



FIRST LOVED

Experience God love you,
up close and personal,
as he loved the disciples through Jesus.

With Dr. Mark Gordon Fee

"We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19
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SESSION 1 -- Loving the Jesus Way

1. The title, **FIRST LOVED**, comes from 1 John 4:19 – “We love because he [God] first **LOVED** us!”
2. **LOVED!** Such a wonderful feeling to **be loved by someone!**
 - a. Hopefully you’ve been **loved** by someone recently or at some time. Take a moment right now to remember one of those times of being loved. [Pause and do it]. Hopefully you’re experiencing the joy and pleasure again from that loving experience.
 - b. **How did they express their love for you? Words and actions** are the only way humans can reveal their thoughts and feelings of love to another person.
3. **As John wrote, God also loved us in the past through an extraordinary act of love:**
 - a. We read: “**This is love:** not that we loved God, but that **he loved us** [first] and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” [1 John 4:10; See also John 3:16; Romans 5:8].
 - b. What that means is that Jesus suffered the just penalty in our place for the wrongs we had done to God and others. And we are so grateful for that.
 - c. We also read descriptions of how much God loves us in the scriptures. (Ps. 103:11)
 - d. It’s wonderful to read about how much God loves us and how he showed it. But have you ever longed to experience God love you with words and actions just like you experience through people, just like you experienced from the person you were just thinking about?
 - e. **The twelve disciples of Jesus actually experienced God love them, up close and personal, with words and actions, through Jesus! BUT THEY DIDN’T KNOW THIS AT FIRST.** Truthfully, neither did I for the first 18+ years of my walk. My focus was on Jesus – his teaching and miracles. I viewed the disciples as just students, learning his teaching to teach others -Mt. 28:20. But loving one another?
4. John writes in his gospel that **Jesus LOVED the twelve disciples:**
 - a. [John 13:1] “**Having LOVED his own** (chapters 1-12) . . . **he LOVED them to the end**” (chapters 13-21). From the time he called them to follow him up to his ascension, he loved “**his own**”, his twelve disciples.
 - b. Three years is 1,095 days @ 10 hours a day = 10,950 hours. Imagine all the ways, all the times, they experienced him love them and observed him love others.
 - c. Consider this: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” [John 21:25]. The world is not a big enough library!

d. Jesus **loved** them many times in many ways. But he also **loved them in a specific way.**

i. He loved them **by the Spirit:**

1. We were told this at the beginning of John's gospel by John the Baptist. He said, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him (v 32). . . (34) I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One." [fulfilling Isaiah 42:1]
2. [Luke 4:1, 14] "Jesus, **full of the Holy Spirit**, left the Jordan and was **led by the Spirit** into the wilderness. . . . Jesus returned to Galilee **in the power of the Spirit.**"
3. [Acts 10:38] ". . . God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with **the Holy Spirit and power**, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." **DOING GOOD, HEALING = LOVE!!**

ii. He loved them **as the Father loved him:**

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." [John 15:9; see also 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:23, 24, 26; also Paul, Eph. 1:6; Col. 1:13]

5. Jesus gives the disciples a **NEW COMMAND to love his way!**

a. Jesus said: "A new commandment I give to you, that you ----- **LOVE** one another **EVEN AS I (Jesus) HAVE LOVED YOU**, ----- that you love one another." *They had 3 years of experiences to draw on.*

b. Jesus followed the command saying: "**By this** all men ["people", ESV] will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" [John 13:34-35, NASB]. **OR**, "*By this, people will identify you as belonging to me, if you have my kind of love for one another and others.*"

c. During Jesus' first teaching in Luke's gospel he says, "The student [or apprentice] is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully **trained** will be **like** their teacher" [Luke 6:40, NIV]. In what way or ways did he want them to be "like" him so people would know they were his disciples? To love one another **just as** he had loved them. Not only were they loved by all their experiences, but they were also **trained to love as loved!**

d. **Training** has four components – instruction, observation, coaching, practice. Learning to love the Jesus way means you also get to experience him love you. Like training to be a "masseur" or a "chef".

e. **When Jesus washed their feet, it was both a profound act of love and training:** Each of the twelve disciples experienced Jesus wash their own feet and watched him wash the other eleven (John

13:5-15). That's training! Jesus concluded saying, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you", i.e., love as I have loved you!

6. Then, Jesus reveals to them **that God the Father himself had also loved them through him** (presumably by the Spirit as well). What they didn't know, NOW THEY KNOW.
 - a. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that **the Father is in me**? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is **the Father, living in me**, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and **the Father is in me**; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves." [John 14:9-11]
 - b. The new command also given by the Father: "Love one another as I, your God and Father, have loved you through Jesus by the Spirit."
 - c. Jesus **LOVED** the disciples **many times and in many ways** over the 3 years. But when he loved them, he **LOVED** them **by the Spirit, as the Father had loved him**. And, **the Father** himself, **LOVED** them through him.
7. What is "NEW" about the command?
 - a. "New" in Greek is defined as "unknown, strange, remarkable." What made the command "new" in that sense? **[Illustrate with Joe and Jill]**
 - b. What makes it "remarkable" is that a person must **BE LOVED** by Jesus (by God) first, **in order to LOVE** others **AS he has loved them**. Anyone can "Love your neighbor as yourself". But not so with the new command. A person must **BE LOVED** first in order to **love as loved**.
8. How do we, his present-day apprentices, get loved by God today in an "embodied" way like the disciples did through Jesus so that we can love as he has loved us?
 - a. BY THE SPIRIT – just like God loved the disciples through Jesus.
 - i. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate ["helper", NASB] to help you and **be with you** forever—**THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH**. . . and [HE] **will be in you**." [John 14:16-17; also, 16:7, 13]
 - ii. He continues: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and **we will come to them and make our home with them**" [John 14:23; Jesus "in us" verses: 14:20; 17:20,23,26; **ROMANS 8:9-10**].
 - iii. **THEREFORE**, Jesus says, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but **WAIT** for **the gift** my Father promised [*the Holy Spirit*], which you have heard me speak about" [Acts 1:4-5, NIV]. Jesus also said, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within

them.' **By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive**" [John 7:38-39; see also Acts 2:38; 11:15-17; 19:2-6; Galatians 3:2,5].

- iv. *Most of us probably know this. But I don't think most of us have practices that help this reality become "embodied" experiences of the Father/Jesus loving us.*

b. **The "LOVE VERSE" and "GOD-SIGHTING" practices to BE LOVED by God – Father, Son, and Spirit.**

- i. These practices, [similar to the historic practices of Lectio Divina and the Examen], help us **experience God love us in "embodied" ways, through words and actions as he loved the disciples through Jesus.** *The tools are familiar to most of us (bible, prayer, community) but done in a new or different way.*
- ii. The **Love-Verse Practice** is a way to experience God speak loving words to us from the **Bible** through ourselves and one another. The **God-Sighting Practice** is a way to notice and experience God love us through **our loving interactions (community)**. Also, as we do both practices, we engage in **interactive prayer** as we listen to and speak with him by the Spirit [John 16:13].
- iii. Experiencing God love us in these ways, according to neuroscience, has the greatest potential for transforming our minds [Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:24] because we are most shaped by and remember our emotionally engaging experiences.

c. **Ultimately, through these and other practices, the Holy Spirit transforms us to be "like":**

- i. Paul writes: "And **we all**, with unveiled faces contemplate ["behold as in a mirror", NASB] the Lord's glory **are being transformed into his image** with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" [2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV]. *God stands in front of the **MIRROR**, but we see Jesus, "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) in the mirror and in time, us (Rom. 8:29).*
- ii. I believe he wants us to be able to say John 14:9-11!

d. **The FAMILY BUSINESS we were "born" into and participate in! Image-making and image bearing:**

- i. *"Yahweh and Son(s) and daughters: IMAGE-MAKERS - Transforming people to LOVE THE JESUS WAY."*
- ii. *Therefore, my working definition for discipleship is: A life-long, **training relationship** with God and Jesus by the Spirit, AND with his people, to become like him [image making], in order **to love as he has loved us [image-bearing]**; together with them, image-making and image-bearing, until he comes.*

9. We must **spend time with him** to be loved by him. **He wants to spend time with us**, to love us. We **WANT TO** spend time with him. We come together with **excited anticipation!**
- a. John writes: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. . . . because God is love. . . . We love because he first loved us” [1 John 4:7-8, 19, NIV]. God says, “*Come to me who is love, from whom love comes, and let me love you first and then, because of experiencing me love you, you will love me and others because I first loved you! SO, COME! I AM WAITING WITH EXCITED ANTICIPATION FOR YOU!”*”
 - b. God says through Luke 15:20, NIV, personalized: “When you get up and come to me your heavenly Father, [*whether you’ve sinned or not, verse 18*], while you are still a long way off and I see you, I am filled with compassion for you; I run to you, throw my arms around you and kiss you [*and celebrate over you, verse 23*]” He continues: “*I WAIT WITH LONGING FOR YOU! AND WHEN I SEE YOU, I RUN TO YOU. I CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN US!*”
 - c. God says, “*I WILL HELP YOU GRASP AND KNOW MY LOVE!*” He continues: “In order to root and establish (“ground”, NASB) you more deeply in my love, I will give you the power (the “ability”, NASB) . . . **to grasp** (“comprehend”, NASB) how wide and long and high and deep is **the love of Christ [my love for you] and to know (experientially) this love that surpasses knowledge**—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of ME” [Ephesians 3:17-19, NIV, personalized].
 - d. God says, “*I WANT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF MY LOVE TO SATISFY YOU (quench your thirst; appease your hunger), TO DELIGHT YOU LIKE EATING GREAT FOOD!*”
 - i. He continues: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the **waters** . . . Why spend money on what is not **bread**, and your labor on what does not **satisfy**? Listen, listen to me, and **eat** what is **good**, and you will **DELIGHT** in **the richest of fare**” [Isaiah 55:1a, 2; NIV]. “**Taste** and see that [I] the Lord [*am*] good.” [Psalm 34:8, NIV, personalized]
 - ii. *FOOD IS NOT JUST FOR NUTRITION (knowledge of his love), BUT ALSO FOR PLEASURE (experiencing his love).* [Menu and Umbilical cord illustrations]
 - e. *Experiencing his love satisfies our soul and fills us with joy!*
 - i. [Moses prayed]: “**Satisfy** us in the morning with **your** unfailing **love** that we may **sing for joy and be glad** all our days” [Psalm 90:14, NIV]. *I am here now to satisfy you with my unfailing love that you may sing for joy and be glad all your days!*
 - ii. [David writes]: “Because **your** steadfast **love** is better than life, my lips will praise you. . . . My soul will be **satisfied** as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with **joyful** lips” [Psalm 63:3, 5, ESV]. We say, “*Lord, your love is better than life. My soul is satisfied as with fat and rich food so I praise you with joyful lips!!*”

- iii. God also “satisfies” our soul with his love inwardly – his Spirit directly loving our spirit and so confirming with our spirit how deeply we are loved [Romans 8:16]. “I have poured out my love into your heart through Holy Spirit whom I have given to you.” [Romans 5:5]
- iv. [Jesus promises]: “If [*When*] you keep my commands [*especially to love as I have loved you*], you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands [*primarily to love you as he has loved me*] and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that **your joy may be complete** [be full, NASB].

f. **LOGO:**

- i. Triune God eternally exists “loving and being loved” [John 17:24]. They eternally “remaining in, abiding in” complete JOY!!! So they say, “Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness” [Gen. 1:26-27] so they can experience love and joy with us and with one another!



