

THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK1

**MAY THEY ALSO BE IN US
SO THAT THE WORLD MAY
BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE
SENT ME.**

JOHN 17:21

Our world is engulfed in conflict. Mere disagreements have overblown into prejudice, hate, and anger. Our communities are as much defined by their deep divisions as they are by their achievements and moments of temporary celebration.

But in this oh-so-important prayer that Jesus prayed for us, there is the hint of a solution.

“It is time for the followers of Jesus to lead.”
(*Prologue, pg. x*)

We who have surrendered ourselves fully to the will of Jesus—pastors or professionals, teachers or single moms, small business owners or stay-at-home dads—must love differently.

Our friend, Larry Osborne, suggests that the early church movement didn't explode on to the scene merely because of the work of a few great missionaries. It was changed by a “cobbler in Corinth” who was changed by his encounter with Jesus and then proceeded to live his life differently, loving those in his community and pointing them to the Source of his new life.

Multiply that by millions, and you have yourself this global movement that is still transforming lives today.

In other words, YOU are a critical part of the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17.

The world will pay no attention to church leaders getting red in the face, saying we should be better at this. But when you (and a few thousand people around you) start loving differently, with kindness, generosity, and grace—simply put, when you begin to be “in Christ”—the divisions and screaming voices will lose their appeal. There is a better way.

On the worst night of His life, Jesus prayed that we would discover it. Let's ask Him to help us with that.

PRAYER:

Father, help me to see my part in Your plan. As Jesus prayed for me, now I pray the same and I ask You to help me to be in You so that the world around me will believe. Heal the divides in our world, but reveal to me how You are calling me to be part of that healing. Amen.



THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 2

IF ONE PART SUFFERS, EVERY PART SUFFERS WITH IT; IF ONE PART IS HONORED, EVERY PART REJOICES WITH IT.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:26

When we think of this verse in terms of our human bodies, Paul's point is hard to miss. Have you ever tried to endure something physically challenging while fighting a stabbing pain in some part of your body? Perhaps you have shared a presentation with a group of people while you were horribly ill, or you have tried to run a race with an injury in your leg. Paul's point is so simple it is easily overlooked; when one part of our body is suffering, the rest of our body (and usually our mood) suffers with it.

It's just as true in the Body of Christ.

But somehow we miss it. What does it look like for us to grow in our awareness of the suffering of brothers and sisters? Our global conversation gives very little consideration to this. Instead we become numb to suffering when it isn't ours. We explain it away, or we try to justify it with bad theology. Some even dare to say God causes the suffering of those we consider "outside" of our lines.

That just isn't true.

The Scriptures tell us that our God is One who identifies as a Suffering Servant. Psalm 34:18 tells us that He is close to those who are brokenhearted.

When we enter into the suffering of those around us (especially those who are different from us) we invite God's Spirit to move in and heal. Perhaps you can think of one or two people who are hurting in your community. Ask God to show you how their suffering can become your suffering, and how you might respond.

This is how we love.

Like a stand of aspen trees, we are connected to one another deep beneath the surface, and there will always be times when each of us needs the support of the stand (or the body) to survive.

God set it up this way. Our connection to one another is not just how we survive in this world. It is how we will prevail. It is how we will glorify and honor Jesus. (pg. 37)

PRAYER:

Father, our Healer and Comforter, it is all too easy to numb myself to the pain of others. Help me to identify those You are calling me to serve, and give me the spiritual courage to move in close. And in this way, heal us. Amen.



THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 3

BE ALERT AND OF SOBER MIND. YOUR ENEMY THE DEVIL PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO DEVOUR.

1 PETER 5:8

When followers of Jesus take His command for us to love one another seriously, our enemy also takes notice. It works directly against His plan for a world filled with greed, selfishness, and ultimately destruction.

Our love for one another gets under the enemy's skin.

Which is why we shouldn't be surprised by Peter's warning to us. **Peter never says fear the devil. Just pay attention. Watch what's happening. Take appropriate action. Resist him. Confront evil.** (pg. 52)

Here's the good news: when you have confessed Jesus as Lord of your life and you have stepped across that line of faith, you are safe in His hands. In Romans 8, Paul declares triumphantly that nothing (including any powers) can separate us from God's love. So the enemy cannot destroy us.

But he can divide us.

Think through many of your relationships. Consider those who you would call friends, and specifically those that love Jesus and faithfully point you back to Him. These are the enemy's targets. Perhaps there are ways he is dividing you even now? Be alert! Commit to one another that you will not let the devil devour your relationship. That you will confront evil the moment it appears.

PRAYER:

Father, I ask for Your protection over my relationships. Thank You for the friends and family You have placed in my life. May we not become so focused on the work ahead of us that we miss out on the love between us. Keep evil at bay, thwart his plans, and may Your kingdom be established here on earth—and in my relationships.

Amen.



THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 4

Jesus sets the bar for humility, and He sets it very high. When we hear Paul's command for us to approach one another with this kind of mindset, we should be shocked by this description of the Incarnation.

Jesus made Himself nothing.

God calls us to serve those we are in relationship with in the same way that Jesus served us. This is more than simply being helpful—we are to *become* a servant. We serve, not to impress. Not so that someone will notice how humble we are, but because this is the way of Jesus.

This is what's so tricky about humility—it can never be about us.

C.S. Lewis helps us remember that humility isn't "thinking less of yourself", but rather, "thinking of yourself less."

Regardless of your position, your title at work, your social status, or your wealth, what would it look like for you to approach the relationships in your

life with this kind of servant heart? How would your world change? Paul said we should have this mindset *in our relationships*. It all comes back to how we treat each other.

