



The IMAGINE Series focuses on the hope of a different world as followers of Jesus make disciples who make disciples.



Stories from a Pastor's Heart

Pastor Michael listened to community leaders and church members who were local firemen, police officers, and first responders. It was their feedback that informed the church's support for an impactful community initiative. Church and community leaders noted that a large segment of neighborhood homes lacked the protection of fire alarms. Church members realized that a city program provided fire alarms for free, but distribution and installation were the challenge. Out of these opportunities and challenges, an idea was born. The church organized themselves into multi-cultural teams. Some of the teams spoke Spanish, others spoke Portuguese, and a few Laotian members were represented as well. The English speakers of the church divided into groups of five or six and Pastor Michael prepared each group for distribution. On the specified date, hundreds of home visits were made. Church members distributed and installed the free fire detection equipment for their neighbors. As the installation concluded at

I. Introduction: "We are Christ's Ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Have you ever felt beaten by the world?

Have you ever felt that your spirit had been stripped and left bare to the harsh elements?

Have you ever felt that no one cares about your future?

I have been there.

I was the one lying on the side of the road as many passed by.

They continued on, unconcerned or unaware of my need.

But today I am thankful. I'm thankful for the one who did stop and reach out.

I am grateful for the one who took the time to bring comfort to my wounds; thankful for the one who supported me when I could not stand on my own.

I am grateful for the one who cared enough to see hope in my future.

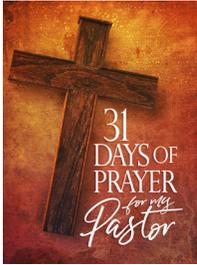
I can share this story with you because of one...one who became my "neighbor" and extended the love of God to me.

—The Traveler

These words, penned by an anonymous poet, capture the heart of one who has experienced the grace of God through a true "Jesus ambassador" (2 Corinthians 5:20). We can recall that the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) provided practical and caring support to the traveler, who was struggling to survive, alongside the road. Likewise, if we hope to see others come to follow Jesus, every believer will have to become "a neighbor" to others around us and lavishly extend the love of God.

Seeking to define the limits of love that we should be expected to demonstrate, religious leaders would ask Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus reframed the question, transforming it from one that suggested limits of love to one that reflected deep care, grace, and

each home, church members offered prayer for the residents. The prayers were unanimously received. Pastor Michael and his congregation are winning favor within their community because the church is gaining a reputation as one who serves.



For more stories and encouragement, order a copy of *31 Days of Prayer for My Pastor* here.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . ." (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher:

Share with your congregation:

"Lord Jesus, I sense that you would be pleased for me to share

_____ with _____.
Prompt and empower me to do so by your Spirit."

compassion. Rather than "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus posed the question, "Who was a neighbor?" Within the context of this introduction, Jesus began to paint a picture of what ambassadors sharing Great Commandment love look like—defined not by limits, but by radical sharing of His life and love.

II. How Did Jesus Live His Life "On Mission"?

If we hope to see a child, family member, friend, neighbor, or co-worker come to follow Jesus, we must look to the One who embodies relevance and impact. If we hope to live as an ambassador who effectively shares the gospel with others, we must ask ourselves, "How did Jesus present the good news? How did He reveal Himself to people?"

- Did Christ offer the Jews only rational arguments as to why they should believe He was the Messiah? No.
- Did He depend upon elaborate performances and costly productions to bring people the message of hope? Hardly.
- Did Jesus focus His witness on opportunities to debate with political leaders and the religious hierarchy in order to disprove their theories and shed the light of truth upon their misguided philosophies? Evidently not. So how did Jesus present a defense of the faith?
- Ambassadors share a relational witness.

Jesus did not just impart the truths of the gospel; He lived them. Jesus did not simply offer isolated rational arguments about the tenets of our faith. Rather, He consistently modeled the character and behavior that His teaching encouraged.

- People became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah as they witnessed His tears for a friend, His acceptance of an outcast, and His compassion for the infirmed (John 11:33–36; Luke 19:1–10; 18:35–42).
- Others were drawn to the Messiah by His supportive presence and unconventional demonstrations of love (John 9:1–41; Luke 17:11–19).
- Jesus Christ did not merely present a rational or propositional apologetic. He lived out a relational one.