- ii. **Being loved and loving as loved**, the rhythm and balance of life, is how we continually remain in his love and experience full and complete joy! [*Food, drink and rest to move; mask on first...*]

10. THE JESUS WAY: By the Spirit, we get loved; we love as loved; we remain in his love and experience full joy! May this be our way of life for the rest of our lives! Enjoy!

[Note: At the beginning, like dry soil in a pot, you might absorb little initially. But stay under the flow daily and you will absorb more and more!]

SESSION 2

The “LOVE VERSE” Practice: Experiencing and Internalizing God’s Words of Love

1. **The five parts of the practice are:** *personalize, vocalize, memorize, meditate, and imitate.*

2. **FOCUS: What are we coming to do?**

“The Lord would **speak** to Moses **face to face**, as one speaks to a friend” [Exodus 33:11, NIV]. “I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and **talk with you face to face**, so that our joy may be complete” [2 John 1:12, NIV]. “**Listen, listen** to me, and eat what is good, and you will **delight** in the richest of fare.” [Isaiah 55:2b, NIV]

3. **PERSONALIZE:** We personalize a scripture that is about God or addressed to God, by changing the pronouns so that God speaks it directly from his heart to ours.

a. God spoke fragments of scriptures to Jesus at his baptism. God said to Jesus at his baptism: “You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased” [Luke 3:22]. God not only loved Jesus through the verses, but also gave him his identity: [Psalm 2:6-7]: “I have installed **my king** (his “anointed,” v 2) on Zion, my holy mountain. I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: ‘**You are my son**; today I have become your father.’”; [possibly Genesis 22:2]: “*Take your son, your only son, whom you love . . .*”; [Isaiah 42:1]: “Here is **my servant** whom I uphold, my chosen one **in whom I delight** (I am well pleased). I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.”

b. He also knows us individually and personally: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care (will or knowledge). And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” [Matthew 10:29-31]. “(I) call (my) own sheep by name and lead them out” [John 10:3, NIV]. “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb” [Psalm 139:13ff; Also Luke 15 – they search for the one lost sheep and coin; He calls stars by name, Psalm 147:4].

c. “I am not human, that I should lie, not a human being, that I should change my mind. Do I speak and then not act? Do I promise and not fulfill?” [Numbers 23:19]. “I the Lord do not change!” [Malachi 3:6]

4. **Vocalize:** Listening to God speak scriptures to you, through you and others, by the Holy Spirit.

a. “In the past **God spoke** to our ancestors **through the prophets** at many times and in various ways, but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son . . .**” (Hebrews 1:1-2; see 2 Peter 1:21). “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; **he will speak** only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13; See also Acts 8:26, 29; 10:19, 22). **The only way most people experienced scripture throughout history was hearing someone speak it.**

b. Hearing God speak personalized scriptures aloud is a relational experience:

I. Speaking and listening (conversation) is an experience between persons, face to face. When we speak his words of love aloud, God becomes present to us, through us.

II. Tone (volume), pace, and accent affect the message. Only 7% of a message is words.

III. As we get familiar with God's heart and truth by listening to him speak scriptures to us over and over, we begin to trust when Holy Spirit speaks to us [John 16:13] in our thoughts (1 Corinthians 2:10-15). Dallas Willard writes: "God's gracious incursions into our souls can make our thoughts his thoughts. He will help us learn to distinguish when a thought is ours alone and when it is also his." [Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, 102].

5. **MEMORIZE** [tips for memorizing, page 54]

- a. "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds . . ." [Deuteronomy 11:18]. Jesus said, "It is written!" [Matthew 4:4, 7, 10]
- b. Dallas Willard in *Hearing God* writes: "It is better in one year to have ten good verses transferred into the substance of our lives than to have every word of the Bible flash before our eyes."
- c. We want to memorize personalized scriptures because we are loved again, over and over, through them. "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." [Jeremiah 15:16]

6. **MEDITATE**

- a. "Oh, how I love your law [The Bible]! I meditate on it all day long" (Psalm 119:97; see also Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8).
- b. The two Old Testament words for meditate are defined as: (1) "To utter, mutter, moan, meditate Perhaps the Scripture was read half out loud in the process of meditation." (2) "The basic meaning of the verb seems to be . . . go over a matter in one's mind. This meditation or contemplation may be done either inwardly or outwardly . . . [in] silent reflection . . . or rehearsing aloud."
- c. Solomon summarizes the process in one verse: "Pay attention and turn your ear [**listen**] to the sayings of the wise [to my words]; apply your heart to what I teach [**meditate**], for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart [**memorize**] and have all of them ready on your lips [**speak**]." [Proverbs 22:17-18, NIV]

7. **IMITATE – Love as Loved!**

Through this process of speaking, listening, memorizing, and meditating on his words, we grow comfortable with speaking the Lord's words (Scripture or of the Spirit) on behalf of the Lord to others. We also want them to experience his love through them as we did. "But the one who prophesies [speaks

God's words] speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort." [1 Corinthians 14:3, NIV]

Creating an "Amplified/Expanded" Version of Your Passage

The differences in bible translations:

1. [Zephaniah 3:17, NIV, personalized]: *"I the Lord your God am with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves you. I take great delight in you; in my love I will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."* Now experience it with additional words from the NASB, ESV, and NLT translations (in **bold**): (Insert name), I, the Lord your God, am with you. I am your mighty, **victorious** (NASB) warrior, your **savior** (ESV) who saves you. I take great delight in you _____. **I exult over you with joy** (NASB) **and rejoice over you with gladness** (ESV). In my love, I will no longer rebuke you. **Rather, I am quiet over you in my love** (NASB). **I also quiet** (calm, NLT) **you by my love** (ESV). I rejoice and **exult** (ESV) over you _____ with **loud** (ESV) singing, **joyful songs** (NLT), and **shouts of joy** (NASB)!
2. The Father says to us through the words of Jesus' prayer: **"I love you even as I love Jesus"** [John 17:23]. Using a definition for the Greek verb, *agapao*, *to love*, we could hear the Father add: **"I love you - value, esteem, feel generous concern for you; I am faithful towards and delight in you - even as I [do] Jesus."**

Hebrew Poetry:

Hebrew poetry (like the Psalms) often enhances the meaning of an opening phrase by following it with a second or third **similar** (synonym), **opposite** (antonym), or **informational** phrase. For example: [Psalm 19:9-11] **"The decrees of the Lord** are firm, and all of them are righteous [*opening statement*]. ¹⁰They are more **precious** than gold than much pure gold [*expands on original statement adding value*]; they are **sweeter** than honey, than honey from the honeycomb [*a "similar" statement of value*]. ¹¹By them your servant is **warned**; in keeping them there is **great reward** [*contrasting statements*]." All the phrases enhance our understanding of the "decrees of the Lord."

Paul's use of similar and opposites:

Paul used lists of **similar** (synonym) and **opposite** (antonym) behaviors to describe what love does and does not look like. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, he begins describing what love is with positive words: "Love is **patient**, love is **kind**," and could have continued as he did in Colossians 3:12-14: "Clothe yourselves with compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and **patience**. Bear with each other and forgive one another . . . Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love . . ." Instead, he switches to eight contrasting/opposite behaviors: "**love does not** envy, boast, keep a record of wrongs, delight in evil; **love is not** proud, rude, self-seeking, or easily angered" because these are the non-loving behaviors they are presently doing and need to stop as the first step towards loving.

Another option is to find similar (synonyms) and opposite (antonyms) words of words in the verse using the Internet, a dictionary, or thesaurus and then ask the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to guide you into all truth (John 16:13). To help you today, we have worksheets for you like the following example that match the scripture you chose from page 12.

Worksheet Example: Isaiah 62:3, 5 and Philippians 4:1

"I, your Father, am here to give you the power (the ability)...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus (and my love for you), and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of Me!" (Ephesians 3:18-19)

"(I), the Spirit of truth, will guide you into all the truth. I do not speak on my own; (I) speak only what (I) hear, and I will tell you what is yet to come." (John 16:13; personalized)

STEP ONE: Read the verse circling the specific words that capture your attention.

"You, _____ are a crown of splendor in my hand, a royal diadem [crown] in the hand of your God. . . . As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so I, your God, rejoice over you." "For I love you and long for you, _____. You are my joy and my crown."

STEP TWO: Look in the box below to see if any of the translations listed use synonyms or synonymous phrases for any of your words and circle them.

ALTERNATE TRANSLATIONS (of Isaiah 62)

AMPLIFIED	You shall also be [so beautiful and prosperous as to be thought of as] a crown of glory and honor in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem [exceedingly beautiful] in the hand of your God
NLT	The LORD will hold you in his hand for all to see--a splendid crown in the hand of God
NASB	You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD

STEP THREE: Compare the list of words below from your passage. Find the ones you circled. Read the lists of synonyms and antonyms that are beside them and circle any words that capture your attention.

SPLENDOR	<u>Synonyms/Similar:</u> magnificent, radiant, brilliant, beautiful <u>Antonyms/Opposites:</u> drab, shabby, shoddy, common, unimpressive
REJOICE	<u>Synonyms/Similar:</u> celebrate, delight, exult, revel <u>Antonyms/Opposite:</u> lament, bummed, disappointed, saddened
LOVE	<u>Synonyms/Similar:</u> deep affection, strong attachment, devotion <u>Antonyms/Opposite:</u> hate, dislike, indifference, uncaring, repulsed
LONG	<u>Synonyms/Similar:</u> earnestly desire, ache, dream of, yearn, crave <u>Antonyms/Opposite:</u> despise, dislike, disinterest, loathe, hate

JOY Synonyms/Similar: gladness, delight, treasure, ecstatic happiness

Antonyms/Opposite: heartache, distress, sadness, disappointment

STEP FOUR: Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you write your extended version on a separate piece of paper. Often this takes several drafts.

“You are a crown of **splendor** in my hand...”

- You (insert your name) are a magnificent, radiant, beautiful crown in my hand...
- (Your name), you are certainly not common, shabby or unimpressive to me...

“...a **royal** diadem (**crown**) in the hand of your God.” (NOTE: Neither the word royal nor crown was in the list. But the words captured our attention. We prayed and asked the Holy Spirit for synonym/antonym words or phrases that might work).

- You are one of a kind—a unique, exquisite, priceless crown—in my hand.
- ...a king or queens crown, not a child’s tiara. One of the royal treasures.

“As a bridegroom **rejoices** over his bride so I, your God, rejoice over you.”

- As the bridegroom celebrates, delights or revels over his bride, so I...
- The bridegroom would never say, “Oh bummer, you’re here. I’m so disappointed to see you. You’re not who I was hoping for.”
- ...so I, your God would never lament that you’re mine, would never be bummed or disappointed in seeing you. NO! I celebrate, delight, feel heart-pounding excitement when I see you!

“For I **love** you and **long** for you.”

- For I have such deep affection, devotion and strong attachment for you.
- I earnestly desire, ache and yearn to be with you.
- It’s not possible for me to feel disinterested or be uncaring or indifferent toward you.

