

O u t l i n e

Lesson 12 - Community & Involvement: God Cares, Do I?

I. Introduction – The Greatest and Second Greatest Commandment

- A. Matthew 22:33-40 – "And a second is like it ... love your neighbor as yourself."
Deu 6:4-9
- B. Luke 10:25-29 – "He wanted to justify himself, so he asked 'Who is my neighbor?'"

II. Who is my neighbor? – Radical design of this sphere: Christ, a neighbor, the needy

- A. Story of the good Neighbor – Jesus didn't answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" but instead told us what a good neighbor is – Luke 20:29-37
- B. Who are the needy? – poor, orphans, widows, sick, prisoners, outcasts, unpopular, neglected, left out, homely, last – The needy are great in a sphere we neglect



III. Seeking the Heart of God

- A. God's heart for the needy and lowly – He saves the poor and lifts up the lowly –
Who is this God?
- B. Foundational Presuppositions - God is and He has revealed Himself to us
- C. What is it about the nature of God that causes Him to reveal Himself to us?

1. Isaiah 65:1-2 "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me: I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation that did not call on My name.. All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people. Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts,"
2. Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."
3. Matthew 11:28-29 "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
4. 2 Cor 3:18 "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

IV. "Tapeinos" – The humble heart of God

- A. John 14:4-9 tells them "Anyone who has seen me, has seen the father." – Man of steel and velvet – 2Tim 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."
- B. Psalm 35:10 - My whole being will exclaim "Who is like you, O God!"

V. Involvement – God's Involvement and Ours

- A. Seeing others as God sees them and recognizing that they have eternal significance.
Do we care enough to know what others believe?
- B. Jonah and Nineveh - Jonah running from the face of God – "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city?"
- C. Transforming Culture - "How Christianity Changed the World"

- People Transformed by Christ	- Hospitals and Health Care
- Sanctification of Human Life	- Education, Labor, Science
- Elevation of Sexual Morality	- Liberty, Justice, Slavery
- Charity and Compassion	- Art, Music, Literature
- Dignity of Women	

1. William Wilberforce –Abolished slavery through a deep sense of calling, band of like-minded brothers, and sustained public persuasion
2. We are in good company - Hebrews 11- Cloud of Witnesses

D. "What do I do?" – Get your calling from the One who made you, the One who gifted you. Continue to gaze upon the face of God, pursue Him and continually be transformed into the very image of Christ. May God's truth be a fire in your bones.

Key Terms

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Needy: The poor, orphans, widows, sick, prisoners, outcasts, unpopular, neglected, left out, homely, last, etc. See the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Story of the Good Neighbor: Often referred to as the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus reveals what a good neighbor is and how a good neighbor should act. See Luke 10:25-37.

Tapeinos: Greek for humble. The same word is used by Jesus to describe his heart as well as the many verses that call us to be humble. For example "for I am gentle and humble in heart." See Matthew 11:29, James 4:6 and Philippians 2:8.

Triclinium: A room in a Roman building used to entertain company. Hosts and guests would recline on pillows around three sides of a low square table; the fourth side of the table was left open to allow service to the table. Dining was the defining ritual in Roman domestic life, lasting from late afternoon through late at night. Typically, 9-20 guests were invited, arranged in a prescribed seating order to emphasize divisions in status.

William Wilberforce (1759-1833): An English parliamentarian and leader of the campaign against slavery.

Historical Figure: William Wilberforce

Do ideas, beliefs, and conceptions of truth have a measurable impact upon the shape of culture and society? Can an individual – with the help of co-laborers and friends – actually change the times in which he or she lives? If you doubt it, consider the example of William Wilberforce.

It's arguable that Wilberforce was one of the three or four *most* influential figures of the past two centuries. As a result of his labors, one of the most heinous evils of all human history – the "execrable villainy" of institutionalized slavery – was eradicated from the British Empire at a time when her political power and prestige were at their height, an achievement that was directly attributable to his belief in the absolute truth of the Gospel. For Wilberforce was a convinced

Christian who held that the biblical principles of selflessness, sacrifice, and love *must* be actively applied to the needs and concerns of the human community at large.

Wilberforce was born at Hull, Yorkshire, on August 4, 1759. His father, a well-to-do merchant, died when William was nine years old, and the boy was sent to live with his aunt and uncle, strong evangelical Christians and firm friends of the preachers George Whitefield and John Newton. Under their care, William quickly came to possess "a rare and pleasing character of piety." Of Newton, Wilberforce later wrote, "I revered him as a parent when I was a child."¹

His fashionable mother, alarmed to think that her son was becoming a religious "enthusiast," soon brought him back to Yorkshire, where he was quickly introduced to the social "gaieties of Hull." By the time he went off to St. John's College, Cambridge at the age of seventeen, Wilberforce had all but abandoned his earlier Christian beliefs.

While at the University, having inherited a large fortune from his uncle, Wilberforce was compelled to choose a career from among the three options most commonly allotted to young gentlemen of wealth and station: pleasure, business, or public service. He selected the last, and upon leaving Cambridge at the age of twenty stood for and won election to the House of Commons as representative for Hull in 1780. In 1784 he was reelected for Hull, and on April 6 of the same year he was elected for Yorkshire County.