The apostle Paul reinforced the need for a relational apologetic as he shared this powerful insight for presenting the gospel: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Paul seems to be saying, "Share the written letter (the gospel), and share the living letter (your life)." The two make a powerful combination. Such a relational approach to the gospel is even more important in our postmodern culture, where the prevailing question is not: "Are these propositions true?" but rather, "If these propositions are true, then what?" It is only as we impart our lives along with the gospel that this important question will be answered.

A. Living life "on mission" impacts every aspect of daily life.

"But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7–8).



M-1 Imparting the gospel and one's very life in daily activities and relationships, vocation and community

As we become 21st century good Samaritans and live our life "on mission," we extend the life and love of Jesus. Below are three specific ways to further your engagement as Christ's ambassador.

Truly know people. In order to truly know someone, you must focus undivided attention on his or her concerns and needs. As good Samaritans, we should:

- Leave our "side of the road" with its priorities and preoccupations to become attentive students of other persons and their needs.
- Notice the surroundings and situations of others, their relationships and needs, with particular attention to their isolation and aloneness.
- Make caring inquiry, when appropriate, into their hopes and dreams, their disappointments and fears.
- Offer the gift of our presence, expecting that they will see Jesus in us (see Colossians 1:27).

Initiate caring involvement. Be among the first to extend loving support to the hurting person according to the need of the moment, drawing upon what you have come to know about him or her. As good Samaritans, we should:

- Offer thoughtful words and, at times, appropriate touch.
- Visit, call, or send notes just to say, "I am thinking about you."
- Reassure the person's hopes and dreams by communicating, "I'm looking forward to rejoicing with you as God blesses your future."
- Commit to travel through the disappointments and fears of others, communicating, "I'm committed to go through this with you."
- Help lift the burden of the situation and struggle with practical help, thus fulfilling the law of Christ—the law of love (see Galatians 6:2–3).

Vulnerably share as a fellow traveler. Communicate that you also, at times, have been stranded by the road, needing help.

Significant impact and deepening of relationship takes place, as we are vulnerable to share that we are "imperfect" ambassadors.

I sometimes struggle with . . .

1. Being so busy with my agenda that I fail to notice people's needs.
2. Feeling inadequate over how to help.
3. Thinking so much about people's spiritual needs that I overlook their relational or physical needs.
4. Not being able to see beyond a person's sin or the ways in which they are different from me. I am, therefore, not always sensitive to their need for acceptance.
5. Being judgmental, critical, or condemning.

After you have identified your areas of hindrance, pray privately or with one or two others.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . ." (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher:

Share one of your own hindrances to compassionately take initiative to share your life and His love. (Review the list to the right)



M-2 Expressing and extending the Kingdom of God as compassion, justice, love, and forgiveness are shared

When we truly experience and express Great Commandment love through our lives, it will express and extend His kingdom as we startle the world around us.

B. Living life “on mission” extends kingdom hope.

“For this is how much God loved the world—he gave his one and only, unique Son as a gift. So now everyone who believes in him will never perish but experience everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Possibly the most familiar of all Bible verses is about a God who loves. How startling it is when we begin to imagine the wonder of such love, the miracle of the gift named Jesus!

Throughout the pages of Scripture, we’re touched by the uniqueness of the God-man Jesus. Christ’s words were startling and His miracles amazing, but everything He said and did was meant to call attention to how He loved. Take a moment now to reflect on how Jesus expressed what the kingdom of God is like by startling people with His love.

- Jesus startled lepers with loving compassion by healing their bodies and bringing dignity to their lives, sometimes even touching them in order to heal them (Luke 5:12–13; 17:11–19).
- Jesus startled a Samaritan woman when He broke all cultural conventions by asking her for a drink of water (John 4:4–26). In the midst of her shame and rejection, the Savior entrusted her with a conversation about eternal things and “extended a message of mercy and justice” (Micah 6:8).
- Jesus startled the woman caught in adultery when He knelt beside her, joining her at the point of her hurt and extending hope and forgiveness. He dispersed her accusers with His words and then offered restoration to her as He lovingly said, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:10–11).