“You are my **joy** and my crown.”

- You are my treasure and delight.
- You bring me inexpressible gladness.
- This is how I see you and feel about you as my crown.

Then put the phrases together. In the example below, the actual verses are in bold and underlined:

“(Insert your name _____), **you are a crown of splendor in my hand**, a magnificent, radiant, beautiful crown like that of a king or queen. As my **royal crown**, you are one of a kind, a unique, exquisite and priceless ornament in my hand. You are not now or ever shabby or common to me. **As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so I, your God, rejoice**, celebrate, delight, revel—no, feel heart-pounding excitement **over you!** Have you ever seen a bridegroom look disappointed over his bride? How much more impossible is it for me to ever feel

disappointed in seeing you, in having you as mine, as my beloved. You see, I really, really **love you**. The affection in my heart for you is so deep creating an unbreakable attachment to you. Thus, I find myself often **longing** and yearning **for you**, desiring to spend time with you. **You are my joy**, my delight, my treasure. You bring me inexpressible gladness. Do you see and understand how impossible it would be for me to ever feel disinterested, uncaring or indifferent toward you. **You are my crown**, my bride, my joy, my love—priceless now and forever!

Jessenia's version of Isaiah 62:3, 5 and Philippians 4:1

“You are the shiniest piece of bling in my closet—a four-karat stud in ma ear. As a balla trips ova his shorty, I trip ova you. I love you and spend ma time thinkin' bout you. They ain't none like you. You make the diamonds in ma grill shine and I just wanna tell tha world. You are the sweetest shorty in tha game. Me and you, damn, we like two songs in a jacked iPod. I can't do nuthin' but love you. Shorty you drive me crazy!
Love, Jesus.”

ALERT: Sometimes listening to the Lord speak to us through the “Love Verses” can trigger painful memories of either harm done to you or harm you caused. Although uncomfortable, now that it has been revealed, it can be healed! Resist suppressing or ignoring it. Seek help from a leader. Let them comfort and help you. Hopefully you can find a ministry that practices **memory healing**. For instance, the first time I heard the Lord say, “I take great delight in you Mark,” I had a strong reaction of doubt saying, “Why? That can't be true. Plenty of people have told me why I am a disappointment and therefore not lovable.” Some painful memories of people berating me came to mind that I realized I had never addressed. I needed healing and to work through forgiveness.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES of Amplified/Expanded paragraphs

ORIGINAL VERSE (personalized)

“ _____, when you get up and come to Me, your heavenly Father, while you are still a long way off and I see you - I am filled with compassion for you. Even now _____, I run to you, throw my arms around you and kiss you.” [Luke 15:20, *personalized*]

AMPLIFIED/EXPANDED VERSION

“ _____, sometimes you stay a long way off from me because of how you see you. You withdraw and hide from me because you think that when I see you, I will treat you as you treat yourself – condemning, critical, disgusted or disappointed in you. BUT I AM NOT YOU! When I see you (and I see it all, the good, the bad, strengths, weaknesses, imperfections, failures) I don't feel disgust, disappointment or anger. No, I am filled, not just feel, but I am filled, filled to complete capacity, with compassion for you, filled with kindness, tenderness and mercy. That's why I run to you – not walk, not wait, but sprint to you to reach you, to connect with you, to throw my arms around you and kiss you!”

ORIGINAL VERSE (personalized)

“I love you, _____ with an everlasting love; I draw you to myself with unfailing kindness” . . .
“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, my unfailing love for you, _____”

will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, for I have compassion on you.” [Jeremiah 31:3 and Isaiah 54:10, *personalized*]

AMPLIFIED/EXPANDED VERSION

“ _____, I cherish you, hold you dear in my heart, and not in a momentary, fleeting or temporary way, but with undying, ceaseless affection. It will never run out, never end, never stop. Fix your eyes, your heart on me, on my character, my unfailing kindness, gentleness and compassion and let it draw you to me. My character, my heart is reliable and inexhaustible. My love for you will never be disturbed. It is firm and unwavering as a mountain. And my covenant to you, my vow to you, my commitment of peace between us, will never be abolished. I will never discount it, violate it or forsake it. Though you break it or are unfaithful to it, I am faithful and forgiving because I have compassion on you!

SESSION 4

The “GOD-SIGHTING” Practice: Experiencing and internalizing God’s Acts of Love

What is a God-sighting?

1. Experiencing God love us in a “physical” or “embodied” way by the Spirit as he loved the disciples through Jesus.
 - a. Reminder: The Father and Jesus are in us by the Spirit [John 14:23; Romans 8:9-10]. The Spirit speaks to us [John 16:13] and does so primarily through our thoughts [1 Corinthians 2:10-15].
 - b. John wrote: “The Word [God the Son] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. . . . **No one has ever seen God**, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” [John 1:14, 18, NIV; also John 14:9-11, “seen me . . . seen Father]. Remember, this happened by the Spirit in him [John 1:32; 3:34; Luke 4:1, 14; Acts 10:38].
 - c. John also wrote: “**No one has ever seen God**. But if we love each other, God lives in [among] us, and his love is brought to full expression in [among] us” [1 John 4:12, NLT]. Thus, we can “see” experience God’s love through one another.
2. Notice how Paul experienced God comfort him though Titus:
 - a. God says through Paul: “I, your Father of compassion and God of all comfort, comfort you in all your troubles, so that you can comfort [others] in any trouble with the comfort you have received from me” [2 Corinthians 1:3-4, *personalized*, NIV]. But how do we usually “receive” comfort? [*Someone physically present with us, holding us, crying with us, listening to us*]
 - b. “For when we [Paul and Timothy] came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But **God**, who comforts the downcast,

comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also *by the comfort you had given him*. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.” [2 Cor. 7:5-7, NIV]

3. **Paul also believed that his love was not just his own but Jesus’ in him**: “It is right for me **to feel this way** [joy, v. 4; love, v. 4:1] about all of you, since I have you in my heart . . . God can testify how I long for all of you **with the affection of Christ Jesus**.” [Philippians 1:7-8, NIV; see also Philippians 2:1-2]

The God-sighting practice

4. **Five parts**: Remember with thanks, personalize, vocalize, meditate and imitate
5. **Remember** a loving interaction and describe it, writing it as a **prayer of thanks** to God:
 - a. Paul wrote: “I **thank** my God every time I **remember** you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with **joy** because of your partnership in the gospel . . .” [Philippians 1:3-5, NIV; see also Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 1:4].
 - b. Following Paul’s example, we review our day to **remember** our interactions with family, friends or other people. The interactions could be (1) **how we loved someone**, (2) **how someone loved us**, or (3) a loving interaction **we observed**. We then write **all the details of the experience as a prayer of thanks to God** – ours or their words, tone of voice, actions, emotions, facial expressions, and body language.
 - c. **Examples from Mark’s journal when he loved someone, someone loved him, and loving interaction he observed**.
 - i. **When he loved someone**: While reviewing my day, I remembered my interaction with my daughters – what I said, did, and felt. Then I wrote: “Father, thank you for the deep, deep love I felt in my heart for my daughters today. I found so much pleasure in hugging them, lavishing affection on them with kisses, tickling them, and speaking words of endearment—‘You’re awesome!’, ‘You are so special to me!’, ‘I love you soooooo much!’ Lord, I so badly wanted them to grasp how intense and great my love was for them that I squeezed them too tight (which they let me know). Lord, I just love them so much. I was frustrated by the limitation of words and actions to convey the depth of love in my heart for them.”
 - ii. **When someone loved him**: While reviewing my day, I remembered my interaction with my friend Sam – what he said, did, and felt: Then I wrote: “Lord Jesus, thank you so much for Sam’s enthusiastic hug and words of affection—‘*Bro, so awesome to see you. I’ve missed you. I am so grateful for this opportunity to be together.*’ Lord, his

excitement, warmth, and delight in me were so heartwarming. I felt deeply loved. Thank you so much for loving me through him!”

iii. **An observed loving interaction:** While reviewing my day, I remembered my interaction with my friend John and his delight in his daughter – what I said, did, and felt about her: I wrote: “Father, thank you so much for the joy of experiencing my friend John talk about his little girl today. He was radiant, proud, and could hardly contain his delight. He just had to share with me how special every little thing she was learning and doing meant to him. I couldn’t help but smile with joy and delight with him.”

d. **“Remembering”** is a way to obey Paul’s appeal - “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, **keep your eyes on** those who live as we do” [Philippians 3:17, NIV]. It is also a way to intentionally “behold as in a mirror” [2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV] those moments when “God’s kind of love” manifests [see 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 John 4:9], or becomes visible again, to or among us [1 John 4:12].

6. Personalize: [Similar to what we did with the Love Verse practice]

a. We listen to God (or Jesus) speak to us about how he was actively loving us or others during that interaction in those ways and “so much more.”

b. This idea came from Jesus’ comparisons: “You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So, if you sinful people [insert name] know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more** will I, your heavenly Father give good gifts to you who ask me?” [Matthew 7:9-11, NLT; see other examples on page 69].

c. We trust the Holy Spirit’s guidance [John 14:26; 16:13]: Dallas Willard writes: “God’s gracious incursions into our souls can make our thoughts his thoughts. He will help us learn to distinguish when a thought is ours alone and when it is also his” [Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, 102]. If you are unsure what you wrote is from the Lord, ask a friend or spiritual leader for feedback and check it against the Bible (“weigh” and “test”, 1Corinthians 14:30 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

d. The examples above continued

i. **When he loved someone:** REMEMBERING WITH THANKS: “Father, thank you for the deep, deep love I felt in my heart for my daughters today. I found so much pleasure in hugging them, lavishing affection on them with kisses, tickling them, and speaking words of endearment—‘You’re awesome!’, ‘You are so special to me!’, ‘I love you soooooo much!’ Lord, I so badly wanted them to grasp how intense and great my love was for them that I squeezed them too tight (which they let me know). Lord, I just love them so much. I was frustrated by the limitation of words and actions to convey the depth of love in my heart for them.”

PERSONALIZE: “Mark, if you, beloved son, love this deeply, how much more do I love you as my own child. If you can find such pleasure hugging them, kissing them and tickling them, how much more is my pleasure in you and my joy in lavishing my affection on you. You are awesome to me, special to me, and I couldn’t be more proud to love you as my own. How effortlessly it is to speak my words of affection over you. I’m your number one fan! Can you even begin to imagine how deeply I want you to know what’s in my heart for you? If you, son, how much more, how much more! And how much more do I long for your girls to know my love as well.

[More examples on page 50]

7. Vocalize: We read our personalized “how much more” aloud or listen to someone else say it to us in the same way we speak a “Love Verse.”

