





Theme: Becoming Better and Not Bitter "By Getting Outside of Ourselves"


 You also can get these Meditation Moments each day directly on your phone. Just text "**med moments**" to **970-426-0700** to receive the **daily Meditation Moment** each morning and start your day grounded in faith and peace.

Weekly Memory Verse:

²⁶ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. – Matthew 20:26-27

Meditation Moments for Monday, August 4 – Read **Matthew 25:31-40**, After outlining warnings about Jerusalem's fall and the end of this age of the world in Matthew 24, Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment. His story about the judgment indicated his Kingdom's priorities. Kingdom people, he said, care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people whom Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine." It's as if these actions not only served others, but also helped those who were giving to feel better about themselves, so much so they were not concerned with who was watching.

 When people don't have enough to eat or wear, can't afford medical care if they're sick, are in prison, can feel different from us, but sometimes that is us. Most of us are willing to do a little something to help "them." But Jesus called such people, "these brothers and sisters of mine." To truly buy into God's world changing work of service means seeing that the poor, the sick, the prisoners, and the outcast are not "them"—they're "us." What has helped you grasp the truth of Jesus' teaching?

 In Jesus' story, those he said had helped him were surprised: "When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?" They saw a need that they were willing to meet, not someone who might reward them. What can help

you learn to see the face of Jesus in the faces of the people you meet, especially those who are outcast or hurting? When have you found the freedom and joy that comes from blessing others because you know God cares about them and sees them as his children?

Prayer: *O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 5 – Read **1 Peter 4:8-11**. Too often, we have a “one size fits all” idea of what it means to serve. In fact, there are as many unique forms of service as there are people. The apostle Peter’s letter called followers of Jesus to, “use whatever gift you have received to serve others.” As Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12:17, “If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing?” The call is to be yourself, as long as “being yourself” includes being a servant to God and others.



In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul said that using our gifts without love renders them useless to God (and, most often, to anyone else). In today’s reading, Peter, in a shorter, less poetic form, made the same point. What makes love so vital as the environment in which we use our widely varying gifts? Whom do you know who is finding joy by using his or her gifts in love?



What Peter said in verse 8 seemed to draw from the Hebrew wisdom of Proverbs 10:12. These passages remind us that honesty, or being true to ourselves and who God made us to be, and the willingness to give ourselves away, build up the community, in turn helping us and others around us to be better and not bitter. We still hear heated debates about whether pure self-interest or community-mindedness makes for better human lives. Both Old and New Testament Scriptures came down firmly on the side of building community. How easy or hard do you find it to accept that wisdom?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me not just to act loving on the outside, but to show “sincere love” to all your human children. Keep making my heart more like yours. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 6 – Read **Galatians 5:13-16**. The Apostle Paul planted new churches in the Roman province of Galatia, which is modern-day Turkey. But after Paul left, “false teachers” came to Galatia and began convincing people they still had to follow certain rules and laws for God to accept them. Paul, in his letter, strongly resisted the false teachers. He urged his readers to claim their spiritual freedom in Christ, a freedom defined by the words Jesus identified as one of the “great commandments”: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”



Paul echoed Jesus’ teaching from Matthew 22:35-40, where he gives the great commandments. But he added a sweeping claim: “All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement.” Even many Christians struggle to accept that. We often think it takes “right” baptismal practices, specific ways of reading the Bible or doing communion, or a whole variety of doctrinal nuances to “fulfill the law.” Can you trust, whether for your own walk with Christ and that of others, that “love your neighbor as yourself” truly fulfills “all the law”?



