

THE CHRISTIAN BROADCASTING NETWORK

LOVE WELL

in a *Divided* Culture



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*Navigate Challenging Times
with Jesus' Love*



Day 1

Navigate Challenging Times with Jesus' Love

Do you find yourself struggling to approach difficult conversations with friends and loved ones? Perhaps you have something important to share—a belief or strongly held opinion that directly opposes someone else's. Or maybe you're faced with questions on a tricky subject by someone whom you know you just can't avoid responding to anymore.

Maybe you've engaged in some difficult conversations already that haven't gone well, leaving you feeling prideful, bitter, angry, offended, shut out—misunderstood, frustrated, or hurt. These are very common emotional responses and feelings when faced with difficult conversations. We live in a divided culture, no doubt. No matter what country you live in, your ancestral heritage, or your family dynamic, we are all a divided people.

When we learn to **love well in a divided culture**, we can trust our Good Shepherd to lead us into conversations that allow His love to flow through us!

Cultural issues have always existed. As King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9, ***"History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new"*** (NLT). When Jesus walked this earth, the same issues, the same divisions, and the same controversies existed. In some ways, things look different now, but the roots of these issues are the same.

This resource will address how we can love people well despite our divided culture. How we initiate conversation and how we respond is our responsibility, and we'll look to Scripture for great examples of how Jesus and other heroes of our faith engaged in difficult situations.

You'll be challenged to lay down your own agenda and fully lean into the Holy Spirit's voice and direction. You'll learn how to engage with spiritual disciplines to help you put on the full armor of God as you head into battle—all the while experiencing new ways or reigniting old ways of having Christ's love influence your behavior and soften your heart toward others.

Let's begin with prayer, using Proverbs 4:23, inviting the Holy Spirit into our time over these next 10 days and beyond.

Father God, *Proverbs 4:23 says, **Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.** I ask that You help guard my heart and mold and infuse it with Your love. Allow the words that come out of my mouth to represent Your love for mankind. Thank You, Lord, for being present within me at all times. You never leave me, and You're here, right now, guiding my steps. Allow me to quiet any noise and distractions that are keeping me from hearing Your voice. Give me discernment and direction as I prayerfully consider difficult conversations. Give me the exact words to say and help me to remain silent when that's Your will. Let the Holy Spirit show me direction in my situation through our Father's Word—giving me clarity and confidence along the way. Let my words and actions be a marvelous outpouring of the love of Jesus Christ to others. In His name, I pray. **Amen.***

Day 2

Put on the Full Armor of God

Each day can feel like a battle, and if you're going into a difficult conversation, you need to put on the full armor of God.

One of the best ways to be ready for the daily difficulties of living in a divided culture is to establish and keep daily Spiritual disciplines through prayer, reading the Word, praise and worship, meditating and listening, and daily confession and repentance.

Let's look at Ephesians 6:13-17, where Paul writes about putting on the full armor of God to illustrate how we can equip ourselves spiritually for daily battle.

- **Belt of Truth (verse 14):** The foundation of our spiritual armor is the belt of truth. Truth keeps us grounded in God's Word, the source of all truth. God's Word guards against deception, falsehood, and the schemes of the enemy.
- **Breastplate of Righteousness (verse 14):** As believers, the righteousness of Christ covers us, and the breastplate protects our hearts. It guards against any attack on our souls and our mission to reflect Christ's goodness through the Holy Spirit within us.
- **Shoes of Peace (verse 15):** As shoes support mobility and provide stability, the shoes of peace empower us to stand firm in our faith. We walk confidently in the peace that comes from knowing Christ Jesus, and our footsteps carry the pleasant aroma of His presence.
- **Shield of Faith (verse 16):** The shield protects us from Satan's fiery arrows—darts of false accusations, fear, temptation, judgment, and the desire to rely on ourselves over God, just to name a few. As we hold up this active defense weapon in our artillery, our trust in God's promises strengthens our defense, allowing us to see God's power and protection on display, making our shield impenetrable to the devil's attacks.
- **Helmet of Salvation (verse 17):** As a helmet protects our heads and brains, the helmet of salvation protects our minds and assures us of our salvation—our security in Christ. With clear minds, we have focused hearts on God's big picture of eternity; when our perspective is on His kingdom, our response is to show the love and compassion of Christ to others.
- **Sword of the Spirit (verse 17):** The sword is God's Word—our one offensive weapon in the battle against evil. ***For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires (Hebrews 4:12).*** Never underestimate the power of God's Word!

