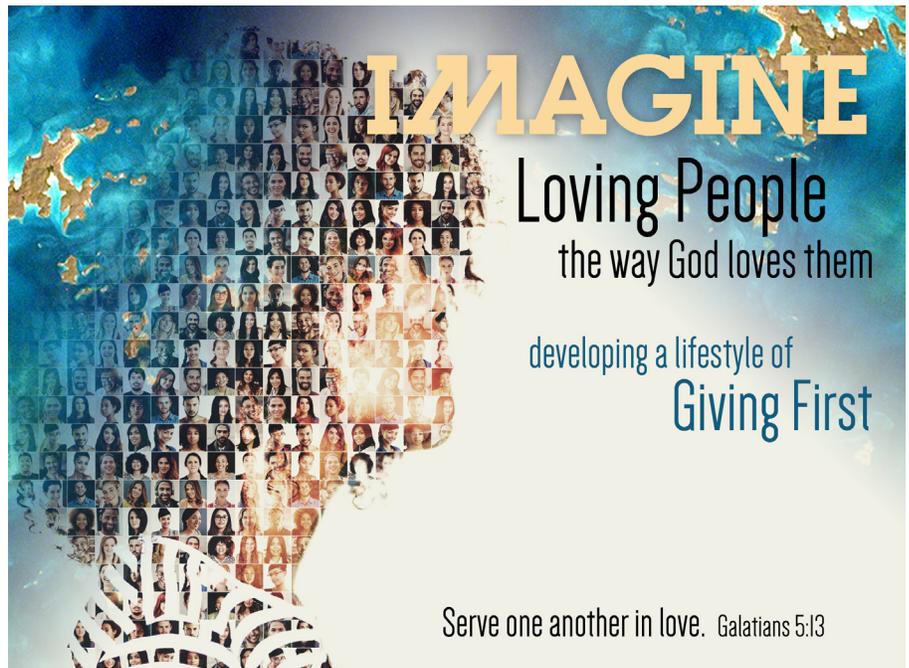


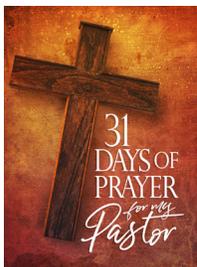


The IMAGINE Series focuses on the hope of a different world as followers of Jesus make disciples who make disciples.



“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



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

I. The Startling Love of Jesus

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 loved people and how He startled them with His love.

Jesus startled lepers by healing their bodies and bringing dignity to their lives, sometimes even touching them to heal them (Luke 5:12,13; 17:11–19).

Christ startled a Samaritan woman when He broke all cultural conventions by asking her for a drink of water. Amid her shame and rejection, the Savior entrusted her with a conversation about eternal things (John 4:4–26).

Stories from a Pastor’s Heart

Pastor Roger started a church more than 20 years ago. He, his wife, and 17 other faithful friends followed the Lord’s calling to plant a church in a suburban community of Arizona. God has been faithful to lead and provide. The church now reaches thousands and makes an eternal impact on their community. When asked about his success, Roger remembers how it all began.

I had a routine of “startling love.” Every Friday morning, I would drive to work and ask the Lord, “Who should I startle with love today?” By the time I got to the office, I had a list of names. I would begin making phone calls. “Ann, this is Pastor Roger. I was on my way to work this morning and remembering your faithfulness and how much I appreciate your leadership in the pre-school ministry. I’m just calling to say thanks on behalf of countless parents and kids whom you’ve loved well for so many years.” Or “Jose, this is Pastor Roger. I drove into work today and was thinking about what an incredible

joining her at the point of her hurt and providing protection for her life. 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 NLT).

Pause now and reflect on the startling love of Jesus touching your life.

“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.”

“And then he said, “Peter, follow me.”

— John 21:19

II. Loving People . . . Is Characteristic of Following Jesus

Two powerful, simple words that change everything: “Follow Me.” To follow Him is to avoid a broad road that many travel, leading to destruction—choosing instead a narrow road leading to life (Matthew 7:13–14).

Consider the blessing that Christ has invited you to follow Him—to “partner” with Him in kingdom purposes.

Pause to consider that God’s ultimate purpose for your life is to follow Him so that you can express His glory, which . . .

- allows you to receive of God’s abundant blessings.
- enables you to bless others with His love.
- blesses God and brings Him pleasure.

What do these truths do to your heart? Might you be touched to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, confident that such an offering honors and glorifies Him?

