

Love | Mission from the Inside Out
First Edition

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from The Message, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.

Copyright © 2024 by Tanner Peake

TannerPeake.com
EveryHome.org

For Grandma Emerald



Contents

First Love	01
Muddy Waters	13
Mission from the Outside In	25
What Kind of Love	35
Loving God	47
Loving Ourselves	57
Loving Others	69
Love in Action	83
Mission from the Inside Out	93
Appendix	101



*And this is my prayer: that your
love may abound more and more...*

ONE → Philipians 1:9 NIV ←

First Love

ON A WARM DAY, the morning sun illuminated the worn trail in front of an old man's tired and slow feet. These feet had once been young, steady, and full of strength. They had walked alongside Jesus on the long, dusty roads between towns, where a ragtag group of disciples traveled with their beloved teacher. These feet had carried the man into homes filled with the sick and desperate, and they had leapt with joy as Jesus laid compassionate hands on the suffering, making them whole and well.

They had borne him into synagogues where Jesus taught with an authority and insight unlike anything heard from the religious leaders of the day. His feet had led him to the shores of the Sea

of Galilee, where he and his friends baptized new believers, rejoicing with those who found hope and freedom in the teachings of the one they began calling “Messiah.”

These feet carried him to the edge of Lazarus’s tomb, where he witnessed his dead friend walking out alive at Jesus’s command. They had taken him to the upper room on Passover night, where Jesus washed these very feet and where he rested his head on Jesus’s chest, absorbing the profound love that had transformed him in ways he was only just beginning to comprehend. Later that night, these feet had walked into Gethsemane, where Jesus wept in prayer before being brutally seized by an angry mob.

His feet led him to Golgotha, where he watched in horror as the man he had followed for years was unjustly crucified. There, he heard Jesus’s dying wish for him to care for Mary, his mother. And three days later, these feet carried him again to a tomb—this time, an empty one.

Over the years, these feet journeyed to towns, villages, and gatherings, where he spread love, taught, and nurtured the fledgling community of followers of the Way. They even took him, in chains, to the island of Patmos, where he was imprisoned by Rome for preaching the message of Jesus—the message of love and freedom that threatened Rome’s power and control.

On this day, his feet, now old and tired, no longer bound but weakened from years of labor, carried him slowly back to Ephesus. There, a growing community of believers he had helped nurture awaited him. Despite his slow pace, John—the “beloved one”—moved with a lively spirit. He was eager to break bread, share stories, pray, rejoice, and weep with those he had discipled.

He was particularly excited to see a young man who reminded him of his younger self when Jesus first called him on the shores of Galilee.

Years earlier, John had spent hours teaching, listening to, and discipling this young man, growing deeply fond of his zeal and passion. Before departing to continue his pastoral work, John had entrusted his care to the church leaders, knowing his young faith was fragile even in its sincerity. Now, many years later, he longed to embrace him and see the man he had become.

Upon his arrival, the church in Ephesus greeted John with joy and care. They shared stories of growth, joy, trials, and difficulties. Finally, John asked about the young man, wondering why he was not among the group to greet him.

The leaders' eyes saddened as they explained that after John left, the young man had fallen into a dangerous lifestyle. Though he had initially engaged with the community, over time he was lured into a gang promising money and power. This gang had terrorized communities, and the young man, once filled with passion for love, had become its leader, his zeal corrupted by power and anger.

John, with sudden urgency, demanded, "Take me to him now." The leaders, astonished and fearful, warned him of the danger, but John insisted. Reluctantly, they led him to the gang's outpost. As they drew closer, John walked the final stretch alone. The gang encircled him, weapons drawn, but John called out for the young man, his voice infused with a love that stunned the vicious group.

"I am looking for my son! Where is he?"

Recognizing John's voice, the young man was struck with the terror of exposure to the gentle yet tenacious old man who had loved him so deeply. He began to run in shame. But the old man pursued him with the same determination as the young fisherman he once was.

As he ran, he called out: "Why do you run from me, child—from your own father, unarmed and very old? Be sorry for me, not afraid of me. You still have hopes in this life. I will account to Christ for you. If need be, I will gladly suffer your death, as the Lord suffered death for us; to save you, I will give my own life. Stop! Believe! Christ sent me."

Upon hearing this, the young man stopped, overcome, and burst into tears, dropping his weapon. He fell to the ground, and John embraced the desperate, broken young man. In this moment, John's love restored the young man's ravaged soul—a reflection of the God who never stops pursuing, never stops loving, and never stops reaching.ⁱ

• • •

This story is an imaginative retelling of an ancient tale about the disciple John. First told by Clement of Alexandria, the story has been passed down through many generations. It is a testimony of how the embodied and incarnational love of Jesus transformed those who loved and followed him, and the radical ways that love was then carried to the world. While we do not know if this story is true, it is certainly not hard to see its continuity with the writer of the words, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."ⁱⁱ

John, who uniquely and with deep affection referred to himself

as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” has been known throughout Church history as one who was adamant, passionate, and unwavering in his commitment to communicate the transformational love he had discovered through the revelation of Christ. This enduring message continues to be profoundly relevant to those who follow the way of Jesus today.

There are few words that have been so convoluted, tarnished, watered down, confused, and misunderstood as *love*.

And yet, love must be embodied, or it fails completely.

There are few words that have been so convoluted, tarnished, watered down, confused, and misunderstood as *love*. While this word leads us to something we all seem to know deep within our souls—something we ache to give and receive—it has also been abused and misused. It’s a word that has been cheapened by harm, unfaithfulness, and hypocrisy, often from those who claim to be its messengers in the world.

In 1965, the song “What the World Needs Now Is Love” spread across the United States. At the time, the culture was exhausted by war, global unrest, domestic tensions, racial and gender disparities, and political divisiveness. So the song’s message—all the world needs to be made whole is “love, sweet love...it’s the only thing that there is just too little of”—resonated.

Even as this song rose in popularity, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was issuing a radical call to the soul of a broken nation.

He invited Americans to become the “Beloved Community” through a commitment to justice, equal opportunity, and love of one’s fellow human beings. Love was central to King’s theology. For King, as for many others before and after him, love is what brings about true transformation in the world.

Only three years after a song about love topped the nation’s charts, this great Civil Rights leader was killed for delivering the same message. While the world sang about love, he died for it.

• • •

John gives a strong warning to those who are in danger of neglecting love. In his writings in the book of Revelation, he reveals a message from the heart of God to a church that had demonstrated incredible commitment to faith and holiness but had lost what was, and continues to be, the most central aspect of the Christian message:

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.ⁱⁱⁱ

What a sobering message for a church that was known throughout the Christian community to be filled with holiness and committed to truth, a church that refused to give up even while living in a culture that threatened them for staying faithful. And

yet, God's heart was grieved by the way this community had left their "first love." The departure from love was no small thing, no minor issue. "How far you have fallen."

Let's put this in the context of a modern church.

Imagine a church that is held in high regard among the Christian community. The church was originally founded by a small community of followers of Christ whose lives had been utterly transformed by Jesus's love. Not only had they cognitively experienced this love, but they had discovered healing, freedom, forgiveness, and grace. This love led them to a passionate desire to show compassion to their community, and with a commitment to be faithful to this transforming love, a small church was born—unpolished, messy, filled with a mixture of addicts, businessmen, sex workers, PTA parents, and high school dropouts. The community was a patchwork of wealthy and poor, marginalized, and those who enjoyed a privileged status in the prevailing culture. The experience of love bound them together—an unlikely community—a "beloved community."

Over time, the love that resonated from this small group spread, and the community expanded. More wealthy individuals joined, and what had once been a gathering in homes and a rented-out warehouse turned into gatherings in a shiny new building, worship music with musicians who rivaled professional bands, exciting light shows, and slick sermon series. Discipleship groups were full, and the church launched an outreach program to the unhoused community in their area. It ran a food pantry that fed hundreds of families a week, and it led weekly outreaches that spread across the community. More and more people were reached. More and more people were coming. Things started getting exciting when the influence of the church

grew to the point that they began to have political sway in the community. The pastor of the church started having dinner with influential political leaders who sought his endorsement, and soon the church became known for making political statements on divisive issues.

There was a growing list of things the church was “against.” They were doing much for the community, yet there was a sense that their intrinsic passion, tenderness, and compassion had been replaced by a subtle pride and self-righteousness. It was not overt, but it could be felt in the ways that the pastor no longer associated with people from a different political viewpoint or with people who did not contribute to his image. Some began to voice concerns about the drifting culture, but they were silenced or disregarded. “Look how many people are getting saved,” leaders argued. “Look at all the good we are doing.”

The church seemed to be at its peak. Hundreds of satellite churches had been planted. Politics and policies in the community had been changed. Money was flowing in for “kingdom purposes.”

And yet, they had left behind the most important thing—love. If John the Beloved were to enter the scene, he would issue the same strident call to repentance he gave the early Ephesian church: *Return to your first love.*

This is the decision point. If the people repent, there is great reason for hope. What has been lost can still be restored.

But if love continues to be neglected, we know what happens next—the story is a familiar one. A local news outlet reports on allegations of abuse and harm by the leadership of the church. Little by little, it is revealed that a culture of spiritual bypassing

has dismissed concerns of the pastor's narcissistic tendencies, as well as leaders who used their position of authority to harm others. The allegations grow, and soon the pastor and the entire board must resign. The church suffers deeply, and over time what was once a thriving metropolis for Christianity dissolves, leaving a wake of harm, confusion, disillusionment, and grief.

