

BOLD FAITH PRAYER 2017

O LORD,

*In honor of your Holy name, help me
to truly love my neighbor as myself;*

*Touch through my hands, speak through
my words, love through my actions;*

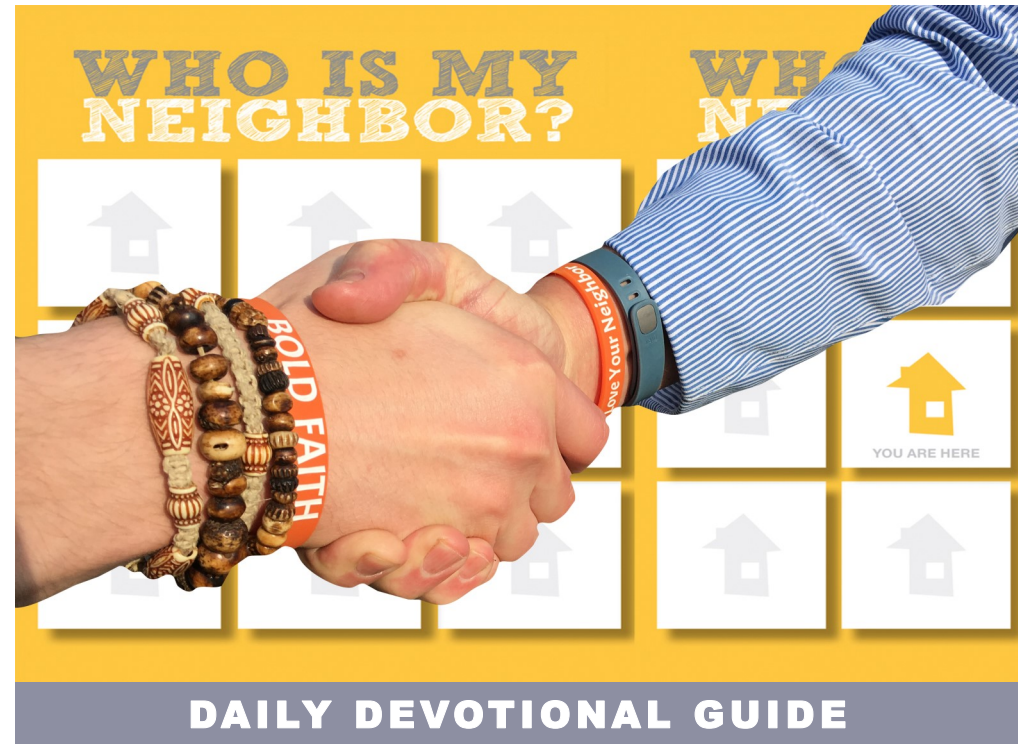
Soften and turn hearts toward You;

*Let Your Spirit work immeasurably
more than imagined;*

*I boldly ask these things in your name,
Lord Jesus.*

Amen.

Bold Faith VI LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR





Jesus replied:

*“Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with
all your soul and with all
your mind.’ This is the first
and greatest commandment.*

And the second is like it:

*‘Love your neighbor
as yourself.’”*

Matthew 22:37-39



YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE I AM WHOLE AGAIN- LOVESONG (THE CURE)

1 John 3:1-3

Have you ever considered what it was like for Adam to wake up one morning and see Eve? At this point in his life he has seen everything there is to see, named all the things that God had created. Still, he didn't know what it was like to see a person. When God makes a woman, Adam, for the first time in his life, sees not a *something*, but a *someone!* At last, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. But there is something different about her as well. She is like him, but at the same time, not like him. For the first time in his life, Adam realizes he isn't just a human, he is also a man. Adam really didn't understand who he was until he met Eve. Seeing who she is helps him understand who he is.

We know that Jesus Christ died so that we could be the children of God, but there is still something we just can't understand about our relationship with Him. There is something missing that we just can't see. In 1 John chapter 3, God makes a promise. He says that one day, we will see something that no one has seen since Adam and Eve left the garden; Him! We will get to see our God! And when we do, we will finally get to understand our place in His creation. Seeing our Creator will help us understand that we are like Him, and finally understand who we are. Being with God will make us whole again.

