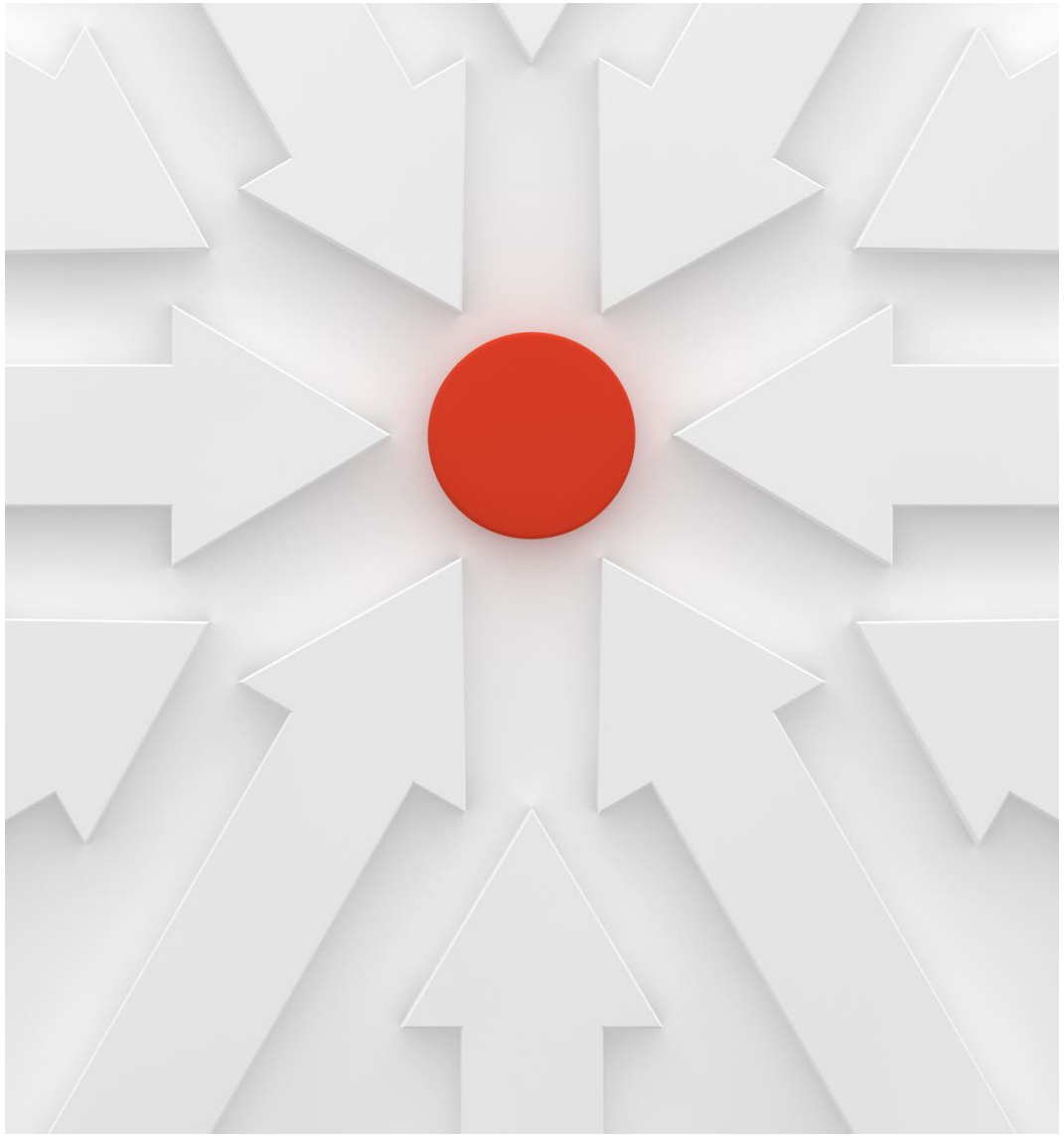
Holy Conferencing

For Communal Connection



Holy Conferencing *for* Communal Connection *a.k.a.* Christian Conferencing

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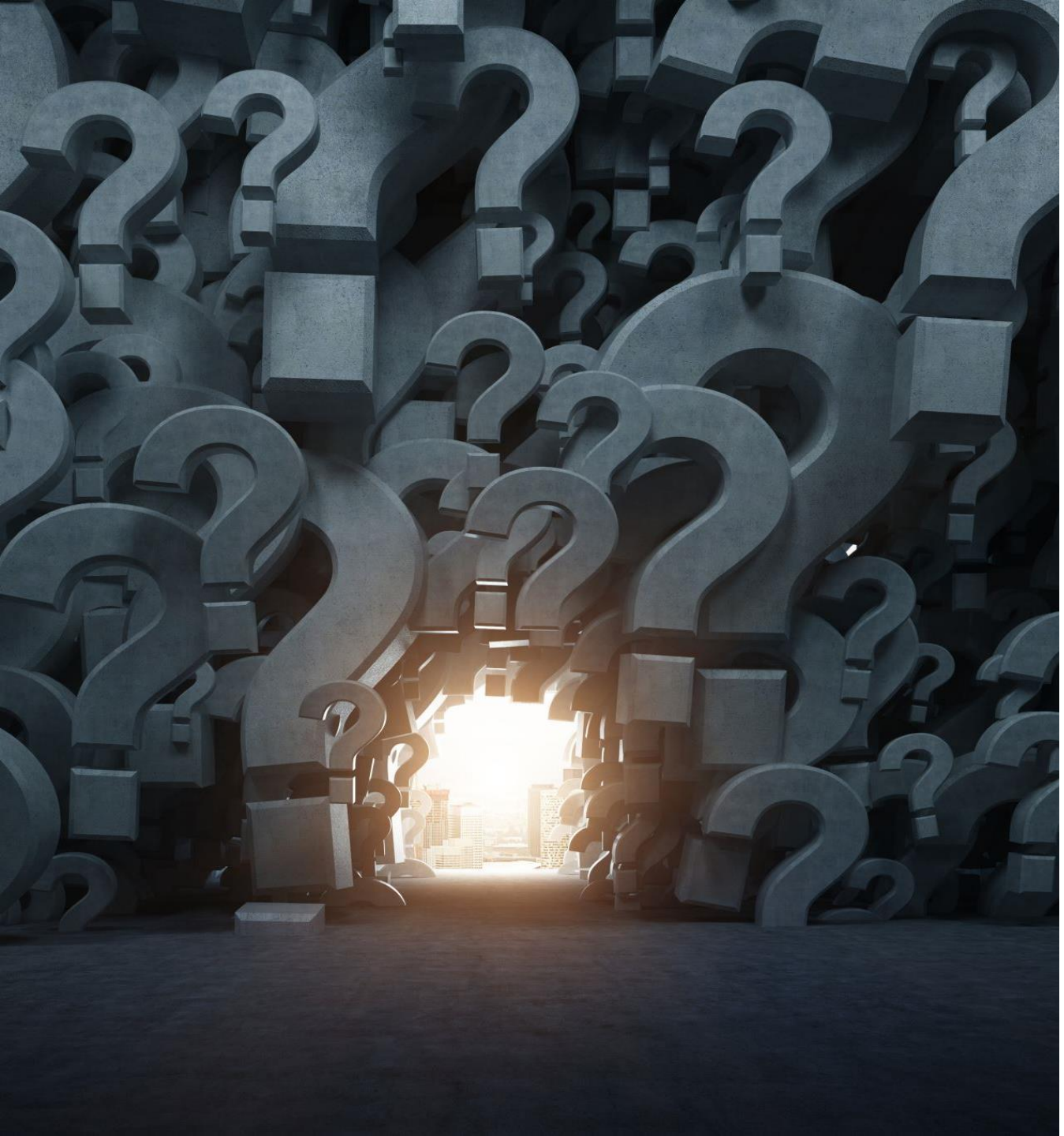

UMC Resources

https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/guidelines-for-holy-conferencing-what-god-expects-of-us

- *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*

- *Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

- *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.*

- *And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (**Colossians 3:12-16a,17 NRSV**).*

- **Guidelines for Holy Conferencing: What God Expects of Us**

- Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.

- As you patiently listen and observe the behavior of others, be open to the possibility that God can change the views of any or all parties in the discussion.

- Listen patiently before formulating responses.

- Try to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.

- Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise, dialogue may be inhibited.

- Accurately reflect the views of others when speaking. This is especially important when you disagree with a position.

- Avoid using inflammatory words, derogatory names, or an excited and angry voice.

- Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.

- Make use of facilitators and mediators.

- Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God – not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.

We believe Christians can discuss important issues without the acrimonious debate and parliamentary maneuvering that can divide a group into contending factions. We see too many examples of that in secular society.

