

Embrace  
All Love  
One

## Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise noted entries written by Joanna DeWolf

Compiled and edited by Joanna DeWolf

Design: Ben Farnham / [www.benfarnham.com](http://www.benfarnham.com)

Copy Editing: Carmen Williams

### SPECIAL THANKS:

Free Methodist Church of North America General Conference 2015  
Embrace All Team: Kathy Callahan-Howell, Dukens Boliere, Refugio Sanchez.

The larger Embrace All team members for conducting interviews with people around the country who are doing the beautiful work of Embracing All.

First readers for their encouragement and helpful feedback:

David Brewer

Gisele Nelson

Pamela Russell

Jeff Shinabarger

Judy Shinabarger

Matt, Mom and Dad — who always go above and beyond.





# introduction

Many years ago a professor of sorts, a life-long God-follower, a man who liked to get things right asked a popular teacher of the day the ultimate question, “How do I live forever?” Because even hundreds of years ago people were obsessed with life and death. They may not have been tweeting YOLO (You Only Live Once) or experimenting with how to freeze themselves now so as to live in the future, but they too felt the weight of the shortness of life. They too sensed the longing to live more and to live right so as to earn a reward of some kind. Fighting against the death that came to every single person, they wondered how to have life. If this popular teacher is worth anything, he must answer the ultimate question, “How do I live forever?” Of course, this teacher’s answer made history both for his answer and his non-answer.

**Jesus** (answering with a question): What is written in the Hebrew Scriptures? How do you interpret their answer to your question?

Scholar: You shall love—“love the Eternal One your God with everything you have: all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind”—and “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus: Perfect. Your answer is correct. Follow these commands and you will live.

Of course, the scholar wanted more than a simple answer. Love? Just love? Isn’t there a long, complicated book I can read and memorize? Maybe there is a secret scientific formula that I can perfect and sell for millions of dollars. Specifics, Jesus, I need specifics. Seeking to justify himself, then, he asked the follow-up question:

**Scholar:** Ah, but who is my neighbor?

This question we still ask today. Like the Scholar, we are still trying to get out of love, trying to box it in, give it a beginning and an ending, turn it into a task to accomplish. Like the scholar, we try to excuse our lack of love by hoping Jesus will give a particular answer. We can then simply love that neighbor, check off the box by that name, and be assured of eternal life. But Jesus, that answer/non-answer popular teacher gives us the story of stories:

**Jesus:** This fellow was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho when some robbers mugged him. They took his clothes, beat him to a pulp, and left him naked and bleeding and in critical condition. By chance, a priest

was going down that same road, and when he saw the wounded man, he crossed over to the other side and passed by. Then a Levite who was on his way to assist in the temple also came and saw the victim lying there, and he too kept his distance. Then a despised Samaritan journeyed by. When he saw the fellow, he felt compassion for him. The Samaritan went over to him, stopped the bleeding, applied some first aid, and put the poor fellow on his donkey. He brought the man to an inn and cared for him through the night.

The next day, the Samaritan took out some money—two days’ wages to be exact—and paid the innkeeper, saying, “Please take care of this fellow, and if this isn’t enough, I’ll repay you next time I pass through.”

Which of these three proved himself a neighbor to the man who had been mugged by the robbers?

Scholar: The one who showed mercy to him.

Jesus: Well then, go and behave like that Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37, The Voice)

Rather than answering the question “Who?” Jesus told the scholar how. The who question has been answered throughout scripture:

Go and make disciples of all nations... (Matthew 28:19)

God wants all people to be saved. (1 Timothy 2:3,4)

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

We are to open our eyes to the people God has placed right in our pathways—regardless of the color of their skin, the language they speak, the god they worship or the orientation they claim—and we are to do whatever needs to be done. We are to embrace with love the neighbors God brings to us. 1 John elaborates on this interaction between the scholar and Jesus:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

(1 John 3:11-18)

Instead of asking who, let's start loving with actions. The next question then is "When?" When will I choose to love? When will I take action to love my neighbor? Of course, the only reasonable answer is "Now".

This small book is intended to be a stimulus to action. It can be read daily as a reminder to love my neighbor today, not just in word but in deed. The important thing, however, is not to simply read it, but to do something. It can take 50 days or 100 days. Do it at the pace that makes the most difference for you.

It is meant to challenge your prayer life, your dialogue with God, that place daily where we power up, receive comfort and bask in true friendship. Our prayer life is also where we get our direction for the day. Let these prayer challenges help you to pause and listen for God's direction to love today.

It is meant to challenge your thinking, that internal dialogue that affects what you choose to do, but if it only affects your thoughts and not your actions, it is not enough.

It is meant to share celebration stories. These are not shared so that you can compare yourself and come up short. As has often been quoted, "Comparison is the thief of joy." The stories are shared to encourage you that real people are choosing love. People just like you who find it easier to be selfish, shy and comfortable have listened to the Holy Spirit leading them out of their comfort zone into new places of love. Let their stories spur you on to your own love story among your own neighbors.

It is meant to offer specific actions you can take to love. Some of us just need a specific suggestion, a technique to find the courage to talk to someone different. Try the offered ideas and then let Jesus guide you to your own.

Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor. That is the way to live—forever.

# day one

## AS IS

by Refugio Sanchez



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: “Jesus speak.” Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.



### Think

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7)

When you buy an item from the sale table marked “As Is,” you know there’s a flaw somewhere, and agree to overlook it without complaint. That’s what it means to “accept one other”. Consider that Romans also tells us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. If we are to accept others as Christ has accepted us, we will accept one another “As Is”. With all our flaws, inconsistencies, cultural differences, and wounds. With all our talents, gifts, skills, and attractiveness. We will take each other “As Is” and agree to overlook the flaws without complaint. If we could do this in our homes, that would be game-changing enough. If we could also do this in our churches, schools, workplaces and neighborhoods it would be world-changing.



### Go

Before greeting each person you meet today, imagine a sticker on their forehead that reads, “As Is”. As you shake their hand picture yourself fully accepting that person just as he or she is without complaint.

# day two

## SUPRA-HUMAN

By Bishop David Roller



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: “Jesus speak.” Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.



### Think

Some folks are easy to hug — others, not so much. The easiest ones to hug are those just like us; they talk like us, dress like us, spend like us and even hug like us. That’s just human nature, to accept those like ourselves; but shouldn’t Christians live a supra-human nature?

There’s that “image of God” thing that instills in us that “love of God” thing that drives us to that “mission of God” thing. That’s why we embrace those who are different, and especially those who can’t reciprocate, who have nothing to offer us. We love them and embrace them simply because they bear the image of our Creator and are included in the redemptive work of the Son. If they were worth Jesus, they’re worth us. If Jesus loved them, we’ll love them; if Jesus came to rescue them, we’ll at least sit next to them in church!

Let’s make this practical, on a personal and church level. On a personal level, it’s “unnatural,” but on a church level, it’s even harder to break the normal sociological barriers that keep us with those like ourselves. The walls of this sociological corral are normally constructed around matters like race, language, economic level/class, culture and even sport teams. But we see past the dividing walls that separated us to the image of God and the work of Jesus that unite us.

Embracing those not like us means we intentionally begin conversations, join clubs, take snacks to, sit with and enjoy persons who support your team’s arch-rival, persons with different skin and hair, persons who talk “funny,” persons who

ride bicycles to work and persons who voted for the other guy (or lady) for president.

And as a church, we're veritable outlaws when it comes to the unwritten laws that separate us. Churches break cultural rules if the rules don't measure up to God's cultural standards. We do what "normal" groups don't do. We love those unlike ourselves. We welcome those who can't "contribute". And then we teach those newly embraced people that we don't accept the rules of the dominant culture, and soon they too begin to see the beauty of living by God's cultural rules.



Prayerfully choose who you will "hug" today.

# day three

## THE UNCOMFORTABLE WAY



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: “Jesus speak.” Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.