With the full armor of God, you're ready to be a soldier for the Lord who loves well in a divided culture.

Today, we challenge you to read God's Word daily and take note of the Scriptures that speak to your soul. God will help you use those verses at just the right time. Sin that is unconfessed and unrepented of keeps us from fully experiencing and worshiping God. Humbly come before the Lord in prayer and search your soul for those things you need to confess. Agree with Him that they're sin, decide to live differently, and ask for His help in making this change. Enter into a time of thanksgiving and praise, worshiping God. Take note of how you hear God's voice. Is it through prayer, journaling, listening to music, sitting quietly, or some other form of worship? Whatever that may be, leave space to experience personal connection with Him each day.

Father God, You are my Great Protector. Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Help me put on Your full armor every day. Give me the desire to engage in daily spiritual disciplines with You and Your Word. Give me a heart that desires to build a foundation on Your truth. Help me quiet the outside distractions of my daily life and the world around me so that I can fully experience You and what You're teaching me. Let Your love and compassion overwhelm me in a way that my only response is to pour that love and compassion back out into others. Help me love well in a divided culture. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Day 3

Building Relationships

Have you ever been approached by a stranger or someone you don't know really well at all, and they started giving you unsolicited advice? You probably feel frustrated by this intrusive conversation, or you may just completely dismiss the stranger altogether. They don't know you, they don't know your situation, and it's none of their business.

But what happens when your closest friend, mentor, or loved one approaches you with a concern? You may be more inclined to listen and engage in a conversation. It may be difficult, but you know this person intimately and trust that they have your best interests at heart.

In these situations, the individuals may have had the same concern, but the approach and outcome are very different. Relationships are crucial in these situations. We are far more likely to be open to advice when we trust the person.

As we're navigating difficult conversations, let's look to Jesus as a great example of someone who built relationships with others who held different worldviews and beliefs. He gathered a group of 12 men, all sinners, all walking in their own ways of the world, and met them where they were. He ate with them. He journeyed with them. He spent time with them. He built a relationship with each of them individually. He called them friends. He practiced what He preached—living out godliness right in front of them on a daily basis.

Because of the way Jesus lived and loved them, the disciples wanted to know Him; they wanted to be like Him. They wanted to model His practices. In following Him and listening to His Word, they were convicted by the truth. He spoke with wisdom and God's anointing.

Their lives were transformed by Him and His Word. Believers have the same living Holy Spirit of God within us, allowing us to speak, love, and live in a way that reflects Christ. Through our actions and words, others can be drawn to Jesus and His truth, too!

Build relationships with those around you. Love them well. Meet them where they are. That does not mean that you agree or support their worldviews and beliefs, but you care for them. As you walk with them, ask God to shine through your words and actions. Let His love be evident through your interactions.

As we seek to **love well in a divided culture**, we need to be courageous. Use loving words, gently rebuke lies, and correct misunderstandings, all while leaning into the Holy Spirit's guidance. As you wear the full armor of God, you're equipped with all the tools you need to engage in these conversations. You're not going to win every battle, but you'll be standing on God's truth, and His Word doesn't return void.

It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.

Isaiah 55:11

Building relationships takes time, and life transformation only happens through the work of the Holy Spirit in someone's heart. Ultimately, you aren't responsible for someone's heart conversation, but you're responsible for how you present yourself—a representative of Christ.

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Romans 12:9-13

The following passages of Scripture offer direction on how we ought to treat one another, despite the situation or circumstances.

