

*the*  
**PROVERBS 31**  
**MINISTRIES**  
*podcast*

**Biblical truth for any girl in any season.**

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**Meredith:** Hi friends. Welcome back to the Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast, where we share biblical truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Meredith Brock, and I am here with my cohost, Kaley Olson.

**Kaley:** Well hey, Meredith, it is so great to be back with you today. So before we get started, I have a question for you that I know the answer to, but our listeners need to know the answer to, so —

**Meredith:** Uh-oh, what is it?

**Kaley:** [Inaudible] or do you not have a new kitten, and what is her name?

**Meredith:** We do have a new kitten, and I thought we should name her Quarantine because she is officially our quarantine kitten. My kids wanted one so bad and we've been stuck inside, so I was, "Oh my gosh, anything that can get them to be distracted from asking me, 'Can we do one more art project, mommy? Can we watch one more show?'" So we got her and the kids decided her name is not Quarantine, her name is Turnip. And she — Turnip — came from, I don't even know, but she has proven to be a great distraction during this stay-at-home quarantine season and I'm grateful for Turnip, Kaley. I'm grateful for Turnip.

**Kaley:** I just love that her name is Turnip.

**Meredith:** I don't know where my kids came up with that, but she's has been a welcome distraction during this season. And I hope all of our friends listening to this have found their own way of coping with such an unusual season in life, right, Kaley?

**Kaley:** Yes, absolutely.

**Meredith:** Okay. Okay. Well enough about Turnip and quarantine. Everybody, we know if you've been listening to our podcast for very long at all, you've heard us talk about a gentleman named Joel Muddamalle. And Joel is really a staple on the podcast; we're so grateful to have him around, and he is such a key part of what we do here at Proverbs 31. Joel works with Lysa TerKeurst and our First 5 team to write theological content, and really serves as our sounding board for pretty much everything we send out from Proverbs 31 to ensure that it's biblically accurate, because that's really, really important to us.

Kaley: Yes.

Meredith: But, we realized that probably some of you might be new and you have no idea who Joel is. So, we have Joel here with us today and I'd love for him to help our listeners get to know him a little bit better. So, we're going to ask you a couple questions, Joel, are you ready?

Joel: I'm so ready, and Meredith I'm so proud of you. I feel like you now really have my last name down.

Meredith: I know.

Joel: I don't even have any anxiety when you're about to say it; I'm just, "She got it."

Meredith: Yes, probably for real, this might be the first time that I didn't have anxiety saying it because it is a hard name to say, Joel, okay, so I —

Joel: No joke.

Meredith: ... the encouragement, you guys have really stuck with me on this one [crosstalk]. Here is your first question.

Joel: All right.

Meredith: How long have you been on staff with Proverbs 31, and what exactly do you do, please?

Joel: Yeah, so I have been on staff for about four years, I think we're jumping into year five, which is absolutely crazy to think about. And my role, I serve as Director of Theology and Research, and so, I mean, you really did a great summary. Essentially, I get to spend most of my time doing theological research, doing some writing for First 5, some teachings like this, but really bringing oversight to the theological development. Often in our world, there are things that are happening and we want not cultural lenses by which to bring meaning to that; we really want biblical lenses to bring meaning to it. And so that's kind of what I get to do, I get to look into the scriptures and I get to work with Lysa on her book projects, and her Bible study projects, and some of the exciting things that the ministry does. And so my world is filled with theology books, names that maybe you've not heard of, sometimes original languages. And so, it's just fun, that's what I get to do.

Meredith: Awesome.

Kaley: Yes. We're so thankful for the way that you just help us stay on track, Joel.

Meredith: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kaley: Okay, I have the second question. All right, this is a fun one. What disciple do you resonate with most from the Bible?

Joel: This is so good. Hey, they didn't even tell me these questions beforehand. I think everybody needs to know this right now, okay? So I feel this weight of integrity as well, so I'm going to give you what I wish I could say. I wish I could say I resonate with Paul, because Paul's like Ivy League, he went to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, I mean, he was the Oxford guy. I want to resonate with Paul, but in all reality, you all, I really resonate with Peter. I am from Chicago, I'm from right outside of the city of Chicago. And I just, I didn't have an Ivy League education in that sense. I was just grew up and, I don't know, I can resonate with Peter. I can resonate with his struggles. I can resonate with his questions. I can honestly resonate with his failures and how they really shaped and formed him into who he became as a foundation for the church in the first century. And so, I wish I could say Paul, because Paul's the cool thing to say, but in honesty, it's Peter.

