

Introduction

In the United States today, most of the news we consume is national and most of our conversations about the forces that shape our lives are conversations with people who live hundreds or even thousands of miles away. This makes it easy to think about “big picture” problems—and easy to assume that there isn’t much we can do to fix things that are broken.

God is the same today as he was in the beginning and will be at the end, and his salvation is for all people in all places at all times, but scripture shows us that he works that salvation in ways that are always intensely local and intensely specific.

This theme of the infinite, divine God manifesting his character in specific communities at specific times was central to Jesus’ life, ministry and redemptive work. Looking to scripture to see how this theme shaped Jesus’ mission can help us better understand how to live as his ambassadors now.

For the next week, set aside fifteen minutes each day to go through the day’s scripture passage and reading, consider the day’s reflection questions, and then use the day’s prayer prompt as an entry point to talking with God about how this passage of scripture can help you live more faithfully. As you do this, be sure to take notes of any insights, questions, goals and things to do that occur to you. In the weeks ahead, those notes can be used to inform your prayers, shape your conversations with other Christians, and begin a to-do list for putting these principles into practice.

If you are already going through a Bible reading plan or have some other guide you are using to give order to your devotional life, you do not have to stop using that to use this guide! God’s word nourishes us, but it’s more than okay to use this guide as a dietary supplement rather than as your primary rations. Whatever your history and relationship with the Bible, this guide should be challenging and encouraging, and help you understand our King’s life in new ways.

Day Three

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?”

Luke 13:1-4

Understanding Our Neighbors

When we read Jesus' warnings about not being like the Pharisees, or when we read about his debates with the Sadducees, it's easy to imagine his opponents as archetypes—broadly written characters designed to make a particular point or help get a story going. But for the Jews living under Roman rule in the first century CE, the Pharisees and Sadducees weren't abstract concepts or literary tropes. Instead, the Pharisees and Sadducees were real people with real influence in the lives of their neighbors.

Jesus' conversations in scripture are shot through with discussion about the real events happening in peoples' lives and communities. In this passage, Jesus discusses two current events—a recent human rights abuse and a recent tragic disaster. He doesn't consider answering these kinds of questions or having conversations about the authority figures in his followers' lives to be something extraneous from his mission.

Following Jesus means following someone who was able to talk with his neighbors about the things that were already on their minds, and who understood his neighbors so well that he could connect their concerns to something bigger without them feeling like he was changing the subject.

Reflect

What does it mean to have “Christian conversations” with people who don't share your faith? Why is it easier to just tell someone what you believe than it is to listen to their concerns and respond with wisdom to the things that are troubling them? What would make it easier for you to respond with wisdom?

Pray

Admit to God that we don't care about the people around us as much as he does, and we aren't as concerned with the things that affect their lives as he is. Thank him for hearing our cries, even when they seem foolish, and for being present in our questions and needs. Ask him to show you ways that you can listen better, care more deeply and serve more effectively in the lives of the people around you.