**It was from love we were created,
and it is love that reminds us what
is ultimately most true about us:
we are the beloved of God.**

Does this sound familiar? This story could be written in numerous ways and is certainly not limited to one denomination or to large churches. We are all in need of daily reminders to hold fast to love.

Sadly, the history of the Church at large is riddled with stories of brightly burning lamps being snuffed out because of a loss of the core message of love. The fall from love is profound and damaging to our souls, our psychologies, our bodies, and our communities; the only safe thing is for it to be exposed. The influence of loveless communities must be removed. It was from love we were created, and it is love that reminds us what is ultimately most true about us: we are the beloved of God.

It is not a small thing that John insisted on being known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Notice that he did not write, “the disciple who loved Jesus.” Rather, his preferred identity was one who was loved by God. One who did not identify with his role as an influential apostle, preacher, or teacher. One who did not

identify with his incredible works for the sake of the message of God—healing, casting out demons, standing up for truth. Nor did he identify with the great sacrifices he had paid for the message of Jesus—being persecuted, bound, isolated, and exiled on a faraway island. No, none of this was even remotely worth identifying himself with. He did not even choose to identify with his given name, the family he had come from. He was so transformed by the love of Jesus and what that meant for him that his first and most important identity was, “I am the one Jesus loves.”

Through this experience of love, we, like John, can carry God’s message in a way that transforms lives and communities. In the pages ahead, we will explore what it means to live our life as a mission from the inside out: motivated, sustained, and carried by the love of Christ that is deeper, higher, stronger, and more committed to us than we could ever fully grasp, yet open and available to each of us every moment of our lives.

Let’s dive in.





TWO

Muddy Waters

OVER A DECADE AGO, I was a young man, newly married, with a passion for Jesus and a wild optimism. That's when I first encountered the ministry of Every Home for Christ.

All my life, I've been an enthusiast—a natural evangelist for whatever has captured my interest or attention. I am ambitious to a fault, believing fiercely in my own calling to contribute something meaningful to the world. I have always wanted to make the world a better place, and I've always believed that if I just followed God's calling on my life, I would.

All this is to say: when I arrived at Every Home, drawn by the Spirit of God through the threads of my life, I was no stranger to the world of ministry. I was many years into a search for meaningful work. I had already been part of other Christian organizations, followed charismatic leaders, ascribed to grand visions, and participated in countless activities aimed at carrying Christ to the world.

Here at Every Home, I found something unique. I remember standing before a world map at Every Home's headquarters. Printed across the map were the names and faces of local believers leading the ministry's expression across the world. This was something different. As I learned more about the ministry, its model, its history, and its foundational beliefs, I knew I'd found a place my hope could land.

This was a ministry that, in all its best expressions, was simply putting love into action in meaningful ways all around the world. It was human, with real people carrying real good news to people who really needed it. It was humble, submitting its best strategies and ideas to the wisdom of local believers. It was not overly complex. Its only agenda was to make sure no one was left behind. This was a community that was not bound by red tape or distracted by nuanced theological battles. Instead, Every Home was a diverse fellowship, held together by Christ, motivated by love, always moving outward with it into the world. This was what captured my heart, and it is what keeps me at Every Home today.

Yet, over the years, as I have served this ministry in various roles and eventually in leadership, I have learned that the simplicity of Every Home's activity and the purity of its love is no small or easy feat. In fact, it is something that generations of leaders before me have toiled to preserve. Guarding it will be the primary task

of my leadership. Love, it turns out, is hard-won. It's not always simple, and Every Home is not alone in our wrestle with what it means in action.

On the surface, it would seem the Christian tradition regarding love is clear:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.ⁱ

Without love, we are nothing. Without love, we have nothing. Love makes life worth living. Love makes faith worth having. Love makes our words worth speaking. Love makes mountains worth moving. It's all about love.

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”ⁱⁱ

All of the Christian faith can be summed up in *love*. That means our mission, our witness to the world, and our evangelistic activity should all be summed up in love. That's straightforward enough, right?

Somehow, it's actually *not* always entirely straightforward.

Sometimes, especially when it comes to the world of witness and missions and evangelism, the whole thing is *less than clear*. I could put my finger on countless examples of activities done *in the name of love* that do not resonate as purely loving.

I think of zealous preachers on street corners with cardboard signs, announcing eternal damnation in permanent marker. Is it possible this kind of activity is not communicating the love we think we're proclaiming?

I think of a friend who told me that her childhood youth group created an "evangelism strategy" in which they staged a serious injury to garner attention, intending to turn that attention toward a gospel presentation. Things went wrong; an ambulance was called; the gathered crowd dispersed in anger. Is manipulation like this really what Jesus had in mind when he said, "you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth"ⁱⁱⁱ?

I think of western missions movements that carried a gospel laced with imperialism—movements of extravagant charity that also decimated countless cultures and people groups in the name of something between democracy and eternal destiny. Can the mixed legacy of colonialism be held up as a pure example of love?

I think of Megan Phelps-Roper, whose book *Unfollow* chronicles her upbringing and eventual departure from the Westboro Baptist Church. Westboro Baptist, an unaffiliated Baptist church in Topeka, Kansas, is widely considered a hate group by Christians and non-Christians alike. It is known for its malicious public protests—especially at funerals—with hate-filled rhetoric plastered on signs I wouldn't want to read out loud. And yet, the group claims they are acting in love:

It was even implicated in God's commandment to "love thy neighbor." *Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* The context made it abundantly clear to us that to love our neighbor was to rebuke him, to warn him away from the sins that would result in punishment from God. If we failed to do so, the blood of the wicked would be on our hands.^{iv}

I would venture to guess that most funeral-goers do not experience rebuke of their deceased loved ones as a form of love.

I think of fear-based altar calls and door-to-door evangelistic salesmen and early American settlers carrying the gospel along with diseases that would wipe out entire tribes of people and practical aid offered in exchange for religious conversions and fire-and-brimstone roadside billboards and the confrontational question, "Do you know what will happen to you after you *die*?"

It would be hubristic to assign a motive to any person conducting these activities, but the fruit of such work must draw into question the purity of its source. Can any of it come from love alone? If I'm honest—if I can see beyond my own complex need to justify any of it—my heart knows the answer. These are not pure expressions of love. In the least, other motives are intertwined.

The waters of our witness are muddy.

And I'm not the only one who feels this way. In a study on generational differences when it comes to sharing faith, Barna found:

Almost all practicing Christians believe that part of their faith means being a witness about Jesus (ranging from 95% to 97% among all generational groups), and that the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus (94% to 97%)...

Despite this, many Millennials are unsure about the actual practice of evangelism. Almost half of Millennials (47%) agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith. This is compared to a little over one-quarter of Gen X (27%), and one in five Boomers (19%) and Elders (20%).^v

Across generations, believers are unwavering in our confidence that the Christian faith has something valuable to offer the world. We all long to see our neighbors experience relationship with Christ.

Yet, increasingly, we (Christians *and* non-Christians) are growing uncomfortable with evangelism as we know it. *Something is not right here*, our souls are telling us—and I think it's time to listen. We are made to know love when we see it, and our eyes are opening. We want people to know Christ, but we do not trust the methods we've known for sharing him. This is a disconnect we can no longer gloss over or ignore.


In the following pages, I want to invite us into a nuanced conversation about our witness to the world through the lens of love. It's a conversation that matters to me as it relates to the work of Every Home for Christ, and I believe it matters to all of us as Christians who are called to carry Christ in our worlds.

I will propose that the problem isn't evangelism itself or the desire to share our faith with others. I think the problems arise when our motives are corrupted or co-opted by anything other than love. I believe our internal resistance to certain types of Christian witness is not the devil's interference or our own weakness but a Spirit-led response to activity that is simply not rooted in the loving heart of God.

Across generations, believers are unwavering in our confidence that the Christian faith has something valuable to offer the world.

Our witness to the world can be a joyful lifestyle that flows out of the abundance of love we find when we've truly encountered Christ. No more Sunday-morning guilt over our failure to evangelize every restaurant waiter we meet. No more fear over awkward encounters with our neighbors because *this time I have to invite them to church*. No more sending our youth groups to the mall with fake surveys to trick a quota of people into listening to "good news" (yes, I actually know someone who experienced this).

We're going to find, instead, what it means to be so grounded in the love of God and shaped by his love for all creation that our lives become an overflow, spilling hope and love into our worlds. We will find a vision for Christian witness that is rooted in, exclusively motivated by, and only known as *love*—without exception, without confusion, and without fear. We're going to rediscover our mission, as believers, from the inside out.



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself this question:

What motivates my witness?

. . .

Try to answer this question as honestly as possible. Is it love, fear, duty, passion, excitement, a mixture of things, or something else entirely? If your honest answer bothers you, don't beat yourself up or shame yourself. Instead, start with curiosity. What has muddied the waters for you, personally? What do you feel as you honestly reflect? If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



Mission from the Outside In

IN LUKE 10, JESUS TELLS A STORY we commonly refer to as the parable of the Good Samaritan. It's a parable he tells in response to a man—or, specifically, “an expert in the law” who “stood up to test Jesus”—asking him to *clarify a thing or two about love*.