### Think

For decades, John Wesley preached in the fields throughout the country of England speaking of the work that Jesus could do in all people. As biographer A. S. Wood describes, Wesley was the least likely candidate for this ministry:

He endured [field preaching] only because God had called him to adopt such a means...There is something ironical that such a man as Wesley should expose himself ...Nor did he shrink from the uncouth mob...with filth and foul odours, and often heckling and violence...a dapper little don...finical about his appearance...as neat as a tailor’s model...he could not bear a speck of dirt. He hated noise and disturbance. That he should venture...and face the great unwashed was nothing short of a miracle. Only grace could have turned John Wesley into a missionary to the common people.

The man of order, quiet and cleanliness was called out to the rowdy, loud and coal-mining dirty. After many years of field preaching, Wesley himself said, “To this day field preaching is a cross to me...But I know my commission and see no other way of preaching the gospel to every creature.”

What has the grace of God done in and through you? If God could call John Wesley to a group of people so unlike himself to minister in a way so uncomfortable for him, where might God be calling you?



Choose one thing that you could do today that would bless someone else even if it is a little uncomfortable.

- A. S. Wood, *The Burning Heart. John Wesley: Evangelist*, 94.
- *The Journal of John Wesley*, V, 484 (September 6, 1772).

# day four

## WALKING INTO A ROOM

### *Stop*

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: “Jesus speak.” Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.

### *Think*

Each of us has a running internal dialogue when we walk into a room. It usually fits into one of these categories:

#### **Self-Absorbed**

What do I look like?  
What do they think of me?

#### **Judging**

What is that person doing?  
Why is she wearing THAT?

#### **Networking**

Who is important that I need to know?  
How can I make a good impression?

#### **Serving**

What needs to be done?  
What can I do to help?

#### **Connecting**

I wonder what his story is?  
Who needs a friend right now?

Do you see yourself in one of these categories a majority of the time? Where would you like to be?

### *Go*

Today as you walk into a social group choose a Serving or Connecting question and see how it changes your interactions.

# day five

## AT THE HEART



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: “Jesus speak.” Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.



### Think

Study 1 Samuel 16:7 today by reading it in different Bible translations. Start by asking the Lord to speak to you, then read slowly and circle one word in each different translation that stands out to you.

And Jehovah saith unto Samuel, ‘Look not unto his appearance, and unto the height of his stature, for I have rejected him; for [it is] not as man seeth -- for man looketh at the eyes, and Jehovah looketh at the heart.’ (Young’s Literal Translation)

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (New Living Translation)

But God told Samuel, “Looks aren’t everything. Don’t be impressed with his looks and stature. I’ve already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.” (The Message)

Take no notice of his looks or his height. He is not the one, for the Eternal One does not pay attention to what humans value. Humans only care about the external appearance, but the Eternal considers the inner character. (The Voice)



### Go

Using the four words you circled, write a statement of loving action for your day. Write it on a small piece of paper and place it in your pocket. Act on that statement today.

# day six

## MURDER IN OUR HEARTS

BY BISHOP DAVID KENDALL



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: "Jesus speak." Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.



### Think

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village. (Luke 9:51-56, NIV)

Since Jesus had already been embracing Samaritans, it was stunning that this Samaritan village told Jesus to stay away. He wasn't welcome. Their un-welcome, and dis-courtesy was highly insulting. James and John felt the insult, and it brings out the worst from their hearts. They were offended, angry, and they asked Jesus:

"Shall we fire-bomb these people? Shall we blast them to hell?"

Jesus turned and rebuked them, and then went to another village on his way to Jerusalem...Eventually all who follow Jesus must come to the place where murder in the heart can die. That is where Jesus takes them and takes us.

If any would follow, let them deny self, take up the cross and follow to that place. In order to love as Jesus loved, we must deal with the murder in our hearts. In order to embrace all people, which is what Jesus does, we must deal with the murder in our hearts. In order to bring wholeness to our world, we will need

to love people Jesus' way, and that will not happen unless the murder in our hearts dies.

We will not likely fail because we are unwilling to take a stand, or sacrifice some comfort, convenience, time and money. Many followers of Jesus have done such things. But we will fail if there is murder in our hearts, if Jesus' love does not conquer our hearts.

Will you give Jesus the murder in your heart today? Will you pray for, wish for, and actively give a blessing to your enemy? This is following Jesus.



Pray for your "enemy" today.

# day seven

## YOUR LIFE STORY

### *Stop*

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple sentence prayer: “Jesus speak.” Sit in silence for 1 minute before reading further.

### *Think*

The Gentleman’s Magazine for March 1791 summed up John Wesley with these words:

The great point in which his name and mission will be honored is this: he directed his labours towards those who had no instructor; to the highways and hedges; to the miners in Cornwall, and the colliers in Kingswood. These unhappy creatures married and buried amongst themselves, and often committed murders with impunity, before the Methodists sprang up. By the humane and active endeavours of him and his brother Charles, a sense of decency, morals, and religion, was introduced into the lowest classes of mankind; the ignorant were instructed; the wretched relieved; and the abandoned reclaimed...He was...one of the few characters who outlived enmity and prejudice, and received, in his latter years, every mark of respect from every denomination.

What if USA Today were to sum up your life? How would it read? How would you like for it to read?

### *Go*

Choose one thing you can do today to write your life story in a way that shows you love God and love your neighbor.

# day eight

## PUT THE HEART INTO

by Refugio Sanchez



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

“Encourage one another and build each other up.”  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Hidden inside the Greek word for encourage is *kardia*, usually translated “heart”. A literal translation of encourage is to put the heart into. When we encourage someone else we are giving them heart. The opposite is also true. If we are discouraging to others, we are pulling out a piece of their heart. Sit with those images for a moment. Mentally sketch the picture of you pulling out another’s heart with the words you say, with the looks you give. Feel yourself shudder with disgust. Now take more time to paint the picture of you giving another a piece of heart. Say an encouraging word, look upon her in love. Watch her heart expand right in front of you and notice how it changes her countenance.

We have often been taught that if we cannot say something nice, then we should say nothing at all. But what if God says, “Go ahead. Say something nice.”



### Go

Think of one person you can specifically encourage today. Write a note. Say encouraging words. Give them heart.



### Extra

Google “TedX Becky Blanton The Year I Was Homeless” for a vivid illustration of the power of words.

# day nine

## TO BRING UNITY



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

As you read this passage from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, consider that the Bible is translated into hundreds of languages. Consider that a Kenyan farmer, a Native American teenager, and a Chinese homemaker are also reading about how they are adopted into God’s family. How does that change how you read this passage?

Ephesians 1:3-11 (The Voice)

Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus the Anointed One, who grants us every spiritual blessing in these heavenly realms where we live in the Anointed—not because of anything we have done, but because of what He has done for us. God chose us to be in a relationship with Him even before He laid out plans for this world; He wanted us to live holy lives characterized by love, free from sin, and blameless before Him. He destined us to be adopted as His children through the covenant Jesus the Anointed inaugurated in His sacrificial life. This was His pleasure and His will for us. Ultimately God is the one worthy of praise for showing us His grace; He is merciful and marvelous, freely giving us these gifts in His Beloved. Visualize this: His blood freely flowing down the cross, setting us free! We are forgiven for our sinful ways by the richness of His grace, which He has poured all over us. With all wisdom and insight, He has enlightened us to the great mystery at the center of His will. With immense pleasure, He laid out His intentions through Jesus, a plan that will climax when the time is right as He returns to create order and unity—both in heaven and on earth—when all things are brought together under the Anointed’s royal rule.

In Him we stand to inherit even more. As His heirs, we are predestined to play a key role in His unfolding purpose that is energizing everything to conform to His will.

What is your key role in His unfolding purpose?



Try to see your day through someone else's eyes. As you wait in line, imagine how the cashier sees that same line. Imagine how the mother with the young child sees that line. Imagine how the store owner sees that line.

# day ten

## GOD IN YOUR OWN IMAGE

### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.

### Think

You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do. —Anne Lamott

Many of us have been brought up to say that we don’t “hate” anyone. Perhaps we don’t. However, there are several degrees between love and hate.

Hate...Dislike...Grudgingly Put Up With...Don’t Care...Tolerate...Accept...Like...Love

The fact of the matter is that Jesus did not tell us to “grudgingly put up with” our neighbors. He also didn’t tell us to “tolerate” our neighbors. He specifically chose the word “love”.