Meredith: I get that. I get that. The one with the temper, that's me.

Joel: Yeah. [Crosstalk] If I had to cut off Malchus' ear, or head, and got his ear like yeah, you should probably not do that.

Meredith: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's right up my alley. We'll just, [crosstalk] right now. Okay, so next question, Joel, are you ready? This is geek alert, friends and listeners. We're going to ask Joel the ultimate geek question, a Bible geek question, and that is, if you had to speak one of the biblical languages for an entire day, would it be Greek or Hebrew, my friend?

Joel: Oh, Greek. Greek all day. Greek all day long. And this is very practical, because Greek came so much easier to me than Hebrew.

Meredith: Okay.

Joel: Hebrew has these guttural vowels. I don't even know how to... I can't, I'm not going to even do it. I'm not going to even make a fool of myself on this podcast by trying to do a guttural sound for you. And the other thing too is for the most part, Hebrew is still being said. So when I was in Israel with Meredith, we were in Israel together.

Meredith: Yeah.

Joel: And our friend [Gila] Would look at me trying to pronounce Hebrew words and almost just snicker and laugh. And I'm, "Nah, I can't do this. I'd rather go with Koine Greek, a dead language nobody can make fun of." We can have debates about pronunciation, but nobody really knows, Homer's not going to show up or Plato's not going to show and be, "Hey. By the way, you did that wrong." So Greek all day, every day.

Meredith: Okay. That was easy enough.

Kaley: Okay. Very spiritual question here now.

Joel: Okay.

Kaley: Would you rather have dinner with Michael Jordan or C.S. Lewis?

Joel: Oh my gosh. You all, this is... This... I mean the answer is Michael Jordan — I know everybody's shocked.

Meredith: I am in shock right now.

Joel: But here's my rationale. Here's the rationale: to my knowledge, MJ has not written a plethora of books that I can steep into his mind. C.S. Lewis at least has written so much.

Meredith: Okay, okay.

Joel: I feel like I can have dinner with C.S. whenever I want. I'm going to pick up *Mere Christianity* or *Weight of Glory* or one of his unpublished letters that I've got a digital copy of. I can have coffee with C.S. this morning if I want to by reading one of those letters, but it's much more difficult with MJ. You know what I mean?

Meredith: Yeah.

Joel: It's not just as easy.

Meredith: Yes.

Joel: If you watched *The Last Dance*, you know he's a very private individual, so I [crosstalk].

Meredith: Yeah. Well, I think that was a very logical, very logical answer to that one. You did mention coffee in your answer, which is no surprise to me because I think it's a subliminal, subconscious [crosstalk] for you Joel, that you're constantly thinking about when you're going to get your next cup of coffee. So, our last and final question is, how many cups of coffee do you think you drink in one day?

Joel: Well, as we are recording right now, I have a grande in a venti cup of black coffee with steamed coconut milk. And I will go through this probably three or four times in a day. And so we're looking at many, if we just now, we bring the venti cup down to just a regular coffee cup, we're looking at many cups of coffee in a day, too... and my mom is a nurse practitioner, so she's very stressed out about my health.

Meredith: No kidding. [Crosstalk] thinking about that.

Joel: Yes. Yes. So it's not unusual for me, last night, to drink a cup of coffee as I was reading at 11 o'clock at night and —

Meredith: Oh my gosh. Wow [crosstalk]. Oh boy.

Kaley: Oh my gosh. Theological content at Proverbs 31 brought to you by, coffee. [Crosstalk] Great. Okay, lets transition a little bit and just let everyone know that I have a really cool announcement about what's going on with our First 5. We mentioned that Joel works a lot with First 5, and so I feel like this is a great time to talk about this. You all, we're about to finish the entire Bible; so five years ago, we started First 5, and we started by

studying the Bible book by book, and now we're about to finish with the book of Revelation in a study titled, *All Things New*, which I'm really excited about because I don't know if you guys are like me, whoever's listening, but the book of Revelation was the book I didn't want to turn to as a kid because it seemed scary. I have memories of what.. What's that movie series?

Joel: *Left Behind.*

Kaley: Yes.

