



## “Loving Losers Build Bridges”

**Theme: Building a Bridge over Troubled Waters**

**Weekly Memory Verse:** <sup>5</sup> *You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.* <sup>6</sup> *Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.* *Philippians 2:5-6*

**Family Activity for the Week:** Do you notice yourself praying for those people you like, those you trust and love? Do you make time to pray for the people in your life that cause you anger, pain, frustration? Take a moment at the beginning of this week to think of all the groups you are in – small groups, classes, bible studies, cohorts, etc. Write down each person’s name on a sheet of paper and place it on the wall next to your bed. Every night this week, pray for everyone on that list and any others that God might place on your heart. Share with God the experiences or feelings that come to mind and ask God to shine His light through each and every one. May you learn to see His likeness in their presence! Psalm 19:14 says, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

**Monday, October 5** – Read Philippians 2:1-8. History says the city of Philippi was full of retired Roman military men. Ask them who was a great leader and they’d have named Alexander the Great, the Greek leader who conquered nearly all of the known world, or the Roman Emperor Augustus who forcibly ended a civil war in the empire. Yet Paul urged the Philippians to be like Jesus (the Christ = anointed one), a vastly different kind of king. Instead of using his position to gain things for himself, Christ used it to give to others.

- ▲ We read in verse 6 that Jesus, “did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.” Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Who arrogantly grasped at the chance to be ‘like God, knowing good and evil’? Why, Adam in Genesis 3.” Jesus, who *was* God, showed, “what it really meant to be divine... the true meaning of who God is. He is the God of self-giving love.” Paul urged the Philippians to, “adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus.” Are you willing to even think about adopting that attitude?
- ▲ Verse 7 then said Jesus “emptied himself.” In Greek grammar, the “himself” meant “he was glad to...,” or “he was willing to give up all he had.” “Emptied” didn’t mean Jesus stopped being God. Jesus didn’t have an ego need for any rank or glory. He took the form of a slave and died on a cross. Would you admire Jesus more if he’d strutted around jeering, “Do you know who I *am*?” and seeking applause? Why or why not?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I call you Lord, not despite your humble, serving life and death, but because of it. As I worship you, send your Spirit to grow more of your self-giving love in my heart. Amen.*

**Tuesday, October 6** – Read Luke 9:51-56 and John 4:4-10. Just knowing Jesus was going to Jerusalem led a Samaritan village to refuse to allow him to stay in their village. Jews hated Samaritans because they were a mixed race born of Assyria’s policy of wiping out the identity of conquered peoples. You can read about this in 2 Kings 17:24. Samaritans hated Jews, who snubbed their offer to help rebuild the Temple in Ezra 4:1-4. Each side’s fear of the other had hardened for 700 years. The Samaritan woman was astonished that Jesus would ask for something as simple as a drink of water—yet Jesus reached out to Samaritans, again and again, rather than fearing or avoiding them.

▲ In Luke 9, the Samaritan villagers were rude and unwelcoming. James and John reacted as we are often tempted to. “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?” they asked. But Jesus said no. Have you ever been in a position either to fan the flames of hatred higher, or to lower the temperature and move toward peace? Which course did you choose? How did things work out?

▲ What risks of misunderstanding, damage to reputation, rejection or rudeness existed for Jesus when he chose to engage the Samaritan woman in conversation at Jacob’s Well? What made him willing to take those risks to offer “living water” to a member of a different and despised race, and a disgraced woman at that? What does his model teach us about fearing people who are different?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, it’s true that “hurt people hurt people.” But you refused the path of fear and anger even when snubbed. Transform my heart to be more like yours each day. Amen.*

**Wednesday, October 7** – Read Matthew 5:21-24 and 43-48. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was like his “platform,” to use a modern political term. Startlingly, he widened the reach of the sixth commandment we find in Exodus 20:13. He said contempt, shown by words that tear down and destroy others, is as morally destructive as the physical act of murder. Then Jesus expanded on that idea in the strikingly different way he taught his followers to treat enemies. Avoid anger and revenge, he said. Offer God’s expansive love to everyone.

▲ In verse 22, the word translated “you idiot” was the Aramaic word *raca*. It didn’t express friendly teasing but showed deep-seated contempt for another person. What tempts you to feel contempt for candidates or people you know who see political issues differently than you do? How would campaign ads and personal conversations change if we all lived by Jesus’ standard?