“Teacher,” the man stands up and says, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”ⁱ

Jesus asks the man, “What is written in the Law?... How do you read it?”ⁱⁱ

The man responds by reciting the two greatest commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul

and with all your strength and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"ⁱⁱⁱ

"Do this," Jesus says, "and you will live."^{iv}

Not quite satisfied, and wanting "to justify himself," the man presses Jesus further: "And who is my neighbor?"^v

Who must I love, exactly? We're not alone in our lack of clarity about what it really means to love.

That's when Jesus tells a story:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?^{vi}

Who must I love? What, specifically, must I do to ensure my own eternal life? Jesus doesn't exactly answer the questions.

Instead, he confronts something deeper. He takes those questions and gently turns them upside down, subtly—subversively—revealing the motives underneath. He invites the man to see beyond his own questions into the eyes of the people around him.

When confronted with these questions, Jesus seems less concerned with explaining a sound doctrine of salvation and more concerned with showing us how to become good neighbors. In profound kindness, he lifts our eyes and invites us to see what he sees: a world in desperate need of love.

I believe Jesus sees us with the same kindness with which he looked upon the “expert in the law.” He sees our concern for the things of God. He sees our commitment to knowing his ways. He sees our longing to be in right standing before him.

And yet, I believe, he wants to gather all of this in his hands and gently turn it over. I sense his invitation to see where and why our evangelistic efforts have let us down—not because he wishes to condemn us, but because he longs to draw us closer to his heart. He wants to lift our gaze, fill us with hope, and overwhelm us with love for his creation. He wants to send us into the world with open eyes and abundant hearts.

The scriptures tell us that the ancient expert in the law (meaning: *God’s law*) in this story wanted to test Jesus and to justify himself. But his questions reveal a deeper, more defining motive—a motive that Jesus confronts: the man is afraid he will not attain what he wants from God. He is afraid of losing his life. His motive is *fear*.

Jesus sees this. He presents two sympathetic characters in his parable—a priest and a Levite, men who would’ve known the law and lived to obey it. And yet, in this story, their fear leads them

not toward the suffering of another soul, but away from it. Their fear compels them not to extravagant mercy—like the Samaritan—but to avoid getting their hands dirty. In the eyes of Christ, their motives fail them.

As witnesses in the world, I believe the core question we must face, as witnesses in the world, is reflected in this story: *what is our motivation?*

In my time in ministry—through decades of experience in many different organizations, under different leaders, utilizing different strategies, operating under different beliefs, and constrained by different streams of the Christian faith—I have consistently seen what happens when our witness to the world is motivated by fear.

I have seen believers “share the gospel” because they believe it is their duty to a watching, judgmental god. Their focus is consumed by tasks to complete rather than set upon people to serve. They dehumanize their neighbors on their quest for spiritual reward. They confuse behavior modification with spiritual transformation. They lose sight of what drew them to Christ in the first place.^{vii}

I have seen Christians whose evangelism is motivated by fear for their own eternal destiny or their neighbor’s. “[F]ear breeds control,” David Benner writes. “People who live in fear feel compelled to remain in control. They attempt to control themselves and they attempt to control their world. Often despite their best intentions, this spills over into efforts to control others.”^{viii} When fear is at the wheel, evangelistic witness often turns into control-based fearmongering, a crusade for conversions in which “the ends justify the means” in a race against the clock of a capricious god.


Yet the scriptures are clear: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.”^{ix}

Although God is always at work, even in the complexity of our mixed motives, I believe that evangelism rooted in fear is problematic evangelism. Fear-based evangelistic activity is a witness that fails to move in alignment with God’s heart and produces fruit we instinctively reject.

There is no fear in love.

Jesus offers us another way. He calls us to a witness rooted exclusively in love. His is an invitation to love as an end in itself. Like the Samaritan, we can be compelled not by fear but by the simple fact that we are all human, made in the image of God, bound together in the suffering and celebration of life on this earth. Rather than fearing for our souls or the souls of our neighbors (*I’ve taken care of that*, I imagine Jesus might whisper), we are free—fully sustained by the love of God—to offer them our lives.

This kind of witness—a witness motivated by love, moving in love, and for the sake of love alone—is what drew me to the community of Every Home. It is the kind of witness I know I am called to carry in my own life and to lead my community toward, and it is the kind of witness that can heal the world.



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself this question:

Does fear control some part of my life?

. . .

We all experience fear. This is normal, and sometimes it is very important. Fear motivates us to move away from danger. For example, it is a good thing to feel fear when we are facing an oncoming car or a dangerous person. Fear can help us survive because it motivates us to act in ways that keep us safe. However, sometimes fear can start to take control when we no longer need it to help us survive. In these instances, fear no longer serves us. John wrote that there is *no fear in love*. In other words, love settles our nervous systems. It moves us from simply surviving to fully thriving. If fear is controlling some part of your life, honestly share this with God without shame. Ask for openness to experience and receive God's loving-kindness, which washes away fear. If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



What Kind of Love

IT'S PROBABLY OBVIOUS at this point, but this entire book is about love. So, in the name of getting on the same page, let's take a second to dive more deeply into what it is we're talking about when we talk about love. What kind of love? How would we define it?

In our world today, the word "love" is used in any number of genuine, meaningful, inauthentic, trite, damaging, and even painful ways. It is used in ways that heal and harm, set free and manipulate, include and exclude. So when we speak of love,

we must look closely enough to be sure we're talking about the same thing.

My favorite poet, Mary Oliver, wrote of love:

Not anyone who says, "I'm going to be
careful and smart in matters of love,"
who says, "I'm going to choose slowly,"
but only those lovers who didn't choose at all
but were, as it were, chosen
by something invisible
and powerful and uncontrollable
and beautiful and possibly even
unsuitable—
only those know what I'm talking about
in this talking about love.ⁱ

There is, indeed, something almost impossible in this conversation about love—something that can only be felt and sensed and tasted and seen, never captured in tidy theological definitions or even words. When we examine love, when we try to be "careful and smart" about it, we find it is instead something we can only be surprised and overwhelmed by.

This is the very experience to which our tradition invites us.

"Dear friends," the scriptures say, "let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."ⁱⁱ

God is love.

Stop for a second. Before you continue reading, take a breath and let this sink in.

- The God who created the 200 billion trillion stars (yes, I guess that's a real number).
- The God who created 2.16 million species of animals wandering around this planet.
- The God who created humans and each of our 30 trillion cells.
- The God who saw us and knew us when we were just a faint heartbeat in our mother's womb.
- The God who has counted every hair on our heads (which is not that big of a deal for some of us).
- The God of awe and beauty, pastel sunrises, and ice-cream cones in the summer.
- The God who sees us in our entirety and embraces us on our worst days.

That God describes himself as “love.”

He is love. What a fantastically wild aspect of the Christian faith. It's one that should constantly amaze us.

The Christian faith proposes a unique definition of love—a claim that is radical: *God is love*. As Christians, when we talk about love, we are talking about God himself. God is identified not just as *having* love or *acting* in love, but as *being* love. Theologian Frederick Bauerschmidt writes, “Trivialization and abuse can lead us to forget the claim that God is love is the radical claim of Christianity. It is radical not simply in the sense of being a shocking and explosive claim, but in the sense of lying at the root of the Christian faith. In some sense, the entirety of things that Christians believe flows from this claim.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In truth, the Christian understanding of the concept of love originates thousands of years ago, revealed by God to people living in very different circumstances than we do today. In the Old Testament, various writers documented God's identity in records that were handed down in written and oral traditions. Their understanding of God was progressive—an unfolding of God's nature through generations. We don't often think about it, but humans haven't known everything about God all at once.

In stories written over thousands of years, through traditions shared around tables, in festivals celebrated generation after generation, a uniting theme emerged that would be among the building blocks of Judaism. The idea is captured in a Hebrew word: *hessed*.

Throughout the books of the Old Testament, the word *hessed* is used 253 times. It is the most commonly used word to describe God, yet most scholars acknowledge how difficult the word is to translate. Every Bible translation seems to frame this deep, enduring concept in slightly different ways.

The ESV says “steadfast love.”

The NIV says “great love.”

The NET says “loyal kindness.”

The NASB says “loving kindness.”

The KJV says “mercies.”

The NLT says “faithful love.”

Clearly, the word carries a unique breadth and depth. *Hessed* is a love that is deeply relational, with radical implications for how the Jewish people understood God. The word carries an understanding that God is attentive, connected, loyal, compassionate, faithful, and consistent in his love for people.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes the concept this way:

What is *hesed*? It is usually translated as ‘kindness’ but it also means ‘love’ – not love as emotion or passion, but love expressed as deed. Theologians define *hesed* as *covenant love*. Covenant is the bond by which two parties pledge themselves to one another, each respecting the freedom and integrity of the other, agreeing to join their separate destinies into a single journey that they will travel together, ‘fearing no evil, for You are with me’ (Ps. 23:4). Unlike a contract, it is an open-ended relationship lived toward an unknown future. In one of the loveliest lines in the prophetic literature God says to Israel through Jeremiah, ‘I remember the kindness [*hesed*] of your youth, the love of your betrothal – how you were willing to follow Me through the desert in an unsown land’ (Jer. 2:2). *Hesed* is the love that is loyalty, and the loyalty that is love.^{iv}

The God-who-is-love, as revealed in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition, is the God of a particular kind of love: a deeply connected, proactive, and uncontrolling love.