On most days, the conversations and actions of our world reek with the stench of pride. It is why humility is so shocking. It clears the air. We can breathe again. (pg. 62)

As a people who are called to the mindset of Christ, may our humility be a fresh breeze blowing through our homes, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and our churches. May we humble ourselves as Jesus did, that He would again be exalted in our lives.

PRAYER:

Father, I want to be more like Jesus. Help me to reflect His Incarnation by how I serve those in my life. Bring to mind loved ones who need comfort or encouragement, and show me how to love them well.

Amen.

IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER, HAVE THE SAME MINDSET AS CHRIST JESUS:

*Who, being in very nature God,
Did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...*

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7

THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 5

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, TAKE NOTE OF THIS: EVERYONE SHOULD BE QUICK TO LISTEN, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY, BECAUSE HUMAN ANGER DOES NOT PRODUCE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT GOD DESIRES.

JAMES 1:19-20

James, the half-brother of Jesus, hits us hard with these words about anger. The way he suggests that we enter into conversations with each other is strikingly different than what we're used to—it's a dance. Let's call it the Conversation Two-Step:

One quick, and two slows.

First of all, we should be quick to listen. When you find that you disagree with someone, ask questions. And then ask some follow-up questions. Actually hear what that person is saying instead of preparing your monster-of-a-comeback.

Getting this admonition from James wrong can lead to an accelerating cycle of anger. James goes on to talk about how our tongues can be like a fire that sets "the whole course of one's life on fire."

These days it's not just our tongues. Thumbs on a touchscreen are just as inflammatory.

Words that cut deeply, comments that fill the room with a foul stench, murmurs that leave behind an undeniable mess—they matter. For this is how most communities die—one toxic sentence at a time. (pg. 109)

May the people of God learn to dance through conversations without stepping on each other's toes. May we be slow to become angry and rather seek to understand. And may our gentleness with one another produce the kind of righteousness that God desires.

PRAYER:

Father, tame my tongue. Let my words be words that build up, encourage, and inspire, rather than tear down and destroy. Let me be slow in my response to things that anger me and resist the temptation to inject my own toxins into an already-toxic atmosphere of a conversation—whether in person or online. Let Your Spirit bear the fruits of gentleness and self-control in my life

Amen.



THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 6

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN SAID TO HIM, *“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”* (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

JESUS ANSWERED HER, *“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”*

JOHN 4:9-10

Divisions and prejudices are nothing new; indeed, they are as old as time itself. But the way of Jesus has always been about bridging divides. Through the Incarnation, Jesus bridged the divide between heaven and earth by becoming one of us. Through the cross, Jesus bridged the divide between sinners and a holy God.

In this brief interaction in John 4, Jesus bridges the divide between two people groups who had all but given up on each other.

It will be a difficult challenge for many of us, but can we put ourselves in the position of the Samaritan woman? She is likely not just rejected by the Jews (for being a Samaritan) and men (for being a woman), but even rejected by her community in general because of her reputation. Many of us know what it is like to be in her position.

Marginalized, cast aside, written off...rejected.

But Jesus offers her a unique opportunity—a meaningful conversation and a chance at a new kind of life. Here’s the key: this kind of offer could only come from someone in Jesus’ position. It is a powerful example of Jesus actually living out His humble character; He is serving her. But how?

By paying attention to the space between them.

We who follow Jesus are called to do the same. This is how we will bridge the divides in our communities. Can you think of someone you know who is different from you? Someone with whom our worldly ways suggests that you should ignore or avoid? Consider how you might acknowledge the distance. How God might be leading you to step in closer.

...we are mysteriously connected by the person of Jesus, and the Creator will now bring into existence such good and lasting things. Parts of the body that barely said hello will now sense the Spirit rushing through, giving life to that which is outrageously, wonderfully different.
(pg. 181)

PRAYER:

Father, oftentimes it is the distance between me and someone else that makes oneness seem impossible. Reveal to me Your love for those people who are in my life. Give me a starting point, and show me how to move in to the difficult relationships. Give me grace, and give me courage. Make me an instrument of Your peace.

Amen.

THE GENIUS OF ONE

DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 7

When Jesus first spoke these words, it was to a specific group of people. A somewhat messy, ragamuffin, confused group of disciples. Many of them were still trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle—everything they had seen, from the crucifixion to the resurrection—and couldn't begin to imagine what must have been next.

You and I are not so very different.

And yet we are invited into the same great calling, to both “go” into the world, and to “teach” people what an obedient life with Jesus looks like.

As with any culture, this mission has both an outward and inward focus. Go and announce the good news of the resurrected Christ to a world without hope. Along the way, welcome others into the work of God, making disciples, not converts. Why? Well, if the words of Jesus are to be believed, eternity hangs in the balance. But so, too, does tomorrow. The daily struggle against injustice and exploitation, fear and brokenness, regret and aloneness is also very real. We have been invited to partner with God in what he is still accomplishing on planet earth. (pg. 42)

The easy thing to miss here is our own personal responsibility to this. So quickly do we see this commission as something for the Church. Let church leaders figure this one out. Leave it to the pastors. Those people over there—not the one standing right here.

Hear now the voice of Jesus; He is calling *you*.

Go.

Be in the world.

Love those who are in your family, your community, your neighborhood. But love those who are different from you. Jesus tells us to “pray for your enemies”. Yes, them too. But we must never lose sight of how important it is that we the followers of Jesus, love one another in this way, too. And as we do, well, perhaps we are already on our way to teaching others what it means to obey everything Jesus has commanded us.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You that even as You have called me to enter into the world, You have promised that I do not go into it alone. I am grateful for Your promise that You are with me to the end. I ask for the grace, the courage, and the wisdom to love those You have placed in my life well. But I ask for an ever-growing awareness of Your presence with me.

Amen.

“ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME. THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE.”

JAMES 1:19-20