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

A.B.C.

I JUST CALLED TO SAY I LOVE YOU

This well-known song by Stevie Wonder says, *"I just called to say I love you, I just called to say how much I care. I just called to say I love you. And I mean it from the bottom of my heart."*

These words inspire me as I think of how the Apostle Paul, writing to the Church at Philippi (Philippians 1:3-17), told them how much he loved them and commended them for their love for each other. In verse 9 he writes, *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more..."*

Paul further encouraged the believers in Philippi by reassuring them that the Lord had indeed placed him as a prisoner in the Roman Palace for a reason: to share the "Good News" of the Gospel with "the whole palace guard, and to everyone".

Paul used "The Art of Neighboring" to get to know his guards, attendants and house servants. He built relationships with them, and was able to share how he saw his situation - *"that I am in chains for Christ" "to the glory and praise of God."* He also commended those who, like him, *"preach Christ out of love"* (Philippians 1:15-16).

Let us practice "The Art of Neighboring" by getting to know our neighbors and building relationships with them. Let's meet each one, get to know their names and their children's names. Let's find out what they like to do for hobbies and what sports teams they follow. We can drop off a plate of homemade cookies or a pie, plan a neighborhood block-party or a cook-out. Let's get to a place where we know our neighbors well enough to lovingly share the Gospel, "The Good News," with them.

Paul took each day as an opportunity to get to know his neighbors, and through the relationships he developed was able to share his heart openly—and they knew his heart!

When you think about the City of Philadelphia, you think of "The City of Brotherly LOVE," right? What if we could have our own city become a village of brotherly love?

The Apostle John says it this way, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* It's a truth we've sung so often: *"And they'll know we are Christians by our love."* I can almost imagine God calling us on our cell phones to encourage us, and saying, "I just called to say, 'I love you!'" How would that make you feel? How about if we get to know our neighbors so well that we can call them up and simply say: "I just called to say I love you, I just called to say how much I care, and I mean it from the bottom of my heart."

D.R.

WE FOUND LOVE

Romans 5:6-8

How many songs in our society are a cry to “find love in a hopeless place,” and yet, so many are still left crying out for genuine love when the next person lets them down. The search then continues for genuine love: love that does not fade, love that does not falter, and love that does not fail in the storms of life.

There is a love that perseveres through times of pain, loneliness, and even abandonment by all you thought were friends and those you loved. How good would it be if, instead of looking to each other for love, we looked to the only person who was/is/and ever will be the epitome of what love is and how it is to be viewed!

This kind of love is only found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the altogether Loving One! Romans 5:6-8 *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

“We Found Love” or, rather, Love found us, while we were still Love’s enemies. No person has ever or will ever again show the fullness of love as did Jesus Christ. He took my place, your place; standing under the outpouring of a Holy God’s righteous wrath. Taking our sins in His body on the cross; granting to us freedom from sin, death, and hell! Praise God that LOVE found a way to redeem men’s souls and do it through the person and work of Jesus Christ the Righteous One!

If you have never ‘found love,’ real and genuine Love, then seek Him today! You will find HIM to be Love worth finding. Read Romans 10:8-10, 13 for this truth.

For those who have found this Love, don’t keep it to yourself, share the Love of Christ with everyone with whom you come into contact.

T.R.

CAN'T BUY ME LOVE

1 John 4:9-10; Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Paul McCartney “don’t care too much for” theology. Unlike John, who before his death described himself as a “most religious fellow,” or George, who was a devotee of Hare Krishna for over thirty years, or Ringo who, just a few years ago, announced a return to faith and asserted that “God is my life,” Paul has kept his distance from God.

But his early song, “Can’t Buy Me Love” (some of you are probably hearing it in your heads right now!) has some good theology. Love isn’t for sale. You can’t buy it and nothing you can do will earn it. Love isn’t a commodity.

