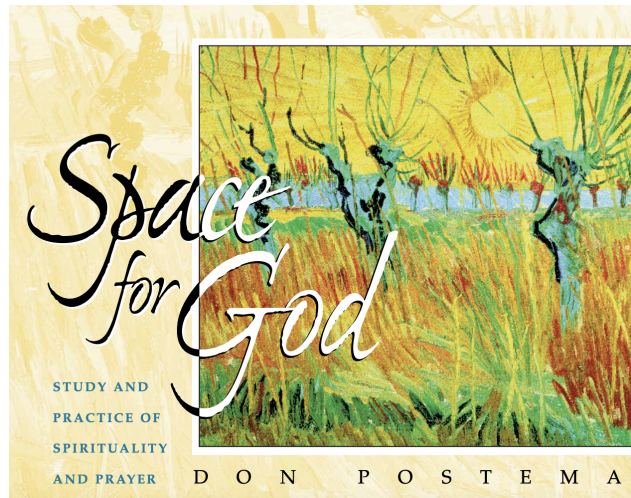


Space for God Online Sharing



Chapter 1: Making Space

Responses to readings:

Preface, by Henri Nouwen

Becca: The word from the preface that stuck out for me was “sanctification” - so I looked up its meaning: 1) the action of making or declaring something “HOLY” 2) the action or process of being freed from sin or purified.

God frees us, gathers us, unites us and reconciles us - this is a good reason to spend time with God.

An Invitation by Don Postema

Becca: The invitation is to unity through prayer and gratitude. The point of focusing on the spirituality (prayer) of gratitude is for us to see the “giftedness of life” that I so often miss in the hustle and bustle of my busy life.

Chapter 1 Making Space: Van Gogh quote

Sharon: I need the reminder to “grasp life at its depth.” Otherwise, I go into autopilot mode and focus on habitual, surfacey things, including sinful, selfish reactions. Life at its depth is more than me and my not-always-good desires.

Becca: Living in the present moment. I have such a difficult time doing that. If I did, I imagine that life would feel more real, that the connection with God would feel more real because I would feel more connected to what is happening right here, right now.

Also, the negative thoughts, experiences seem to stick and I brush over the positive like they're expected or deserved. What if I held the positives, studied them, grew gratitude and instead, brushed over the negative?

Chapter 1 Making Space: Psalm 37:7

Sharon: Seems so simple and doable, but reality is patience and being still are super hard for me! "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him."

Chapter 1 Making Space: Heidelberg Catechisms, Q and A 26

Sharon: I believe all that, including the part about him providing whatever I need. I get hung up sometimes thinking, "But is he providing what others' need?"

Chapter 1 Making Space: Van Gogh "Bent Figure of a Woman"

Sharon: It's amazing to me that she could be thinking anything! It's amazing to be human and have this unlimited capacity for thinking and feeling. Yes, I can see God in nature and in the Bible, but also living deeply and considering others...God is so clearly there.

Don Postema's Reflection

Sharon: I love when Postema is discussing the need to spend time in prayer, but finding little time to pray. He writes, "Many people share and understand that problem. It's the opposite extreme they are suspicious of. If I told you that I had no trouble finding time to pray, that I spent three hours every day in prayer, you might wonder if I was very 'productive.' You might even think I was wasting time, or not earning my pay."

Right! I'm almost embarrassed to say I have a Monday night group for meditation practice and a Wednesday night prayer group, Raji and I will be sponsoring a student Christian club on Tuesdays, then of course it's *Space for God* on Thursday and church on Sunday. Is that weird? Would people think I'm overdoing it? I know I'm not. The meetings help me spend time with God. I want to also find this time on my own.

