



Like you, I've watched the demonstrations and riots unfold this week. I'm saddened by the violence and destruction, but I'm also saddened by the systems of oppression that I have been ignorant of, or worse, overlooked.

Think about some of the images you've seen this week. Think about some of the stories you've heard this week. What thoughts come to mind?

As I've been processing my thoughts, I am reminded that Yahweh – the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness... -- has a heart for those who suffer, and those who are overlooked. The Spirit put this passage from Jesus' sermon on the mount on my heart. As you read it, I want you think about these words considering current events.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

1. Describe one of the images you saw this week of someone you think exemplifies being "poor in spirit".

2. Think of the grieving mothers of young black and brown men who have been beaten, lynched, or murdered primarily because of the color of their skin. We grieve the loss of a loved one, but sometimes we also grieve the sorrows and sins of others. What thoughts is God putting on your heart?

3. People of color have been exploited and oppressed in our country for hundreds of years. Forced into submission, their sweat and toil created the wealth and fine estates of many proud plantation owners. Following their Emancipation by President Lincoln, laws and

practices continued excluding and suppressing people of color from opportunity while allowing white Americans to succeed. Describe a time in your life when you chose pride over humility in dealing with another person.

4. "God blesses those who hunger & thirst for righteousness", as I said last week, we who are the predominantly white church, must awaken from our slumber and be a voice for what is right. The Lord says, through the prophet Isaiah, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6, NIV). Pray asking for the Spirit to awaken a hunger and thirst for righteousness in you.

5. When we show compassion toward others, forgiving others of their offenses, we are demonstrating God's mercy towards us. Consider a time when you chose to judge another without giving them an opportunity to explain their actions. How could that situation have been different if you had showed mercy instead?

6. In this passage, being "pure in heart", is not so much about *moral purity* as singleness of purpose in life. It's about living a life with the purpose of *loving God* and *loving others* above everything else. How can you express your love for God by showing love towards a person of a different skin color this week?

7. God blesses those who bring peace into hostile situations. This often means keeping channels of communication open and listening to all sides before making a judgement. Do you deal with anger and disagreement quickly instead of allowing them to fester? Do you encourage others to work-out their differences without hurting one another?

8. We have witnessed hundreds, thousands of people who are praying and peacefully protesting for justice and for heavy yokes to be broken. I believe they are doing God's

work (Isaiah 58:6). Have you come to a place where you are “pure in heart” (singleness of purpose) and are willing to suffer if needed? Are you willing to “take the heat” and stand alone for what is right?

Pray, asking God to reveal your own racial biases. Ask Him to help you love your neighbor regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or cultural background.

Often in conversations we are thinking about how we’ll respond to what the other has said. Choose a neighbor who comes from a different background than you. Express your love by asking what they think about current events and actively listening to them.