life God intended. What if we were to grasp that Jesus didn't just die for this *idea* of sin, but to sacrifice for a *people* He loved. That He didn't come to divide us in to categories of "Saints" & "Sinners", but to give the hope that comes from knowing God thinks everyone has chosen a way that's not best, but loved and died for us anyway.

I grew up associating Jesus with condemnation. But I'll never have such an easy time condemning people again. Jesus taught me this.

God, help me to know your love, and to give it. A love that doesn't reserve itself for acceptable performances or lifestyles that don't threaten me. Help me to love people that I disagree with, that I don't understand, that offend something in me, and that challenge me to think and to listen. Shake me up when I don't do these things God, because it's then that I love me and my ideas more than real people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Eddie Mullin, Student Pastor

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you pieces.” Matthew 7:6

For four years I walked the streets of a major city reaching out to the homeless. We would go to areas where street children hung out, bringing food with us and a passion to see their life circumstances changed. In the beginning I had it all figured out, they just needed a roof over their heads, a job, clean clothes and they would be all better. Until I met Kevin in 2002.

Kevin had managed to hitchhike across the country in an attempt to start fresh. He was 20 years old, and had so much anger in his soul you could see it from a mile away. The first time I offered him a sandwich and tried to engage him in conversation he swat at my hand, threw the sandwich on the ground and cursed me out. My initial reaction was shock, then hurt, and to be honest I wanted to retaliate. He told us to leave, so we did. The next day we were back in the area, he approached us with swinging arms and cursing like I had never heard before. This time another homeless youth stepped between Kevin and I and instructed Kevin to never disrespect me again. Kevin knew the law of the streets and stepped back. We continued on in our conversations with the other kids in the area and the entire time we spoke with the others I noticed Kevin sitting in the corner watching us, taking mental notes, and talking to himself under his breath.

This went on for months with me continually getting frustrated, wondering why he wouldn't accept us as people who just wanted to help. Why would he not receive the first aid that we so graciously offered to his blistered feet? Why would he not consider going someplace safe to sleep or take a bottle of water or a sandwich? After about a year of being cursed out and swat at a new volunteer started working with our organization. She was old enough to be my grandmother, and I honestly didn't think she would last very long climbing under bridges and into sewers. I was so very wrong. Her first night out we went to one of the usual spots. I wanted to introduce her to some of my homeless friends and make sure they knew who she was. Kevin was there. Only this time, he was silent. He stared and stared at us, and finally she asked why he was off in the corner. Trying to avoid talking in front of other kids, I told her I would explain later, but she would have none of it. Before I could stop her, she started walking over and I watched in utter amazement as she sat down, handing Kevin a sandwich and water. I was floored as I saw her talk to him, and him respond graciously as he shared stories with her that, when I later heard them, explained everything. You see, this new volunteer had a striking resemblance to Kevin's grandmother, and when he saw her, he saw comfort, because it was his grandmother who was there when his parents were beating him, it was his grandmother who dressed his wounds. It was his grandmother who would comfort him and talk to him about his day, until she died, right before he arrived in our city.

My judgment of what Kevin needed was so off base. My handing him a sandwich and bottle of water was very much like throwing what is holy to dogs or throwing pearls before swine. It's just not what he most needed. In many ways, we do this every day. We throw people things, opinions and ideas, that we're certain will help, but the recipient doesn't know what to do with it. And giving what can't be used, understood or applied can even make a bad situation worse. Like even a good sandwich can elicit bad memories. We have to be willing to listen and find out the whole story, to do the work of denying ourselves anger for people being what they are, and waiting to see how God can reveal to us how our enduring, patient love can make for wholeness.

Lord, help us to be slow to judge the lives and needs of others. Help us to see that just like our own lives aren't black and white, neither are the lives of strangers and those we live in community with. As we look out into the world, help us to see the heart and soul of people and aspire to love them the way you want them to be loved.

Pam McKerring, Pastor of Mobilization

“The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.” (Proverbs 11:1-2 NIV)

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye...So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:1-5,12 NIV)

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?” (Romans 2:1-3 NIV)

“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11-12 NIV)

“... I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” (Romans 12:1-3)

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 5:22-6:1 NIV)

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19 NIV)