We believe the Holy Spirit leads in all things, especially as we make decisions.

We want to avoid making decisions in a fashion that leaves some feeling like winners and others like losers.

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We can change the world through honest conversation on matters about which we are passionate.

...thanks to the participants at The Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly, sponsored by the Division on Ministries with Young People, through the Discipleship Ministries, held in January 2007 in Johannesburg, South Africa, for inspiring the framework of these guidelines. They adopted similar guidelines for Christian Conferencing at the convocation. This work is based on guidelines for "Holy Conferencing" that emerged from the United Methodist "Dialogue on Theological Diversity" in February 1998.

Eight Principles of Holy Conferencing A Study Guide for Churches and Groups

By Bishop Sally Dyck The United Methodist Church

https://mnumc-email.brtapp.com/files/eefiles/documents/holy_conferencing_study_guide_2012.pdf

"Holy conferencing" is what we call the spirit and principles that guide us to be caring in our conversations—that is what makes them holy. Based on the premise that how we talk to and about each other is as important as the decisions we make together, holy conferencing calls forth deep spiritual maturity from each of us. That is what helps us to relate to and even love one another in spite of our differences.

When we follow the guidelines or principles of holy conferencing, we discover that it is more than just being nice to each other around divisive issues. We find ourselves reaching deep into our souls as we seek to follow the gospel message of loving our neighbors and our enemies, including those who disagree with us with as much passion and conviction in their viewpoint as we have in ours.

Every Person is a Child of God

- If anyone boasts “I love God” and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both. (1 John 4:20-21, The Message)

Listen Before Speaking

- Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with— even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently. (Romans 14:1, The Message)

Strive to Understand from Another's Point of View

- We are called to imitate Christ's humility. The beautiful liturgical poem that we find in Philippians 2 reminds us that Jesus,
  - who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8, NRSV)
- This liturgical poem calls upon the Christians in the church at Philippi to imitate Christ's humility. It is evoked in a context of conflict created by special interests.
  - Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:3-5, NRSV)

Strive to Reflect Accurately the Views of Others

- The 1904 Book of Discipline, the Methodist Church's rules of organization for ministry, emphasized the importance of unity and the practices that engender unity.
  - In order to form a closer union with each other: 1. Let us be deeply convinced of the absolute necessity of it, 2. Pray earnestly for, and speak freely to, each other, 3. When we meet, let us never part without prayer, 4. Take great care not to despise each other's gifts, 5. Never speak lightly of each other, 6. Let us defend each other's character in everything as far as it is consistent with truth, 7. Labor to honor each to prefer the other before himself (The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church [Eaton and Mains, 1904], pp. 127-128).

Disagree Without Being Disagreeable

- So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. . . . Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. . . . Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us. (Eph. 4:25-27, 29; 5:1-2a, NRSV)
- John Wesley believed that being disagreeable isn't very effective if our goal is to change another person's mind! He said:
- Be not displeased if I entreat you not to beat me down in order to quicken my pace (in coming to your persuasion) . . . not to give me hard names in order to bring me into the right way. Suppose I was ever so much in the wrong, I doubt this would not set me right. Rather, it would make me run so much farther from you and so get more and more out of the way. . . . For God's sake, if it be possible to avoid it, let us not provoke one another to wrath. Let us not kindle in each other this fire of hell, much less blow it into flame . . . if we die without love, what will knowledge avail? ("Preface to Sermons on Several Occasions," §§ 9-10, in *The Works of John Wesley, Vol. I, Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler [Abingdon, 1976], p. 107)

