Hi,

I have a sad update this morning. As most of you know, Patti’s brother, Rob, has been courageously fighting advanced prostate cancer for some time. He lost that battle on Sunday morning, at the age of 57. Please keep Rob, Patti, Stephanie (Rob’s long-time partner), and all our family in your prayers. This is a reminder that even in the midst of this virus, all the stuff of life goes on, often sadly hindered by this isolation. We’d be in Atlanta right now to comfort Stephanie and be with Patti’s remaining siblings -- but we can’t. So, we are all just in our homes doing our best. Surely this story is being repeated countless times all across the world.

Here’s a few updates:

* My Tuesday class on Genesis will be at 11:45 today on [my own Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle). No account needed, just follow the link. But you will need an account to comment. If you and I are not friends on Facebook, just send me a friend request and we will be.
* Don’t forget, links to the on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). I’ll have this week’s recordings posted tomorrow.

The Old Testament is filled with way too many troubling passages, often very violent. But God’s love is revealed throughout the pages of the Hebrew Bible. This time of crisis seems an especially good time to reflect on the nature of God’s love.

***Deuteronomy 15:1-11 (NRSV)***

**Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who is a member of the community, because the Lord’s remission has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.**

**If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,” and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”**

A member of our congregation once wrote me after reading the book of Numbers: “I must tell you, though, that I was really bothered by reading Numbers and about the slaughter of the Midianites. I understand why Moses advocates killing the men and the sinful women. However, why does he say to kill all of the boys as well? And God condones this? This is troublesome.”

Who among us isn’t troubled by such stories? And there is more if we were to read through Joshua, Judges, Samuel and the rest. Some of these stories are so shocking and troubling that they can blind us to the message that we ought to hear in these books.

It is very hard for us to comprehend just how different the world of the ancient Near East was from our own. Life was brutal, short, and cheap. It was a world in which “an eye for an eye” was moral progress. Abraham isn’t shocked when God tells him to sacrifice Isaac because child sacrifice was practiced by some of the cultures in and around Canaan. Only half-jokingly, I suggest to my students that they try to imagine the world of Conan the Barbarian!

If we imagine well, if we really come to grips with life in the ancient world, then we’ll find that it is not the bloodshed that shocks us. Rather, we are surprised by God’s demands for compassion, generosity, and justice for even the weakest persons. The community of God’s people was to be dramatically different from any community, society, or culture the world had yet seen.

*“What does the Lord, your God, require of you?” (Deuteronomy 10:12)*

For all the attention devoted in these OT books to priests and sacrificial rituals, what does God really want from his people? Moses spells it out in Deuteronomy 10: “Live in his presence in holy reverence, follow the road he sets before you, love him, serve God, your God, with everything you have in you. Obey the commandments and regulations of God . . .” (from Peterson’s *The Message*).

Even the rite of circumcision, the sign of the covenant given to Abraham, is only a signpost to the heart. “Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart,” Moses tells them. God doesn’t play favorites or take bribes. God looks after the widows and orphans. God even takes care of the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. God’s people are to love strangers in the same way. For the Jews, life is to be one long training class on loving as God loves.

But how is this love to play out in practice? As Jesus would teach more than a millennium later, true love is lived out, it is practiced – it lies in the doing, not the feeling. Let’s take a look at some of the “love-practices” that Moses spells out in the sermon called Deuteronomy.

* The Israelites are to set apart a tithe of all their agricultural production. Some is to be used for the benefit of the Levite priests who have no land or livestock of their own. Further, “the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.” (Deut. 14:22-29)
* Every seventh year is to be a Sabbath year in which debts are to be forgiven. The people are always to be open-handed with those in need and willing to lend. God cautions them that they are not to get stingy as the Sabbath year approaches when debts will be forgiven. They are always to give liberally and ungrudgingly. Remember – this is more than 3,000 years ago. It surely doesn’t much square with the world of Conan. (15:1-11)
* Slaves are to be freed in the seventh year and given a head start on their new life. (15:12-18)
* Judges are to be appointed. They are to judge fairly and honestly. They are not to play favorites or twist the law. “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue . . .” (16:18-19).
* If an Israelite sees their neighbor’s livestock wandering away, they are to do something about it, not turn a blind eye. This is about the pro-active caring for others. (22:1-4)
* They are to lend without interest. If they make a vow, they are to keep it. They can eat the grapes or corn from a neighbor’s vines or field – but only what they need on the spot. There is sharing and there is stealing. (23:19-25)
* If a poor person pledges their cloak as collateral for a loan, the cloak is to be returned to them at sunset so they don’t have to be cold at night. A widow’s garment is never to be taken in pledge.
* The wages of poor and needy workers are to be paid each day. (24:14-15)
* If some of the harvest is accidentally left in the field, it must stay there so it can be picked up by the “alien, the orphan, and the widow.” Likewise, some olives are to be left on the trees and grapes on the vines. (24:19-22)

*Love large and small*

One of the most striking things about this list is that some of these compassionate acts are big, like freeing slaves, but others are so small, such as returning a poor person’s cloak at night if they’ve pledged it as collateral. It may be hard to imagine living in the brutal world of the ancient near east, but it isn’t very hard to see in this brief list a challenge to us in our own day and world. The particulars may have changed, but the call to justice and generosity in all aspects of our lives and toward all people -- neighbor and stranger, near and far, friend and enemy, strong and weak – is undiminished. We are to lovingly care for those who are least able to care for themselves, while always remembering that God cares for us in just this way. Thanks be to God

*A site to check out*

I’m sometimes asked where I use Bible study software. I do -- the Logos system. It is available in a number of different packages at varying prices. I think there is a free starter system. You can check it out at [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com) if you want to learn more.

*Movie recommendation*

If you never saw *The Freshman* with Marlon Brando and Matthew Broderick, now is a good time. Brando is a hoot and Broderick is his usual charming self. It is available to rent on Amazon and Apple.

*Book Recommendation*

Few topics are more puzzling people than our teachings about the Holy Spirit. And I don’t know a better place to start than with Gordon Fee’s *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*. It really opened my eyes and I was blessed to come across it early in my teaching ministry.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott