

Week 1: Respect

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

—CS Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

Reflection Scripture: Respect

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:3-4 NIV

Day 1: Everyone is Someone for Whom Christ Died

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ...” –Jesus

John 3:16-17 ESV

Carol says:

I remember running into a worldview wall when it came to respecting the life of every human being and God’s sovereign rule in salvation when it comes to justice and judgment.

There are those who have done horrendous unspeakable things to others. And I wrestled with God’s call to forgive. Then I realized what it meant to forgive, what it cost Him to forgive. I asked myself: *Am I OK with Jesus paying the price for someone’s sins, who I see as unforgivable and irredeemable?*

To forgive is to respect Jesus’s gift of salvation to whoever the Father chooses, and the person’s right to receive it, no matter what they’ve done or what I think about them.

This truth caused me to see myself and others in a different light. The light of His glorious grace.

Stacy says:

I’m not sure when I realized it. The idea of sin being sin no matter how I saw it. Some preacher or teacher said the words, *There are no sin rankings, no small or large sin. No sin which required Jesus to do more than He already did.*

Jesus died to cover the white lie I told yesterday and the murder the prisoner committed some years back. Neither sin needed more redemption, more bloodshed, more death from the One who hung on the cross. Sin is sin. Whether I viewed it as not so bad or horrendously evil, His death was required for redemption.

My husband and I saw him recently. Someone we know caught up in a drug addiction. I barely recognized him... thin, dirty, unkept. He stood with his friends visibly wired and I was overcome with sorrow. He doesn’t know. He has no idea of the sacrifice made for him or the possibility of freedom. I wanted to whisper as I walked by, *Jesus loves you... right now in your drug-induced high... dirty and unkept... the Savior loves you.*

This truth has done a work in me. Where judgment once ruled, now I find sorrow and a call to pray.

Respect

respect – *noun*... **1:** a relation or reference to a particular thing or situation... **2:** an act of giving particular attention: consideration **3 a:** high or special regard: esteem **b:** the quality or state of being esteemed...

---Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Ed.

There are two aspects to the definition of *respect*. The first considers the way we relate to another, the reference we use in our attitude and behavior toward them. The second definition of *respect* is seeing someone as better than ourselves, we esteem them, see them as worthy of high regard. God has something to say on both facets of respect when it comes to loving others and relating to one another.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

What were we once? How did we live? Who did we follow?

We are all sinners (Romans 3:23). Each of us only worthy of God's wrath, not His mercy, not His love, not His grace. God's Word calls us to consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4) because we all come from the same broken mold. We should first relate to one another with respect to sin.

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

But what did God do? Why?

How are we saved? What for?

Not only are we all sinners, but God loves us enough to die for us. God so loved the world He sent His only Son, not to condemn, but to save. Our respect for others, saved and unsaved, finds its basis in God's love. He believes all are worth dying for. Anyone whom God deems worth dying for deserves our respect.

Respect

Based on our own merit, we deserve nothing but death. Only God's grace equips us for good work and enables us to love others. How does this truth make you see yourself with respect to others?

There is no room for boasting (Ephesians 2:8-9), seeing yourself as more highly esteemed than others. We boast to show ourselves as better with respect to others. It is disrespectful to brag about our own accomplishments or character. Disrespectful to God and to those we boast.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy to all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

—Titus 3:1-7 ESV

Underline the phrase “*show perfect courtesy to all*” in the above passage.

Show perfect courtesy to all. Respect all. Because we too were once foolish, blind, hateful sinners living only for self. Until. His goodness and grace, love and mercy, busted into our lives, washed us clean and made us new.

We are not to dis-respect anyone, because apart from the grace of God we are just like them. We have nothing in and of ourselves worth lifting up over another. We should see ourselves in their place, relating to them with an understanding of what it is to be lost.

Everyone is someone for whom Christ died. This is the basis of respecting everyone and the foundation of loving them.

Talk It Out

Talk it over with yourself:

Who do you find it hard to respect? Why?

Can you see them as someone for whom Christ died? Does this change your perspective?

Talk it over with God:

You too were one who only deserved God's wrath, but He gave you mercy because of His great love for you. Thank Him for His love and saving grace. Ask Him to bless you with His love for others.