- Mark 12:31
- John 15:12
- Ephesians 4:2
- Philippians 2:3
- 1 Peter 4:8

Spend time today praying through these verses of Scripture, and choose one to commit to memory. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you release any of your own agenda and focus on the truth of these Scriptures and His guidance as you build relationships and **love well in a divided culture!**

Heavenly Father, Your Son left the greatest example of living out Your love. Help me to be intentional about building relationships with those around me who hold different beliefs. Make it known where You want me to start. Equip me to set aside my own desires and focus on the truth of Your Word, memorizing Scripture to have readily available as my trusty sword. Help me to love well in a divided culture while sharing Your transforming truth. Anoint me with Your Spirit when the difficult conversations rise. Let my heart and words be pleasing to You, reflecting Your love and compassion. You are the Rock on which I stand, O Lord, my redeemer. **Amen.**

Day 4

The Emotional Battleground of Difficult Conversations

Why do difficult conversations happen? Most often, there are differing opinions or points of view between two parties. There are differing worldviews: you have a godly worldview and a worldly worldview. The godly worldview is based on God's Word and His commandments on how to love and live on this side of heaven. The worldly worldview is based on self-interest and the desire for happiness. Those with a worldly worldview are in strong opposition to those who hold a godly worldview.

The worldly worldview is not an acceptable way of life for those with a godly worldview and vice versa. So, how do we navigate difficult conversations with those who hold views in direct opposition to our own? The challenge is to **love well in a divided culture**.

In our own communities, we interact with different people all the time. Most of the time, we can assume some general common knowledge about people in our area. However, when you're interacting with others online, you've opened the door to speak with people from across the globe with cultural backgrounds you may know nothing about, as well as those in your own community.

As you interact online, remember the kind person who held the door open for you at the bank this morning may be the same online user bashing you and your faith in the comment section of a post you shared.

Trying to reconcile the way in which people interact online can lead to disappointment, misunderstanding, and offense. The tolerance for differing opinions is met with such hostility. It's hard to feel and give love on social media, but we have the opportunity to lay down our desire to be heard or to be right and just point others to God through our online interactions. When others read what we post and write, do they feel hatred, judgment, and condemnation? Or are we choosing to share the godly worldview that cares deeply about the eternity of these lost souls?

We can share truth that is contrary to the worldly worldview, but it can be done in a way that points to Christ and to His truth. These don't have to be 'gotcha' moments but can be presented in a way that points to the goodness of God and the way He desires us to live.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses how we should respond to those who are difficult or disappoint us like this:

“But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.”

Luke 6:27-29

Jesus says to love our enemies. That’s not natural for us to do, but in Christ, the supernatural act of loving our enemies is possible. When we focus on the condition of their souls, we can extend the same grace and mercy that Jesus gives us. People may hate us, hurt us, curse us, and verbally slap us, and if our concern for them is that they would turn away from their hostilities and accept our loving Savior’s sacrifice for them, we’re more able to love them as Jesus does.

We can’t let our emotional response to contentious, accusatory, and combative words thwart God’s purpose for allowing us (His children) to still be here—pointing others to Him!

With all conversations, including online, we need to remember to put on the full armor of God. We can be prepared and ready for battle while gently and kindly pointing to the truth of God’s Word—in an effort for someone to be transformed by Jesus Christ’s love.

All of the armor of God is meant to defend who we are in Christ, and the sword of the Spirit is the offensive weapon that we can use to effectively counter lies and temptation.

Father God, help us to put on Your full armor to protect us and help us walk in love. You've tasked us with bringing in the truth and we are surrounded by deception and lies. As we put on the belt of truth, use it in Your strength. Guard our hearts with the breastplate of righteousness that gives us courage. Place the sandals of the Gospel of peace on our feet so that we may walk in a way that honors You and demonstrates Your unfailing love. Guard us with the shield of faith to stop the Enemy's strategic and relentless pursuit in opposition to You. Protect our thoughts with the helmet of salvation. Help us take every thought captive to obey Christ. Wield Your sword, which is Your holy Word, to destroy arguments and lofty opinions raised against Your knowledge (2 Corinthians 10:5). Let my words (spoken or typed) bring glory and honor to You, penetrating the souls of the lost. As we lift up this prayer to You, help us to pray continually for all others who are bringing Your truth and love to this ever-increasingly dark world. **Amen.**

Day 5

Responding With Humility

We live in a culture marked by division; people come from diverse backgrounds and belief systems that shape their worldviews. These differing perspectives can sometimes be off-putting to those who do not share them. Therefore, how can we effectively engage in conversations with those whose beliefs starkly contrast with our own?