I like the simple definition of Michael Card, who, in his book *Irresistible: Hesed and the Mystery of God’s Lovingkindness*, simply defines the word in the following way: “When the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything.”^v God describes himself as one who, according to no merit of our own, gives us everything.

In the Christian tradition, our revelation of the love of God continues to unfold in the person of Jesus: love takes on flesh and walks among us. Remember, Jesus defined his purpose by love: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only

Son...”^{vi} He defined his teachings by love: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”^{vii} “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”^{viii} He defined his people by love: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”^{ix} Once you start looking for it, you can’t stop seeing “love” plastered everywhere throughout the gospels.

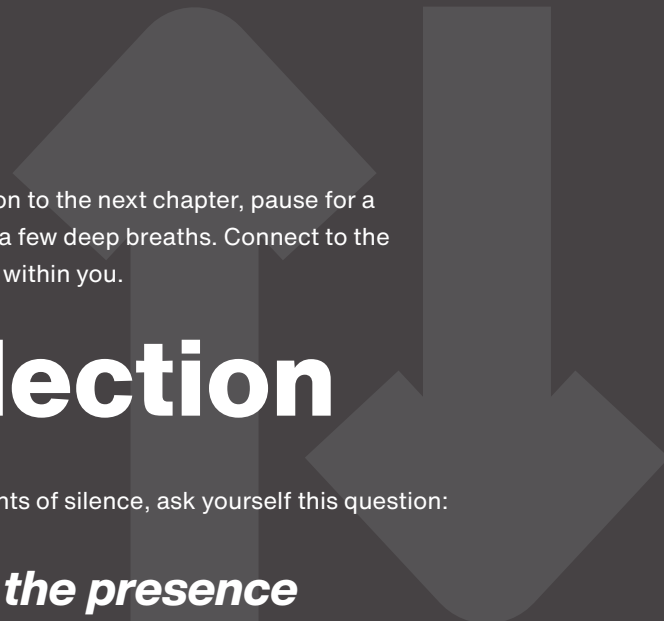
Love is before, above, and more central than all other facets of our faith.

The writers of the New Testament use the Greek word *agape* to capture the concept of *love*. *Agape* appears 348 times throughout the New Testament and was not a commonly used term until Christians adopted it. Even when Paul began to use the word, it still lacked the depth of the Hebrew concept of *hessed*. In fact, many scholars believe the writing in 1 Corinthians 13 is Paul’s attempt to expand the definition of the word *agape* so that it would more fully align with the Hebrew word *hessed*:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.^x

Agape, according to Paul, is at the core of the Christian message. It is “the Way” (as our faith was known in the days of the early Church). Love is before, above, and more central than all other facets of our faith.

In the way of Christ, and in the traditions of our faith, it is impossible to move beyond love. If we truly want to know what it means to grow in faith, to become more whole and wholehearted, it is only for love, by love, and unto love. There is nothing else. And it is not just any love—it is the love that is God. It is relational, open-handed, active, loyal, and profoundly pure. It is, as author David Benner says, love that “connects us to life, because the presence of genuine love always reveals the presence of God.”^{xi}



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself this question:

***How has the presence
of genuine love in my life
revealed the presence of God?***

• • •

Consider this openly and honestly. Has the presence of God come through people who have shown you great love? Have you experienced genuine love for a child or spouse that has transformed you? Have you had moments of transcendence in which you experienced the love of God within? Simply allow yourself to remember these moments. Let them come to you in detail as you recall them. Let them wash over you. What is the experience in your body as you remember what it means to experience genuine love? If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



Loving God

IN THE FIRST CHAPTER of Ephesians, Paul writes to the early Christian community at Ephesus: “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”ⁱ The church at Ephesus, it seems, was known for its love—just like Jesus had hoped.ⁱⁱ

Yet, just a few decades later, the same community is admonished:

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have

tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.ⁱⁱⁱ

As you read this, it seems that, in practice, the church in Ephesus was doing many things quite well. They were known for their hard work. (To me, this would be one of the greatest compliments!) They were known to persevere. (This is something that must have been especially true given that it is mentioned twice in this admonishment.) They were even known for their “rightness.” For example, it was known that they didn’t tolerate wicked people or spiritual charlatans. They had endured even amid great hardship. On its face, they were known for some excellent things. They sound like an impressive group of people!

It looked as though the church at Ephesus was in good standing with the Lord—a model faith community. But underneath it all, something had changed: they were doing all the right things for, we must infer, all the wrong reasons. They had forsaken their first love.

This story of the church of Ephesus serves as a sobering reminder. God is concerned for our hearts before he is interested in our service. He wants our love before he wants our compliance. The heart of things matters, and it matters a lot.

This book is about love, but it’s also about “mission.” Thus, a topic we are continually returning to is the idea of “witness.” What should our witness look like? What is our motive for witnessing?

As a people committed to Christian witness, we run the risk of making the same mistake as the Ephesians if our attention is focused on figuring out the right activity rather than cultivating our first love. St. Augustine once said, “My weight is in my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.” If we are to participate in the redemption of the world in any way, all our activity must be carried by our first love.

Our first love is the love that is God. It is the love that drew us to Christ, that overwhelmed us with grace, that never leaves us alone. It is the love that transforms us, in the quiet places, from the inside out.

This is a love we can only experience, not one we can mentally grasp or logically understand. It invites our surrender, not our assent. It is love known in relationship, established through years, and sustained through unconditional faithfulness. As David Benner says:

Any authentic spiritual journey must grow from direct, personal experience of God. There is no substitute for a genuine encounter with Perfect Love... If God is love, he cannot be truly known apart from love. He cannot, therefore, be known objectively. One cannot observe him from a distance and know him. To do so is to fail to genuinely encounter his love. One can encounter divine love only up close and personally.^{iv}

As believers, we often share our “testimonies”: moments in our stories where we encountered God in ways that changed things for us. Sometimes these mark the moments of our earliest turning toward Christ—transformative “conversion” experiences that divide a “before” and “after” in our lives with God.

For me, the moment that changed everything—the moment I consider my *conversion*—happened in India. I was in my late teens at the time, and my grandfather (a man who had embodied Christ’s love for me throughout my childhood) had recently passed away. He left me an inheritance with a stipulation: the money was intended for a short-term missions trip.

I did not expect to encounter God on this trip. I was a teenager grappling with grief, reeling from the death of a man who had made me feel safe in a chaotic world. From the instant we landed, I was just a rural Montana kid trying to survive the sounds and smells of a place so foreign from my home, I could hardly believe I was on the same planet.

A few days into the trip, I was on a bus as our group traveled through an impoverished area of Old Delhi. I could hardly process what I was seeing: heaps of trash and tarp-tent homes strung between them. In a moment that changed me forever, I locked eyes with a boy standing naked in front of a tin wall. His eyes were gaunt, his shoulder protruding, his hair clotted with dirt, his skin grimy with the film of his life. *This was his life.* My soul spun as I grappled with this reality.

I encountered a God whose love was great enough to span the chasm between rural Montana and the slums of India.

I have told this story at many points in my life, each time with a progressive revelation of what happened in my heart in that one moment of eye contact in India. The experience stays with me

and continually teaches me more about the love of God, like a sacred text I can read on repeat and discover new meaning in every time.

What I read in that moment when I recall it today is that I saw myself in that young boy's eyes. I saw that our suffering—though, in substance, worlds apart—was held together in the hands of a God who was love. In that boy's eyes, I encountered a God whose love was great enough to span the chasm between rural Montana and the slums of India. God had not abandoned this boy in Old Delhi, and he would not abandon me. His love was enough, and it was for all of us, and it was for me.

This love changed me. It altered the way I see myself. It altered the way I see other people. It transformed the way I love my world.

Everything we do is defined by what we love. The focus of our love dictates the kind of people we become and the kind of community we form. The focus of our love orients the way we offer love in our worlds. Brennan Manning says that love “determines why and at what times you get up in the morning, how you pass your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, and who you hang with; it affects what breaks your heart, what amazes you, and what makes your heart happy.”^v

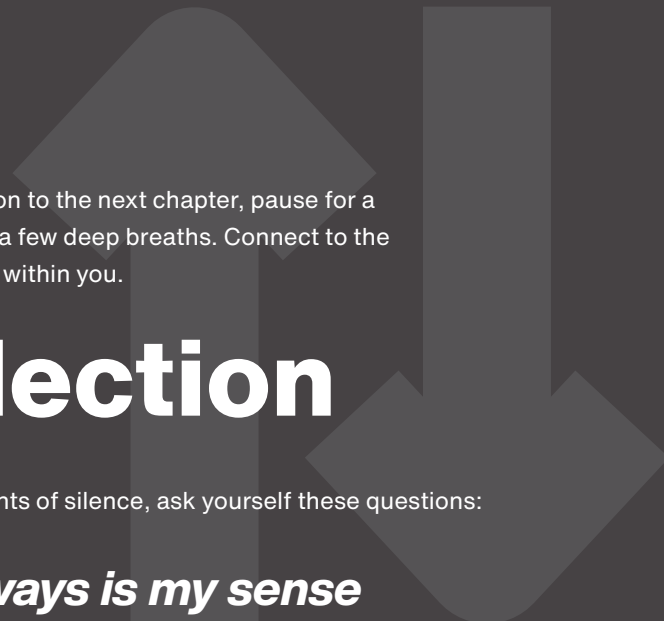
What we love, then, also determines the shape of our witness. A mission driven by a love for being right looks remarkably different than a mission compelled by love for God and his creation.

Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus looks like this:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that

out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.^{vi}

In the Christian life, our formation in love is an end in itself. Our service to God and obedience to his ways only matter if they are all, first, “rooted and established in love.” Only from a heart captured by divine love—from the inside—can we join Christ in his redemptive work of all creation.



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself these questions:

In what ways is my sense of mission motivated by love for God? In what ways is it motivated by love for something other than God?

. . .

As you reflect on these questions, simply think back on the last 24 hours. Allow the past day to enter your memory. As you do, notice places where you were motivated by a love for God's heart. What do you notice about these instances? How did it feel? What did it look like? Were there times when you were motivated by something other than a love for God's heart? What was that experience like? Simply notice without shame. If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



Loving Ourselves

JESUS TOLD US THAT the entire law of God can be summed up in two commandments:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.ⁱ

I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this same text in *The Message*:

“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.” This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: “Love others as well as you love yourself.” These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.ⁱⁱ

For those of us today, earnest in our efforts to live a life fully dedicated to the teachings of Christ, Jesus makes the path relatively easy. He gives us two simple commands—although sometimes I wonder if there are three imperatives tucked into his words: the way of Christ is to love God, to love others, and to love *ourselves*.

We are familiar with the idea of loving God and loving our neighbors. If you have been around a church or a community of faith for any time, you will have heard these ideas preached or discussed. But loving ourselves? This isn’t something we talk about quite as much.

We simply cannot love other people if we do not love ourselves.

The idea of *loving ourselves* can feel tricky. We can get twisted up and turned around in conversations about ego, selflessness, selfishness, humility, pride, and more. But thousands of years ago, Jesus knew something that experts are only beginning to understand today: we simply cannot love other people if we do not love ourselves. This is intricately entwined with our experience of God’s love for us: we must know our own belovedness in

the eyes of God if we are to communicate such love to our neighbors. Our love for ourselves flows out of understanding who we are before the Lord. Peter van Breemen explains:

The seventeenth-century Austrian priest-poet, Angelus Silesius, dared to sum it up this way: ‘Nothing or no one is more beautiful than I, since God—beauty itself—has fallen in love with me.’ This is exactly what Jesus desires—that we know and realize how precious we are in God’s eyes, that God allures us and speaks to our heart, that it means very much to God to gain our love.ⁱⁱⁱ

Loving ourselves is an act of seeing ourselves as God sees us. This is a lifelong journey, and it’s harder than it sounds.

Recently, I was sitting with my wife and my oldest daughter, Tyler. As I often do these days, I was whining about how much weight I have gained in my middle age. To be honest, this has been a real area of sensitivity to me. In my younger years, I used to be active and athletic. I was naturally lean. But as I have grown older, a combination of age (what happened to my metabolism?), travel, and medications have “ganged up” on me. As a result, I have gained some weight. (I know, I know. This is just life. But that explanation hasn’t really helped me get over it.) It bothers me for several reasons and has become something I think about far too much. I find myself lamenting the body I have and wanting a body I used to have. My wife, a therapist, would probably say that my self-image borders on self-hatred.

On this day, I was doing some self-indulgent self-deprecating. Finally, after listening to me for a couple of minutes, my teenage daughter had had enough of it. So, wielding her gift of articulating things forcefully yet simply, she said, “Dad, stop talking

like that. I can't handle it anymore. What if you talked about my body the way you talk about yours? What if you talked about John's body"—my youngest son—"in the way you talk about yours? What if you made fun of how our bodies are? You would never do that, so stop it!"

Ouch.

Her words really struck my heart because I realized something is wrong with my perception. I don't "see" myself in the way I should. I don't love myself. I certainly don't see my body in the way that I see others. I cherish my kids and have watched their precious bodies grow over the years. I rocked their small bodies to sleep. I helped nourish them. I nurtured their bodies when they were injured. And, as they have grown older, I marvel at the way God has designed them as beautiful, strong young people. I "see" their bodies as lovable, and nothing will ever change that. But, with myself, I struggle to do the same.

Loving ourselves is learning to "see" differently, and, frankly, that can be hard. It's learning to love our aging bodies the way Christ loves us; it's learning to accept our quirks; it's seeing our personalities as something made by God. This is what it means to love: not just seeing others as lovable, but really coming to grips with the fact that God has loved us thoroughly and unconditionally. This is the work of a lifetime.

Accepting that we are loved requires us to accept the free gift of God's love as he gives it to us. It requires that we experience Christ's love for us. It echoes the prayer of Paul for the Ephesians:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to

grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.^{iv}

The kind of “knowing” that Paul longs to see in this early Christian community is not limited to the mind—the Greek word he uses it *epignosis*, referencing a personal, experiential knowing. It isn’t abstract or disconnected. It is intimate knowledge. We cannot know Christ’s love with our minds; we know it through holistic encounter. And in such encounters, we come to know our own belovedness. As St. Augustine said: “Quia amasti me, fecisti me amabilem”—*in loving me, you made me loveable*.

One of the biggest enemies of loving ourselves is shame.

According to researcher Brené Brown, shame is “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.”^v Brown says that shame is one of the most primitive emotions and that, for the most part, every human struggles with it at some point. She also says that we are universally afraid to talk about it. She says, “The less we talk about it, the more control it has over us. Shame hates being spoken.”^{vi} Shame disintegrates our relationships—it causes disconnection within us and with those to whom we are closest.

It is nearly universal: at some point in our lives, we are filled with the overwhelming sense that we are “flawed and therefore unworthy of love.” Even Christians—those of us who claim allegiance to the God who is love—can and will, at some point in our lives, struggle with shame.

I can personally attest to this. My life in the last ten years has been a journey of overcoming shame by learning to love myself the way Jesus loves me.

I have worked in ministry for nearly fifteen years. Over these years, one thing has always been consistent: I have been passionate about Jesus and pointing other people to his love. I have pleaded with people—through writing, on stages in front of crowds, and in any other way I could imagine—to accept Christ’s love for them. Day in and day out, this has been my calling: to invite people to open their hearts to the transformation that comes from encountering Christ’s love. This has been one of my biggest joys in life. For many years, I would have said that my understanding of the love of Christ was firm and unshakeable.

But in 2017, I began to doubt Christ’s love for me. I was in my thirties and deeply connected to my family and my work. And then, in what seemed like a breath, the floor fell out from under my faith. I experienced a spiritual vertigo, and I was unable to orient myself in the heart of God or his thoughts of me. I was lost, without a map, and spiritually disconnected from all I had known about Christ. It was like spiritual amnesia.

I had built my life and identity upon certain beliefs about my own story: *I had a good childhood. I came from a Christian home. My parents loved me. I grew up surrounded by a community that cared about my welfare.* And while these beliefs were—and remain—true, something else was also true: as a child, I had suffered a series of serious abuses that left a mark on me. These events were so traumatic that I had suppressed my memory of them, which is a typical human response to trauma. In 2017, my body could no longer suppress these memories, and I began having flashbacks to the abusive events.

As the abuse played over in my mind, my soul was greatly disturbed. I was barraged by depression. There were times when I didn't know how I could live my life. I felt like a fraud—an impostor who projected a hope-filled positivity to the public but, on the inside, suffered deep and enduring pain. I wanted to quit my job in ministry and disappear.

I was overwhelmed by shame. As much as I tried to shake it, I could not escape the feeling that I was broken and nothing could put me back together. I was, undoubtedly, not loving myself the way God loves me. I could not see myself or my story through his eyes.

Fortunately, I had friends who wouldn't let me stay stuck in shame. In time, they directed me to safe places where my mental health could be addressed and supported. I was able to work with a therapist who helped me process the trauma and taught me how to show compassion to myself. He brought kindness to dark places in my story. He didn't allow me to hide in my shame. He took me by the hand and led me back to the God who loves me, even amid abuse and its aftermath.

When it comes to our own lives, it can be challenging to love ourselves the way God loves us.


It has been an arduous journey, and it's one that I'm still walking. But I have learned to discern the voice of shame and cast myself before God's mercy to keep me in his love. To this day, I still go to therapy numerous times a month. I have experienced more of Christ's love for me through the kindness of my therapist than from any other place in my life.

Loving ourselves isn't always simple. For many of us, it can be easy to believe that God loves others. But when it comes to our own lives, it can be challenging to love ourselves the way God loves us. We all have places where we struggle to believe we are good enough to be loved.

And yet the love of Christ is for us, even in those challenging places. Redemption is often experienced in learning to see ourselves with kindness just as God sees us with kindness. God's love breaks into our lives through our friends, our spouses, or, as in my case, through a therapist. And when God's love does break in, we learn to love ourselves.

Loving ourselves is not a trite matter or a token phrase. Loving ourselves is the work of a lifetime. It requires our honesty; we must open our eyes to the truth of our own stories and experiences. It requires our vulnerability with ourselves, with God, and in relationship with others; we must name the unreached places of our hearts and be willing to expose them to love. It requires our surrender to the love of those in our worlds—to the friends, family, and strangers who see us through the eyes of Christ and offer us his love in ways we cannot control. This is work that happens from the inside out.

We simply cannot offer love to others until we have opened our hands and hearts to this work in our own stories. We cannot give more love than we have received from Christ. We cannot love our neighbors if we have not learned to love ourselves. Mission from the inside out requires that we love ourselves the way Christ loves us. It requires that we learn to trust our own belovedness.



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself this question:

In the core of my being, do I trust that I am beloved, just as I am?

. . .

We all struggle to trust this at some point in our lives, but we must be willing to consider that love is the true heart of God for us. Notice if there are specific areas in your own story where you find it difficult to see yourself as lovable. Honestly share this with God. Now envision God as the Father to the prodigal son: see him welcoming you with open arms and embracing you, just as you are. Are you able to receive this love? If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



Loving Others

LOVE IS NOT ONLY THE ORIGIN of our personal transformation and the definition of our faith; in the way of Christ, it is also the sum of our calling to the world, the fuel of all we do, and the goal of every task we undertake.

Let's return to 1 Corinthians 13:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains,

but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.ⁱ

These verses describe a number of laudable actions: speaking “in the tongues of men or of angels,” prophesying, having faith that can move mountains, giving everything “to the poor,” and suffering for a cause. These actions are generally considered “good” or “righteous” in the Christian tradition.

And yet, according to scripture, all are worthless apart from love. Without love, “I am only a resounding gong.” Or, as Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*, “I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.”ⁱⁱ

If we think we are pleasing God because we are in ministry, doing “big” things, maintaining significant responsibilities, voting a certain way, or generally carrying out some sort of “right” action—this verse provides a warning: if we are to please God, it will be because our motive is love, not because our activity conforms.

Right now, I’m writing in the tranquility of the early morning in my home. It’s peaceful. The only sounds I hear are of my mini-dachshund, Oscar, pitter-pattering around on my hardwood floors, looking desperately for attention. I have a candle burning next to me and a stack of books strewn on the floor. This is my refuge.

But it’s election season in America. And I’m aware that if I were to open the news app on my phone, flip on the TV, or step outside my front door, I would be walking into a very, very different environment. It’s nonstop, and it is everywhere: phone calls

from pollsters every hour, college-aged door-to-door canvassers pounding on our front door, unending commercials (most of which are strung with vitriol), and nonstop news cycles about anything and everything pertaining to the political candidates. It's overwhelming and divisive. After a while, you forget what we are even fighting about. It's a far distance from my refuge.

It's causing us anxiety as well. According to the American Psychological Association's report "Stress in America 2024," politics is the number one stressor of Americans today (69 percent of Americans said they were stressed about the US presidential election). To put this in context, only 55 percent of Americans said they were worried about war, which is somewhat unbelievable given the hostile discharges of missiles between numerous nations happening right now. Seven out of ten Americans believe our election could turn violent. These statistics point to an America that is exhausted by division but, at the same time, feeling helpless to avoid conflict. We feel lovelessness outside our front doors.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sadly, statistics point to the fact that Americans are also simultaneously struggling with loneliness. A report from 2024 says that one in three Americans are experiencing loneliness once a week. It's so bad that it's now being called the "loneliness epidemic." According to the same report, those lonely in our nation reported that the number one thing they do when they are lonely is find a distraction—usually watching tv, scrolling through social media, or listening to podcasts.^{iv}

Stop with me and consider this storyline of American society. Americans are tragically disconnected and looking for connection. Loneliness is rampant. And the lonely, looking for some form of connection, distract themselves with various forms

of media, most of which are trafficking high-stress political content. Our society is ballooning with loneliness and perpetuating anxiety. What a quiet and hidden cyclical tragedy!

Our society is ballooning with loneliness and perpetuating anxiety.

Consider this, though. Today, there are over 200 million Christians in America. Some estimate that Christians make up 66 percent of the nation's population. I've often wondered what would happen if Christians were to focus more prominently on their neighbors than they do their politics. Call me naïve, but could it be possible that we could significantly change our nation simply by being willing to step outside our front doors (dodging, of course, all the political ruckus) and engage with the lonely people living on our streets? (I mean, we can assume one in three people living on your street are chronically lonely!) Indeed, people are entitled to vote how they see fit. But, in scripture, the emphasis of New Testament Christianity was never politics. It was love. Jesus always transcended the politics of his time by drawing near to the broken-hearted.

If lovelessness is outside our doors right now, could we be love to those who need it? The second greatest commandment makes it clear: loving our neighbor is what it means to be Christian.

Historically speaking, people who profess to be Christians have done many things in the name of “loving others”—even in the name of Christ—that have not born the fruit of love. The scriptures tell us that “the fruit of the Spirit”—the Spirit of the *God who*

is love—“is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” If the fruit of our “love” for others is fear, destruction, spiritual trauma, divisiveness, anger, or judgment, then we must begin to gently question our alignment with love. We must acknowledge, at least, that something else is at play.

The love that compels us to love others as Jesus does is the kind of love previously described: *hessed*, *agape*, revealed in the person of Christ—the *love that is God*. This is not perfunctory love. It is not something to which we mentally assent. It is a love that develops deep within our souls, formed through experience with the love of Christ for ourselves and our worlds. It is a love like Paul describes:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.^v

Love for others in the way of Christ is an honest love. It sees people wherever they are, without judgment: “To behold the other in his or her truth is the starting point of love; it cannot be omitted. Without this truthful beholding, all our further love rests shakily on a weak foundation.”^{vi}

This love is an attentive, relational love. Peter van Breeman says it this way: “Love means showing the other how beautiful he or she is. The other person cannot discover this alone; even a mirror will not suffice. Another human being is needed.”^{vii}

This is a love that always dignifies the other with respect, attention, curiosity, and contextual awareness. It is not a love that rushes in, but a love that seeks first to understand. It is a love that moves with humility, willing to admit that we might not know all the answers or have all the right solutions. Dr. Gabor Maté says:

We ask, without judgment, why a person or group—any person, any group—would end up being the way they are and act the way they do, even or especially when we are vexed or perplexed by it. We might also call this the compassion of context. However sincere our desire to help ourselves or someone else, we cannot do so without beholding the suffering being experienced, including knowing its source as best we can... Absent a clear view of the context, one is left, at best, harboring inert good wishes and engaged in well-meant but ultimately ineffective interventions.^{viii}

The love we carry for others is a love that knows healing is possible and wants it, always.

And with that deep awareness, this is a love that turns toward hope. Because it is anchored in the love of God—a love in view of restoring all creation—the love we carry for others is a love that knows healing is possible and wants it, always.

When I was twenty-one, I joined a group of young people to move to the city of San Francisco, California, with the expressed agenda of praying for citywide renewal. San Francisco is nicknamed the “city of love,” but the reality is far more complex. At the time, my spiritual community was a religious one with a

conviction that the “city of love” deserved *judgment*. The voices around me were convinced that the sins of the people of San Francisco were too great. They would even go so far as to predict some sort of destructive event at the hands of God.

Against this backdrop, a small group of us decided to move to the city to pray for its redemption. As I reflect now, I see that our group of young people was uncomfortable with the spiritual narrative we were hearing. We were not content to prophesy judgment on the city from afar; we wanted to understand the people who lived there. We wanted to see what would happen if they encountered Christ’s love. We didn’t have a mission statement or even much of a plan. Our motivations were uncomplicated and certainly not theological. We simply wanted to pray because it was the only thing we knew to do with our desire for people to experience the goodness of Christ.

When we arrived in San Francisco, we committed to a prolonged fast on the city’s behalf, including (for reasons I cannot recall) praying through the night. We gathered in a small, second-story church auditorium on Market Street to pray from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. nightly. As the sun rose, we would fall asleep on the church’s floor. Then, upon waking, we spent the rest of our hours walking the streets to meet the people for whom we were praying. We maintained this routine for weeks on end.

One night, during our tired prayers, we heard a knock at the door. Usually we ignored knocking because it happened often and was typically unsafe to respond to, but something led us to open the door that night. Outside stood a man in his twenties. He had seen the lights on in the church, and he wanted to see if anyone was there.

We invited the man in and learned his name was Jackson. In the light of the auditorium, we could now see that his body was covered in sores. We helped him sit down and began asking questions about his life and what had brought him to our doorstep that night.

With tears in his eyes, Jackson told us his story.

Jackson was from Idaho, a far cry from San Francisco. He was the son of a horse trainer and had grown up working with his dad daily. Jackson shared that his dad was an incredibly harsh man, chastising him for every little mistake he made and even physically abusing him. Jackson felt unseen and unloved by his father, and—even as a child—he vowed to run away from Idaho as soon as he was old enough.

When the time came, Jackson fled to San Francisco. He found work in the Castro District and began a series of intimate relationships that ultimately resulted in his diagnosis with HIV/AIDS. Jackson told us that he hadn't been able to obtain treatment because of the cost, and the sores covering his body were a result of the infection.

That night, Jackson had been walking down the street feeling like a man on the run. It was a rock-bottom moment in his life. He was, all at once, a young boy rejected by his father and a man rejected by the world. He was at the end of himself. He saw a light on in the church, and he simply hoped someone would respond if he knocked.