“He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me” (Psalm 50:23).

Share with Him your response to the following:

Jesus, as I consider the wonder that my “following” you actually blesses You and others around me, my heart is filled with _____.
(For example: My heart is filled with praise, awe, wonder, gratitude, love, joy. I cannot get over how much You love me, and I hope I never do!)

Pause to pray with your partner or small group, giving God honor through your praise and thanksgiving that He’s inviting you to follow. You have the privilege of joining Him in an eternal calling. “Lord Jesus, from a grateful heart, lead me by your Spirit as I champion you as people’s only hope”



P-1 Living a Spirit-led life of doing good

“You’ve called me your teacher and lord, and you’re right, for that’s who I am. So if I’m your teacher and lord and have just washed your dirty feet, then you should follow the example that I’ve set for you and wash one another’s dirty feet. Now do for each other what I have just done for you.”

—John 13:13–15

“When the Jews who were hostile to Jesus heard him say, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven,’ they immediately began to complain.”

—John 6:41



P-2 “Startling people” with loving initiatives to “give first”

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

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

Pastor/Teacher:

Share a recent example of your “freely giving” of His love and grace to someone in your life.

“Recently I was excited to share _____ with _____.”

A. Following Jesus Means . . . “Going About Doing Good”

“You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

“One and done!” That is the phrase people use when something is done once and never repeated. It’s over and done with, complete, move on . . . nothing to see here.

But here is good news from the upper room; Jesus is still washing feet. His ministry of humble serving is not one and done! He is still the great and mighty Lord of all who washes the feet— hearts and souls—of whosoever will come (Mark 8:34). Right now, you have a divine appointment with the scarred hands of the Messiah. In His kingdom, He rules by serving.

I know. It is difficult to come to Him. A bit embarrassing to keep dragging mud behind you. Come anyway. His ministry, His greatest joy, will not be completed until you see Him face-to-face. Maturity is the distance between sin and repentance. The shorter the distance, the greater the maturity. Waste no time. He stands ready to serve.

Pray like this: *“Lord, I know I am in great need of Your cleansing grace right now. Look at me, Lord. . . I’m a mess. Thank you that you never refuse repentance. You never refuse those who come in humility. I confess (name the sin and failure) and ask you to cleanse me. Thank you, Lord that you continue to wash dirty feet!” However, the task is not completed with repentance.*

Jesus also said, “You also ought to wash another’s feet.” Who do you know that needs the tender compassion and acceptance that Jesus has shown you? Muddy feet are usually left to others to care for, but not today. Today the Lord appoints you to be His hands and His heart. Join Him in “doing good” as His Spirit-empowered follower.

Go and do the same! Ask Him now: *“Holy Spirit, who would you send me to that I might champion Jesus as our only hope of life and life abundant?”*

B. Following Jesus . . . Means “Startling People with Love”

“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Luke 6:38).

Many today still grumble because they miss seeing Him for who He really is. Sadly, many miss Jesus because they don’t encounter Him in His people.

Pause to ask God who, in the traffic pattern of your life, needs to experience encouragement, comfort, acceptance, or support through you! Freely we have received these facets of His grace, and freely we are to share them.

“No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and His love has been brought to full expression through us” (1 John 4:12).

True fellowship, in which we genuinely love each other, enables the full expression of God’s love. This means as we experience God’s love through the love of others, we see Him as He really is. As we receive acceptance from others, we’ll be able to see the God of gracious acceptance (Romans 15:7). Through the comfort of a friend, we’ll be able to see the One who is “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).



P-3 Discerning the relational needs of others with a heart to give of His love

“Here’s a young person with five barley loaves and two small fish.”

—John 6:9

“Jesus then took the barley loaves and the fish and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to the disciples to distribute to the people. Miraculously, the food multiplied, with everyone eating as much as they wanted!”

—John 6:11



P-4 Seeing people as God sees them, so we can love them as God loves them

Just as we receive this blessing of experiencing God through others, we are called to express His presence to others, giving testimony through the giving of His love in order that they might see Him more clearly and find added hope. We have a “giving first” God, and He calls us to be a “giving first” people.

Pray together with a partner or small group, asking for His life to be shared through you, beginning with those close to you and with other followers of Jesus, and then extend this sharing of His love to others who need to know Him.