Also, Postema writes: "Jesus was a very busy person (Mark 6:31), so busy that his friends thought he would go mad (Mark 3:20-21). He was seldom left alone. So he had to make time to be alone, to give undivided attention to God to pray" (Mark, Matt, Luke passages). I really felt that busyness of Jesus when I made the slides for our first meeting with the verse of Jesus going to solitary places to pray, in the midst of all the activity recounted in the chapters:

Mark 1:

Jesus baptized by John
Tested by Satan

Jesus proclaims good news, calls his disciples, drives out an evil spirit
Heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law
Heals many sick and demon possessed people

35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

More preaching
More healing

Mark 6:

Jesus preaches, heals sick
Sends out the 12 disciples on their mission trip; they report back

31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Feeds 5,000 people

46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Walks on water
Heals sick

Seeing all that activity with Jesus finally getting away to a quiet place help me see that prayer is rest and a relief. I often think of it as a very strenuous activity or a chore I don't really want to do.

Windows to Insight: Van Gogh quotes and "Fountain in the Garden of St. Paul's Hospital"

Becca: "Spirituality means living in depth, awareness and contemplation" I feel that making space for God in my life is helping to create more spirituality in my life. It is making a difference. It's creating a change in me to a more spiritual person.

Take Time to Be Holy

Sharon: I love the simplicity of these verses: "Take time to be holy, speak oft with the Lord;/ Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word"... "Take time to be holy, the world rushes on; / Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone." I also like the tune. Thank God for music, right?

The suggestions are a challenge to me, though. As an extrovert, I love the reinforcement of people. I'm comfortable with openness. I not much with secrets! But I like the idea of making a conscious choice not to rush on with the world and take in the good stuff. Like now.

I like this [version](#) on YouTube.

The Contemplative Life

Sharon: "Contemplation itself, of course, is not indolence; it is not idle. The saints work hard. Mary's effort at the feet was no easier than Martha's in the kitchen." Yes. I think it is difficult to

spend time in prayer. I'm glad Henry Zylstra wrote this. I use the idea of Mary and Martha to help me sometimes. I'll remind myself to choose the greater thing. But this quote also affirms to me that it isn't easy. The way I'm made as a human and the habits I've developed all these years makes it a challenge to just sit at Jesus' feet.

Perseverance in Prayer

Sharon: I definitely need routines. One of my main healthy routines is weekday yoga to practice mindfulness and take a break after my first three classes of the day. I do it regularly because of my routine. I want that perseverance in prayer with the routine. I'm not quite there with the schedule Calvin suggests: upon waking, before and after meals, before work, end of day.

Session 1: Making Space

In the first session, there were three invitations for sharing thoughts and feelings. You are also welcome to share here. You can follow the below example by writing your name with your comment.

1. Why are you taking the Space for God course?

Sharon: I am looking for structure and companionship in my spiritual life.

2. What are some hindrances to prayer or the spiritual life that you have experienced – activities, thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and feelings – that keep you from spending time with God?

Sharon: At the meeting I journaled that spending time with God doesn't feel tangible to me, like other things I do. A few weeks ago I wrote all of the following:

It's crazy how spending time with God is the very last thing I do. I would rather organize a prayer course than pray. I've been doing this the past two days (Dec. 26 and 27). All my time is spent making slides and organizing thoughts, not being still with God. I love the early morning time and I want to do everything that needs doing then: exercise, lesson planning, food prep, cleaning the house, walking the dog, etc. I put God last and rarely make space for God in these prime time hours. I wonder if I'm scared to be with the divine presence. I want new habits. Every once in a while I do pray in the morning, but it's definitely not every day. (In other seasons of my spiritual journey, I have had some discipline with reading scripture and other good stuff, journaling and centering prayer in the mornings.) I go to a centering prayer group because I find I need to be with other people in order to pray. Same with attending church – I think that's a big reason why I go to worship: to be in a space with God. I want to do this on my own, too. I think I am very undisciplined right now.

