



Lent 2010

Forty Days of Loving Prayer



Houghton Wesleyan Church

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Houghton, New York



Welcome to our 2010 Lenten spiritual adventure, Pray-Love-Act: Forty Days of Loving Prayer.

During these days, we encourage you to participate in these five disciplines. They are an opportunity to be stretched through this life-changing adventure.

Discipline #1: Participate in the daily devotional, "Loving Prayer" by Dr. Thomas Carruth. We invite you to join with other members of our congregation as we read the same Scriptures and devotional material.

Discipline #2: Read I John each day. Read and study the inside back page which has listed "What did Jesus ask us to do in love?"

Discipline #3: Become involved each day in the suggested acts of love. Don't just talk about love-live love by doing these specific acts. You'll be thankful that you did.

Discipline #4: Attend church each Sunday morning. Go expecting to meet Jesus and you will. It may be in the sermon, in the reading of the Scriptures, through the music, or through someone you talk to before or after the service, or in a Sunday School Class. May this discipline be a real delight for you as you experience Christ anew!

Discipline #5: Sign up and participate in the Prayer Vigil. You will find that this time you spend in prayer in the Prayer Room is life-transforming.

Each week of prayer vigil we are encouraging you to focus your prayers and love on different persons.

- Week 1: Loving Prayer for Ourselves
- Week 2: Loving Prayer for Our Family
- Week 3: Loving Prayer for Our Church
- Week 4: Loving Prayer for Our Neighbor
- Week 5: Loving Prayer for the Global Church
- Week 6: Loving Prayer for the World in Need



Day 1: Jesus becomes real through love

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, fill me with your love so that my mind may be enlightened and my eyes opened to the reality of your presence. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Luke 24: 14-53

The reality of the presence of Jesus Christ becomes our abiding experience when we accept His love for us and affirm our love for Him.

Jesus the Christ was made real to John because he accepted the love of Jesus and Jesus accepted the love of John. So, in the friendship of this union of love, it was revealed to John that this Jesus he saw and touched was the preexistent, living and eternal Divine Son of God. It was more than a mere intellectual acknowledgement: it was a deep inner knowledge of the spirit of John from the Spirit of Christ.

Through the enlightenment of love came the love insights into the true love nature of God. Thus John was able to write: "God is love." You can never see who Jesus really is until you love him. You can never understand the true nature of God until you love him and accept his love.

You can never really see people until you love them. When people see you and know you, do they believe that God is love?

I accept the love of Jesus so that I may love others into accepting his love.



Day 2: Living love in a world of hate

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep aflame in my heart the candle of love regardless of how dark grows the night of hate. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

Love always shines the brightest when the night of trouble, sorrow and hate seems the darkest. Did you ever hear a person say, "I didn't realize we had so many friends until we went through this trouble."

Once when I was being accused and persecuted, a loving friend wrote to me saying, "Your friends do not need an explanation and your enemies wouldn't believe one." When you are hated, you don't go around and try to find out why people hate you and then try to straighten out their thinking. This is impossible. Jesus was hated by many; yet he was the most lovable person who ever lived.

When hate defeats us, it is always from the inside. "You can hate me, and I may never know it, but it will ruin you." Young Christians, especially, struggle under the illusion that they can be nice and get along with everybody, and thus antagonize nobody. The passage of years will show the futility of such a dream.

The world is always antagonistic to the ideas and programs of God. The devil is very real. Hatred is more than disagreement; it can be the deepest disease of the human heart, and must be the most widespread of all sins. The Bible is very clear: we are to overcome evil with good, and we are to love our enemies. St. Paul said, "Love never fails."



Day 3: Our fellowship in His love

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me today to create a fellowship of love wherever I go. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Acts 2:1-4

A loving fellowship in the Lord Jesus is never accidental nor incidental. It is always the result of dedication, prayer, and a loving intention. It is first love from Christ, then a love for Christ, then a love for each other. It always comes in this order.

Do you love Christ enough to love people exactly as they are, without waiting for them to change into what you think they ought to be? If you do, you can begin now to be a part of a fellowship of love.

Do you love Christ enough to forgive people who are wrong without waiting for them to apologize? If you do, you can be an instrument of healing in a fellowship of continuing love.

Do you love Christ enough to respect the sincerity of others in a group when they disagree with you? If you do, then they may respect you and respond to your love. When we are most at home with others in a loving fellowship, then Christ is most at home in our fellowship of love.

Today I shall live all day in the fellowship of his love.



Day 4: Our joy through his love

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to radiate such happiness today that others will find your joy through my joy. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2, Philippians 2:1-8
Some one has said that a good way to spell JOY is to have Jesus on one side, you on the other side, and nothing in between.

What is the secret of the joy of Jesus? It was His perfect love. Jesus perfectly loved God his Father. He perfectly loved everybody. He perfectly loves you right now, just as you are.

Look at this perfect love of Jesus in contrast with perfect hate. Hate seeks to destroy. Love seeks to save. Hate was the serpent in Eden luring man away from God. Love is Christ on the cross reconciling man and woman with God.

Did you ever see a person walking down the street singing and whistling and saying, "Oh, I am so happy today, I just hate everybody?" No, and you never will. I can show you a lot of people who are filled with the joy of Jesus. They love everybody and they make others happy.

Why not sing today, "I've got the Joy, Joy, Joy down in my heart to stay."

Oh happy day that fixed my choice on thee, my Savior and my God! I will be happy in that choice all day.



Day 5: His light and his love

The Love Prayer: Lord of light and of love, shine in every area of my life until there is no darkness of evil anywhere in my whole personality. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-8

All physical life on earth, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, depends directly or indirectly on sunlight. All spiritual love life is dependent directly or indirectly on the light of God.

Just as the sun gives life and warmth to the green plants that grow in the soil, so does the light of God give life and warmth to the life of the Christian.