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

2Corinthians 5:14-16 ESV

Work Out Your Faith

Respect:

Today, every time you consider someone less than yourself, take the judgmental thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Pray:

Lord, this is someone for whom You died. Reveal Your great love for them today.

Reflection Scripture: Memorize

This week reflect on Scripture through memorization. Memory prompts are given daily. Use whatever technique helps you memorize. Write it on a notecard and carry it around with you or put it in a place you see it often. Rewrite the verses over and over. You may also want to check out ScriptureTyper.com. Choose the way you best learn. Just remember to allow His Word to work in your heart as you memorize.

Do _____ out of selfish ambition or vain _____. Rather, in _____ value others above _____, not looking to your own _____ but each of you to the interests of the _____. Philippians 2:3-4

Day 2: Freedom to Choose

"...And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." — Joshua 24:15 ESV

Stacy says:

After hours of late nights sharing in the pain of someone I hold dear and countless conversations about how they came to the place they now stand... my loved one chose the same path once again. In spite of what God revealed, and the wise counsel of others. They made a choice and I was fed up. I checked out emotionally and mentally. Inside I was screaming, *FINE! Have it your way. I'm DONE!*

It wasn't the choice I wanted them to make. In fact, I was pretty angry and frustrated because the choice affected me and many I love dearly. It was easier for me to wash my hands of the whole matter. I'm pretty sure you won't find "easy" in the definition of love.

I'm learning love often means respecting someone's choices even when it is not what I would choose, especially when it is the very opposite of what I think is right. Because love is not about being right or wrong, love is respecting all of us have a choice.

Honestly, I'm no different. I've made choices to love the world instead of God. I've chosen my way instead of His when the going got tough. I still do at times. God lovingly respects my choices and never gives up on me.

Love calls us to do the same... to never give up. Love urges us to pray, and pour out respect in ways that reveal His love for them. When we believe in the power of God's love, and His will for all to come to know Him. Then there is never a moment when being done is an option.

No... the only option... the only choice Believers have... is love.

Carol says:

Respecting one's freedom to choose has really hit home since my children have become adults.

Well into their twenties now, they make life choices for themselves. Some great, some questionable. Some so questionable it makes me wonder where I failed. I continually have to remind myself of their freedom to choose.

I also must remind myself to trust God with their freedom, His love for them, and His ability to redeem all our bad choices. It helps to look back at the choices I made as a young adult. It's a humbling perspective, which brings His redeeming power and grace into living color.

Respecting others includes respecting their choices. Everyone has freedom to choose when it comes to what they believe by faith.

Joshua respected those he led into the Promised Land, calling on them to choose whether they would serve God, the idols of their forefathers in Egypt, or Abraham's forefathers. He also gave them the choice of serving the gods of the previous inhabitants of their promised land. Joshua made his choice clear, and then put a clear choice before them.

We too must respect people's freedom to choose when it comes to what they believe about Jesus.

Read Mark 8:27-28

People had many different ideas about who Jesus was. List them below:

Jesus respects people's freedom to choose what they believe about Him. He never tells them they are wrong. He never argues. He doesn't debate. He reveals Himself through His teaching and miracles, sometimes with words. But He never forces the issue, because He knows the truth. Who He is must be revealed to them by the Father.

Read Matthew 16:13-17

When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" what did Peter say?

According to Jesus, how did Peter know He was the Christ, the Son of the living God?

When it comes to respecting people's understanding of who Jesus is, we are ultimately respecting God's freedom to reveal His Son to whom He will reveal.

Flesh and blood cannot convince people to choose Jesus. Only the gift of faith, the Spirit of revelation, the opening of eyes by Father God, can move someone to choose Him. We must

respect God’s timing and judgment when it comes to others believing Jesus is the Savior of the world.

For [God] said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

— Romans 9:15 ESV

Respecting an individual’s freedom to choose not to believe can be difficult when it’s someone you love. Resisting the temptation to argue, debate, convince, and browbeat into belief can be hard. Our instinct is to fight for them. It can also be difficult to trust God and respect His timing in choosing to gift your loved one with faith.

Some make a choice by *not* making a choice. Even the choice not to seek truth at all is one we need to respect in others. We are not to call them fools or ridicule them. But it doesn’t mean we can’t pray for them and build relationship with them, waiting for an opportunity to speak truth in love.