3. Any thoughts on your need for solitude and prayer?

Sharon: At the meeting I was struck by my need for rest (especially after reading about Jesus in the Gospel of Mark). I forget that prayer and solitude is a time for rest, not a task. I wrote all the following a few weeks ago:

I know I need this. Fortunately, at a pretty young age (24) I was forced to have a quiet time for scripture reading and prayer every morning for 10 months because I was in a Christian rehab situation (“His Mansion” in the NW suburbs, a place that ministered to people with addictions and mental illnesses). I experienced having space for God every day that year during a 30-minute early morning quiet time, and since then it always feels important to do that (although I don’t do it as regularly as I wish). Currently, at work I’m super busy from 7:45-11:20. It is a huge relief for me, most days, during my break for lunch to close the door to my classroom, roll out my yoga mat, and follow a 20-minute Yoga with Adriene YouTube video. It clears my head and helps me warm up. (The classroom I’m in is so cold.) I try to follow the yoga with prayer. I don’t always do it, but I’m pretty sure I need it.

Chapter 2: I Belong

“In a picture, I want to say something comforting” ..Van Gogh quote

Sharon: I’m so glad that Van Gogh wrote that he wanted to show “something of the eternal” in his people. That helps me see that amazing aspect of his work and be reminded of that in all people. I belong to God and so does everyone else.

“Reflection” by Don Postema

Sharon: “Or we can stay with that loneliness a little while and become aware of life at a deeper level.” It’s so hard to stay with the loneliness. Food, phone calls, novels, TV, plotting, planning, rehashing...I want to try harder to sit with it.

Psalm 100

Sharon: The reason we can come to God with shouting and joy is that we belong to him. It’s pure freedom in our acceptance. I also like the inclusiveness in the psalm: “Shout to the Lord, **all** the land.”

“The Souls Which I Have Made,” Abraham Kuyper

This reminded me of my experience the second time doing the Waiting Parent exercise. I was surprised by God’s love for me and the banquet given to me. I know I belong to God. Now I imagine him saying, “Sharon belongs to me.”

Session 2: I Belong In the second Zoom session, there were a few invitations for sharing thoughts and feelings. You are also welcome to share here. You can follow the below example by writing your name with your comment.

1. How did you feel as the prodigal child?

Sharon: Amazed that God was so happy to have me return. It’s so easy for me to imagine leaving, to see the temptation to seek out something more than what I had, then go through pain, feel shame, but then “come to my senses” and realize that I have a home in God. Still amazed, though, at his love and acceptance.

2. How was the experience of repeating the phrase “I belong to God” for two minutes?

Name: Response

Sharon: It felt a little robotic in the session, but I plan to keep doing the exercise and see if it permeates my thinking and feelings.

3. Your prayer to God after the experience of imagining ourselves as the prodigal and repeating the phrase

Sharon: Dear Lord, I do belong to you. Thank you. No matter how far I've run or where I've been, I've made it back home and you have always welcomed me. You had a feast for me when I was so unworthy, dirty, misspent, I was still loved and yours because I belong to you. It's powerful, Lord, to know this. It's beautiful, God, to be with you. Such a relief, my home in your arms. You hold me. I really lost it out there, and now I've come back. Thank you, Father.

Chapter Three Reflection and Windows to Insight

“I Belong to God” prayer (Don Postema, Leader Guide)

Some in your group may have trouble with the phrase “I belong to God.” This may not be the phrase each person would choose as his or her own focusing words. I chose it because it summarizes the content of chapter 2, the essence of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 1), the thrust of the Bible, and a basis of the Christian life.

I suggest that people stick with these words for a few more weeks, perhaps with a variation such as “I belong to you, O God.” Later on people may find and use a phrase that more deeply expresses their personal belief and experience of God. This course is not meant to legislate what people say, but to help them find the way of prayer that best enhances their relationship with God. Still, I recommend that group members stick to something similar for a few weeks so that they can learn from each other's experiences. By session 6 they will be choosing a more personal style.