C. Following Jesus . . . Means Meeting People at Their Point of Need

“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

There is no better illustration of “freely receiving” and “freely giving” of His provision than Christ’s miracle of feeding thousands. “Freely you have received, therefore freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

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 receive from His abundance. At other times, He calls you to discern and give to the needs of others. His inheritance toward you never runs out; His provision is without limit.

Quietly consider: What relational needs like, encouragement, care, support, or affirmation might you need during your struggles?

Yield to the Holy Spirit within you as the Giver of good gifts ministers to you. Would you open your heart to receive these gifts from Christ, the One who provides?

Now pause to reflect on the relational needs of others in your life.

What acceptance, compassion, appreciation, support or respect 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, just like the hungry multitudes in John 6.

Pray like this:

“Lord Jesus, I sense that you would be pleased for me to share _____ with _____.”

Prompt and empower me to do so by your Spirit.

D. Following Jesus . . . Means Seeing People Both Fallen and Alone

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Who sinned? The entire ninth chapter of John holds many great insights for the followers of Jesus. As Jesus and His disciples are going to

“Teacher, whose sin caused this guy’s blindness, his own, or sin of his parents?” Jesus answered, “Neither. It happened to him so that you could watch him experience God’s miracle.”

—John 9:2–3

Jerusalem, they come upon a man beside the road blind from birth. The Bible records that Jesus heals the man, prompting a lot of trouble. The man is called before the religious leaders. His family is brought in to try to explain what has happened to him. Finally, because he continues to testify that Jesus was responsible for his receiving his sight, they throw him out of the synagogue. When Jesus hears about it, He goes, finds the man, and reveals more of Himself to him (see John 9:35).

Of specific importance to us becoming people who love as Jesus loved is the issue of grace. Surely, He has looked beyond our faults to see our needs (Romans 5:8 and Luke 19:7), but can we do likewise?

One tragic part of the story is that even as Christ’s heart is moved with compassion and grace, when the disciples looked at the same man beside the road, they asked this question, “Master, who sinned? This man or his parents . . .” Do you see the contrast between the heart of Jesus moved to minister to needs and the hearts of the disciples wanting to know, “Who sinned?” The disciples seem focused on the issue of sin, while Jesus seems drawn to this “sinner” being “alone.” As we walk by faith and not sight, we also will see people as God sees them.

Following Jesus and loving as He loves means becoming a person of grace. It means seeing and ministering to people’s aloneness and needs, such as support, encouragement, and acceptance, rather than seeing and reacting only to sin. The power to see people as God sees them must come from God, and the power to give grace comes from having partaken of God’s grace. “For it is by grace you have been saved . . .” (Ephesians 2:8). “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). **One of the things that will empower your ministry to hurting people is reflection upon the abundant grace you have received from God, prompting gratitude in your heart.** Pause often to consider Calvary and your own fallenness and aloneness then whisper the words “He did it for me.” Never get over the wonder that you have been loved, and you’ll be constrained in loving others. (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When we encounter Jesus, his grace is not just for us but for all. Secure in the wonder of His love, can you submit your life in a new way, a way that allows God to involve you so that others can experience—witness, observe, see clearly—the miracle grace of the Father?

Begin small. What humbling experience in your life can you submit to God right now to use for His glory?

Pray like this: “Jesus, you have changed my life so that I could be a witness to others of your amazing grace. I’m especially grateful for how you keep loving me, even though I disappoint you at times by _____.

I ask that you use your grace in me for your glory. Send me to others with eyes to see them as you see them. I celebrate your love and grace toward me as your Spirit empowers my love of others.

Jesus said to her, “You don’t have to wait any longer, the Anointed One is here speaking with you—I am the One you’re looking for.”

—John 4:26

III. Loving People . . . Is Characteristic of His Grace

Shockingly, Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah, but how did she deserve or merit such revelation? It was only by grace, unmerited, and so it is with you and me.

Reflect on what you have done or could do to deserve His forgiveness. There's nothing that you could do to earn the gift of His Son? Every one of us much conclude: It's only by His grace. It is only God's unconditional love that provided the gift of Calvary and the forgiveness that is available to us.

Make a list of all the things you have done this week to cause God to love you less . . .

Answer: NOTHING!

Make a list of the things you have done this week to cause God to love you more . . .

Answer: NOTHING!

" . . . to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

Now allow the Holy Spirit to touch your heart with thanks and gratitude, praise and wonder that God has freely given the gift of His Son and the empowering of His Spirit. **Share your praise and worship with the Lord:**

Father, as I consider the unmerited gift and provision of your Son and your Spirit just for me, my heart is touched with _____.
Overwhelm me with gratitude and empower me through the wonder of your grace that I might live a Spirit-empowered faith, pleasing you in all things.