8. Meditate:

- a. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—**think about [literally “ponder”]** such things.” [Philippians 4:8, NIV].
- b. **The way we remember an experience, a memory, can allow us to “re-live” the experience:**
“We quite literally *re-present*—make present again—our experience of the world when we have a memory. More technically, we reactivate the same network of neurons that were initially activated in our original experience, to some extent experiencing the event all over again. The re-experience or re-presentation will replicate the intensity of the original experience to the degree that our inner re-presentation is like the original experience—concrete, vivid, and with all our senses (55-56). . . . What matters to the neurons in our brains is not whether an event is external [happening presently outside of us] or internal [in our brains] but only whether or not the event is experienced as *real, concrete, and vivid*. . . . We take a *truth* [or truth-communicating event] and mentally experience it as *real*.” [Gregory Boyd, Al Larson, *Escaping the Matrix: Setting Your Mind Free to Experience Real Life in Christ*, 125-126].
- c. Therefore, after we write about our loving interaction, we want to replay the memory as vividly and concretely as possible, using all of our senses so that we can re-experience it with as much intensity as the first time. We can do a memory two ways: either as an observer or being in it. The goal is to do the memory as an active participant experiencing the Lord love us through us or another person. As we relive it, we also listen to the Lord’s “how much more” words, both internally and by speaking them aloud or hearing someone else speak them to us. We also listen for any other thoughts he wishes to share with us.
- d. When it is a particularly powerful experience, and we really want it to change us, it is important to replay the memory over and over for days or weeks like we do a verse so that we are trained and transformed by it.

9. Imitate:

- a. “And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.” [1 Corinthians 11:1, NLT; also 4:16]

- b. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” [Philippians 4:9, NIV]

‘ On Days We Have No Loving Interactions ’

Sometimes, when reviewing our day, we weren’t with people or, we realize that we were not loved or didn’t love in an intentional way. Days like these happen and are normal. Some options for these days:

1. Give thanks for his presence and protection from the evil one [John 17:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:3].
2. Give thanks for his provision and/or other ways (not through people) that he showed his presence and love.
3. Go to page 59 and select a passage of how he loved us in the past. Make it a vivid and real experience in your mind and heart. For example, the Lord says, “Forgive as I have forgiven you” (Colossians 3:13). We then imagine him present with us reminding us of all the times he has forgiven us. Maybe we remember when someone forgave us and hear the Lord speak those words through him/her again in our mind and heart (“I, the Lord Jesus, forgive you”). *Then we give thanks!*
4. Remember someone or several people you deeply love (family, friends, or even your pet). As you feel your loving thoughts and emotions rise for them, pause and hear the Lord say to you: “If you can feel such love for _____, how much more do I feel that way for you.” Also, you can replay a pleasant memory of when they loved you or you loved them and again hear the Lord say: “If they (or you) thought, felt or loved that way, how much more do I think, feel or love you.” Remember, the more vividly and concretely you engage in the memory, the more deeply you will experience it and be affected by it again as if it were the first time.
5. Looking for, but not finding, a moment when someone loved us helps remind us to be intentional to love others so they can experience a “God- Sighting.” Sadly, many people are often not loved for days because they don’t experience someone loving them. What about doing something right now for someone? Be intentional; it’s so worth it!
6. Occasionally, when reviewing our day, we remember how someone harmed us instead of loved us. We understand how painful that can be. We also acknowledge that forgiving someone is a difficult process. We use a process called *Memory Healing Prayer*. This process helps us to experience God love us in our pain and love us by reminding us of how much he forgave us first so that we can forgive as forgiven (Ephesians 4:31).¹

¹ **The Memory Healing Prayer process abbreviated:** Depending on how severely we were harmed, forgiving someone can be quick and easy or it can be a longer process involving several steps. In Step One, we pour out our pain and anger to the Lord over the harm we experienced. He loves us with empathy, comfort, and validation. In Step Two, we invite the Lord to remind us that he loved us when we were his enemies and forgave us first of all our wrongs against him and others. We feel loved by him as we experience his mercy, grace and forgiveness afresh. In Step Three, we choose to forgive because he forgave us first. In other words, we no longer keep a record of it. We release the person from the debt they owe us and leave justice in the Lord’s hands, just as Jesus did (1 Peter 2:23). We need to do this as many times as it takes for the memory to be healed, when it no longer causes pain, anger or the desire to retaliate. (The full version of this process is included in FLM’s *Getting Along* curriculum).

7. At other times when reviewing our day, we remember when we did not love people. Resist the shame. Remember that God's love for us is not based upon our behavior. The Triune God loves and values us based upon who we are to him and the value and love he chose to place on us. But be intentional to express a love-based apology: "I'm so sorry for the pain I caused you. What I did was wrong and is never ok under any circumstance. By God's grace I will never do it again. I will do whatever is necessary to change and to help you heal and to restore your trust in me.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF THE GOD SIGHTING PRACTICE

When I loved someone:

REMEMBER WITH THANKS: While reviewing my day, I remembered how I responded and what I felt when I saw my friend, Sam, have a bad fall. I wrote: “Father, thank you for the depth of love and compassion I felt in my heart for Sam when he fell. I felt such concern for him. I was amazed by how quickly I responded with care and comfort, holding him, helping him, and saying comforting words to him like, ‘Sam, its going to be ok. I’m here. I’ll take care of you. I love you brother. Hang in there.’ Lord it was such a joy to be your loving presence to him.”

PERSONALIZE: “Mark, like yours for Sam, so is my compassion, love, care, and concern for you and so much more. How much more quickly and deeply do I respond this way when you are hurt or hurting son? I am always here to comfort you and support you because my love for you is like yours for Sam and so much more. And if you found such pleasure in caring for Sam, how much more is my pleasure in caring for you. Remember your comforting words and the way you said them. Listen to me say them to you: ‘Mark, I love you. I’m here. It’s going to be ok. I’ll take care of you.’ It’s true son! I love you like that and so much more.”

When someone loved me:

REMEMBER WITH THANKS: While reviewing my day, I remembered that in the morning, I was sitting alone in the living room feeling very discouraged and had been crying. My wife had left for work but suddenly returned because she had forgotten something. She saw me and noticed my pain. She postponed leaving for work to sit with me, hold me, and pray for me. I wrote: “Father, thank you so much for coming and loving me through Robin. I thought she had already left for work. Lord, her tender touch just melted me. I felt so comforted. She spoke hope and comfort to me and then prayed such a hope filled, faith filled prayer for me. Her compassionate touch and soothing, faith filled words were just what I needed for the day. Thank you for her amazing love for me. Thank you again for loving me through her today.”

PERSONALIZE: “Mark, if Robin was so quick to stop and respond to your need, how much more am I attentive to and present to you in your time of need. Her love, her compassion was also mine and yet it’s so much more. I knew you were discouraged and so I came to you through her. Together with her, I loved comforting you, holding you, and speaking truth and hope into your soul. I loved her prayer. Her prayer expressed my heart so well. But I also ever live to intercede for you. You are always on my heart and mind. I will help you, strengthen you and uphold you. I am faithful. You are deeply, deeply loved by Robin. You are as well by me to that degree and more! Hold fast to that truth! Never will I leave you or forsake you.”

When I observed a loving interaction:

REMEMBER WITH THANKS: While reviewing my day, I remembered watching a first-time mom and dad look at, hold, speak to, and show off their newborn baby. I wrote: “Father, thank you for Joe and Jill’s expressions of love for their new-born baby - so proud, so affectionate, so caring. Lord, the delight on their faces was priceless. They were so eager to share their delight in their baby with me.”

PERSONALIZE: “Mark, if they felt that way, looked at, spoke to their baby that way, how much more is my delight in you, how much more are my words of, sounds of, looks of affection, words of pride, and expressions of care for you. See and listen to my heart for you through their looks and words right now. Oh, I love you that much and so, so, so much more beloved son!”

The GOD SIGHTING EXERCISE

Now spend some time alone with the Lord to do this practice. Remember to focus not only on his or her (or your) words and actions (including bodily gestures and touch), but especially focus on emotions, tone of voice and facial expressions. **Please write your “personalized” paragraph legibly on another piece of paper so someone else can read it to you.** There is a blank page at the end of the workbook if you need to use it. **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write these in an email and send to your group].

1. HOW DID YOU LOVE SOMEONE? *[IF YOU NEED A REMINDER, SEE THE FIRST EXAMPLE ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE]*

REMEMBER WITH THANKS: Remember to focus not only on your words and actions, but especially focus on your emotions, tone of voice and facial expressions [as you can imagine them]. **Begin with,** “Father, thank you for . . .” Please write legibly here or on another piece of paper. **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write your “thanks prayer” and your “personalized” version in an email and send to your group].

PERSONALIZE: Let God express his love to you through the experience using the content from the “thanks” you just wrote above. Begin with your name: “_____, if you (or they) felt, did, or said . . . how much more do I (emotion, action, etc.) . . . for you.” Please write legibly here or on another piece of paper. **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write your “thanks prayer” and your “personalized” version in an email and send to your group].

2. HOW DID SOMEONE LOVE YOU? *[IF YOU NEED A REMINDER, SEE THE SECOND EXAMPLE ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE]*

REMEMBER WITH THANKS: Reminder: Generally, we thank God in two ways: (1) We give thanks for how the person expressed their love, and (2) give thanks to God for loving us through them that way. In this way, we acknowledge the person loved us and that our Triune God “manifested” his love to us through that person as well (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). Remember to focus not only on his or her words and actions, but especially focus on emotions, tone of voice and facial expressions. **Begin with:** “Father, thank you for . . .” **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write your “thanks prayer” and your “personalized” version in an email and send to your group].

PERSONALIZE: Let God express his love to you through the experience using the content from the “thanks” you just wrote above. **Begin with** your name: “_____”, if they . . . (emotion, action, etc.), how much more do I (emotion, action, etc.) . . . for you.” [OR] “That was my love for you and so much more!” Please write legibly here or on another piece of paper. **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write your “thanks prayer” and your “personalized” version in an email and send to your group].

3. WHAT LOVING INTERACTION DID YOU OBSERVE? *[IF YOU NEED A REMINDER, SEE THE THIRD EXAMPLE ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE]*

REMEMBER WITH THANKS: Remember to focus not only on his or her words and actions, but especially focus on emotions, tone of voice and facial expressions. **Begin with** “Father, thank you for . . .” **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write your “thanks prayer” and your “personalized” version in an email and send to your group].

PERSONALIZE: Let God express his love to you through the experience using the content from the “thanks” you just wrote above. Begin with your name: “_____”, if they (love, care, feel for that person) . . . how much more is that my (love, care, emotion, etc.) . . . for you!” Please write legibly here or on another piece of paper. **[NOTE:** If this is a Zoom FL weekend, please write your “thanks prayer” and your “personalized” version in an email and send to your group].

Tips For Memorizing

1. Choose a portion of the verse to memorize. Write it in your journal. When you get it memorized, add another portion.
2. How have you memorized things in the past? Tests, dramas, poems, Lord's prayer, etc. Apply what you did back then to this portion of the verse.
3. Is there a logical progression of thought? Can you picture it like a sequence of actions, pictures, thoughts or movements?
4. Start with nouns, verbs, or phrases. What's easiest to remember first?
5. Look at the verse. Repeat it. Then say as much as you can without looking. Repeat this process until you can get through an entire sentence. Take a break to allow the Spirit to renew your mind.
6. Review the portion you are memorizing throughout the day if even for 5 minutes. Say what you can remember aloud, then work on what you forgot.
7. Put it on a 3x5 card or enter it into your cell phone so that you can carry it with you.
8. Record yourself reading the scripture verse on your cell phone and listen back to the recording multiple times while driving in the car.
9. Change your computer or phone screen background to an image with the verse you're working on. You can download many at firstlovedministries.org!
10. *Don't be discouraged!* Even if you don't memorize anything right away, be patient. It may take multiple practice times for you to memorize something new until you establish the habit. This is all part of training.