No one ever loved you because you deserved it. Not your mom or dad, not your wife or husband, and certainly not God. Love doesn’t work that way. Love does not depend on the loveliness or lovability of its object, but on the heart of its subject. That is, love doesn’t start with the person being loved, but with the person doing the loving.

God doesn’t love us because we are so great, but because he is so good; not because we are so lovable, but because he is love. How wonderful is that? If God’s love depended on my lovability, there are times (to be honest, most times), I would be unloved.

We can point people to God and his Son Jesus Christ by loving them the way God has loved us: not because they are lovable, but because we are possessed by God’s love. We can *proactively* love them, as God loved us. And when they are unlovable, we can love them anyway, because our love doesn’t depend on them but on the God who has loved us.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

S.L.

I CAN'T HELP FALLING IN LOVE

1 John 4:19, Revelation 2:4

Those who are familiar with this song might remember the 1961 film “Blue Hawaii,” starring Elvis Presley, from which it came, where “The King” sang this sweet sentimental tune, with this refrain, “I can’t help falling in love with you.” (If you’ve not seen it, look it up and watch the scene on YouTube. You’ll enjoy it.)

Though Albert Einstein is said to have stated, “You can’t blame gravity for falling in love,” falling in love is a response to a force similar to that of gravity that draws us into a deep emotional connection with another person where we desire to be with that person intimately for the rest of our lives. Sometimes it is scary and sometimes it is wonderful, but it is always a response to something we see in another that causes us to fall in love. In them we see beauty; in them we see worth and an attractiveness that stirs our hearts and causes us to want to be with them.

I fully embrace the romantic notion of falling in love. However, I reject the common idea that is so often the reason given for couples splitting up, that of *falling out of love*. Love is a choice and we need to often revisit the reasons we fell in love in the first place and find new ones in order to re-stoke and perpetuate the flames of passion.

First John 4:19 reminds us simply and succinctly why we fell in love with Jesus; because He loved us first. He demonstrated His love by giving Himself freely for us. Our love, our devotion, our desire to be in relationship with Him comes as a result of His love, His devotion, His desire to be in relationship with us. He initiated love and how can we not respond?

At times the passion of our love for Him might wain and if it does we need to remember His beauty, His kindness and all He has done for us. Please understand this truth: we need to fall in love with Jesus regularly!

Elvis sang, “Take my hand and my whole life too. For I can’t help falling in love with you.” Will you pray this little prayer with me to *THE KING* today? “Dear Jesus, I know how deeply you love me, so how can I not respond? So today, I give you my hand, my heart and my whole life too. Because I can’t help falling in love with You!

J.M.B.

MY ENDLESS LOVE

Psalm 42:1-2

Back in 1981 Lionel Richie and Diana Ross sang a sweet duet on the radio that would melt your heart. Two lovers confessing their undying love for each other – it is the stuff of dreams in a fallen world. I would sing along with them whenever they came on the radio and thought, “Is it really possible that this kind of love could be real?” It was at about that time in my life I had a personal encounter with God that answered that question for good.

We sometimes forget that the central truth about Christianity is that God really loves us, that this faith is built upon a romance for the heart from God to us and back again to Him. We recall that God SO LOVED the world and forget how real and personal this kind of love can be. Now this love isn’t a “here today, gone tomorrow” kind of love based on emotion. God’s love for us – really, for the whole world – is truly endless. He created eternity just so we would have a way to fully understand it for ourselves—that’s how big his love is! This God-kind of love (*agape* in Greek) is an unconditional love; it is never based on the performance of the one being loved. This endless love never gives up. It will never walk out on us.

In Psalm 42:1-2, the writer describes the results of being touched by this love only God can provide. He speaks of our deep, heart longing for this endless love. We simply want more of it because there is no substitute for how it makes us feel valued. David wrote this psalm to express his feeling towards God in light of the many times God Himself stepped into his life and brought blessing and deliverance.

Take this moment to clear your mental “to do list” and consider how much God loves you, and how He wants to do even more in your life! Then look around at all the people who cross your path daily and consider how much He loves them too. Bold Faith is all about taking this kind of love and giving it away to those who have never tasted it for themselves.

