



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 17 Growing in Love

Day One

Love is More Than a Feeling

In Lesson 16: *Growing in Faith*, we learned that faith is belief based on the reliability of the one trusted. For the Christian, faith is an active trust and confidence in God. It specifically means placing our trust and confidence in Jesus Christ, God's Son, as Lord and Savior.

Faith is not static—it grows as we learn to rely on God more fully in every area of life. Love, likewise, is not static. Our capacity to love increases as we recognize and embrace God's unfailing love. Faith means trusting in *His love* rather than relying solely on our emotions. This does not mean our experiences of God's love are unemotional or impersonal—they can be deeply moving and expressive. However, we are called to live by faith, not by feelings.

Definitions: *Emotion* is a natural, instinctive state of mind arising from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others. *Feeling* is an emotional state or reaction; it can also refer to a belief, especially one that is vague or irrational.

Sometimes our feelings do not match reality. We may not feel loved, valued, or even seen by God, yet through *faith in Jesus Christ*, we become confident that we *are* loved, valued, and seen by Him. A helpful reminder is this: faith trumps feelings.

In Lesson 17, the final lesson of Unit 4, we will focus on love—the most powerful and influential of human emotions. While love often stirs deep feelings, it is ultimately a choice and an action, grounded in faith. Remember, love grows best in the fertile soil of faith.

The apostle John helps us understand what it truly means to love God—not merely through emotion, but through obedience and trust. As you read 1 John 5:3–5, notice how love, faith, and victory are deeply connected in the life of a disciple of Christ.

Read 1 John 5:3–5 and answer questions 1–3:

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5:3–5

1. How is our love for God expressed (v. 3)?
2. Why are God's commands described as "not burdensome" (vv. 3–4)?
3. How does faith in Jesus lead to victory over the world (vv. 4–5)?

Both the Old and New Covenants call for obedience. Under the New Covenant, disciples overcome evil through faith in Christ and by relying on His Spirit to empower us to live in obedience. We trust Jesus to help us follow God's commands, and our obedience becomes an expression of our love for God. We do not depend on emotions or feelings to love and obey—we depend on faith in Jesus Christ.

Obedience is not burdensome when it flows from a personal devotion to and communion with God. As we spend time with God and His Word, we are shaped and matured in His ways, yearning for His will. Obedience forms us into disciples after God's own heart—those who do everything He desires (Acts 13:22).

God desires us to be holy—sacred and set apart. By obeying God and His Word, we separate ourselves from sin. Scripture provides clear instruction on God's standard of righteousness—what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, we must examine any sinful habits or addictions that might hinder our love walk. In Christ Jesus our Lord, we are called to be vigilant in casting off these destructive patterns and walking in newness of life.

Not only are we called to cast off sinful habits and inappropriate behaviors, but we are also called to replace them with godly habits and loving actions. This kind of transformation is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we rely on Him, He empowers us to exchange sinful patterns for holy practices—He is always ready to help when we ask.

True fulfillment comes only from being filled with God and aligned with His purposes. We were created by Him to find our satisfaction in Him alone. Everything else ultimately leaves us empty.

In Matthew 12, after some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus for a sign to prove Himself, He responded with a parable about an impure spirit that leaves a person but later returns, bringing even more spirits with it. Jesus used this story to illustrate the spiritual condition of their ancestors—and to warn that rejecting Him would result in an even worse state.

This parable reaches across time and still speaks powerfully to us today. If we are disobedient and not truly born again, we risk falling completely under the control of the enemy. Without Jesus dwelling in us through His Holy Spirit, we have no defense against Satan's attacks.

In Jewish belief, arid or desert places were often thought to be the dwelling places of evil spirits—unclean, desolate regions removed from God's presence. So when Jesus described an impure spirit wandering through such places and then returning to a person, His audience would

have understood this as a warning about the restless and destructive nature of demons. The real danger came when the spirit found the person's inner life "swept clean" but still empty—without God's presence. This made them vulnerable to even greater spiritual ruin. Jesus was warning that outward reform without inward transformation leads to a far worse condition.

Read Matthew 12:43–45 and answer questions 4–8:

"When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation." Matthew 12:43–45

4. According to Jesus, what happens when an evil spirit leaves a person but later returns and finds the "house" (life) unoccupied (v. 45)?
5. What do you think Jesus means when He describes the house (person) as unoccupied (v. 44)?
6. How does this parable warn against relying on outward behavior change without true inward transformation through faith in Christ?
7. What does this passage teach us about the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, rather than simply removing sinful habits or influences from our lives?
8. In what ways does Jesus' warning challenge you personally—and how might it shape the way you disciple others?

When an army occupies a region, it controls that territory for its own objectives. Likewise, when a house is occupied, someone lives there and uses it for their purposes. So it is with our lives as a spiritual house.

