



### Colossians 3:16 Preparation

*"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you..."*

**Pastor:** Take a few moments to consider your own life and how Christ's love has touched you.

How has He startled you (like the soldiers at Calvary) with His unconditional forgiveness?

Just like the thief on the cross, how has Christ extended His acceptance of you at a point of failure?

And just like Mary, how has Jesus provided His support for you during a time of struggle?

Pastor, consider sharing these times as part of your own testimony of how God has demonstrated His startling love for you. Let this vulnerable testimony of hope become a part of your sermon. "I remember the time when Christ

\_\_\_\_\_."

**Introduction:** It's on this day, that we celebrate the startling love of Jesus from Calvary and the message of hope from the garden tomb. Calvary and the empty tomb bring us hope in our darkest hours, hope for life now and life eternal.

**Jesus did amazing things while He was here on earth. He drew large crowds because of His miracles and unconventional teachings. Christ even startled people by the things He said:**

To the lame man, He said, *"Arise, take up your stretcher and go home"* (Luke 5:24).

To the man with a withered hand, Jesus said, *"Stretch out your hand"* (Mark 3:1).

To his friend, Lazarus who had laid in the grave for four long days, Jesus said, *"Come forth!"* (John 11:43).

Jesus must have even startled His parents after they had been looking frantically for their "missing son." At the age of twelve, Jesus announced, *"I must be about My Father's business!"* (Luke 2:49).

**Jesus also startled many people by the things that He did:**

- Christ turned water into wine. (John 2:9)
- He walked on water. (John 6:19)
- Jesus cast demons into swine. (Mark 5:11-13)
- He raised loved ones from the dead. (John 11:43-44)

**But there's something more important than all of these amazing words and miracles: Jesus startled people with His love!**

Christ's words were startling and His miracles amazing, but everything He said and everything He did was meant to call attention to how He (God) loved.

Let's take a moment now to reflect on how Jesus loved people and how He startled others with demonstrations of His love.

- Jesus startled lepers by healing their disease-ravaged bodies and bringing dignity to their lives. Christ's healing love was practical and yet startling since He was even known to touch lepers in order to heal them. Not even the terrifying disease of leprosy (with all its physical manifestations and social stigma) prevented Jesus from demonstrating His extravagant love (Luke 5:12, 13, 17:11-19).
- Christ startled the Samaritan woman when He broke all cultural conventions by asking her for a drink of water. In the midst of her shame and rejection, the Savior entrusted her with a conversation about eternal things (John 4:4-26). This seemingly simple interaction showed what lengths to which Christ would go to demonstrate His love.
- Jesus also startled the woman caught in adultery when He knelt down beside her, joined her at the point of her hurt and provided protection for her life. Christ dispersed her accusers and then offered the woman restoration 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). Christ rescued a sinner and restored a life, all the while confirming His startling love.

## II. Christ's Love Brings Hope to Troubled Lives

*"And hope does not disappoint us" (Romans 5:5).*

Christ's love brought hope to those He loved. The lepers were healed and were able to rejoin their families and community. The Samaritan woman's sense of worth was restored, and to such an extent, that she returned to give testimony to all who would listen. The woman caught in adultery was rescued from the certainty of shame and death, yet must have been overcome with the joy of her new-found freedom and restoration.

Each page of the Gospels is filled with encounters of Christ's startling love and the hope He brought to troubled lives.

It's at this season that we are challenged with the eternal significance of the empty tomb! And now as we reflect this Easter season on the gift of Christ at Calvary, let's consider some of Christ's final words from the cross. These too, reflect the startling love of Jesus.