So, draw a deep breath, face yourself in the mirror everyday and say, “I am truly loved by God.” Then ask Him for a divine appointment each day so you can make someone’s day better because of Him. You will never be the same, I promise!

H.J.

I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU

Romans 13:10

As the title goes, so goes the song, repeated 11 times in a 35-line song “I will always love you.” It’s hard to remember any of the other lines. However, the gist is “*I am not good for you and our being apart is better for you. Therefore, I wish you joy and happiness, but above all I wish you love.*”

The song was first written and sung by Dolly Parton in 1974. The Whitney Houston version was written for the 1992 film “*The Bodyguard.*” The tender and yet powerful vocals of Houston mixed with a saxophone solo leaves the listener longing for such an eternal love.

While the big screen is the perfect place for such hopes and imagination, the reality of such love in the day-to-day struggles of life is allusive. Yet the human heart yearns for such a love. Does such a love and fulfillment exist?

The Bible tells us (without the drama and music playing in the background) that it does. “*No greater love than this,*” said Jesus, “*than a man lay down his life for his friends,*” (John 15:13). He then goes on to declare that you and I are his friends if we keep his commandments. This was all made possible because He chose us. “*You did not choose me,*” said Jesus, “*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.*” His command to us is: “*Love each other.*”

We are to always love each other, not with a Hollywood type of love. That kind of love, as the songwriter implies, is a love that only gets in the way. The love we are to have for one another, as the Bible describes in 1 Corinthians 13, is a love that endures and can hold up in the day-to-day struggles of life.

It is nice to know that there is one who will always love us and never declare it is better if He departs. He is not “*The Bodyguard*” as much as He is *the guardian of our souls.* (1 Peter 2:25, NLT)

*Three things will last forever--faith, hope, and love--
and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13 NLT)*

D.S.M.

IS LOVE A FEELING?

In 1964, The Righteous Brothers, recorded the hit single “You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling”. One reason the song was a smash is because it so accurately reflected one of the mantras of the 1960’s -- Free Love. Love was touted as something that could be openly expressed and physically demonstrated without any need for a deeper, long-lasting commitment. If you felt like it, you were free to do it. And when the feelings left, you moved on.

That attitude, while symbolic of the 60’s, has been around as long as mankind. It represents a misunderstanding of what love really is. Is love a feeling or is it something else? If I don’t feel “warm and fuzzy” when I’m around someone, do I really love them? Or, as the song suggests, when I no longer have that loving feeling in a relationship, should I assume no love remains and the relationship is over?

As good as romantic love may feel, it pales in comparison to God’s kind of love. God’s love is not dependent on feelings which naturally come and go according to our circumstances. It’s not conditioned by the object of its affection, but rather it’s rooted in the subject, the one who loves. It’s far more volitional than it is emotional, though there are emotions that accompany God’s kind of love.

Our theme verse for this year’s Bold Faith Initiative, Matthew 22:39, says we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Recall that this is a commandment, not a suggestion. And, it’s not just any command. Jesus said its second only to loving God first. Commandments require a response of obedience, whether you feel like it or not. God doesn’t temper his expectations of us by how we’re feeling at the moment. He mandates action and expects us to respond!

The people around you each day (your neighbors), need to know God loves them; that God is genuinely concerned about their wellbeing, and that he is willing to help them. And, you and I know what our neighbors may not yet understand – that God intends to use us as conduits of his love. He intends to love our neighbors through us. They will know he cares for them because his people care for them.

Remember, your ability to love your neighbor is not determined by what they do, or who they are, or by how you feel about them. By faith, we choose to concern ourselves with their wellbeing and do what love does – reach out to them. And often, when we do reach out in faith, “loving feelings” will follow. Not the superficial, “warm and fuzzy” emotions the world is looking for, but more substantial things like genuine compassion, patience and concern.

J.E.