If all the people who I like and love look and act much like me, I need to rethink my ability to love my neighbor. It is natural to love those who love us and like those who like us. It takes Jesus living in us to love those who we would prefer not to love.

### Go

Take some time to identify one person who falls closer to the hate end of the spectrum in your life. Begin to pray daily for that person. Ask God to bless her and to open your heart to her.

# day eleven

## A CHURCH ABOVE A BAR

By Dukens Boliere



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

In 1862...wait, did you just slide past those numbers without thinking about them? 1862 was over 150 years ago. In 1862, B.T. Roberts established a mission church above a saloon in Buffalo, New York's notorious Five Points area. A church above a bar in 1862? As if that wasn't innovative and gutsy enough, some of the women converted there moved into Roberts' family home as a "safe zone" until they could live on their own.

Put yourself into B.T. and Ellen Roberts' shoes for a moment. Try to imagine the sights, sounds, and smells of a church above a bar. What unique problems might a church service conducted above a bar face? Now imagine bringing the rough and tumble women into your home to share your food, your sleeping space and your living space. This is the founder of the Free Methodist denomination. How does this inspire you to move toward the struggles of others instead of away from them?



### Go

Look around you today for someone who appears to be struggling. Make eye contact, smile and say, "Hi". Consider whether you have the courage to ask that person if they have anything they would like you to pray about with them. Then, pray. If you are not yet ready to do that, simply say, "Hi", and as you walk away, say a prayer for that person.

# day twelve

## SERVANTS CAN



### *Stop*

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### *Think*

In John Weece’s book *Jesus Prom*, he quotes his friend Gary as saying, “Servants can go places kings can’t.” If you are going to take action and do something to connect with someone who is different from you, you must go as a servant and not a king. Especially when it comes to minority, impoverished, under-served or invisible populations. They expect to be bossed around, told what to do and treated as less than. Everyone treats them that way. While we may want to be friends, sometimes if we are the person in the typical position of power, we have to start by being a servant.

Here is one practical way to do this: Go to the places where others feel comfortable. This, of course, implies that you will probably not feel comfortable. Henri Nouwen says it eloquently as he applies Jesus’ ministry call to Peter in John 21:18, “In all truth I tell you when you were young you put on your belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go.” Nouwen says that spiritual maturity is “the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go...the servant-leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places.”

## ✚ Go

In the margin, write down three places you would rather not go in the area where you live. Make a plan to visit one of those places this week, if only for a few minutes. Ask the Lord to help you see that place as He sees it.

## + Extra

Find and read Henri Nouwen's book *In the Name of Jesus* where this quote originates. It is a very short book, the text of a lecture he gave after leaving his work at the university to live and work among people with severe mental and physical disabilities. This is a book meant to be read and re-read for those desiring to become a servant of all.

# day thirteen

## SMILE



Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Sit in silence for 1 minute.



In his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie offers this simple poem entitled, "The Value of a Smile at Christmas". A department store posted it at their checkout during the harried weeks of Christmas shopping:

It costs nothing, but creates much.

It enriches those who receive, without impoverishing those who give.

It happens in a flash and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.

None are so rich they can get along without it, and none so poor but are richer for its benefits.

It creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in a business, and is the countersign of friends.

It is rest to the weary, daylight to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and Nature's best antidote for trouble.

Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is no earthly good to anybody till it is given away. And if in the last-minute rush of Christmas buying some of our salespeople should be too tired to give you a smile, may we ask you to leave one of yours?

For nobody needs a smile so much as those who have none left to give.



Smile today. See how it changes you and those around you.

# day fourteen

## WRITTEN FOR US

### *Stop*

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.

### *Think*

Read Romans 15:1-6 from The Message translation.

Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, “How can I help?”

That’s exactly what Jesus did. He didn’t make it easy for himself by avoiding people’s troubles, but waded right in and helped out. “I took on the troubles of the troubled,” is the way Scripture puts it. Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it’s written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we’ll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

Now read it again slowly and underline any words or phrases that stand out to you. How does this Scripture challenge you? How does it inspire you?

### *Go*

Look for the person that you say, “How can I help?” to today.

# day fifteen

## SMILE



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Lord, have mercy on me.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

“Let us renounce that bigotry and party-zeal which would contract our hearts into an insensibility for all the human race, but a small number whose sentiments and practices are so much our own, that our love to them is but self-love reflected.” —John Wesley

That phrase “contract our hearts” brings to mind Dr. Seuss’ Grinch whose “heart was two sizes too small.” No one wants to think of himself as the caricature of the grumpy, selfish Grinch and yet how often do we look at others without understanding and seek to steal their joy by attacking what we do not understand.

Look at the word “insensibility”. Maybe it means here that it dulls our senses. Staying in our own group with people only like us leaves us with a spiritually dulled love. Our heart cannot operate as it was created. It is as if our noses are plugged, our ears are filled with wax, our nerve endings numbed, our taste buds burned, and our eyes dulled with cataracts. We are not living fully as we were created to live if we are not fully loving.

But the strongest, most incriminating phrase: self-love reflected. When we only love those who are like us we are truly loving only ourselves. And this is the saddest way to live--to only love ourselves in others. Think of how ridiculous we find the story of the Greek god Narcissus who falls in love with himself—staring at his own reflection in the water. How stupid he was. Yet Wesley says here that when we love only those who are like us we are just as silly and stupid. For in loving sameness, we are only loving ourselves.



Take some extended time today to pray the following prayer. Write it out as an act of consecration. "Lord, you told me to love my neighbor as myself. Would you do heart surgery on me? Often my heart only seems to have love for me and those like me. Grow my heart Lord so that I can't help but love all those you place around me."

# day sixteen

## LIFE IS PRECIOUS

By Dukens Boliere



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Lord, have mercy on me." Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

As early as 1910, the Free Methodist church reached out in love to unwed mothers. The Home of Redeeming Love opened as a rescue home for girls and their newborn babies who may not have had anywhere else to turn. In 1931, the ministry added a maternity hospital to care for physical needs as well as shelter, emotional and spiritual provision. Now known as Deaconess Pregnancy and Adoption Services, it has helped more than 10,000 women in crisis and united 5,000 families through adoption.



### Go

As you look around your church or neighborhood, do you see a single parent who could use some encouragement or support? Choose one of these ideas or think of another creative way to reach out in love.

- Offer free babysitting for an hour or two.
- Send her flowers to tell her she is loved.
- Invite her and her children over for a meal.
- Write a note to tell him something he is doing well as a parent.

# day seventeen

## GO HARD OR GO HOME



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Lord, have mercy on me.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

One popular video exercise program available is called ChaLEAN Extreme. She believes in something called Muscle Fatigue. Work a muscle until you can't possibly do one more repetition. This is how to make the muscle stronger. Many of us practice the opposite exercise strategy: when we feel a little bit tired, we stop. Guess how strong that muscle building strategy leaves us? Weak. The same might be true of our love muscles. If we want them to get stronger, we need to push them farther. We need to love when it is uncomfortable, love when it pushes us beyond where we have ever been able to go. Love until it forces us to depend on the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to love through us.

Loving another person is hard. Any one who believes in the touchy feely, romantic notion of love (whether in dating and marriage or in serving the poor or in shepherding a flock) is just living in a dream world. Truly loving another requires action. Self-denying action. Consider these scriptures:

Matthew 16:24 “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

Galatians 6:9,10 “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

As they say in the gym or on the street, “Go hard or go home.”

## **⚡ Go**

Fatigue your loving others muscles today. Serve one more time. Listen longer. Give just a little bit more.

## **+ Extra**

Here's a cross cultural music challenge for some of you today. Listen to Christian rap artist, LeCrae challenge us to give our all for Jesus. Google "LeCrae Go Hard or Go Home". If the words are a little hard for you to follow, google the same thing but add "Lyrics" and find the words to the song.

# day eighteen

## THERE YOU ARE

### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Lord, have mercy on me.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.

