

Love

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:13 (NRSV)

Let's be honest, this is uncomfortable. We were not created to live in the tension of a world that does not see each person as equal. We were not created to live in the tension of a world that does not honor the image of God in each person. We were not created to live in the tension of a world where the oppressed are portrayed as less than human. We were not created to live in the tension of a world that allows a brother to kneel on the neck of his brother. We were, however, created for love. As Jesus prophesies about his own crucifixion, he reminds us that holy love is embodied by sacrificial discomfort. It's okay to feel uncomfortable when we recognize our own biases held beneath the surface of our hearts. It's okay to feel uncomfortable when confronting racial insensitivity in our friends and family members. Bearing the weight of sin is full of discomfort, just ask Jesus! He, too, was uncomfortable on the cross. But sacrificing our comfort for the sake of the healing and restoration of our brothers and sisters in the black community is an act of love. In fact, it is an act of the greatest love. In sacrificing our comfort in self-reflection and conversation, we honor the lives of our black brothers and sisters and participate in their freedom from oppression. That surely sounds like the great and holy love of Jesus.

action

Search me, God, and reveal to me any subconscious bias I may be holding beneath the surface of my heart. Forgive me for holding onto my bias for so long and rid me of it please. Help me to better see your image reflected in the faces of people of color. Forgive me for the moments I haven't spoken up or confronted racial insensitivity when faced with it. Lord, give me the courage to speak out against these things and hold loving, corrective conversations with those in my circle of influence who say racially insensitive things. Help me to find comfort in the discomfort, that I may love others better than I ever have before.

If you feel tempted to bow out of a difficult conversation, take a deep breath, stay and listen for a while. Pray in the midst of the conversation. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you some insight on God's perspective and courage to maintain the discomfort. Actively practice thinking of discomfort as sacrificial love.

Joy



So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.

John 16:22 (NRSV)

I have a friend named Dr. Rev. Sam Vassal, and he said to me once, “Agents of racism are themselves victims of racism, because the principality of racism seeks to destroy us all.” Today’s world makes it easy to pin brother against brother, while failing to recognize that we are all victims of racism, including racists themselves. Racism is a vehicle the enemy uses to steal the joy of all people. Not a single soul feels joy when someone hurts them with racially insensitive actions or words, but I’ve never met a joyful racist either. Racism has a tendency to suck the life out of a person because we were never meant to be the judge of anyone. The role of Judge has always belonged to God, and when we humans try to fill the position, making snappy judgements of a person’s character based on physical appearance, we forsake the role we were actually designed to play, children of God! When we choose to simply be children of God instead of individual judges, our joy returns, and not even the principality of racism can steal it! So we hope in the promises of God our Father, that he gives his children joy that no one can rob us of.

action

Heavenly Father, forgive me for trying to be the judge sometimes. I choose to give you your role back as Judge, and in doing so, I choose to live only as your child instead. I pray for those who would rather play judge than child; please remind them of how joyful life can be when we submit to the role of your children.

Try to remember the most joyful moment of your childhood. You were created to live in that joy. Next time you are tempted to assume something negative about a stranger, try flashing them your biggest, brightest smile instead. Choose to see them as a fellow child of God and invite them into a moment of shared joy.





Peace

...and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

ephesians 6:15 (ESV)

As a body of believers a deep desire of ours is to be able to dwell in peace. We usually focus on the harmonious concept of peace. Which is needed. However, what if we focused on the work it takes to create and sustain this peace. Having peace does not mean that there is a lack of turbulence. Having peace challenges and stretches you. Peace is being able to uproot injustices and create space for those who are different than you. This kind of peace is given to us from Jesus. His peace brings wholeness and oneness. Jesus' peace is similar to a puzzle. Jesus' peace gathers the scattered pieces and puts them together, knowing that as a whole they create a masterpiece of God's work. This is our duty. Uprooting the injustices of our lives allows us to step into wholeness with others, with God! We must be aware of the work and be ready for the process. A college professor of mine often said "peace be the center, and we be the tender". We are the workers of peace, we start by tending to those labeled as "others" to us and pulling out the weeds we call injustices. This is our duty.

actions

Heavenly Father I recognize your peace and how much this world needs it. May I be a vessel of peace that seeks to uproot injustices every day. Lord, grant me courage to step out of my comfort zone and into the work of peace. Here I am Lord, use me!