Speak about Issues; Do Not Defame People

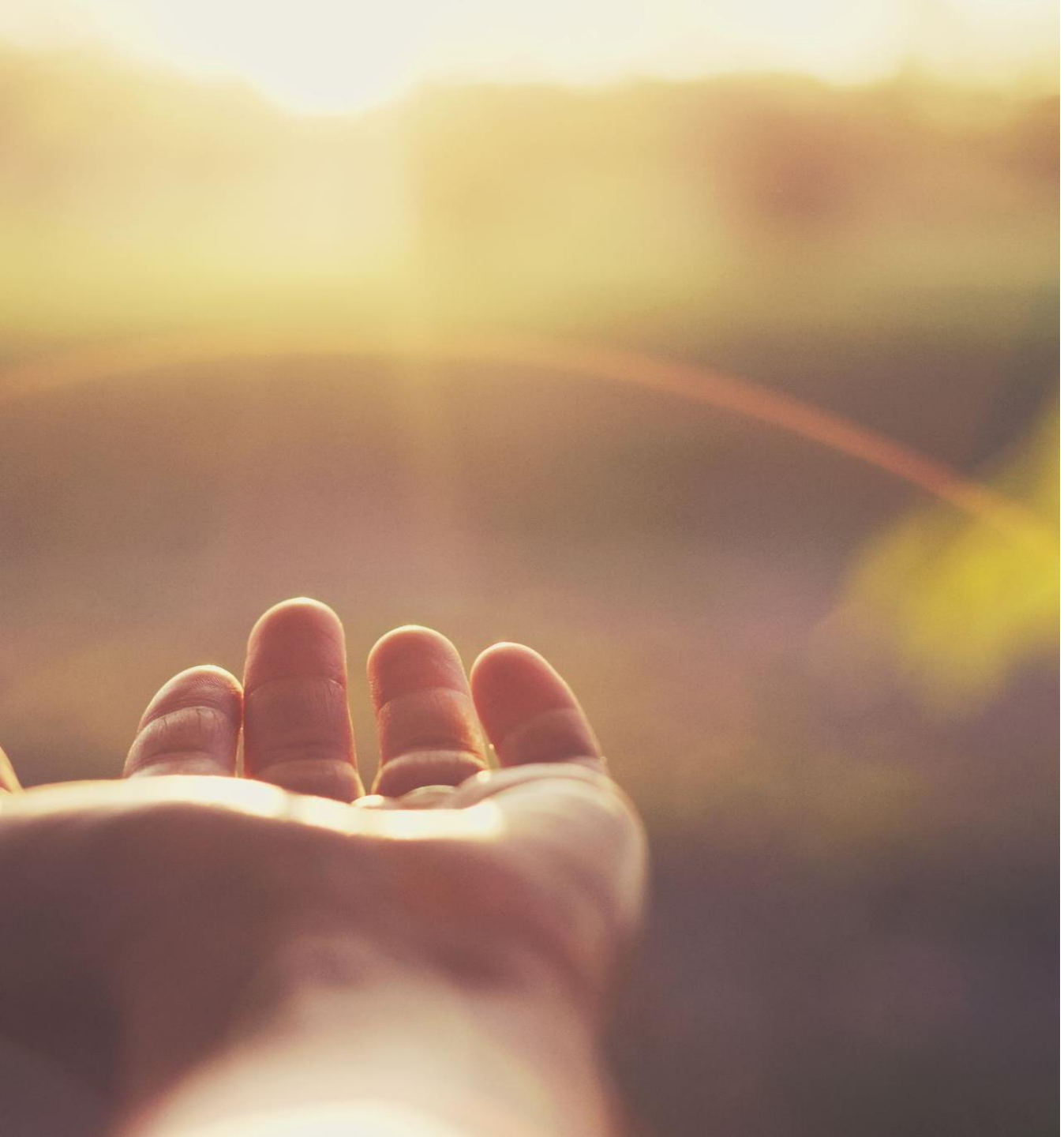
- You're familiar with the command to the ancients, "Do not murder." I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother "Idiot!" and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell "stupid" at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill. (Matthew 5:21-22, The Message)

Pray in Silence or Aloud, Before Decisions

- To those who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. (Luke 6:27-28; The Message)

Let Prayer Interrupt Your Busy-ness

- “PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.” In another denomination’s practice of holy conferencing around difficult decisions, a call to prayer was requested at certain intervals. In the midst of impassioned speeches, with long lines forming in front of microphones marked “for” and “against,” the presiding bishop called for a time of prayer and asked those in line for the “for” microphone to pray with the person opposite them in line for the “against” microphone. Joining hands, bowing heads together, praying to the same God through Christ Jesus, persons with deeply-held convictions let prayer interrupt not only their busyness, but their differences. Likewise, those at tables reached out to pray with those who disagreed with them and were seated around them.



- No wonder that John Wesley said that Christian conferencing is a means of grace, for it puts us in the position of growing in spiritual maturity. In order to confer with others who disagree with us, we need to practice our faith in ways that challenge us spiritually as well as relationally. To love God and our neighbor requires nothing less. After all, as Jesus said:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same . . . but love your enemies, do good . . . expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for [God] is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:32-33, 35-36, NRSV)

- In Matthew it says that we are to be perfect as God is perfect. To be perfect means that we seek "a more excellent way," the way of love. Through love we are made perfect in Christ.