CLOSE TO YOU

Psalm 63:1-3, Song of Solomon 3:1-5

At what point was our relationship with the Lord reduced to a mere duty of religious activity to be performed? What happened to the sheer joy, delight and wonder of our just being with Jesus, in His presence in prayer alone or together with others in a worship service? When was the last time we had a desire to experience Him with no other agenda?

The Carpenters, the popular 70's brother/sister singing duo, performed a myriad of romantic songs. "Close to You," is one of my favorites. It celebrates the pleasure and satisfaction of simply being in the company of one's love. (If you're too young to know the Carpenters, look them up online. You'll like them a lot, I promise.)

Some might be offended that a pastor or Christian leader might know and even enjoy a secular love song like this one. But I'm convinced that God created romantic love as something to be enjoyed and treasured; and while a lot of popular music glorifies love outside of covenant relationships, there is much about romantic love with one's spouse that deserves to be celebrated in song. The reason being, our romantic love life is good and beautiful; and is designed by our Creator to remind us of the way He feels about us.

The first time you read through the Old Testament book the Song of Solomon, I can imagine that you asked, "What is literature like that doing in the Bible?" I've heard some argue that there is nothing erotic or sensual intended by Solomon in his writing and that the book is to be understood exclusively as a spiritual expression. To those who say such things I want to ask, "Have you *even read* the book?" The Song of Solomon celebrates the joy of physical love, and also the ache of the heart of one wanting, desperately to be with her love. The reason Solomon's book is in the Bible is because crazy romantic love is a part of the human experience, by God's design; and ultimately because that is the type of crazy, heart aching love relationship He desires to have with us.

Let's not let the busyness of life, and even the things we do for Him, get in the way of being with Him. Let's sing to Him about our desire to be close to Him and then make time in our schedule to do just that.

J.M.B.

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT LOVE IS

1 John 3:16

*"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.
And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."*

There seems to be much confusion in culture today regarding what true love really is. I am not convinced that we accurately understand what it truly means to love the way God intended us to.

We use the word "LOVE" in many ways. To depict the way we feel about something, or to show our preference for one thing over another. For instance, one might say things like; "I love sports", "I love chocolate or the outdoors". There are additionally varying uses and weight that the word "love" might convey. One might say that they love their spouse and that they love sweets, but hopefully they don't love their spouse like they love sweets! The ways we use the word "love" are not always proper, and the word has become diluted in a culture that "throws it around" so much.

According to 1 John 3:16 we can know what true love looks like. We needn't look any further than the example Jesus exhibited. That God through His Son initiated a loving relationship with us; He took the first step, He made the initial commitment before any reciprocation on our part. If God then is the initiator, that makes us the responders. We love God back as He first loved us! We know what true love looks like because we're the recipients of God's true love toward us.

However, our love for God and others need not only be responsive, but demonstrative. This means that as we love God responsively it will naturally be demonstrated to those around us; after all His love for us was by demonstration, wasn't it? His love should serve as the example that we too are called to demonstrate our love to God and to our neighbors. True love literally and figuratively causes one to love those around them.

P.G.P.

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

Singer George Benson put out a song in 1977 entitled “The Greatest Love of All.” The song quickly rose to the top of the charts and later was further popularized by Whitney Houston. At face value, the title would hint at a song about the love of God. If you listen to the song, or read its lyrics, you’ll discover that the song is not about God at all. The ‘greatest love’ the author is referring to is as the chorus suggests, “learning to love yourself.”

The Bible in no uncertain terms declares that love is the highest of virtues – coming straight from the nature of God (1 Corinthians 13:13) and that we are to love as God has first loved us (1 John 4:7-8, 19). The highest expression of love however, is not to love ourselves, but rather God first and others second (Matthew 22:37-39). In fact, self-love is not mandated or even encouraged in the Bible, it is assumed. We naturally love ourselves and easily look toward our own self concerns above others, even above God. In addressing marital love, the apostle Paul instructs husbands to love their wives like they already love their own bodies – by feeding and caring for their needs. And in the second great commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are expected to care about the needs and concerns of our neighbors as we naturally care about our own needs and concerns.