This is the heart of Jesus' warning in Matthew 12: the critical issue is whether or not God's Spirit is dwelling within a person. If He is not, the soul remains unprotected—an empty house vulnerable to invasion. Evil spirits, finding no divine presence or resistance, can return and take control, establishing their influence once again. An unguarded and spiritually empty life becomes a target for the enemy's destructive plans.

But when the Holy Spirit dwells within us, He not only protects us—He fills us. He does not just defend against evil; He transforms us with love. Not a fragile, sentimental love, but a steadfast, strong, and dependable love that flows from the very heart of God.

Read Romans 5:5 and answer questions 9–13:

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:5

9. Who pours love into the hearts of believers?

10. By what means is God's love poured into our hearts?

11. Do you believe God has poured out His love into your heart by the Holy Spirit? Yes No
(Underline One) Explain your answer:

12. What gives *you* confidence that you can love God and love your neighbor?

13. In what ways do faith and love work together in the life of a believer?

Action Step

14. Memorize Romans 5:5 and recite to your discipleship team.

Scripture tells us that in Jesus Christ, God has poured out His love into our hearts. God the Father and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and love through us. Romans 5:5 is a powerful faith statement—one that calls us to place our confidence in what God has declared in His Word. God *is* love, and by His Spirit, His love now lives within us.

Romans 5:5 is one of my favorite verses because it answers a personal prayer—the desire to become a more loving person. By faith, we receive God's love, and by that same faith, we are empowered to love Him and to love others. Love is not something we can create or manufacture on our own—it comes from God alone. Whatever our background, history, or current situation, each one of us has the same invitation: to receive and share God's love through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

However, we also have an enemy who works relentlessly to distort and diminish the gift of love God has given us. The devil—or one of his demons (evil spirits)—may whisper lies such as: *No one cares about you. Your parents didn't love you. Even God doesn't love you. You don't love anyone. There's no such thing as love.*

Demons may also try to convince you that you are incapable of love, planting thoughts like: *You're selfish. You don't care about anyone but yourself. You'll never be a good disciple because you don't truly love others. You can't love, so why even try?*

Satan wants to block your faith by feeding you lies. When you begin to believe those lies instead of holding fast to God's truth, your walk with Him becomes disrupted. You may find yourself spiritually stuck or unable to function as God intends. That is dysfunction.

In those moments, love is hindered. Faith weakens, and instead of trusting what God says, you start listening to accusations. That is exactly where the enemy wants you—confused, discouraged, and disconnected from God's love.

But the good news is—we are not left to fight these lies alone. God's Word says His love has already been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not just place love in us—He grows it. As we walk with Him daily, surrendering our thoughts, words, and actions, we begin to grow in love. Love is not just a feeling—it is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). And like any fruit, it develops through time, care, and practice.

15. Read and meditate on the following ways to grow in love through the Holy Spirit. Which one are you most drawn to? Which is most challenging? How is the Spirit leading you to love?

Growing in Love Through the Holy Spirit

(1) Remain in Christ (John 15:4–5): Just as branches must stay connected to the vine to bear fruit, we must remain in close fellowship with Jesus. Abiding in Him allows His love to continually flow through us, nourishing and shaping our character.

(2) Receive God's Love Daily (1 John 4:19): We love because He first loved us. Time in prayer, worship, and Scripture helps us stay rooted in God's love, giving us the strength to love others—even when it is difficult.

(3) Walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 22–23): Love is the first fruit of the Spirit. As we yield to His leading in daily decisions, attitudes, and actions, He cultivates and matures love in us—not just as emotion, but as Christlike action.

(4) Obey God's Word (John 14:21): Obedience deepens our love. As we follow His commands—especially to love others as He has loved us—our practice of love becomes more authentic and sacrificial.

(5) Practice Love in Action (1 Corinthians 13): Love grows through practice. Serving others, showing patience, forgiveness, and kindness—even when it costs us—builds spiritual strength and reflects Christ to the world.

(sincerely)6) Pursue Holiness (Hebrews 12:14): As we strive to live in peace and purity, the Spirit deepens our love for both God and people.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #1–15 with your discipleship team.

—End Day One—

Day Two

Love Other Ethnic Groups

Building loving relationships with people different from us can be difficult. We tend to gravitate toward those who are similar and withdraw from those who are not. But this is not God's design—He calls us to sincerely love and care for everyone.

As disciples of Christ, we must build relationships on two foundational truths:

- (1) God created every person in His image
- (2) God loves every person.

The term “race” has traditionally been used to group people by shared physical traits. These classifications have varied over time. For example, in the 19th century, some anthropologists and biologists divided the human race into broad categories like Asian, Black, and White.¹

Today, the trend is shifting toward the term ethnic groups, which refers to people who share a common cultural background or ancestry. Globally, there are more than 5,000 ethnic groups.

Definition: *Ethnicity* is the state of belonging to a social group with a shared national or cultural tradition.

