



## Living Stones

1 Peter 2:1-10

October 17, 2021

We are going to 1 Peter chapter 2 today.

Peter first met Jesus about 30 years before he wrote us this book. One day in his early 30s, he went out to do his work as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee like he probably had done six days a week since he was a teenager. But that day, everything would change:

**Matthew 4:18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.**

Peter’s previous life and ways and ambitions were gone, and now he was beginning a totally different life of following Jesus. He hadn’t seen it coming, but Jesus came into his life and he had to give it all up to follow Him.

And while Jesus may not be calling most of us to give up careers to follow Him, when Jesus comes into any life, that life has to be different than it would have been without Jesus. There are old ways that are left behind and a whole new way of life that begins.

Peter is writing this book to unpack for us the huge thing that it is to become a Christian, and the massive impact that should make on our lives.

To become a Christian is to receive a gift from God. We were deserving of death and hell for our sin, but instead, we got grace. God sent His son to die, He gave us the gift of faith, so that we could be forgiven and released from our guilt and shame. And the whole thing was planned by God for our good before the world began.

And people who have received that massive gift are like Peter out on the boat - Jesus calls us to follow Him, and given the magnitude of who Jesus is and what He did in our lives, we drop the nets and follow. We can’t be the same.

And in the previous passage, Peter wrote **“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1:22)**. One of the primary ways that Christians live distinct lives is in their love for one another.

And in today’s passage he will continue that train of thought by unpacking for us more of what that love looks like (or doesn’t look like,) he will give us more resources to continue to grow in that love, and He’ll remind us of what Jesus is building in his church so that we can work alongside the Lord in building as opposed to being people who tear down what He is building.

**1 Peter 2:1-10 “1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-- 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. "They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”**

So Peter has said that people who have come to believe in Jesus must become people who love, and verse 1 here starts with a list of the things loving people don’t do, or some sins that people who strive for love and holiness have to “put away” or “put off”, and he mentions five things specifically:

**1 Peter 2:1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.**

All of these are sins we commit against each other, either in our hearts or with our lips (or keyboards or phones.) And people who have received the grace of God are called to put all of these off. “Put away” could be translated “take off,” like you would take off an old

dirty garment. Christians who are robed in Jesus can't be robed in malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

Christians are distinct in that we don't clothe ourselves with the same heaviness that non-Christians clothe themselves with.

In our world today, these sins are not only practiced but celebrated.

If I had to define cancel culture, I would say that it is a way of life aimed at destroying reputations characterized by malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. These are the clothes we wear in our day, particularly on social media.

This is normal posture, even for many professing to be Christians. And it can seem to be right, usually because the people who are doing the cancelling feel like their cause is just.

And any way of life out there can easily become a way of life in here. The church is like a boat out on the stormy ocean of the world, and waves come crashing over the deck and threaten to fill the church on a regular basis.

But to put on Christ is to put off former ways. And so Peter lists five of those anti-love ways that we are called to drop. And you can group them into sins of the heart and sins of the lips (or keyboard).

**Malice** is a sin of the heart where you have an evil posture toward others, a desire to hurt people, nail people, see harm come to people. You're scanning for an opportunity to bring harm to someone. The book of Proverbs refers a few times to people who "lie in wait" for others.<sup>1</sup> Malice looks for an opportunity to do harm to others.

Peter knows he needs to remind his readers to put off malice because they are people under pressure. They are scattered in an empire that rejects Jesus, they are being persecuted, and people under pressure are all the more prone to lash out and harm others. On a dark day, you just want to see the bad stuff happen to somebody who's not you. You want to see life dump on somebody else, and can even get a certain sense of sick peace when you hear that someone else is harmed.

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 1:11

But Peter says take that off, take off malice. Those are not the clothes that people who have received grace wear.

If God had a posture toward us where he was seeking to do harm, we'd all be doomed. We all deserved whatever we had coming. But He gave us grace.

Jesus came on a mission to redeem us.