The life of love with God is essentially a constant exposure of a submitted and submissive soul to the total influence of God's light of love. We love because He first loved us, and because He loves us now, and because He will love us always.

The love light in our eyes, in the tone of our voice, in the touch of our helping hand, is nothing more than the reflection of His love in our hearts.

Jack Williamson said "Jesus Christ means for me the experience of conversion, resulting not from the absence of something, but from the presence of Someone."

Lord of light and love, reign in every hidden corner of my soul. Cleanse and polish all my actions and reactions until my whole nature reflects the love of God through the presence of Jesus Christ my Lord.



Day 6: When darkness veils his lovely face

The Love Prayer: Help us, our Father, to realize that when we are in the darkness, you are not in the distance, but are close beside us. Amen.

The Love Scripture: II Corinthians 4:8-18

Faith is one of love's strongest allies. Even when we cannot understand why the darkness of tragedy has overtaken us, we can still believe that God loves us.

The New Testament teaches us that bad things often happen to good people. So does the Book of Job. Loving God with all your heart does not give you an insurance policy against all suffering and hardship. It is in the midst of our suffering that the love of God may become most real and meaningful to us.

It is in the darkness of tragedy that often the love of God shines most brightly through us to bless and witness to others, and to let others bless and witness to us.

Remember, we can see the stars only in the blackness of the night. And we can see the love light of God best when all else is dark.

You are the candle of God's love. Let your love light shine in the darkness of the world so that others may know His love.

Daniel Lemons said "Since I have been converted through Jesus Christ, people are seen in a new and better perspective as objects of God's love."



Day 7: Walking in the light

The Love Prayer: Lord, help me to learn how to walk in the light of love with others in this life, that I may live in the light of love with others in eternity. Amen.

The Love Scripture: I John 1:6-10

If everybody with whom you live and whom you love remained as lovable in all their moments as they are in their most lovable moments, how easy it would be for us to keep walking together in love!

Walking together in the light of love constantly requires changing together in love and in life. So we learn that the love life of yesterday is never sufficient for the love walk today and today's will not be sufficient for tomorrow.

We do not always see the need of new love light simply by looking at each other. It is only as we walk in his light that we see our unlovely and unloving selves. It is through his inspiration that we want to keep in step with each other as we walk in love. And it is only with His power that we are able to walk constantly toward a better life.

Phil Wells said: "To have gone into the depths of sin and be retrieved by the power of God through salvation is my testimony."

Divine Father, we are so grateful that your light is always shining. We want to walk in the same light in which Jesus walked. Help us to be so faithful that every highway of life becomes a brightway of love that leads home to You. Amen.



Day 8: Our loving fellowship and his cleansing blood

The Love Prayer: Lord, let my daily life of fellowship with you keep my cleansing up to date. Amen.

The Love Scripture: James 4:1-10

Together in his love we have been cleansed; we are now being cleansed; and we shall be cleansed. This is the basic reason why we all need to be continually a part of the Body of Christ, the Church. When we live alone in selfishness and self-centeredness, we do not learn how much cleansing we need.

The wisest and most loving friends we have are those who love and accept us as we are, yet know how to tell us occasionally, in love, what is wrong with us, and then help us to do something about it.

We need to remember that the walking and the washing, the living and the loving, go along together. It is the person who doesn't keep their cleansing habits up to date that offends their friends. It is the Christian who doesn't keep their corporate love up to date that is not likely to keep their cleansing up to date.

Remember, we do not need to wash off the same dirt every day. Jesus can examine us and keep us cleansed daily from specific sins.

Jesus means a new start in life. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are becoming new.



Day 9: Self-deception and blind love

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth Thou hast for me. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-29

When a person can't see their own sins, there is something seriously wrong with their life of love. We are inclined to see only the sins that we want to see, and these are usually the sins of other people.

It is said that love is blind. The blind love we have for ourselves makes us blind to our faults. We simply don't want to know the ugly truth about ourselves. The sin of wanting to remain blind is one of the strange afflictions sin brings upon us.

Some people seem to think that if they just ignore their own sins, they will go quietly away. This is spiritual suicide. Forgotten sin does not mean forgiven sin. It should be forgotten only after it is forgiven.

David declared in Psalm 51, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

One of the greatest ways we can show our love for Jesus is to tell Him the whole truth about our sins so he can do for us all he wants to do, and that is to cleanse us from all sin. True love contains a basic honesty that is life-giving and life-sustaining.



Day 10: Christian love and Christian confession

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, I make my full confession to you and through you because I love you supremely and I accept your love. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Psalm 51:1-19 and James 5:16

One of the hardest things about confession of sin is not just the fact of the specific sin. Sometimes with embarrassment we have to admit that we have done wrong. Often the hardest part of confession is our reluctance to admit that we are the kind of person that would do such a terrible thing as sin. We do not want to admit that we sin because we are sinners.

God's love is revealed in his total concern. He wants not only to forgive the specific sin, but he wants to cure the condition that made sin possible.

The person who has the most delicate conscience about sin is the one who is most completely filled with the love of God.

One of the strange facts about love is that when we are closest to God we may feel the greatest need of confession.

One of the most heart-rending facts about sin is that it is not only violation of a law, but it is also a sin against the Person who loves us most. It is when we have wounded his love that we find we have the deepest motive for confession, and he has the deepest reason to forgive.

When you hurt someone you truly love, you do not have to work yourself up into a mood for confession. The knowledge we have sinned provides its own motive.



Day 11: Great is the faithfulness of God's love

The Love Prayer: Great is they faithfulness unto me, O Lord, and for this I am grateful. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Romans 5:1-8

The First Epistle of John teaches that God will do four things for us: (1) Be faithful to us. (2) Be just with us. (3) Forgive our sins. (4) Cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Love without faith in the one you love can be very disappointing. One thing that makes children love their parents is because they trust them, and have faith in the continuing love of the parents.

