

LIFE AND VALUES: RADICAL EMPATHY

Scripture used: [Psalms 113:5-9 \(NLT\)](#)

OVERVIEW

In this second sermon of a seven-part series, Pastor Hurmon reminded us to identify and state 3-4 key values to live by. Last week's message that everyone matters to God does not mean that everyone is always right. [Romans 3:23](#) tells us that we all fall short of God's glory and are in need of a Savior. Our actions have consequences ([Romans 6:23](#)). And we should not become co-dependent ([Romans 1:24](#) shows God giving us up to our idolatry and sinful desires when we are determined to reject God, although God never *gives up on us*). Although we may not always like our neighbor, God calls us to love him or her, and treat everyone with kindness and respect, which may include the pain of confronting others with truth as lovingly as possible. This is the message of the cross and the character of God: sacrifice, redemption, and love, and these character attributes are all expressed through a radical empathy that moves God to "stoop down" and be with us, coming alongside us in our lives to save us.

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Character matters.** In the words of John Maxwell, character represents who we are on the inside. It's different from reputation (improving and curating the outside). [Mark 7:20-22](#) reminds us that what's inside (if it's pride, envy, foolishness) can defile us. The opposite of these things reflect the character that God is forming in us: integrity, courage, perseverance, confidence in God, compassion, and wisdom.
- 2) **Facing challenges is an opportunity to build endurance & character and find salvation** ([Romans 5:3-5](#)). Lori Kaye, who was killed in the Poway synagogue shooting, was widely known to treat everyone with extravagant kindness. She was a close friend to one of our partners at NBCC, and the tragedy of the synagogue shooting, alongside the burning of 3 black churches in Louisiana (both done by white supremacists who considered themselves Christians) reminds us that it isn't ultimately about what we say we believe that matters, it's about whether the character of God (His love, grace, and kindness) has been formed inside of us. Lori gives us a picture of godly character. She threw herself in front of the shooter to protect her rabbi. Her daughter described her as having "radical empathy," an ability to relate to people and build bridges even across differences. This quality is what Psalm 113 describes God as having - a radical empathy that allows Him to "stoop down" and lift up the poor and needy.
- 3) **Radical empathy** is built upon knowing that everyone matters to God - no exceptions. Radical empathy is needed in families - with spouses, children, parents, siblings. It needs to be exercised like a muscle. We may not be able to care for everyone, but with radical empathy we can start by doing for one what we wish we could do for all.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - Discern your heart. What do you usually experience or feel when you encounter people who have different opinions or beliefs than you, whether in the church or outside the church? How comfortable are you building bridges with others and hearing their story and respecting their opinions, while also being able to share honestly what you believe and why?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Read and review [Psalm 113 \(NLT\)](#) together. Reflect on the character of God that is "enthroned on high" and yet also "stoops down" to come alongside and lift up the poor and needy. What aspects of God's character do we see in the Psalm, and what other aspects of God's character do we hold onto? What does it look like for these character attributes to be formed in us? What difference would it make in how we relate to others around us, our neighbors, family members, and co-workers?
- 3) **DO** - We were challenged in this message to strive to live with radical empathy this week. Ask God for open eyes to look for opportunities to be empathetic to someone around us. Take time to build a bridge, to hear a life story, to understand where someone is coming from. Perhaps give space for this kind of sharing in your Life Group. Ask God for an opportunity to demonstrate God's love to someone from a very different background or life situation than you. If God opens the door for this kind of encounter, write down how it made you feel, and share it in your Life Group next time you meet!