Meredith: *Left Behind.*

Kaley: And I feel like sometimes our childhood experiences transition into adulthood and I'm, "Ooh, am I old enough to turn to this book and study it yet?" So, if you're like me and this seems daunting, I want you to join me in the First 5 app. And I want you guys to purchase an Experience Guide to walk through this study, because the app is free but the Experience Guide helps complement the study to allow you to dive deeper and process what you're learning with the app in your quiet time each morning. So, the study starts July 20th, 2020; if you're listening to this later on, we're in 2020 right now so mark your calendars now, purchase an Experience Guide and join us for this study.

Meredith: Yes. So excited about that study. I know I've definitely been intimidated by Revelation as well, so I can't wait to dive in. Well, let's get to it. A couple of weeks ago, Joel came to us with something that he had personally been studying for a while, and Kaley and I both felt, "Wow, our podcast listeners need to hear this." And so, we are really excited for him to share with you today what he's been learning, so Joel, why don't you take it away?

Joel: Yeah. Guys, one of the things that I have just been so intrigued about is just how we think about our lives. And I don't know about you, but it's often — it's days and days and days will go by and I'm just thinking about my life in the present, I'm thinking about what's on my calendar, what's maybe in the day ahead if we're really planned out. I know both you and Kaley and Meredith are, you have things booked for weeks or months maybe into the future. But one of the things that I realized that you just, literally opening up my calendar and looking back I was, "Huh, I don't often look back at my past to see what has taken place." I don't look back to really consider where have I gone through; how did I get to my present? And what does that tell me about what my future is?

And I don't know about you, but sometimes I have these memories, it's almost like a movie screen, and I begin to think about my background. And so I'm, "Huh, in seminary," I remember in seminary, walking into a church history class. And when I walked into that history class, the thoughts in my brain were, "What in the world could church history teach me that could help in my present?" I'm, "I've got ministry things. I've got scriptural things I got to deal with. I've got teaching lessons, preaching things, I've got a family I've got to take care of, I've got kids, I've got a wife. How is church history going to help me?"

And I felt like the authors, what they wrote in church history in our past where they're out of date, they're out of time, they're out of context for my life in the here and now. And what I have found today is how wrong I was, not only was I wrong about church history, but I realized how dangerous it was to neglect history in general. So you may have heard a famous quote by Winston Churchill from a speech he delivered to the House of Commons, I think it was around 1948. This is what Churchill said, he said, "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it." Now, sadly what many of us may not know is that this quote isn't original to Churchill; actually it came from a philosopher named George Santayana who lived around 1905. And Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Both Santayana and Churchill, they actually remind us that there's so much to learn from our history. And we're able to apply the good from our history and are also able to prevent repeating mistakes when we're aware of that.

One of the things that we should learn as people: How have we responded in the past? How have people before us responded in the past heroically in the midst of tragedy, in the midst of crisis, when things are absolutely outside of our control. And as I'm saying these words, I don't know where we are going to be or where you're going to be in you listening to this, but I think I can say a simple word, like the pandemic, and I think we all go to that moment in history. And so, I could say something like 9/11, and every one of us would go to a specific moment in history. I remember being in school, in class, and watching a television where the second tower gets hit. And interestingly, when I ask my kids, I've got three little boys under the age of eight and we just welcomed a little baby girl, Emilia Jane, she's four months old.

And so Meredith has Turnip who's her quarantine baby, and I've got Emmy, who's a legit, I mean, she's a quarantine baby. It's crazy. But I asked my kids, "Hey, let's talk about 9/11," and they have no idea. No clue. But when I ask my kids about the pandemic, they will absolutely remember; this will be a marked moment. And so, I wanted to think about what actually has happened in those historical moments. So when we trace history, we find evidence of a deeply rooted story that takes shape and forms us in so many different ways. And today for the followers of Jesus, that story echoes the ancient Israelites and what they experienced. It involves a journey that involves trusting God through times of celebration and revival, times of sorrow and lament in exile, in times of hope and anticipation of rescue in the midst of oppression. They experience deliverance from their plight and from their suffering all because of who God was and who He is today.