Then there are those who choose to let you know their choice to reject the truth about Jesus through combative and disdainful behavior. You may even suffer persecution because of their choice. However... we are called to respect their choice, too.

Read Luke 6:27-28

How does Jesus teach us to deal with our enemies?

Read Matthew 5:44-45

Who does Jesus say you will be when you love your enemies? Why?

Respecting one’s freedom to choose, no matter what they choose and how they voice it, is all about remembering God gave you the same choice. As Believers, we act like our Father, blessing others with the same respect.

Talk It Out

Talk it over with yourself:

Respect

Whose choices do you find hard to respect? Why?

Understanding God’s sovereignty in doling out faith, do you find it hard to respect (trust) His timing and judgment? Why?

Talk it over with God:

Ask God to remind you how He allowed you the freedom to choose. He did not force you. He did not coerce or manipulate you. He wooed you.

Ask Him to teach you how to woo others to Christ and respect His judgment in the process.

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.
Isaiah 30:18 ESV

Work Out Your Faith

Respect:

Sometimes we ask someone to make a choice which affects us too. *Where do you want to eat? What movie do you want to see? You choose.* But when the choice is made we interject with, *I don’t like that. Or I’ve already seen that.* It’s not very respectful to give someone the freedom to choose and then argue with their choice.

Today, or at some point this week, work out respect by following through and respecting their choice. Not with teeth gritted. But with an attitude of love and grace for their choice.

Reflection Scripture: Memorize

Do _____ out of _____ ambition or vain
_____. Rather, in _____ others
above _____, not _____ to your own
_____ but each of you to the _____ of the
_____. Philippians 2:3-4

Day 3: Freedom to Walk Away

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?"

John 6:66-67 ESV

Carol says:

I have to say, looking back over my journey of faith to where I am now, He respected every time I walked away from His offer of grace and Lordship.

One instance happened in high school. I was part of a Christian youth group called Young Life. During this time, I had an opportunity to confess a sin. Something I'd done, but didn't realize until later, when another member of the group came in complaining about a "hit and run."

Earlier that evening, I hit a car backing out of a parking space. The passenger riding with me told me I didn't do any damage and to go on. So, I did. When I heard what I'd done from the daughter of the woman whose van I hit, I was mortified. Afraid. And completely silent.

In that moment, was an open door which I chose not to walk through and it closed. Shortly after, I stopped going to Young Life meetings. Decades later, after I began walking with Him, He brought me back to this place. It was a sin He called me to confess and make restitution for the damage done. As hard as it was, it was a step in experiencing the true freedom He calls us to.

He will let us walk away. But He will not stop pursuing.

Stacy says:

There was a young man in my youth group who struggled with bipolar disorder. I'm not sure why he started coming to our meetings, but he did. After small group one night as the kids filed out to go home, he waited until the last teen walked out. He looked me in the eye and boldly said, *I heard what you said Mrs. Stacy, but I don't believe it. A good God who loves me would never allow what I'm going through. And there's nothing you can say to prove me wrong.*

I was startled by his statement, but I also understood. With all the courage I could muster I replied, *You're right. There is nothing I can say to prove God's love for you. I don't have to... God will prove it to you.* He shook his head and walked away.

As I drove home I prayed, Lord, it is up to you. I stepped out and spoke words only you can back up. Prove it! Prove your love for him because no words I can say will do it.

Just the other day a retired preacher in our church came into the shop. He placed his hand on my shoulder and told me he spent some time with the same young man this week. He told me how the young man mentioned me and my influence in his spiritual life.

Me? I thought. I didn't do one thing but let that boy walk right out the door!

Sometimes the most beautiful love we have for others is to watch them walk away. It's a tough thing, heart-wrenching at times, but love always trusts. God is constantly proving His love for those we see wander from His Way. Those who look us dead in the eye and speak their unbelief.

It's my job to love and let go. It's God's job to do the rest.

Everyone has the right to walk away from faith, from relationships, and right out of our lives. But no matter what they walk away from or why they walk away, we are called to respect their freedom to do so.

Read Mark 10:17-22

What was the man looking for?

What did Jesus tell him to do to gain what he lacked?

How did Jesus feel about him when He looked at him?