Pause now and reflect on the startling love of Jesus:

Jesus, you first startled me with love as you brought me into relationship with you. Pause to give Him thanks.

“Dear Lord, I give you thanks for loving me to yourself when . . .”

“Jesus, do it again! Keep it up! Dear Lord, open the eyes of my heart that I not miss the abundance and constancy of your startling love.”

Hear His startling cries of love from the cross for those who betrayed, tormented, and rejected Him:

- “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).
- Listen again as He speaks hopeful, accepting words to the thief by His side: “Today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).
- Then, “He said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother’ from that time on, this disciple took her into his home” (John 19:26–27).

We, too, are the beneficiaries of His forgiveness and hope, justice and compassionate care. Humbled by such matchless grace, we have been made partakers of His love. Our world needs to be startled by this same love. They need to see a living model of Great Commandment love in action. Let us go forth with gratitude and compassion and begin to startle our world with God’s love.



M-3 Championing Jesus as the only hope of eternal life and abundant living

C. Living life “on mission” calls us to share the hope of Jesus.

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

When Jesus learned they had thrown him out, he went to find him and said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” (John 9:35).

The ninth chapter of John’s gospel describes the best day of this man’s entire life. Yet no one—not friends, family, or the religious community—was willing to celebrate with him. The people of the neighborhood ignored him. The religious leaders accused him. His family rejected him. But when Jesus heard all of this, He went to find him.

Take a moment right now to recall a friend or loved one that is experiencing life alone. Jesus is calling you to simply walk alongside and encourage them through your life and the hope of the gospel.

Pause with your small group or partner and ask God to “send” you:

“Send me, Holy Spirit, to _____ who at times is alone, struggling with _____.”

Today, make a phone call, send a text, or have a cup of coffee and do what Jesus did. When He heard that the man was alone, His first response was not to preach to him, pray for him, or give a pep talk but simply to be with him.

Your friend needs the same today. As you live His life alongside them, listen to the Holy Spirit for just the right time to share of Jesus, “the hope that is within you.”

The discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus has personal relevance to each person “born of woman,” to each of us, to you, to me (John 3:1–5). It’s this shared experience of being born again that makes us part of His family, a shared community of Jesus followers.

In His family, we, like Nicodemus, have been challenged to embrace Him as more than “teacher” but to receive Him as Lord. We, like Nicodemus, have been provided the opportunity to add to our natural life, His supernatural life and then to share Him with others.

It’s this miracle of being “Spirit-born” that unites us by the Holy Spirit to both Jesus and to one another. It’s this connection of the born-again that creates true fellowship, a community of Spirit-empowered followers who embrace the imperative to “let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Pause together with a partner or small group:

- Sharing your personal “born again” stories.
- Celebrating that His Spirit, like the wind blows where it will, bringing the new birth to all kinds of people, and He wants to impart His good news through you.
- Praying for one another that your walk with Jesus would experience the freedom to be characterized less by the “natural” and more by the supernatural, allowing His Spirit to boldly champion Jesus!

"You shouldn't be amazed by my statement 'You must be born from above!'"

—John 3:7



M-4 Yielding to the Spirit's role to convict others as He chooses, resisting expressions of condemnation

III. Jesus' Ambassadors Are Secure in Their Identity and Calling

You as a Minister of Reconciliation

Ultimately, our culture's gravest problems cannot be remedied by political, social, or economic means. We throw more laws, programs, and money at these problems every year, yet they continue to increase. The solution to the alienation and aloneness of the human heart can be found only in God's offer of reconciliation through his Son, Jesus . As Spirit-empowered individuals embrace their identity and calling, abundant life and meaningful relationships with others are possible.

Christ has entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to us, His church. God is at work in us, calling a hurting world to Himself. He is the solution to the heartache of our world, and because He is in us, and we are in Him, we have the awesome ministry privilege of co-laboring with Him to see people reconciled to God and to one another.