In verse 13, Paul bluntly stated a truth we may struggle to admit. We all have selfish impulses, especially if given the ability to choose freely. In verse 16, He pointed his readers to the One who can give us the ability to live in love when he writes, "Be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires." In what parts of your life do you want to invite the Spirit to empower you to love your neighbor as yourself more fully?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, "loving" sounds so simple until real life makes it harder to apply. As I draw nearer to you, I ask your empowering Spirit to teach me more and more what it means to love as you love. Amen.*

Thursday, August 7 – Read **Isaiah 58:5-8** and **Micah 6:6-8**. Many in Jesus' day tried to limit the command to love your neighbor found in Leviticus 19:18 of the Hebrew Bible to other Israelites. Even that was hard to live up to. Isaiah 58 spoke to those whose many "religious" deeds (including fasting) sprang from self-serving motives. Isaiah's fellow prophet Micah said similar words. They were speaking to a people who had become bitter towards God and others. Why, people asked, didn't God honor their feasts and fasts? The prophet said they didn't need skin-deep piety and external fasts. They needed to "fast" from mistreating other people.



Fasting is a helpful spiritual practice, whether from food or some other valued activity. But the Israelites' fasting only seemed to go skin-deep. Isaiah 58:3-4 noted sadly that the pious "fasters" kept abusing their workers and fighting each other. How do verses 6 and 7 speak to your heart and your life today? What is one step you can take this summer to make your spiritual practices truly life-changing, as the prophet called Israel to do?



Jesus' echoed Isaiah and Micah when he said in Matthew 9:13, "Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice." How have you seen your spiritual practices change your heart and lead you to a life of greater service? How are you growing in your ability to show mercy to others? To whom can you extend a merciful act of service today?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for opening my eyes and heart to care for and show mercy to your children in need. Use me and whatever good things I have so that through me "your light will shine in the darkness." Amen.*

Friday, August 8 – Read **Matthew 20:20-28**. James and John thought they'd get their bid for power in before the other disciples. Jesus kept talking about his kingdom. "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "In the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no status seeking. The world's kingdoms are about having power over, but in my Kingdom, we serve." Jesus was reminding them that the world's ways actually would lead to bitterness, even though it promised power, wealth and fame. Jesus was going to flip their idea of what brings a better life upside down.



We have a good idea what power, privilege and importance look like. Down deep, most of us wish for some of the perks that go with power. But Jesus' view was succinct and direct: "that's not the way it will be with you." Jesus said he didn't come to be served, but to serve, and even give his life. In what specific

ways does living like Jesus change your approach to life? How might that alleviate bitterness in your life?



Jesus told James and John, "You WILL drink from my cup." James was the first apostle martyred in Acts 12:2. On the other hand, Christian tradition said the apostle John, serving and writing, lived for many years in Ephesus and then was in prison on the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean. In what ways did John, as well as James, "drink from Jesus' cup"? In what ways, if any, has your life so far called on you to do that? How does Jesus promise to take bitter moments and turn them into something better strike you today? Do you believe it? Why or why not?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I thank you that your love's transforming power can motivate me to live a servant life. Teach me how to treat others as you treat me, helping me to experience a better life where bitterness is dispelled. Amen.

Saturday, August 9 – Read **Acts 9:36-42**. There's no record of a church building in the city of Joppa, but the church was there. Exhibit A was a marvelous seamstress named Tabitha, or Dorcas, meaning "gazelle," in Greek. No scrap of evidence said she ever preached a sermon, but God equipped her to sew and gave her a heart for the poor. The "show and tell" time in verse 39 is a deeply touching scene. Tabitha lived her faith in such beautiful ways that God used Peter as a channel to allow her to keep living it longer.



Tabitha loved people, lived out her love through her gift of sewing, and changed the whole city. What are you able to do that God can use to bless others? To what extent do you think behavior like Tabitha's is a matter of natural inclination, and to what extent do you believe it reflects intentional moral choices? God used both Peter, the apostle, preacher and healer and Tabitha, the seamstress with a compassionate heart, to lead many to believe in Jesus. What role(s) has God equipped you to play in serving others? How committed are you to doing your part in helping others to "put their faith in the Lord"? If you are looking for ideas, you can find ways to serve on our website, <https://www.summitdurango.org/volunteer/>.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me never to think, "All I can do is _____, and that doesn't matter." Make my life, and whatever abilities I have, count as much for you as Tabitha's lovely life of service. Amen.