### Think

There are two types of people...Those who come into a room and say, ‘Well, here I am,’ and those who say, ‘Ah, there you are.’ —Frederick Collins

In your mind’s eye picture some people in your life who have been “There You Are” people for you. What is it about them that sends you that message? How do you feel while you are with them?

### Go

Practice being a “There You Are” person today. Before walking into a room, quickly pray, “Lord, open my eyes to the others in the room and give me courage to fully focus on them, receive them, and celebrate them.” Once you walk in the room, make it your first mission to greet someone and ask them at least one question beyond, “How are you?”

Possible questions:

Tell me something good about your week(end).

Do you have anything exciting planned for the summer?

What’s your favorite thing to do on a rainy/snowy/sunny day?

Read any good books or seen any good movies lately?

### Extra

For more on the art of conversation, pick up *The Fine Art of Small Talk: How to Start a Conversation, Keep it Going, Build Networking Skills—and Leave a Positive Impression* by Debra Fine.

# day nineteen

## ME FIRST

By Refugio Sanchez



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Lord, have mercy on me." Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

"Live in harmony with one another." (Romans 12:16)

Sounds simple enough, doesn't it?

"Be of the same mind"

"Agree with each other"

"Live together in peace"

We all say that we want that kind of life: a life without drama, without arguments, without slamming doors or raised voices. Here is the kicker: if we want that life, we need to go first. "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." We practice "me first" thinking in so many ways and yet when it comes to harmony, forgiveness, and compromise we quickly drop the "me first" mentality.



### Go

Today, practice "me first". Be the first to say, "I'm sorry." Be the first to say, "Let's try it your way." Be the first to pick up the phone and invite a new person to do something fun with you. Be the first to initiate the conversation in the lunchroom. Be the first to volunteer to help someone in need.

# day twenty

## GIVING AND RECEIVING



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Lord, have mercy on me." Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

"Nobody is so poor that s/he has nothing to give, and nobody is so rich that s/he has nothing to receive." These words by Pope John-Paul II offer a powerful direction for all who want to work for peace. No peace is thinkable as long as the world remains divided into two groups: those who give and those who receive. Real human dignity is found in giving as well as receiving. This is true not only for individuals but for nations, cultures, and religious communities as well.

A true vision of peace sees a continuous mutuality between giving and receiving. Let's never give anything without asking ourselves what we are receiving from those to whom we give, and let's never receive anything without asking what we have to give to those from whom we receive. (Henri Nouwen)

Take a few moments and think about your relationships. When have you experienced a relationship in which there is mutual giving and receiving?



### Go

Is there a relationship in which you have been doing all the receiving? Look for a specific way to give this week. Is there a relationships where you have been doing all the giving? Look for a way to simply receive this week.

# day twenty one

## “FREE” METHODISTS



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Lord, have mercy on me.” Sit in silence for 1 minute.



### Think

B. T. Roberts, an outspoken and gifted Methodist pastor, became the first Bishop of the Free Methodist Church. Roberts led the Free Methodist Church to grow into a prosperous denomination committed to proclaiming:

- (1) freedom from sin through the grace and power of Jesus Christ,
- (2) freedom for all persons by advocating for just laws,
- (3) freedom in worship, and
- (4) free pews symbolizing open access to--and signaling God’s preference for--the poorest of the poor.

How do you see these freedoms at work in your local church? Is there one your church is better at than another?



### Go

What is one practical thing you could do to improve upon a weaker “freedom” in your local church?

# day twenty two

## HELP ME UNDERSTAND



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Holy Spirit, fill me.”  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own. —Henry Ford

One key phrase that we could all use more often is this: Help me understand. We only have one set of eyes and therefore see the world and particular situations only from our own perspective. Every single person who walks into any given situation sees it from only his two eyes. When we are seeing things differently and our differences set us squarely at opposite sides of an issue, we can choose to stubbornly state our perspective and demand our way. We also can make the choice to say, “Help me understand.”



### Go

Use the phrase “Help me understand” in a potential conflict situation today. Say the words and then listen carefully. Ask God to help you understand in a new way.

# day twenty three

## A NEW WARDROBE



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, fill me."  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Paul said, in Colossians 3:10, 11, of Jesus' people and Jesus' Kingdom:

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (NIV)

Now read it in another version. Underline a word or phrase that jumps out at you.

Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. (NLT)

Now read verses 9-11 from The Message. Again mark something that stands out to you.

Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious,

insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

Do you need a new wardrobe? Is it possible that your polite words have not matched your heart? Have you been lying to others by pretending care and concern but walking away and thinking only of yourself?



Choose today to throw out the old T-shirts of self-centeredness and prejudice. Ask the Lord to clothe you instead with compassion and embracing of others.

# day twenty four

## BUT THEY ALL...



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, fill me."  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

How often have you heard or said something like this?

Liberals are all...  
Asians always...  
Men always...  
All black people...  
White people...  
Americans always...

This tendency to lump an entire group of people together and label them with just a few words or phrases is a symptom of Outgroup Homogeneity--the perception that people not like you are pretty much all the same. Dr. Christena Cleveland, in her book *Disunity in Christ*, explains the problem which then arises:

Once we reach this conclusion (and we do so quite swiftly), we are no longer motivated to interact with and learn more about the outgroup. We think we already know everything there is to know about them.

When we grab hold of a simple description of a group of people, our natural tendency is to write off that group of people. We fail to look deeper and recognize the great diversity within the group. Especially when the stereotype is something unappealing to us, we easily excuse ourselves from getting to know anyone on an individual level. Consider the possibility that Jesus rejected Outgroup Homogeneity. He surprised his disciples as he stopped to talk to outcast lepers, journeyed through and made friends in Samaria, made time for children and befriended Pharisees like Nicodemus. He demonstrated that each person is unique and

labels do not represent individual people.  
Move toward giving up Outgroup Homogeneity thinking. What group of people have you written off by a shallow assessment? Do you know any “exceptions” to your generalizations of that group? Have you considered that there may be more “exceptions”?



Is there anyone you are acquainted with in that group that you could spend some time getting to know more deeply? If so, intentionally connect with that person today and set up a specific date and time to get together.

# day twenty five

## MIDDLE OF THE ROAD



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Holy Spirit, fill me.”  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

As human beings, we naturally seem to want to categorize things and people and behavior. With those categories often come either spoken or unspoken judgments of bad or good, safe or unsafe, friendly or unfriendly, helpful or unhelpful. This story by Robert Lupton is a great example of how our first thoughts are often misguided.

“Look at them, walking down the middle of the road,” we said.  
“Young toughs. They act like they own the street.”

It looked like an act of defiance to my wife, Peggy, and me...  
We had moved into the city to work and make our home,  
and...decided to take evening walks, a different direction  
each night, until we were familiar with our new surroundings.

Unexpected things happen when you walk down city side-  
walks at night...Things that the shadows conceal. Like a dog  
that lies in wait and then ferociously attacks the fence that  
only he knows separates you. And there are sections of side-  
walk, broken and jutting, with which time and tree roots have  
had their way...

Scary strangers soon became familiar faces. Staggering  
drunks became friends for whom we learned compassion.  
Young people, sometimes high on drugs, became individuals  
with names and families and special needs. Even those who  
were most elusive behind their locks and bars—the elderly—  
began to wave and respond to our “Good evening.”

Of course there were the real and ever-present dangers.

An occasional sociopath, the deeply troubled person who preyed on the unsuspecting and struck fear in the hearts of the entire community. Broken glass poised and ready to puncture the next thin-soled shoe to happen by. And tall weeds that reached out to scratch and cling. But for the most part we discovered that the real enemies of the street were alienation, misunderstanding, prejudice...

More than seven years have passed since Peggy and I moved into the city. We still take our evening walks....And the unexpected dangers that lurk in the darkness? We've learned to elude most of them by walking in the street rather than the sidewalk. Someday a newcomer to our neighborhood will remark, "Look at them, walking down the middle of the road. They act like they own the street!"



Try to catch yourself as you make judgments on someone's behavior. Could there be a different explanation for their behavior than what you had previously assumed?

- *Theirs is the Kingdom: Celebrating the Gospel in Urban America* by Robert D. Lupton, 1989.