**Even at the point of His death, Christ was still startling others with His love:**

- Imagine how Jesus must have startled the Roman soldiers who stood beneath His cross. The very men who had mocked Him, tortured Him, driven nails into His hands and feet, and gambled for His clothing, would have heard Jesus say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).
- Consider the thief who was crucified next to Jesus. After a lifetime of deception and sinful choices, the man must have been startled to hear Jesus' words of acceptance: "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
- And finally, let's recall one of Christ's final encounters with His mother, Mary. Jesus looked down from the cross and saw His mother standing with His beloved disciple, John. Once again, Christ displayed His startling, supportive love. Jesus looked ahead to His approaching death



Click here to view a message on the resurrection with Josh McDowell.

and made provision for His mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to John, “Here is your mother.” As confirmation of this provision, the Bible says that from that day forward, Mary lived in the house of John (John 19:26, 27).

Today is the day that we celebrate the amazing demonstration of love through Christ’s death at Calvary, confirmed by the empty tomb. Yet even as we recall Christ’s words from the cross, we see His amazing forgiveness, acceptance, and support and love for others.

**Personal Application:** You may be here today with these same needs. You too, may need Christ’s forgiveness, His acceptance or His support. Our encouragement for you today is: Don’t leave this place today without allowing Him to meet your needs!

*“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5).*

### **III. Christ’s Love, Demonstrated Through Us, Can Bring Hope to Our Pain-filled World**

*“God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” (Romans 5:5)*

In case we’re not convinced that our world needs the startling love and hope of Jesus, just think...

During the next 60 minutes, it is estimated that (within the United States):

- More than 150 people will be diagnosed with cancer
- At least 64 people will die from cancer
- 10 people will die from alcohol abuse
- 2 people will die from illicit sexual behavior
- 2 people will die from illicit drug use
- 3 people will die from suicide
- 5 people will die from traffic accidents

When people are struggling, what do they need? If it’s not enough just to give Bible verses, then what does it look like to care?

*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).*

This verse explains that people all around us need compassionate ambassadors of Christ’s love. They need Bible verses with skin on!

Could you join me in this goal? Could you stand with me in this heart’s desire?

**That our church family would be more widely known as a Community of Hope—a place where Christ’s forgiveness, acceptance and support are abundantly available.**

**Here’s our opportunity:** As we go about our daily routine, we have the incredible opportunity to be an ambassador of God—an ambassador that loves and cares like Jesus!

Whether we encounter a friend who is experiencing sickness or dealing with the death of a loved one, a family member who is making destructive choices, or someone who is simply feeling alone, each of us has the privilege to offer Christ's startling love.

#### IV. Christ's Love Empowers Our Message of Hope

*"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors..." (2 Corinthians 5:20)*

And after each encounter with the Christ who lives inside us, people's lives can be filled with new-found hope.

*Christ's Love Empowers Our Message of Hope*

Let's remember again Christ's startling love at Calvary. He...

- **Forgave** those who had wounded and rejected Him.
- **Accepted** a thief before he had changed.
- **Supported** His mother, even while suffering excruciating pain and sacrificing Himself for all of humanity.

Think of Christ's loving initiative. Remember His forgiveness, acceptance and support. Then pause to review the people who are a part of your life. You have been placed in your family, in your place of work, and in your community as His ambassador. Jesus longs to share His love and hope through you. Christ wants to demonstrate His forgiveness and acceptance through you. He wants to communicate His support through your actions and your words.



**L-2** Listening to and hearing God for direction and discernment

**Experiencing Scripture:** *"Speak Lord thy servant listens"* (1 Sam 3:8-9).

Let's pause quietly before the Lord and ask God to bring a name or a face to your mind. Ask God to speak to you about someone who needs to encounter a compassionate ambassador. Ask God to show you a person who might need your demonstration of His forgiveness, acceptance or support.

*"Lord, I sense it is important for me to share your love with*

\_\_\_\_\_."

Constrained by Love: How are we going to live as Christ's ambassadors? It may seem impossible for you to arrive at a place where you could offer hope to others when you're just getting by yourself. So where are we going to get the power to live a life of caring for others?

Now, thank Him that He has revealed Himself.

*The message of Easter gives us our answer.*

Easter shows us that death and the grave were powerless in the face of God's love. It is this same power that will enable us to live as His ambassadors. But how will we access this power?

