



grow. pray. study.

June 22, 2025 *The Gospel in Despicable Me 4*

Scripture: John 3:3-5 (CEB) and 2 Corinthians 5:17 (CEB)

The Daily Transforming Power of Genuine Love

MONDAY 6.23.25 Romans 12:9-21

Sunday's sermon, the second in a three-part series called "Director's Cut," looked at the movie *Despicable Me 4*. In this week's GPS, we will consider Biblical insights on transforming "villains" to "anti-villains" as portrayed humorously in *Despicable Me 4*.

Despicable Me 4 may, on the surface, feel like little more than a lighthearted piece of entertainment, good for some animated laughs in an over-serious world. But even as the movie invites us to laugh at the characters' antics, it draws on a range of themes that subtly echo the apostle Paul's sweeping picture of how to build better relationships and a better world. Family bonds and loyalty, good versus evil, and redemption and positive change all play a crucial role in the film's comical plot.

- "Read through these verses again and again and feel the simple, practical energy they evoke. They offer a no-nonsense vision of Christian living.... we should note the remarkable command in verse 9: hate what is evil, stick fast to what is good. You can't get simpler, or clearer, than that." * Gru began the *Despicable Me* series as a villain. Love drew him into the Anti-Villain League, and in the latest film, he struggles to "stick to what is good." What most tugs you away from what is good?
- Gentile and Hebrew Christians in Rome clearly found themselves polarized at times, frustrated by or angry at each other. What would it have taken for them to be able to regularly "be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying"? Could we really do that in our highly polarized times? In what ways did that specific counsel reflect the serious spiritual reality behind "love should be shown without pretending" (verse 9)?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me to always pursue the good for others and for your kingdom. Teach me how to avoid the enticing evils that draw me away from what is good. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part Two: Chapters 9-16* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 76). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

From Lonely Villain to Connected Family Man

TUESDAY 6.24.25 Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

[Genesis 2:18](#) stated a human truth: it isn't good for any of us to be all alone. Ecclesiastes 4 expanded on that idea, describing the tragedy of great wealth with no human connections as a "terrible obsession." In the *Despicable Me* film series, Gru moved from villainy to anti-villainy mainly through having a family. Ecclesiastes showed the antidote for selfish isolation with down-to-earth images of helping someone up after falling, staying warm on a cold night and weaving a three-ply cord.

- The wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes warmly valued human friendship. "Two are better than one," he wrote. They "can help each other, can keep each other warm and safe." He added that "a three-ply cord doesn't easily snap," which "may imply that three companions are even better than two." * In what ways have you found value in facing life with people you trust and care about rather than all alone?
- One key New Testament image for God's people was "family" (e.g. [Romans 12:10](#)). In Bible times, "orphans are used to depict loss, vulnerability and social disruption.... the plight of the widow and orphan often occur in tandem in the Scriptures." ** Today, Resurrection's mission partners in Africa highlight the tragedy of over 100 million orphans and helpless children due to the AIDS epidemic. How does that background make Jesus' promise in [John 14:18](#) meaningful to you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me how to claim you as my Companion and Comforter and join with others in your family to help each other on our spiritual journeys. Amen.

* Brent A. Strawn, study notes on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1061 OT.

** Article "Orphan" in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 615.

Love Conquers Fear that leads to Lying

WEDNESDAY 6.25.25 1 John 4:11-19

Threatened by villain Maxime Le Mal, Gru wanted to hide his family under false identities. His youngest daughter objected to lying about her name, and her fearful dad asked, "Why can't you be more like your sister Edith? She lies all the time." * There may be times when using a false name is wise, but John clearly knew that fear can move you to embrace actions or attitudes that are the opposite of what God desires for you.

- John's letter urged believers to remember daily that their ultimate destiny rests in the hands of the God who "is love." John said that perfect love—that is, God's love—casts out fear. John wasn't writing about some abstract, sterile belief. It was a passionate, living, active trust that Jesus was no fairy tale, but was and is exactly who he said he is. How could that kind of trust have kept Gru from responding to his fear and trying to teach his daughter to "lie all the time"?
- John's simple words are so familiar that we can miss the depth of his thought. "God **IS** love" was very different from saying "God loves" (as one of many qualities). Selfless, self-giving *agape* love is God's very essence. In her book *Many Waters*, Madeleine L'Engle wrote that "all the raging of creation... was enfolded in a patient, waiting love." ** How can it shift your view of life's meaning and purpose to believe in a patient, waiting love, rather than just a cold, uncaring universe?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that your love is a fixed point I can depend on in an ever-changing world. Keep me steady, stable, loving, and out of fear's grip every day. Amen.

* From <https://www.ranker.com/list/best-quotes-from-despicable-me-4/saim-cheeda>.

** L'Engle, Madeleine, *Many Waters* (A Wrinkle in Time, Book 4). Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR). Kindle Edition, p. 318.