Others in your group may be worried about “doing it right.” Accept how each person uses the phrase, and encourage him to continue. I think it's necessary to say the phrase slowly while breathing naturally. If you let the words follow your natural rhythm of breathing, you'll be reminded of them throughout the day. As you breathe, the words will form naturally with your rhythm.

Some people may also wonder about how they are supposed to “feel.” I find Thomas Merton's remark helpful. “We should not judge the value of our meditation by ‘how we feel.’” As I explain in chapter 5, prayer is not meant first of all to make us feel good, but to center our thoughts, hearts, and lives on God; to make us more aware that we live in

God's presence; and to challenge us to live out of that awareness each day. If we feel good, so much the better.

Chapter 3: Gratitude Takes Nothing for Granted

The Call of the Rain

Sharon: I don't usually think of rain as a blessing or "an invitation to come to the wedding." But I like the idea. I usually focus on clear skies and sun as a sign of goodness and hope, but this reading reminds me that all the weather comes from God and all of it includes his grace. I like what the author says about immersion (yes, I feel that about swimming in a pool or lake), but I don't often feel delight in the rain. Now, I want to try to experience that idea next time it rains: "A walk in the evening rain in any setting is to walk in the midst of God's loving attention to his earth, and like a baptism, is no simple washing, but a communication of life."

Session 3: Gratitude Takes Nothing for Granted In our third Zoom session, there were a few invitations for sharing thoughts, experiences, feelings, and prayers. You are welcome to share here. You can follow the below example by writing your name with your comment.

1. Please share your name and things you enjoy at work and in your recreation.

Sharon: I love my high school English class students, especially the seniors this year, who are so full of life and potential, just mostly not seeing it in themselves. That's the challenge for me, to help them see the importance of improving their speaking, listening, reading, writing, and research skills and how it will benefit all aspects of their lives, for their lives matter. For myself, I love the peace and ease of swimming laps. No competition, just water and movement. It's very soothing to me.

2. How were your experiences with the morning "I belong to God" prayer, to the Chapter Two readings, and to repeating the prodigal son/waiting parent exercise?

Don Postema, "I belong": One more thought about I Belong. You can expand it to include others in the prayer as well. God knows their situation so you can just name them.

_____ (name) _____ belongs to you, O God.

Sharon: I was more aware of loneliness in the past two weeks when it came up because of the readings in the book, but I notice I still don't want to sit with it much. Praying "I belong to you, oh God, I belong to you" felt nice and safe, humbling in a good way, kind of like my dad Em said, about the dog at its owner's feet. I was very moved a few days ago when I stumbled over a song that reminded me so much of the message in Luke of the waiting parent/prodigal son. The song's chorus repeats, "Just remember, you can always come home." Amazing message that God loves us and welcomes us, always, as we belong to God and our home is with God.

3. Journaling our thanks...

Sharon: I was so thankful last night for everyone at the group, glad others mentioned being thankful for the sharing in the group. I was also glad Mona mentioned cake. I want to be grateful and aware of those sensory experiences that sometimes I take for granted. Yesterday, probably the main thing that stuck out to me that I was grateful for was the avocado in my salad.

4. Six-word statement of faith or our life

Don Postema: I invited people in our church to write their beliefs or life stories in six words. Some examples: Faith. Hope. Love. Peace. Joy. Gratitude. That's just words. Others wrote stories. Friend of God. Friend of others. That's when I wrote: A spirituality of grace, gratitude, compassion. Nurtured by a contemplative life/practice.

