



grow. pray. study.

January 19, 2020 “What Would Jesus Say About Race, Gender and Equality?”

Scripture: Luke 10:25-29 and Galatians 3:26-28

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

All humans made in God’s image

MONDAY 1.20.20 Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-23

A patriarchal Hebrew culture told the two creation stories in Genesis 1-2. Yet neither story cast male or female in an “inferior” role. It’s clear in the Genesis 1 story, in which the story said “in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.” People often misunderstand the Genesis 2 story’s use of “helper” to depict the first woman. But men especially should know that “The person most often described as a help in Scripture is God; your helper is the strong one who is capable of getting you out of a mess. Being a help does not imply being subordinate.” *

- What key message(s) do you find in the poetic archetypal lines of Genesis 1:27: “God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.” What essential qualities do you believe make up “God’s own image”? In what vital ways can human beings share in those qualities? What does this tell you about your worth and that of all other people?
- A handbook for Bible translators said, “Fit for him [“perfect for him” in the *Common English Bible*] is literally “alongside him” or “corresponding to him.” The sense is “suitable for him, adequate for him,” or perhaps even “like him.” ** When have you heard (believed?) that women are somehow less capable or worthy of respect than men? How does accurately understanding the words these archetypal stories used put the complex realities of gender in a more positive light?

Prayer: Lord, you’ve given all of us (not just me and people like me) your image from creation onward. Keep teaching me how to value our differences in the setting of our common humanity. Amen.

* John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–16*. Nashville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 40.

** William D. Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1997, p. 71.

Jesus: good news for everyone, not just men

TUESDAY 1.21.20 Luke 10:38-42, Galatians 3:26-29

Jesus treated women as—well, people. Most rabbis thought women couldn’t learn and wouldn’t teach them. Dorothy Sayers, first woman to earn an Oxford degree (with highest honors), was a devoted Christ follower. She called Jesus “a prophet and teacher who never nagged at [women]; never flattered or coaxed or patronized...who rebuked without [demeaning] and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them...who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend.” * In Galatians, Paul followed Jesus. He boldly wrote that, in Christ, old divisions between male and female no longer applied.

- Jesus teaching Mary may seem normal to us. In his day, it was most unusual. It was not an isolated incident, either (cf. [Luke 8:1-3](#), [Matthew 27:55-56](#), and women as the first resurrection witnesses, as in

[Luke 24:10-11](#)). How does Jesus' model speak to attitudes and actions that still undervalue (and often underpay) women in homes, workplaces or other settings?

- Paul wrote some things (e.g. [1 Corinthians 14:34-35](#), [1 Timothy 2:11-15](#)) that sound troublingly anti-female. His cultural setting likely shaped his words, but those passages seem to speak to limited church or city issues. On the other hand, Galatians 3:28 was a sweeping view of how Christ changed human relationships (cf. also [Romans 16:1-3, 7](#) where Paul named women as valued ministry partners). In what ways have you seen the church live out Galatians 3:28? Where do you, or the Christian community, still need to grow in fully living this out?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we're "enlightened," but we still too often hear jokes about women's driving or emotionalism. Guide me to discern and live beyond any gender labels that my heart still harbors. Amen.

* Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human? Penetrating, Sensible, and Witty Essays on the Role of Women in Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, p. 68.

Jesus healed across national and religious divides

WEDNESDAY 1.22.20 Matthew 15:22-29

"The regions of Tyre and Sidon" (modern Lebanon) were Gentile territory, not Jewish. The disciples were no doubt nervously wondering "What are we doing here?" It appears that Jesus went there, at least in part, to teach them a lesson. His seemingly rude, nationalistic answers to the woman in need were like parodies of the disciples' biased attitude. But the woman cleverly pressed her case. Jesus affirmed her faith and honored her request for help.

- Written words can't show tone of voice or facial expression. If verses 24 and 26 were Jesus' true view of this desperate Canaanite mother, what he did in verse 28 didn't make sense. Might we understand the story better if we imagine Jesus with an ironic lilt in his voice, and a bit of a twinkle in his eye? Clearly, in the end, Jesus honored the mother's plea. How did his behavior rebuke and seek to change outlook the disciples' expressed in verse 23?
- Matthew's gospel seems to have spoken particularly to Christians of Jewish background, some of whom struggled to accept Gentiles (cf. [Acts 15:1-21](#)). How would this story have spoken to the ethnic, cultural and gender divisions the early church faced? How does it speak to today's divisions, such as between people trying to silence or "send away" victims of various types of abuse and those who demand justice for the victims?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you weren't about to let national or gender prejudice keep you from responding to this mother's heartfelt plea. Give me a willingness to do all I can to respond to pleas for help, even from beyond my comfort zone. Amen.

Grace that reached beyond ethnic/religious boundaries

THURSDAY 1.23.20 John 4:4, 9-10, 39-40; Ephesians 3:10-15

In Jesus' day, Jews hated Samaritans, a mixed race born of Assyria's policy of wiping out the identity of conquered peoples ([2 Kings 17:24](#)). Samaritans hated Jews, who had snubbed their offer to help rebuild the Temple ([Ezra 4:1-4](#)). Each side's hatred had hardened for 700 years. Yet Jesus didn't fear or avoid Samaritans but reached out to them repeatedly. Ephesians 3 said God's plan is to use God's people, working together in the church, to restore our broken world to its intended total wholeness (cf. [Revelation 21:1-5](#)). Clearly understood, God's mission crosses all human boundaries.

- In [Luke 9:51-56](#) Samaritan villagers rudely refused to welcome Jesus. James and John reacted the way we often feel. "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 to either 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?

