***Session 3 A Life That Manifests the Fragrance of God*** ***(Jn. 15:12)*** *“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)*

*Tonight we are on Session 3 in John 15. This is our second semester on John 15 so I am calling it John 15 (Part 2). I am titling this “A Life that Manifests the Fragrance of God.” We will look at the verse about being the fragrance of God. The nature and purpose of fragrance is to attract. It is to wow and to woo and to awaken and to stir the heart. The Lord says that there is a lifestyle in which God’s fragrance is actually manifested through us. It will attract and woo and wow believers, unbelievers, and angels as well! Even the Lord Himself is attracted to the lifestyle that says yes to Him in this way.*

*We are going to look at the all-too-familiar commandment to love, and what I want you to see tonight which we are going to look at is the context in which God commands His people to love. It is the way that God puts His glory on display to the unbelieving world. And not only that, it is the way that God has chosen to usher us into a supernatural quality in our inner life. The Lord says, as it were, “If you will exert yourself in the grace of God to love that dynamic process that is challenging in the flesh, it will, little by little, usher your inner man into a supernatural lifestyle.***”**

1. the command to love: Putting God’s glory on display
	1. John 15:12 is a reiteration of John 13:35 where Jesus declared that when His people love others it puts God’s glory and goodness on display for others to see what His personality is like, especially
	in His kindness for sinful people, and it is the way God has chosen to usher us into a supernatural quality in our inner life. By our loving others, Jesus looks attractive to those who observe it.

12“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn. 15:12)

35“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn. 13:35)

23 “…that they may be made perfect in one [love and unity], and that the world may know
that You…have loved them as You have loved Me.” (Jn. 17:23)

*Paragraph A: John 15:12 is a reiteration of John 13. Remember we are looking at the five chapters of the Upper Room Discourse—John 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17—which is one message. In John 13 at the beginning of the evening Jesus declared that when His people love other people it puts God’s glory and goodness on display. It says here in John 15, “Other people will know that you belong to Me and that you represent Me and that you are like Me when you love one another. If you love one another, it will attract believers and unbelievers to understand Me more.” Thus by loving others Jesus looks attractive to the people who are observing that love.*

*Well, He says it even more directly in John 17:23, “The unbelieving world will know…” Jesus said, as it were, “The Father loves you in the same intensity He loves Me. When He sees you love other people, the unbelieving world will understand what is happening because there is a supernatural work in a human life.”*

* 1. The Lord intentionally and joyfully bound His reputation on earth to the measure of love that His people walk in. His plan is to manifest His fragrance or glory into the earth (2 Cor. 2:14-15)
	through His people who are His “official” witnesses and ambassadors (Isa. 43:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:20).

14…God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses [manifests, NAS]
the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. (2 Cor. 2:14-15)

*Paragraph B: The Lord intentionally—and I would say joyfully—bound His reputation on the earth to the measure that people walk in love. I mean, from the natural point of view this was a risky proposition. God said, in effect, “I am going to take weak and broken people, and I am going to put My reputation at stake according to the measure that they love people.” We know that through history the body of Christ has not done this so well, and the Lord’s reputation has been injured through that, yet He says, as it were, “I am committed to it! I am intentional about this. I am joyful about it!” because He knows it is going to succeed in the end. His plan is to manifest His fragrance into the earthly realm through weak and broken people like us who interact with the grace of God in this way. God has called us His “official” representatives. Literally. He says, in effect, “You are My witnesses! Yes, they can look at the sky and see a witness of My glory in the heavens, but the most direct and official witness of My personality is My people endeavoring to walk in love.” Again, I am just awestruck that God would bind His reputation to our measure of maturity in love, and He did it joyfully! We are His ambassadors. We are the “official” representation of His character and His personality on the earth.*

* + 1. ***Always leads***: God leads our life specifically to give us the best opportunity to “triumph” in our inner man. He has set us up for spiritual success gained by embracing the way of love.

