



10.26.25...Whom Will You Love? | Luke 6:27-36

I didn't grow up in a Christian home. But my mom still made sure my brothers and I learned a few important lessons about kindness and respect.

I have my mom and *Little House on the Prairie*, for teaching me how to treat others.

And even though we learned some lessons on respect — we didn't practice them much with each other. We could turn a game of Monopoly into a full-on civil war.

Siblings!

One of those lessons, hopefully very familiar to us, was the "Golden Rule" — **Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.** I think my mom repeated it often. I had it memorized, in the King James Version no less.

Did you grow up with the "Golden Rule"?

Is it still a thing? Is it still being taught and passed on?

So, I didn't realize how *biblical* that rule was until this past week. When I saw it right there in black and white, staring up at me from Luke 6:31, "**Do to others as you would have them do to you.**"

The very words of Jesus.

Huh. Jesus said that?

I thought it was just a folksy saying like, "**A stitch in time saves nine!**"

The Golden Rule — it's simple, memorable, maybe even nostalgic. It reminds us of simpler times, when a promise meant something, and when people treated one another with decency and respect.

But Jesus didn't give it to us just as a nice saying. He gave it to us as a way of life that can change the world.

Let's make it practical for a second. Let's say you love a good hot cup of coffee in the morning, but your spouse can't stand coffee and only drinks orange juice.

The Golden Rule doesn't mean you make them coffee just because *you* like coffee. It means you pour them a cold glass of orange juice — because if you were them, *that's* what you'd want.

It's not about doing what *you* like; it's about imagining what *they* need and want. Empathy. That's the heart of the rule — and the heart of Jesus.

We call it the “Golden Rule,” though the Bible never uses that phrase. One theory says a Roman emperor named Alexander Severus loved it so much he had it written in gold on his palace walls.

Regardless of where the name came from, the moral has stuck even centuries later — even by people who've never opened a Bible.

But if we listen closely, two things become apparent about this Golden Rule.

One, Jesus didn't mean for it to be quaint or nostalgic. Jesus meant it to be revolutionary, turning our ideas of love, fairness, and justice completely upside down.

And two, as much as the rule sounds simple, every honest follower of Jesus knows, it's anything but easy.

We live in a world torn apart by conflict and cruelty—between nations, within communities, even inside families and churches. So, we might ask: if everyone knows the Golden Rule, why is the world still so broken?

Because understanding it is easy. Living it day in and day out—that's the hard part.

Too often, we reduce it to something transactional: *If I do good to you, then you should do good to me.* It's what makes the world go round.

But Jesus makes it clear—this is not a trade. It's not reciprocity. Its grace extended to the undeserving.

**“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.”** Jesus explains.

Love that expects something in return is not the kind of love Jesus is talking about. The love of God is unconditional, self-giving, sacrificial—Jesus is calling us to a higher standard.

That brings us to Jesus' haunting and final question for us in this sermon series — implied in every line of our text: *Whom will you love?*

If we're honest, these are some of the hardest words Jesus ever spoke.

He isn't talking about loving people when there are polite disagreements or mild irritations. He's talking about loving the people who have hurt you — who've betrayed you, insulted you, taken from you, and opposed you.

Jesus then goes on to illustrate his teaching with three vivid images: turning the other cheek, giving away your shirt, and walking the extra mile.

And I learned this week — I didn't understand Jesus' examples at all. I thought they were about being weak or passive. But that's not what they mean.

They are about *courageous nonviolence*, about responding to evil without becoming evil, which is truly loving.

Let's start with verse 29 **turning the other cheek**.

In Jesus' time, a slap in the face wasn't meant to start a fight — it was meant as an insult. A backhanded blow only with the right hand, never with the left, was meant to humiliate someone considered inferior — a master to a slave, a Roman to a Jew.

Jesus says, "***If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.***"

At first, that sounds like eating abuse — but it's not. It's *defiance without violence*.

In Matthew 5:39, almost the same exact teaching, Jesus says, "***If anyone slaps you on the RIGHT cheek, turn to them the other.***"

Turning to them your left cheek, the physical mechanics of it, would make a backhand impossible. It would force the aggressor to strike you with their right fist — but fists were used only for equals.