# day twenty six

## DID YOU KNOW?

By Dukens Boliere



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, fill me."  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Fear ruled the hearts and minds of Americans during World War II. These fears combined with stereotypes, prejudice and racism prompted the moving of all Japanese immigrants to internment camps. This action displaced many Japanese Free Methodists from churches begun in Los Angeles, Berkeley and Seattle during the early 1900's. In a belated apology, the 1964 general conference confessed its failure to speak out against wartime internment of Japanese Americans and the loss of opportunity to minister to their needs. Today, the Free Methodist Church is blessed with a vibrant Pacific Coast Japanese Conference.

What injustices are happening in the United States today that we as Christians are ignoring? What injustices are occurring that 20 years from now we may need to once again confess our sins of omission?



### Go

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see the need, to open your mind to see it from a new perspective, to open your heart to love those in need, to open your mouth to speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and to open your hands to act in just and merciful ways. When you see a need, choose to love, speak and serve.



### Extra

For more discussion of the complexity of Race, google "Race: The Power of An Illusion" including quizzes, interviews, and links to a 3 part documentary.

# day twenty seven

## CONNECTING

### *Stop*

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: “Holy Spirit, fill me.”  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.

### *Think*

Become friends with people who aren't your age. Hang out with people whose first language isn't the same as yours. Get to know someone who doesn't come from your social class. This is how you see the world. This is how you grow.  
—Grammarly

Ask God today to show you who you can connect with who is different from you. Do a mental walkthrough of your day: workplace, school, gym, neighborhood, and church. Do you see a face? If no one comes to mind, ask the Lord to open your eyes today to see someone He would like you to connect with.

### *Go*

Once you have at least one face or name, set up a specific point of connection with that person. Call him and ask him out to lunch. Invite her out for a walk. Go to the nursing home and visit him. Sit by her in church. Grow through connection.

# day twenty eight

## LOOK-WHAT-GOD-CAN-DO-THROUGH-US LIST

By Refugio Sanchez



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Say a simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, fill me."  
Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

"Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:10)

Notice the word "above" in this verse. We're not just talking about showing respect; we're talking about putting them first. Ahead of us. Above us. Easy to say, yet often hard to do. Willingness to let others have the credit would have to come from God...and that's the point. The New Testament is not a new version of the Ten Commandments, a thou-must-do list. This is a look-what-God-can-do-through-us list. Only by his power can we embrace humility. Only by his strength can we practice playing second fiddle.

In what situation can you let God live through you by honoring another above yourself?



### Go

What is a specific way that you will choose to honor someone else today?

# day twenty nine

## THEOLOGY FOR EVERYONE



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: “Here I am Lord, send me.” Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Chew on and pray on this today:

Jesus did theology among the outliers—the poor, the sick, the marginalized, women, Samaritans, fishermen—and he was rejected by the religious elite. “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” Jesus proclaimed, “because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” Theology is for everyone. And if theology doesn’t make sense among the very people Jesus centered his ministry around, then it doesn’t make sense.

If it’s not good news for the poor, it’s not good news. If it’s not good news for the hungry, it’s not good news. If it’s not good news for the weak, it’s not good news. If it’s not good news for the oppressed, the forgotten, the hurting, the lonely, the people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the spiritually and physically sick, then it’s not good news. The gospel isn’t the gospel when it belongs to the powerful to dispense, explain, and exclude as they see fit. There is certainly an important place for theological training and for recognizing those uniquely called to scholarship, teaching, and ministry. But they aren’t the only ones qualified to talk about faith. My theology is only as rich as the diversity of people who have contributed to it, and it is a poor theology indeed that considers only the perspectives of those who look, think, and live just like me. (Rachel Held Evans)

Who has taught you most about Jesus? Is there someone you know loves Jesus who may offer you a different perspective?

## Go

Plan a time to sit and talk about Jesus together with someone who has a beautiful walk with Jesus but is very different from you.

## Extra

If you would like to learn more about creating ways to learn from those with different backgrounds, purchase *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* by Eric H. F. Law. In particular, Appendix C offers a simple model for leading a community Bible Study that invites every person to participate and share their perspective.

# day thirty

## CELEBRATION STORY



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Charlie Ash pastors a non-denominational church in a town of 1,900 people. The founding members felt that reaching people outside the church would require a different way of doing ministry. Using Celebrate Recovery as a core ministry, the church fully embraces people wrestling with various kinds of addictions. Charlie spends time with people when they are hurting. He befriends people who are hurting, rejected, and who don't know how to receive love. This is a key aspect of the ministry of Fountain Fellowship. They are a growing collection of damaged people who are being healed. People do not want to be projects, and approaching people seeking a particular result is not often fruitful. He says it this way:

We must love without expectation. We must love people for who they are. God sees what people can become and we can share in God's understanding that hopeless people can become far more than they or we can imagine. Our part in that is to love and to hope.

They leave the rest to God.

In reading the story, is there a phrase that stands out to you?



### Go

Before meeting up with someone today, carefully think about what your expectations of that person are. Imagine what your meeting would look like if you set aside those expectations and simply tried to receive whatever they had to give to you today. Then walk in and receive.

# day thirty one

## LAUGH AT YOURSELF



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: “Here I am Lord, send me.” Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Vulnerable is a tricky word with many meanings and connotations. It also has many levels of depth. When we are seeking to begin a relationship with someone very different from us, it pays to be vulnerable—being okay with making mistakes and learning from others. This includes being able to laugh at ourselves. A story is now circulated around the Lansing, Michigan Bhutanese and Nepali community about the time Nar Badha made Joanna cry. Joanna did not grow up eating spicy food and her tolerance for spices is extremely low. By a comedy of errors both in seating choices and language barriers, she took one bite of a Nepali dish not intended for her. After several long moments of tears, drinks of water and bites of plain rice, she finally regained her senses--much to the delight of everyone in the room. This story has been told and retold in many households and it usually comes with an offer for Joanna to eat the hottest pepper. It also created a connection between people—a memory, a shared joke, and an acknowledgement of Joanna’s spice vulnerability.

How have you shown your vulnerability lately? Are you able to laugh at yourself? Learning to laugh at your own mistakes is not only a great spiritual practice—we all need to get more comfortable with our imperfect humanity—but it is an important social practice—it helps others relax and laugh with us.



### Go

When you make a mistake today, even something small like saying a wrong word, slow down before correcting yourself or trying to hide it and laugh. Acknowledge imperfection, spread joy and connect meaningfully with one action.

# day thirty two

## YOU DID IT TO ME



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Consider these words of Jesus from Matthew 25:31-45 (MSG):

When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,  
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,  
I was homeless and you gave me a room,  
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,  
I was sick and you stopped to visit,  
I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'...

He will answer [the goats], 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.'



Sometimes we read this passage and simply feel guilty. Let's turn a feeling into action. First, think back over the last six months of your life. Have you met Jesus' need in some way? If you have, rejoice. If you have not, confess and repent. Now pull out your calendar. Who is an overlooked or ignored person around you? Schedule a time to meet their need in a tangible way in the next month. If you are not a calendar person, do it today.

# day thirty three

## HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER

### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.

### Think

Sin is ugly. Our flesh flees ugliness, preferring instead the shiny attraction of surface beauty. How often do we flit from one shallow attraction to another denying both our own sin and pushing away the flaws in others? Consider these convicting words shared by Pastor Bruce from Lansing:

For 15 years I had a spiritual director, Fr. Colman Grabert, a monk at St. Meinrad Archabbey in southern Indiana. In one meeting at the monastery he said something that has been transformative in my life. "Until I can get to the point where I fail to be scandalized by anybody else's sin, unless I can sit in the presence of someone else's struggle and shortcomings and not throw up my hands in disgust and say, 'There's no hope for you,' until I can daily recognize my own need for grace and beat my chest and cry, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' then I have not yet become the person God wants me to be." I think recognizing our own great need for grace enables us to be less judging and much more gracious when it comes to others, whatever their background may be.

Grace. God gives us what we need and not what we deserve. Have you truly received God's grace? That grace should not only cleanse us but it should begin to naturally pour out onto others' sins as well.

### Go

Don't just say grace today, give grace, especially to those you think don't "deserve" it.

