

RIVER *Flow*

Seven Days of Devotional Practice

August 16 – 22, 2026

A TEACHER CONSECRATION SABBATH

The Good You Already Know

A Note Before You Sit

This week our children go back to school, and this coming Sabbath we lay hands on the teachers and staff we are sending into the year with them. Before we do, we sit for a week with one sentence of Jesus — small enough to carry in a pocket, large enough to carry a whole year: *do to others as you would have them do to you*.

You know it already. That is exactly the trouble. We have worn it into a rule — the Golden Rule — a thing we hold over other people and tape to the wall. But Jesus never called it that, and it was never a rule. It is a desire. He takes the deepest wish of your own heart — to be treated well, to be seen, to be loved — and makes it the whole measure of the good you owe your neighbor.

So this week we do not try harder. We pay attention to what we already long for, and we turn it outward, one person at a time. Read slowly, a few quiet minutes each morning. Come to Sabbath ready to celebrate what God is doing — in our teachers, in our children, and in you.

— *Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.*
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

Daily Devotional Guide

SUNDAY, August 16 — The Good You Already Know

“In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” — Matthew 7:12

Read: Matthew 7:7–12

Reflect: We call it the Golden Rule, but that name was pinned on it more than sixteen centuries after Jesus spoke, and he never used it. Look again at what he actually says. He hands you no list, no code, no set of rules for the year ahead. He points you in one direction — inward — and makes the measure of every good you owe your neighbor the good you already wish for yourself.

That is why this verse works on the youngest child and the oldest saint alike. You will never see inside the person beside you; you have never had access to anyone’s interior but your own. And that one place you can see, Jesus makes the bridge to every place you cannot. The good you have been looking for was never in a book. It is already in you.

Notice: Name the good you would most want done to you today. Hold it gently. We come back to it all week.

Pray: Father, you have already placed in me the good you ask of me. Open my eyes to it. Amen.

Stay: Each morning this week, take a few unhurried minutes. Name one good you most long to receive. Imagine it for one person you will see today. Then do that one thing before the day ends. Name it, imagine it, do it — and return to it every day.

MONDAY, August 17 — Your Own Wish, the Measure

“...whatever you wish that others would do to you...” — Matthew 7:12

Read: Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31

Reflect: The whole command hangs on a verb of wanting — *whatever you wish*. Jesus does not tell you what to feel or hand you a catalog of good deeds. He points to your own longing and makes it the standard. What you want done to you is not a distraction from love; it is the very knowledge of what love requires.

This is a mercy, because the hardest question in the world — what does this person actually need? — is one you can never fully answer from the outside. But you can always answer a nearer one: what would I want, if I were them? Consult that, and turn it outward. You are not guessing anymore. You are giving what you already know.

Notice: Before your next hard conversation, ask the one question you can always answer: what would I want here?

Pray: Father, when I do not know what another needs, teach me to consult the wish you gave me. Amen.

Stay: Return to the practice. Today, let your own wish to be treated well tell you what to give.

TUESDAY, August 18 — The Grace That Comes First

“...how much more will your Father... give good things to those who ask him!” — Matthew 7:11

Read: Matthew 7:7–12

Reflect: Notice the small word that opens the command: *therefore*. “In everything, therefore, do to others...” A *therefore* always reaches back to pick something up, and this one reaches back to the verses just before — ask, and it will be given; how much more will your Father give good things. The giving comes after the receiving. Grace is the ground; the good you do is the overflow.

Which means the desire itself was never yours to manufacture. The wish to be treated well, to be seen and loved, was placed in you by a God who went ahead of you and planted it in every human heart. On the mornings you feel empty, you are not asked to squeeze love out of a dry well by force. You are asked to receive that the water is already there — and to let it flow.

Notice: Notice where you have been trying to produce love by effort, when it was meant to be received first.

Pray: Father, I did not earn this desire; you gave it. Let me give from what I have received. Amen.

Stay: Return to the practice. Today, take your step from fullness, not from grit.

WEDNESDAY, August 19 — A Horizon, Not a Floor

“...do to others as you would have them do to you.” — Matthew 7:12

Read: Matthew 7:12; Leviticus 19:18

Reflect: Nearly every wise teacher before Jesus said this in the negative. Hillel: what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. The same shape runs through Tobit, through Confucius, through the early church’s own Didache — do no harm. And a negative rule is a floor: you can keep it perfectly by doing nothing at all. Restrain yourself, and you are finished.

Jesus turns it over and makes it positive, and a positive command is not a floor but a horizon. It never lets you stop, because there is always another good you could imagine and do. Heard as a rule, that is exhausting. Heard as a desire fed by grace, it is freedom — the endless, glad imagining of good for the people God has put in front of you.

Notice: Where have you settled for doing no harm, when a good was waiting to be imagined?

Pray: Father, lift my eyes from the floor to the horizon. Show me one good I would have skipped. Amen.

Stay: Return to the practice. Today, do the positive good you could have left undone.

THURSDAY, August 20 — No One Is Exempt

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” — Leviticus 19:18

Read: Matthew 7:12; Leviticus 19:18

Reflect: Most of our failures to love are a kind of special pleading — making ourselves the one case that gets excused from a standard we would otherwise hold. This command quietly closes that exit. The measure you apply to your neighbor is drawn from what you want for yourself, and to exempt yourself you would first have to stop wanting to be treated well — which is the one thing you cannot do.

The same command that leaves no one exempt also leaves no one out. *As yourself*, it says — your neighbor's wish to be treated well is no less than your own, and no greater. The child knows this. The stranger knows it. You are not above the command, handing it down; you stand inside it, on the same footing as everyone you will meet today.

Notice: Where have you made yourself the exception this week? Name it honestly.

Pray: Father, let me hold no standard for others that I quietly slip out of myself. Amen.

Stay: Return to the practice. Today, give someone the very thing you would want in their place.

FRIDAY, August 21 — The Line, Not the List

"...for this is the law and the prophets." — Matthew 7:12

Read: Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 22:37–40

Reflect: Jesus adds a line the older sayings lack: *for this is the law and the prophets*. It is not a flourish. The same phrase opened the body of his great sermon — I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets — and now it closes it, so that everything between is gathered up and summed in this one command. The Golden Rule is not one rule among many. It is the line the whole list was always driving at.

He says it again later: on love of God and neighbor hang all the law and the prophets. The whole weight of Scripture's moral vision comes to rest on a desire you already carry in your chest. You do not need to master a library to know how to treat someone this year. You need to consult one longing, and grant it.

Notice: Name the one relationship where love has hardened into a list. Return it to the line.

Pray: Father, let one desire, not a rulebook, shape how I treat the people you have given me. Amen.

Stay: Return to the practice. Today, let love be the line, not the list, with one difficult person.

SABBATH, August 22 — The Good You Already Know

“We love because he first loved us.” — 1 John 4:19

Read: Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:8–10

Reflect: Today the week comes together, and today we celebrate. We have carried one sentence through seven mornings — not a rule to try harder at, but a desire God placed in us before we could speak. This morning we consecrate our teachers and send them into the year to do the one thing this verse asks: to want for every child the good they long for themselves, and to imagine it into being.

Remember what the whole week rests on. This love is fruit, not force — the outflow of a heart already at rest in the love of God. You cannot manufacture it by gritting your teeth; you can only stay near the One who is its source, and let it flow. So look back and give thanks. Where your own longing became someone’s good this week, that was God, running his open road straight through you.

Notice: Look back over the week. Where did your desire become someone else’s good?

Pray: Father, the good was in me all along, because you were. Send me into this year to give it away. Amen.

Stay: You have named it, imagined it, and done it, one day at a time. Keep walking it. The good you already know is already in you — because he first loved you.

Next Sabbath we return to the Abiding in Jesus series.

Group Discussion Questions

1. The sermon said the Golden Rule was never a rule but a desire God has already placed in you. Did seeing it as a desire rather than a rule change how you treated anyone this week?
2. This week's practice was to name a good you long for, imagine it for someone, and do it. Which was hardest — the naming, the imagining, or the doing? Where did it catch, and where did it drop?
3. Jesus turned a negative rule ("do no harm") into a positive one ("imagine a good and do it"). Where have you been keeping the floor when the horizon was open?
4. The sermon said your own longing to be treated well is the measure of love. Where did consulting your own desire this week show you what someone near you actually needed?