What we learn from these examples is that the people of God, you and I today, need to continually repeat a trust in God. Our reaction and response to crisis should be a reaction and response by saying, "Lord, I trust you." And because of our fallen world, we will continually be presented with challenges, hardships, and crises. And when I want to, just let's take a step into the story of the Israelites, let's just consider, what did they experience? What the Israelites longed for, they had to wait for a really long time. They were looking for the Messiah. They were looking for a conquering King who would bring rescue to all their momentary plights, and what they longed for came in fulfillment through Jesus, the son of God. Jesus on the cross does something so massively heroic, and I just want to point out now, we're in these two different stages, the Israelites are

looking forward to a moment in time. And now the people of God, we actually look back to a specific moment in time, because that moment in time changes the trajectory of history for us in our future.

What is that moment? It's the moment where Jesus submits himself to hanging on a cross. The cross was the ultimate symbol of defeat and loss in the Roman empire. Today, imagine walking around with a necklace, and having a necklace that had a symbol of lethal injection or the electric chair, right? We'd be, "Whoa, that is awkward. That is not a symbol that ... I don't think I want to be associated with that symbol." The cross at that time was that symbol; nobody in their right mind would want to be associated with the symbol. But then think about 2,000 years later, how common is it for us, even non-Christians, to have a cross as a symbol they put on a necklace or on a chain or a bracelet? They may even get it placed on them, in their homes as decoration. So, the point here is that what Jesus does, it has such a significant impact and only Jesus could have turned a symbol of total defeat into a sign of total victory.

The cross is a symbol of defeat, but it is reversed and it becomes a sign of victory, and it changes the trajectory of humanity who was once held in the grasp of sin and death. But Jesus, through His divine blood, He disarms the evil powers of sin and death, he makes it possible for all of us who repent and turn from sin and turn towards Christ to experience that exact same victory. And now I know, Meredith and Kaley, you all are, "Okay, this sounds really good, Joel, but I feel like my right now experience does not in every way reflect this victory that you're describing." Right? So Meredith, Kaley, is that fair to say?

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. It's hard to live in the ... When you hear that, that sounds really inspiring, Joel. But the reality is, is most of us right now are living in that historical pandemic moment, and people are afraid of their income, and that doesn't feel like, "Am I going to be able to get a paycheck?" That doesn't feel like victory.

Kaley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joel: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And I think what this brings to mind and to recollection, is the tension of Scripture. And here's what I think is the tension of Scripture, the tension of Scripture is that we have a hope. That word "hope" in the New Testament, it's never used of wishful thinking, not once. It has no connotation in the Greek to have any type of wishful thinking. My kids right now are hoping that they're going to get Oreo McFlurries tonight. That is wishful thinking y'all. They are not getting Oreo McFlurries tonight. Now maybe if Emmy asks, but she's four months old, so she can't ask anything, but that wishful thinking. In the gospels, in the New Testament, hope is built on an assurance of what is to come.

Meredith: Wow.

Joel: And that leaves us in this tension because now we're assured, we have this assurance of this future reality with Jesus, but we also have to face the present reality that feels so far from that. And what this is often referred to theologically is the "in-between," the "already" and the "not yet." And you and I live in the in-between of Christ's first return,

the incarnation, and then the anticipation of His final return, when He comes and rules and reigns, not as suffering servant, but as victorious King. We live in the already and the not yet. The kingdom in Luke, Jesus tells the Pharisees that're asking, "When is the kingdom going to come?" And Jesus says, "You don't have to look any further, it's here right now," right? But it's here and now in part, and not in fulfillment. We wait eagerly for the final establishment of the kingdom when Jesus comes back.

So why is that important? This means that in our present, yes, we will face the stain of sin on humanity, and the earth while we live is still in the in-between. So we're going to experience pain, suffering, trials, tribulations, all of these things are still a very real presence in our lives. But here's another important reminder: They were absolutely a reality and the expectations of the disciples of Jesus and for the ancient church in the years after Jesus rose to heaven. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but I mean I have recently, is we have the New Testament, we have Jesus, then we have the resurrection and we have Acts and then we have Paul's letters. Have you ever thought, what actually happens after the disciples die? What goes on with the church? How are they formed? What takes place? What were the realities? For me, there's this massive gap between the end of the New Testament, and it's, we have this picture of Revelation, but before that, there's just this blank spot.