When approaching these challenging situations in our divided culture, we must learn to set down our own agenda and desires as we listen for guidance from the Holy Spirit. We can look to Jesus as the greatest example of humility.

In Jesus' day, cultural differences abounded. Interactions between men and women were bound by rules and regulations. Elite religious leaders didn't associate with those who weren't following Jewish laws. Jews didn't associate with Samaritans. In our world today, we may not experience the same cultural differences, but nonetheless, they are present even within our own communities and churches! Let's look to John 4 to see how Jesus **loves well in a divided culture.**

Jesus planned His visit to the well to wait for the Samaritan woman while His friends went to get food. She was surprised to see anyone at the well at that time of day, let alone a Jewish man. She intentionally timed her visit to the well to avoid interacting with her own people, who scorned her because of her lifestyle.

In His humility, Jesus laid aside the cultural expectations of the day to seek out this woman. He asked her for a drink from the well. She questioned His request, pointing out that He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan woman. Jesus didn't care about the cultural norms; He cared more about her soul than anything else.

They had an awkward conversation. He spoke the truth about her current lifestyle. Jesus was Holy. He was God in the flesh, and yet His love and wisdom poured out when He conversed with her, not judgment. He didn't shame her or speak condescendingly. He didn't make her clean herself up before he offered her Living Water. She not only did not deny the truth about herself, she wasn't defensive about hearing it. The comfort she experienced through this respectful conversation helped her lay down her social prejudice

and receive the Living Water He offered. Her overflowing joy prompted her to gather her people to meet Jesus, leading to the salvation of many Samaritans.

There were times when Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and “sinners” that surprised those around Him. Jesus didn’t and still doesn’t care about our social position or reputation. He always bridges cultural differences to save those who are lost.

The power of Christ is displayed here in these accounts, and we, too, have the ability to use discernment as we humbly submit to the Holy Spirit and **love well in a divided culture.**

As a believer, you represent Christ. For His namesake, how will you respond when challenging discussions arise? How will you initiate difficult conversations?

Holy Spirit, Your Word says to trust in You and to not depend on my own understanding. I want to seek Your will above my own agenda and follow the path in which You lead me. Help me to humbly submit myself to You each day, following Your lead. Help me lay down any past prejudices and break down any personal barriers that I've put up. Open the door for others to be able to hear past their own beliefs. Give me great discernment and guide my heart, words, and actions. In Your power and strength, anoint me to represent You well. Give me a humble spirit, completely committed to You. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Day 6

In the Face of Opposition, Be Gentle and Humble

“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.”

John 15:18-19

Christ tells us that we will clash with culture. As we face opposition, disagreements, and challenges, we can **love well in a divided culture** as we honor God in everything we do and say with His help.

As believers, we have been tasked with sharing Jesus—the Great Commission—to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19-20). As we navigate cultural differences, keeping our focus on the big picture of Christ’s kingdom can help bring everything into proper perspective. We aren’t commissioned to win arguments, but we are commissioned to share Jesus with the world. This is for the sake of someone’s eternal soul.

We’re called to live differently. We’ve been set apart for Christ. As we represent Him, what we say matters, but it’s also how we live, how we respond to others, how we initiate conversations, and how we conduct ourselves each day. Scripture tells us that we will know a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:16-20), and the fruit of Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

We must remember Whose we are when we engage with culture. Getting caught up in arguments trying to defend ourselves or our faith often leads us to behave poorly. In our efforts to live for His name's sake, we want to be living evidence of His Holy Spirit within us.

Remember how Jesus responded when He was taken before Pilate. The way He was being questioned would provoke anger from most people. Yet, He was selective in His responses, remaining nonconfrontational and choosing to remain silent at many opportunities when He could have responded. He simply spoke the truth in very few words, remaining humble and gentle (See Matthew 7:11-26).