**John 3:17 “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

Jesus scanned for opportunities to save and gave His life to save, not to nail. Jesus took the nails so that we could be forgiven and have our guilt lifted. Jesus loves to declare us righteous, but malice loves to declare people guilty.

And while normally people under pressure will scan for deficiencies in others to do them harm, people who have received grace are eager to bless others.

So take off malice. Don't let our cold, hard, malicious world make you like it. Don't let the pressure cause you to enjoy seeing others harmed. Let Jesus make you like Him. Jesus gave His life so we could be forgiven, and didn't return evil for evil or an eye for an eye.

People who love aren't malicious. They aren't out to get others.

And he says to also take off **Hypocrisy**, a sin of the heart where you grow accustomed to acting contrary to your words because you want people to think you're something you're not.

It's mankind's default religion since the garden of Eden. I know I'm not who I should be, so I cover up. I'll do it with religious language, self-righteous posturing, pretending, or even by attacking others who have deficiencies to draw attention away from mine.

I make myself out to be holy and righteous, and my concern is not that I would actually be holy, but that I would appear holy to people. Hypocrisy doesn't care if God thinks I'm holy, it cares only if man thinks I'm holy.

And if I appear that way to people, good enough.

But as people who have come to believe the Gospel, who have come to believe that the Son of God had to be crucified for my sin it was so bad, we can drop the act. God already said I'm a sinner apart from his grace, He already said there is no one righteous, not even one. Hypocrisy gets solved not by trying hard not to be hypocritical, but by believing what Christians say they believe - that my sin is so severe and I am so helpless on my own that I need a savior.

And Jesus already died for my sin. So I can stop trying to provide an alternative to his righteousness with my own self-righteousness.

I'm robed in his righteousness, but hypocrites would rather be robed in lies, which are less satisfying and never last, but in the moment seem to work.

He also says to put off envy.

**Envy** is not wanting others to be blessed or succeed and wanting that only for ourselves. It's a violation of the tenth commandment in **Exodus 20:17** **"You shall not covet."**

And this is a sin of the heart where, because Jesus is not enough and we get our identity from other things, we resent it when people have those other things and we don't. And it rots us:

**Proverbs 14:30** says **"A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot."**

Envy rots the bones, it rots our frame. It destroys us from the inside. And envy can be a regular state of mind for us, and can drive a lot of the desire we have to see others fall, but we can become so accustomed to it that we don't even notice it.

So we have to stop and ask, "What is our attitude toward those that have more than us?" People with a better career? People who are smarter? People who have better relationships? Whose kids seem to be turning out better? People who have the family we want, or the good looks we want? People who have money and houses and cars?

What about when they didn't earn it?

What about when I think I'm actually a better person than them, but they seem to have it so much easier or they have so much more?

Do these things make us thankful for what God has given to others? Do these things sometimes provoke us to imitate them (gladly)? That's not necessarily envy. Or - do we criticize? Do we call their achievements or possessions "wrong"? Do we try to tear them down? Do we throw shade at what they have?

In the early days of our church, someone came to meet with me because he was concerned that somebody else in the church had purchased a house that he thought was too big. And I later learned that at the same time he came to meet with me, he was involved in absolutely huge marriage-wrecking sins. But he framed the meeting as a concern for righteousness.

But he wasn't concerned for righteousness, he didn't give a rip about doing what's right. He envied what someone else had and framed it as a religious concern. And I've learned that this happens all the time. We envy, so we wrap our envy in religion to make it seem right. (I just don't think a Christian should drive a car like that, live in a house like that, go on a vacation like that - until, at least, I get the opportunity to do those things, then I'm all about grace and the benefit of the doubt.)

But concern at the blessings of others is almost never righteous concern. (If it is, we talk to that person directly, not about them, we listen to them, we know we can't read minds and hearts.) Usually our anger at the blessings of others is just pure envy and not righteous or holy.

Because righteousness and holiness make us loving people. And people who love others don't envy - they're glad when people are blessed by God.