Chapter 4: Gestures of Gratitude

(No responses)

Chapter 5: Prayer as Attitude

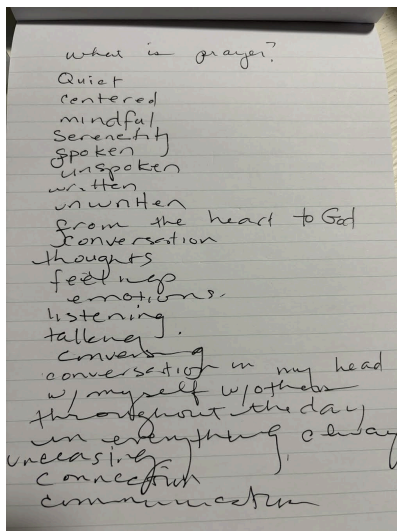
In session we asked the following questions. I asked people to email me their responses. See below.

What is prayer to you?

Heath: words arising from my heart
spontaneous, alive, participatory

Sharon: A chance to be real, my true self; relationship; help

Kim:



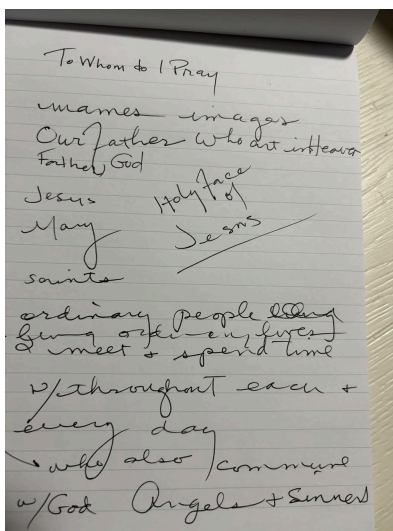
Becca: Prayer for me is: quiet connection to God. Focus on God and listening to His word and instruction. Vibes of gratitude during our talking time. A time to bring cares and concerns to God, a time to call on Him.

To whom do you pray?

Heath: Always, I start, "*Gracious and loving God*"....
to a flowing, loving, and pure grace actively engaged in the universe at all times

Sharon: Father, Jesus, Lord; I picture Jesus from stories in the Gospels.

Kim:



Becca:
I belong to God, my Rock
my Redeemer
my Healer
my Cleanser
my Empowerer
my Shield
my Protector
my Courage
my Confidence
my Focus
my Guide
my Joy
my Love
my Friend
my Answer

my Communicator
my Negotiator
my Inspiration
my Call
my Plan
my Equipper
my Constant
my Everything
my Deliverer
my Path Forward

Chapter 6: Prayer as Act

(No responses)

Chapter 7: Wrestling With God

From Phil Jackson on Monday, April 15:

The advice on making space for God when we first wake, before speaking, is working very well for me. Today I read part of our next chapter. It was exceptionally moving, having read it first thing. The theme of wrestling with God theme reminded me of one of my two favorite poems ever and I wanted to share it, I think it's a good complement to what we're reading:

The Man Watching

By Rainer Maria Rilke

I can tell by the way the trees beat, after
so many dull days, on my worried windowpanes
that a storm is coming,
and I hear the far-off fields say things
I can't bear without a friend,
I can't love without a sister.

The storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on
across the woods and across time,
and the world looks as if it had no age:
the landscape, like a line in the psalm book,
is seriousness and weight and eternity.

What we choose to fight is so tiny!
What fights with us is so great.

If only we would let ourselves be dominated
as things do by some immense storm,
we would become strong too, and not need names.

When we win it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not *want* to be bent by us.
I mean the Angel who appeared
to the wrestlers of the Old Testament:
when the wrestlers' sinews
grew long like metal strings,
he felt them under his fingers
like chords of deep music.

Whoever was beaten by this Angel
(who often simply declined the fight)
went away proud and strengthened
and great from that harsh hand,
that kneaded him as if to change his shape.
Winning does not tempt that man.
This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,
by constantly greater beings.