This call from God is being restored to the 21st century church. The call is to relevance in ministry, applying the Great Commandment principle of love in His church and beyond. Only as we hear and heed His call, will we give evidence that we are His disciples.

A. Ambassadors are moved with compassion—not counsel, criticism, or condemnation.

"And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8).

"But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion . . ." (Luke 10:33).

Critical to the ministry of reconciliation, we as good Samaritans prayerfully ask for the Lord's discernment and guidance. We must be convinced that the compassionate care of Christ in us is often more valuable than any advice we may give. Your eagerness to share words of advice or counsel will often hurry you past the pain and needs of others. Counsel may indeed be appropriate, but only after compassionate care.

Following the example of Jesus, we must respond with care to people in pain, trusting the Holy Spirit to deal with any wrong and sinful behaviors and attitudes.

Recall His acceptance of Zacchaeus before he changes (Luke 19:1–10) and His support of the woman caught in adultery before He exhorts her in right living (John 8:3–11).

You and I must see people as God sees them—persons in need of His saving and freeing grace to be sure, but also persons who are in pain, needy, and often alone, needing a grace-filled relationship with God and possibly you!

Our sharing of "truth" may indeed be appropriate, but always in love (Ephesians 4:15) and always free of condemnation (Romans 8:1, 33–34). The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts of sin, and He guards His job jealously, finding no need to share it with us!



M-5 Ministering His life and love to the "least of these"

B. Ambassadors are called to serve.

To be "sent" with the heart and mission of Jesus is to live as a servant, sharing His life, love, and the gospel.

Recall a time when you were prompted to serve a friend, family member, or even a stranger during a time of need. "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). When did God involve you in ministry to another person at their point of need and aloneness?

I recall when (who/what) _____ and

God led me to _____.

(For example: I recall when several homeless people gathered near my house to stay warm. God prompted us to take them warm soup and blankets each day until the weather changed.)

Serving others with sensitivity and initiative is a critical part of our being "sent" to live and love as Jesus. Christ exemplified this when He noticed the many needs of hurting people around Him and took initiative to meet those needs.

Take notice of opportunities to be "sent" as a servant to others in your life:

- Look for the unnoticed people around you. Start a conversation. Ask them about the details of their lives.
- Offer to help someone with their groceries, offer your seat on the bus, or even buy a cup of coffee for the person next in line.
- Take care packages to the homeless in your town or volunteer to deliver meals to the elderly.

"Jesus repeated his greeting, 'Peace to you!' And he told them, 'Just as the Father has sent me, I'm now sending you.'"

—John 20:21



M-6 Bearing witness of a confident peace and expectant hope in God's Lordship in all things

C. Ambassadors are confident in the Lordship of Jesus.

Is this any less true today? Is Jesus any less aware? Is He any less in control? Is He not interceding for you before the Father right now? "He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

The ministry of Jesus is complete and absolute. His life spent on earth proved His character and forged the Redeemer's everlasting ministry as the One who now lives to bring our petitions, prayers, and praise before the Father's throne. It's true. He really does hold the whole world in His hand.

Imagine heaven! The very atmosphere is a sweet aroma of praise that raises like the cloud that Isaiah saw in his vision. Before the throne is One who looks like the Son of God! Standing. Beseeching. His voice rising and falling with faith, hope, and love for His church. From the mouth of the One risen from the dead, your name is spoken. You. Jesus is interceding for you.

Paul said in Philippians 4:6 to "make your request known to God."

- Is there a wayward child your heart breaks for?
- Is there a soul that you cry out for?
- Is there a purpose in life you are asking for?

See the Lord, high and lifted up, His scarred hands spread before the Father, and His voice filling the celestial air with faith. He carries your petitions before the throne.

“Now Jesus was fully aware that the Father had placed all things under his control, for he had come from God and was about to go back to be with him.”

—John 13:3

It is time to pray with new faith, friend. Let your request go to the One who intercedes before the Father.

- Make your request known, “Jesus, I bring my need, petition, prayer, and request before you now.”
- Begin to thank Him as He takes your petition and presents it before the throne.
- Close your eyes and imagine the scene in heaven as your Lord delivers your petition before Father God.