So, by turning the left cheek, you were saying: *You may try to shame me, but I refuse to see myself as less than you. I am a child of God — your equal in dignity and worth.*

Jesus wasn't teaching passivity. He was teaching dignity. He was showing His followers how to reclaim their humanity in the face of injustice — to love themselves as God loves them.

Then Jesus continues in Luke, "***If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.***"

That's not about generosity, that's how we use it today. "He'd give you the shirt off his back, he's so generous. It's not about generosity; it's about exposing injustice.

In ancient Israel, the poor were often so indebted that creditors could literally take the clothes off their backs as collateral for a loan. To give up one's coat meant giving up one's last protection against the cold.

But Jesus is painting a picture for them. Imagine the scene: a poor man standing nearly naked in the street. The oppressor, the creditor, holding the poor man's cloak and shirt.

The crowd would gasp! Not at the poor man's shame, but at the cruelty of that greedy man and the broken system that brought him to this point.

By surrendering his last possession, the poor man unmasks the greed of his oppressor. His vulnerability becomes another form of non-violent protest.

It's as if he's saying, *You can strip me of everything, but you cannot strip me of my humanity. You can take my coat, but not my soul, not my worth in God's eyes.*

Again, Jesus is calling His followers to stand firm in love.

And then there's the phrase we all know, from Matthew 5 again: **"Go with them the extra mile."** We use it today to praise good service or extra effort, but the origin is much deeper.

In Roman-occupied Israel, soldiers could compel civilians to carry their equipment for one mile. It was humiliating forced labor—a daily reminder of oppression. But the law also set a limit: one mile, no more.

So, imagine the surprise when Jesus says in Matthew, **"If they force you to go one mile, go with them two."**

Why? Because at that second mile, everything changes. Now the power dynamic shifts. The soldier is no longer in control. The oppressed person has taken the initiative.

That second mile exposes the absurdity of the system and reveals the freedom of one whose dignity can't be stolen, that even self-love is stronger than hate.

Jesus' teaching here in Matthew and Luke became the spiritual foundation for the nonviolent movements of people like **Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela.**

Each of them understood that love is not weakness. It is power under control. It is courage and strength guided by compassion for self and others.

And it is still very much needed today.

So again, we ask: *Whom will you love?* Will you love only those who love you back? Only those who agree with you, look like you, think like you?

Or will you dare to love your enemies? To turn the other cheek, give your shirt, walk the extra mile – not to be taken advantage of, but to stand in your God-given dignity?

To expose evil without replicating it? To show the world what divine love looks like?

Because when we love this way, we reveal the character of the One who loved us first.

Jesus ends this teaching with these words in Luke: **“Love your enemies, do good to them... Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”**

To love like this is to live as God’s child – to reflect God’s mercy in a merciless world.

Turning the other cheek doesn’t mean tolerating abuse. Walking the extra mile doesn’t mean surrendering your worth. It means standing firm in grace. It means saying: *You cannot make me hate you. You cannot steal my compassion. I am a child of God – and I will act like one.*

For us, the Golden Rule isn’t a slogan to hang on the wall. It’s a calling to live out every day.

Because every time we love when it’s hard, every time we forgive when we could retaliate, every time we extend grace to someone who doesn’t deserve it, we are bringing resurrection life into a dying world.

When a driver lets someone merge in traffic instead of racing ahead – that’s the Golden Rule in motion.

When a teenager stands up for a classmate being mocked online – that’s the Golden Rule at work.

When a church gives their pastor a cool mug and a stack of Oreo cookies – that’s the Golden Rule alive and well at BUMC!

So, who's next for us to love?

May we go from this place, renewed in our resolve to love like Jesus is teaching us to love. Let us be ready to love boldly — until the world sees God's love, expressed through us. Amen.

**Time of Reflection:**

1. Whom am I called to love this week, even when it's hard or inconvenient?
2. In what practical ways can I live out the Golden Rule in my home, work, or community today?