

Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus – together

They took note that they had been with Jesus. ~ Acts 4:13

Monday, March 18: Disciples live and love as God expects rather than as man expects

“You have 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.

~ Jesus, Matthew 5:43-45a

These quotes are literally age-old Bible “isms” long heard from Jesus: “Love your enemies” and “love your neighbor.” They remain with us, are familiar even to non-believers, and can be rolled off the tongue almost without thought – which can be a problem. When Jesus said to love your enemies and do good to the poor, He backed up that talk with His walk, His life, and His death. He was intentional about that walk – to the death (and resurrection).

Let's allow Jesus' example of loving His enemies to inspire us as we follow in His footsteps and live out our discipleship. We too can walk the talk and embrace God's call to love our neighbors, even the ones who fall into the category of enemies. You may be surprised how often you can practice this aspect of discipleship. Check out the *Enemy mode* description at the end of this week's devotional material.



Prayer prompt:

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight and spiritual strength to live and love in a way that you could be accused of “acting just like your Father”!

“
YOU'RE
JUST LIKE
YOUR
DAD.
”

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:7-12

Read vs. 7-12 2x,

Mark the words or phrases that catch your attention.

Meditate: Talk with God about those words. Ask Him to impress things on your heart or mind in response. Write them down.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.



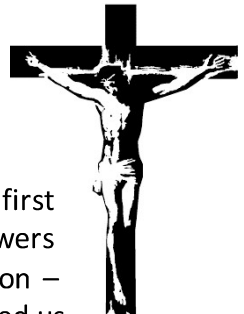
Pondering Point: Look at David's requests: Cleanse me, wash me, let me hear, let me rejoice, hide your face, blot out, create in me, renew me, do not cast me away, restore me. Which ones are you connecting with? Any? Why is that?

Tuesday, Mar 19: God's Mission Seen in 1 Peter 2:13-25

[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed. ~ Peter, 1st Peter 2:24



Pondering Point: Read 1 Peter 2. In the first dozen verses, we hear that we, the followers of Jesus, are living stones, chosen, God's possession – and called to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. If you kept reading, you saw more verses encouraging us to endure suffering that comes at the hands of others, not unlike Jesus Himself suffered. In this way, God will be glorified in our lives.



Jesus suffering willingly at the hands of enemies, leading to our salvation, seen in 1 Peter 2:24: *Jesus [bore] our sins so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness*. We were healed of our sin problem and now can live for — better yet — we can live *with* God; we can fellowship with God. And now we can glorify God too as we follow Jesus' example, including the possibility that we suffer under the hands of evil men.



Prayer: Father God, we know that Jesus didn't "want" to suffer but was willing to do so under Your authority and care. I too — obviously — don't want to suffer. But if it is Your will that I do so, help and strengthen me like You strengthened Jesus. I want to honor You.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:7-12

Ps 51:7,8 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Teaching or Command of God:

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in



Proverbs 3:11-12

THE PROMISE

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."



Pondering Point: Hyssop was a plant used to sprinkle water or other mixtures on worshippers or confessors as a sign of forgiveness. Martin Luther translated this phrase of David's as, "Unsin me with hyssop."

Wednesday, Mar 20: Your Identity in Christ

- **In Christ we are children of the Heavenly Father and will display evidence of that by loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us.**

I heard an excellent description of what God gave Moses on Mount Sinai: The Ten Commandments were referred to as ten *agreements*. This gets to the principles behind the Ten Commandments, looking at them as something one *agrees to do* as a follower of God. That was the deal with the original people of God through Moses. Bring that mindset into your setting and our theme for the week of loving our enemies. We are agreeing as His children to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us because that's what God Himself does and would have us do. Basically strip it all down and here it is: God, I agree to live in the way You call for me to live and love the way You call for me to love (See John 15:12).



Prayer: Father God, when I have a difficult time loving others, would You strengthen my resolve and deepen my love, especially for those not being loving toward me – even temporarily. I know You're the source of all love and that You love me despite my sin, giving Your Son to die for me. Help me to live like a saint -- to live out my sainthood, my child-of-God qualities rather than my original sin nature self. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:7-12

Ps 51:9,¹⁰ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Teaching or Command of God:

Rid yourselves of all the offenses
you have committed, and get a
new heart and a new spirit.



