



**grow. pray. study.**

**January 15, 2023 Lessons from @MLK on Using Social Media**

Scripture: Proverbs 31:8-9 (CEB), Matthew 7:12a (NRSV), Ephesians 4:29 (NRSV) and James 2:14-17 (NRSV)

**Action, not just words**

**MONDAY 1.16.23 James 2:14-26**

**As our country remembers the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,** this week's GPS is built around six short quotations Dr. King might have used on social media (had it been available in his day) and their Biblical roots.

Even the finest talk, James said, “needs to translate into... Jesus-shaped action, to make any significant difference.” \* Dr. King (not yet a national figure) led the Montgomery, AL bus boycott, starting in December 1955. He said participants’ actions grew from faith: “It is not enough for us to talk about love, love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian...faith. There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love.” \*\*

- In many early Christian congregations (as in many today) one or more people stood at the exit door and told departing worshipers something like, “The peace of God go with you.” A lovely practice—as far as it goes. But Dr. King, like James, bluntly noted that it should move us to seek ways to actually relieve a person’s need. What ways have you found to make offering God’s love to another person, not a way to let yourself off the hook, but a reason to take practical action?
- “*God is one*: This is the Jewish profession of faith known as the Shema Israel: “Israel, listen!” ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)).” \*\*\* Through Greeks, Romans and other peoples’ oppression, faithful Jews had died rather than deny that “God is one.” The right words (even the centrally right words) did not alone make them citizens of God’s kingdom. We sometimes call that “lip service.” How did James’ teaching here align closely with what Jesus himself taught (cf. [Matthew 7:21-23](#))?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, shape my life into a living, walking, breathing exhibit of what you meant by “love your neighbor as yourself.” Help me not abstractly think, but concretely live, my love for you. Amen.

\* Wright, N. T., *Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 18). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

\*\* From <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1955-martin-luther-king-jr-montgomery-bus-boycott/#:~:text=I've%20never%20been%20on,I%20will%20not%20be%20content>.

\*\*\* Patrick J. Hartin, study note on James 2:19 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 457NT.

## **Mourning doesn't last; morning always comes**

### **TUESDAY 1.17.23 Psalm 30:5-12**

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On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled bus segregation unconstitutional. Dr. King recalled, "I read... 'The United States Supreme Court today unanimously ruled bus segregation unconstitutional in Montgomery, Alabama'.... The dawn will come....' Weeping may endure for a night,' says the Psalmist, 'but joy cometh in the morning.'" \* Dr. King's focus, like the psalmist's, was on how God's people could draw strength from recalling times when mourning had turned to joy.

- Scholar Donald Williams wrote, "In [the psalmist's] illness there has been weeping, the sense of God's absence, and mourning. Now...the healing of God has turned sorrow into joy." \*\* Difficult times can make God feel absent even for people of faith. (Don't forget Jesus quoting [Psalm 22:1](#) on the cross.) We sometimes use the phrase "God showed up" to describe times of recovery and restoration. How does joy in our lives grow from God's presence with us?
- Dr. King went on to say, "This faith adjourns the assemblies of hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism." \* Can you remember "dawn" times in the world's history, or your country's history? How about in your own life? How fully can you resist hopelessness and pessimism and look forward to God bringing a joyous morning to our world?

**Prayer:** Lord, when I face hard times where "weeping may stay all night," I thank you that the worst thing is never the last thing. In the end, you always have and always will turn sorrow into joy. Amen.

\* *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986, p. 504.

\*\* Donald Williams, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 13: Psalms 1–72*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986, p. 239.

## **“Better to suffer for doing good”**

### **WEDNESDAY 1.18.23 1 Peter 3:13-17**

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1 Peter told early Christians to be ready to explain their faith and to suffer for it if necessary. In April 1963, Birmingham, AL jailed Dr. King for a week. In a letter to local clergy who criticized his civil rights work, he said, “The early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the Church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.” \*

- You may, from time to time, meet people who challenge your beliefs, with a strong air of doubt and skepticism. Many will try to be kind, but like Romans in Peter’s day or segregationists in Dr. King’s, some may not be kind at all. The author of 1 Peter challenged readers to stay respectful and humble in all situations (cf. also [Ephesians 4:29](#)). How easy or hard do you find it to remain respectful and humble when someone challenges your faith? For what reasons?
- Peter said, “Happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness!” James 1:2 said, “Think of the various tests you encounter as occasions for joy.” But they were in the vicious Roman Empire or first-century Jerusalem’s highly anti-Christian climate. Does their counsel fit for a Christian high-school student, or a Christian worker in a heavily secular, skeptical workplace setting? How can you be fearless about transformation without being hostile and hurtful?

**Prayer:** O Lord, in my passion to live out my Christian faith, help me to be humble to all I meet. Let your loving kindness flow through me as I represent you to the world around me. Amen.