It is difficult for young Christians to realize that God loves them just as much when they are wrong as he does when they are right. His faithfulness does not depend on our righteousness any more than his love depends on our goodness.

The relationship that makes Christian life possible is the fact that God continues to cleanse us and love us. So great is his faithfulness!

Just as God continues to forgive, cleanse and love us, so we need to be merciful, forgiving and loving to those who hurt us and sin against us. The Lord's Prayer says "Forgive us ... as we forgive those ..."

Oh love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee.
I give Thee back the life love,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.



Day 12: The loving advocate

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, I am grateful that when I come to the ultimate moment of judgment when I shall need you most, that you will stand with me and plead my case. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Romans 6:1-23

The concept of one person standing with and for another person in the hour of judgment is a beautiful promise. Only Jesus Christ is qualified to be our advocate, for the following reasons:

1. He is the only One who can plead our case, for he has already paid the price on the cross for the sins we have committed.
2. Jesus is and always will be in perfect harmony with the Father. Therefore He is qualified before the Father's court to be our Advocate.
3. Jesus is more than our legal Advocate; he is our love Advocate. This is where the grace of God comes in and makes our forgiveness possible.
4. Jesus knows all about us. He does not have to review our case just before we are judged.
5. Jesus has gone on ahead for us, and has already forgiven us before we meet God in judgment. Because we have been born again through faith in Christ and in what he has done for us, our names are written in heaven.

If we let Christ stand with us and for us here in this life, he will stand with us before the judgment throne of God.



Day 13: Knowing one another in love

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to know that by your power it is possible for us to love everybody. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 3:34-38

Someone has said that the reason we do not love people is because we do not know them. Perhaps the opposite is also true: we do not know people because we do not love them. The way to know a person is to love them as they are until we can see the best in them and bring out the best in them.

The command Jesus gave for people to love each other was not simply a suggestion for our happiness; it is a necessity for personal and corporate living.

The whole genius of Christian democracy is based on mutual appreciation and mutual respect that finds its ultimate expression in Christian love. How else can we build a family, a community, a church, a nation, a world? Loving one another is more than sentimentality. It is an intelligent insight into human virtues and personal needs. All of us have good friends who have severe faults, but we love them anyway. We all have shortcomings that offend others, but need love. We cannot "love people" in a general way; we must always love each other as individuals.

We all need someone we can love and look up to at the same time. This is why there is virtue in having heroes for children and youth. The sort of person we look up to and love helps to determine what we become.

We become a part of everyone we have loved, and everyone we have loved becomes a part of us. To love everybody more doesn't mean we have to love anyone less!

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Day 14: Loving Jesus and living in victory

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, let me live today in the victory of your love in all my actions and reactions. Amen.

The Love Scripture: I Peter 3:7-11

The better I know Jesus, the more I love him,
and the more he inspires me.

He lifts me when I am lonely.

He leads me when I am lost.

He stoops to me when I stumble.

He remembers me when I forget him.

He goes with me wherever I go!

Therefore ...

He is Bread for my soul as I hunger for love.

He is Light for my steps as I stumble in darkness.

He is Strength for my will when I am tempted and tried.

He is Hope in my heart when I am weary and homesick.

And when the load is more than I can carry,

He gets under the yoke with me.

When I am forsaken by friends, he is the Friend

Who sticketh closer than a brother.

When I am defeated by sin,

He helps me to start over again.

When the journey seems too long,

And the goal too distant, I hear him say:

"Lo, I am with you always!"

If any little word of ours can make one life the brighter,

If any little song of ours can make one heart the lighter,

God help us speak that little word, and take our bit of singing,

And drop it in some lonely vale and set the echoes ringing.



Day15: Love's blessed assurance

The Love Prayer: Our Father, we thank you for the assurance that love gives, that lets us know that we really are your children. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Galatians 5:22-26

Life's most important question is, "How can I know that I have experienced Christ's salvation?" Some people are satisfied with a mechanical answer. They quote Scripture, say they believe it, and that it gives them assurance. There is a lot of merit in this approach. The deeper assurance is the assurance love gives. You can believe good doctrine, quote the right Scripture and have a great faith, but it is only when you have the loving Spirit of Christ that you have the true inner witness that you are a child of his.

Many people have been truly converted who could not read or write or quote Scripture. They loved Jesus, and his love was real to them. They loved everybody, and so had the promised assurance of his love.

More people have been won by the love they saw in another person than have been won by intellectual argument. Some rely on the sweet feelings of good deeds they do. This can be very deceptive. Paul said a person could give all, including his own body, and yet if he didn't have love, it would profit him nothing.

The witness of love has a language all its own. Did you ever meet a loving Christian and feel at once that you had known them for years? This is the work and witness of love.

Only lovable and loving people will feel at home in heaven, because on earth they have been at home with each other in love.



Day 16: The wages of hate is death

The Love Prayer: Our Father, we ask that you save us from killing ourselves, our neighbors and our friends. Help us to avoid the subtle poison of hate that may bring death. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 15:18-25

There are many ways to die. One may die slowly or suddenly. One may die accidentally or on purpose. One may die of the slow aging process or of disease. The whole field of psychosomatic disease has shown us how attitudes affect health. A resentment born twenty years ago can cause today's ulcer. Some doctors claim that up to 90% of illness is emotional in origin.

Hate is a gateway to death. A small fire in a tiny corner of the attic can destroy a whole house. A small resentment can eventually destroy a life.

Most people who hate do not intend consciously to murder the person they hate. It may be just the indulgence of a sick mind, perverted emotions, or temporary passion. But there is a measure of death in all hate.

Did you ever see a person who was once radiant, kind and loving suddenly become bitter, cynical and cold? If you looked, you would find that hate had entered that heart. Hate is like poison gas: it can turn and poison the user. Hate is the killer of joy, inspiration and happiness. Once I saw a mother on a train in a raging battle with her child. She may have been mad at her husband, but she was destroying the personality of the child. If a tiger were loose in your community killing people, you would call a group together and kill the tiger. There is a worse killer loose. His name is hate. Look carefully, for he may be hiding in your life.