Ezekiel 18:31

THE PROMISE

Isaiah 43:25

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."



Pondering Point: Which image captures you more:

Getting a new heart and a new spirit, or

God remembering your sins no more? Why is that?

Thursday, March 21

Re-Center around God

You might think that this is an easy week to **review** because you have no enemies or no one persecuting you regarding your faith in Christ. (Of course, you might have no enemies because your faith is hidden and unknown to associates and friends. If that is the case, you have something else to consider as you review and re-center your life around God.) As a help to discern potential areas to practice loving enemies, refer to the *enemy mode* description at the end of this week's devotion. Then review, repent if called for, and once again return to God as necessary.



Review: Ask yourself: Who are my enemies? Who does not seem to like me? Who has it out for me? Would God approve of my attitude toward these people?



Repent: When do I fall into enemy mode? Do I need to repent? Do I harbor resentment or bitterness? Remember: This is not about whether others need to repent. This is about your behavior, thoughts, and attitudes. God will deal with them also.



Return: How could I treat these others differently, maybe even better than I currently do? What would Jesus do in my shoes? How could I show grace and kindness even when facing enemy mode from others? Go to God in prayer and ask for direction with what has arisen in your heart and mind. Additionally, ask a godly, trusted friend for their insights too.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:7-12

Ps 51:11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Teaching or Command of God:

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.



1 Cor. 6:19

THE PROMISE

Ephesians 3:12

In [Christ Jesus our Lord] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

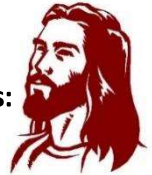


Pondering Point: How are you honoring God with your body? What is one specific thing you could do today as an act of worship using your body or strength?

Micro-Group Connections: A Disciple's Lifestyle



Micro-Group Moment (MGM):
Considering a life of **VIGILANCE** as
a case for participating in Micro-Groups:



*Watch and pray so that
you will not fall into temptation.*

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 26:41

One person's vigilance (or lack of it) can have life-long impact on every micro-group they are part of: wives and husbands; parents and children; extended family; friends, etc. If you have time, check out this stark Bible story that exemplifies the impact that a lack of vigilance can have on many people, including those not directly connected to the offenders.

Vigilance

The quality of being
alert and watchful

Here is a Micro-environment lesson we can observe as the boy Samuel living his life with God under the care of Israel's High Priest Eli. The story describes the impact Eli's lack of vigilance has on his family, and by extension, the people of Israel. There are some minor and major issues that arise. The story is found in 1 Samuel 2:27-36, but it helps greatly to read 1 Samuel 2:12-26 to get a flavor of what God was dealing with.

- What application or lesson jumps out at you in this episode?
 - For Eli
 - For Eli's family
 - For Samuel



Concluding Prayer prompt: As makes sense for your various environment and situations, ask God to help you overcome your “fleshly” desires and weather the storms created by others “fleshly” desires as well.

Friday, Mar 22: Discipleship Point from Matthew 5:43-48

This week's discipleship point is about learning to be healthy amid unhealthy *environments*, and close cousins to that, learning to stay healthy amid potentially unhealthy *people*. Unhealthy disciples produce unhealthy fruit. Healthy disciples produce healthy fruit.

Hear encouragement to stay healthy in these words from God: *“Forgive as your Father has forgiven you”* (Ephesians 4:32) and *“man's anger does not bring about the righteousness of God”* (James 1:20) and *“love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”* (Luke 6:27). Every relationship we have is somewhere in the healthy to unhealthy spectrum, ranging from awesome to abusive. For our part, we look to bring healthy mindsets, attitudes, habits, and coping skills. Along with that, let's make sure that *“no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble”* (Hebrews 12:15) while God is seeking to use us to love the world.