It would be an understatement to say that our group was heart-broken by Jackson's story. We were too young to realize it at the time, but something within each of us resonated with Jack-

son's story. We each had our own wounds, our own traumas, our own abandonments. We each had unreached places of our own hearts that we were afraid to expose to the light of love. Jackson went before us, modeling a vulnerability that we would each learn to imitate in our own way. While we could not intellectually explain what it would practically mean to love Jackson like Jesus loved him in that moment, we knew that it started by sitting with his story in the safe and embracing presence of God. We wept with him and felt powerless to help, but we placed our hands on his shoulders and prayed for his healing. We prayed that he would encounter God as a kind Father who would never leave him or forsake him, who looked upon him with kindness and love. We prayed for hope, joy, and redemption.


Someone in our group sat down at a piano and began singing "Amazing Grace." In the darkness of the night, in the "city of love," we stood together with Jackson as equals, souls before God—each of us needing something beyond ourselves, each of us at the mercy of God's grace. I'd never felt so far removed from the religious community that spoke, at a distance, of judgment on the lives of people like Jackson in San Francisco. The only thing I experienced in that moment was God's love for all of us.

God's love is radical.

When we suspend our own judgment and open our eyes to see Christ encounter people right where they are—as he always does—we find that God's love is radical. It reaches far beyond our biases, our political opinions, and our theological beliefs. It reaches beyond our capacity and our understanding. This can be difficult for our hearts to comprehend, but it is what Jesus

lived and died for—incomprehensible love. This is the love we are called to carry for others.

Our group had moved to San Francisco with a mission to pray for a city to be saved from judgment. What we encountered that night—in the body of a man who carried the broken story of abandonment, rejection, and judgment—was the heart of a Father who never leaves, never forsakes, never rejects, and always sets us free from judgment. That night, we did not just encounter God's love for Jackson; we encountered it for ourselves. Loving Jackson opened our eyes to the way God sees all of us, welcomes us home, and embraces us with affection. To love others is to do the same. It is to err on the side of opening the door without judgment and letting Christ have his way.



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself this question:

Is there a person or a group of people I struggle to love just as they are?

. . .

We all have people in our lives who rub us the wrong way: people who have hurt us, or people who have very different beliefs, theological convictions, political viewpoints, or lifestyles than we do. The call to love others is not a call to love them once they change or become like us. We are free to love others as they are when we know deeply that we are loved as we are. Picture one person whom you find it difficult to love in this way. Take a moment to pray for God's eyes and heart for this one person. How does God see them, feel toward them, and love them? If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



Love in Action

IN WESTERN AFRICA, sandwiched between Nigeria and Togo, is the nation of Benin. Benin is a small nation of just over thirteen million people from forty-two African ethnic groups. Poverty is rampant in Benin; the national poverty rate in 2021 through 2022 was just over thirty-six percent.ⁱ The average monthly income in Benin is equivalent to 120 US dollars.ⁱⁱ This is a nation where, economically speaking, people are hanging on for dear life.

As part of its ministry in Benin, Every Home for Christ partners with Soles for Jesus, a United States-based organization that exists to share the love of Christ by distributing shoes to the underserved in sub-Saharan Africa.ⁱⁱⁱ A pair of shoes might not

solve poverty on a grand scale, but it can make a meaningful difference in the daily lives of people experiencing poverty. (As I write this, it is sobering to reflect on how many shoes I have sitting in my closet right now, while there are people around the world who literally don't have any shoes.) Shoes can prevent injury, improve health, and increase access to work and education. Shoes can be a practical expression of Christ's attention. A single pair can be an act of love.

During one outreach hosted by Every Home and Soles for Jesus, a blind man named Gerard shared that his family had tragically been abandoned in a camp for the blind. Before receiving a simple pair of shoes, he was convinced no one in the world cared for him. He felt absolutely hopeless. But one day, a group from Every Home approached him. They bent down, and then a gentle pair of hands offered him pair of shoes. With deep gratitude and tears in his eyes, Gerard happily accepted. And in that simple act, a life was dignified. In that one moment, love broke through to someone deeply in need. In Gerard's words, in that moment, he realized his life matters.

One act of love demonstrated to Gerard that his life matters.

Another person who received a pair of shoes at the outreach was named Linda, and, like Gerard, she is also blind and living marginalized within her nation. An outreach team noticed her, approached her, and offered her the gift of a pair of shoes. With deep gratitude, she took the shoes and promptly put them on. Then, looking up at the team, she told them that she had never before experienced such love from Christians, but the gift of shoes made love real for her. She wanted to commit her life to Christ immediately.

Love was made real through a single pair of shoes, and a life was transformed.

After the outreach, a local chief heard about these simple expressions of love and was so moved that he reached out to Every Home, offering to donate a place in his village for the ministry to plant a church for his people.

Love is not something we just talk about or feel or hold in our hearts. Love is something we do. Love is a pair of shoes given to someone who doesn't have any. Love is something we make tangible and offer to our worlds, for nothing other than its own sake. And when this kind of love is what we carry, people respond. Lives and communities are transformed through meaning and kindness.

Love is our foundation. It is the lens through which we see God and see ourselves. It is the lens through which we see others. It is the fuel of our mission. It is our first and most important responsibility. It is our end and our means. And love is the expression of the mission itself.

**Love is not just something we talk
about or feel or hold in our hearts.
Love is something we do.**

Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."^{iv} And the scriptures are clear that the love to which we are called is active: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."^v We are to love one another—not just with

any love, but with depth, from the heart—as Jesus loved us. We are to love not just in thought or sentiment, but in action.

In the early centuries of the Christian faith, contagious diseases had a devastating effect on the human population, especially in the epidemics of A.D. 165 and 251. The first epidemic saw up to a third of the population of the Roman empire wiped out, and at the height of the second, some 5,000 people died *every day* in Rome alone—possibly amounting to as much as two-thirds of the population of Alexandria. Panic and social chaos ensued. Most who could, fled, abandoning those who were sick and dying. Others threw infected family members out into the streets.

The roots of Christianity are acts of love in a longing world.

Yet an early Roman historian reported the compassionate response of Christians: “Unsparing of themselves... visiting the sick without a thought of the danger, assiduously ministering to them, tending them in Christ.” Many Christians caught the infection, “and when they had cared for and restored health to others died themselves.” Because the provision of food, water, and basic nursing care can considerably reduce mortality in epidemics, many thousands of lives were saved by their courageous actions.^{vi}

In its earliest days and purest form, Christianity took hold because it was love at work in the world. It wasn’t because it had the most political power or the best theological arguments. It wasn’t because it used the most advanced technology or had the nicest buildings. The roots of Christianity are acts of love in

a longing world. The way of Christ is practical, tangible, proactive love without agenda or control.

As I write this, I have just returned from the border of Ukraine, where I spent a few days hearing from Every Home leaders who are at work in the war-torn country. Sitting across the table from these leaders, I listened to story after story. I was struck by how heinous—how unfathomably cruel—war can be. Families are displaced. Homes are destroyed. Lives are uprooted.

But I was also moved deeply by what *love in action* looks like in this situation.

One of our leaders told me of a profound ministry that Every Home is conducting on the frontlines of the war in Eastern Ukraine. Amid falling bombs and fleeing citizens, Every Home is part of training and deploying chaplains who literally crawl into foxholes with Ukrainian soldiers. What is their ministry? Love has compelled them simply to *be with* these brave men and women as they bear tremendous pressure. They offer their presence—the strongest witness of love they can fathom. And in cases where soldiers fall victim, they offer proper burials.

Chaplaincy in the midst of war is love in action.


When I recall the most profound moments of love in my own story, they are not the moments when someone convinced me of a new belief system. They are not when someone proved a point. They are not when I forced myself to comply with a set of religious values. The moments of love that drew me to Christ are the hours I spent with my grandfather, who offered me his attention when I was just a boy trying to find my place in the world. They are the eyes of a child in India and the broken body of a man

named Jackson. They are stories of my grandmother. They are the arms of my family and the gentle leading of my friends when they saw I needed help. These are the things that changed me. These are the acts of love that formed me into the person I am today. These are the moments that knit my heart to the way of Jesus. This is the love that catches me up in redemption.

When our love is in action, people respond. When love is what the world sees of us, the world is drawn to God. But the response is not the reason we go. We don't offer our love in exchange for change. We don't give a pair of shoes in the name of love for the sake of conversions. We love because we love, and the rest is the Lord's. As Paul says:

Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.^{vii}

Love moves us. Love is the movement. Love is the goal of moving. And we never move beyond love. This is mission from the inside out.



Before you move on to the next chapter, pause for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Connect to the Spirit of God alive within you.

Reflection

After a few moments of silence, ask yourself this question:

Where am I aware of “love in action” in my everyday life?

• • •

“Love in action” is most often not big or flashy. It is often small, hidden, and it may go unnoticed. By paying attention, however, we can begin to see opportunities to celebrate “love in action.” Do you notice love in a mother’s kind embrace of her toddler who has fallen and scraped his knee? In the generous smile and warmth of a check-out clerk with impatient customers? In the teacher who goes the extra mile to help the struggling child? In the undivided attention you give to your friend as they share their grief with you? How might you become more mindful and present to “love in action”? If you want, write or journal your thoughts on the following pages.