So Peter says to put off malice, hypocrisy, and envy - those common sins of the heart.

And he says to put off the sins of **deceit** and **slander** as well, common sins of the lips and keyboard, as well.

And this is an area where we need to recover a sensitivity to sin, and we need to recover some conviction. Because we become very numb to these sins of the lips, especially if our lives are awash in social media where just about any speech seems to be OK.

The holy life that God requires of us is a life with very different use of the lips or the keyboard than the life lived apart from Jesus.

God cares very much how we speak about others. It made the ten commandments as well: In the ninth commandment, God commanded us not to bear false witness.

In the old Heidelberg Catechism, which is a series of questions and answers that teaches the Christian faith, the question is **“What is required in the ninth commandment.”**

And here’s the answer...As I read this, I’d urge you to evaluate your own speech and your own use of social media in this light:

***I must not give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard. Rather, I must avoid all lying and deceit as the devil's own works, under penalty of God's heavy wrath. In court and everywhere else, I must love the truth, speak and confess it honestly, and do what I can to defend and promote my neighbour's honour and reputation.***

So in cancel culture that is malicious and loves to find fault, what would it look like for us to “twist no one's words?”

When you build a loyal friendship with someone for years, you reach a point where you don’t have to be guarded in your speech with them, and they don’t have to be guarded in theirs with you. Because they know that if they say something that could be misinterpreted, you’re going to interpret it in the best possible light. That’s what you do with a close, loyal friend. You become the kind of person that people don’t have to be too guarded around when they speak because you believe the best and listen for what they’re trying to say.

Contrast that with a social media troll. They open the app with the intention of finding some speech to interpret in the worst possible light. They say, “You meant the worst thing you could have possibly meant, and even if you didn’t think you meant that, your speech still exposed that deep down you are ignorant, or evil, or a racist, or a sexist, or any number of other labels. And if you deny being those things, that’s evidence that you are those things, because who would deny them unless they really were them.”<sup>2</sup>

That’s a far cry from twisting no one’s words and not joining in condemning someone rashly.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a logical fallacy called the Kafka trap, which is pretty much the epitome of twisting words.

And I think the danger is that social media reinforces this kind of ungenerous speech. We learn to look for the potential flaw in someone's speech, and then twist and exploit it to our advantage. And when we call it out, we get the likes and the resulting dopamine hit, and we keep doing more of the same.

But the Gospel that we believe says that Jesus came and gave undeserved grace to sinners. He is eager to forgive, to cleanse, to restore relationships. He brings His enemies near. Jesus was eager to help bad people receive grace, he wasn't eager to make people worse than they were.

Which means that in our speech and our listening to people, we need to recover the principle of charity. And this is an old word for this idea. Charity isn't, in this use, giving money to a cause, but interpreting people in the best possible light.

Two non-Christian guys named Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianov wrote a book called the [Coddling of the American Mind](#), a really excellent book overall, and there they write:

*"The principle of charity...says that one should interpret other people's statements in their best, most reasonable form, not in the worst or most offensive way possible."*

It is interpreting a person's words how we would want ours interpreted. We don't twist words, we overlook minor offenses. We laugh off little things that would offend us if we were hypersensitive or proud.

**Proverbs 10:12 "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses."**

We're not looking for a weapon against people, we're overlooking as many minor flubs as possible and treating others how we would want to be treated when we speak or write. We ask people to clarify, we allow them to restate things.

We twist no one's words. Not even the words of our enemy.

We've received the grace of Jesus, and receiving grace makes you gracious in your speech and your interpretation of the words of another.

What would it mean to "not gossip or slander"?



**Proverbs 10:18 The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool.**

Sometimes we have a hard time discerning what's acceptable and what's not. When are we communicating bad news about someone that needs to be communicated and when are we just gossiping?

If you have a friend, and you find out from a couple of reliable sources that her teenage son is using drugs, for example - it isn't Gossip to tell your friend about it. It's what you should do.