This year’s Bold Faith Initiative gives each of us a directly applicable assignment – to love our literal neighbors as if we’re loving ourselves. That’s God’s kind of love flowing through us and into people we are befriending and learning to care about. We are impelled to go next door and lend a hand where needed; or to stop someone on the sidewalk and strike up a conversation; or to take a meal to the new parents three doors down; or to invite the elderly couple over for a cook out Friday evening.

These promote the truly greatest love of all – God’s love for the world. And it’s manifest through us in obedience to his command to practically care for the people He has placed around us on a daily basis. Imagine the impact in your own life, or in your church, or in our county if all of us (possibly several thousand strong) simply obeyed that second great commandment on a regular, ongoing basis. Gear up, because that’s exactly what God intended for us to experience and what He wants us to share – the greatest love of all.

J.E.

IT’S THE POWER OF LOVE!

Romans 1:16

According to Huey Lewis and his band The News, the “power of love is a *curious* thing.”

I guess that’s one way of putting it, but when it comes to the love of God conveyed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul says “it is the *power* of God unto salvation to all who believe” (Romans 1:16).

Several years ago our church annually assembled a group of junior and senior high school students who were transformed into a ministry team called “The Power of Love.” Volunteer leaders developed a theme and combined popular music and testimonies from group members into a 40-minute long program. They had weekly rehearsals and a weekend to learn the material and bond with fellow cast members. Finally, it was ready for presentation. I’m reminded of the theme song from the Muppet Show, “No more rehearsing and nursing our parts. We know every part by heart.”

The group would travel to performance at area churches for a Sunday morning or evening worship event.

Two things happened.

1. People were ministered to as the group sang and shared from their hearts the lessons God was teaching them and sometimes the pain they were experiencing. The Holy Spirit used these young lives to bless and encourage others.
2. The cast and crew came together, in the spirit of faith and fellowship and learned how to relate to each other and how to relate to God.

When the POL season was finished, a final performance was presented at our church and it was fun and amazing to see how God used the experience to work in their lives and bring them closer to Himself. Some kids got saved. Some took a step in the area of discipleship. Some learned more deeply about prayer and compassion.

The power of the Gospel. The power of God’s love. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, living in us and working its way through us.

A curious thing? Not really---It’s just the Power of Love.

D.P.

RELEASE ME AND LET ME LOVE AGAIN

1 John 2:15

Most popular songs about relationships either focus on the flourishing of romantic love or on the death of it. “Release Me and Let Me Love Again” does both. The song is about a man who wants to escape his current relationship so that he can pursue another one. Apparently this situation is not uncommon, since over a hundred different artists have covered the song, including Englebert Humperdink, Elvis Presley, Willie Nelson and Dolly Parton. Everyone knows that real love can’t be split in two.

No wonder the apostle John claims that “If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them” (1 John 2:15b). By the “world,” John means *the things* that the world has to offer. How many people have failed to love God with all their hearts because they loved the things of this world more? The rich young ruler walked away sad, because he had great wealth (Matthew 19:22). Achan brought trouble on Israel because he refused to obey God and kept the possessions of Jericho for himself (Joshua 7:24-25). Saul valued his reputation and royal position more than God’s will (1 Samuel 13:8-14). People today fill their thoughts and their time with careers, financial goals, and future plans, leaving God the leftovers and assuming that this is simply the way life is. But it is not possible to love God and *things* at the same time. As Jesus says, you will inevitably end up loving one and ignoring the other.

If you can’t love God and things at the same time, you certainly can’t love your neighbor and things at the same time either. Love for money will keep you from giving it away to those in need. Pleasure in possessions will prevent you from taking delight in people. Ambition for personal advancement will empty you of the desire for bringing unbelievers into the Kingdom of God.

If we are to truly love God and neighbor, we must be set free from the love of the world and the things it has to offer. We must pray to God, “Release me from the love the of world, and let me love again.”

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

K.L.

WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Romans 5:5

Being a child of the 60’s & 70’s I remember Tina Turner singing this song of utter despair about life. In the lyrics she laments about the kind of love she has experienced as being worthless. I think everyone has experienced the heart ache of natural human love in their teens and early twenties. I dabbled in the things of God for years as a kid and walked away from the Church life simply because I thought that the world offered me a lot more... boy was I wrong!

Love has absolutely everything to do with this life we live. Now I’m not talking about the world’s kind of love that brings both marriage and divorce because it’s primarily dependent on a “second hand emotion” that is too often self-serving and fickle. I’m talking about the love every heart longs for, the love that only comes from God Himself – agape-love. The God kind of love that is absolute, unchanging and unconditional. THAT kind of love is what gives life its ultimate true meaning.

To every Christian I remind you that this exact kind of agape love has been placed in your spirit by an act of the Holy Spirit already (Romans 5:5). Think about that, the love the whole world is searching for is already alive within you now! I am convinced that if we could actually pattern our life’s decisions on this one thing alone by asking ourselves “what would love do” that there wouldn’t be enough room in our Churches to hold all of those who wanted to know this Jesus we worship. I read my Bible and I see a very simple thing that God has required of the Church. First is to Love God with all of our being and to love our neighbors as our self. The second is to tell everyone we meet about the goodness of God (the gospel) so they can be saved.

It’s right in front of our faces every time we look at the cross of Christ, a vertical and a horizontal form of our new life in Him. Now, loving Jesus is easy but that loving mankind is something else. When we choose to take this love and give it away in little ways and in big ways we set into motion something very powerful. We release God’s reality into the hearts of the lost by planting a seed of hope. A seed that says “it is true; there is a love that still seeks me.”

It’s my sincerest prayer that you take a step of faith today and ask God to give you a divine appointment where you can sow a seed of Agape love into a total stranger’s life today. You will experience a compelling partnership with the Almighty every time you do. Try it, you’ll like it and your life will never be the same.

H.J.

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW, IS LOVE, SWEET LOVE

Colossians 3:14

*“ And over all these virtues put on love,
which binds them all together in perfect unity”*

After the apostle Paul encouraged the Colossian Christians to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and to bear with each other – he exhorted, “Put on love!” After that list of qualities you might have said, “But Paul, all those things are an expression of love.” But there was more the Holy Spirit had in mind as He was inspiring the thoughts of Paul.

The crooners of the 1960’s tune *What The World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love* also sang of the need for the world to have more love even though it already had lots of other good things. *“It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.”* While there are all kinds of expressions of love in our world that are self-centered, we need a whole lot more love that is Christ-centered.

Our neighborhoods need more expressions of compassion, kindness and forgiveness. And while we need to bear with one another with gentleness and humility there is one more godly quality needing much more attention in our hearts and in our actions.

God’s kind of love: agape.

It is the kind of love with no strings attached. It’s the kind of love not based on behavior or the attitudes of someone else.

As we consider many ways to express the love of God in our neighborhoods, the good Samaritan continues to be a great example. There were no strings attached to his help. The beat up guy probably was not in a good mood and we have no idea of his character. He just needed help.

Your neighbors need a neighbor with agape love. Your neighbors who are not Christ followers need to see what God’s love looks like from Christ followers in their neighborhoods. “See how they love one another.”

We don’t need any more resounding gongs or clanging cymbals of feigned love. We need to express and show the real thing, agape, which will enhance all our other godly qualities.

J.D.B.

THERE ARE NO “PART TIME LOVERS”

The smooth beat and playful lyrics of Part Time Lover, by songwriter and singer Stevie Wonder, are very telling. If audiences would take the time to listen to the words and message being proclaimed they would catch the irony. While the playful performer tells bits and pieces of living as a Part Time Lover, it is masqueraded in self-deceiving sounds and rhythms of the storyteller. The inevitable end, as the song writer concludes, is one of bitterness and sorrow.

