

This guide is an invitation to follow Jesus with greater purpose and hope. It will help you to explore the scriptures and challenge you to live out your faith. Each week we'd love for you to think about how you relate: **Up** (with God), **In** (with church) and **Out** (with neighbors).



### Weekly Questions:

- How is God getting my attention? For help, think about these areas:
- How are you living up with God?
- How are you living in community with other followers of Jesus?
- How are you living out on mission with your neighbors?
- What are you going to do about it?

### From Garden to Garden: Conversation 3 Jeremiah 29:1-14

**A Level Playing Field: The Lens of Kingdom Blessings & Woes** As we enter Act 5 of scripture's grand story—the hinge part of the narrative that changes everything—Jesus stands on a "level place" with a diverse crowd of disciples, Gentiles, and hurting people gathered from Judea to Tyre and Sidon. Unlike the Sermon on the Mount, Luke presents Jesus teaching on a plain, demonstrating that maturing as a disciple is not reserved for an elite tier of "super-disciples," but is an even playing field for everyone. Here, Jesus offers us a new set of "glasses"—a lens or filter—to view reality. Just as specialized blue-light or colorblind glasses filter out harmful rays and bring clarity to deficient vision, Jesus' teachings reframe what true flourishing means. He pronounced blessings on the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the rejected, while issuing sobering "woes" to the rich, the well-fed, and the highly praised. Jesus exposes how material wealth and societal comfort often lead us into self-reliance and independence from God. True kingdom blessing is not tied to temporary happiness or external security, but to our daily, radical dependence on Jesus.

- When you evaluate whether your life or someone else's life is "blessed", what filters or markers do you tend to rely on other than Jesus' teachings?
- How does Jesus standing on a level place among a diverse and hurting people challenge our assumptions about who discipleship is for and who is invited?
- In what areas of your life have comfort, abundance, or societal praise made it easy to lean on your own independence rather than depending deeply on God?

**Radical Love & Mercy for Enemies** Our culture conditions us to operate on a "tit-for-tat" mentality, where our victory feels sweeter if our opponents suffer bitter loss. Yet Jesus completely turns human relational dynamics upside down by commanding: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you." True Christian counterculture is not defined by arguing over current social hot topics, but by choosing to love those who are vastly different or who have directly harmed us. Author Anne Lamott writes that "love is seeing the darkness in another person and defying the impulse to jump ship." This radical posture is embodied in stories like the South African mother during the Truth and Reconciliation hearings who, after a former officer murdered her husband and son, asked that he visit her home twice a month as a adopted son so she could pour out love on him. Mercy looks past destructive behavior to behold the image of

God in every human heart, extending the same undeserved kindness that our Heavenly Father has lavished upon us.

- Who is someone in your life, or a specific group, that you find exceptionally difficult to love, pray for, or extend unearned kindness toward?
- How does the concept of “love as seeing the darkness in another and defying the impulse to jump ship” reframe your current conflicts or relational strains?
- What is the difference between worldly conditional love (I’ll help you if you help me) and the love and mercy of God?

**Hopping Off the Judgment Seat: Measuring with Mercy** Jesus leaves no ambiguity when he instructs: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Being a disciple requires us to learn to hop off the judgment seat—a seat God never assigned us to occupy. Like a sports referee who carries the heavy burden of constantly calling fouls and judging plays, trying to judge other human hearts is an exhausting pressure we were never created to bear. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned: “Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.” When we spend our lives evaluating and condemning others, we lose sight of our own need for redemption. When we choose mercy as our default measuring stick, Jesus promises that a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured back into our lives.

- In what ways does holding onto judgment or condemnation toward others blind us to our own personal faults and need for God’s grace?
- Why is it such a relief to realize that God has not called you to sit on the judgment seat over the lives, choices, or hearts of people around you?
- How can you practically choose mercy as your primary measuring stick in your home, workplace, or church this week?

### **Practice: Viewing the World Through Jesus Glasses**

Putting on the lens of Christ requires us to throw away old filters of anger, political labeling, and self-righteous judgment. Practice living out Jesus-shaped mercy this week through these rhythms:

- **The Filter Swap, aka Check Your Lenses:** Identify a situation or a group of people you habitually view through cultural, political, or media filters. Intentionally pause and ask: what do Jesus’ teachings in Luke 6 say about how I should speak about them? Will you pray with them instead of remaining stuck in judgment.
- **Generous Initiative:** Select one person who has hurt you, spoken misinformed words about you, or is difficult to be around. Take the initiative to do a quiet act of good for them, offer a gesture of blessing, or pray specifically for their flourishing without expecting any recognition, apology, or return.
- **Vacating the Judgment Seat:** Whenever you feel the urge to critique, condemn, or referee someone else’s choices or heart this week, step down from the judgment seat. Remind yourself of Bonhoeffer’s warning and choose to offer the same amount of grace as you expect to receive from God.
- **What kind of glasses will you see the world through this week? Grace, mercy and love? Or revenge, anger and judgment?**