Because that speech is intended to push a relationship of the parent closer to the kid. It is taking true information, communicating it to someone with real authority, in the hopes of seeing restoration. It's passing along bad news, but to the right place with the hope of helping.

But if we speak about somebody in any way that divides our hearers from them, it is prohibited. To tell a story about someone that's going to make your friend look at them badly or think of them differently is divisive and only meant to harm.

And we are called to treat people who regularly use their speech to divide in really specific ways:

**Titus 3:10 "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,"**

Christ took us, who were the enemies of God, and with his death and resurrection, reconciled us to the Father. And if our speech is shaped by the Gospel, it will be the kind of speech that brings people closer to one another, not the kind that divides.

And this verse says we all have a responsibility in making sure that we are building a culture where divisive, slanderous speech isn't tolerated. This says to warn a gossip a couple of times and then put that distance between yourself and that person. It's a command not only not to gossip, but to help prevent it in your response to it.

The church father Tertullian said, "What a man should not say he should not hear."

So we don't twist words, we don't gossip or slander.

What does it mean not “to condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard?”

Social media has opened the door for all of us to be busybodies and to jump on board condemning people. It’s a place where people can be accused and then tried by the twitter jury. And it gives us the opportunity to pile on people who are accused of something without any firsthand knowledge of them or what they actually did.

And this is dangerous, because if people are like me, I know my default mode is to hear that somebody did something and immediately think they did it. The accusation equals guilt. But when we are going to believe that someone did something that would make us think less of them, God’s standards require real proof:

**Deuteronomy 19:15 “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”**

God’s law has always said that we don’t condemn anyone based on the word of one accuser without proof. There needs to be proof to condemn.

But we almost always assume an accuser is in the right, and to pursue condemnation is the right and good and moral Christian thing to do.

When we think about criminal attorneys, a normal way to think about things is that the prosecuting attorney is a good guy, and the criminal defense attorney is a bad guy. I could drop the name of some local well-known criminal defense attorneys and, if you follow that sort of thing, you’d immediately think, “That guy is scuz. He’s slimy.” The one who defends criminals is bad, and the accusing, or prosecuting guy, is good.

But remember which type of attorney Jesus was for us. He was the defense attorney. He provides a defense for us against God’s wrath, even though we are guilty and deserving of it.

And we think that it is the moral and Christian person who pursues the accused with a Javert-like intensity. But that isn’t always the right position to be in.

Satan’s name means “accuser.”

**Revelation 12:10 “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”**

Satan traffics in false accusations, and day and night works to accuse falsely.

In scripture, remember that Jesus was condemned by false accusers. We should expect that the enemy will be sowing lies about people. This person thinks this about you. This person is not authentic. This person’s kids are like this. This person actually believes this false thing. This person hasn’t repented of his past.

Christians can’t believe all accusations are true, knowing who Satan is, and knowing the Christian story. We know false accusations can be a problem, because in God’s law in Deuteronomy he spelled out that if you falsely accused someone and that was found out, you would get the punishment you were seeking for them.

So we should be slow to believe an accusation and quick to dismiss it if there isn’t proof, which the bible defines as 2 witnesses.

So if someone tells you, “This person was talking trash about you,” you are totally free to not believe that without another witness.

Now, one caution - passages like this have sometimes been used to silence people who have been victims of crimes that nobody could see. Where there couldn’t have been another witness. Crimes like sexual abuse rarely happen in the presence of more than one witness. So people have been afraid to bring an accusation to the authorities or even to discuss things that happened to them with close friends or better authority figures.

But this passage doesn’t say you need two witnesses to bring an accusation, just that we can’t establish guilt without it. And sometimes, when you bravely come forward to the police, you find out others have too, so a pattern is established. Or sometimes there is other evidence, so they can put together a case against someone. This shouldn’t silence anyone that something happened to, because you never know how God in his justice can bring out evidence or other victims to establish proof. So you can tell parents, or police, or pastors, or bosses about sins that were committed against you, even if there was nobody there to see it.