P-5 Ministering His life and love to our nearest ones at home and with family

A. Loving Grace ... Begins at Home

God created the heavens, the earth, and all that lived upon it. He built an amazing home for Adam to live in and called it "good." It's also important to notice the first time God declared something was "not good." God, the Creator, made this declaration about Adam's relationships. Adam was alone, and his aloneness in relation to other humans was "not good." God has the same declaration for our homes: It's not good to be alone!

Listen carefully, as we consider the pain of aloneness, and you can hear the Father's heart. Listen closely, and you may sense God's concern for countless marriages and families.

- He sees the wedding photos in our homes, but His heart is broken because so many couples are married but still alone!
- God sees children as gifts from the Lord, but families are so busy with activity that many children are missing intimacy and are very much alone (Psalm 127:3).
- The Father sees single adults with powerful potential and incredible ability to live for His glory, but they are hindered by the loneliness of their hearts. (2 Timothy 2:22).

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

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

Pastor/Teacher:

“Honor your . . . spouse.”

Pause to recount an important character quality of your spouse that has enriched your life. “My spouse’s (humor, compassion, generosity, etc.) definitely helped shape who I am today.

Your home has a purpose: God declared in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that man should be alone.” To experience God’s intended abundance in life, marriage, family, and friendships, aloneness has to be removed from our homes. Aloneness could be defined as: A sense that an important person in my life does not deeply know or care about me. The experience of aloneness is painful; it’s debilitating. The antidote for aloneness is the experience of closeness and intimacy within relationships. We are created to need intimate relationships with God and with other people. In other words, we need both spiritual and interpersonal relationships.

An individual can have a relationship with God, and not be spiritually alone, but still experience interpersonal aloneness. Looking back to Genesis 2, Adam was alone interpersonally but not alone spiritually. After Genesis 3 and Adam’s choice to sin, each of us now enters the world both spiritually and interpersonally alone. This aloneness can only be resolved through intimate relationships with God and other people.

Experience Scripture: “Rejoice with those who rejoice . . .” (Romans 12:15).

Reflect on God’s provision of your spouse, children, family, friends, and the body of Christ—just for you. Your life has been blessed because of God’s ample provision. How does this provision touch your heart?

For example: I feel humility and gratitude. I haven’t thought much about God providing these relationships just for me. I’m grateful that He did!

Reflecting on the way that God has provided for our relationships often prompts gratitude in our hearts. How does your gratitude now motivate your care toward others?

For example: As I think about how God has provided significant relationships in my life, it makes me want to do a better job of providing for other people in my life, beginning at home.

Pause now and celebrate together how God has provided for you through those who know and care for you. Then ask the Holy Spirit to deepen your expressions of grace-filled love toward your spouse and children, family, and friends.



P-6 Expressing the fruit of the Spirit as a lifestyle and identity

“But all that is recorded here is so that you will fully believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you will experience eternal life by the power of his name.”

—John 20:31

B. Loving Grace... Ministers the Fruit of the Spirit

Notice the patience and pursuing grace we find in Jesus’ love of Mary, the disciples and a hesitant Thomas; we also have received this same loving pursuit as it provides hopeful confidence of His Lordship and purposeful living empowered by His Spirit.

“ . . . We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Romans 5:11).

Let’s be reminded that before we were drawn into a personal relationship with God, we were separated from Him. Because of our sin we had no friendship, no relationship and no peace with God. But because of His grace we were saved from our eternal separation from God. We were reconciled, brought back, and restored by His Spirit to express His life and love.

Pause quietly before the Lord as He reminds you what life would have been without Him? Ask Him to remind you of His grace and how the Lord gifted you with the Holy Spirit and desires to express Himself through you.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

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

Pastor/Teacher:

Consider sharing a needed, deepened work in your own life... as His Spirit empowers:

patience	kindness
gentleness	self-control
joy	goodness
love	faithfulness
peace	



P-7 Expecting and demonstrating the supernatural as His spiritual gifts are made manifest and His grace is at work by His Spirit

“When Jesus saw him lying there, he knew that the man had been crippled for a long time. So Jesus said to him, ‘Do you truly long to be healed?’”

—John 5:6

- “I’m especially glad that God brought me to Him because . . .”
- “I rejoice in God’s gift of the Holy Spirit because . . .”