Discipleship Prayer: Father God, I pray that You would have Your Holy Spirit strengthen me and direct me that I might be empowered to emulate the actions of Your son, my Lord Jesus and His example. I want to be able to love my enemies, I want to be able to get past my anger, handle other's anger well, and be able to let go of bitterness so that it does not take root in my heart. I know that I cannot do this in my own strength, so I pray for Your Spirit's help knowing that He helped Jesus and strengthen Him as well. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:7-12

Ps 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Teaching or Command of God:

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.



Romans 6:13

THE PROMISE

Psalm 147:6 The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.



Pondering Point: Work through this prayer prompt:

Father God, grant me a willing spirit that I might offer every part of myself to You as an instrument of righteousness, my:

mind heart voice attitude strength

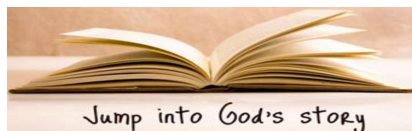
imagination humor skills education

spirit energy sexuality experience memory

my sense of touch taste smell sight hearing

Saturday, March 23: Scripture's Story for the Week

Jesus Rides into Jerusalem
on a Donkey
See Luke 19:28-48



Tomorrow is Palm Sunday, the day in which Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem, not on a mighty horse, but on a humble and lowly donkey. The donkey-versus-horse analogy has often been used to parallel Jesus' overall ministry. Rather than overcoming His enemies with a show of force, He overcomes with a show of love. Rather than overwhelming with a show of strength – a.k.a. a war-horse – He overcomes with meekness and humility, dare we say weakness, symbolized by the colt. Well, as disciples, we are called to meet and even overcome our enemies like Jesus did. Rather than meet evil with evil or strength with strength, we are to oppose evil with good and overcome enemies with love and prayer. So we are called to not just love our neighbors but to love even our neighbors who happen to be our enemies.

Sunday, Mar 24: Call to worship God, to gather together

*This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Psalm 118:24

When we lift our hands in praise and worship, we break spiritual jars of perfume over Jesus. The fragrance of our praise fills the whole earth and touches the heart of God. ~ Dennis Ignatius



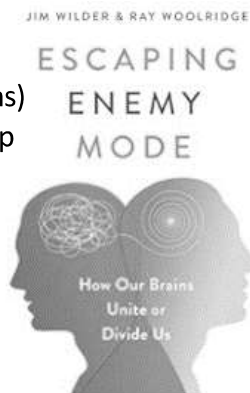
Prayer prompt: Father God, while You are setting a table for me in the presence of my enemies (Psalm 23:5), I want to honor You by loving those enemies as You ask. While You are restoring my soul (Psalm 23:3) in worship, I pray that my heart worships You rightly not just today in Your house but every day in Your world. Let my life glorify You among all people... friend and enemy, family and stranger, fellow citizen and foreigner alike, in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

An introduction to **Enemy Mode** by Life Model Works

Our brains can develop a damaging state of mind where we see and experience others as adversaries. Living in enemy mode poisons family relationships, separates friends, and breaks communities apart.

Enemy mode produces relational blindness. Even someone we love dearly can be seen as an adversary, and in this state of mind we:

- Want the “enemy to lose”
- Turn people into objects (not fellow humans)
- Can’t discern when others are trying to help
- Recruit others to attack the enemy
- Feel justified in hating
- See other people’s motives as “bad”
- Feel alone, believing no one on my side
- Will often attack or withdraw from allies
- See enemy mode as a strength



“The trouble is enemy mode keeps us from seeing people as fellow humans with value. The consequences are painful and costly.”

SIMPLE Enemy Mode starts with the feeling someone is not on our side. An uneasy tension develops when relational connection signals are missed, ignored, mistrusted, or feared.

STUPID Enemy Mode is a high-energy moment fueled by "hot" anger. We destroy people and things we value or need. We sober up later realizing this person wasn't our enemy.

INTELLIGENT Enemy Mode doesn't miss signals or get stupid. "Cold" anger fills the brain with plans of resentment, revenge, hired guns, deception, even more diabolical deeds.

“All 3 types of enemy mode impair brain function so we cannot tell if the other person is truly an enemy.”

Find out more at escapingenemy.com