And here's the good news: We actually find out a whole bunch from the ancient church fathers who write after the disciples. And so, this isn't really canon of Scripture, this isn't the same as reading Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, or Paul's epistles, it's more like reading a history biography of somebody who lived right after those days of Jesus. And in this moment, I wanted to, while we're in the middle of a pandemic, I was, "I wonder, is this the first time that humanity has experienced this?" I think everybody's, "Of course, Joel, this is not the first time." But I was really curious, how did the church historically respond when these types of things came up? And here's something spectacular I found while I was studying, one of the most spectacular realities is how Christianity exploded across the known world in the midst of, catch this, persecution, hardship, when there were plagues, pestilence and disease. So —

Meredith: Wow.

Joel: ... right after Jesus raises from the dead and He ascends into heaven, after those disciples die, the church actually goes through some of the most horrific moments in history, and they were war-torn, and included famine and pestilence and disease. And so, now we have a question: How did the church respond? Well, one of the very earliest stories in church history comes from a Bishop by the name of Dionysius. He was the Bishop of Alexandria, and he writes and comments on how horrific, how terrible things were for the people that he administered to. The people had just endured a terrible war, and on the heels of the war, around 263 A.D., a massive, severe disease and pestilence afflicted the people. And it's really interesting, one of the historical accounts say that up to 5,000 people had died in the single day in Rome.

Meredith: Wow.

Kaley: Wow.



Joel:

You all, five... I can't even imagine. And this is what's really interesting, what does Dionysius say? He says, "Now, indeed everything is tears and everyone is mourning and wailings resound daily through the city because of the multitude of the dead and the dying." Things were so bad that what Dionysius compares when he sees all of this, is he sees, he's reminded of the plague in Egypt, back in the book of Exodus with the death of the firstborn. Things were so bad that it seemed there was not even a house that was not impacted by death. But in the midst of such pain, we still ask this question, how do the people of God respond? And I think they have one of two options: They can turn to their own needs, or they can live out of the love that they themselves have experienced by the cross of Jesus and the example of Christ selfless love. This is pretty amazing. Dionysius says, "Most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast each other and visited the sick fearlessly and administered to them continually, serving them in Christ."

So what Dionysius watches is that the people of God actually acted out of the selfless love. It says that some of the best brothers and sisters departed this life because of their service and love for others, he's really referring to doctors and those that were in the medical profession. That while everybody else had just ran away, they had stayed back to take care of the poor, take care of the sick. But then Dionysius observed something different about people who were not captivated by the love of God; this is what he says. He says that, "Some deserted those who began to be sick and fled from their dearest friends, and they cast them out into the streets when they were half dead and left the dead like refuse unburied." And so we have this, such an interesting story, of a choice of response. But then behind the response is this question of, what motivates us to respond in this manner? And because the people of God had been so deeply impacted by the love of God, they responded in love to their neighbor.

In the midst of this tragedy, the church grew and flourished. Why? How is it possible for the church to experience this type of exponential growth and vibrance when everything seems to be falling in shambles? Because the church serves as a signpost and a symbol of a future hope that is tangibly present today when we unite our love to Christ. Only in Christ can we find true joy and happiness and peace when everything seems to be in chaos. It's Christ and His presence alone that gives us calm in the storm, even if the storm itself is not calmed. This is a compelling, real story for a world that is desperate to experience this kind of lasting and true peace. And now, some of you all are, "Great Joel, this Dionysius guy, he seems like he's awesome. But is this a one-off? Is this only one time in human history?"

Well, let me just give you a couple really quick examples. The plague in the 1500s, John Calvin responded to this crisis by saying, "If the believer should be afflicted by illness, he must not be so stung by the severity of his hardship that he erupts in impatience." And I feel this right now, this is mine [crosstalk], but, "I want to erupt in impatience." Okay Calvin, I'm listening to you if his hardship, if he erupts in impatience and demands from God an explanation —

Meredith:

Oh boy.

Joel: ... can anybody say, [crosstalk]. Go again, thank you for speaking up for the everyday person right now, right?

Meredith: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Joel: But then Calvin is about to do what our friend, Lysa TerKeurst calls a "Jesus juke." Then he does this —

Meredith: Oh boy.

Joel: ... he's says, "Rather he must, considering the justice and gentleness of God's discipline, recall himself to patience."

Meredith: Wow. Wow.

Joel: And I'm, "Okay, wow. There is a discipline of patience that the Lord desires from us, even in times of crisis." Another example, World War I, and we talked about C.S. Lewis earlier, and this is why I felt so good about my answer because I've done a lot of research on C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis fought in World War I and he was injured in that fight, and so he wasn't able to continue fighting, and he wanted to continue to serve by turning his attention to theology and writing. The church today benefits from the experiences of Lewis during the great World Wars and we have books like, *Mere Christianity*, you all catch this, that has sold over 200 million copies.