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Pause to consider what deepened expression of the Holy Spirit’s fruit might be needed in your life. Might you need to express more of the Holy Spirit’s love, joy, or peace? Patience, Kindness, or goodness? Faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control?

Now, with a partner or small group, ask the Holy Spirit to express Himself through you in fresh ways and then “rejoice” together in claiming the promise of abundant fruit. The Lord smiles when He sees His people living out His Book, yielding to the Holy Spirit.

C. Loving Grace . . . Ministers Through Supernatural Living

Imagine . . . A place where healing waters were stirred by grace but limited by man’s ability to be first in line—a place where deliverance had gained a reputation but only for the fastest, not the neediest or the most downtrodden?

That is where you find Jesus. See Him standing, observing, talking, and listening. He is asking the Father, “What do you want me to do?”

There is a man lying near the pool. He is a nobody in a beautiful place marred by the worst that life can offer. Jesus stands over him. “Excuse me, sir, but do you truly long to be healed?” There is no demand, only an honest question. “Do you want the impossible . . . the improbable . . . what you have asked God for every day? Are you ready to have your life changed?”

The man doesn’t answer the question, at least not directly. In fact, his response is that healing is impossible. Not improbable or unlikely. Impossible! For some, even though they are living every day in a beautiful place, their only identity is the sin and sickness they have come to know.

Take a moment to encounter Jesus beside your own troubled waters. Hear Him ask the question, “What do you want Me to do?” Tell Him now, and He promises to take it before the Father!

He is not bound by what you believe about yourself. He is not waiting for you to get the right answer to the question. He knows you do not have the strength or even the belief. In fact, that’s the very reason He is asking the question. **He stirs the waters of the soul.** He troubles the heart and mind so that His miracle of transformation can take root and thrive; so, He can give you a Spirit-empowered faith which is unexplainable apart from Him.

Next, move towards the place you desire to be. Jesus told the man, “Get up!” Now speak up with gratitude that demonstrates faith. Claiming the hope and promise of the Holy Spirit’s “living water” flowing through you, touching others with His presence and power (see John 7:37–39).

Pray like this . . .

"Jesus, thank you that You hear me! I yield to your grace and lean into your mercy. I receive by faith the promise and power of your Holy Spirit. You have met me beside these troubled waters, and now I give you praise. Give me an 'unexplainable' life characterized by your Spirit."

The lesson? Jesus is at His best when you are at your weakest and worst. Welcome to the springs of living water, which will empower your victorious living. His name is Jesus.

IV. Loving People . . . Is His Newest Command

The lazy flame of the oil lamps cast more shadows than light as the twelve huddle around the low table. Beneath the open windows, the city breathes out life and commerce. The noise carried by a slight breeze tempers the stale air. You can smell the scents from the street mixing now with the sweat of the men and the simple meal prepared for the Master. They are dirty from the feet up.

Everything has changed. On the walk from Jericho, He had been so focused. What was supposed to be triumph when He entered the city turned to tears as He wept over the same. The words He speaks now are distilled down to a profound whisper as they bend in to catch every word. The years of teaching and preaching come to light in the dim glow of the room. "Love each other as I have loved you," He says. It is a living command. And it is what separates His people, His Spirit-empowered followers from all others.

Is this really possible? Practical? Doable? Only by first experiencing the kind of love that Jesus demands. "This is my command." It is not a suggestion or an encouragement. It is the marching orders for the followers of Jesus from this final night and going forward to His second return. There is no place on earth that this kind of love is lived out like in the church of Jesus Christ. Whether in a church service, a discipleship conversation, or small meeting in a home, bonds are formed that give examples of what Jesus commanded. The body of Christ is knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped as each part, working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love (Ephesians 4:16).



P-8 Taking courageous initiative as a peacemaker, reconciling relationships along life's journey

A. Loving People . . . Shares the Hope of Reconciliation

"Each of us must give an account of ourselves to God" (Romans 14:12).

Healthy, God-honoring relationships need constant attention and a commitment to personal responsibility and "peace-making." God's hope for our relationships requires that each of us give a frequent account to God for our own choices and behavior (Romans 14:12). We often think that only dysfunctional relationships need attention, but the healthiest relationships are constantly developing and carefully maintained. Every type of relationship—marriage, friendship, employer/employee, parent/child, co-worker, classmate, or roommate—will benefit from the healing power of confession and forgiveness.