# day thirty four

## NO GREATER LOVE



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Pastor Jerry leads a Free Methodist church in the small rural town of Sumner. His journey toward embracing all was challenged on a mission trip to New Orleans, during Mardi Gras, with a group called No Greater Love. The group walked the streets, telling people that God loved them. When his team was told that their next location would be in a heavily gay area, Jerry immediately replied that he couldn't do that because in his heart he did not believe God loved gay people. He began to pray, and continued to pray, and eventually realized that God really does love everyone: gay people, adulterers, thieves, addicts, alcoholics, and all of those that we tend to look down on.

He saw that, even though he was raised in the church, and even though he had heard some of the best teaching the church offers, he still stumbled; how much harder must it be for people who do not have his advantages. God's vision is for the lost, hurting and dying.

Jerry's vision, and that of his congregation, is for the community. Sumner, like many rural towns, has a high rate of poverty and a high rate of addiction. The congregation is learning to love that community by supporting people when they can, hurting with people who are hurting, and sharing the love of Jesus. Pastor Jerry and his congregation rely on the Biblical truth that "God is able to do exceedingly more than we can ask or think about. Jesus is what it's all about. Loving the people Jesus loves."



Is there a group of people that you have a hard time loving and perhaps have even assumed that God does not love? Invite the Holy Spirit into this place in your mind and heart and ask him to give you the eyes and heart of Jesus for that group of people.

# day thirty five

## JONAH AND NINEVEH

By Dukens Boliere



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Sunday School children always learn the story of Jonah and the Whale. While the whale part is truly incredible, we may have lost the profound power of the story as it pertains to loving others. Jonah's sin clearly involved disobeying God, but we can't stop there. Why did Jonah disobey God?

Jonah, like the rest of the Jewish people of the time, hated the people of Nineveh who they considered violent and lawless. Jonah also deeply knew his God: "I knew that Thou are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." He knew that if God was sending him to the people of Nineveh, that it meant God loved them too. And Jonah didn't love them.

The word prejudice comes from two Latin words meaning "beforehand" and "to weigh the evidence carefully". Prejudice literally means to rush to judgment before all the facts are in.



Your challenge today is to read Jonah 3 and 4—after Jonah is rescued from the whale.

What did Jonah do after God delivered him from the whale?

What happened in Nineveh?

How did Jonah respond to his success?

What questions did God ask Jonah in 4:9-11?

Much like our stories, the story of Jonah is left unfinished. We are left wondering, once again, what Jonah will do when confronted with God's love. We can make guesses, but the more important question is this: What will you do when God's love confronts your prejudice?

# day thirty six

## GET TO KNOW THEM OVER A MEAL



### *Stop*

Bend your knees in prayer today. Make your chair an altar. Say a simple prayer: "Thank you Emmanuel that you are here with me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### *Think*

Consider this woman's perspective:

People and friends who were different from me have always surrounded me so it was a natural part of my life. It feels weird to me sometimes to not be surrounded by the diversity that I am used to. One thing that I have learned is that getting to know people and building relationships with people will help you to know who they are. Most of the time when we have formed assumptions, judgments or stereotypes, we do it on face value, based on outward appearance. When we get to know people, then we find out that we are not as different as we may seem.

We naturally judge people from the outward appearance, and I've learned to keep an open mind and not to assume anything just because people look a certain way. A great example of this was when I had dinner at a new couple's house. They look like your typical yuppies, fancy house and furniture and lifestyle. Then to hear their stories of how imperfect their lives were and how their marriage and family life and business almost went completely down hill, it made me realize that these people that I assumed had it all together, really were just as broken as other people that were not as well off as they were. I had compassion for them that I would have never had if I hadn't taken the time to sit down with them and get to know them over a meal....



The world is full of strangers and acquaintances. This leaves so much space for stereotypes, judgments and assumptions to rule our interactions. Ask God to show you one person from your church, workplace or neighborhood today that He wants you to get to know better. Get to know them over a meal.

# day thirty seven

## DISCIPLES NOT PHARISEES



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

We have so much to learn from one another. Consider these words from Taylor, a Michigan teenager:

When we are truly able to see people as God sees them we will be willing and able to Embrace All. People are broken, the church is broken and God is the only thing that can bring us to a place of Embracing All. We need to continue to follow the example of Jesus and love people where they are at. We need to be disciples not Pharisees.

Church people throw around words like Pharisee and disciple with varying assumptions about what they mean. Today, take some time to define these two groups of people from Scripture. Take out a blank sheet of paper and divide it into two columns. Pharisee goes on one side and Disciple goes on the other. Now write down words or phrases that describe each one. (If you need help, look at these scriptures: Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 3:1-12; 5:19-21; 9:9-13; 15:1-20.)



### Go

Honestly ask yourself what habits or behaviors you have that fall into each of these categories. Ask God to help you put away Pharisaical behaviors and replace them with the marks of a disciple.

# day thirty eight

## MOMENT BY MOMENT

By Bishop Matthew Thomas



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Sometimes I wonder which of the following two primary pursuits would more significantly impact the world--if we all had big plans and worked daily toward the realization of those big plans; or, if we all made a commitment to find a way, each day, to live a life of radical, moment by moment obedience to God. If I read and understand the Scriptures well, I think the answer is clear--a life pursuing daily obedience to God.

I know that Jesus came to fulfill a big plan. He masterfully lived out a master plan. But, it must be noted that in so doing he lived compellingly connected to people around him--responding to their pain, their cries for help, their mocking injustices, their smug hostilities, their complacency and their hope-filled appeals as though THAT was his plan....He noticed someone touching his garment, the children, the lepers crying out from a distance. He responded to more than one blind man, demoniac and crippled person. He followed Jairus to his home, went to Peter's home to help his mother-in-law and helped the demon possessed when those tormented by them were interrupting his otherwise intentional, missional day. I am convinced that if he were only focused upon the death and resurrection, that we would not see such tactile and taxing engagement along the way. It would be superfluous to the plan. It was not. It was modeling behavior for us to see and to reveal his heart at its best.

I would that more and more people were committed to live in daily pursuit of obedience. God will most certainly take care of the rest. You are part of a big plan--it is God's. Do not spend your

whole life trying to discover it. Spend most of your life living out a life pursuing obedience and sacrifice.



Try an experiment today. Set an alarm on your phone or computer or watch to go off every hour. Each of those hours, sit quietly for a moment and ask God what He would have you do for the next hour. See if taking this time to recalibrate with God every hour makes a difference in your day.

# day thirty nine

## CELEBRATION STORY



### Stop

Take 3 deep breaths. Open your hands, face up in front of you. Say a simple prayer: "Here I am Lord, send me." Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Through her Bible studies and personal reading, Abby began to sense God calling her to move outside her comfort zone at school. She noticed a girl with a disability sitting by herself at lunch and the Lord nudged Abby to go and sit with her. She did not do it that day, struggling with her social identity. On the second day, she got in the lunch line and the same girl stood in line behind her and struck up a conversation. Abby knew God was at work. She and her friends began to sit daily with this girl as well as some other students with disabilities. Though she says that sometimes finding topics of conversation can be challenging, the knowledge that she is doing what God has asked her to do encourages her to push through the difficulties. When asked how she has seen God in new ways through reaching out to those who are different, she responded:

I see God as the ultimate provider --- opportunities (all the time), words to say, courage to do it. He provides the comfortable in the midst of the uncomfortable. I asked God to give me touch points and opportunities and He has given me much more than I expected.

He is the LOVER of the unloved. He has a huge heart for these girls. I have seen God's love for me. I have not been made fun of or been harmed in any way. He had me in mind to do this work. He is faithful and a provider.

Look again at the words Abby uses to describe God: "the ultimate provider." How often we think of God as the provider of things we want: food, safety and things that make us happy.

Abby sees God as the provider of opportunities, the provider of words to say, the provider of courage to do what she has been called to do.



What does God want to provide for you today? Will you receive His provision by seizing the opportunities He gives you to love?