While some scientists still refer to race based on physical traits, many now agree that race has no true biological basis. All humans belong to the same species—*Homo sapiens*—and are about 99.99% genetically identical.² Race, then, is largely a social construct shaped by perception, not science. The Bible agrees: there is only one human race, descended from Adam and Eve.

The harmful side of racial classification is racism—the belief that one race is superior to another, often expressed through prejudice or discrimination. Racism is not limited to one group. People of all races and ethnicities can fall into the trap of favoring those who are similar while avoiding or mistreating those who appear different.

Prejudice is *not* always based on skin color. It can also stem from differences in religion, politics, nationality, language, income level, or even physical or mental health. Sadly, the effects of prejudice go far beyond personal bias—they have shaped history in devastating ways.

“Race violence in the twentieth century became so widespread that a new term was created to describe it. The word ‘genocide’ was coined in 1944. It comes from ‘genos,’ which is the Greek word for race, and ‘cide,’ which in Latin means killing. Down through the centuries, fairly

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_\(human_categorization\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(human_categorization)) (accessed 4/16/2016). Anthropologists are people who study human societies, cultures, and how they develop. Biologists are scientists who studies living things.

² Ibid.

simple and standard racist attitudes have resulted in countless wars, race violence, small and large-scale atrocities, and massive deaths—a pattern which continues today.”³

Definition: *Ethnic cleansing* is the forced removal of an ethnic or religious group from a specific area, often through violence, intimidation, or displacement.

Around the world, ongoing ethnic cleansing, genocide, and racial tension have left deep and lasting wounds. Here are three disturbing examples:

(1) The Armenian Genocide: “Beginning in 1915, ethnic Armenians living in the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire were rounded up, deported and executed on orders of the government. The combination of massacres forced deportation marches and deaths due to disease in concentration camps is estimated to have killed more than 1 million ethnic Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks between 1915 and 1923.

(2)The Holocaust: “After coming to power in 1933, Germany’s Nazi Party implemented a highly organized strategy of persecution, murder and genocide aimed at ethnically “purifying” Germany, a plan Hitler called the “Final Solution”. Six million Jews and five million Slavs, Roma, disabled, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, and political and religious dissidents were killed during the Holocaust.

(3) The Rwandan Genocide: “Civil war broke out in Rwanda in 1990, exacerbating tensions between the Tutsi minority and Hutu majority. In 1994, returning from a round of talks, Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down outside of the country’s capital, Kigali. Habyarimana’s death provided the spark for an organized campaign of violence against Tutsi and moderate Hutu civilians across the country. Approximately 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates were slaughtered in a carefully organized program of genocide over 100 days, making history as the quickest killing spree the world has ever seen.”⁴

This evil finds its ultimate source in Satan and his army of demons. They are the true enemy, working through unbelievers and captives to stir up fear, pride, unforgiveness, and hatred. But disciples of Christ are not immune—we, too, can be tempted in this area.

That is why each of us bears a personal responsibility to examine our own hearts. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must be willing to recognize where we have contributed to ethnic prejudice—whether through personal bias, avoidance, careless words, or silent indifference.

16. Do you think God is willing to forgive the perpetrators of genocide? Yes | No (Underline One) Explain your answer:

³ Racism and Genocide by Rayni Joan: <http://www.keypubs.com/keypubs/keypubs-racism-and-genocide.htm> (accessed 6/14/2016).

⁴ http://endgenocide.org/learn/past_genocides/?id=gadex&gelid=Cj0KEQjwh428BRCnvcyI-5nqjY4BEiQAijebwmN2MfATU5McJmgWRfiakQpIFh1xu3WqHLKgwSE2kPkaAnrM8P8HAQ (accessed 4/16/2016).

In the eighth century BC, Assyria was *the* evil empire—bent on war and known for legendary cruelty. They massacred entire villages and piled up their victims' heads outside city walls as a warning. God called the prophet Jonah to go to Assyria's capital, Nineveh, and preach against its wickedness. But Jonah did not want this brutal enemy to be forgiven, so he ran. After being swallowed by a great fish, repenting, and being vomited onto dry land, Jonah obeyed. He went to Nineveh, warned them of God's coming wrath—and these violent people listened and repented.

17. Read Jonah 3:10. Did God forgive the Ninevites after they repented? Yes | No (Underline One)

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. Jonah 3:10

18. Read Jonah 4:1–2. How does Jonah describe God?

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Jonah 4:1–2 (Cf. Exodus 34:6–7.)

19. Read John 3:16. Is God still gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity? Yes | No (Underline One)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Jesus died to save all—those hurt and those who hurt. Even in death, He showed godly love. We must forgive those who hurt us.

20. Read Luke 23:34. What did Jesus say as He was nailed to wooden beams?

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Luke 23:34

If you belong to a minority ethnic group within a population, you have likely experienced some form of discrimination. This can happen in the workplace, a club, prison, sports team, neighborhood, or broader society.