*In verse 14, we see God’s leadership strategy for our life. He leads our life in a way to give us the best opportunity to triumph in Christ in our inner man. It is not always easy on the outside, but the Lord is planning our spiritual success. He is setting us up for success in our inner man by leading us in a way that we can triumph if we chose to. In the process of triumphing, meaning we choose love, even though in the flesh it is a challenge and difficult, but we choose it because we see the bigger picture of why love is so important. And He says that is leading us into triumph, meaning we say yes to His leadership in difficult situations, or when adversaries and enemies come against us, but we choose to love them and to bless them.*

*Something will change on the inside of us little by little. God defuses or manifests the fragrance of who He is in every place you go! That is a remarkable statement that God says! “If you will say ‘yes’ to My leadership, I will lead you to a place where you triumph, and the net result will be My attractiveness will be seen in you everywhere you go.” Even in the most hostile relational environments—it may be a family setting, it may be in a workplace—the Lord says, as it were, “It may not happen automatically, but as people observe, they will become attracted to Me through you.”*

*However, it is as we say “yes” to His leadership and to His plan that we triumph in difficult circumstances by choosing love.*

* + 1. ***Fragrance***: The purpose of fragrance is to attract. There is a lifestyle in which God’s fragrance is manifest through people. It wows, woos, and inspires believers and unbelievers.

*The nature and purpose of fragrance is to attract. It is to wow, and to woo, and to awaken, and to stir the heart. The Lord says that there is a lifestyle in which God’s fragrance is manifested through us. It will attract, and woo, and wow believers, unbelievers, and angels as well!*

* + 1. ***To God***: The Father is attracted to the beautiful lifestyle of the one who seeks to love deeply.

*Even the Lord Himself is attracted to the lifestyle that says yes to Him in this way. Verse 15 is remarkable: “We are to God the fragrance of Christ!” Even the Father is attracted to the heart responses that say “yes” to this process. God sees the beauty of it worked in us.*

* + 1. ***In every place***: His plan is that Jesus’ attractiveness be seen in us everywhere we go.

*As this fragrance manifests, it inspires believers, and it also awakens unbelievers. As you say “yes” to this process over the years, more and more you will hear more testimonies or there will be more testimonies of people inspired to love God and to see the attractiveness of Jesus because of your choices, even in our weakness. Believers will see the attractiveness in you, and they will love Him more because of you.*

* 1. People who walk in God’s love and joy while being mistreated or when suffering make Jesus look satisfying and attractive to those who observe them. When you have joy and confidence in Jesus and walk in love while being mistreated or when suffering, then people want to know how you do it. So they ask about “the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). They ask because they do not know how to have joy or to love difficult people when they are being mistreated or suffering.

14But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake…15be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear… (1 Pet. 3:14-15)

*Paragraph C: People who walk in God’s love and walk in God’s joy—because in the verse before John 15:12, verse 11, which we will look at in a minute, Jesus said “I am going to put My joy in you”—people who walk in love and joy while they are being mistreated by people or while they are suffering in difficult circumstances make Jesus look attractive. They make Jesus look satisfying. No one is impressed by people who are happy and content when their circumstances are going well. I mean, that is cool and we might think, “Well, you ought to be happy! Look at all of the good things around you!” It does not strike anyone’s attention in a noteworthy way when someone is happy when things are all going so well. However, when we are being mistreated, or if circumstances are really difficult and we are suffering—and there are ten different ways you can suffer—people want to know how it is that you are trusting Him and loving Him.*

*1 Peter 3:14-15 says, “…that if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, people around you will ask you, ‘What is the hope that is operating in you?’” They want to know what is happening in you because they cannot love or have joy when they have difficulty. God set it up that way. He wants you. He wants us believers to advertise His attractiveness by the way we respond to Him when we are in difficult circumstances or we are being mistreated by people. Peter said, “Be ready to give a reason, to give an answer to the people who are asking you, ‘Why do you have that hope?” How are you in such difficulty and yet connected to God in a way that you have joy?”*

*Now I am saying this not to be mean, but in the last year or two how many people have asked you how it is that you are encountering God in the midst of difficulty? How it is that you can keep your joy? Most of us will say, “Oops, not so many!” Well, that is what the Lord’s plan is. He is going to lead us in a way so that we have triumph in this kind of way.*