There is only one response adequate and that is praise to the One who lives to make intercession, for you. Let His kingdom come on this earth just like it is in heaven.

“As many as are the promises of God, in Him they are ‘yes’ . . .” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Pause now with a partner or in your small group to give thanks for the certainty of His Word; although, every man be found a liar, God remains faithful to fulfill His Word. Thank Him for the certainty of His Word and for the John 10:10 promise of life’s abundance as declared by the Son: “I came to give you everything in abundance, more than you expect—life in its fullness until you overflow!” (John 10:10).

“Father God, with grateful heart I cling to your promises for direction in life. Hearing Christ’s promise of abundant life gives security and hope. Open the eyes of my heart to see your plans for prospering in whatsoever I do as I walk in the light of your Word” (see Psalm 119:105).



M-7 Faithfully sharing of time, talent, gifts, and resources in furthering His mission

D. Ambassadors are called to gratefully give.

“Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy toward him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same’” (Luke 10:36–37).

What is it that empowered the Samaritan to cross the road and minister sacrificial care to the hurting traveler? We are not told directly, but Christ’s words in Matthew 10:8 provide insight as He said, “Freely you received, freely give.”

- As we observe the Samaritan’s “freely giving” of his compassion and care, we are left to wonder about his “freely receiving.”
- When and where had he been touched by Great Commandment care? How and through whom did he receive it?
- Had he in times past been the recipient of Christ’s healing touch, His gracious acceptance at a point of failure, or possibly His support during a time of struggle? We are not told. But this one thing seems important: the Samaritan has not gotten over the wonder of being cared for himself. Never get over the wonder of His abundant care for you!

Herein lies the power to faithful stewardship. Paul exhorts us in 2 Corinthians 6:1 not to receive the gifts of God in vain. Had the priest and Levite taken the Master’s care for granted? Tragically, it seems so.

There is no better illustration of “freely receiving” and “freely giving” of His provision than Christ’s miracle of feeding thousands.

“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish . . .” (John 6:9).

“Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish . . .” (John 6:11).

Pause quietly to picture Christ with eyes toward heaven, His hands open...

- With one hand, He receives what is available—five loaves and two fish from a young lad.
- With one hand, He gives freely and abundantly to the needs of all.

At times, this calling is to freely receive as He gives to you through relationship with others. At other times, He calls you to freely give to the needs of others. His inheritance toward you never runs out. His provision is without limit.

Quietly consider: What encouragement, care, support, or affirmation might you need in the midst of your struggles? Yield to the Holy Spirit within you. Would you open your heart to receive these gifts from Christ, the One who provides?

What stewardship of time or talents, gifts, or resources might you freely give to someone this week? Could you take the time to think of a specific name and then yield to the Spirit’s prompting? As you share His life and love, others will find hope in the Jesus who provides.

If we as Christ’s ambassador hope to adopt a relational apologetic, we must recognize that there is a price to be paid. Sharing one’s life with another person requires a deep, costly commitment because only as our walk matches our talk, will we have an effective, contagious witness for Christ.

- Only as we impart His life and love in spite of others’ faults and failures, will we give witness to a Christ who longs to accept us (Romans 15:7).
- Only as we offer our time talents and practical help, will we give witness to the God who bears burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Only as we share of our gifts and resources when others are hurting and in need, will we give witness to a Christ who is both acquainted with sorrows and grief (Isaiah 53:3) and moved with compassion for others (John 11:35).

The supernatural and sacrificial love of God demonstrated through His people will draw others to Christ and bear fruit that remains. We must be willing to allow God to make us “good stewards of His manifold grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

IV. Christ’s Ambassadors Impart Legacy.

We live in a world of hurt and emotional isolation. Our communities are filled with people desperate to find healing for broken relationships, a sense of meaning to replace the emptiness of their lives, and peace in the midst of chaos and insecurity. The crises are innumerable. The pressures can be overwhelming. Consequently, our world needs a relevant, vibrant body of believers who will serve as a shelter from the storm and a place of refuge from the stresses of life.