Likewise, before we respond to things in our culture and conversations, we should ask for discernment from the Holy Spirit. We will likely find ourselves in more situations requiring us to be gentle and humble rather than expressing anger. Even in moments when we feel like we would be justified to engage in arguments, lean on the truth of Romans 12:21, which says, **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"** (ESV).

To overcome evil with good, allow the Holy Spirit to guide your words as you carefully point to God's Word as the absolute truth; oftentimes, that's all we need to say. Let the power of God's Word cut through man's logic and barriers. Allow the sword of the Spirit to manifest itself within the heart of those hearing it.

It's important to recognize that some believers struggle with communicating with gentleness and humility. People often point to Jesus' anger when He cleared the Temple (Mark 11:15-19, Matthew 21:12-17, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:13-16). However, His anger was in defense of His Father's house. If you encounter disrespect for your faith or hear blasphemy, remember your mission is to share Jesus, not to retaliate. Judgment and vengeance are God's domain, not ours (Deuteronomy 32:35).

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.

2 Timothy 2:24

When someone disagrees with what you are saying, maintain a gracious, gentle, and patient attitude instead of becoming angry and defensive.

Father, there is so much evil in this world that contradicts Your Word. I want to follow You and Your direction, but sometimes I get angry and want to fight back. Give me discernment and help me respond in gentleness and humility. When I want to bring up something I know is controversial, help me to present it in a way that honors You. Help me lay aside my own feelings to represent You well. Equip me with the words You need me to say in all situations. Help me overcome evil by doing Your good work, no matter the circumstance. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Day 7

Made in the Image of Our Creator

Every person is made in the image of our Creator. Genesis 1:27 says, "**So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**" Our challenge today is to re-evaluate the way we interact with those image-bearers with whom we disagree.

How do we treat others despite how they treat us? Do we look at them and see the person Jesus died to save, or do we look at them and see their sins or our disagreements? Do we know when to keep silent and love well, or do we come armed with an argument prepared to prove a point?

As we strive to **love well in a divided culture**, we can take a step back and look at the big picture. Christ wants everyone to come to salvation and be part of His Father's kingdom. It is not our job to transform someone's heart in Christ; that's the Holy Spirit's role. Loving well means honoring our positions—don't play God. We aren't here to form judgments and bring condemnation. This isn't about us or our feelings—it's about sharing Jesus with those who don't know Him and letting the light of His goodness and holiness shine through us and illuminate the darkness around us. We want others to desire to know Jesus as their personal Savior.

Despite our differences, we need to see people as individuals whom Jesus Christ laid down His deity to walk on earth as man, to take on their sins and die in their place. The blood of Jesus was shed for all of us. Remember who you were before Christ, walking down the road of destruction until Jesus stopped you in your tracks and gave you a new life. This person is on that same road, in the same position you once were. Lovingly come alongside them. Set down your own feelings for the sake of their soul.

For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.

Luke 19:10

We're designed to point to Jesus—showing the love of this amazing, holy, beautiful, and loving Savior. Jesus tells the parable of a Samaritan man who stops to help a Jewish man beaten and left for dead. Several Jewish men pass by the injured man without offering assistance. Despite his different cultural views, the Samaritan man shows unexpected mercy and compassion. His selfless act of kindness demonstrates his care for and value of the man's life over their cultural differences (Luke 10:30-37).

Regardless of what other people are doing, remember Jesus says that loving others is the second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-39); reflect back on the parable of the Good Samaritan and other Scriptures pointing to the importance of showing God's love. Be motivated to love others no matter what.

Let's be honest; it's not easy to love everyone else like Christ does, and we don't want to come across as fake. Sometimes, we just aren't feeling full of compassion and mercy. It's in these times that we need to go to the Lord in prayer. Confess to God that we can't do it without Him! Ask God to give us what we need to **love others well in a divided culture**. Spending more time with God in prayer will always replenish our souls.