* 1. God leads us in a way to triumph spiritually—after people slander us, then they observe our godly responses which leads some to glorify God. God’s advertisement to unbelievers is the joy and love we have in difficult times—*it declares there is an all-satisfying God whose leadership is perfect.*

12having your conduct honorable…that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may,
by your good works [godly responses] which they observe, [they] glorify God… (1 Pet. 2:12)

*1 Peter 2:12 says, “Even the people that speak against you as evildoers”—meaning they are slandering you; you are not an evildoer but they call you an evildoer—“when they see your godly responses, they observe it, and it may take them a while, but eventually many of them will begin to glorify God by saying, ‘This is not natural! You know something, or you know Someone that I do not know!’” They will end up, not all of them, but they will glorify God, and His advertisement to unbelievers is the joy and love that you walk in when you are in difficulty because you are declaring that there is an all-satisfying God who is worth it and you trust Him. No matter what else is happening, that is where you confidence and joy is.*

1. The two great commandments (Mt. 22:37-39)
	1. The two great commands are deeply connected. We love people best as an overflow of loving God, and we love God best when we seek to love people. By seeking and loving God, our lives are empowered to love people better. A man will love his wife better as he loves and connects more with God. Moms will love their children better as they love and connect more with God.

37“You shall love the Lord…with all your heart…38This is the first and great commandment. 39And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt. 22:37-39)

*Roman numeral two: The two great commandments. We know this passage very well. Matthew 22:37, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart. That is the first commandment and the great commandment.’ Verse 39—again, very, very familiar—“The second commandment is just like the first one”—it is very similar—“love your neighbor,” and this interesting phrase, “in the way that you love yourself” in the grace of God is the idea. The Bible tells us both to hate our life and who we are outside of the will of God and outside of our identity in God but to love our life and who we are in the will of God and in our identity in the grace of God. And so we both hate our life and love our life.*

*Now I have heard people over the years debate which is the most important–the first commandment or the second commandment. Really, it is an unnecessary debate that for some reason has emerged. I have listened to those kinds of questions, debates, and even arguments for many, many years. Some people say, “Well, those folks doing the first commandment, but what about people?”*

*Other people say, “Yeah, but if you say what about people, what about God?” We do not need to have that debate because we love people best as an overflow of loving God. However, it goes the other way too, we love God best when we seek to love people. By seeking and loving God, we are empowered to love people a lot better and so we never pick between the two.*

*You know, I have had fun with a kind of corny little question I like to ask, “Which is your favorite: your heart, your liver, or your kidney?” We do not have to pick between them. I want all of them.*

*We understand this, but I think it is good to say it: a man will love his wife better if he connects with God more. A lot of godly women get that, and they are saying, “Honey, go ahead and take the weekend to go on the retreat!” They are encouraging them, and that is good because a man will be a better father and husband in the home if he connects with God, but it takes time to connect with God. Though the time that they invest to connect with God make less time for other things, but they love in a greater way. I could give a hundred illustrations. It is the same for a mom. She will love her children better if she takes time and draws back to connect with God better. She will love her children better. She will have less time with her children, but the quality of love will be richer and stronger because we do not have the resource within ourselves to do this without loving God.*

* 1. ***Premise***: Every human has great value and dignity being created in God’s image (Gen. 12:7).
	When we see human beings as created in God’s image, then we see that they possess great value regardless of the quality of their character or skills. By seeing God’s value and love for each person, we are energized to love them in a greater measure with more consistency. I have observed that when people see others as “Image Bearers” of God they love them more. It is hard to dismiss anyone—even the most sinful and broken people when seeing them through God’s eyes.