But in our normal, day-to-day situations, we would all do well to treat people as innocent until proven guilty by 2 or three witnesses.<sup>3</sup>

But remember we are not only commanded not to do bad things with our words. We're commanded to build up. Jesus not only removed the wrong from us but He gave us His right. So our words are not only to not be deceptive and destructive, they're to be constructive.

We do what we can to defend and promote our neighbor's honour and reputation.

We have a responsibility to help protect the good name of one another.

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<sup>3</sup> And we should be wise about human nature - that people like to make a case against another when that other person isn't around so details can be exaggerated, so I can be right and the other person can look wrong, and isn't there to defend herself:

**Proverbs 18:17 says, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him."**

There have been a number of times that we've known married couples that are struggling seek out counseling, which is good to do, but often one spouse will go to the counseling and the other won't. It's not rare at all for the one who goes to counseling to come out saying, "My counselor thinks my spouse is the problem."

Obviously it wouldn't be wise to believe the counselor is actually saying that. But if the counselor is saying that and hasn't talked to the spouse, the counselor is being unwise. They can say, "From what you're saying it sounds like your spouse is the problem," but that should come with a big asterisk "one who states his case seems right until the other comes and examines him." We can never accurately assess a dispute if we're only talking to one person.

We also know that it is human nature to find allies in our cause against someone. But an ally isn't a witness. So someone does something wrong to us, and we immediately find the people we know don't like our enemy. And we get reinforcements, so now dozens of people are saying he did this thing. But only one is a witness.

So if we evaluate ourselves, most of us would not say that we're doing a great job in how we speak.

How does that change?

If our whole strategy is just to try harder on the outside, we won't be able to keep it up. Yes, in the moment of temptation, do what's necessary, try hard, power through, tamp down that sinful thought or word. But nobody can keep that up.

And nothing gets better without confession and repentance. So we have to start there.

And then we have to be changing internally. So Peter tells us how:

**1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-- 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

Peter had earlier said that we have been born again by the power of God. And if we have been born, like little babies, we should do what new babies do and long for milk.

And that milk that he's referring to is probably the word of God in the scriptures. (1:23 says we were born again by the living and enduring word of God - it is the power source Peter is referring to in context here.)

And he says in 2:2 to long for it. To crave it like a baby craves milk. To be nourished by it.

For us to have thoughts that are free from malice and envy and hypocrisy, and lips and social media feeds that are free from deceit and slander, we have to have hearts nourished by the goodness of God in the word.

In the Bible, we have a whole book given to point us to Jesus. And in the story of Jesus you see His goodness to us again and again. His goodness in making us, dying for us, adopting us, promising us a future. The Lord is good, and we will taste it in the word.

And as I do so, I'll find my hope in God, my identity in being his child, my purpose and my sustenance from God.

And if that's the case then I can stop finding my identity in what other people think of my phony religion, or in being better than others. I don't have to engage in malice to keep

others down, because God is so good and gracious that I know there's plenty to go around. I don't need to envy, because in a kingdom supplied by a loving Father, more for you doesn't mean less for me. There is plenty of love and grace to go around, and I don't gain any of it by taking it from others.

Crave the goodness of God that you find in His word. It's by longing for God's word that we grow in our salvation. My speech about others will change if I'm consistently in God's word.

And also, if I grasp what God is doing in bringing people to Himself and building His church in that way, I won't want to do anything that tears it down:

**4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. "They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.**

Peter says that when we come to Jesus, we are coming to the one who is the Cornerstone of a great building. The world rejects Him, but we see Him as precious enough to build our lives on.

And just like he is the cornerstone in a building, we are stones in the walls of that same building. Our lives are built on Christ, and though He is mocked by the world, in the end, nobody who believes in Him will be put to shame. So we've built our lives on the foundation of Jesus and we don't have to worry that in the end we will be ashamed of doing so.

