

The Lost Art of Kindness:

Civility as a Christian Calling

with Mariann Budde

Participant's Guide

CHURCHNext

Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde explores the idea of civility as a Christian calling by delving into the powerful theme of kindness, as exemplified

in both the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian teachings. In exploring the biblical stories, such as the forgiveness Joseph showed his brothers in the book of Genesis and Ruth's compassion for her mother-in-law, Bishop Budde introduces the deeper spiritual principles behind acts of kindness.

Being kind, however, doesn't mean abandoning our principles. Bishop Budde examines the importance of standing firm in our convictions while respecting the dignity of others, even during moments of strong disagreement. By studying both scriptural principles and personal experiences, this course aims to equip participants with the skills needed to balance confidence in their beliefs with humility. You'll learn strategies for approaching conflicts with grace and clarity, encouraging mutual respect in both personal and public interactions.

Bishop Budde also offers insight to help you integrate kindness as a fundamental aspect of Christian living. By focusing on the importance of guarding our speech and resisting divisiveness, we will align more deeply with the teachings of Jesus. Through self-reflection and spiritual growth, this course encourages participants to apply principles like doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly in all aspects of life. Prepare to engage thoughtfully, reflect deeply, and leave with practical tools for cultivating kindness, compassion, and dignity in a world that often fosters division.

About the Instructor

Mariann Edgar Budde serves as spiritual leader for 86 Episcopal congregations and ten Episcopal schools in the District of Columbia and four Maryland counties. The first woman elected to this position, she also serves as the chair of the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation, which oversees the ministries of the Washington National Cathedral and Cathedral schools. A passionate believer in the gospel of Jesus and the Episcopal Church's particular witness, Bishop Budde is committed to the spiritual and numerical growth of congregations and developing new expressions of Christian community. She believes that Jesus calls all who follow him to strive for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being. To that end, Bishop Budde is an advocate and organizer in support of justice concerns, including racial equity, gun violence prevention, immigration reform, the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons, and the care of creation.

Bishop Budde was consecrated as the ninth bishop of Washington in November 2011. Prior to her election, she served for 18 years as rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis. She earned a B.A. in history at the University of Rochester, graduating magna cum laude. She earned both a Masters in Divinity (1989) and Doctor of Ministry (2008) from Virginia Theological Seminary.

Her sermons have been published in several books and journals and she is the author of three books, *How We Learn to Be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith* (2023); *Receiving Jesus: The Way of Love* (2019) and *Gathering Up the Fragments: Preaching as Spiritual Practice* (2007).

When not working, you'll often find her riding her bicycle, spending time with family, or cooking dinner for friends. Bishop Budde and her husband, Paul, have two adult sons, Amos, married to Erika, and Patrick. They are proud and doting grandparents.

The Takeaway

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Session One: Biblical Origins

We begin with the biblical origins of kindness, looking at teachings from both the Old and New Testaments that highlight how kindness—expressed as mercy, forgiveness, and compassion—plays a critical role in human interactions and our relationship with God. The Bible, while vast and complex, continually emphasizes the importance of treating others with kindness, even in difficult circumstances. Through examples like Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers and Ruth’s loyalty to her mother-in-law, we learn how acts of kindness transcend the harsh realities of life and reflect God’s own nature.

In the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus, especially through parables such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, embody this theme of kindness. These stories encourage us to love not only our friends but also our enemies. Paul’s writings to early Christian communities further emphasize the importance of kindness, gentleness, and forgiveness as central to Christian living.

Session 2: Standing and Kneeling

In this class, we will explore the delicate balance between standing firm in our personal convictions and practicing kindness and humility toward those who hold opposing views. Through the lens of scripture and thoughtful reflection, we will discuss the importance of developing clear convictions rooted in self-awareness, study, and prayer. This clarity allows us to remain grounded in our beliefs without feeling threatened by differing perspectives. By acknowledging that others may have insights we lack, we open ourselves to learning and growth, even in moments of disagreement.