The man came looking for the way to eternal life. Jesus told him he was lacking one thing: treasure in heaven. The man could not do what Jesus asked him to, he was wealthy and could not give everything to the poor. The man went away. Jesus loved him. But did not try to stop him.

Read Mark 10:23-27

What makes it difficult for people to enter the Kingdom of God?

How is it possible for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom?

Jesus respected the rich man's decision to walk away. He didn't run after him or try to console him. He just told him the truth, however hard to hear, and loved him by letting him go. Jesus trusted God the Father to work the impossible in the young man's life.

Sometimes, it makes us sad to walk away from a hard call. But Jesus allows us to. And we have to allow others the freedom to walk away too.

Read John 6:53-66

Jesus is speaking to the crowd that followed Him after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15, 22-52). They were looking to get their stomachs filled again, but Jesus was more concerned about feeding their spirits.

What did Jesus say they had to do to have life?

How did they respond to the teaching?

Why did some take offense?

These disciples walked away because Jesus's hard teaching offended their personal sensibilities. They could not understand what He was saying, so they walked away.

Again, Jesus respects their decision to leave. Ultimately He's trusting His Father to reveal the truth, because no one can understand unless the Father makes the way.

Read John 6:66-69

What did Jesus ask the twelve?

How did they respond?

Some stay even when they don't understand, because they've come far enough to know there is no other way.

Respecting those who walk away, leaves the door open for them to return as Believers. Those who walk out because of a hard truth are unbelievers, even though they looked like Believers

for a time. If we don't respect them in their walking away, treat them with love and kindness, they may not come back.

It can be very painful to watch people walk away from faith, from relationships, and out of our lives, but remember God has a plan in all of it. And really there is nothing we can do to keep them from leaving, but we can respect them and leave the door open for them to return.

Talk It Out

Talk it over with yourself:

Think about a time when you were involved in someone walking out on you or you walked out. What was the root issue? How did you feel? How did you respond?

How would you feel if they came back? or if you were called to go back? Did your parting leave room for a choice to return?

Talk it over with God:

Share your wounds over past walking out or walking away experiences in your life with God. Bring them before Him one at a time. Ask Him to reveal the root of the emotion attached to these episodes in your life. Allow Him to fill you with His love for those who have walked away from you or you have walked away from.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ..."
John 15:12 ESV

Work Out Your Faith

Respect:

Is there someone in your life who is struggling with unbelief? Someone who frankly said to you, *I hear what you're saying, but I don't believe it.*? Are you carrying around guilt because you hoped to change their mind, but instead they walked away?

Or maybe you've written someone off, said: *They'll never change!* Given up hope of their ever returning. Are you hard-hearted toward them? Unbelieving when it comes to God being able to do the impossible?

One of the most loving things we can do is boldly go before the Father, walk into the throne room or beat on heaven's door, for the sake of someone else. Today, storm heaven with your prayers for this person. Bring them by name.

Respect

Whether you're bearing guilt for not doing enough or hardened by doubt and unbelief, work out your faith by asking to God prove His love for them. Ask Him to do what you see as impossible in their lives.

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Mark 10:27 ESV

Reflection Scripture: Memorize

_____ out of _____ or
_____. _____, in _____
_____ others _____, not
_____ to your _____ but _____
of you to the _____ of the _____. _____ 2:3-4

Day 4: Authority

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Romans 13:1 ESV

Stacy says:

In my early twenties, I had in mind how life would go. My parents raised me to be independent, and somewhere along the way, I decided that meant I would stand up to authority on every level. It almost wrecked my marriage. I remember thinking, *No man is going to tell me what to do. I'll not be brought to tears.* As you can imagine, there were many standoffs in my home. Some small, others monstrous, and when I came out on top I placed a checkmark in the win column of my life and continued on my way.

Eventually, all my winning left me on the losing side of the most important relationship I had. Broken and messed up I searched His Word for help. When I read the words of Ephesians for the first time, I thought I would puke.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Ephesians 5:22-23 ESV

This did not fit into my worldview. As a child I bucked authority, though I did it silently. I perceived authority as imprisoning and I fought like mad against it. This Scripture brought me to a crossroad. I could continue doing it my way or I could choose God's way.

It wasn't easy, my flesh bucked every single step I took toward submission. There were times I fought tooth and nail to be submissive. I've bitten down hard on my tongue which needed to be tamed. I've agreed when I really wanted it my way. It wasn't easy, it still isn't at times.

God's Word is clear about my respect for authority. Learning to respect and submit to my husband has gently taught me respect for authority in other areas as well.

Carol says:

It came like lightning one day, a light bulb moment, when my children were little.

I'd been reading a book by Dr. James Dobson, in which he said one of the issues with children which deserved corporal punishment, i.e. a spanking, was disobedience and disrespect for authority. I wrestled with his teaching and wondered if it was true.

Respect

Then the epiphany came. Children learn to respect authority through their relationship with their parents. And if they don't or won't respect their parents, then they will probably never be willing to come under the authority of their Father in heaven.

Yes. Children disrespecting their parents is a spanking offense. Their eternity is at stake.

Respecting those in authority is essential to our walk of faith. To respect the authorities placed over us is to respect God. *There is no authority except from God.*

Read Romans 13:1-7

How seriously does God take the issue of respecting government authority? What are the consequences for disobeying?

Considering those currently in government leadership positions and the state of our government based on their decisions, how do you feel about them as "God's servant for your good" (Romans 13:4)?

Faith, being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1), can be challenging when we come under those who use their authority in ungodly ways. Trusting God with the authority He's placed in our lives and our response to it will either draw us closer to God or farther from Him.

There are other areas besides government where respect of authority is an issue.

Read Colossians 3:18-4:1

Now, list every relationship found in this passage and the respect to be shown.

Are only those under authority called to treat those over them with respect? What else did you see?

Re-read Colossians 3:23-24

What reason is given for treating one another with respect in these relationships?

We are called, not only to respect government officials, but children are commanded to honor their parents, and wives are called to respect their husbands. Slaves and masters are not a relationship we see in our culture, but it certainly equates to employees and employers. Anyone who has authority over you deserves proper respect because they have been placed there by God.

Those in authority also have a responsibility to God for the position they have been given. Treating the authority given us with respect is just as important as respecting the authority placed over us.

Respecting authority is an important faith issue because it reflects our trust in God and His sovereignty in giving and placing authority in our lives. For those who follow Christ there should be no fear of authority, and the authority given should be wielded with a sincere fear of the Lord.

When we use our authority in a loving manner as God calls us to, we witness God's love to those we lead. When we serve with the grace and excellence of one serving God, we witness His love to those over us.

There is no authority except from God.

Talk It Out

Talk it over with yourself:

List the people or institutions who have authority over you. Have you considered their position as from God? Why or why not?

Respect

List the places where you have been given authority. Have you considered it as a charge from God? Why or why not?

Talk it over with God:

Ask God to help you see Him behind the authority over you and given to you. Seek His guidance in responding to authority in a Christ-like manner.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Colossians 3:23-24 ESV

Work Out Your Faith

Respect:

Write a note of thanks and encouragement to an individual or group of individuals in authority over you whom you have had a difficult time respecting. Ask God to use you to inspire them to fulfill their role in a manner which will please Him.

Reflection Scripture: Memorize

Day 5: God's Unique Love

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 19:34 ESV

Stacy says:

Parenting three unique humans taught me so much about God's unique love for us. While they are similar in many ways, they each have distinct needs and receive love differently. I learned quickly that each of my children required discipline in different ways. What worked for one often didn't work for another. And sometimes absolutely nothing worked and they would have to face the consequences of their choices.

God is the perfect parent. He knows what circumstances and situations will work together to bring His children closer to Him. His unique plan for our lives is created with the utmost probability that we will come to understand His love for us fully.

I may not see what good can come from a child's bad choice. There are times I just don't get it. But God does. I'm learning to respect His way in this. Even when it looks hopeless, like there's just no good in something, respecting His unique love for me and others gives me hope.

Carol says:

Sometimes, His unique brand of love comes across in painful confusing ways.

He captured my heart April of 1994. By August of the same year He allowed me to jump into a pit of fear and anxiety that grew deeper for years and took just as many years for Him to lift me out. The whole season lasted about a decade.

At the time, I didn't understand what was happening. Weren't things supposed to get better when you followed Him? But in hindsight (which is always 20/20) I see how He allowed the enemy to attack me in a vulnerable spot attached to many heart wounds and lies.