GOD AND JESUS DESCRIBE THEMSELVES

[1 Timothy 6:15-16, NIV]: “I, your God, am the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal, [“eternal”, 1:17], and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To me be honor and might forever.”

[Isaiah 66:1-3, NIV]: “This is what I, your Lord, say: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being? These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.’” **[Isaiah 55:8-9]:** “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

[Romans 11:33-36, NIV]: “Oh, the depth of the riches of my wisdom and my knowledge! How unsearchable are my judgments and my paths beyond tracing out! Who has known my mind? Or who has been my counselor? Who has ever given to me, that I should repay them? For from me and through me and for me are all things. To me be the glory forever!”

[Isaiah 40:28-31, NIV]: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? I, the Lord, am the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. I don’t grow tired or weary, and my understanding no one can fathom. I give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in me will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

[Exodus 34:6-7a, NIV]: “I am the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

[Colossians 1:15-20, NIV]: “I, the Son, am the image of the invisible God [also Hebrews 1:2-3], the firstborn over all creation. For in me all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through me and for me. I am before all things, and in me all things hold together [also 1 Corinthians 8:6]. And I am the head of the body, the church; I am the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything I might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in me, and through me to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through my blood, shed on the cross.”

[Philippians 2:5-11, NIV]: “I, Jesus Christ, being in very nature God [see John 1:1-3], did not consider equality with God something to be used to my own advantage. Rather, I made myself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, I humbled myself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted me to the highest place and gave me the name that is above every name, that at my name, Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that I, Jesus Christ am Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

[Ephesians 1:19-23, NIV] “God exerted his incomparably great power and mighty strength [which he also gave to you] when he raised me from the dead and seated me at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under my feet and appointed me to be head over everything for the church, which is my body, the fullness of me who fills everything in every way.”

Welcome Beloved!!!

"Come to me _____, your God, who is love, from whom love comes (1 John 4:7-8), and experience my love for you first (1 John 4:19). Because I am love, there is never a moment that I am not loving you. So come _____, notice, engage in, receive, and enjoy my love for you. I AM WAITING WITH EXCITED ANTICIPATION FOR YOU!"

"When you get up and come to me _____ your heavenly Father, [whether you've sinned or not, verse 18], while you are still a long way off and I see you, I am filled with compassion for you; And when I see you _____, I run to you [because I've been waiting, longing, watching for you]! By faith, see me even now closing the gap between us! Enjoy, delight in my embrace, my hug, as I throw my arms around you and kiss you [and celebrate over you, verse 23]" [Luke 15:20].

" _____, you are my beloved! Rest secure in me for I shield you all day long. As the one I love, rest between my shoulders" (Dt. 33:12). "I tend you like a shepherd. I gather you in my arms and carry you close to my heart!" (Dt. 32:10). "I shield you _____ and care for you; I guard you as the apple of my eye!" (Dt. 32:10)."

" _____, to me belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet, I set my affection on you _____; I chose you and I love you!" (Dt. 10:14-15). "You are my treasured possession!" (Dt. 7:6; see also 1 Peter 2:9).

"I love you _____, meaning I supremely value, esteem, and delight in you; I feel generous concern for you. My love for you is everlasting, steadfast, and unfailing. Oh, let my loving-kindness draw you to Me" (Jeremiah 31:3).

" _____, today and every day, I will help root and ground you more deeply in my love by giving you the power (the "ability", NASB) . . . **to grasp** ("comprehend", NASB) how wide and long and high and deep is **the love of Christ [my love for you _____] and to know (experientially) this love that surpasses knowledge**—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of ME" [Ephesians 3:17-19, NIV].

"I want your soul's hunger and thirst to be satisfied in me, in my love _____. So come, come to my waters . . . why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me _____ and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare!" (Is. 55:1-3; also Ps. 63:1-5). "Please, taste and see that I your Lord am good!" (Psalm 34:8). "For I will satisfy you with my unfailing love that you may sing for joy and be glad all your days!" (Psalm 90:14).

"Then go _____ and love people as I have loved you [my command] and you will remain in my love just I loved people as the Father loved me and I remained in his love. Do this, and my joy will be in you and your joy will be full!! (John 15:10-11).

Holy Spirit Verses

From the Spirit's Heart to Yours

Listen now to these personalized verses from the Holy Spirit regarding his relationship with you:

As promised to you long ago, _____ (Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36:27), **I, Holy Spirit**, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9-10), **have been sent to you** by God (John 14:16) and Jesus (John 16:7) **as our gift** to you (Acts 2:38) **to rebirth and renew you** (Titus 3:5; John 3:5-8).

You received me when you believed in Jesus (John 7: 39; Galatians 3:3, 5). **And it is I who confirms with your spirit that you, _____ are God's child** so that in your heart you cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:16; Galatians 4:6).

I was poured out generously into your heart, _____ (Titus 3:5) **filling you with power, love, self-discipline** (2 Timothy 1:7) and **self-control** (Galatians 5:23). For **you received power** when I came upon you (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49; Ephesians 1:19) and **God's love was poured into your heart through Me** (Romans 5:5).

My fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Your God of hope **fills you with all joy and peace** [through Me] as you trust in Him **until you overflow with hope** through my power (Romans 15:13). For life in the kingdom of God is righteousness [i.e., love (14:15)], joy and peace in Me (Romans 14:17).

I will always strengthen you in your inner being and help you (Ephesians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14). I **strengthen you with all power, _____** according to my glorious might so that **you might have all endurance and perseverance with joy** (Colossians 1:11).

_____, I was also given to you **to be your helper** [i.e., counselor, advocate], **to teach you** all things and **to remind you** of everything Jesus said (John 14:16, 26; 1 John 2:27).

I guide you into all truth because I am the Spirit of Truth, **speaking only what I hear** and not on my own (John 16:13). I **give you wisdom and revelation** so that you may know God better (Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 1:9).

For **I have removed the veil from your face** so that you may behold the Lord's glory—Jesus. And as you contemplate him, as in a mirror, **I will transform you into His likeness** from one degree of glory to the next until He comes (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4, 6; Revelation 22:17).

For you have been released from the law in order to **serve [i.e., love God and others] in the new way [of keeping in step with Me]** and not in the old way of the written code (Romans 7:6; Galatians 5:16, 18, 23, 25). Live in accordance with Me, **setting your mind on what I desire**, not on what your flesh desires . . . **[For] the mind governed by Me is life and peace** (Romans 8:5-6).

I help you in your weakness when you do not know what you ought to pray for **by interceding for you . . .** in accordance with God's will. Then, in **all things, I work for good** for you who love God (Romans 8:26- 28).

Jesus' Words of Love Personalized

1. **[Matthew 11:28-30]:** (Insert name) “_____, I know you are weary and burdened. So come to me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
2. **[John 15:9-11]:** “As the Father loves me _____, so I love you. Remain in my love. Keep my commands, and you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father’s commands and remained in his love. I have told you this _____ so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”
3. **[John 14:27]:** “Peace I leave with you _____; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. So do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.” **Jn. 16:33** “_____, I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart _____! I have overcome the world.”
4. **[John 14:1-3]:** “_____, Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you _____, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”
5. **[John 15:14-17]:** “_____, you are my friend if you do what I command [Love one another as I have loved you, v. 12]. I no longer call you servant _____, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friend _____, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me _____, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love your brother and sister.”
6. **[John 10:3, personalized]:** “_____, you are one of my sheep. I call you by name and lead you out.” **(10:11, personalized)** “I am your good shepherd for a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep _____; [because I care for my sheep, v. 13].” **(10:14-15)** “I know you and I want you to know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” **(10:27-28)** “Listen to my voice _____; I know you. Follow me. I give you eternal life _____, and you shall never perish; no one will snatch you out of my hand.”
7. **[John 6:35]:** “I am the bread of life. Come to me _____ and you will never go hungry; believe in me and you will never be thirsty.” **[John 10:10]:** “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.”
8. **[John 14:21, personalized]:** “_____, you are one who loves me and you show it by keeping my commands. Therefore, you are loved by my Father, and I too love you and show myself to you.” **(John 14:23)** “My Father loves you _____, and we have come to you and have made our home with you.”
9. **[Matthew 12:48-50]:** “_____, you are my (brother or sister) because you do the will of my Father in heaven.” **[Hebrews 2:11, personalized]:** “I am not ashamed to call you my (brother or sister) _____.”
10. **[Matthew 20:28, Personalized]:** “I did not come to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for you _____ and for many.”
11. **[John 17:26]:** “_____, I have made the Father known to you, and I will continue to make him known to you in order that the love he has for me may be in you and that I myself may be in you.”

Sometimes Jesus spoke words of love directly to specific individuals about their situation that seem applicable to anyone who is in relationship with Jesus.

1. **[Luke 22:31-32]:** “ _____, _____ Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, [interceded for you, (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25)] that your faith may not fail.”
2. **[Adapted from Luke 10:39-42]:** “ _____, _____, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is necessary. Choose the good part, what is better. Sit at my feet and listen to my teaching (v. 39). Don’t let anyone or anything take that away from you. I never will.”
3. **[John 8:10-11]:** “ _____, where are they? Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you _____. Go now and leave your life of sin.”
4. **[John 4:14, *personalized*]:** “Because you believed in me _____, I gave you ‘living water,’ the Spirit, whose presence in you is like a spring of water that wells up in you to eternal life, so that you will never thirst.”
5. **[2 Corinthians 12:9]:** “ _____, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in *your* weakness.”

This final list of scriptures is passages about what Jesus does for us today!

1. **[Hebrews 1:24-25, 18, *personalized*]:** “ _____ Since you have flesh and blood, I too shared in your humanity so that by my death I might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free you from your slavery to your fear of death. . . . Because I myself suffered when I was tempted [tested], I am able to help you _____ when you are being tempted [tested].” [Note: the one Greek word can be translated as “tempted” or “tested.”]
2. **[Hebrews 4:15-16, *personalized*]:** “For with me, Jesus, you _____ have a high priest who is able to empathize with your weaknesses, because I was tempted in every way, just as you are—yet I did not sin. Therefore _____ approach God’s throne, My throne, of grace with confidence, so that you may receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need.”
3. **[2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, *personalized*]:** “I, the Lord Jesus Christ myself and God your Father, who loves you _____ and by his grace gave your eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your heart and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”
4. **[2 Thessalonians 3:16, *personalized*]:** “I am the Lord of peace _____, and I myself give you peace at all times and in every way for I the Lord am with you.”
5. **[Romans 8:34-37, *personalized*]:** “Who then is the one who would condemn you _____? Certainly not me. For I, your Lord Jesus Christ who died—more than that, who was raised to life—I am at the right hand of God and interceding for you, not condemning you _____. So who or what shall separate you from my love for you? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things _____ you are more than a conqueror through me who loves you.”

Personalized Verses of How God/Jesus Loved Us In the Past and Still Love Us Today!