Day 17: His love and his sacrifice

The Love Prayer: Help me to know, O Lord, how little we have given for him who gave his all for us. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 15:1-15

The words of Jesus in John 15:13 are most humbling. He says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

We all have had men and women die for us on battlefields. Perhaps few of us have had some individual step out and die specifically to save our lives. Such a sacrifice would place us under a debt of gratitude impossible to pay.

Jesus did die for us as the Son of God. This puts us under an obligation to God the Father. We might translate John 3:16 to read "For God so loved everyone of us that he gave his only begotten Son for each one of us."

The teachings of Jesus have informed and inspired us. The example of Jesus has overwhelmed us. But it was his sacrificial death that saved us. When we kneel at Calvary we see how little we have done in response to his great sacrifice for us.

Paul writes of giving ourselves as a living sacrifice. This is often harder than to be a dying sacrifice.

We are in a life-and-death struggle against communism. Yet communists are willing to make great sacrifices for what they believe. Unless Christians are willing to sacrifice, we may lose the battle for a long time.

The key to sacrifice is love. We will always give our lives, our time, and our money for what we love.



Day 18: The insight of love into human need

The Love Prayer: Lord, open the eyes of my heart so that I may see the deepest needs of my brother or sister. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Luke 10:30-37

Every day of our lives, most of us have a chance to do some loving deed. It may be waiting courteously in a line of traffic or at the checkout counter to let someone go ahead. It may be a gesture in the home, a word in the office, or a kind response over the telephone. It may be simply a friendly greeting.

The world is hungry for loving deeds. Our philosophies, our doctrines and our arguments fall cold unless they are backed up by loving deeds.

Loving deeds are important, not only for what they mean to the receiver, but for what they mean to those who serve. Have you noticed how happy those people are who continually do good deeds for others?

Isn't it wonderful that God has made us so that we need the good deeds of others to help us! But even greater, God in Christ sends us out to find people who need help, and then makes us do something about it!

Remember the Sunday School song that says: "Look all around you, find someone in need. Help somebody today." Jesus came as a servant, and he set the pattern for us. Let us follow him, and stop trying to "boss" or master other people or "straighten them out!" Let's just serve them in love, as he did.



Day 19: Dwell in God's love

The Love Prayer: Lord, help me to make my heart a dwelling place for your love. Amen.

The Love Scripture: I John 5:1-5

When we are mean, rude or unkind to another person, people silently wonder if God's love really dwells in us. Even when they do not ask it aloud, it may be in their minds. This is a valid question.

There is an old saying that goes like this: "What you are speaks so much louder than what you say, I cannot hear when you talk."

A kind person once said to me, "The preacher who can do the most good is the preacher in whom the most people have confidence." Couldn't this be said about any Christian? All of us need to have an image that assures love if we want to help others.

I do not know the many solutions needed for the race tensions of our day, but I am sure that I love everyone. I do not want any person looking at me and wondering if I love them.

Regardless of the many ways in which you may be able to help someone, love is the greatest gift you have to offer. The largest and costliest tangible gift may become an offense without love.

Sometimes all we have to give is love. Many people have so much of the world's goods and so little of the world's love. They are rich in things and poor in the spirit of love. "And they'll know we are Christians by our love."



Day 20: In deeds of love and mercy

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, even as you went about Galilee doing deeds of love, help me today do some loving deed that I have put off for a long time. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Matthew 25:34-46

The text suggests that we need to see one another as sisters and brothers. This viewpoint makes all the difference. When a member of your family is in need, it seems easy to get together money. Yet how we dread to see the solicitor come around on the annual drive for needy families. If those who will starve today could only get to somebody's back door, most of them would be fed. We will sleep soundly tonight because we cannot hear the cry of a starving child.

There is a twofold solution to our neighbors' need: First, we ought to get them to help themselves whenever possible. This is not always possible. When it is not, then we should help people in emergencies until they can learn to help themselves. There is not much point in finding a job for a starving person next week when that person may not live until tomorrow.

There is much surplus food in many parts of the world; yet people are starving. The big problem is in distribution. While most of us do not grow or sell food, nearly all of us can do something personally for someone in need in our own community. Our biggest challenge is not to find a brother or sister in need, for they are everywhere. Our problem is to be a brother or sister indeed!



Day 21: The heritage of his commands

The Love Prayer: Lord, help us to remember all the covenants we have with the followers of Christ who have gone before us. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-15

If we forget the loving commandments of those who have gone on before us, we shall deserve to have our requests forgotten when we have gone on.

When I was a little boy on a farm in the deep South, there were Christian people who, in the hour of death, would call in their loved ones and make some last requests. How deeply moving it was to hear someone say, "This was the last thing my mother ever asked me to do." How beautiful, how strong and binding were those farewell requests!

Perhaps we have never understood what really went on at the Last Supper, when Jesus was making His last requests of His closest friends. How they must have pondered the accent of his voice, the look on his face, and the exact words he used. He must have had some personal words for each one of them. I am sure he did for Simon Peter.

One thing is sure. He must have believed his followers would carry out enough of his commands so that the program would go on. The millions who still follow Jesus are a tribute to the compassion of his commands and the abiding fellowship of his presence and his power.

When Napoleon was dying on the island of St. Helena in 1821, he wondered where his followers were, as he remembered wondering that Jesus still had millions who followed him after two centuries.



Day 22: When we need to forgive ourselves

The Love Prayer: O Lord, how thankful we are that you understand us better than we understand ourselves. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Psalm 62

Often the hardest person to forgive for doing wrong is yourself. Have you ever heard anyone say, "I just can't forgive myself?"