- In Greek, “the many different varieties” in Ephesians 3:10 was one word—“*polupoikilos*.” It meant “many colored,” as though Paul was picturing God’s grace and wisdom as a kind of cosmic rainbow. In what ways have God’s grace and wisdom added richness and beauty to your life through contact with believers from other backgrounds? How can you help your church reflect that beauty to all who come in contact with us?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you refused the path of fear and anger even when snubbed. Help me to live into your spirit as a member of your church and join in doing your work in our big, diverse world. Amen.

Grace bigger than human labels or divisions

FRIDAY 1.24.20 Matthew 19:9-12, Acts 8:26-39

Water! What would keep me from being baptized?” [*The most ancient manuscripts do not include what, in some versions, is presented as verse 37.*] 38 He ordered that the carriage halt. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Lord’s Spirit suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.

“You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” (Ephesians 4:4-5)

In ancient Israel, [Deuteronomy 23:1-2](#) banned eunuchs and illegitimate children. But Jesus welcomed into his kingdom even people most Hebrews barred. “Jesus’ characterization of eunuchs matches the Roman description that lumped people who were intersexed (born eunuchs); who were castrated, often as an act of war (man-made eunuchs); and who voluntarily became eunuchs on their own into a single all-encompassing category.” * Judaism would not have accepted the Ethiopian as a convert. The Holy Spirit led Phillip to baptize and fully welcome the Isaiah-reading eunuch into God’s family.

- The prophet most mainline scholars call second or third Isaiah wrote, before Jesus, that God welcomed “eunuchs” as part of God’s family (cf. [Isaiah 56:3-5](#)). Scholar David Mc. Kenna wrote, “Eunuchs represent all of the outcasts who will be gathered into the new community of faith.... Every generation of believers must ask itself the question, ‘If God welcomes outcasts into His family and His church by faith, who are the outcasts to whom we are denying the privilege?’” ** Who are the “outcasts” you and your congregation find it hardest to welcome?
- As we honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s legacy, we recall that Ethiopians were also Gentiles and people of color. Yet that man, despite all those barriers to acceptance, was reading from Isaiah 53 and seeking to understand the message. The Bible is literally at our fingertips today, printed as well as on our computers and smartphones. How can you, like the Ethiopian, plan to read and understand the Bible more clearly?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I feel confused, please keep sending people to guide me in your way. And when you call me to help someone else, give me the wisdom to transcend any barriers that might keep me from pointing them to you. Amen.

* Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution and Christian Faith* (p. 120-121). Island Press. Kindle Edition.

** David Mc. Kenna, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 18: Isaiah 40–66*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994, p. 186.

A healthy body needs all its parts

SATURDAY 1.25.20 1 Corinthians 12:7, 12-14

The apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, called all Christ-followers together “the body of Christ.” We know each part of our physical body adds to our well-being. But in churches or communities, we (often subconsciously) shut out some members of the “body.” Scholar Amos Yong wrote, “The weaker members of the body who are of central import cannot be excluded from being channels of the Spirit’s manifestations...God freely distributes the Spirit’s [gifts] to all members of the body so that each one can contribute to the common good of the body...people with disabilities are central to, rather than marginal to, the charismatically gifted body of Christ.” * For Resurrection to live fully as Christ’s body, [Matthew’s Ministry](#) is vital, not a minor add-on. So are people of all races, economic and educational levels, nationalities, gender identities and any other source of discrimination.

- God gives each Christian gifts and talents that empower us to with God to change the world for the better. But no one person receives all the gifts and talents needed. God wants each believer to fill a place that makes the overall body stronger. It is natural for all of us to tend to believe what we’re involved in is the “most important.” Have you ever seen people with different gifts, ministries, backgrounds or cultural preferences yield to the all-too-human urge to see other people or ministries as “rivals” for attention or resources? How can we allow the “same Lord” behind them all to help us avoid unhealthy siloing or infighting, so that “the body of Christ” can carry out Christ’s mission in the healthiest possible ways?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you’ve called me to join with others in carrying out your mission in the world. I commit myself to use the gifts you’ve given me in harmony with other members of your body for your purposes. Amen.

Family Activity: Anyone with experience with children will know their ability to detect injustice is highly developed—“it’s not fair” is a regular refrain. We can channel this natural flair for fairness into productive and critical discussion about the nature of equality and what constitutes fair treatment. To help facilitate a discussion, gather 15 pieces of candy or cereal. Give yourself 10 and your child 5. They will most likely protest immediately. Ask them to share ideas about how to make the distribution more “fair” and allow them to redistribute the candy or cereal. Read Romans 2:11. Discuss that God loves everyone equally regardless of their appearance, their clothes, their physical capabilities, skin color, language, etc., and God calls us to give equal respect to all.

* Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), p. 94.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Elizabeth Hill and family following the death of Darlene (Gigi) Hill (mother), 12/31/2019

Dara Wilson and family following the death of Graydon Wilson (husband), 1/7/2020

Brenda Kelley and family following the death of Garey M. Kelley (husband), 1/8/2020

James Cochran (STAFF MEMBER) and family following the death of Raymond Merritt "Pat" Cochran (grandfather), 1/10/2020

Kylinn Grimm and family following the death of Shane Grimm (father), 1/11/2020

Rochelle Vossman and family following the death of Brian Vossman (husband), 1/12/2020

Mary Alice Morton and family following the death of Jack Brooks (other), 1/13/2020

Terrie Dalrymple and family following the death of Roger Wright (brother), 1/14/2020