Felt Need

We long for a way to overcome the tension and the heartache of the division within our nation, our church, our family, and even within ourselves.

Key Idea

“Deeply held disagreements become the occasion to exercise love by openness to learning from one another” (132).

Key Verse

“You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.”

— 1 Corinthians 12:27 (CEB)

Suggested scripture for worship


Supporting Readings

Chapter 3 of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection

Theologically Considered by Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki pp.125-134.

Section VII of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection by John Wesley pp. 73-80.
ILLUSTRATION—EXERCISING LOVE

Do you dread going to family gatherings because you know if certain people show up there will be an all-out war? Have you ever lost a friendship or know there are certain issues that you can’t bring up with a friend because you just don’t agree (politics, religion, or social justice issues)? Have you seen someone’s demeanor change in an instant to disgust, distain or even hatred when a topic is brought up? Have you been that person? Generally, we don’t want to deal with conflict and opposition let alone hear about it on a Sunday morning, but if we want to be Christ’s light in this world, we can’t avoid it.

How do we overcome the strong desire to fight back or dig in our heels at all costs? How do we love our enemies - how do we exercise love?

CONNECTION TO THE WESLEY READINGS

Wesley advises us against thinking we have nothing to learn from those whose views oppose our own (127). We must listen and learn not letting pride, the need to be right, better than, justification, or blame get in our way.

1. Love “is extraordinary; love is the beginning, the middle and the end; there is nothing higher” (129). It is easy to love those who are like us, it takes strength to love those who are not or are considered enemies because they do not think or do like us. ….“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:32).

2. Practice the spiritual disciplines and means of grace (sacraments, prayer, worship, study scripture) seek out God’s will and become more attune to the love of God for us, flowing through us, inspiring our own love to others” (131).

3. Do not neglect any opportunity for doing good (131).

4. Desire only God, simply aim at pleasing God, whether by doing or suffering, and all lesser goals fall into their rightful place (132).

5. Use occasions of disagreement and disapproval as opportunities to reach new heights of learning how to love (133).

6. Be exemplary in all things – be a shining light (134). Don’t let others say as the Indian philosopher Bara Dada, that “Jesus is ideal and wonderful, but you Christians, you are not like him.”

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them…. “Deeply held disagreements become the occasion to exercise love by openness to learning from one another” (132).
PERSONAL CONNECTION

I will never forget the advice a friend shared during a small group meeting. We were talking about life changing moments and how to deal with them. He had gone through a rough divorce and could not get past the ill feelings, hatred and unforgiveness he was feeling towards his ex-wife. A counselor told him to pray for her for 30 days straight, but the 30 days would start over if he had a negative thought about her during the day. He had to restart the 30 days many times before he actually made it through. And when he did, he found that he had truly forgiven her. They were able to co-parent their children without putting the children in the middle, forcing them to take a side. I've used his advice in my own life and found that it does work!

CONNECTION TO SCRIPTURE

Jesus uses four very strong action words in these verses:

Greek agapao — love your enemies
Greek poimoe kalos — do good to those who hate you
Greek eulogoeo — to speak well of
Greek proseuchomai — to pray for, to intercede for

None are in the passive voice. They don’t just take care of themselves. They are active verbs describing deliberate action to do good to one’s enemies.  

RESOURCE

The Anatomy of Peace, Resolving the Heart of Conflict by The Arbinger Institute

1 Love Your Enemies (Luke 6:27-36) by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, jesuswalk.com