Meredith: Wow.

Joel: What in the world? I think, it said 2 million copies.

Meredith: Yeah [inaudible], that's a lot, that's 200 million copies.

Kaley: 200 —

Joel: Is it 200 —

Kaley: 200 million copies.

Joel: Okay. So I mean, I questioned myself on that. I'm not going to math, so I thought maybe I got that wrong. No, 200, that's insane. Here's another example. World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he remains in Germany during World War II and he fights against the Nazis the best that he could. Catch this: In 1939, he has an opportunity to leave war-torn Germany and go and teach in New York at Union Theological Seminary. He actually gets on a boat to go and to take up the position and to leave, and he lands in New York, and then he's struck with a conflict where he's, "You know what? No. There are people back in Germany that need the gospel,;they need to learn." And so he gets on the very last commercial passenger ship to cross back across the Atlantic, and from 1935 to 1940, Bonhoeffer taught an underground seminary. Eventually, Bonhoeffer is caught by Hitler

after a failed attempt to overthrow him in 1944. Catch this: He was hung in 1945, it was actually two weeks before the war ends.

Bonhoeffer was so convicted of his responsibility to act on behalf of those that were being murdered, he said, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." It was so important to him that Christians act as agents of Christ to the lost and to the broken. We have gone through so many of these examples, and here's one of the things that we find: When the church, the family of God, acts and lives out the gospel in the midst of all of this chaos, we provide proof and evidence of the surpassing peace and stability that only the gospel of Jesus can establish in the hearts of mankind. And so today —

Meredith: Joel, say that again, friend, because I think our friends, they need to hear that because it's true. Because in the midst of a global pandemic or in the midst of an angry fight at Thanksgiving dinner, let this soak in, friends. Say it again Joel.

Joel: Yeah. So when the church, the family of God, acts and lives out the gospel in the midst of the chaos, we provide proof and evidence of the surpassing peace and stability that only the gospel of Jesus can establish in the hearts of mankind. And what we have found, Meredith and Kaley, and for all of our friends listening in, that, if I could summarize this entire teaching thus far, it's so simple. The church has a long history of being the stable center for humanity and society in the midst of crisis and hardship. And this is what our world is looking to, and I just want to turn to James 3:17, and just give us a couple very practical things that you and I can do right now. Because you're thinking, "This is great, Joel, but I may not be a John Calvin and may not be a Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this is Dionysius. I'm definitely not a Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt. This seems far off."

But here's what James says, and I love the book of James because James gives meaning, flesh works application, to all of Paul's lofty theology. And so, in James 3:17, he says, "Hey, there's two different types of wisdom. There's a wisdom from beneath, an earthly wisdom that's going to ultimately cause destruction in our hearts. But there's a wisdom from above, a godly wisdom." And as people who are citizens of an above type of kingdom, we should actually be a recipient of this above wisdom and enact it, and here's what he says. He says, "One, we should be lovers of peace." This isn't a self individualistic reality, it's not about being a tranquil person at rest, just me, myself and I. It actually has larger connotations of the Hebrew word, *Shalom*. It's a word that describes God's desire and design for the relationship of humanity with God, self and others, and the world at large. And so here on earth, we're supposed to be lovers of peace. If we're lovers of peace, we're a person who works out God's design and His desire for *Shalom* to be present within our world.

The second thing that James says is that we're to live and act in gentleness. I was doing some study, the original Greek word has overtones of goodness, courtesy, being benevolent, and mild and meek. Now listen so carefully: To be meek is not to be weak; rather it is to live and exercise restraint in light of the strength that God has given us. It's a bridled power, and this is exactly what Jesus models to us in His temptations in the wilderness.

Number three, James tells, we're to be teachable. This one's hard for me because sometimes, I'm going to be honest, I'm going to put myself out there, I feel like I kind of have it. I kind of know it. And what James says is, "No. Actually there's a wisdom in knowing when to hear and when to learn." This phrase, to be teachable, could best be translated by, willing to yield or willing to conform, and this means that as Christians, we're willing to learn and to be taught. I think in today's context, this means we're considerate and respectful of the authority that God has placed over us. Even though we may not want to do some of the things that are asked of us, we do them because we trust the God has placed them in leadership, this is all throughout the book of Romans, for a purpose and for a reason. And so, we actually teach the world what it means to be a teachable person when we honor those in leadership.