He used the difficult season to refine me spiritually, free me up, and grow me in understanding who I am and who He is. He did it all because He loves me and couldn't leave me in the mess I'd made.

Once settled in their promised land, God commanded His people to love the strangers who came in their midst like one of their own. Not because of who they were or what they had done, but because of who He is and what He had done.

Respect

He demonstrated His love for the Israelites by freeing them from the Egyptians who enslaved them as strangers in their midst. God's people were to respect His love by loving others. They were not to treat others as they had been treated, they were to treat others in the same way God treated them. He has a unique love and unique purpose for every person on earth.

Think about the strangers, foreigners, sojourners in your midst, i.e. illegal aliens, homeless, those new to your community. How do you feel about them? Do you treat them with respect? indifference? contempt?

When you consider God's love for "strangers" and His command to love them, how does that make you feel about God? What do your feelings reveal about you?

In God's eyes we are all sinners, yet He loves us dearly and wants all to be saved.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 3:16-17 ESV

God's love is not exclusively for Believers. He sent His Son to die for the whole world. The entire despicable population of earth for all time. Including you.

List some of the worst in our world's history who rebelled against God.

Now, consider God's love for them as demonstrated through Jesus's death on the cross. Record your thoughts.

Can you respect God's love for all? Believers and unbelievers alike?

Read Romans 5:10

Who were we in relationship to God when Jesus died for us?

What was the result of Jesus's death?

God calls us to love our enemies because He loves His. Being like Him requires us to love our enemies and work toward reconciliation, because we were all His enemies at one time.

Respecting God's unique love includes respecting His sovereignty in allowing both good and evil in the world.

Some stand firmly in their unbelief of a good loving sovereign God, because of the presence of evil in the world. Yet, God is love. And somewhere in all the seemingly disproportionate doling out of good and evil, God has a plan to bring His people to Him through what He allows.

Read Acts 17:26-28

What does God determine for every person on the face of the earth?

Why?

God loves everyone and wants everyone to find Him. He places each person strategically in the exact time, space, and circumstance which will most likely compel them to seek Him and find Him.

Whether He places them in the middle of the Bible belt or the heart of a war torn third world nation, in a loving home or an abusive environment, He is revealing His love toward all people in the world in a wide variety of ways.

He alone knows what each person needs to draw them to Himself and we should not judge His means, but trust His unique love and eternal perspective.

His unique love is different from the world's because He is not concerned with our current comfort, success, or happiness. He is most concerned with our hearts, our spirits, and our eternal destiny.

Read Isaiah 48:10

How does God refine the people He loves?

Trouble speaks volumes in our lives and draws our attention to the one thing that truly matters. The One who can truly save. God.

While the world says love means protecting others from pain, God uses pain to lovingly draw those far from Him to Him.

God's love is unique for each individual and very unique compared to what the world calls love.

To respect His unique love is to embrace His love for the stranger and the lost, and to choose His definition of love and its purpose as our definition of love, too.

Talk It Out

Talk it over with yourself:

What stirs in your heart as you consider God's sovereignty in placing people in difficult, oppressive, abusive situations? Does it look like love to you?

How have you felt toward God when He lets hard things come into your life? affliction? oppression? abuse? Do you believe He still loves you?

Talk it over with God:

Ask God to open your eyes to see His unique love in all people's lives, including your own, and to open your heart to His unique brand of love.

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! **The children of mankind** take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.*

Psalm 36:7 ESV (emphasis added)

Work Out Your Faith

Respect:

Looking back over your life, have you recognized a circumstance or situation God allowed for your good? to bring you closer to Him? When we stand on the other side of

a difficult circumstance, we have a unique opportunity to love someone who is currently in the same situation.

Those who have been abused as children can offer much hope and love to children who are being abused. A recovering alcoholic has much grace for the one still imprisoned by their drinking.

Consider the circumstance God has overcome in you. Is there someone you know struggling in the same way you once were? Seek them out. Have lunch or coffee and if God opens the door... share what He has done for you.

Reflection Scripture: Memorize

No hints today. Not even blanks. Write the week's verse from memory. Include what you learned about yourself and God as you reflected on His Word this week.