Because the people in your life are imperfect . . . when you mess up, 'fess up!

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

Key Truth: How we deal with our inevitable life's hurts determines our relational closeness to God and others.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

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

Pastor/Teacher:

Consider vulnerably sharing how, at times, it's difficult for you to apologize. What are your struggles? Pride? Fear of what others might think? Being perceived as weak? Others might use it against you?

"I sometimes struggle admitting when I'm wrong because I . . ."

(i.e., "because I focus so much on others that I think my sin is justified.")



P-9 Demonstrating His love to an ever-growing network of "others" as He continues to challenge us to love "beyond our comfort"

"So I give you now a new commandment: Love each other just as much as I have loved you. For when you demonstrate the same love I have for you by loving one another, everyone will know that you're my true followers."

—John 13:34–35

The powerful simplicity of confession is an essential tool for any peace-making plan. Saying the words, "That was wrong of me, will you forgive me?" can become a frequently employed strategy for bringing disconnected relationships back into alignment. Perfection is only possible for deity, not humanity, so we need God's plan for restoring relationships.

Because the people in your life are imperfect . . . when they mess up, forgive them!

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31–32).

" . . . to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

Reflect on what you have done or could do to deserve His forgiveness. There's nothing that you could do to earn the gift of His Son? Every one of us must conclude: It's only by His grace. It is only God's unconditional love that provided the gift of Calvary and the forgiveness that is available to us. Now allow the Holy Spirit to touch your heart with thanks and gratitude, praise and wonder, that God has freely given the gift of His Son and the empowering of His Spirit. Share your praise and worship with the Lord. As I consider the unmerited gift of God's provision of His Son and His Spirit just for me, His unfailing love and complete forgiveness, my heart is touched with . . .

Now, yield in prayer to be a Spirit-empowered follower who faithfully "forgives others as you have been forgiven."

B. Loving People . . . Moves Us Beyond our "Comfort Zone"

"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 as He extends the boundaries of love through you. Our calling is to become "fully trained" in extending the life and love of Christ, our Teacher.

Pause to consider your "comfort zone." We all have one in those settings and surroundings where we sense adequacy, familiarity, and "safety," but Jesus the great Teacher has come to transform you!

Reflect on His boundary-breaking love toward Samaritans, sinners, lepers, and tax-collectors.

Pause and pray, asking for courage to expand expressions of His love through you, yielding to the Spirit's work.

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 love beyond your comfort zone.

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 beyond your comfort zone and how He has brought others into your life. Perhaps, there has been a stranger, spouse, child, family member, friend, or even an enemy whom the Lord has involved in His transforming work in your life.



P-10 Humbly acknowledging to the Lord, ourselves, and others that it is Jesus in and through us who is loving others at their point of need

“Holy spirit, prompt and empower me to live beyond my adequacy and to love beyond my present boundaries. ‘Here I am Lord—send me.’ Lord Jesus, as you expand your love through me and 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.”

C. Loving People . . . Is Really Jesus Loving Others Through Us

With these words, Jesus is both reminding the disciples of His past demonstrations of love and concern for them as well as foreshadowing His forthcoming display of perfect love at Calvary. Through His sacrifice, and through His continual caring involvement in our lives, Jesus has loved us as well. The more we recognize and receive His love, the more we can embrace our true identity as His beloved and our life-calling to share His love.

Consider what Scripture reveals about God’s love for us:

- He has poured out His love upon us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).
- God demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8).
- Nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:38–39).
- The love of Christ for us is infinitely great and surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:18–19).
- Because of His great love for us, God made us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:4–5).

Jesus left behind exact instructions with the disciples as to the how the world was to know about Him. His intent was that the love the disciples declared they had for Him would be demonstrated in practical and observable love for others. In other words, the world would believe in the love of God because His people truly loved one another.

We are not simply people who believe Scripture’s great doctrines about Christ; nor are we merely people who practice good and righteous behavior. Hopefully, we do believe right doctrine and practice right behavior, but **we must be careful not to think that our identity lies in either of these things.**

Pause to give thanks that our true identity is that we are ones who have been loved by Jesus. We are His beloved. Additionally, as part of our identity is the undeserved calling and privilege to be “ambassadors for Christ” and co-laborers with Him in love (2 Corinthians 5:20, Matthew 11:28–29).

“Lord Jesus, I embrace and celebrate my identity as your ‘beloved.’ I yield to your Spirit that you might share the life and love of Jesus through me.”