One reason people can't or don't accept forgiveness is because they are victims of self-pity. There is sometimes a morbid delight in the guilt complex. This may bring sympathy and appear to show humility. But some people are more sorry for themselves than they are for their sins. A false sense of guilt can be very destructive in a life. We need to accept God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of others. And then we need to forgive ourselves. This brings peace.

People who forgive themselves should realize that in so doing, they have not committed any new sin. All the sins you have ever committed have been forgiven by God. We need to forgive ourselves, because we need to forget the defeats of our yesterdays. The great Billy Sunday used to say, "If you keep looking back, it won't be long before you're going back." How true this is.

Let's make Paul's way our way. He says in Philippians: "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul had a lot to forgive and forget about himself. So do we.



Day 23: Love that overcomes

The Love Prayer: O Lord, we ask of you wisdom to recognize the voice of a false prophet, and the insight to appreciate the prophets of truth. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Psalm 119:57-64

There is a selfishness and indulgence in love that is often fatal to the lovers. There are people who love each other for their own selfish pleasure.

You see, love can become a refuge from reality. Some love their families so much they just stay at home and ignore the outside world.

Let us remember these facts about Christian love:

1. Overcoming love is never a selfish love.
2. Overcoming love is self-giving.
3. Overcoming love has a faith that can't be denied.
4. Overcoming love keeps the ultimate goals of life in mind.
5. Overcoming love is saturated with the Holy Spirit.
6. Overcoming love is joyous and optimistic.
7. Overcoming love stands on the promises of God's Word.
8. Overcoming love lives and feeds on the ministry of the memory of God's love.
9. Overcoming love has the assurance of the inner voice of Jesus saying, "Lo, I am with you always."
10. Overcoming love has the endless patience to wait and believe in the ultimate triumph of goodness.

God's overcoming love can unlock prison doors. It can melt a stony heart. On Easter morning, love set Jesus free and he has been living ever since, and will live forever.



Day 24: Laity communicate love

The Love Prayer: Our Father, help us to know that it is when we are most loving that we are most pleasing to God. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 21:17-20

Here are some of the characteristics of a Christian who communicates love to others:

1. They make up their mind that their main business is to communicate love. This is the dominating desire and motive of their life in their home, in their church, in their business, in their total fellowship with all people.
2. They are the ones who take the example of Jesus as their daily image and ideal, always asking themselves "What would Jesus do, say, think, or feel?" in any situation.
3. They are the ones who, by constant fellowship with Christ, control their moods. They practice a happy mind, staying in good humor, and keeping their thinking positive and friendly. This takes will power!
4. They forgive quickly and refuses to hold grudges.
5. They are tender-hearted and sympathetic, and practice constant kindness toward their family, their co-workers and their friends ... and even their enemies.

Can you imagine a church filled with people like this?

Loving God, we open our minds to you to be inspired; we open our hearts to you to be filled with love; we dedicate our mouths to speak words of love. Use our whole personality to communicate your love to others. In the loving Spirit of Christ we offer ourselves. Amen.



Day 25: Knowing God through love

The Love Prayer: Our Father, we thank you for our family circles where we dwell in love. Help us to let God's love dwell in our hearts so every home may be a fellowship of love. Amen.

The Love Scripture: I Peter 2

The ten commandments of a loving family:

1. Thou shalt put the love of God above every other love, and he will enable you to love each other as you should.
2. Thou shalt be regular in worship at home and at church, and thus continually find forgiveness and renewal.
3. Thou shalt practice Christian courtesy at all times, with all members of the family in all situations.
4. Thou shalt have loving respect at all times for the opinions of all others in the family.
5. Thou shalt speak kindly of others at all times, and thus refrain from malicious gossip.
6. Thou shalt love to share with each other and with others what God has given you; this will include time, talent, money, food, clothing and fellowship.
7. Thou shalt love to work and provide for each other the necessities of life, and the joys of total Christian living and thus meet together life's emergencies.
8. Thou shalt love to laugh together and enjoy the good things of life.
9. Thou shalt accept correction from other members of the family, and not be sensitive and angry when corrected by another.
10. With the help of the Lord, thou shalt maintain a good disposition in your home 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year.



Day 26: Love or lust

The Love Prayer: Lord of life and of love, still the tempest within that would wreck my life; help me to set my affections on things above. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Romans 5:16-26

A person who develops only one type of love could never develop real Christian character. Love always involves choice. To love or not to love is a basic decision. And there is another kind of choice: to love one thing means not to love its opposite. To love the good, the spiritual, the beautiful is not to love the sinful, the crude, the vulgar elements of life.

We have very quick changes in our loves. A new trend in dress, songs or customs, and we are off in a honeymoon of a new love!

We do not love things for what they are, but for what we are. Our love is basically a response. A person with a pure heart, a clean mind and a refined nature is not a victim of lust.

We sometimes think that to take evil away from people would take people away from evil, but that is not true. We need to have our inner love-nature changed.

Education has cleared up a lot of the taboos and superstitions about sex, but education does not have the whole answer! It takes the power of a living God to purify us and keep us clean.

A life of intelligent love is the gift of God's grace to the human heart where Christ has been enthroned. He must reign in our bodies, our minds and our spirits. He is the Lord of life and of love!



Day 27: Loving eyes or lusting eyes

The Love Prayer: Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Isaiah 35:1-6

The human eye is one of the great miracles of God's creation. But we do not actually see with our eyes. They are merely windows through which the pictures come. We see with our minds, our imaginations, and our hearts. Two people looking at a painting do not see the same picture.

Some people see evil where none exists. Thus the evil imagination of a lusting mind can put a cloud of darkness and resentment over an innocent gesture.

If we did not have eyes, there would be no race problem, for we cannot tell the race of a person by feeling their skin. People with loving eyes do not see people according to the color of their skin. They see people as people, realizing that God has made of one blood all nations of the earth.

Loving eyes look upon a person defeated by sin and see a potential saint. Loving eyes look, for beauty. If the sky is dark, and it rains all day, loving eyes see beauty in the raindrops that refresh the earth.