Older Americans remember the Jim Crow laws and racial segregation in effect from 1874–1975. After slavery was abolished, many former white slave owners refused to live or work as equals with their former slaves. This led to the "separate but equal" policy in the South, where Black

and White Americans were required to use separate facilities—including schools, buses, and even water fountains.⁵

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. observed, “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.” While much has changed since then, much still remains the same. Historically, most American churches have remained largely separated along ethnic lines. However, recent studies show some progress. As of 2020, about 16 percent of Christian churches in the U.S. are considered racially diverse—defined as having at least 20 percent of their members from a different racial or ethnic background than the majority.⁶

Though this marks significant growth from previous decades—when that number was only around 5 to 7.5 percent—the vast majority of churches still reflect a single dominant ethnic group.⁷ True unity in the body of Christ requires ongoing humility, intentional relationships, and a commitment to reflect heaven’s diversity here on earth.

While “racism” has historically impacted ethnic minorities, such as African Americans in the US and other countries, the pendulum seems to be swinging in the other direction. Increasingly, White individuals are experiencing hostility or exclusion because of their skin color. This too is a distortion of God’s intent. Racism in any form—whether rooted in historical oppression or modern resentment—is sin. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to reject all partiality and reflect the love, forgiveness, and unity of Christ to every person, regardless of background.

21. Why do you think the church remains divided along ethnic or cultural lines?

There may be many answers to this question, but the important point is to recognize that divisions exist and persist within the church. If the body of Christ remains separated, how can we expect the world around us to be any different? True fellowship and unity start with us—His disciples. We are called to work, play, and worship together in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Read Romans 12:16–17 and answer questions 22–24:

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. Romans 12:16–17 (Harmony in this context is having the same mindset or living in unity of thought.)

22. How are we to live with one another (v. 16)?

⁵ The Social Welfare History Project: <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/eras/civil-war-reconstruction/jim-crow-laws-and-racial-segregation/> (accessed 4/16/2016).

⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/study-multiracial-churches-are-growing-but-racial-unity-may-be-elusive/2020/11/13/d688163a-25b6-11eb-8672-c281c7a2c96e_story.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 5/16/2025).

⁷ 5 Ways to Make your Racially Divided Church More Diverse: <http://racelrelations.about.com/od/diversitymatters/a/RacialSegregationinChurch.htm> (accessed 4/16/2025).

23. What should our state of mind be and who should we be willing to associate with (v. 16)?

24. Do we repay evil for evil (v. 17)? Yes | No (Underline One)

If we are unwilling to associate with people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, we are showing partiality and prejudice. We may see others as beneath us or unworthy of our attention—or simply fear how our associations might affect our reputation.

Sometimes, entire ethnic or cultural groups are viewed as enemies. This may come from painful experiences, media messages, or historical wounds. When a crime involves people from different backgrounds, Satan often plants the “all” lie—that all people from that group are bad or untrustworthy.

Do not believe the devil’s lies. In every community, there are both good and bad individuals. As Christ’s ambassadors, we are not called to avoid the “bad” but to reach them. Jesus came for the lost. As His disciples, we are to be fishers of people—including those we might want to avoid.

We must pray, share the gospel, and live a life of love. As followers of Christ, we cannot afford to give in to sinful assumptions, imaginations, or feelings.

Read Luke 6:27 and answer questions 25–26:

*“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Luke 6:27–28*

25. Suppose someone truly despises you because of your ethnicity and considers you an enemy. How are you to treat that person?

26. How did our model, Jesus Christ, treat His enemies (See Romans 5:7–10)?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #16–26 with your discipleship team.

Action Steps

27. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you honestly review your life. Have you ever avoided, judged, or hurt someone because they were from a different ethnic group or cultural background?

28. Confess any sins the Lord reveals from question 27, and ask Jesus to help you love and value people of all ethnicities and backgrounds the way He does.

—End Day Two—

Day Three
Defining Love

Before the apostle Paul wrote his letters, the Greek word *agape* was rarely used. Paul gave it rich meaning by describing a uniquely Christian kind of love—one that is not based on emotions or the worthiness of the person loved, but on God’s sacrificial love shown in Christ. This self-giving love comes from God (Romans 5:8) and is made possible in us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).⁸

Read Colossians 3:12–14 and answer questions 29–31:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love [agape], which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:12–14 (To clothe yourselves means to deliberately adopt and live out these virtues as part of your identity in Christ, like putting on a garment each day.)

29. As a disciple of Christ—God’s chosen, holy, and dearly loved—how should you treat all people, even those from different ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds (v. 12)?

30. How do you respond to those who display prejudice or discrimination toward you (v. 13)?

31. What quality “binds them [virtues] all together in perfect unity” (v. 14)?

Love weaves together our compassion, humility, gentleness and patience, empowering us to forgive and restore relationships. Guided by that love, we now turn to 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 and consider how God calls us into the ministry of reconciliation to foster unity.

32. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–19. What can *you* do to help bridge ethnic and cultural divisions and replace them with harmony?

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 (Reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship.)

The ministry of reconciliation flows from God’s love. As Jesus said in John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Since we have been reconciled to God through Christ, we are now called to help others experience that same restoration.

⁸ Trent C. Butler, editor, *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 897.

The Bible speaks of divine, romantic, familial, and brotherly love—all rooted in God. Made in His image (Genesis 1:27), we share His capacity to love. But only through Jesus and the Holy Spirit can we live out godly love—pure, holy, and self-giving.

Read 1 John 4:9–10 and answer questions 33–35:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9–10

33. How does God show His love among us (v. 9)?

34. How do *you* allow Jesus to live and love through you?

35. What is love (v. 10)?

The New Testament defines God’s love by pointing to Christ’s atoning⁹ sacrifice. This brings us back to the New Covenant of love from Lesson 6—the covenant sealed by Jesus’ blood on the cross, securing every spiritual blessing for believers (see Lesson 6, pages 23–24).

Jesus loves you with a pure and holy love. Though He did not *feel* like being spit upon, or endure the excruciating pain of the cross—bearing the full weight of God’s wrath for humanity (Mark 14:38)—His love for the Father and for us moved Him to go willingly—even joyfully—to His death (Hebrews 12:2). As Jesus modeled for us, Christian love is not driven by emotions but on faith in God’s unchanging character.

36. Read Romans 5:8. How does God show His love for you?

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Jesus’ death is the ultimate expression of God’s love, but His love was also displayed through His compassion and healing throughout His earthly ministry. The Triune God does not change (Malachi 3:6); the same love and mercy Jesus showed then, He still offers today. Even when we cannot see Him working, we trust by faith that He is near. His love is constant and unfailing.

⁹ Ibid., 128. “Atonement, meaning reconciliation, was associated with sacrificial offerings to remove the effects of sin and in the New Testament, refers specifically to the reconciliation between God and humanity effected by the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.”

This same trust in God's steadfast love is echoed in the life of David. He wrote Psalm 52 during a time when his life was in danger. Doeg, a servant of King Saul, had reported David's location to the king—who, driven by jealousy, was actively seeking to kill him.

Yet, in the face of this threat, David writes that he is *like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God*. This simile—a comparison using vivid imagery—conveys strength, stability, and fruitfulness. The olive tree, long-living and deeply rooted, symbolizes enduring faith and divine provision.

Read Psalm 52:8–9 and answer questions 37–39:

But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. ⁹ For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will hope in your name, for your name is good. Psalm 52:8–9

37. What does David trust in (v. 8)?

38. What does David hope in (v. 9b)?

39. Will you place your trust in God's unfailing love and hope in His name? Yes No (Underline One) Explain your answer:

David is saying that, like a tree, he is firmly rooted in God and never without resources. His roots reach deeply into the source of life—God Himself. Because he remains open to God and His Word, David continues to grow strong and bear fruit. His enemies cannot uproot him, for his confidence is anchored in the Lord.

Though he faces life-threatening danger, David boldly declares his unshakable trust in God's love and goodness. He expresses his faith publicly, praising God among His people—revealing the strength of a heart that draws its hope from the character and name of God.

Action Step

40. Sincerely pray the following prayer. I have prayed. Yes | No (Underline One)

Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit,

You are good. No matter what is happening in my life, I declare You are righteous, holy, and faithful. You are worthy of unwavering trust and confidence.

I pray to always trust in Your unfailing love and place my hope in You. No matter what circumstances arise, may I continually praise and proclaim Your goodness. Amen.

Under Roman emperors, Nero (54–68 AD) and Domitian (81–96 AD), Christians were mistreated and martyred at an alarming rate. First John was written around 85 AD, during this intense period of persecution. Considering the hatred and suffering endured by both the author and his readers, it is striking that the apostle John writes not about vengeance—but about love.

Like David's example in the Psalms, John does not allow his enemies or his circumstances to shape his response. Instead, he places his trust in God. He is rooted in Christ and grounded in His teaching.

Read 1 John 4:11–13 and answer questions 41–43:

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 1 John 4:11–13

41. Why should we love one another (v. 11)?

42. How is God's love made complete in us (v. 12)?

43. How do we know God lives in us (v. 13)?

Since the writing of 1 John, countless testimonies have emerged of extraordinary love rooted in Christ. Such love does not come from human strength but from knowing the source of true love—God Himself. One powerful example is Mamie Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till.

When asked if she harbored bitterness toward two white men, or toward whites generally, for the brutal murder of her son in 1955. This is what she said:

It certainly would be unnatural not to [hate them], yet I'd have to say I'm unnatural....The Lord gave me shield; I don't know how to describe it myself....I did not wish them dead. I did not wish them in jail. If I had to, I could take their four little children—they each had two—and I could raise those children as if they were my own and I could have loved them....I believe the Lord meant what He said, and try to live according to the way I've been taught.¹⁰

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #29–43 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

¹⁰ New Interpreter's Bible, Volume Twelve, p. 434. Quoted in Studs Terkel, *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession* (New York: New Press, 1992) 21–22.