# day forty

## LOVE COMES ALIVE



### Stop

Bend your knees in prayer today. Make your chair an altar. Say a simple prayer: “Thank you Emmanuel that you are here with me.” Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

A clinical child psychologist from the Rainier Avenue FMC has recently joined a group of Christian health care professionals who started a pediatric primary care clinic in the heart of the city. When asked how he has seen God in new ways through embracing all, he responded:

I think that the effort that is required to truly embrace others from diverse backgrounds has provided me with tangible examples of how God wants us to love one another. Through cross-cultural interactions, God has brought 1 Corinthians 13 alive for me:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Take a moment to dissect these words from 1 Corinthians 13. Underline the adjectives that describe love. Now circle the verbs that show love in action. Could an outsider use any of these words to describe your love?



### Go

Ask the Lord to show you one word that you can focus on for awhile both as an attitude and an action. Consider how that word

will change your interactions with your family, your colleagues, your neighbors, and even your enemies. Write that word on a card and post it where you will see it often--on your car dashboard, on the bathroom mirror, or at the kitchen sink. Maybe even write it in permanent marker on your body, on your hand or arm. Let it stay there awhile reminding you how you want to love.

# day forty one

## I CAN DO IT



### Stop

Bend your knees in prayer today. Make your chair an altar. Say a simple prayer: “Thank you Emmanuel that you are here with me.” Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Read this testimony from Shari about her calling:

“While at a conference, I felt God telling me to start a new ministry for people with disabilities. I questioned Him at first, but he assured me I had enough experience. After receiving the assurance from God, it wasn’t hard for me to embrace this group. I figured if He thinks I can do it, then I must be able to do it—with His help of course.”

Many of us question God when He first asks us to do something. We are not alone in this uncertainty. Moses wanted more signs than God speaking through a burning bush and still begged God to use a different spokesperson. Isaiah first said, “Woe is me!” until God cleansed his lips. David’s brothers and the entire army of Israel saw Goliath and knew what needed to be done, yet the teenager David was the only one to trust in His mighty God enough to take action.



### Go

When you are tempted to say, “I don’t have enough experience. I don’t have those skills. I don’t know enough about that issue,” it is time to return to faith. Memorize part or all of this passage today and walk forward in faith.

Don’t fear, because I am with you;  
don’t be afraid, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you,  
I will surely help you;  
I will hold you  
with my righteous strong hand.

I am the Lord your God,  
who grasps your strong hand,  
who says to you,  
Don't fear; I will help you.  
(Isaiah 41:10,13, CEB)

# day forty two

## WHERE GOD IS



### Stop

Bend your knees in prayer today. Make your chair an altar. Say a simple prayer: “Thank you Emmanuel that you are here with me.” Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

God is in the places that we least expect. Consider this account from 2 Kings 6:8-17:

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.”

The man of God [Elisha] sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.” So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”

“None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.”

“Go, find out where he is,” the king ordered, “so I can send men and capture him.” The report came back: “He is in Dothan.” Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” the servant asked.

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may

see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.



Pray today: "Open my eyes, Lord, that I may see you in unexpected places." When you see Him, open your mouth to tell someone else how you saw Him. Begin the habit of seeing and saying. Be an eyewitness.

# day forty three

## JUST GET HOME



### Stop

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

A black man's experience in the U.S. is different than a white man's experience. Listen to these words from African-American poet Propaganda:

I remember my father getting stopped. He was taking me to basketball practice and was asked, "What are you doing in this neighborhood? This is a nice neighborhood. What are you doing out here?"

I quickly began to think that the police didn't like us.

I remember my father telling me, "Here's the thing, son. Just get home. If that means you 'yes, sir,' 'no, sir,' do what you have to do. You just have to make it home. Because if you're a threat, they will beat you. You have to do everything in your power to show them you're not a threat."

Just get home. It sounds like words a father might say to his son heading off to war. The sad fact of the matter is that many minority groups in the United States feel the weight of those words in their everyday lives. Let the emotion of those words sit in your heart for a while today.



### Go

Look around you for someone who is a minority in your neighborhood. Consider that they may be fighting a battle that you have never seen before. Offer smiles, say hello, extend

kindness, offer welcome. Do your part in spreading peace.

**+** *Extra*

For the rest of Propaganda's thought-provoking and action-oriented essay, "Justice for Black Lives Begins With Us" see Relevant Magazine, Issue 74, Mar\_Apr 2015, p. 44-45.

# day forty four

## IT IS DIFFERENT



### Stop

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Forbes.com posted two articles recently rating the largest metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) in the United States. In one article, Grand Rapids, Michigan snagged the number one spot out of 100 MSA's as the best place to raise a family. In the other article, Grand Rapids, Michigan came in second to last when evaluated as a city where African-Americans are doing the best financially. The same city means different things to different groups of people.

What about your city or town? Do you think that different people groups experience your city differently than you do? In what way?



### Go

Do you have a friend or acquaintance who is from a different people group that you could ask to share his or her experience with you? If you do, be sure to simply listen without defensiveness. In fact, listen without comment and without sharing how your experience is different, unless they ask you. Give the gift of a listening ear today. Accept his or her experience as it is and begin to process what it might mean as it relates to you.

- <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eddf45gihi/best-cities-for-raising-a-family/>
- <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2015/01/15/the-cities-where-african-americans-are-doing-the-best-economically/>

# day forty five

## FORGIVENESS



### Stop

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

"Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)

Sweet, isn't it? These words kind and compassionate are easy and beautiful words along with their synonyms:

Tenderhearted  
Merciful  
Sympathetic  
Understanding

And they are beautiful words. Sometimes they are even easy to practice. Little acts of kindness given to those who are kind in return. Acts of compassion for those truly in need often flow freely from our hearts and hands. The kicker, however is in the rest of the verse...

"...forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

What it really comes down to is forgiveness. It's more than shared cups of hot chocolate and thank-you notes tucked in purses. It's rubber-meets-the-road Christianity. "Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you." The real talk here is that often we do not embrace others because we are nursing our wounds and protecting ourselves. Our wounded and unforgiving hearts even expand the level of protection so that we begin to withdraw from even other people who are like the one who hurt us. Layer after layer we add to the walls around our hearts when we harbor unforgiveness.



Who do you need to be kind and compassionate to today by forgiving them? Try God and see if He truly can give you the strength to do all things.

# day forty six

## CELEBRATION STORY



### *Stop*

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### *Think*

Topeka Free Methodist Church hosts a unique ministry called Wednesday Worship Warriors (WWW), a weekly service of worship and teaching for adults with developmental disabilities. Local agencies bring residents to the church on Wednesday evening, along with staff personnel who remain for the service. Several people who are members of the church and who worked with this community of people had a vision for this ministry, since these folks often feel un-welcome at local church worship services.

Pastor Mark Waterhouse shares his unique perspective: "I was asked to lead the worship/singing time. I was at first reluctant because I was uncomfortable around such people. But I was willing for God to stretch me as I worked outside of my 'comfort-zone,' so I agreed. God changed my heart towards these folks while I served...not before I was willing to do this. My mind obeyed, and my heart followed. My leading the singing has developed into using sign language for motions to follow along as they sing. Thus it is not merely a verbal experience, but a whole body experience of worship. It has become quite an animated time of worship as everyone is free to worship without any pretense."

The church has not only provided this unique service, but has also worked hard to stay connected in specific ways. The Sunday AM congregation provides snacks for those on Wednesday nights. There have also been friendly competitions between WWW and Sunday AM when they have collected food and other items for local missions, such as the Topeka Rescue

Mission. Last year the Sunday AM church purchased Bibles for everyone who regularly attends WWW...large print (some are visually impaired), hardcover, NLT Bibles. The WWW group gives back by cleaning the church once every 5 weeks after worship. Several from the WWW time also come to the Sunday morning worship service and three have become official members of the church.

Pastor Waterhouse sees God at work, "The church has a better grasp of God's grace. We are fulfilling the mission to make disciples of all people."



Have you been asked to do something that you are uncomfortable doing and have been dragging your feet? Perhaps, like Pastor Mark, you can simply obey and God will change your heart as you go. Take the first step today.