◀ PART 1: Loving as God the Father Has Loved Us ▶

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #1

Experience God love you now through these passages:

1. *(God's words to Moses now to us)*: "[I am] 'The Lord, the Lord, the **compassionate and gracious** God, **slow to anger**, abounding in **love and faithfulness, maintaining love** to thousands [to you], and **forgiving** [your] wickedness, rebellion and sin.'" [Exodus 34:6-7]
2. *(God speaks through Paul)*: "I am rich in **kindness, forbearance and patience** toward you" [Romans 2:4, *personalized*]. "I am kind to the ungrateful and wicked." [Luke 6:35; *personalized*]
3. *(God speaks through the Psalmist)*: "I am **good** to you, **my love** for you **endures** forever, and my **faithfulness continues** to you and to all generations." [Psalm 100:5, *personalized*]

Listen as he reminds you to love as he has loved you:

1. *(God speaks through Paul)*: "Therefore, **AS** one of my chosen people, holy and **BELOVED**, clothe yourself with a heart of **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience** [See 2 Corinthians 10:1], **bearing with** others, and . . . **forgiving as I, the Lord, forgave you**. And above all these things, **put on love**, which binds ALL together in perfect unity." [Colossians 3:12-14, *personalized*]
2. *(God speaks through Paul)*: "Since you live by my Spirit, keep in step with (walk by and be led by) my Spirit" [Galatians 5:25, 16, 18, *personalized*]. "...the fruit of MY Spirit in you is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." [Galatians 5:22-23, *personalized*]
3. *(God speaks through Paul)*: "I am the Father of **compassion** and the God of all **comfort**. I comfort you in all your troubles, so that you can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort you have received from Me" [2 Corinthians 1:3-4, *personalized*]. *(Jesus speaks through Hebrews)*: "I Jesus, am your faithful high priest who is able to empathize with your weaknesses, because I was tempted/tested like you in every way" (Hebrews 4:15, *personalized*). *(Jesus speaks through John)*: "When I saw Mary weeping, I was deeply moved in spirit and troubled . . . and I wept." [John 11:33-35, *personalized*]

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #2

Experience God love you now through these passages:

1. *(God speaks through John)*: "**This is love**: not that you loved me, your God, but that I loved you [first] and **sent MY son as the atoning sacrifice for your sins**." [1 John 4:10, *personalized*]

2. *(God speaks through Paul)*: “Remember, it was while you were a sinner [an enemy, v. 10; harming me and others] that Jesus died for you to demonstrate my own love toward you.” [Romans 5:8, *personalized*]

Listen as he reminds you to love as he has loved you:

1. *(God speaks through Jesus)*: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. . . . Love (insert enemies name) _____, your enemy, do good to _____ who hates you, bless _____ who curses you, pray for _____ who mistreats you [even as I have prayed for you]. . . . Then your reward will be great, and you will be [my child], child of the Most High, because I am kind to the ungrateful and wicked [as I was with you]. Be merciful, just as I your Father am merciful [to you].” [Luke 6:31, 27-28, 35-36, *personalized*]
2. *(God speaks through Paul)*: “**In light of MY mercy** [loving you first], **present your body as a living sacrifice** [love], holy and pleasing to ME, your God, for this is the only worship that makes sense.” [Romans 12:1, *personalized*]
3. *(God speaks through Paul)*: “**Imitate me, your God**, therefore, **AS** a beloved child and **walk in love, JUST AS** Jesus loved you and **gave himself up** for you, a fragrant offering and **sacrifice** to me.” [Ephesians 5:1-2, *personalized*]

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #3

Experience God love you now through these passages:

1. *(God speaks through Micah)*: “Who is like me, your God, who **pardons** your sin and **forgives** your transgressions? **I do not stay angry forever**, because **I delight in loving kindness. I will again have compassion on you**; I will **tread** your iniquities under foot and **cast** all your sins into the depths of the sea.” [Micah 7:18-19, *personalized*]
2. *(God speaks through Isaiah)*: “I, even I, am he who **blots out** your transgressions, for my own sake, and **remembers your sins no more.**” [Isaiah 43:25; see also 1 John 1:9]

Listen as he reminds you to love as he has loved you:

1. “**Forgive** each other, just as in Christ, I your God **forgave** you.” [Ephesians 4:32, *personalized*]
2. “[Love] **keeps no record** of wrongs.” [1 Corinthians 13:5]

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #4

Experience God love you now through these passages by reminding you of when he saved you:

1. *(God speaks through Paul)*: “You were by nature an object of my wrath. But I, your God, being rich in mercy and because of my great love for you, **made you alive** with Christ even when you were dead in transgressions—by grace **I saved you** . . . It is **my gift to you**, not of your works, so that you cannot boast.” [Ephesians 2:3-5, 8-9, *personalized*]

2. (*God speaks through Paul*): “For you were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But when my kindness and love appeared [of God your Savior], **I saved you**, not by works of righteousness which you had done, but according to my mercy. I saved you through the washing of **regeneration and renewing** by the Holy Spirit, **whom I poured out on you generously** through Jesus Christ your Savior, so that, having been **justified** by his grace, you might **become an heir** according to the hope of eternal life.” [Titus 3:3-7, *personalized*]

◀ PART 2: Loving as Jesus Has Loved Us ▶

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #1

Experience Jesus love you now through these passages **and** listen as he reminds you to love as he has loved you:

1. (*Jesus speaks through John*): “By this you know love: I, **Jesus Christ MYSELF, laid down MY life for YOU**. I want you therefore to **lay down YOUR LIFE** for your brothers and sisters. If you have material possessions and see a brother or sister in need but have no **pity [compassion]** on them [literally, close your heart against them], how can **MY LOVE** [the love of God] dwell in you? Beloved one, do not **love** in word or speech only but **in deed and truth.**” (1 John 3:16-18, *personalized*)
2. (*Jesus speaks through Paul*): “**Remember MY grace**, the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ, that though I was rich, **for your sake I became poor** so that you, through my poverty, might become rich [i.e., disadvantage yourself for others as I did for you].” [2 Corinthians 8:9 *personalized*]

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #2

Experience Jesus love you now through these passages:

1. (*From Jesus in Matthew’s gospel*): “[I] did not come to be served but **to serve** [you] and to give [my] life a ransom for many [including you].” (Matthew 20:28, NASB, *personalized*)
2. (*Jesus speaks through Paul*): “I want you to **have this in your mind**: though I existed in the form of God, I did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **I emptied myself**, taking the very form of a **servant**, being made in human likeness [*I denied myself*]. And being found in human form, **I humbled myself** by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! [*I took up my cross for you*].” [Philippians 2:5-8, *personalized*]

Listen as he reminds you to love as he has loved you:

1. (*From Jesus in the Gospels*): “So, if you desire to become my disciple, you must **deny yourself, take up [your] cross daily** and **follow me**. For if you desire to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it [you will find it].” [Luke 9:23-24, *personalized*; also Matthew 10:39]
2. (*Jesus speaks through Paul*): “**I died for you** so that as you live, you should **no longer live for yourself but for me**, who for your sake died and rose again.” [2 Corinthians 5:15, *personalized*]

3. *(Jesus speaks through Paul)*: “[Do] not please yourself . . . [but] **please your neighbors** for their good, to build them up. **For even I, Jesus Christ, did not please myself.**” [Romans 15:1-3, *personalized*]
4. *(Jesus speaks through Paul)*: “...in humility **value others above yourself**, not looking to your own interests but [looking] **to the interests of the others.**” [Philippians 2:3-4]
5. *(From Jesus himself)*: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet [humbly served you], you also should wash one another’s feet [humbly serve each other]. I have set you an example that you should **do as I have done for you**” [John 13:14-15]. [**Note**: Jesus washed everyone’s feet including Peter and Judas knowing what they would do against him—Peter denies/disowns (v. 38) and Judas betrays (v. 21, 26). I.e., we serve always unconditionally].
6. *(Jesus speaks through Paul)*: “You, my brother [or sister], were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, **serve others** humbly in love.” [Galatians 5:13]

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS #3

Experience Jesus love you now through these passages and remind you to love as he has loved you:

1. *(Jesus speaks through Paul)*: “**Accept** one another, **even as I, Jesus Christ have accepted you**, to the glory of God.” [Romans 15:7, *personalized*]
2. *(Jesus speaks through Peter)*: “**I, Jesus Christ, suffered for you**, leaving you an example, that you should **follow my steps** . . . When they [you] cursed me, I did not curse back at them [you]. When I suffered [physically], I did not threaten, but committed myself to him who judges righteously. [Beloved, follow in my steps, suffering as I suffered for you].” [1 Peter 2:21, 23, *personalized*]
3. *(Jesus speaks through Paul)*: “**Forgive each other AS I**, your Lord, **forgave** you.” [Colossians 3:13, *personalized*; see also Ephesians 4:32]

EXERCISE: DEFINE GOD’S LOVE

Jesus' new command to us is to love as he has loved us. Hopefully, as you have spent time in these scriptures you have experienced him (and the Father) love you. Whereas the verses in Session 2 are primarily the Father telling you who you are to him and how much he loves and values you, **the verses in this session are from the Father and Jesus describing their loving response to our needs and bad behavior**. In this exercise, we would like you to review the verses again for the purpose of **creating a definition of God's love**. Hopefully, through this exercise, the nature and character of his love will be more deeply internalized into your mind and heart, so that his love comes through you more and more to bless others. After you have worked on creating your definition, take a look at our attempt at the bottom of page 64. Ours is not better, just one example. The goal is for you to have a definition that you can remember.

DISADVANTAGING OURSELVES FOR OTHERS

An expanded version of the Bible passage below is included here followed by a response. We pray that as you listen to Jesus, this passage will take on significantly greater depth for you. Perhaps your response to Jesus' words will be similar to the concluding response. You may also want to write your own response. *Enjoy!*

*(Jesus says through Paul): "Remember my grace, the grace of your **Lord Jesus Christ**, that though I was rich, for your sake I became poor so that you, through my poverty, might become rich."
[2 Corinthians 8:9, *personalized*]*

FROM JESUS:

"My name is **Jesus**, 'the Lord saves,' (Matthew 1:21). Father and Spirit sent me to save you. This is why I was sent into the world (John 3:17). Only I could accomplish it as both man and God (John 1:1-2, 14). I was happy to do it for your sake (John 10:14-15, 17). I am also **Lord**—the Old Testament name for God (Exodus 3:14-15). I am God, the Lord of lords and the King of kings (Revelation 19:16; 2 Timothy 6:15-16). I, the Son, am the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For (by) Me, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through me and for me. I am before all things, and in (by) me all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17). I am **Messiah** (Christ), the anointed one, the prophesied king from the line of David fulfilling God's promises (Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 16:16-17)."

"So, REMEMBER MY GRACE, the measureless, undeserved love, kindness and favor I lavished on you. ALTHOUGH I WAS RICH, having every advantage, privilege, opportunity, possessions, honor, and blessings that was due my position as King of Kings, Creator, and God the Son, FOR YOUR SAKE, for your good, your advantage, your opportunity and blessing, I BECAME POOR. I disadvantaged myself, surrendered everything, gave it all up, and left it behind, denying myself, and taking the form of a servant, your servant. I did this SO THAT THROUGH MY POVERTY YOU MIGHT BECOME RICH—rich with hope, a future, and blessings present and eternal; rich with eternal life, forgiveness and grace for others."