\* From <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/197294-letter-from-birmingham-jail>.

## The ultimate dream: God's eternal kingdom

### THURSDAY 1.19.23 Luke 22:25-30

**As our country remembers the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this week's GPS is built around six short quotations Dr. King might have used on social media (had it been available in his day) and their Biblical roots.**

On August 28, 1963, a huge crowd at the Washington Monument heard Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. After immediate, important American goals, he added: "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together [[Isaiah 40:4-5](#)]. This is our hope." \*

- Dr. King's dream reached beyond urgent legal triumphs (though he worked hard for those) to God's eternal kingdom of harmony and beauty. In Luke 22, as enemies plotted his death on the cross the next day, Jesus promised his followers that they would be with him in that kingdom. Jesus' vision (and Dr. King's) is of history moving toward good—God's ultimate victory, restoring the world to the Creator's intention. How does that faith strengthen you for life's darker moments?
- Robert Greenleaf, Max DePree, James Autry and other admirable business leaders have written powerful books about "servant leadership." \*\* Do you find "servant leadership" just an idealistic oxymoron, unrealistic in the "real world"? Or might Dr. King's adoption of Jesus' way of leading be a life-giving alternative to the more common views of leadership as prestige and privilege? Have you had the privilege of working with and learning from one or more true "servant leaders"?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, teach me how to find my glory in serving God and others, as you did, rather than in having others serve me. This is a hard prayer, but I mean it. Amen.

\* From <https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/01/16/dr-martin-luther-kings-i-have-a-dream-speech-full-text/21655947/>.

\*\* [Robert Greenleaf, Servant Leadership](#); [Max DePree, Leadership is an Art](#); [James Autry, Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership](#).

## God's way: extend love to everyone

### FRIDAY 1.20.23 Matthew 5:43-48

As our country remembers the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this week's GPS is built around six short quotations Dr. King might have used on social media (had it been available in his day) and their Biblical roots.

In July of 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. This was a big step toward Dr. King's goals. He had clearly studied and internalized the "golden rule" Jesus enunciated so clearly in Matthew 7:12. He wrote, concisely, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." \*

- Dr. King preached his last Christmas Eve sermon on December 24, 1967. In it, he said: "Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return.... This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Love your enemies.... I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself...every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear.' \*\* In what ways has Jesus relieved you of the burden of hating, as he did Dr. King? Is there any area where you want that to happen in 2023?
- John Wesley, Methodism's founder, said in Matthew 5:48 Jesus called us to be "perfect in love," always growing toward loving with God's all-inclusive love. He rejected the idea that "perfect" meant never sinning (missing the mark). Does it challenge you more, or less, to see "perfect" as about the state of your heart rather than just your outward actions? How might you live (even on social media) with God's generosity toward the "unrighteous" people you know?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, make me an instrument of your peace. Keep teaching me to trust in the long-term power of love, the world-changing power that makes me a follower of Jesus. Amen.

\* From <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/197294-letter-from-birmingham-jail>.

\*\* "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in James M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986, p. 256.

## How Dr. King and the apostle Paul faced the prospect of death

### SATURDAY 1.21.23 2 Timothy 4:5-8

As our country remembers the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this week's GPS is built around six short quotations Dr. King might have used on social media (had it been available in his day) and their Biblical roots.

In 2 Timothy, Paul knew his earthly life would soon end because the Roman emperor hoped killing him might stop others from becoming Christians. Scholar N. T. Wright said, "The picture we get...is of a man facing serious trouble and likely death, beset with problems and anxieties.... He lives in the present world, Caesar's world, as already a cheerful citizen of the world to come, Jesus' world." \* On April 3, 1968, Dr. King spoke in Memphis, TN at a rally supporting fairer treatment for city sanitation workers. He told his Apr. 3 audience, "I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers? Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter to me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will." \*\* An assassin shot and killed him the very next day.

- Hebrews 2:15 said by dying and rising again, Jesus "set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death." That was clearly true for both Paul and Dr. King. Has Jesus' presence in your life set you free from the fear of death? In what ways is it liberating to surmount that fear? You may feel as though you have only a relatively short time left to serve God in this life, or you may be looking forward to many decades of faithful service. Is the present course of your life such that you are confident that, whenever it ends, you will be able to say, as Paul did, "I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith" (verse 7)? If not, what "mid-course corrections" do you want to make Paul's words also your personal testimony?

**Prayer:** O Jesus, you walked into the darkest, deepest place we face—into death itself—and then emerged, alive and victorious. Keep me on course to end this earthly life in faith and triumph, as Paul and Dr. King did. Amen.

\* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus* (The New Testament for Everyone). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

\*\* From <https://www.afscme.org/about/history/mlk/mountaintop>.