But we aren't just individually being built on Christ, we are built into the walls of the house together. The stones are all connected. And if you decide to go to war against one of the stones, you are going to war against the whole wall, the whole house.

Over the last couple of years, any of us who are on social media have seen Christians be absolutely brutal to each other. About the election, social issues, masks, vaccines, and a

number of other issues. There were times during the election that I saw people brutally attacking each other even though they would both show up here on Sunday. I remember thinking these people are both going to be taking communion together on Sunday..

Christians under pressure lashed out at each other, not just disagreeing on issues, but attacking and trolling and twisting each other's words and being willing to ruin the reputations of others to win points.

And there are rare times when the only way to handle a situation is with a public, individual call-out, those are rare. And we are supposed to be guarding each other's reputation, meeting face to face when we see a sin or a wrong, and recognizing that we are so connected to each other that to attack one is to attack the whole house Jesus is building.

Peter goes on:

**1 Peter 2: 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."**

Look what he says about us. Christians are together a new and chosen race of people. They are a priesthood that exists on earth for God's glory. We're a new nation.

And how many of our conflicts come from seeing our being Christian as a less important element in our lives than our race or our nation? We'll divide the body of Christ based on national politics and race, forgetting that we are a new nation, a new race, a new people..

And we together exist in a brand new community, a brand new nation, a brand new people to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus.

Think of how important this is to Christians like the ones Peter was writing to and like at least some of us who are experiencing alienation from the culture around them because they follow Jesus.

They don't have a home any more in their culture, they are losing jobs, family members are rejecting them, and Peter says, "Good news, you are a new people!"

The loss of community out there is supposed to be remedied with the creation of a new community in the church.

But malice, slander, envy, hypocrisy, and deceit all ruin that new community.

When we attack each other, it's like we've put the ladder up on the branch, and we're sawing off the branch that it's leaning against. We're wrecking the very thing we need for support.

So put off all of the sins that affect the community of the church. Don't think it's ok on twitter or facebook - that isn't your avatar posting those things, it's you. It's your speech, your heart coming out.

Remember the mercy you've received in Jesus and extend it to others. If grace doesn't make us gracious, we are not grasping grace.

We have received a huge gift - forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, fellowship with Jesus. And that has to change our hearts and our speech.

#### Prayer of Confession:

Father, as we come to your word, we can taste that you are a God of goodness. From the beginning of the Bible when mankind fell into sin, you already began to promise a savior so that we could be recipients of your mercy and goodness forever. You've pursued us with your love and grace, and gave your Son so we could be forgiven.

But we confess that we haven't reflected your love well. We often deceive one another, we are content to have people think we are living holy lives when you know we're not. We aren't content with your love so we envy others and slander to punish them for receiving your good gifts. So forgive us.

Thank you for Jesus. His perfect record of truth-telling and honesty and love for others is ours because of the exchange made on the cross. Thank you for the mercy we've received from Him for the sins of our hearts and our lips.

Spirit, we pray that you'd convict us of these sins, cause us to repent, and allow us to drink so fully of the goodness of God in His word that our craving for the blessings others have, our desire to harm others, our desire to wear the false righteousness of hypocrisy



all dissolve. Help us to cherish your people and the church you are building that we wouldn't dare to tear them down.

And help us to believe the promise that you have forgiven our sins and the sins of our friends around this room as we've confessed them to you. Help us to live free from the guilt they brought about because you took the guilt, and help us to live free from suspicion and malice and envy, trusting that you are also at work in our brothers and sisters here.

### **Questions for Discussion in Small Groups**

- 1) What do malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander have in common?
- 2) How has social media numbed us to the weight of these sins? How can we fight against these impulses that online dialogue emboldens in us?
- 3) What is the difference between restorative conversation and divisive conversation?
- 4) How does our understanding of what Christ has done on **our** behalf impact how we treat each other?
- 5) Consider last week's encouragement to love sincerely as an active work toward our neighbor. In moments that invite us to entertain malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander, what are some ways we can sincerely love instead?