When love is in your heart, in your mind, and in your voice, you will have love in your eyes, and God will save you from the lust of things you are not supposed to have.



Day 28: Our love and our pride

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, save me from being proud of my humility. Keep me humble so that I may serve others and always look up to thee. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

In today's Scripture, we find the seven-fold path of humbling that Christ imposed upon himself. (1) He made of himself no reputation. (2) He took on the form of a servant. (3) He was made in the likeness of man. (4) He humbled himself. (5) He fashioned himself as a man. (6) He became obedient to death. (7) He became obedient to the cross.

When Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," he was asking us to follow his seven-fold path of self-imposed humility.

Pride has probably destroyed more good Christians than all other sins put together. Pride may come from a love for prestige, or an arrogance to rule over others.

Pride is dangerous because it is so often the vice of the virtuous. People can be so offensive about their virtues that they drive others away from God.

Pride is dangerous because certain kinds of pride are good. For instance, we should have some pride in personal appearance. There is no virtue in going about looking like a vagrant. But none of us like to see a person vain and arrogant about their appearance.

Pride destroys personality because it breaks our love relationship with others. Pride destroys us spiritually because it gives us a false picture of ourselves.



Day 29: Eternal love

The Love Prayer: O Thou changeless and eternal Christ, be with me in a changing world. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Psalm 90

The mystery of death brings eternal love into significant focus. While I write these lines in a comfortable home in protected America, people are dying in other countries. Homes are torn with unspeakable grief. When loved ones gather at an open grave, can they believe that God is love, and that we never lose those we love when we both belong to God?

True love has the virtue of being eternal. Without this dimension, life would be irrational. It takes eternal life to explain eternal love. Perhaps the greatest tragedy is giving affection to that which is temporary.

How many people have given their entire lives for the love of money? During the Great Depression, people took their lives because of the lack of money. Isn't a person wise when they give that which they cannot keep for that which they cannot lose?

The more love you give away, the more you have. The more love you have, the more you want others to have. God made us with a deep hunger for eternal love. Passion, emotion, infatuation, sex all pass away, but the love of God never ends. In our youth, this love is our sure foundation; in maturity, our guide; in old age, our refuge. "Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly. Amen."



Day 30: In his will is abiding love

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to know that we have eternal life now and forever in Thee. Amen.

The Love Scripture: I Timothy 6:11-14

Love always abides in persons with distinct personalities. A great preacher pointed out that it is not enough to believe in immortality; we must believe in our personal immortality. Love can't love other love. Love can't be conscious of itself except as love in another person. We do not put love in a package; it must have an abiding place.

Love abides in obedient hearts. Disobedience destroys love. We obey God because we love him. He accepts us because he loves us. Therefore we abide in him and he abides in us. This is wonderful.

Abiding in God gives our love for him security and permanence, When I was a small child living at home with my mother and father, I abided with them and they abided with me. This helped create a loving relationship that lingers in blessed memory. When we abide with Jesus, we know him better. I heard a Christian say, "I know Jesus better than I know any other person." How well do you know Jesus?

Abiding in Jesus means accepting responsibility. Some people do not love because they know that love means accepting responsibility. Some couples avoid having children because it means responsibility. How beautiful our love for our children is because we have the full responsibility for them, to clothe, feed and educate them. Abiding in Jesus is eternal. He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."



Day 31: Loving and not loving at the same time

The Love Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to love with my whole heart all the time. Save me from half-hearted love in a divided world. Amen.

The Love Scripture: I Thessalonians 5:14-28

The human heart can be divided. We can love and not love at the same time. This is what divides and defeats the church.

Think of the impressive people who love God, support the church, and still live with sin in their lives. They wouldn't want the church destroyed, but they will admit that they do not love God with all their hearts. This kind of love is dangerous because it is so subtle.

Did you ever have persons seem very friendly when you were together; they laugh with you and really seem to enjoy your company? But when you are gone, they stab you in the back. They gossip about you; they would cheat you in a trade or take advantage of you for their own gain. Someone has said, "With friends like that, I don't need any enemies."

My testimony is that some of the people who love me have hurt me more than all other persons. Jesus had this problem with Simon Peter. He asked, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" Can't you just hear Peter saying, "Who, me? Love you? Why, Jesus, I am one of the best friends you ever had." But you recall that he denied him a little later.

After Pentecost, ask Peter that question! It takes the Holy Spirit to purify our love. Can you put your whole heart in the words "I love you?" Say it to God. Then say it to your family and friends, to everyone in the world!



Day 32: Love's divine inspiration

The Love Prayer: Lord, I need a new touch of your divine love in my life. Give me the anointing of your love today. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 1:1-14

When you consider all that Jesus has meant as inspiration to people through the centuries, no wonder he continues to be humanity's greatest source of inspiration today. Some people so desire to honor and elevate Jesus that they have removed him from real life and have made him a far off mystic "up there with God somewhere." This, of course, defeats the very purpose and meaning of his love ministry. When the early disciples preached the resurrection of this loving Jesus, he was to them a present reality, and not just a memory.

Since God's ability to help us is so conditioned on our response, he had to find a way for us to be inspired by his love. When he was ready to tell us how much he loved us and how he wanted us to love him, he sent to earth the Person who was the most lovable individual who ever lived. Through the love life he lived, he elevated love to become the unique quality of Christianity.

Most of us love Jesus because someone allowed his love to love us through that human person. It may be that the biggest hindrance to the growth of God's kingdom on earth is the failure of so-called Christians to allow the love of God to give them love for humanity.

Back of every great conquest of the Christian faith has been a divine anointing that has enabled a preacher, a missionary or a person to love people through their own hearts, with the love of God. "By love may he be gotten and holden: by thought, never."



