

Preparation for Session 32 – Presuming Innocence

Innocent unless proven guilty. Our country's legal system is based on that notion. If we can presume people accused of serious crimes innocent, then why not our friends, family members, or the people we meet on the street?

1) Innocence of everyday happenings

Imagine you are driving on a road where two lanes are merging into one. There are at least five signs that warn you that the lanes are merging. Now a car comes speeding up the shoulder at the last minute to try and jump in ahead of you. What immediately runs through your mind? Do you speed up and try not to let them in because they should have seen the signs that warned of the merge?

Maybe the driver is just a jerk and impatient, but what if s/he has a sick child, or a pregnant woman in the car? Or what if the driver is lost and doesn't know the area, and the merge caught him/her off guard?

Imagine, now, that you knew the person was innocent. How does that feel? Are you angry? What if you could grant that person innocence without knowing for sure? How would that change your everyday life?

Can you list other common aggravations that might be alleviated by presuming innocence?

2) Innocence in relationships. Sometimes we talk before we listen. That may be especially true for those of us who are parents. Have you ever jumped to conclusions with a loved one, only to regret it? Can you remember a time when you presumed the guilt of a friend or family member? What happened? How might "presuming innocence" have changed your actions?

3) If we were to presume innocence when meeting people, lifestyles, and philosophies foreign to us, how would that change our outlook on life? Our actions?

4) How can we balance presuming innocence with a healthy skepticism?