--Translated by Robert Bly

Submitted to S4God by Phil

Chapter 8: In Session Prayer

Our categories of prayer:

One another in this group

Children

Our family members

Neighbors and co-workers

Workers: in health care, schools, social agencies, police and firefighters, nursing homes

Manual laborers and those trying to subsist on low wages

Unemployed

Anyone with financial struggles

Those who are sick

Hungry
Homeless
Victims of abuse, prejudice, and discrimination
Grieving a loss
Experiencing effects of war and climate change
Migrants and refugees
Prisoners
Pastors, religious leader, teachers
Political leaders
Those who hate us/ have hurt us / those we disagree with / misrepresent our faith

Chapter 9 comments from Phil

Another new way of looking at life is brought to me in Chapter 9: "Praising God" is a gift to God (as we know him) AND TO THOSE AROUND US, and even ourselves. Like the author, I had felt awkward thinking of a God who has an ego that needed to be praised. This view turns it all around. In a way, is this kind of praise simply making me a more positive person? Positivity affects all of us.

In any case, I loved this book, things like the view of praying as if we ARE the person we pray for; getting in a habit daily, including for me reading something inspiring each morning; and more has been transformative.

On a side note, I've been curious about the book format, it seems like two smaller pages on each page. I don't know the thinking behind it but it seems to work.

See you all soon. Phil

Session 9 Looking Back Questions about Prayer and Justice/Compassion

Have any of us experienced this compassion (that Nouwen speaks of) as we offered intercessory prayers for others during these past weeks?

Did we feel closer to God as we prayed for others?

Did we feel compelled toward some kind of direct action or service as a result of praying earnestly for the poor, the hungry, the lonely?

Did our prayers help us hear the cries of the needy more distinctly?

Prayers of Intercession

There are certain things that should always be included in our prayers of intercession. We should always pray first for the church, for our own local church, as well as for churches throughout the world. We should pray for the peace, unity, and purity of the church. (See John, ch. 17.) Second, we should pray for the ministry of the gospel; for pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons; for evangelists, missionaries, church administrators, and especially for our own pastor. (Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:2.) Third, we should pray for all people, particularly those who have not received the gospel. (1 Tim. 2:1-8.) Fourth, we should pray for our president and all those in authority in our nation, as well as for those world leaders who are responsible for maintaining peace and justice (vs. 2-4). Fifth, we should pray for all those who suffer or are in special need, particularly those of our friends and neighbors whose specific needs are known to us (James 5:13-16).

—Hughes Oliphant Olds, *Praying with the Bible*, p. 88



From Phil Jackson

The image that Don Postema uses in Chapter 8 intrigued me, and was frankly hard to see on my copy so I Googled it. This has some other good reflections... Phil

[Hope and despair in Rembrandt's 'The Good Samaritan'](#)

By David Golwer, March 6, 2021, *National Catholic Reporter*

Rembrandt's intriguing and enigmatic [etching](#), made in 1633, portrays the good Samaritan bringing the wounded man to the inn, an image that reverberates with

implications for facing life in difficult times.

The Good Samaritan, etching by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1633 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The inn to which the Samaritan brings the wounded man is in a state of disrepair. Deep cracks



appear in the outside wall, some of the boards on the railing of the steps are broken, and the wooden eaves are in the same shabby state. It is in this decaying and sometimes disturbing world — considering the gratuitous act of violence the wounded man had just suffered — that the Samaritan's surprising act of mercy takes place, a place where everyday life continues as normal: A man gazes nonchalantly from a window of the inn as the wounded man is being helped down from the animal. A woman gets water from a nearby well. Birds are in the tree above her, leaves drift down to earth, two chickens stand just in front of the well, and the woman pays no attention to the Samaritan's act of kindness and mercy taking place just in front of her. And, in the right front foreground, a central location nearest the viewer, a dog, with its back to us, defecates on the ground.

The centrality of the dog is striking, and the structure of the painting leads viewers from the bottom right — where the dog performs a rudimentary bodily function common to all animals — along a diagonal to the left and back — where the Samaritan performs a selfless act of mercy.