Wilberforce was well suited to the life of a politician. Naturally vivacious and gregarious, he was widely regarded as one of the wittiest and most charming men in England. A regular at all the fashionable London clubs, he rapidly became an important fixture in William Pitt's Tory government. He might even have succeeded Pitt as Prime Minister had events turned out differently. But a "great change" was in the offing.

In 1784 Wilberforce took a pleasure trip to France with his mother, his sister, a female cousin, and his friend and former teacher Isaac Milner. He had no idea what he was letting himself in for by inviting Milner, a Cambridge professor and an evangelical Christian, to join the party. During the course of their travels, Wilberforce and Milner read and discussed the Greek New Testament and Philip Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. By the time they arrived back in London on February 22, 1785, Wilberforce was intellectually convinced of the truth of biblical Christianity.

Inwardly conflicted as to the practical implications of his newfound faith, he told Pitt that he intended to "withdraw from public life for a time." But the Prime Minister forcefully opposed this plan. "Surely the principles as well as the practice of Christianity are simple," he said, "and lead not to meditation only, but to action."²

Wilberforce received the same counsel from his childhood mentor, the Reverend John Newton, now vicar of St. Mary Woolnoth's church in London. "It is hoped and believed," said Newton, "that the Lord has raised you up for the good of His church and for the good of the nation."³

So Wilberforce decided to remain in politics. In time, he became convinced that God had placed before him "two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners [morals]."⁴ It is important to understand that these two aims were intimately interrelated. For Wilberforce's accomplishments in the public square were predicated on the principle that social

reform must flow from genuine spiritual fervor. He was not primarily a moralizer or a "do-gooder," but a *Christian* who believed that the well-being of a nation is directly dependent upon the sincerity with which its citizens adhere to basic biblical truths. This was the theme of his best-selling book, *A Practical View of Christianity* (1797),⁵ in which he spoke powerfully against "the fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines." "If ... a principle of true Religion should ... gain ground," he wrote, "there is no estimating the effects on public morals, and the consequent influence on our political welfare."⁶

It was in the strength of this conviction that Wilberforce, together with a group of like-minded Christian political associates – the so-called "Clapham Community" – set out to tackle the evil of slavery. At the request of nobleman Sir Charles Middleton and with the encouragement of Pitt and Grenville, he took upon himself the charge of "giving notice of a motion on the slave trade" in the House of Commons, noting his resolve to do so in a journal entry of October 28, 1787. He made his first parliamentary speech on the subject on May 12, 1789 and introduced a bill to abolish the trade in 1791. That bill went down to defeat by a vote of 163 to 88.

But Wilberforce was not to be so easily discouraged. He re-introduced his slave trade measure in Parliament the following year – and the next year, and the next. He persisted in the battle for almost twenty years, enduring storms of criticism, slander, and malicious opposition along the way. At last, after nearly two decades of unremitting toil, the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill passed the House of Lords by a vote of 41 to 20. In Commons, where the victory was won by the stunning margin of 114 to 15, Wilberforce was accorded a standing ovation for his dedicated efforts. The bill became law on March 25, 1807.

It was an incredible achievement; and yet, for Wilberforce and his associates, it was only the first step. From the beginning of the Anti-Slavery Movement they had proceeded on the assumption that their goal would not be achieved until *abolition*, the end of the slave trade, was followed by the *emancipation* of all slaves within the confines of the British Empire. The fight for this second part of their objective, which continued beyond Wilberforce's retirement from Parliament in 1825, did not reach its conclusion until July 26, 1833, when the Abolition of Slavery bill passed the House of Commons on its third reading. Three days later Wilberforce was dead.

Wilberforce would have disclaimed credit for these earthshaking accomplishments; and yet, as biographer John Pollock assures us, "the essentials of his beliefs and of his conscience formed the foundation of the British character for the next two generations at least."⁷ He was convinced that "Christianity's supreme political value is its direct hostility to selfishness."⁸ In this, he merits the emulation of those of us today who are involved in the entire scope of pro-life issues – issues which, as Senator Mark Hatfield has observed, "flow from our present-day manifestation of the 'grand malady of selfishness.'"⁹

In death, Wilberforce was survived by his wife Barbara and six children – two daughters and four sons. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, where a statue now stands to commemorate his legacy of faith and freedom.

¹ Garth Lean, *God's Politician* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard Publishing, 1988), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 38.

³ David J. Vaughan, *Statesman and Saint: The Principled Politics of William Wilberforce* (Nashville: Highland Books, 2002), 56.

⁴ From Wilberforce's Diary, 1787; cited in Vaughan, 61.

⁵ In full, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*.

⁶ William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, ed. Kevin Charles Belmonte (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 51.

⁷ Cited in Lean, 177.

⁸ Lean, Ch. 15.

⁹ Mark Hatfield, Introduction to *Real Christianity* (Regent College Publishing, 2003).