At the heart of this approach is the recognition of the inherent dignity and divine image in every person. This class will emphasize the importance of respectful discourse, where listening, humility, and kindness become tools for disarming hostility and fostering genuine dialogue. By standing firm in our beliefs while also kneeling in reverence toward others, we

can navigate heated discussions with grace. Through these teachings, you will learn how to embody kindness in even the most challenging interactions, allowing your voice to be heard more effectively without compromising your integrity.

Session Three: Kindness and Calling

In this lesson, we explore how the practice of kindness is deeply rooted in our call to follow Christ. In a world filled with division and harmful speech, choosing kindness becomes a powerful way to demonstrate Christ-like love. This lesson talks about the importance of aligning your actions, words, and thoughts with the teachings of Jesus—and how kindness is not simply a passive choice but a deliberate response to the call to bear Christ’s likeness in every interaction, whether personal or public.

Session Four: The Micah 6:8 Promise

In this final lesson, we will explore timeless values derived from Micah 6:8 — doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly — and reflect on how these principles can guide us in our everyday lives. Through the lens of scripture and personal reflection, we will also look at the teachings of the Book of James, discussing how to cultivate a spirit of being quick to listen and slow to anger. Together, we will explore how these principles foster peace, mutual respect, and purposeful leadership in a divided world. Jealousy rears up again in the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Discussion Questions

Session One: Biblical Origins

1. Reflect on a time when you had the opportunity to show kindness in a difficult situation. What made it challenging, and how did your actions impact the outcome?
2. How do you see the themes of kindness, forgiveness, and mercy play out in today’s society? In what ways can these teachings be more widely adopted in modern times?
3. In the New Testament, Jesus teaches about loving one’s enemies. How might this teaching challenge your own understanding of kindness? How can you apply this to personal or societal conflicts?
4. How does Paul’s emphasis on kindness, patience, and forgiveness in his letters to Christian communities resonate with you? How can these virtues be practiced in your interactions with others, especially in moments of tension?

Session Two: Kneeling and Standing

1. Think of a recent conversation or debate where you faced opposing views. How might standing firm in your own convictions while showing humility toward the other person have changed the tone of the discussion?
2. Reflect on a situation where someone approached you with hostility or defensiveness. How could a softer, kinder approach have impacted the outcome?
3. The lesson emphasizes the importance of recognizing the divine image in everyone, even those we disagree with. How does this concept challenge or affirm your approach to conflict resolution?
4. How can practicing humility and kindness in intense debates not only preserve your integrity but also potentially influence others to reconsider their stance?

Session Three: Kindness and Calling

1. How does practicing kindness align with your understanding of Christian values?
2. In what ways do you struggle with harmful speech, and how might you work on this area in your life?
3. How do self-care and spiritual growth contribute to your ability to be kind to others?
4. What are some practical steps you can take to surround yourself with diverse viewpoints and experiences as part of your spiritual growth?

Session Four: The Micah 6:8 Promise

1. How do you think the principles of “doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly” can be applied to conflicts in your own community or workplace?
2. Reflect on a time when you felt your dignity was compromised or disrespected. How did you respond, and how might you have reacted differently if the situation had been handled with more respect?
3. The speaker mentions listening as an essential part of engaging others. How can practicing active listening change the way you interact with people who hold opposing views?
4. Consider the idea that preserving another’s dignity can help reduce violence or conflict. In what ways can you promote dignity in both high-stakes and everyday interactions in your life?

Resources

Additional ChurchNext classes include:

- [Make Me an Instrument of Peace: A Guide to Civil Discourse](#)
- [Civil Conversations in Uncivil Times](#) with Ray Suarez
- [Bridging the Political Divide](#) with Parker Palmer
- [Spiritual Truth in an Age of Fake News](#) with Elizabeth Geitz and Rebecca Cotton

Other helpful websites include:

- [Braver Angels](#)
- [Election Engagement Toolkit](#) from the Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations