

Monday

Focus on Matthew 5:38-39

Jesus' words forbid his disciples from viewing any person as a personal enemy. Jesus' followers are to regard all people, even evil people, as neighbors and relate to them lovingly and not hatefully. Jesus' followers are to endure abuses graciously and refuse to seek revenge.

What do we do when someone slaps us? Let's think about that slap. Most people are right-handed – then and now. To be slapped on the right cheek likely means that someone backhanded you and a backhanded slap is more painful and causes more injury – knuckles instead of palm. In Jesus' time, this type of slap was very insulting of a person's honor and the rabbis taught that such a slap deserved double the monetary fine or a typical slap. So this is the worst slap, as it were. Jesus says to respond by showing the other cheek. This willingness to endure further abuse shows the strength of the disciple's resolve not to retaliate.

Jesus is the perfect model of this teaching. He was mocked, spat on, beaten with sticks, slapped, scourged, and nailed to a cross. Still, he endured all of that without retaliating and speaking words of forgiveness. Never are we more like our Savior than when we respond to abuse not with retaliation but with grace. By turning the other cheek, we are de-escalating the situation and showing love for a neighbor who is being evil to us.

Jesus had no personal enemies. If anyone had good cause to have personal enemies, it was Jesus. Take a step of brutal honesty with yourself: who are your personal enemies (whether you've ever met them or not)? What will you do with your words, thoughts, actions, and prayers so that they are no longer your personal enemy?

Tuesday

Focus on Matthew 5:40

We live in a litigious society. Jesus did, too. What would your life and our society look like if we lived by Jesus' teaching in v. 40?

The premise of v. 40 is that you are guilty and it is not wrong that this person is suing you. If you were innocent, Jesus would probably suggest you continue to court and be found to be innocent and give the person suing you nothing but grace. Ordinarily, then and now, if you get sued and you are in the wrong, you are going to fork over whatever the court requires of you and not a penny more. Or you might offer a low-ball settlement. Jesus is teaching us to settle out of court before trial and offer more than what the other party might gain if they won their lawsuit. How bonkers is that?

Jesus is teaching us not to retaliate by putting up a fight even though we are guilty but instead that we should pay what is fair (and would be required by the court, anyways) and then pay an additional amount that seeks to make amends for mistakes in an effort to win the respect of your opponent. Here's what Jesus is thinking. You, gentle disciple, are overdue on a debt of \$100. You have a shirt worth \$80 because you are a snazzy dresser. Jesus is saying you should give the person your coat, too, to make up the \$20, and exceed, the original amount. You can start wearing your less fancy shirts and coats. This, Jesus says, is relating to your creditor fairly in the Kingdom of God.

Wednesday

Focus on Matthew 5:41

The Roman Empire was in charge and one of the key tenets they had for supplying their government and troops was to take necessary supplies or seize animals from local populations. They could also force residents to perform tasks, such as when Simon of

Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross when Jesus could no longer carry it. The Romans had laws regulating such things, but they were often ignored. So, when Jesus references a disciple being forced to go a mile, he is referring to a Roman soldier compelling a person to do some labor, like carry their equipment, for a mile. A mile might have been the Roman regulation so that the locals did not get too angry and revolt.

Jesus is teaching that in such a situation that his disciples should exceed the distance required by the soldier. The disciple will carry the equipment the first mile out of a sense of obligation, but will carry it the second mile out of compassion and a humble desire to serve. Wow. If Russia invaded and occupied Rockingham County and you were walking down the street and a Russian soldier wanted you to carry something for a mile, Jesus teaches you to do the first mile because it is your obligation and the second mile out of compassion and service to that soldier for the sake of God! When someone compels you to do something you don't want to do, do it happily and go the extra mile to glorify Jesus.

Who could you go the extra mile for as a demonstration of your devotion to Jesus?

Thursday

Focus on Matthew 5:42

We are a church who values service. There are many ways we serve our community and world as individuals and families and there are ways we serve our community as a church. I leave it to you to discern if you can "give to the one who begs" by engaging in our ministries of service, compassion, and hospitality to those in need in our community and world at Cooks Creek. We have plenty of opportunities between now and the end of the year to serve especially through the food pantry and Open Doors. Both the food pantry and Open Doors could also use financial contributions. How do you want to serve?

Friday

Each week in 2022, we are praying for the most dangerous places to be a follower of Jesus. Please spend today in prayer for Bhutan and the Christians in Bhutan. You can get more info, and this info comes from, here: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

What is life like for Christians in Bhutan?

In Bhutan, the government assumes that all citizens are Buddhist. Anyone who converts to Christianity is watched with suspicion, and efforts are usually made to bring them back to their former religion. Religious leaders, the local community and family often cooperate in this. No Christian church in Bhutan has official government recognition—all Christians who worship together are technically worshipping illegally.

Areas for prayer:

- The Bhutanese church is divided. Please pray for unity, peace and understanding among the churches in Bhutan.
- Pray for the Christians in Bhutan to remain true and strong in their faith, in the face of Buddhism's strong influence in the country.
- Please pray for churches in central-south Bhutan. Most are constantly monitored by authorities, hindering or even preventing worship and fellowship gatherings.