▲ What’s your gut response to Jesus’ matter-of-fact statement that God, “makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous”? Are you ever tempted to feel that because you are “right,” you should receive better treatment from God (or other people) than those who are “wrong”? Do you feel an inner tug to only try to bless other people you like, or see as “worthy”? How can you become more like God in your willingness to bless anyone who needs it?

**Prayer:** *O God, as I take in your love, help me to better understand the many dimensions of the love you pour into me—and ask me to extend to others. Amen.*

**Thursday, October 8** – Read Matthew 7:1-5 and 12. Jesus challenged our tendency to judge others, while overlooking or excusing any tendency on our part to do similar (or even worse) things. That is destructive and hurtful enough in families or workplaces. Taken into the realm of politics, it seems to go on steroids. Then Jesus added the positive side of the command with what we call the Golden Rule: “You should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you.”

▲ In what ways do you believe Jesus’ words apply to our local, state, or national political “family”? Can you recall a campaign in which two candidates disagreed about the best approaches to issues, yet did so with respect and without implicitly (or explicitly) claiming that the other person is an unpatriotic, dishonest slime ball? If candidates did that, do you believe their supporters (including yourself) might follow suit?

▲ At times Christians act as if the Golden Rule just means to be “nice” in surface-y, social ways. Not so—sometimes treating others as we would wish to be treated challenges us deeply. What people or conditions make it hardest for you to treat others as you’d wish to be treated? Jesus linked the Rule to words from Leviticus 19:18: “you must love your neighbor as yourself.” How can you discern how best to live the Rule in ways that bless others while retaining healthy boundaries and self-care?

**Prayer:** *Lord, you lived your earthly life in the unforced rhythms of grace, never imposing yourself on others, yet always seeking to draw even your enemies. Teach me today how to live more and more that way. Amen.*

**Friday, October 9** – Read Romans 12:9-13:1. First-century Rome was a lot like Washington, D.C. where there was obsession with political maneuvers and intrigue. So, it was especially striking that, in his letter to Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul virtually ignored human power struggles. Nero was probably emperor when Paul wrote his letter and he killed Christians for sport and used them to blame the unrest in the empire! Instead, Paul called the Christians to live as Jesus, their true King, did. They were to seek peace, to overcome evil with good, to live as citizens of God’s invisible yet supreme kingdom.

▲ These verses can be hard to live into even in everyday settings: “Be the best at showing honor to each other.... If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people” (verses 10, 18). What inner fears and drives make it hard for you to honor and live at peace with people who are different from you? How can God’s eternal love for you provide a foundation on which you can set aside the need to climb above others?

▲ Romans 13 reflected ideas common in Paul’s day, and no doubt the facts of life in an empire that did not allow dissent from the emperor’s rule. But it went deeper. Paul later urged behavior the emperor couldn’t monitor in 1 Timothy 2:2-3: “Pray for kings and everyone who is in authority.... This is right and it pleases God our savior.” Right now, ask God to bless a candidate you do not plan to vote for this year. How hard did you find that? Consider continuing to do that throughout this election season.

**Prayer:** *Lord God, I like being right. It’s hard to accept that good people can reach different conclusions. Keep teaching me how, in your spirit, to live at peace with all people. Amen.*

**Saturday, October 10** – Read Ephesians 4:29-32. In strife-torn communities across our country and our world, we see what happens as words tear down community and set people against one another. As we move towards the election, fix firmly in your mind and heart a resolve to speak, “only what is useful for building up, as there is need,” in politics as in all other aspects of your life.

▲ Scholar N. T. Wright said this about verse 29, “Your tongue gives you the opportunity to bring God’s grace to people, by what you say and how you say it, and it’s a shame to pass up this chance... You should behave as those on whom God’s Holy Spirit has placed God’s mark. The word Paul uses could refer to the ‘seal’ or official stamp on a document... The mark indicates who it belongs to and what it’s for.... People who are enslaved to anger and malice may think they are ‘free’ to ‘be themselves’, but they are in bondage. If we are marked out by the Spirit’s personal presence living in us, think how sad it makes that Spirit if we behave in ways which don’t reflect the life and love of God.” Before you forward that e-mail, or post that tart response on a blog, ask, “Does this give grace? Does it build up? Can I picture Jesus sending this?”

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you fearlessly challenged true evil. But you did it by pointing to truth, not by slandering reputations or sharing juicy tidbits of gossip. Help my political words to reflect you well, and to give grace to those who hear. Amen.*