When we draw close to Christ and frequently reflect on His startling love in our own lives, overwhelming gratitude will fill our hearts. It's gratitude for His love that will empower our love of others.

The Hebrews writer refers to what we call, "Easter" when he writes:

*Another priest has arisen (not on the basis of his ancestry, but)... on the basis of the power of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:15-16).*

*Jesus Christ is now our intercessor and our priest because He alone, can claim the power of an indestructible life. And Christ, our priest, brings in a better hope, through which we can draw near to God (Hebrews 7:19).*

The great High Priest, *Jesus, is our "better hope"* through the Easter testimony of His indestructible life!



**L-4** Rejoicing regularly in my identity as "His beloved"

### ***Christ's Love Empowers Our Message of Hope***

Today is a special time to draw near to God and celebrate the startling love of Christ, who gave Himself for you at Calvary.

Let's take a few moments and consider how startling it is that He demonstrated a love that was so undeserved! He loved us when we were unlovable. He was moved with compassion when, from His eternal perspective, He saw us suffering in our alienation and aloneness. Christ's love led Him to a painful death upon a cross in order to make abundant provision for you and me.

Can you hear His startling cry of love for those who betrayed, tormented, and rejected Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). *Have you needed His words of love and forgiveness? Have you ever betrayed Him? Rejected Him or turned against Him? Why don't you draw near to God today and receive His forgiveness in a new and special way?*

Listen again as He speaks accepting words to the thief: "Today you will be with Me in paradise" (v. 43). *Have you ever needed to know that you are still accepted by God? Have there been times when you've needed the reassurance of a welcoming Christ? Draw near to God and receive the Savior's words, "You will be with Me"!*

Finally, can you hear Jesus' words of support for His mother? Can you hear His attentive care? *Have there been times when you needed to know that Jesus noticed your needs and was acting on your behalf?*

Draw near to God today and hear Christ's words of loving support for you. Jesus sees your needs, and He will lovingly provide.

### ***Encountering Jesus***

Imagine Jesus' agony on the cross. He was prepared to take upon Himself the sins of the world. Jesus sensed that His own Father had turned His back on Him. He cried out with a voice that conveyed a feeling of utter abandonment: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Yet there He hung upon a cross, startling people with His love. He was dying, yet He was thinking of those around Him...the soldier, the thief, His Mother. Jesus was giving up His life, yet He was giving life to others—so that they might know His love.

That is the startling love of Christ.

For whom did Christ do all of this? For whom did He suffer and die? Listen as the Spirit whispers, "He did it for you!" If He did not need to die for anyone else, He would have done it just for you! Allow this wondrous truth to motivate you to walk in the hope of His love. And now would you join me in receiving His startling love through a bold declaration of faith: "He did it for me." Say it with me: "He did it for me." Let's pause, be still and give Him thanks for the startling love of Jesus poured out for you and me.

## *Christ's Love Empowers Our Message of Hope*

Now since we are beneficiaries of His forgiveness and compassionate care and are empowered by the gratitude of how "He did it for me," let's bring this message of hope to others around us. Humbled by His matchless grace, we have been made partakers of His divine love. Therefore, we are now equipped to startle others with His love. People around us need to see a living model of God's love in action. So during this week, how could you begin to startle others with His love.

Who among your family, friends, co-workers 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)?

God, may you often remind us of how you have startled us with your love. Keep us grateful and humble. Empower us to take Your startling love of forgiveness, acceptance and support to others around us.



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

### **Engaging Fellowship**

As we close, maybe hold hands together or pray in groups of two or three—and let's ask God together to make us Ambassadors of hope. Recall the specific person God spoke to you about earlier and let's ask God to share His love through us to them this week.

God, help me to express your love to \_\_\_\_\_ this week.  
I know he/she may especially need your forgiveness/acceptance/support.  
Lord, make me an ambassador of Your hope.

**Lord, Make Me an Ambassador of Hope!**