Mission from the Inside Out

MY GRANDMOTHER'S NAME WAS EMERALD, but in our family lore, she is affectionately known as the Egg Lady.

Emerald had encountered God as a young woman under the stars of a Montana sky, and she spent her days following his call while forging a pioneer life as a rancher's wife. Her days were difficult—even, at times, impoverished. She had no context for Christianity. She had eight children, no education, and endless work to do. But she was thoroughly convinced of the love of God, and she never stopped looking for ways to carry Christ beyond her walls. My mother, Emerald's youngest daughter, often reflects: "Her theology was love."

Her theology was love, and her love, in this case, was eggs. Every Monday for many, many years, Emerald packed her car with eggs and drove to the lowest-income neighborhood in a town fifteen miles from her home. It was a small railroad town filled with pockets of Italian, German, and Irish immigrants who were trying to scrape together a living on the Montana frontier. They had come for the American dream (or just to escape their own nightmares), but what they found was life barely above subsistence. Many even made their homes in retired boxcars.

Emerald drove up and down these streets, knocking on every door with a simple offer: *We happen to have some extra eggs, and we wondered if you might want any.* Emerald showed up at the same doors every week. Over the course of many years, this simple act of love knit her heart to the hearts of this community. People began to share their stories with her. She had countless opportunities to weep with those who wept and rejoice with those who rejoiced. She shared the hope of Christ. She shared his love. She kept bringing eggs.

Emerald never turned her egg distribution into a nonprofit organization. She didn't seek to scale her efforts, secure donors to support the work, or keep track of how many doors opened when she knocked. She encountered the love of God, it changed everything for her, and then she offered it to her world. It was simple.

And it changed the world for many of those families. When Emerald died, her funeral was flooded with people my mom referred to as "egg people." They were people who said, "Emerald was my best friend," and many of them shared the profound ways she had shown them love. Her legacy of love continues to this day; I have personally met "egg people" and their descendants.

When I think about what it means for us to be witnesses, my vision is not confined to one expression of evangelism. Our witness to the world might fall within the constraints of traditional ministry. It might look like a local church outreach or a missions organization. It might come with an explicit presentation of the gospel.

She encountered the love of God ... and then she offered it to her world.

Or it might not. Our witness to the world might be a pair of shoes. It might be wartime chaplaincy. It might be a decision to begin therapy.ⁱ It might be “Amazing Grace” in the dark of a San Francisco night. It might be eggs.

What matters isn’t how it looks or whether it meets any particular set of standards. What matters is that our witness is “rooted and established in love”ⁱⁱ—*hessed, agape*, Christ, the God who is love. What matters is that it is offered freely, without fear, without agenda or expectation, out of the abundance of love we have known in our own souls. What matters is that it is active, overflowing from the inside and spilling out into our real worlds.

“God loves us into existence,” Peter van Breemen says, “and longs for us to have life and joy in abundance. It is God’s abiding desire that our lives be eminently meaningful and bear rich fruit, fruit that lasts. Put simply, what counts is love.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”^{iv}

In all we do, may we remain in the love of Christ.



Reflection

Pause and take a few deep breaths. You have reached the end of this book. Simply pay attention to what you are experiencing. What emotions do you have? Perhaps you are stirred up, motivated to return to your first love. Perhaps you are uncomfortable or unsettled. Your experience might be something else entirely.

Simply be aware of these thoughts, experiences, and emotions. No matter where you are, take a few minutes to allow your heart to express itself honestly to God. Open up and share your feelings, your longings, your desires, your fears.

Now, in silence, ask God to show you his love for you. Ask God to reveal his delight in you. Return to your most true place, and with John the Beloved, receive these words:

I am the one whom Jesus loves.

Appendix

01: First Love

- i A paraphrase of a second-century sermon titled “Quis Dives Salvandus” by Clement of Alexandra
- ii 1 John 3:18 NIV
- iii Revelation 2:2-5 NIV

02: Muddy Waters

- i 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV
- ii Matthew 22:37-40 NIV
- iii Acts 1:8 NIV
- iv Phelps-Roper, Megan. *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving Extremism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), Kindle Edition.
- v “Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong.” *Barna Group*, 5 Feb. 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>.

03: Mission from the Outside In

- i Luke 10:25 NIV
- ii v. 26
- iii v. 27
- iv v. 28
- v v. 29
- vi vv. 30-35
- vii For more on obedience in the context of the Christian life, see David Benner's excellent work on the topic, *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*.
- viii Benner, David. *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 41-42.
- ix 1 John 4:18-19 NIV

04: What Kind of Love

- i Oliver, Mary. *Felicity*. (Penguin Books, 2015), 65.
- ii 1 John 4:7-8 NIV
- iii Bauerschmidt, Frederick Christian. *The Love That Is God: An Invitation to Christian Faith*. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 16.
- iv Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan. *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*. (New York: Random House Inc., 2005), 45.
- v Card, Michael. *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God's Lovingkindness* (p. 5). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.
- vi John 3:16 NIV
- vii John 13:34 NIV
- viii John 15:12 NIV
- ix John 13:35 NIV
- x 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV
- xi Benner, David. *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 89.

05: Loving God

- i Ephesians 1:15-16 NIV
- ii John 13:35 NIV
- iii Revelation 2:2-4 NIV
- iv Benner, David. *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 31.
- v Manning, Brennan. *The Furious Longing of God*. (David C. Cook, 2009), 67.
- vi Ephesians 3:14-29 NIV

06: Loving Ourselves

- i Matthew 22:37-40 NIV
- ii Matthew 22:37-40 MSG
- iii van Breemen, Peter. *The God Who Won't Let Go* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc.), 24.
- iv Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV
- v Brown, Brené. *Atlas of the Heart* (New York: Random House), 137.
- vi Brown, Brené. *Atlas of the Heart* (New York: Random House), 136.

07: Loving Others

- i 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV
- ii 1 Corinthians 13:1 MSG
- iii "Stress in America 2024," American Psychological Association, 2024, <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/stress-in-america/2024>.
- iv "New APA Poll: One in Three Americans Feels Lonely Every Week," American Psychiatric Association, January 20, 2024, <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/new-apa-poll-one-in-three-americans-feels-lonely-e>.
- v 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV
- vi van Breemen, Peter. *The God Who Won't Let Go* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc.), 96.
- vii van Breemen, Peter. *The God Who Won't Let Go* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc.), 25.
- viii Maté, Gabor and Daniel Maté. *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture* (New York: Penguin Random House), 384-385.

08: Love in Action

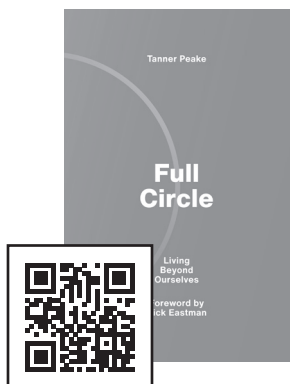
- i "The World Bank in Benin: Overview." (2024, April 3). World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/benin/overview#1>.
- ii "Indicators of economy in Benin." (2024, August). World Data. <https://www.worlddata.info/africa/benin/economy.php>
- iii Learn more about Soles for Jesus at www.solesforjesus.org.
- iv John 13:34 NIV
- v 1 John 3:18 NIV
- vi Shaw, Ian J. *Evangelicals and Social Action* (Inter-varisty Press), 24.
- vii Ephesians 5:1-2 MSG

09: Mission from the Inside Out

- i With a licensed, trained mental health professional.
- ii Ephesians 3:17 NIV
- iii van Breemen, Peter. *The God Who Won't Let Go* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc.), 8.
- iv John 15:9 NIV

More from Tanner Peake

TannerPeake.com



Full Circle: Living Beyond Ourselves

We are convinced of the love of Christ and compelled by hope in him. But how do we carry that in the daily grind of our lives? Tanner Peake takes us around the world through the stories of friends who have found their own circles and are giving their lives in response. Are you ready to transform the way you understand the purpose of your life? It's time to find your circle.



Redeeming Missions Podcast

A podcast designed to expand our collective imagination about what it means to carry Christ as everyday believers with a global perspective. We host hopeful and honest conversations, hold space for diverse experiences, and encounter Christ in the stories we share.

Available wherever you stream your podcasts.



TannerPeake.Substack.com

A conversation about Christian missions and ministry for passionate evangelists, hopeful skeptics, and curious believers from a leader who's honestly wrestling through it too. No hot takes—just thoroughly examined premises and eyes open to see.



MOST CHRISTIANS BELIEVE being a witness about Jesus is part of their faith. But significant numbers of them also believe it's somewhat wrong to share personal beliefs with someone of a different faith. What are we missing?

As the president of a global missions organization, Tanner Peake has seen all forms of Christian witness. He's also honest about our disenchantment with missions and evangelism. But he has hope for the transformative role it can still play in our faith and in our world.

In these pages, Tanner shares fresh vision for Christian witness that's formed, motivated, and carried by love. It's a vision of witness free of guilt, shame, and fear. It's a vision that could change the world.



TANNER PEAKE is the president and CEO of Every Home, a global ministry founded in 1946 with local offices in over 160 countries around the world. He is the author of *Full Circle: Living Beyond Ourselves*. Tanner, his wife Bethany, their three children, and one wiener dog live in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Find more from Tanner at TannerPeake.com.



EverKnown
Publishing