Number four, we're merciful. Man, we've received such a great mercy from Jesus that we should be the very first ones to extend and overflow with mercy to others. And then number five, the last one, this is huge. We're supposed to be impartial. And James teaches us that being a Christian and being impartial, it means that we don't show partiality. And when we do, it's actually incompatible with our true nature in Christ. What does it mean to live with partiality? It often shows up when we gauge our decisions by asking ourselves, "What's in it for me?" I know we don't want to say this often, but honestly I think it all the time when I'm making a decision. I'm, "Huh, what's in it for me?" Well, that's actually showing partiality because I'm actually going to gauge my decision, my response, my actions, my words, and my thoughts based off of what's best for me, not necessarily what's best for my neighbor, and Jesus was not partial with us.

Jesus on the cross showed an impartiality where the good news, salvation, is available for all of humanity. It is not exclusive to one person or one type of people; it is a free gift given to all we just have to respond to that goodness. And so ultimately, when we live these principles out in the midst of chaos and crisis, we're actually joining the ancient story of the people of God who had been formed by selfless love for Jesus. In the same way that believers and 263 A.D. represented Christ in the midst of their crisis, we have an opportunity to do the same. And so friends, when we live and when we act with godly wisdom, we become a people who cultivate a culture of peace in a world that is desperate to experience lasting peace. So let's practice this peace, let's practice gentleness, let's be teachable, let's have mercy, and let's be impartial today. What incredible opportunity to point people to King Jesus.

Meredith: Wow, Joel. So much. I'm going to have to go back and listen to this one again, because there is just so much to learn from it, from just even looking at the church history and being able to apply it to our moment right here today in the midst of a pandemic, or to be quite honest, in the midst of any chaos, in the midst of any confusion that we might be facing. Maybe you're facing the fact that you have a loved one that's sick or facing some relationship strife, that is chaos. And we are given the opportunity to do exactly what you said. I can't help but think when you were talking about the practicing peace and gentleness, being teachable, merciful, and impartial, the first thing that came to mind was, "Oh my gosh, that's the fruit of the spirit."

Joel: Yeah.

Meredith: That's what —

Joel: So good.

Meredith: ... that's evidence that I have spent time with Jesus. I have allowed the Holy spirit to permeate my life so that when I am faced with chaos and when I am faced with crisis, because we will be faced with that —

Kaley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Meredith: ... I am able to tap into a place of peace, a place of selflessness, of gentleness, of self-control, that I wouldn't have access to if I didn't have the Holy Spirit living and breathing in me. So thank you for these reminders today. Thank you for reminding me that this is not the first time that something like this has happened in history, and to be able to look back and see God's faithfulness through the body of Christ during that time and that we're called to do the same thing. What a powerful word. Thank you so much.

Joel: You bet.

Kaley: Yes. Absolutely, Joel. I kept thinking as you were wrapping up your teaching to those five points that you listed out, would be so good to pray through. Like, God, where am I not being merciful? God, how can you help me be more impartial in this area? Because it just felt so practical, because all of us make up the big capital Church —

Meredith: That's right.

Kaley: ... as the body of Christ to the world. And I feel like whenever we all work on those things, we all make the church better for people who see it from the outside. So, Joel, thank you so much for taking time out of your crazy day, I know you have a lot on your plate to be on the show with us. I always feel smarter and definitely more challenged after hearing you teach, so thank you.

Joel: It was an honor.

Meredith: That's right, me too. That's right. Well, I want to remind our friends and our listeners that if you haven't downloaded the First 5 app, we really want to encourage you to do that. Joel is a major contributor there in the theology and the content that is presented there. And if you're ready to dig into Scripture like you have before, or maybe for the first time, come and join us, like we said, at the beginning of this podcast. We're about to jump into Revelation, we're calling that study, *All Things New*, because that's what happens there, and it is an amazing book to study. So come join us, download the First 5 app and jump right in with us. All right, folks, I think that is about all we can handle for today, right? My brain is full. So thank you everyone for joining us, we pray that today's episode really would help you know the truth of God's Word and live that truth out, because we know that when you do, it really will change everything.