Heavenly Father, *how wonderful it is to understand that You created each person in Your own image! You have uniquely designed each person on this earth and have a distinct plan and purpose for their lives. Thank You for inviting me into Your family and calling me Yours. Father, there are people in this world who are difficult to talk to. They don't know You, and they don't know Your Word. Their lives are in opposition to mine. But I know that You have called me to share Your Son, Jesus Christ, with them and love them as You do. Sometimes, people are difficult to talk to, and I just don't feel like I have the right words. Sometimes, my heart just isn't in it, and I need Your help. Psalm 51:10 says, "**Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.**" Amen.*

Day 8

Leave the Judgment Up to the Judge

Making judgments is so easy. We do it every day. We open the refrigerator, smell the milk, and make a judgment call on whether or not a few days past expiration is okay. When we merge into traffic, choose something to read, and socialize, we're making judgments. Each decision we make is a calculated or spontaneous judgment.

But what about judging others? Do we do that as well? Certainly! We judge the character of our co-workers, family, and acquaintances to see if they're someone we'd like to spend more time with or can trust. We make assumptions—right or wrong—about the way people talk to us, dress, and behave. But just because we do it every day doesn't make it right.

Sometimes judgments keep us safe—like crossing a busy street. However, in other situations, our judgment of others pulls us out of our position in Christ and into the judgment seat of God. God doesn't need help judging others. He is very capable of doing that all on His own. Why? Because He is the only One worthy to judge. His divine and holy nature doesn't allow Him to sin, making Him the only One able to judge.

In Matthew 7:1-6, Jesus warns us not to judge others.

“And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

The sin of others is not worse than our own sin, despite how heinous we may find it. Sin is sin. We all struggle with our own sin and the consequences that accompany sin, so why waste time pointing out the flaws in other people? Look at Saul before his conversion. He was so sure that he was doing the right thing for God. He was a Pharisee who intensely persecuted those following Jesus (known as the Way). He was adamant that Jesus was not the Messiah and that those following Him were breaking God's laws. He took on the role of judge and determined the fate of those following Christ by persecuting them.

But what happened when Saul (also known as Paul) had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ? His eyes and heart were open to the truth of the Messiah; he gave his heart and allegiance to Jesus, and he was no longer the Pharisee who hated Christ's followers—he became a follower of Christ who gave bold testimony for Him, led many to a saving knowledge of Him, and penned several of the “letters” that comprise the New Testament of the Holy Bible (2 Corinthians 5:17).

There are probably plenty of people in our lives who, like Paul once did, believe they are fighting for the right cause. In some cases, as a believer, we understand their sense of justice goes directly against God's Word. In these situations, it's easy to want to pass judgment on them, but this is not our role—that's God's. We'd like their outcome to be just as wonderful as Paul's encounter with Christ, resulting in radical life change.

Let's strive to follow Jesus' commands in Mark 12:30-31 as we demonstrate love and humility to others:

“And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

We are able to **love well in a divided culture** when we understand that we are not meant to judge. God loves the sinner as much as He loves us, so let's let Him work out His plan in their lives as He is doing in ours! Interact with others with grace and mercy as we purposely submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit's direction. Remember, not too long ago, we were walking the same path of destruction until Jesus transformed our lives. Rather than cast judgment, let's go to our heavenly Father in prayer for those who are lost.

Heavenly Father, *it is only through Your Son, Jesus Christ, that my life has been transformed. You sent Jesus to pay the penalty for my sin. Thank You for doing for me what I could never do on my own! Father, help me to stop casting judgment on others when I see them going against Your Word or really doing anything I deem as annoying or wrong. Remove the desire to judge others in my heart, and let me see them through Your eyes, offering grace and mercy. I pray for their hearts to be softened and submitted to Your and Your lordship overall. Change their hearts and draw them to Yourself. If I'm to be part of their journey, reveal what I should share with them, directing every word and action! I pray for full transformation in Your Son's name. **Amen.***

Day 9

Love is the Greatest

As you engage in reading Scripture regularly, you'll begin to notice a main theme of the Bible is God's restoration of His people, the judgment of people, and all things being made new in Christ. As God's people, this should encourage us to love.

