



YEAR 1—The God of Life: A Story of God's Redeeming Shalom

Module 4—Coming Alive by Being Human: Jesus Stories on What it Means to Be Human and Fully Alive

Lesson 3—Luke 6:27-49

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

This passage is centered in the reality of God's story. There are plenty of directives for Jesus' followers in this passage, yet every one of them grows out of a center in who God is for us in Jesus Christ. We miss something crucial in this story if we move too quickly to a discussion on how this is our story. We must let this first be God's story before we can even approach it as our own for only God can bring about the transformation required to turn us into the kinds of people envisioned in this passage.

As God's story this passage is a beautiful depiction of God's grace for us in Jesus Christ. The way of life described in this passage is a description of what it looks like for us to truly live in the fullness of life that God has intended for us from the beginning of creation, but it is also a description of how God responds to us in Jesus Christ. God challenges us to love our enemies because that is precisely what he has done. In becoming human in Jesus Christ God was for us even as we set ourselves against him and his life for us by our sin. We became God's enemies, and yet God offered himself in our place, taking up into himself our death in order that we may experience the fullness of life with him through Jesus Christ. God's very life is one of "enemy love" for us that remakes us into who he always intended us to be.

Most fundamentally, our sin cuts us off from life with God. Cut off from God, we are without life. Simply put, life without God is death. Yet, God in his graciousness offers life to us without expecting anything in return. Jesus did not offer himself up in our place in order that we might somehow repay the favor. In grace—pure grace—God poured himself out for us in Jesus Christ, giving himself away in order that we could be ushered back into his life-giving presence, restored to the fullness of our humanity that God always desired us to know and live into.

God's grace is therefore not transactional but relational. God does not keep a ledger determining how much we owe him, but simply looks at us in love, and graciously enters into our humanity to bring us back to into life with him. Grace is thoroughly about God drawing us back into relationship with himself in Jesus Christ. God's grace is thus freedom for us to be who God always intended us to be. We experience this freedom as we become fully alive by living in obedience to Jesus Christ as his follower.

OUR STORY

Understanding this story first to be about God's way of being for us in Jesus Christ, reframes how we consider this as our own story. When we reflect on the way in which God has graciously given himself to us in Jesus Christ it becomes almost impossible not to be transformed by that kind of love. We all know the depth of our own sin. We know the way in which we are cut off from life with God. Even still, God reaches out to us in Jesus Christ and pulls us back into his great drama of restoring life for all the world. There are at least two ways in which God reshapes us through this story and leads us more fully into our true humanity with Jesus.

When we read this story as first about God, we come to see who we truly are in Jesus Christ. Seeing this as the way God has acted in his grace towards us in Jesus throws into stark relief who we truly are as God's own. We often think we are not good enough for God, that somehow our sin defines who we truly are. Jesus tells us otherwise. Yes our sin cuts us off from God, and yet God draws us to himself and provides redemption for the sin that divides us from God's life. We must accept this redemption, turn our backs on sin, and simply live!

The kind of love that God has for us dismantles all our self-made projections about what we must do or be in order to be acceptable to God. God has reached out to us, loved us even while we were his enemies, in order that we may know true life in him. Seeing ourselves in this way leads us away from being who we formerly were, people who are arrogant and prideful about our faith. Instead we are compelled to put into practice the way of Jesus described here.

As we come to see who we truly are in Jesus, through God's grace a desire begins to grow inside of us to live in the same manner that God has lived toward us in Jesus Christ. When we are awakened to true life by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, seeing ourselves for who we truly are in him, we begin to become the kind of gracious and life-giving people whom God has called us to be. As we embrace God's love for us, we begin to embrace the way of love for others, even our enemies. God's grace begins to transform us into people able to give ourselves away for the sake of others, just as God has given himself away for us in Jesus Christ.

OTHERS' STORY

The kind of life described by Jesus in this passage is humble faith. Humble faith is born from a recognition that without God's grace you wouldn't be able to live at all, and that only by turning away from yourself and to Jesus Christ is this way of life even possible. This is precisely the kind of faith that leads us into the lives of others in such a way that they are invited to experience the fullness of life with Jesus as well.

Think about the end of the passage, where Jesus instructs his followers that they are to be non-judgmental, not seeking to point out all the faults of others. In understanding the grace of God as relational based out of sheer love for us reshapes our posture toward others. God's posture toward us was to love us, give himself up for us in Jesus and thus restore us to relationship with him. Our posture toward others is to mirror this. Others' sin is not something we hold over them. In giving ourselves away for their sake, by letting go of our desire to convict them of their sin, our generosity bears witness to God's generosity with us all. Confronted by this grace which they experience through our loving presence in their life, they may turn from their sin and to life with God. Being non-judgmental doesn't mean we don't ever talk about sin with others, but our conversation grows out of a desire for them to experience the fullness of life with Christ. This is how we are to give ourselves away for the sake of others.

Putting our faith into practice in the ways described is what it means for us to become people who bear good fruit. In bearing good fruit, our lives become a source of life for others. In other words, we become the kind of people marked by God's grace, living our lives in discipleship together with Jesus Christ and inviting others into that life with us.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Whenever I read this story I cynically call this vision for life idealistic. Nothing could really be further from the truth. Jesus makes no pretensions that when his followers live in the ways described here—giving to all who ask, loving and praying for enemies, serving those who cannot give back—everything will turn out all right. He even concludes by saying that torrents will come to our lives even when we are putting these teachings into practice. Idealistic? Hardly. Yet, what if the world began to operate like this?

At the center of this passage is the life of self-giving love rooted in Jesus Christ. Imagine a world where this kind of self-giving love is the norm rather than the exception. Imagine a world in which people viewed those set against them not as people against whom they must retaliate, but people whom they can serve and pray

for. Imagine a world in which people were always giving to one another, sharing what they had and asking nothing in return. In such a world, we would be dependent upon one another for our needs being met, and yet if we were sharing then our needs would be met. Imagine a world in which people were not constantly comparing themselves to each other, being judgmental, but helping one another live into the fullness of life for which they were created. Imagine a world in which grace ruled the relationships among people, in which people actually put these teachings into practice. What kind of a world would that be? That sounds exactly like the wholeness and goodness that God intended for creation from the foundation of world. That sounds like the relationships of mutual care and dependence that God has always desired to see fill the whole earth. In short, that sounds like *shalom*. And that is precisely why Jesus has come.

Jesus' people are to live this way as a sign of what God has planned for the world. When God brings about the fullness of life once and for all, the world is already to have seen a glimpse of the kind of gracious, self-giving and loving relationships that will now fill the earth. The church, the community of Jesus, is to live this way in the world in order to point the world to its intended life in Jesus Christ. The church has both the privilege and responsibility of living in this way of Jesus in order that something that seems so idealistic might actually become possible even now, if only in glimpses. In this way, we are drawn into God's life-giving mission for the sake of the world.