Day 33: Love and truth

The Love Prayer: Lord of truth, help me to know that the truthful life is the loving life, and that truth's way is always love's way. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 17:1-18

The unbeatable combination of Christianity has always been love and truth together. Some religions have been content with doctrine, intellect, and understanding, and very little warmth of love. Some have gone to seed on emotionalism. Some have come out against education and have taken pride in their ignorance. This is of course self-defeating.

Jesus and His way of love is so true that it has withstood every form of opposition and criticism possible. It stands today as truly as it did in its beginning.

Keeping the vital balance of truth and love is not easy. The hazard of the Christian teacher is their obsession with knowledge. They come to believe that what the world most needs is to get its thinking straight. There is much truth in this belief; but the hazard is that they may become dogmatic, cold and unloving in their fervor. They may lead many into mental agreement, but few into the love experience of trusting Christ.

It is important that we keep Christian truth up to date. If we believe that there are no new frontiers of truth to discover, we are assuming that our minds have become equal to The Mind. Christian truth is deep enough to challenge forever the greatest intellects. With the invincible combination of love and truth, the ultimate conquest is certain, as Christ marches ahead. One day the knowledge of His love and His truth will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.

May God hasten the day.



Day 34: Becoming like Jesus in love

The Love Prayer: More like the Master is my daily plea, more like the Master I would ever be. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Colossians 3:1-20

To become like Jesus is the highest ideal for personal development ever entertained by the mind of a human being. A great religious leader was once asked, "What is the greatest hindrance to the Christian religion?" He replied, "Christianity."

When we use the term Christ-likeness, it means different things to different people. Some of the bloodiest pages of history were written by "holy" people. This has hurt and hindered Christianity more than all the atheism and communism in the world.

There is nothing needed in daily living so much as human beings who reflect the true image of the living Christ. To yearn to be like Jesus is an evidence of God's grace at work within us. This is the first step for the new Christian. To continue to become more like Jesus in our lives is evidence that we are growing in grace. There is an invisibility about the sanctified life. It is not to be confused with sanctimoniousness. The late Dr. W.E. Sangster said, "If you have to tell people that you are sanctified, it is a good sign you are not." To become like Jesus is the golden dream of the saints of all ages. To become like Him is to learn to love as he loves. Christ helps me to love others as he loves them.

Grant me, even me, my dearest Lord, to know you, and to love you, and rejoice in you. And if I cannot do these perfectly in this life, let me at least advance to higher degrees every day, till I can come to do them perfectly.



Day 35: Recognizing his love

The Love Prayer: Lord, hasten the day when all people shall accept your love and truly know that you are the Son of the Living God. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 6:63-71

Discovering love in surprising situations can be a delightful adventure. Around the corner, and down the street, and there you are, face to face with love in action! One afternoon in Atlanta we saw a lady who was trying in vain to maneuver her car up a hill and out of traffic. Calmly a young man left his own car and came to the rescue of the total stranger. Her gratitude was a joy to witness.

The life of Jesus was saturated with incidents of love in action. The hungry little shepherd boy who shared his loaves and fishes must have been inspired by Jesus. The sick, lame and blind who were suddenly made well by Him must have recognized his love. Genuine love does not exercise itself in order to be seen. But how much poorer we would be if there were no witnesses to acts of love.

Paul recognized the love of Christ as the constraining influence on his own life. Recognizing the Love of Jesus as the dominating motive in our lives is far more than just being aware of His love. "Jesus is Lord" was the earliest creed of the church. Jesus as Lord everywhere is the ultimate hope of Christendom, for it is foreordained in His Word. The only way for a family to live at its highest level is for the love of Jesus to reign in the home.

Peace can come among nations only when people learn what it means to accept the love of Jesus as their own.



Day 36: Born again in love to do right

The Love Prayer: Our Father, help us to know that our love and our life must be one in righteousness, if our witness is to be convincing to other people. Amen.

The Love Scripture: James 3:8-12

"Righteousness" and "love" are two gates to the same garden of life. Love will keep the righteous from being self-righteous. Righteousness will save the loving person from being self-indulgent.

Righteousness and love combine to make a person Christ-like in an unchristian world.

The world may ignore us when we are unloving. But when we are righteous, even good people may condemn us. There are three basic facts to remember about living a good life:

- (1) There must be a desire, or a "want-to." No person is good by accident; they must want to be good.
- (2) There must be knowledge, or "know-how." Ignorance is self-defeating and can frustrate the best of motives.
- (3) There must be power to be good. Without it, both motive and knowledge are defeated. The power to be good comes from God. The bridge between love and righteousness is built by the Holy Spirit, who links the two together within us.

Righteousness has been called the fruit of the tree of life, saturated in love and rooted in the power of God in His Holy Spirit.

"The Love of God is an affection which forgives, even when it is difficult. This love is a continual closeness with us, which never leaves us." (Jim Ruby)



Day 37: The manner of the Father's love

The Love Prayer: Our Father, help us to know that we live because you love us moment by moment. Give us spiritual intelligence to discern the matchless manner of your marvelous love. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

There are many ways to express sincere love. Some choose the intellectual way, believing that love is mainly a matter of understanding and insight. This way has merit. Some choose the emotional means, expressing love by the tone of voice, laughter, compassion and even tears. This way is good, if it is sincere. Others express love primarily in service. Without such people we would all be poor indeed.

Great love can be expressed by the development and unselfish dedication of talents that inspire and enrich the world. Think of DaVinci, whose "Last Supper" is as surely Gospel as a painting can be. The great architect, Christopher Wren, filled the skyline of London with some of the most inspiring churches ever built. Handel's great musical settings of the stories of creation and of our Messiah's life have lifted the hearts of humankind the world over. Surely these talented men expressed great love.

What is your manner of expressing love? It can be in a warm embrace, in a smile, in duties performed with joy. Each of us has a unique way of expressing love. And each of us has been commanded to fill our lives with God's love so that it may overflow constantly in expression to others, pointing them to the God of love.



Day 38: Anointed in his love

The Love Prayer: Lord, we thank you that your love is new every morning. Amen.

The Love Scripture: Lamentations 3:21-24

"Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before" is more than a song; it is reality in the life of a growing Christian. The body requires new energy for life. The food we ate a year ago is not sufficient for the work of today. We receive new love from Christ as we read, ponder and appropriate the Word of God. The Bible is more than a book; it is food for our souls.

New love can come from the fellowship of a prayer group where everybody is loving everybody else. The therapy of such a group is amazing, as tensions, resentments are dissolved in His love.

We find new love in the beauty of worship. As we sing, pray, meet at the Lord's table, together as members of his body, we are renewed in faith and love. How great is the new love we find as we do a kind deed in the Name of Jesus. Find someone who needs food, prayer and love, and minister to those needs. The love of Christ Himself will flood your life.

Some of us need to find new love in forgiving an old wrong, or in ending an old grudge. Joyful reconciliation makes us know how foolish we have been.

We are anointed anew when we bring up to date our conversion and commitment to Christ. A spiritual retreat, a prayer meeting, a kindness to someone going through a difficult time, and renewal becomes ours. Maybe part of the meaning of heaven is that we never grow old in love, and love never grows old in us.



Day 39: When love becomes our teacher

The Love Prayer: Lord, give me the mental humility to learn in love from the loveliest people in my life. Amen.

The Love Scripture: II Peter 1:1-7

Love is the greatest teacher in the world. Love is the teacher of truth. If you want the Holy Spirit to teach you the real truth about God, start living in love.

If you have ever stood in a cemetery beside the bereaved family of a loved one, and lingered with them after the crowd has left, you learned something in love you had not known before. You saw a family united in love, saying goodbye to someone they loved more than life itself. Have you ever gone to pray with a father whose son had been sent to jail? The shame, remorse, and sorrow through which the father was passing was surpassed only by his great love. There you learned that love is stronger than shame, remorse or sorrow.

Have you ever been the means of reconciliation between two people who have hated each other? There you earned that love can overcome even old hatreds. Love is our teacher when we yearn to find a way to do something for someone. People do the seemingly impossible when love teaches them the way. Jesus was and is the greatest Teacher of love. He can teach us to love the unlovely and the unlovable, to go on loving even when others have lost hope.

Love teaches us what God has always been. Love teaches us why Christ came and what He wants to do in us through His Holy Spirit. Browning was right when he said that life is just a chance to learn the lessons of love. Perhaps in eternity we shall learn the total lesson of love.



Day 40: Triumphant Love

The Love Prayer: Lord, I am so grateful that you are coming again. Help us to be ready for you to come in triumphant love. Amen.

The Love Scripture: John 14:15-31

The ultimate triumph of love has been the hope of humanity through the centuries. It has not yet been realized. But the triumph of love throughout the earth is insignificant, as we see how love has caused triumph in individuals over even death.

Love's triumphing over fear on a battlefield may not be the greatest triumph. Even courage in our hearts in the face of danger may not be the greatest triumph of love. It may be that it is the love ability God's love gives us when we have to lived under sustained tension. The late John F. Kennedy warned us, "We may have to live under this sustained tension the rest of our lives."

General Mark Clark reminds us that we had five hundred seventy-five conferences at Panmunjon before we had peace in Korea. Our patience must be undergirded by God as we continue to deal with hate in the world.

Peace still seems remote around the world. And in America there are more of us hating each other than ever in our history. "Polarization" has become a byword. Our nation desperately needs the "triumph of love." Only the God of Love, through His Son Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit can give us this triumph of love.

"My Lord Jesus has been a friend when I have turned my back on him. Knowing he was there has always turned me back around to face him and want to love him."



What Did Jesus Ask Us to do in Love?

1. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **John 13:34**
2. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **Luke 6:27-28**
3. If you love me, keep my commands. **John 14:15**
4. So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. **Matthew 7:12**
5. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. **Mark 11:25**
6. And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." **Luke 22:19**
7. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. **Luke 23:34**
8. Make friends quickly with your opponent. **Matthew 5:25**
9. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **Matthew 5:39**
10. If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. **Matthew 18:15**

Suggested Ideas for the Acts of Love:

1. Love Notes—write a note or send a text message of appreciation to someone. It may be a note to someone you have long appreciated but have never formally expressed it; it may be a note or text message of encouragement to someone; or it may be some other note of love or appreciation. Write several of these throughout the forty days of Lent.
2. Love Calls—make several phone calls just for the purpose of saying, “I appreciate you,” or “You’ve meant a lot to me,” or to say, “Thank you,” or whatever you feel should be said to make someone know you love and appreciate them.
3. Love Gifts—take or send some remembrance to someone. You may bake some cookies or something else with a recipe attached, or give a flower or plant, a book, or offer yourself as a baby sitter so that parents may go out, offer to do odd jobs to someone who may need some assistance around their home.
4. Loving Prayer—pray for one another. Pick out several people and pray daily for them. Expect God to bless them and He will. One of the most loving acts towards another is praying for them.
5. Love Visits—visit someone who needs or may want company. Make a friendly visit to those who are ill, or who can’t get out much during these winter months, to someone who is new in the community, or to someone with whom you have been wanting to visit. Make a visit to them or invite them to your home for coffee or a meal.

Throughout our forty days of loving prayer, we are trying to say, “I love you.” Some of us may be hesitant or fearful of doing this, but, praise God, we can learn to do it. So we will try to say, “I love you,” in as many different ways and to as many people as we can. We need to say it and others need to hear it from us. Don’t wait for someone else to do these things first, or to give to you, rather be the first to give to others. Remember, the one who does the giving receives the greatest blessing.

Every day affirm your love for Jesus and find ways to share his love. This is a Christ-centered love program. Do all that you do in the name of Jesus and make these forty days of Lent into forty days of prayerful love.

Think love, pray love, speak love, act love.

“This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15:12