Why do we only see the back of the good Samaritan at a distance but see the back of the defecating dog so prominently? The provocative image of the defecating dog seems designed, at least in part, to shock a polite audience, just as Jesus's use of a compassionate and merciful enemy, a Samaritan, would have shocked his initial audiences. In a previous study of this image, I concluded that the "dog most likely functions primarily as a playful aspect of verisimilitude, yet it illustrates that life inherently includes the sublime and the everyday, the unusual and the banal, the



sacred and the profane, with the latter — in each of these polarities — often more prevalent than the former."

Such a perspective can serve as a description of the human condition itself, but when I revisited this image recently, I noticed that interpretations of Rembrandt's etching also shed light on divergent yet interlocking ways in which human beings

respond to difficult circumstances.

One response is founded on hope: The parable of the good Samaritan challenges its hearers to reimagine themselves, the world, other human beings and God in radically different ways, and to put that new perspective into concrete action in their daily lives. Yet for centuries, instead of just relating a moral lesson, the parable became for most interpreters an allegory of Christian views of salvation in which the man (who symbolizes Adam) is attacked by hostile forces in the world (the thieves, who represent Satan) and is saved by Jesus (the true good Samaritan) who restores sinful humanity (the wounded man) to a right relationship with God in the church (represented by the inn). In these interpretations, the parable *by Jesus* has evolved into a parable *about Jesus*.



Some interpreters, then, envision such allegorical elements even in Rembrandt's down-to-earth representation, viewing, for example, the open door of the inn as symbolizing the door of heaven, a passageway to eternal salvation that opens for those who perform such acts of mercy. This interpretation reflects the hope that such acts of mercy will be rewarded, as they are in Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats.

The second type of response, however, reflects an overall attitude of despair.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, for example, believed that the man in the window of Rembrandt's etching is the malicious leader of the band of robbers who earlier attacked the man, and the etching portrays the moment when the poor man is seized

by the fear that he will soon be once again weak and helpless before the thieves who previously robbed and beat him. The notorious reputation of such inns and innkeepers in the first century can provide a rationale for Goethe's belief that the man at the window was one of the man's previous tormentors. Indeed, the parable itself reflects that some hearers may view the Samaritan's actions as foolhardy and naïve (e.g., entrusting the wellbeing of the wounded man to an untrustworthy innkeeper).

Another way to approach this image and the parable itself, however, is that this act of compassion and mercy takes place not just in the midst of evil or even in spite of evil, but as a radical and in some ways redemptive act against evil.

To be clear, the parable does not focus on what should happen to the perpetrators of such injustices, whether individual or structural; instead, it illustrates how one should treat the victims of injustices, no matter who they are.

The great theologian Howard Thurman believed that the parable of the good Samaritan demonstrated that the transformation of society ultimately depends on the transformation of individual human beings and that this personal transformation should create not just transformed individuals but a community of like-minded human beings (e.g., a "beloved community") dedicated to social transformation in response to the human need that surrounds them.

In times of personal and societal distress, it is often difficult to believe, as did Theodore Parker (and Martin Luther King Jr.) that the arc of the moral universe, albeit long, "bends toward justice." Thurman realized that the pervasiveness of injustice does not provide an "escape hatch" of despair that one's actions will not make a difference in creating a better society. He believed that there is a persistent struggle between good and evil, both in oneself and in society, and that all are responsible for acts of justice, mercy and compassion in the world of parable and in the world in which we live.

The command at the end of the parable, to go and do likewise, to show compassion and mercy to those who suffer injustices, focuses our attention on the need to transform ourselves into people who work actively on the behalf of other human beings who suffer similar injustices, doing our part to try to bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice.

The parable of the good Samaritan and Rembrandt's response to it accurately portray the injustices in their worlds and ours. They also do not downplay the fact that the results of one's actions to assist other human beings may be seen as foolhardy or even fruitless. Yet we will never know, unless, as Jesus urged at the end of the parable, and as Thurman himself suggested, that we "try it and see."