Day Four
Loving Others

At the end of Day Three, we shared the story of Mamie Mobley, a disciple of Christ who lived out the call to love and forgive. Today, we look at another powerful example of love triumphing over unforgiveness and prejudice.

On the night of August 21, 2015, a tragic accident claimed the lives of Bobby and Pam Clark. They were known for their devotion to Jesus and service to others. The other driver involved in the accident, C.J. Martin—a Black pastor—was devastated. Overwhelmed with grief, he also feared racial prejudice would further intensify an already heartbreaking situation, since the Clarks were white.

Remarkably, Bobby and Pam’s daughter, Robin Quesinberry, reached out to Martin just two days after the accident. She extended forgiveness and, two weeks later, invited his family to dinner. Robin understood the accident was not an act of malice. When the media harshly criticized Martin, she publicly defended him, saying, “This was not any kind of malicious act. If you have anything to say about Mr. Martin, just let it be a prayer for him and his family.”¹¹

Bobby’s brother, J.T. Clark, initially wrestled with anger and grief. At the time, he was not a Christian. But through this tragedy, God began to soften his heart and transform his life. In a surprising act of grace, J.T. later appeared in court to pay Martin’s fine—an act that led the judge to reduce the charges against him.¹²

Today, J.T. Clark, C.J. Martin, and Pastor Mike Price—who was the Clarks’ pastor—lead Bible studies together and serve side by side in ministry. What began in deep sorrow has grown into a powerful testimony of Christlike love—marked by forgiveness, unity, and racial reconciliation.

Their story illustrates the kind of sacrificial love that grows not from emotion, but from obedience to God and the work of His Spirit. It reflects the very definition of love given in Scripture—a love that gives, forgives, and lays itself down for others.

Read 1 John 3:16 and answer questions 44–45:

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. 1 John 3:16

44. How do we know what love is?

45. Have you ever been able to love someone with Jesus’ kind of sacrificial love? Yes | No (Underline One) If yes, please share the story:

¹¹ <https://coffeehousewriters.com/story-behind-my-brothers-crossing/> (accessed 5/21/2025).

¹² Ibid.

We may not all be called to physically die for someone else, but we are called to lay down our lives in whatever ways the Spirit leads. This could mean sacrificing our time, comfort, resources, or personal desires for the sake of others. God has a unique purpose for each of us, and we must remain open and willing to follow His call. As we prepare our hearts to listen, let us consider how we can put others before ourselves in practical, everyday ways. The following Scripture reminds us that true love is shown not just in words, but through action and sincerity.

46. Read 1 John 3:17–18. What are some ways, other than physical death, you can lay down your life?

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? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:17–18

One believer in Africa was raising six children on a monthly income of only ten dollars. He became deeply concerned when he realized that many children in his village were going blind from a disease that could easily be prevented with medicine—just fifty cents per dose.

He began to pray, asking God to send a wealthy person to help provide the funds for the medicine. But no one ever came. As he continued to pray, the Lord impressed upon his heart that *he* should be the one to give. With six children to care for and such a limited income, it seemed impossible. Yet, after much prayer, he and his family decided to buy enough medicine each month to help at least one child.

Their faith and obedience put love into action. For seven years, they continued to purchase the medicine month by month. As a result, 84 children were spared from blindness—because one family chose to sacrificially love others.¹³

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a and answer questions 47–51:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:1–8a

47. In what ways does the story of the African believer reflect the love described here?

48. Why do *you* not delight in evil but rejoice with the truth (v. 6)?

¹³ http://givewithjoy.org/true_stories.htm (accessed 6/15/2016). This is a true story in a series of radio spots by Brian Kluth.

49. Which characteristic of love do you find most challenging to live out—and why?

Action Steps

50. Set aside time each day this week to pray through 1 Corinthians 13:1–8a, asking God to shape your heart and actions according to His definition of love. Also, pray through it together at your next discipleship meeting. I have prayed. Yes | No (Underline One)

51. Prayerfully consider how you can put love into action this week by doing one small, sacrificial act for someone in need. Write a few bullet points of your experience.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #44–49 and Action Steps #50–51.

Paul offers a practical description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, helping us understand how love should be lived out in everyday situations. Though the words are simple, living them out is often difficult. That is why we must rely on the Holy Spirit—so that our love does not fail.

Through the Spirit, we are made one with the Father and the Son (John 17:17–23). God’s Spirit dwells within born-again believers, giving us unity of life, purpose, and love. As a result, the body of Christ—the Church—shares in the same divine nature that exists between the Father and the Son.