M-8 Attentive listening to others' story, vulnerably sharing of our story, and a sensitive witness of Jesus' story as life's ultimate hope; developing your story of prodigal, pre-occupied and pain-filled living; listening for other's story and sharing Jesus' story

- They need the body of Christ to cross the road like the Good Samaritan and give relevant, helpful care.
- People need a place where hurts are healed, and hope is restored.

If we hope to reach our world with the good news, we, as the "called" of God, must show that we are "good neighbors" by our demonstrations of His love.

A. Ambassadors listen for others' story.

Look for the pain of aloneness as you listen for the "story" of others around you. Christ asked the man at the pool of Bethesda, "Do you wish to get well?" (John 5:6). Make it your daily practice to be keenly alert to the stories of pain and struggle of people you encounter. You will find prime candidates for your ministry as a good Samaritan to people who are:

Pain-filled

- Suffering from obvious trauma, tragedy, violence, sin, compromise of principles, etc.
- Experiencing a time of rejection, loss, discouragement.
- Experiencing a time of rejoicing and celebration, but they are rejoicing alone.

Pre-occupied

- Immersed in endless activity and busyness, trying to ignore their feelings.
- Clearly avoiding their most important relationships—those with God, family, God's people, etc.

Prodigals

- Escaping into substitutes such as drugs, alcohol, food, television, pornography, the Internet, work, etc.
- Making self-focused decisions based on the lusts of the eyes, lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life.
- Compromising ethics, morality, values, and principles, and selfless living.

Walking in the Light of God's Word Through Frequent Experiences of Scripture (John 12:35; Psalm 119:105)

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Consider again Christ's startling love at Calvary:

- Forgiving those who had wounded Him
- Accepting a thief before he changed
- Supporting His own mother, even while suffering excruciating pain and sacrificing Himself



M-9 Pouring our life into others, making disciples who in turn make disciples of others

“After this, Joseph from the city of Ramah, who was a secret disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jewish authorities, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. So Pilate granted him permission to remove the body from the cross. Now Nicodemus, who had once come to Jesus privately at night, accompanied Joseph, and together they carried a significant amount of myrrh and aloes to the cross.”
—John 19:38-39

Think of His loving initiative. Remember His forgiveness, acceptance, and support. Then pause to review the traffic patterns of your life. You have been placed there as His ambassador. He longs to share His love through you. He hopes to demonstrate His forgiveness and acceptance through you. He wants to communicate His support through you to others. This week, as His ambassador, ask the Holy Spirit to make real 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Who among your family, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances could benefit from:

- *His forgiveness through you (no matter what their sin)?* _____
- *His acceptance through you (even before they change)?* _____
- *His support through you (even if they have not asked)?* _____

Share these responses and specific people with your partner or small group. Pray together, asking the Spirit to remove hindrances to your witness and to empower the sharing of God’s startling love through you.

B. Ambassadors make disciples—who make disciples.

“Secret disciple!” The two words do not go together. For me to be a disciple—a true follower—it will not be in secret. As I truly follow Him, He will lead me into ever-widening expressions of His love. You, no doubt, have been the recipient of His sacrificial love shared through others, and as you gratefully embrace this love, it frees you to unselfishly love others. Both Joseph and Nicodemus seemed “slow to love” as secret disciples. Let’s not be slow.

“Freely you have received, therefore freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

Recall a time when you were discouraged, misunderstood, or “needy of love” in some way, but God brought another Jesus follower, family member, or friend to support and encourage you. How did this person reassure you, showing loving commitment to you so that you were not alone?

“I remember a time when _____ and God brought _____ into my life to _____.”

Celebrate with a partner or small group. Talk about the times when God brought people in your life to encourage, support and reassure you.

To walk in His light involves frequent and recurring encounters with . . .

- **Jesus**—“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’” (John 8:12). We can practice the presence of the Lord, yielding to the Spirit’s work of Christ-likeness.
- **Scripture**—“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). We can live “naturally supernatural” in all of life as God’s Spirit makes the written Word (logos) the living Word (Rhema).
- **Followers of Jesus**—“You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). We can take courageous initiative as a peacemaker, reconciling relationships along life’s journey.