Create time to reflect on ways you can work on creating peace in your everyday schedule. Share with someone the ways you've seen or experienced injustice, and maybe even call out within yourself the role you might've taken in those injustices. Peace is hard work, and it starts with a conversation such as this.

Patience



But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

romans 8:25 (NRSV)

I have fond memories of my mother singing to me “have patience, have patience, don’t be in such a hurry”. Though it is an iconic song of my childhood, I find myself reaching for its lyrics more often than not. As a child I felt that having patience was a difficult fruit of the spirit to achieve. Nowadays I recognize patience as a tool for growth and success. Paul describes the body of Christ as a people who wait with patience for a hope we do not see with our eyes. We might not always feel the longing as intensely, or always as patiently. Still we hope in the best possible reality anyone can imagine, with patience. This is our human nature. We hope and we pray that the best is yet to come and then we wait. With this mindset we should hope to see our community, our nation, our world become a unified body. We recognize the troubles of our world, and we pray that through Jesus Christ it is restored. Being patient in that allows growth, more spaces for conversation, and a grander awareness of what love truly is.

action

Heavenly Father we live in a culture that wants everything and wants it yesterday. Help us to break free from this narrative and step into the process of growing with each other, being patient with each other’s growth and way of life. Lord, teach us to be still in the midst of storms for your timing is always perfect, never too early and never too late.

I challenge you to pick a day where you intentionally unplug from things that may distract you and sit quietly for ten minutes, reflecting on your needs for growth and what that may look like for you in this season.





Kindness

The natives showed us unusual kindness. Since it had begun to rain and was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed all of us around it.

Acts 28:2

In Acts 28 we see a glimpse of two different people groups unlike each other. We see that the native people sought out kindness as they met the needs of the strangers. They INVITED them into their space and physically took care of them. As Christians we are called to do the same. Unexpected kindness is the most powerful, least costly, and most underrated agent of human change. With just a simple act of kindness barriers are broken down between people groups.

This action speaks volumes to others that may not look or sound like you. As a minority woman when someone goes out of their way to implement kindness, my first thought has always been “they see me.” In that same sentiment, let’s see each other!

action

I urge you to invite someone who may not look like you for coffee or dinner. Invite someone whose complexion looks different from yours for some fellowship time. Build relationships that make you sit in an uncomfortable place. As you build those relationships and grow in that way, it opens up a space where you can learn about that other person’s experience and ask deeper questions. I challenge you to truly see someone, and welcome them to sit at your table.

Goodness



So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

galatians 6:9 (NLT)

I have a friend who always leaves our times together with the following sentiment, "Go do some good." Well, maybe it's more of a reminder or even a commission. Either way, on some days I walk away inspired because doing good things makes me feel fully alive. However, on other days, the thought of doing good can feel exhausting. Not because I don't want to see good things happen but because doing good takes work, often requires us getting messy, and at times, can feel like an uphill battle. I've even noticed while good things tend to start with ease, momentum, and excitement, for good things to be sustained it requires resilience and grit.

For every good and impassioned speech against injustice there are a thousand daily conversations required to build bridges. For every rally attended there is the daily, often costly, commitment to speak truth to power. For every social media comment posted with ease, there is the dedication to live out daily the words we share. This daily grind is not only exhausting but there will always be other voices and systems attempting to push you back or keep you in your place. Yet, as followers of Jesus, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit and refuse to tire out or give up. In the face of adversity, we choose to do some good. When people say we've hit a dead end, we choose to do some good. When the worn out say it's hopeless, we choose to do some good. When violence seems like it has the upper hand, we choose to do some good. When it feels like nothing changes, we reach down deep and choose to keep doing some good. Don't let up or sit this one out—go do some good.

action

Lord, I repent for those moments where I chose to stay silent because doing good seemed too difficult and messy. I repent for the good I've left undone because it seemed too time consuming or I simply didn't want to get involved.

At the end of the day share with someone the good things God led you to accomplish. Not as a spiritual score card but rather as a testimony of how God worked in you and through you to bring about His goodness in this world.