Zacchaeus: From Greedy Villain to Generous Neighbor

THURSDAY 6.26.25 Luke 19:1-10

In *Despicable Me 4*, Gru has changed (mostly) from a villain into a family man who works for the Anti-Villain League. The Bible contains striking stories of just that kind of transformation happening in real people. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was a true villain, dishonestly wealthy and widely despised. Tax collectors helped fund the Roman occupation by collecting taxes (usually excessive) from other Israelites and pocketing the surplus they collected. But meeting Jesus completely changed him.

- Jesus ignored the grumbling crowd and reached out to include Zacchaeus, not deterred because others rejected him as a "sinner." His radical welcome transformed Zacchaeus' life. Who might feel excluded from God's love as you look at the people around you at work, school, or in your neighborhood? How can you and your church help welcome them?
- Jesus' mission was "to seek and save the lost." Scholar William Barclay said, "'Lost' does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place.... A lost [person]... has wandered away from God; and is found when once again in the rightful place as an obedient child in the Father's... family." * In what ways has God given you your rightful place in God's family? When have you been able to help God "find" someone else?

Prayer: Loving Lord, help me to see others through your eyes that lit up with love and compassion at the sight of a "sinner." Help me to love and serve anyone I can in your name. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke* (Revised Edition). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, page 257.

Jesus Transformed Paul's Villainy into Grace-Sharing Mission

FRIDAY 6.27.25 Acts 26:8-19

The apostle Paul, on trial before King Agrippa II, gave a gripping personal testimony about his own transformation from villain to saint. He openly recognized his history of trying to violently wipe out the young Christian community. But he was also clear about the divine commission Jesus gave him: "to appoint you as my servant and witness of what you have seen." That encounter changed Paul and fired in him a mission to bring that change to as many other people as possible.

- The question Paul posed in [Acts 26:8](#) to King Agrippa and Roman governor Festus is still basic for Christian witness: "Why is it inconceivable to you that God raises the dead?" Paul's primary focus was on Jesus' resurrection, but his testimony also showed that his shift from the dead-end task of trying to stifle God's saving work to a living faith grew from the same divine power. Can you trust as strongly in God's transforming power as Paul did?
- It's easy to miss, but in *Despicable Me 4*, Gru did something similar to Paul by changing Maxime Le Mal from enemy to karaoke partner. "Paul here insists, in Acts 26:18, that the gospel will open the eyes of the Gentiles, turning them from darkness to light, and from the satan's power to God's power, so that by faith in Jesus they may receive the double blessing—forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among the sanctified." * Who might you influence to turn from darkness to light?

Prayer: Lord God, your love and grace transformed Saul the Pharisee, scourge of Jerusalem and parts beyond, into the apostle Paul, indomitable sharer of love and grace. Shape me into the person you call me to be. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *The Challenge of Acts: Rediscovering What the Church Was and Is* (p. 147). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

Transforming Villains into God's Beloved Family

SATURDAY 6.28.25 John 3:3-7, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Reviewer Maggie Orsinger wrote, “If you are not familiar with the *Despicable Me* movies, they began with villain Gru adopting three little girls as pawns in an evil scheme, only to build an actual family over time. He even gets married to an Anti-Villain League agent, Lucy.... The redeeming power of family... is what draws you into these films.” * For the apostle Paul, the redeeming power rested ultimately in **God’s** family, though often experienced and shared through family and church family connections with other humans. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “A final reason I think Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies’ is this: love has within it a redemptive power. There is a power there that eventually transforms individuals.... I can see [Jesus] looking out at the Roman Empire with all of her fascinating and intricate military machinery.... I can hear him saying: ‘I will not use this method. Neither will I hate the Roman Empire. I am just going to use love as my ammunition.’” **

- Methodism’s founder John Wesley defined the “new birth” Jesus promised in John 3 this way: “In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the ‘mind which was in Christ Jesus.’ This is the nature of the new birth: ‘So is every one that is born of the Spirit.’” *** Have you, like most of us, moved away from God at some point(s) in your life? When you create that distance, do you picture God as uninterested and distant, as angry and eager to punish, or as lovingly eager to bridge the distance to all human beings (including you) and to give you, in effect, a new life? *The Message* paraphrased 2 Corinthians 5:21 as “We’re speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he’s already a friend with you.” **** How has your reconciliation with God transformed you into “a new creature in Christ”? Who do you know who needs an invitation to join in that transformed, “new life” quality, quite possibly from you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, God was reconciling the world (the world that includes me) to himself through you. Shape me into a transparent, winning beacon of the message that God loves us all. Amen.

* From <https://www.familytheater.org/blog/despicable-me-gru-minions>.

** <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church>

*** The entire sermon is found at <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-45-the-new-birth/>

**** Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message Numbered Edition Hardback*. Navpress. Kindle Edition.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

To **Valerie Bonebrake** following the death of **Bob Bonebrake** (Husband), who died 6/12/2025.

To **Jessica Winne** following the death of **Kim Winne** (Mother), who died 6/2/2025.