Just as the Father sent Jesus into the world out of love and purpose, so Jesus sends His disciples with that same unity of love and mission. Christ’s divine mission was to make the Father known—and that mission now belongs to us as well.

Christian unity and love are nothing short of a moral miracle—evidence of God’s power to overcome the natural resistance of the human will. This kind of love is often more compelling than physical miracles, which only override nature. That is why division and hostility among believers are so damaging—they hinder the world from seeing the truth of Christ.¹⁴

When the Church is marked by strife, bitterness, or disunity, it clouds the witness of the gospel. The world takes notice when those who claim to follow Jesus fail to reflect His love. Instead of drawing others in, our lack of love pushes them away. Our relationships within the body of Christ should be a living testimony of the transforming power of God’s love—a love that builds bridges, heals wounds, and fosters peace.

Loving others is essential to growing in love—it is, after all, the second greatest commandment. Yet even more foundational is loving God. From our love for Him flows the desire and strength to love and serve others. While the commands to “love God” and “love your neighbor” may be familiar, they always deserve fresh attention and renewed passion in our hearts.

¹⁴ *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, s.v. “John 17:21.” Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/john/17-21.htm> (accessed 5/23/2025)

Read Matthew 22:37–40 and answer questions 52–57:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:36–40

Note: *Neighbor* refers to anyone in need, not just those close to us. *The Law and the Prophets* was a common way of referring to the entire Old Testament, which was the complete Scripture during Jesus’ time.

52. According to the first and greatest commandment, how are you to love God?

53. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind?

54. How can *you* increase your love for God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

55. According to the second great commandment, how do you love others?

56. How can *you* increase your love for other people?

57. Memorize Matthew 22:36–40.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #52–56 and memory verses #57 with your discipleship team.

Love is the foundation of our faith—it is the starting point for every believer. Jesus’ words about loving God and loving our neighbor have been recorded in the New Testament to emphasize—*all of Scripture’s instruction concerns and depends on these two commands.*

This is not just a call to feel love, but to live it. It means putting God first in everything and seeing every person as someone worthy of compassion, respect, and grace. Love is not an abstract idea; it is the defining mark of a true disciple.

Rely on the Holy Spirit to help you live a life that expresses genuine love for God and for others. Let this love shape your thoughts, your decisions, and your relationships.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Love is Elementary

Love is not only basic to Christianity, it is the primary test of discipleship. Remember, a disciple is a student and follower of Christ. Following Jesus means a daily life of sacrificial love *in honor of God* and in support of others.

When we dishonor or disregard God, we fall short of loving Him with all our heart, soul, and mind. Love for God is not merely an emotion; it is expressed through reverence, obedience, and wholehearted devotion. Likewise, love for others must be rooted in the same kind of commitment and care, reflecting the love that Christ has shown to us.

The apostle Paul recognized the importance of love and prayed that the church in Ephesus would grasp how wide, long, high, and deep the love of Christ truly is. In this same prayer, he asked that they would be strengthened with power through the Spirit, rooted and established in love, and able to know this love that surpasses knowledge—so that they would be filled to the full measure of God.

Christ’s Spirit led Paul to write this prayer not only for the Ephesians, but for all believers—including you and me. This prayer seeks to shape our entire inner life, including our thoughts, desires, intellect, affections, and will—what the Bible calls our heart, soul, and mind. There is no part of our inner being that is outside the reach of God’s Spirit.

As we read this prayer, pay close attention: the Spirit of love is also the Spirit of power. God’s love and power enable us to live in intimate relationship with Him and to accomplish great works for His glory. The indwelling Spirit does not remove us from suffering or struggle, but He trains our hands for the battle and strengthens us for the journey.

Read Ephesians 3:16–21 and answer questions 58–62:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:16–21

58. What does Paul pray will happen in the “inner being” of the believer, and how is that connected to Christ dwelling in our hearts (vv. 16–17)?

59. What does it mean to be “rooted and established in love”? How does that foundation affect your relationship with God and others? (vv. 17–18)?

60. Paul prays that we would grasp the dimensions of Christ's love—how wide, long, high, and deep it is. What do these descriptions tell you about the nature of Christ's love (vv. 18–19)?

61. When believers know and take hold of the magnitude of Christ's love, what happens (v. 19)?

62. Why do Christ's disciples have hope of being filled with the fullness of God (v. 20)?

Only God can change or move hearts, so it makes perfect sense to ask Him to strengthen both ourselves and others in His love. When we walk in the fullness of God, we come to recognize that—*He is enough*. We do not need anything beyond Him. If and when God chooses to heal, provide, or bless us in specific ways, we receive those gifts with gratitude—but our lives are not built on what God gives. They are built on who God is. He alone is the fulfillment of our deepest needs.