Faithfulness

“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

Luke 16:10 (NRSV)

I don't know about you, but I often struggle to feel like I'm good enough. I am constantly measuring myself up to the person next to me, questioning if I'm as helpful as them, as valuable as them, or as involved as them. But playing the game of comparison often ends in me feeling helpless, hopeless, and worthless. Beyond that, comparing myself to others shifts my focus from the task at hand to . . . well, me. And if there's one thing we should be cautious of in today's world, it is taking up someone else's cause and participating not for their sake, but for ours. Ego is a sneaky beast that weasels its way into our lives through comparison. But Jesus is so kind to remind us that whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much. So when we're participating in race-conscious conversations and confronting our own biases, we do not have to worry about comparing our progress to the progress of those who surround us. God is paying attention to your faithfulness! It often feels like the little things don't matter, but Jesus assures us that they do. Do not feel helpless or hopeless; your consistent acts of faithfulness are important factors to creating sustainable change!

action

Lord, I repent for the moments I have shifted my focus from the task at hand to myself. I choose to fix my eyes on you and your people. May I not lose hope when my faithfulness feels futile. Thank you, God, for honoring those who are faithful in very little.

Pray for someone who looks different than you. Visit a park in a neighborhood you're not as comfortable in. These may be small actions, but God cares about the little things!

Gentleness



to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

Titus 3:2 (NRSV)

What kind of energy do you carry when you walk into a room? Do you tend to quietly slip through the door without anyone noticing? Do you make noise when you enter a room, attracting the attention of everyone else? When it comes to difficult conversations, it's important that we ask ourselves what kind of energy we're bringing to the table. Abrasive volume, tense tone, accusatory language, and use of sarcasm will always create conflict and steer people away from us rather than bringing them into community. But a low volume, relaxed tone, curious language, and use of straightforward honesty will break down walls and barriers that tend to separate us from one another in difficult conversations. Jesus, while he had his fair share of flipping tables, brought a gentle spirit into spaces of controversy and conviction. And the Holy Spirit, gentle as a dove and yet powerful enough to raise Jesus from the dead, is living inside each of us. In moments where we're tempted to be abrasive, we can dig deep inside and lean on the gentleness of the Holy Spirit to lead us through these difficult conversations and navigate relationships with people who think differently than we do.

action

Lord, forgive me for the moments I have chosen abrasiveness over gentleness. I want to reflect your image in every context. May I remember the constant presence of your Spirit, and choose a gentle posture when faced with conflict or opposition in conversation.

We can practice gentleness in moments when we feel flustered. Even if you're not actively having a difficult conversation, use random moments throughout your day when you feel annoyed to practice gentleness so that you're better prepared when the next difficult conversation arises.





Self-Control

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

James 1:19-20 (NRSV)

From click bait to trolling, soliciting a reaction has become a conniving skill in today's world. The goal is to get you to embrace the rhythm of "emotionally react and speak." Now, don't get me wrong, sometimes swift action is required. However, James is calling us to a rhythm that isn't concerned with immediacy but righteousness. Don't make the mistake of thinking this new rhythm is easy. Those who solicit our reactions prey on our pain and suffering. They know how to speak in such a way that drives deep into our bones. However, James invites us to let go of the "react and speak" patterns of this world and embrace a new pattern of being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. When we are quick to listen and slow to speak it gives us time to take a deep breath, process, and allow our thoughts and emotions to be bathed in the Holy Spirit. Righteous anger that comes from the Spirit and not emotional anger birthed in us may certainly be an appropriate response to injustice. It's amazing how often this sacred rhythm ends with not repaying evil with evil but a lament and deeper understanding of God's kingdom and our calling. It's also interesting how self-control is found at the end of the list of fruits of the Spirit. It's as if Paul was reminding us that self-control supplies the necessary space for all other fruits to grow and give witness to Jesus.

action

Heavenly Father, forgive me of those moments when I am more concerned with giving my opinion than being shaped in your righteousness. May I not get seduced into the patterns of this world, but may you produce self-control in me so that your fruit might be seen in all that I do.

Find opportunities to practice the quick to listen and slow to speak rhythm. Before reacting to a post on social media or in a conversation take a breath, surrender your emotions, and ask the Holy Spirit to shape your response. Create space for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness to grow.