"...walk in the light ..."

—John 12:35

The Holy Spirit within us is also critical to our walking in God's light. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals Jesus to us (see John 14:26); brings illumination to Scripture (see 1 John 2:27); and empowers our fellowship together as Christ's followers (see 1 Corinthians 12:2–13). How's your walk?

With your group members discuss the three sources of light—God's Son, His Scripture, and His saints.

- Celebrate together one of the areas in which you are thriving: "I'm doing well at yielding to scripture's protective cautions and transforming work through the Word."
- Pray together about one of the areas in which you could benefit from more exercise in walking in the light: "Lord, help me to experience You as You really are through deepened intimacy with You!"

"Jesus said . . . 'follow Me.'"

—John 1:43

Two simple but profound words can guide my daily walk as light in a dark world: "Follow me." Whatever may come my way today, Jesus has gone before me, He has led, and I'm to follow!

"WWJD" is my key to following.

- What would Jesus DO becomes a guiding principle when uncertainty abounds.
- What would Jesus CHOOSE guides me away from a broad road of destruction onto the narrow road of life abundant.
- What would Jesus SAY guides the words of my mouth away from unwholesome words and into words that edify.
- What would Jesus THINK guides my thoughts away from this world into His Word, which renews my mind.
- Clarity and adequacy for daily living is found in the powerful simplicity of two words from the Word: "Follow Me."

Pause to celebrate with a partner or small group:

"Recently, I sensed an important "following" of Jesus as I faced . . .

and found strength to _____
_____."

C. Ambassadors run the race because our hope is in community.

"... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Years ago, during the United States Special Olympics, viewers were brought to tears during the 100-yard dash. When the starter's gun sounded, the runners, most of whom had Downs Syndrome, raced down the track. About midway through the race, one young boy stumbled and fell, sprawling on the track.

The crowds who were present, and the millions who were viewing, looked on in sympathy. The spectators were given an unforgettable lesson in the power of community by the runners they watched that day. One by one,



M-10 Living submissively within His Body, the Church as instruction and encouragement, reproof and correction are graciously received by faithful disciples

the young runners stopped running and went back to the fallen boy. After helping the boy to his feet, the crowd of runners started again toward the finish line, crossing it together arm-in-arm.

Scripture speaks of how we are running this race of faith. It's not a solo event, but a team relay where each of us is being encouraged by others toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). Our Hebrews 12:1 text is clear. It does not say "let you run," but rather "let us run!"

- A significant measure of the hope God has in mind for you is to be received in relationship with others, but our self-reliance can hinder this blessing.
- A significant measure of the hope that others need is to be shared in relationship with us, but our self-focus can hinder this blessing.
- Just as hope is found in the person of Jesus and the truth of His Word, God's design is for hope to be freely given and received among His people.

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

Experiencing Scripture

"Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). Imagine Christ standing before you—the only true Teacher (Matthew 23:10), the One who is love (1 John 4:8), the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3–4), the One who is humble and gentle (Matthew 11:29, 30). Imagine that He invites you to become like Him, to express His life and love, to extend the light of His presence in a dark world. Our calling is to become "fully trained" in the life and love of Christ, our Teacher.

Though you may not fully know all the transforming work that will be needed in your life, consider yielding to Christ's invitation. Offer the following prayer as an expression of your heart and your commitment to walk in caring and accountable community.

Lord Jesus, as You see those things in my character, behavior, or attitudes that are distracting to my expression of You, please bring others into my life to lovingly point them out. Please let Your Spirit prepare my heart to receive Your counsel, Your reproof, and Your correction from those whom You send. I want to be changed. I want to be more like You. In Your Name, Amen.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . ." (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher:

Pause to reflect on how your own life has been blessed to walk with God's people and how He has brought fellow saints into your life.

Perhaps there has been a spouse, child, family member, friend, or even an enemy whom the Lord has involved to transform you. Has God involved this person in your life so that you have been challenged to conform in Christlikeness?

Consider sharing about this part of your running your race.