"Therefore _____, like me, because I did it for you first, disadvantage yourself for the sake of another's advantage and opportunity. Surrender your position of privilege and entitlement and become the servant of others, spending your time, energy, and resources on them. Excel in this grace of giving. Increasingly look to see how you might use less of what is yours on yourself so that others might have more, affording them opportunities and advantages that they never dreamed possible. Do not please yourself, but please others for their good, to build them up even as I did (Romans 15:2-3). Offer yourself as a living and holy sacrifice for this pleases me. What's more, it's the only worship that makes sense now, worship that is true and proper given what I did for you first (Romans 12:1)."

A RESPONSE:

"Lord Jesus, I am amazed at what you gave up and how you lived among us, joyfully serving and having nothing. It's really the story of the 'Prince and the Pauper.' We didn't recognize you because you looked just like us and

lived just like us only without sin. You lived among us and fully experienced our suffering. But never once did you bring attention to your suffering, but rather suffered quietly and humbly, always for our sakes.”

“Lord, you changed your position. You changed your status. You changed your conditions. You changed everything familiar to you. You traded places with me. But you did not change yourself. In fact, it was because of who you are, your goodness, kindness, compassion, incomprehensible love that you changed everything for my sake. O Lord, how far my heart is from being truly like yours. Please work in me more deeply.”

*(From Jesus himself): “For those of you who do not **renounce [give up, forsake] all that you have [even as I did for you]** you cannot be my disciples.” [Luke 14:33, *personalized*]*

Our attempt at defining God’s love: “God’s love intentionally, unconditionally, compassionately and sacrificially does good to all, for their good, always.

Sources of Joy

Most people think that the primary source of joy is when they experience favorable circumstances, like having all the material things you need, health, no suffering or stress. But the list of verses below suggests that we can experience great joy apart from our circumstances. In fact, according to these verses, we can experience joy anytime because these sources of joy are always accessible to us. Spend a season of time to listen to, memorize and meditate upon these scriptures so that at any moment you can be reminded of where to find joy.

GOD'S PRESENCE BRINGS JOY

[Psalm 16:11]: *"I have made known to you the path of life and I fill you with joy in my presence, with eternal pleasures at my right hand." (personalized)*

[Psalm 43:4]: *"Come to my altar, to me your God, and you will discover that I am your joy and your delight." (personalized)*

GOD'S LOVE BRINGS JOY

[Psalm 90:14]: *"I will satisfy you this morning with my unfailing love that you may sing for joy and be glad all your days!" (personalized)*

[John 15:10-11]: "If you keep my commands, you will **remain in my love**, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this **so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**"

GOD'S WORD BRINGS JOY

[Jeremiah 15:16]: *"When my words come to you, eat them and they will be your joy and your heart's delight." (personalized)*

[Psalm 19:8]: *"My precepts are right giving joy to your heart!" (personalized)*

LOVING RELATIONSHIPS BRING JOY

[Philemon 7]: "**Your love** has given me **great joy and encouragement**, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people."

[2 John 1:12]: "I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, **I hope to visit** you and talk with you face to face, **so that our joy may be complete.**"

GOD'S PROMISE TO GIVE US JOY

[Romans 15:13]: "I am the God of hope and I will fill you with **all joy and peace** as you trust in me, that you may abound in hope, in the power of my Holy Spirit!" *(personalized)*

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22; Romans 14:17]

“Trust Me” Verses

Sometimes we struggle to share and to be generous because we think if we give too much to others we won't be able to take care of ourselves or our family. While God teaches us to be good stewards of all we have, when the Holy Spirit moves us to be generous we can trust God to provide for our every need. Be encouraged by the Lord's care and provision for you and TRUST HIM:

1. “I your God will bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work . . . I who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and . . . your generosity will result in thanksgiving to Me” [2 Corinthians 9:8, 10-11, *personalized*]. *Although I was rich, for your sake, I became poor.” [2 Corinthians 8:6, personalized]*
2. “I am for you. . . . I did not spare my own son for you, but gave him up for you—how will I not also with him freely give you all things?” [Romans 8:32, *personalized*]. “I your God will meet all your needs according to the riches of My glory in Christ Jesus” [Philippians 4:19, *personalized*]. “I am able to do immeasurably more than all you can ask or imagine, according to My power that is at work within you . . . [and glory in My church!].” [Ephesians 3:20, *personalized*]
3. “[I feed the birds and clothe the flowers]. Are you not much more valuable than they? . . . So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and I, your heavenly Father, know that you need them. But seek first My kingdom and My righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” [Matthew 6:26, 31-34, *personalized*]
4. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me [Jesus]” (John 14:1). “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” [John 14:27]. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” [John 16:33]
5. “You know that in all things, I the Spirit work for the good of you who love God, who have been called according to his purpose” [Romans 8:28, *personalized*]. “In Jesus, I also chose you, [which] I predestined according to My plan [where] I work out everything in conformity with the purpose of My will, in order that you . . . might be for the praise of My glory.” [Ephesians 1:11, *personalized*]
6. “Trust in Me with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Me and I will make your paths straight” [Proverbs 3:5-6, *personalized*]. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
7. “I, the Lord, take pleasure in you who fear me, in you who hope [trust] in my loving kindness” [Psalm 147:11, *personalized*]. “Without faith it is impossible to please me, because anyone who comes to me must believe that I exist and that I reward those who seek me.” [Hebrews 11:6, *personalized*]
8. To know me is to trust me! “Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord have never forsaken those who seek you [Psalm 9:10]. “When you walk in the dark and have no light, trust in my name, Yahweh, and rely on me.” [Isaiah 50:10].

“Treasured Possession” Verses

Here are some additional statements of love and value from the Lord (all *personalized*):

1. “(You) who were not beloved, **I call beloved.**” [Romans 9:24-25; also Deuteronomy 33:12]
2. “You are precious and honored in my sight and I love you.” [Isaiah 43:4]
3. “You are **my treasured possession.**” [Deuteronomy 7:6; similarly in 1 Peter 2:9]
4. “In a desert land I found you, in the howling waste of the wilderness. I surround you and care for you. I guard you as **the apple of my eye.**” [Deuteronomy 32:10; also Psalm 17:8; Zechariah 2:8]
5. “You, _____ are a crown of splendor in my hand, **a royal crown** in the hand of your God. . . . I call you “Delights Me” for my delight is in you. . . . As a bridegroom rejoices over **his bride**, so I, your God, rejoice over you, _____.” [Isaiah 62:3-5]
6. “I love you and long for you, _____, **my joy and my crown.**” [Philippians 4:1]
7. “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store in barns, yet I, your heavenly Father, feed them. Are you not **much more valuable** than they?” [Matthew 6:26]
8. You are one of MY covenant people: “To me, Yahweh, your God, belongs heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that is in it. Just as I **set my affection**, my heart, on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [Israel] to love them and their descendants, **so I have set my affection, my heart, on you to love you**” [Deuteronomy 10:14-15, *personalized*]. “I **chose you** to be my own treasure, my treasured possession. I set my affection on you, and choose you, not because you were more in number than any people [*nor for your righteousness, or for the uprightness of your heart (see Deuteronomy 9:5)*] . . . but **because I love you.**” [Deuteronomy 7:6-8, *personalized*]
9. “You are my chosen people, my royal priesthood, my holy nation, my special possession. So declare my praises, since I called you out of darkness into my wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are my people, the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” [1 Peter 2:9-10, *personalized*]
10. You belong to me, Jesus, as a member of my body, my bride, and my family:
 - a. “After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as I, Jesus, do the church—**for you are a member of my body.** So, just as you don’t hate your own body, but feed and care for it, so I care for you, for you are a member of my body, my church.” [Ephesians 5:29, *personalized*]
 - b. ““For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become **one flesh.**’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about me and the church. So, just as a man and woman become one flesh, which is a profound mystery, I have become “one” with you, as one of my church.” [Ephesians 5:31-32, *personalized*]
 - c. “[I], Jesus, [am] not ashamed to call [you] my brothers and sisters” [Hebrews 2:11, NLT]. “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is **MY** brother, sister and mother.” [Matthew 12:50, ESV]
 - d. It is **because of who we are to him** that the Father says: “I love you even as I love Jesus”; “I take great delight in you”; “I rejoice over you”; “You are precious and honored in my sight.”

Jesus' "How Much More" Comparisons

This is a list of Jesus' "how much more" comparisons. The first one, Matthew 6:26 is already personalized. The "personalizations" follow the remaining three passages. *Enjoy!*

"You are much more valuable than they!" (birds and grass)

[Matthew 6:26, personalized]—"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store in barns, and yet I, your heavenly Father feed them. Are you not **much more valuable** than they? . . . (v. 30-32) If that is how I your God clothe the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, **will I not much more** clothe you—you of little faith?" So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and I, your heavenly Father, know that you need them."

"If you . . . How much more do !!"

[Luke 15:3-7]—"Then Jesus told them this parable: 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them [or a woman loses a silver coin, v. 8]. . . . And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that **in the same way there will be more rejoicing** in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.'"

PERSONALIZED: "If you feel this way about a 'pet' or a 'treasured possession,' how much more do I feel about you, value you, and care about you! How much more do I act on your behalf!"

[Matthew 12:11-12]—"He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath'" (see also, Luke 13:15-16; 14:5).

PERSONALIZED: "If you promptly respond to your 'pet's' need because you care for and value it, how much more do I love you, care about you and respond to your needs! How much more valuable you are to me!"

[Matthew 7:9-11] — "Who is there among you, who, if your son [or daughter] asks for bread, will give [them] a stone? Or if [they] ask for a fish, will give [them] a snake? If you then, being sinful, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more** will your Father in heaven, give good gifts to those who ask him!"

PERSONALIZED: "If you care about your children, love your children that much and respond to their needs, how much more do I love and care about you and provide for your needs!"

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-6 DEFINED

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 in the pattern of the last statement, “love does not delight in evil, BUT rejoices in the truth.” The (a.) sentence is the definition of the negative word followed by (b.) a definition of it’s opposite. Put (a. and b.) together, they form a statement one would say to someone.

Love does not envy, *but is happy for another’s good fortune.*

Therefore, I do not resent you for having what I want, or begrudge you for what you have to the point of wishing you deprived of it,
but I am happy for your good fortune and content with what I have or do not have (Philippians 4:11-13).

Love does not boast, *but praises others.*

Therefore, I do not call attention to myself so you will think highly of me whether deserved or not,
but I speak of your successes, to build you up—(Ephesians 4:29).

Love is not proud, *but is humble, valuing others above oneself.*

Therefore, I do not act superior to you, valuing myself above you,
but in humility, I value you above myself—(Philippians 2:3).

Love does not dishonor others (is not rude), *but honors and respects them.*

Therefore, I do not disrespect, insult, or act rudely toward you,
but I honor and respect you—(Romans 12:10).

Love is not self-seeking, *but other focused.*

Therefore, I am not obsessed with gratifying my own desires,
but I seek to please you for your good, to build you up—(Romans 15:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:24).

Love is not easily angered, *but is patient, calm, compassionate and gracious when wronged.*

Therefore, I am not easily offended, quickly feeling hostility toward you when provoked,
but I am slow to anger, patient, calm, compassionate, and gracious toward you—(James 1:19; Colossians 3:12-13).