# day forty seven

## IMITATE ME



### Stop

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Drink in these inspiring and challenging words from Soo Ji Alvarez in the Pacific North West:

Our God is the God of all nations and all peoples and the Good News of the gospel is for all, salvation is for all. Heaven will be filled with all kinds of people and the ministry of reconciliation with one another and with God is just a taste of what Heaven will be like. I want my kids to live in a world where they are accepted and where they are valued for being Mexican-Korean instead of looked down upon. I want them to feel comfortable with people of all backgrounds and cultures and I want them to have a heart for all people, not just the head knowledge that they should do this....

I believe that God is a multifaceted God, that there is no way that we can fully understand him. And his awesome multifaceted nature is best reflected through the diverse, different groups of people that He calls His children. He is not a white God or a black God, He is not a God of just the rich or just the poor. He is a God who cares for all and especially for the broken hearted, for the lost, for the hurting. He is a God who truly did "embrace all" and He is the model for who I want to be and for who I want my children to be.

Have you ever heard a young child say a vulgar word? It is startling and often horrifying. The truth is that children imitate adults. They copy our words, our behaviors and our attitudes. What attitudes about other people are the children around you picking up from you? Are they learning to be patient with those

who are slower? Are they learning to honor older people? Are they learning to turn away from “the ugly”? Are they learning to disparage the poor? Are they learning how to be friendly with each person you pass on the street or in the store? Are they looking over someone of a different race? Can you say confidently with Paul, “I urge you to imitate me”? (1 Corinthians 4:16)

 *Go*

Make an extra effort to watch your words today.

 *Extra*

Google “PBS Frontline A Class Divided” to watch a powerful documentary about a group of children who learned by experience what it felt like to be both powerful and powerless.

# day forty eight

## TOUGH STUFF



### Stop

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: “I worship you, God.” Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### Think

Embracing all is not easy. Many of the people we embrace are not accustomed to being embraced and they will push back rather than receive our overtures of love. Yet, these are the people who most need the love of others and the love of Jesus. Know that you are not alone when you feel like it is too hard to love all people. Listen to some others who have struggled with the same thing:

Ministry to wounded people means pouring effort and energy into supporting them and giving them tools to begin to heal. It is painful to then watch them hurt themselves, hoping that they will not hurt themselves in ways that are permanent.

Sometimes people with special needs or handicaps can be “needy”. I only have so much to give. I feel guilty that I can’t provide for all of their needs.

I set myself up for a lot of letdowns. Loving broken people requires taking risks. It means relying on people who do not have a history of being reliable.

It is REALLY HARD to be an adoptive and foster parent... It’s just a lot of hard of work. You see God still because you are forced to face reality. You can’t hide from the hardest truths about the world we live in, and when you face reality it should bring you closer to God.

While I’ve been blessed since childhood with the desire to get along and be in relationship with “all” — God has done

some work over the years as I have experienced hurt, disappointment and in some cases rejection from some that were “other” than I. After feeling such rejection, I was filled with bitterness for a season though I did not recognize it until a mentor brought it to my attention. I confessed and repented. God has graced me to be able to share love in such cases regardless of how I’m being treated. It is hard at times.

*Go*

You are not alone. Expect hard times. Expect rejection. Plan to persevere. 1 Peter 4:8 says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” Write this on a 3x5 card today and hang it on a mirror, car dashboard or somewhere else you will see it several times throughout the day.

# day forty nine

MONDAY AND TUESDAY



## Stop

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



## Think

Loving our neighbors is not a short-term project. It is a long-term commitment. It is a heart change that spills out to all the people around us on a daily basis. These two practitioners offer some challenging words to help us persevere:

Some people are too attached to their past and want growth without change, love without sacrifice, and service without sharing the suffering of others.

— Pastor Timothy

It was hard when there was no thanks or appreciation. It shows the darkness of my heart. This needs to be exposed, so that I can truly die to self... You realize that once you embrace all on Monday, then you are called to do that on Tuesday as well. I am realizing the patience of God, His love toward me, His patience with me. I hope I am able to reflect that more as I practice embracing all.

— Matt, reminiscing about his time spent in the inner city with Mission Year



Are you tempted to stop loving today? For whatever reason, you are tired, hurt, angry or just done. This is a good time to retreat. Retreat is very different than quitting. It is taking intentional time away from people to be with Jesus. In order to continue loving over a long time, we have to pace ourselves. Take some extended time today to simply be with Jesus. Read more in your Bible than usual. Sit quietly with some praise music. Go for a walk and drink in the beauty of God's creation. Find a place where you will not be interrupted and receive the persevering love of Jesus today. Let him fill you up so that you can go back out and love some more.

# day fifty

## MAKE MEMORIES



### *Stop*

Take 2 deep breaths. Raise your hands up high and say a simple prayer: "I worship you, God." Lower your hands and bow your head. Sit in silence for 2 minutes.



### *Think*

An entire industry sprang up over the last two decades dedicated wholly to preserving memories—scrapbooking. Mothers especially have snapped and scrapped family pictures celebrating the growth and shared experiences of individual families. People grow closer to one another as they spend time together doing memorable things. We do this quite naturally with our families, but the same principle can apply to those we desire to connect with at a deeper level.

One of my most precious memories is when a friend and I took on the crazy idea of introducing our new immigrant friends to Lake Michigan. We loaded up 2 tour buses and a van with people of all ages so they could experience one of our favorite places. The grandmas and grandpas could not speak even one word of English, but the awe and wonder as they spotted that lake for the first time became a lifelong memory for all of us. Finally convincing a shy woman to roll up her pant legs and walk along the water with me until we both were more soaked than we planned. Priceless. We still don't speak the same language but we share a memory.



Make a memory with someone new. Sit down with a blank paper and pen. List five free places or activities in your city or area that you might enjoy. Now write down five people that you might consider “other” that you don’t know very well but would like to know better. Choose one place and one person and plan a time to visit that place with that person. Then next week choose another place and another person. Make memories!

# now what?

50 Days is only the beginning to a lifelong pursuit of loving our neighbors. To continue to be challenged in this journey, we recommend you read one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) with this Embrace All Love One framework.

As you read, answer the following questions:

- 1) Who is Jesus interacting with in this passage?
- 2) Historically, what place in society did this person hold? What was their typical relationship to the Jewish people? (A study Bible or Bible Dictionary would be helpful for finding this information.)
- 3) What did Jesus say?
- 4) What did Jesus do?

“To follow Jesus means that we can’t separate what Jesus is saying from what Jesus is doing.” —Eugene Peterson

Then, take some time to prayerfully think through these personal application questions.

- 1) Who are my \_\_\_\_\_?
- 2) How can I follow Jesus’ example in what I say?
- 3) How can I follow Jesus’ example in what I do?
- 4) Turn your learning into prayer and practice.

Here is an example:

Luke 5:12-16 “Jesus Cleanses A Leper”

1. A man covered with leprosy. Someone who bowed his face to the ground and begged Jesus to make him clean.
2. Lepers were outcasts. Often they were not allowed to even live in the city but were forced to live outside of it. No one would touch them. Leviticus 13 and 14 outline the many rules Jews were to follow to stay away from lepers.
3. Jesus said, “I do choose. Be made clean...Go and show yourself to the priest, and as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.”
4. Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and healed him.

When the crowds started to follow him even more, he withdrew to deserted places and prayed.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. In my life, homeless men and women are like lepers.
2. I am intrigued by Jesus' words, "I do choose." It was in response to the leper saying "if you choose," but it makes me realize that I have a choice in my interactions with people. I can often feel pressured to do and not to do things, but the pressures from the fear inside me or the pressures from the demands outside me do not have to make the choice for me. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I can choose my words and my actions.
3. I want to respond, not just politely but genuinely and generously to those who request help.
4. Prayer: Lord, help me to have real conversations with those in need. Help me to look at them, really look at them and not avert my eyes. Help me, even when I cannot heal them, to give them the respect and honor they deserve. And when I have loved fully, remind me to take time away from other people to be with you. Help me to do this regularly and not just when I am exhausted.  
Practice: Today I will slow down and thoughtfully choose my words and actions with others.

We pray, just as Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:14-21 for the believers at Ephesus, for each of you as you continue to pursue a life of love for your neighbor.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.