When the apostle Paul prays for believers to be filled with all the fullness of God, he is proclaiming the powerful truth of the New Covenant. In Christ, we are invited to partake in His divine nature. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are empowered to communicate with God and to bear witness to others about Him. We are given grace to walk in love and to display the all the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

Love is the identifying mark or characteristic of a disciple of Christ (John 13:34–35). Love distinguishes Christ's followers from the world. May God mark us all with Jesus' sacrificial and perfect love.

One such man marked by love was William Wilberforce (1759–1833)—an abolitionist,¹⁵ politician, and writer. He reflected the love of Christ to thousands of people he would never meet. As a wealthy member of Parliament, he worked tirelessly for 23 years to end slavery in the United Kingdom. *Parliament* refers to the legislative body responsible for making laws in the UK.

In the late 1700s, during William Wilberforce's youth, the transatlantic slave trade was thriving. Each year, an estimated 35,000 to 50,000 Africans were forcibly taken from the region around the Gulf of Guinea and sold into slavery. While English traders played a significant role in transporting and profiting from the trade, they typically did not venture deep inland. Instead, African captives were often taken during conflicts between local tribes and then sold to European traders along the coast. The slave trade had become deeply entrenched in the global economy, with many influential figures defending it as essential to the prosperity of the West Indies and beyond. One publicist for the West Indies trade wrote, "The impossibility of doing without slaves in the West Indies will always prevent this traffic being dropped."¹⁶

¹⁵ Abolition refers to the official act of ending something—most notably, the abolition of slavery

¹⁶ Christian History: "William Wilberforce." *Christianity Today*.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/activists/william-wilberforce.html> (accessed 6/15/2016).

When God called William Wilberforce and a few others to confront the slave trade, they faced intense opposition. Many of his friends feared for his safety. Yet Wilberforce refused to let the issue fade. Over the years, he introduced eight bills to Parliament—all of which were soundly defeated. Finally, in 1807, after decades of tireless advocacy, the ninth bill passed, and the British Parliament officially abolished the transatlantic slave trade. Wilberforce lived to see this victory and died just days later, knowing the cause he had devoted his life to had prevailed.

Earlier William wrote, “This principle of love regulates the true Christian’s choice of companions and friends, where she is at liberty to make such a choice. It fills her with the desire to promote the physical well-being of all around her. Still more, it makes her feel compassion and an anxious concern for their spiritual welfare. If we feel indifference instead, this is one of the surest signs that our faith is weak or declining. Love brings our faith to life.”¹⁷

Wilberforce was a disciple of Christ. He led a disciplined life with the fruit of the Spirit. He was longsuffering as he persistently and tirelessly served in Parliament to free slaves. He loved those he knew and those he had never met. He loved by faithful action and self-control. Simply, he trusted and followed Jesus and never gave up.

63. How does the life of William Wilberforce inspire you to persevere and not give up, even when facing strong opposition?

64. Can others recognize that you are a follower of Christ by the way you show love (John 13:34–35)? Yes | No (Underline One) Explain your answer:

It is not always easy to love others. People can be impatient, hurtful, mean-spirited, and even dangerous. We might like to assume that those who act this way are not true believers—but the truth is, even Christians can display these behaviors. When we are disobedient or ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we are all capable of falling short. Recognizing our own weaknesses can help us extend patience and grace to others who also struggle.

65. Read Matthew 5:44–46? Why are we considered sons of our heavenly Father when we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? Matthew 5:44–46

The command to love your neighbor is not new; it was first given in Leviticus 19:18. However, the way Jesus calls us to love *is* new in its depth and scope. We are to love sacrificially and

¹⁷ Lon Fendall, *William Wilberforce: Abolitionist, Politician, Writer* (Uhrichsville, OH:: Barbour Publishing, 2002), 178.

without limits—using Christ’s own love for us as the standard. Jesus also makes it clear that our love should not be reserved for a select few. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33–37), He defines “neighbor” as everyone, regardless of social status, background, or ethnicity.

Loving others is not for cowards. It is not a frivolous and wimpy emotion. It takes courage and conviction to love as defined by Jesus’ life and death.

Read Ephesians 3:16–21 and answer questions 66–68:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:8–10

66. What does it mean to have a continuing debt to love one another (v. 8)?

67. How are the commandments summed up (v. 9)?

68. What is the fulfillment of the law (v. 10)?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #58–68 with your discipleship team.

Replace sin and old habits with the love of God and love for others. Love is *elementary*—the very foundation of spiritual growth and maturity. It is the fulfillment of the law and the basic building block of discipleship. Love well, and you will be an exceptional disciple of Christ.

—End Lesson 17 and the Disciple of Christ Study—

Congratulations on completing Unit 4: *Disciple of Christ*!

We pray that the lessons you have learned in this unit about living as a disciple of Christ and intentionally making disciples will remain with you always. May God empower you to lead others into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, His Son. We pray that you will be fruitful in multiplying disciples and leaders throughout all nations, all for the glory of God the Father. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Next—Lesson 1: Christ Makes God Known, Unit 5: Gospel of John

Rev 7/12/2025