The love that God has for mankind is revealed through His redemptive actions—sending Jesus as a propitiation for our sins. Knowing that we could never be worthy of earning our own salvation, He sent Jesus to stand in our place, allowing us to be made righteous before Him.

Throughout time, we have always lived in a divided culture, yet the Lord has been so gracious to us—teaching us how to love well. Leaving example after example of how we should care for people and treat them. We can do many things that are “good” for others, but if we don't love them, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, then we're missing the mark.

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Corinthians 13:1-7)

No matter what we do, if our actions are rooted in anything other than love, we have gained nothing. What is the posture of our heart when we're navigating difficult conversations? Are we set out to prove a point and win an argument, or are we positioned in a place where we are humbly laying down our own agenda to serve a great purpose for God's kingdom?

We must challenge ourselves daily to remain close to our heavenly Father through our Spiritual disciplines so that the posture of our heart remains steadfast on Him. No matter the situation we come against, when we initiate a conversation or respond with grace and mercy, we are loving well.

Scripture makes it so clear. Review what love is not: jealous, boastful, proud, rude, demanding its own way, irritable, keeping a record of wrongs, and pleased with injustice. Take a moment to meditate on these descriptions and reflect on your behavior and thoughts. Confess with your mouth and your heart to the Lord, those which you are guilty of doing. Ask Him to forgive you and ban those negative patterns from you in His name.

Then, review what love is: patient, kind, never gives up, never loses faith, always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Ask the Lord God to give you these positive traits through the power of the Holy Spirit living within you. Make it your goal to **love well in a divided culture**, reflecting on these truths and asking God to help you daily.

Father God, I want to love well in all situations, even in challenging conversations. I don't want to be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal, but a person who loves like You love. Your Word says that love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. I want to emulate this in my own life. Love is not irritable and keeps no records of wrongs. It's hard enough to love like that, so I'm asking for Your strength to build me up. I want to rejoice when Your truth wins out, not when I think I've won anything. Lead me to a place where I never give up and never lose faith, remaining hopeful and expectant of You through every circumstance. Direct me to **love well in a divided culture.** In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

Day 10

Go! Love Well in a Divided Culture!

Over the last nine days, we've looked at ways in which we can strive to **love well in a divided culture**. From our differences with those in our own families and neighborhoods to those across the globe, connected through online media—we are all uniquely made individuals, also created in the image of our God. It's challenging to navigate conversations and disagreements when there are fundamental differences in our views and beliefs.

It's a battle, and we know that as followers of Jesus, we're on the winning side. Arming ourselves with the armor of God on a daily basis through Spiritual disciplines like prayer, reading the Word, praise and worship, meditating and listening, and daily confession and repentance help align our heart's desires with the Lord's.

Our challenge to you is to deepen your walk with Christ. As you draw closer to Him, your ability to love and extend grace expands. We aren't called to judge, but we are called to love well despite our differences.

For those who don't know Christ, the reality is that they are headed down a path of destruction that leads to death. Understanding this reality for others should drive us to love and compassion. It is only in Christ that we are made alive—accessing eternity with Him. For those in our lives who don't know Him and hold different worldviews that shape their belief systems, we can pray for them and be vessels of Christ's genuine love.

As you interact with others, remember how Jesus treated you when you were far from Him. Did He try to win arguments with you, was He volatile or abrasive, or did He gently correct you and guide you toward His open, loving embrace?

Don't let your own agenda and desires cloud and muddy the waters, creating barriers for someone coming to know Christ. **Love well in a divided culture** and share the love of Jesus with everyone you encounter!

Father, thank You for loving me well. When I was far from You, You transformed my life. Your love met the opposition in my soul and changed me forever. Thank You! May the love, grace, and mercy that You pour out to me be evident in all my interactions with others. When people look at me, let them see You! Help me love well in a divided culture despite the circumstances. Guide me as I navigate the challenges that come along, equipping me with the sword of the Spirit and Your full armor! **Amen.**

“Do to others as you would like them to do to you. ... Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.
Luke 6:31, 35-36

LOVE WELL

in a *Divided* Culture

*Navigate Challenging Times
with Jesus' Love*



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