

# “Getting Along”

Luke 10:38-42

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Elite rock climbers train for technique and strength. Some rock climbers focus their training on whatever develops easier for them. People can spend a great deal of time debating, arguing, and fighting over whether it is more important to be strong or a technician; however, the debate will not improve one's ability to climb. Elite climbers train for technique and strength.

In today's scripture some people, even some preachers, are quick to pick a side and advocate for only one aspect. Should one learn to love or provide gracious hospitality. This is not a scripture about “either or” or even “good, better, best”. When taken in context, it is clear that both gracious hospitality and learning to love are essential and are of equal value. One needs to go beyond the “either or” and “good, better, best” debates to discover Jesus' message.

Today's scripture immediately follows the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A religious leader was trying to elevate himself, defend his favored status, and justify his view. The religious leader was searching for a way that he could judge, exclude, avoid, and ignore certain people. Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan where the one who is an example of love, that all are to follow, is a despised, outsider from a different religion. No one is beyond God's love. We are to love all people and learn how to love from all people. Diversity is honored, respected, valued. and all people are equal. An aspect of being a true Christian is actively loving all people into harmonies unity. This parable is the context for today's scripture.

In Jesus' day it was a given, a universally accepted expectation, to provide gracious hospitality. The lectionary scriptures, (that is the scriptures that are to be read with our scripture), focus on gracious hospitality. The epistle lesson explains how all things, all people, are united in God. We see more of the fullness of God as more people are reconciled and united in harmony. Resist the temptation to be distracted into thinking that learning to love is in anyway more valuable than gracious hospitality.

Notice that Jesus is teaching us to overcome the sin of sexism, to overcome the traditional roles of men and women. Women are as valued, gifted, and talented as men. Jesus welcomes Mary to be his student, to learn and be a teacher which at that time was a male only role from specific lineage. All are invited to enjoy God's abundant love and share love. All are equal. There is to be no hierarchy.

**Luke 10:38-42 NLT “As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what Jesus taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.” But the Lord said to her, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”**

Mary was struggling with distraction, anxiety, and worry. Jesus came to make each of us whole and our joy complete. Jesus invites us to learn the unforced rhythms of grace. In the case the rhythm of providing gracious hospitality and learning to love.

When we are anxious our tendency is to default back to the way our parents lived and the dominant norms of culture. In the midst of Jesus modeling that Mary is equal to men, able to be a student, teacher, spiritual leader and pastor, Martha reverts to sexism, asking a man to tell a woman what to do and telling a woman to do housework. There were 12 male disciples that were able to do the housework.

Imagine the tone, nonverbal, and physical communication of Martha. I picture it something like this: (*stumping feet, big dramatic sigh, hands on hips*) “Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.” (*eye roll*) Jesus is most concerned with Martha's contempt for her sister. God is reconciling siblings, families, and all people into joyous harmony.

Replacing contempt with love is critical today. I highly recommend Arthur Brooks book, *Love Your Enemies*. Brooks explains how our pandemic of contempt, especially in politics, is devastating us. All of us are partly responsible for our current stench of contempt.

There are volumes of research that explain the destruction of contempt. John Gottman can spend one hour with a couple then predict with 94% accuracy if they will get a divorce. A couple can be different, have completely different views and even get angry and fight and still be a loving couple. Contempt is what tears a couple apart and destroys marriage. Indicators of contempt are harsh sarcasm, sneering, hostile humor and worst of all eye-rolling. Contempt is any speech or nonverbals that communicate you, or your perspective, is of less value than mine.

Gottman says, “There’s been a denigration of respect in the dialogue in this country. It’s become us versus them. We see Republicans thinking they’re better than Democrats, Democrats thinking they’re better than Republicans, people from the coast thinking they’re better than people inland and vice a versa. It goes on and on. This us verses them is toxic, harmful destroying our understanding and compassion.”

Contempt starts when a person thinks they, or their idea, is better than another person, or their idea. Picture the politician that you disagree with the most. Do you think your ideas are better than theirs? Do you think you are a better person than them? If yes to either question, then you are struggling with contempt and need to purge yourself of that contempt.

We are called to get along with each other, to unite in unity, but not uniformity. It is good that we all have different ideas, perspective, views, approaches, solutions. We should not try to be like anyone else. We should wholeheartedly advocate for our solutions, robustly debate, vote, protest and even have angry fights, like a healthy marriage. The line must be drawn before contempt.

The 2016 election was full of contempt, eye-rolling, sarcasm and sneering derision. It is difficult to work with someone when there is contempt. In the past, Republicans and Democrats in Washington would fiercely fight during the day and often have dinner together in the evening having compassion for each other.

Contempt is never morally justifiable. People on the other side of the issue are advocating for what they think is the most loving way. A recent poll indicates that a sixth of us have stopped talking to a family member or close friend because of the 2016 election. People have ended close relationships, an important source of happiness because of politics. We need to reconcile these relationships. We cannot expect our elected officials to get along if we are failing to be in loving relationship with family and friends with different politics. Thomas Jefferson said, “a difference in politics should never be permitted to disturb friendships.” Jesus was quick and clear with Martha to stop the contempt for her sister.