Love keeps no record of wrongs, *but forgives as forgiven.*

Therefore, I do not harbor a grudge or let vengeance grow in my heart when you harm me,
but I forgive you as the Lord has forgiven me—(Colossians 3:13; also Ephesians 4:32).

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, with good.

Therefore, I do not delight in evil. In fact, I hate injustice, oppression, falsehood, and wrongdoing.
Instead, I celebrate and rejoice over truth, fairness, justice and good.

FORGIVENESS VERSES

- “Now that you have confessed your sins, I, who am faithful and just (righteous), **forgive** you your sins and **purify (cleanse)** you from all unrighteousness.” [1 John 1:9, *personalized*, NIV]
- “Who is like me, your God, who **pardons** your sin and **forgives** your transgression . . . I do not stay angry forever but delight to show you mercy (unfailing love, steadfast love, loving-kindness). I will again have compassion on you; I **tread** your sins underfoot and **hurl** all your iniquities into the depths of the sea.” [Micah 7:18-20, *personalized*, NIV]
- “As far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your transgressions from you!” [Psalm 103:12, *personalized*, NIV]
- “I, even I, am he who **blots** out your transgressions, for my own sake, and **remembers** your sins **no more.**” [Isaiah 43:25, NIV]
- “I have **swept** away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.” [Isaiah 44:22, NIV]

From the Lords’ heart to yours: Now that you have confessed your sins, I, Jesus, who am faithful and righteous, forgive you your sins and **purify (cleanse)** you from all your unrighteousness. For who is like me, your God, who pardons your sin and forgives your transgression? I do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy (unfailing love, steadfast love, and loving-kindness). I have again had compassion on you; I have **tread** your sins underfoot and have **hurled** all your iniquities into the depths of the sea. I, even I, am he who has **blotted out** your transgressions, for my own sake, and I **remember them no more.** I have **swept** them away like a cloud, like the morning mist. So, return to me, for I have redeemed you.

From the Lord’s heart to yours: Now that you have confessed your wrong to me, and your heart has been broken and grieved over the harm you caused me, others, and yourself, I delight in, find deep joy and pleasure in, showing you mercy, loving-kindness, and grace. I have again and always will have compassion on you. So it’s with joy I pardon you and forgive you. And this is what that means: I have cleansed you; I have swept away your wrongs like a cloud, like the morning mist. I have tread them underfoot and have hurled them into the depths of the sea. I have blotted them out and remember them no more! How many different ways can I assure you that your wrongs are gone, out of sight, out of mind, now and forever. So don’t look for them, don’t bring them back up in your mind, because I won’t know what you are talking about. I only see you clean, blameless and beautiful. So come to me, return to me, for I have redeemed you and love you.

QUOTES FROM RESPECTED SAINTS

St. Augustine: “Fill yourselves first, and then only will you be able to give.” (*Total Surrender*, p. 30)

George Mueller: “The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord (by meditating on the Word) so my heart might be brought into experiential (experiential) communion with the Lord.” (John Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 127).

Brother Lawrence: “The King, full of mercy and goodness, very far from chastising me, embraces me with love, makes me eat at His table, serves me with His own hands, gives me the key of His treasures; He converses and delights himself with me incessantly, in a thousand and a thousand ways, and treats me in all respects as His favorite. . . I find myself often attached with greater sweetness and delight than that of an infant at the mother’s breast; so that, if I dare use the expression, I should choose to call this state the bosom of God, for the inexpressible sweetness which I taste and experience there.” (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, p.38-39).

Mother Teresa: “Find out in all humility how much you are loved by Jesus. From the time you realize that you are loved by Jesus, love as He loves you.” (*Total Surrender*, p.25)

Bernard of Clairvaux: “If then you are wise, you will show yourself rather as a reservoir than as a canal. For a canal spreads abroad water as it receives it, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing, and thus communicates, without loss to itself, its superabundant water. In the Church at the present day, we have many canals, few reservoirs.”

CONVERTS FIRST PRAYER

“My Father, I could never have sought my happiness in Thy love, unless Thou had’st first loved me. Thy Spirit has encouraged me by grace to seek Thee, has made known to me the reconciliation in Jesus, has taught me to believe it, has helped me to take Thee for my God and portion. May He grant me to grow in the knowledge and experience of Thy love, and walk in it all the way to glory.

Blessed forever be Thy fatherly affections, which chose me to be one of Thy children by faith in Jesus. I thank Thee for giving me the desire to live as such. In Jesus, my brother, I have my new birth, every restraining power, every renewing grace. It is by the Spirit, I call the Father, believe in Thee, love Thee.

Strengthen me inwardly for every purpose of my Christian life; let the Spirit continually reveal to me my interest in Christ, and open to me the riches of Thy love in Him. May He abide in me that I may know my union with Jesus, and enter into constant fellowship with Him; by the Spirit may I daily live to Thee, rejoice in Thy love, find it the same to me as to Thy Son, and become rooted and grounded in it as a house on rock; I know but little – increase my knowledge of Thy love in Jesus, keep me pressing forward for clearer discoveries of it, so that I may find its essential fullness; magnify Thy love to me according to its greatness, and not according to my deserts or prayer, and whatever increase Thou givest, let it draw out greater love to Thee.

(Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision* (Edinburgh; The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1975), 53. “This convert imagined that he knew little, but by today’s standards he would stand among the theological giants!” As found in footnote 24, p.42 of David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*).

Quotes from Current Authors

Michael Wilkins: “As you allow God to love you with His kind of love, you will be able to understand how to love others in the same way.” (*In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life; Part 3 – Toward a new vision of discipleship and spirituality*, 179).

David Benner: “The sort of knowing that is essential for transformation is *experiential knowing* . . . a knowing that has moved beyond belief to experience. . . . It comes from meeting God in a contemplative state. It comes from sitting at the feet of Jesus, gazing into his face and listening to his assurances of love for me. It comes from letting God love wash over me, not simply trying to believe it. It comes from soaking in the scriptural assurances of such love, not simply reading them and trying to remember or believe them. It comes from spending time with God, observing how he looks at me. It comes from watching his watchfulness over me and listening to his protestations of love for me” (p. 76). “My own struggles to become more loving have been the most discouraging aspect of my Christian spiritual journey. . . . Meditating on God’s love has done more to increase my love than decades of effort to try to be more loving. Allowing myself to deeply experience his love – taking time to soak in it and allow it to infuse me – has begun to effect changes that I had given up hope of ever experiencing. Coming back to God in my failures at love, throwing myself into his arms and asking him to remind me of how much he loves me as I am – here I begin to experience new levels of love to give to others.” (*Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*, 88).

Summary of FIRST LOVED - Loving the Jesus Way

Experience God love you
as He loved the disciples through Jesus!

Jesus loved his disciples! John wrote: “Having loved his own . . . he loved them to the end!” (John 13:1). From the day he called them to follow him until he ascended, Jesus loved “his own” with all kinds of words and actions over those three years. During his final meal with them, he revealed two astonishing things about his love – he loved them as the Father had loved him (John 15:9) and the Father himself loved them through him: “If you have seen (experienced) me, you have seen (experienced) the Father . . . because it is the Father living in me doing his work” (John 14:9-11).

Finally, he gave them a new command: “Love one another **as I have loved you!**” (John 13:34; 15:12). He concluded stating that loving one another [and ultimately all people this way] would be the singular characteristic by which the world would identify them as his own (John 13:35). But what about us, his present-day disciples, who haven’t had three years of being loved by Jesus like the disciples experienced? How can we love others “AS” he has loved us? The Father and Jesus are present in us by the Spirit (John 14:16, 23; Romans 8:9-10). The Love Verse and God-sighting practices help us experience their love for us in an embodied way so that we are compelled to and can love others as he has loved us!

1. **The Love Verse Practice:** Invite God to speak to you personally from Scripture texts that provide timeless revelations of his love for you [similar to the early church practice of Lectio Divina].

Sample—[Zephaniah 3:17, NIV, 1984]: “The LORD your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Personalize & Memorize—“*I am the LORD your God and I am with you. I am mighty to save you, (Your name). I take great delight in you. I will quiet you with My love and I rejoice over you (Your name), with singing.*”

Vocalize and Meditate—Speak this personalized Scripture text to yourself, right out loud with passion. Speak it again and again, until the words—like water—begin to soften your heart soil. Invite a friend to speak these personalized words over you. Don’t stop meditating (*i.e.*, marinating your soul) until you *feel* God’s heart toward you through the very words of Scripture. When time permits, write out the verse using synonyms and antonyms to help his truth penetrate deeper into your heart. And listen to the Spirit to give further words of encouragement.

Synonym/Antonym Sample — “(Your name), I am the LORD, Yahweh, your God. I am always with you [son/daughter]. I am never detached or distant. I am here as a warrior to fight for you and to deliver you through the pressures you’re enduring. Do not for a moment allow yourself to think that I don’t care about you. The truth is I adore you; I delight in the relationship we share. I am eager to console you with my love, my kindness, and my affection. In fact, as I listen to you, I celebrate your life and your faith in me with a mighty, exuberant shout!”

Imitate – Share the verse with someone else to pour God’s love into their hearts. Be led of the Spirit to share any additional words of comfort and encouragement.

2. **The God-sighting Practice:** John wrote: “No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in [dwells

among] us, and his love is brought to full expression in [among] us” (1 John 4:12, NLT). This practice helps us to stop, remember, and revel in God’s expressions of love for us through us.

Remember & Give Thanks for the joy you felt as someone loved you, as you loved someone else, or as you witnessed someone express love to another. We really do experience God’s presence and joy when we remember and give thanks for loving interactions and relationships (I Thess. 3:9).

Personalize and vocalize your gratitude by *hearing* God say to you, “If you [or If they] can give, express, demonstrate that kind of love on a human level, imagine **how much more** I, your Heavenly Father, love you that way! I really do love you that much and so much more!” (Matthew 6:26-30; 7:11; 10:29-31; 12:11-12).

Meditate on these comparisons and illustrations of God’s love for you. Write them down in your journal as God invited his OT people to write down his promises and instruction on their doorposts (Deuteronomy 6:6, 9).

Imitate: Whatever you’ve seen or heard, put it into practice (Philippians 4:9).

3. **We gather as his people** (his “church”, 1 Cor. 11:18) in varieties of settings and sizes **to experience and express God’s love in embodied ways**. Paul wrote: “When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation . . .” (1 Cor. 14:26). We also “share and do good” as sacrifices of worship that please God (Heb. 13:16; Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18). Simultaneously, God also distributes other gifts of the Spirit [1 Cor. 12:4-6, 11]. Perhaps, it was because of these abundant and varied expressions of love at gatherings that they were also called “love feasts” (Jude 12).

4. **Finally, join a small group.**

We need to be in safe, committed relationships in order to process the barriers that may surface in us that may prevent us from receiving and sharing God’s love as well as to share our Love Verses and God-sightings with one another. We have all had many experiences of being “unloved” by life and people or being “unloving” to God, others or ourselves. Sharing and praying with others can help to heal and remove these barriers.

5. **The Jesus Way: Being loved and loving as loved, by the Spirit.** This is the rhythm and balance of life and how we remain in his love and experience full and complete joy! (John 15:10-11). [For more information, visit us at www.firstlovedministries.org] **ENJOY!**