As a Christian, to be a “Part Time Lover” of the world means an inevitable end of bitterness and sorrow. John warns of the end days in 1 John 2 that Christians will be deceived if possible. He admonishes believers to not love the world—fully or as part-time lovers. *Do not love the world, John admonishes, or anything in the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

For the Christian, the playful performer who entices believers to be Part-Time Lovers of the world is the devil, the father of lies. Like the “Part-Time Lover” in the Stevie Wonder song, Christians who love the world know they are wrong. To be enticed and live a secretive life as a lover of the world may seem adventurous and fully alive, however, it will only lead to bitterness. Proverbs 5 warns of the adulterous woman that like the songwriter, her lips drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword.

What is true physically is also true spiritually. To follow the adulterous ways leads to bitterness and death. Spiritual adultery can seem enticing and adventurous but is also destructive. The title, “Part Time Lover,” appears harmless and non-committal; however, it is the very opposite. The lover is given fulltime to keeping his secret and is fully committed to his passion. The Christian adulterer, like the protagonist in the song knows what he is doing is wrong, “but it feels so right.” “Chasing love up against the sun,” sounds romantic and daring. However, it is sure to end in destruction and bitterness.

If you find yourself enticed by the masterful songwriter of this age, remember the writings of proverbs and of John. If you have fallen don’t despair. John tells us that *...if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

Therefore, go out and sing a new song that declares, “I am a Full Time Lover of My Lord and Savior,” (written by the Lord of Wonder).

D.S.M.

THE LOVE SHACK

Ephesians 5:31-33

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

It is amazing how God's plan for our family can get so confusing in today's busy world. As I started my Christian walk, I wanted to be the best Christian husband and father possible.

Our problem today is we can easily get lost on what a Christian household looks like. The things we see on TV, read on the Internet and witness in church can easily mislead us. As I studied Ephesians chapter 5 it became clear to me that becoming one flesh was going to be a difficult task. Also, loving my wife as myself meant I have a look at how I loved myself.

As I started to grow through God's word I realized that I could lead by example rather than through words. I found that love was an action word and that if we could truly learn to love ourselves we could truly learn to love our wives as Christ loves the church.

As my relationship with Jesus grew, the security and love in my home grew to a level that surpasses any understanding. If we are going to have a Love Shack (A truly loving home) it will have to be built on the foundation of God's word. So if we individually work on our relationship with Jesus Christ, we can come together as a family and be an example to our friends and neighbors.

Today when someone looks at my house when they're walking by I want them to recognize it as a house filled with love, a true "Love Shack". Let's all take a challenge and be an example to our neighbors and community because, you may be the only example of a Godly family they will see.

This is the best way to love your neighbors.

R.L.

TO LOVE HIM IS TO KNOW HIM

1 John 4:8

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

To know. That is very intimate. When you know something, for sure, it is a part of you. If you're a musician and you know how to play you're instrument well, you have spent many hours getting to know how to do it. Piano, guitar, harmonica, spoons, or whistling all require time spent to do it well. Those who are professionals play every day in order to be able to keep that skill at its top level. Knowing takes participation. An athlete can have natural abilities but does not get to 'know' the sport unless they practice, participate, and play. It's in the relationship of time spent that one gets to really 'know' something or someone.

When growing up we can develop some good relationships with playmates or in college cultivate really great friendships. When years go by and we haven't communicated, we don't know them like we used to. Even with friendships where you pick up where you left off, not missing a beat, you still have a LOT of catching up to do.

When it comes to our relationship with God we can know 'facts' about Him but not truly know Him and the 'relationship' doesn't change us. We get to know the Lord by spending time with Him and His Word...by spending time with Him and with His people...by experiencing His mercies actively on a daily basis. That's when our lives, our frame of mind and our values change. The biggest change is a heart that loves people like God loves people.

Just ask the apostle John. He and his brother James were called the Sons of Thunder. They wanted the Lord to strike down Tyre and Sidon with lightening because they had been slighted. But now after years of fellowship with the Lord, John is known as the apostle of love.

When you get to know The Lord God Almighty, your heart and your life change because His values become your values. It's like that old song sung by The Teddy Bears, "to know, know, know him -- Is to love, love, love him -- And I do, I really do, And I do."

When you know God, you will love people.

J.D.B.