Contempt is literally killing us, diminishing our intelligence, hampering our ability to solve challenges and making us depressed. In Johann Hari’s book *Lost Connections*, he explains and backs it up with research, that a component of the skyrocketing amount of depression today is contempt. Our contempt is severing our connections with others, connections with meaningful work, connections with respect and connections for a hopeful future. When one loses connections, they become depressed. Depression has three causes biological, psychological, and social. Contempt is a major factor in psychological and social depression. Depression is our body’s way of screaming something is wrong. One of the things that is wrong is our culture of contempt, therefore, we, are all responsible for those who struggle with depression. Ironically, the depressed may be healthier, for they are the ones who are screaming for help, to end contempt, to reestablish our connections. Contempt hampers our immune system making us physically sick. Contempt damages self-esteem, alters behavior, and impairs cognitive processing. Contempt increases jealousy, sadness, and insomnia. Contempt decreases performance and makes intellectual tasks difficult. Contempt causes us to be less logically competent. Contempt fuels the myth that we constantly need to choose between two extreme choices one right and one wrong. There is a vast array of right choices that are different for different people. We can choose “both and” instead of “either or”. Contempt increases anxiety, worry, and distraction. Jesus described Martha’s contempt, “you are worried and upset”. These aspects of contempt sprung from her belief that her way was better.

Contempt harms both the person being treated poorly and the contemptuous person. Contempt causes stress and the hormones cortisol and adrenaline to be released. Gottman points out that couples who have contempt for each other die 20 years earlier on average. Contempt is driving us apart, making us miserable, and holding us hostage.

Today contempt is fueled by troll farms and bots. A lot of the content that ignites contempt is not even coming from real people. A lot of contempt is being generated by exaggerations, half-truths, fictitious stories and lies. We can become addicted to contempt, to the sudden surge of hormones that contempt releases in us. One deepens their addiction when they continually choose to view a news outlet, social media site, or any person who treats others with contempt. One purifies their contempt drug when they filter out different opinions. A great deal of money is made by supplying outrage media, products, and services to feed our contempt addiction. We get hooked when a source tells us what we want to hear. We get hooked more as gross caricatures are told of the other side. We are addicted when we feel justified in our side's beliefs as we affirm our worst assumptions about those on the other side of the issue. We are completely addicted when we stoop to name calling the other side short sighted, foolish, stupid or evil. We are completely addicted to contempt when we view another to be of less worth than us, that their ideas are of less worth than our ideas. Fear sells.

The good news is contempt is no match for love. A cycle of contempt can easily be broken with a few words of respect and compassion.

Gottman says there are four things we can do to overcome contempt: First, "focus on other people's distress, and focus on it empathetically. When others are upset listen to them respectfully. Try to understand their point of view before offering your own. Never listen only to rebut.

Second, in your interactions with others, particularly in areas of disagreement, adopt the "five-to-one rule". Offer five positive comments before every criticism. On social media, that means five positive messages for every one others might see as negative.

Third, no contempt is ever justified even if in the heat of the moment you think someone deserves it. Contempt is always bad for you and the other person. Contempt will never convince anyone that they are wrong.

Fourth, go where people disagree with you and learn from them. That means making new friends and seeking out opinions you know you don't agree with. How to act when you get there see points one through three."

In response to how to end our contempt the Dalai Lama gave a shorter answer that sums up Gottman's four rules, "practice warm heartedness". The last two hundred pages of Brooks book *Love Your Enemies* explains how each of us as an individual, and we as a country, can overcome contempt.

Love always overcomes contempt and it often only takes a small gesture of love by one person to break the cycle of contempt. Brooks received an email from a reader who hated his book and let him know in vivid terms. At first, he thought he had three options: ignore, insult, or destroy. Instead he tried another option. He reread the email and did not respond until he had time to let go of the pain it caused him. Then he realized, he read my book, he wrote to me, he is engaged. He took the time to read the entire book and point out what was wrong with all of it. Brooks wrote back, "I realize you really hate my book. I appreciate your time and attention to every detail." Fifteen minutes later Brooks received an email back. He was expecting another attack. Instead the complainer was grateful that his email was read. He offered to buy him dinner to discuss the book. Brooks was shocked from enemy to friend in two emails. Did he like his book? Of course not. Did they agree? No. He simply learned to like him, because he took the time to read his email and was nice in the way he responded.

Remember unity does not mean agreement. Diversity makes us strong and reveals lasting solutions. The right wing and left wing are part of the same bird. Each wing needs the other to fly. Each of us has a duty to advocate for our views and be kind, fair, friendly, and compassionate to all. Kindness and warm-heartedness are the anti-venom for contempt.

When you are treated with contempt, view it as an opportunity. Conquer anger through gentleness, unkindness through kindness, greed through generosity, and falsehood by truth. When you are treated with contempt, your role is to change your heart. We cannot control others. We can control our reactions. When we choose love, we break the cycle of contempt.

When you feel you are attacked on social media, respond with warm-heartedness. Overhear someone make a snide remark about people who vote like you, respond with kindness. Feel the urge to say something demeaning about people who disagree with you, take a breath, show love, and debate the issue, not the person. Next time you are with a group of people who agree with you the moment anyone starts treating the other side with contempt, express your compassion for the other side. Do your best to explain the perspective of the people

your group disagrees with, then explore how both sides can thrive together. Don't feel it, then fake it until you start to feel it.

Another contempt dispersing tool is joy meditation. When you perceive contempt in yourself. Close your eyes. Picture yourself at a joyful time. Relive the goodness that was filling you with joy. Let joy flow through you. Now do the same for someone you love. Picture something wonderful happening for them. Feel their joy and let that joy flow through you. Now it gets hard. Picture that politician that you disagree with. Imagine something good happening for them. Imagine them savoring joy. Let that joy flow through you.

Recently there have been some astounding breakthroughs when protestors gave opposing protestors a few minutes to present their perspective. Did they agree with each other, absolutely not. More importantly relationships were made, people were valued and respected, love was shared, then true debate happened even though throughout it all they passionately disagreed.

Jesus warns, **Mark 3:24-25 NRSV “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.”** The psalmist sings **Psalms 133 NLT “How wonderful and pleasant it is when people live together in harmony!**

You and I can transform our current pandemic of contempt with compassionate love. Amen