27So God created man…in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:27)

*One of the unspoken premises of the oft-repeated commandment to love one another—and we see it all over the New Testament, “love one another,” over and over and over—however, one of the unspoken premises is that every human being has great value and great dignity because they are created in God’s image. I mean the most mean, vile and difficult person is indescribably valuable because they are created in God’s image, and if we can look past their exterior and their character and even different things they do and say, “At the core of that human being is an indescribably valuable human spirit that not only is in the image of God, but it is an imager bearer.” Every human being is an image bearer, and they will live forever.*

*I look at that guy that is a troublemaker and think, “He is worth investing in because, though he does not know it, he is an image bearer of God’s image and he is going to live forever. And that makes him indescribably valuable.*

*Other folks around him might write him off and say, “Get rid of that guy!”*

*You might say, “Well, I mean, that guy does not fit in every circumstance.” I agree with that. There are circumstances I am sure you do not want him involved with, but I am talking about how we view them differently because of the intrinsic value that they do have.*

*What I have found in my own life and also observing in others as well—it is pretty obvious that when people see others as those that bear the image of God, they will love them more. When you and I—I have watched this in other people—when you can look at that other person as one that bears God’s image, you will love them in a greater way. It is not so easy just to dismiss them. Some of the most needy, broken people in the world, if I could get God’s lens and say, “Wait! Wait a second! Look through all of the exterior. There is an incredible valuable human being who lives forever behind that face right there!”*

1. Review: Encountering God’s love and joy empowers us (Jn. 15:9-12)
	1. Encountering God’s love and joy empowers us to walk in sacrificial love for others (Jn. 15:12). Notice the progression: we are to abide in God’s love (15:9) with a spirit of obedience (15:10), which in time results in experiencing His joy (15:11), which empowers us to love others in sacrificial ways (15:12). We lack the ability to love consistently without receiving a measure of joy.

9“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in [focus on, engage with] My love…
10If you keep My commandments…11These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may
remain in you…12This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”
(Jn. 15:9-12)

*Now I am going to give quick review, before we focus on our main verse for tonight which is John 15:12.*

*In the last several sessions of the last semester and the first couple of sessions of this semester we looked at John 15:9, then we looked at 15:10-11. and now we are looking at 15:12.* ***However, what I want you to see is how they are connected****. All of those verses are dynamically connected with one another.*

*It says in verse 9, just by way of review, “As the Father loved Me”—that is truth number one—“that is the way that I love you, with the same intensity”—that is truth number two. And what I call the most important commandment in the New Testament is the next phrase, “Abide in My love.” Stay engaged with Him on these two truths of how God loves God, which is the same way that God loves you. Stay engaged on those two truths. Live in them. If you do, it is like, if you connect with those two truths and stay focused on them, then many, many other truths will come into place. The trajectory will be such that—using an analogy—many other dominoes will go down. If you see the way that God loves God—and there is a vast amount on that truth—and that that is the same way God loves you, and if you stay in that conversation with the Lord—we have spent many sessions on this—then you will set yourself up for many dynamic things to happen in your inner man.*

*This commandment, “Abide in My love,” I consider it to be the most important commandment in the Bible. Stay locked into conversation with Jesus on those two truths in verse 9, the first two phrases. Then, in verse 10, if you do that with a spirit of obedience, then, verse 11, Jesus said, “My joy will operate in you.” If you have joy operating in you, verse 12, you will have the empowerment, the ability, to love people. Not just love people and this is where He lifts the bar way out there. However, He is not putting a heavy demand on us, but He is giving us how far He is willing to go with the human spirit. He says, “I will actually empower you to love people in the way that I love them. I will lead you to that kind of triumph if you want to go that far with Me.”*

*You do not want to start in verse 12 with just the command to love. You want to see the progression. If we abide in God’s love, verse 9, with the spirit of obedience, verse 10, it will result in joy progressively growing in us, verse 11, which empowers us to love people in sacrificial ways. Now, not all love is sacrificial, but consistent deep love has an element of sacrifice in it. And much love is sacrificial. It is not easy on the flesh.*

* 1. ***I also have loved you***(15:9): Love grows in us as we see how Jesus sees and loves us and how
	He demonstrates His kindness towards us, especially in our sin and failure (Eph. 2:6-7). His love
	for us is the basis by which *we* *see and love ourselves* through the lens of His grace (Mt. 22:39).

*Paragraph B: Jesus says, “I also have loved you,” verse 9. Love grows in us not only as we see the image of God in other people, but love grows in us as we see His love towards us. Jesus’ love for you is the basis of you seeing and loving yourself in the love of God. The analogy I have used many times over the years is the woman who prayed, “Lord, I want to love my neighbor as myself,” and the Lord said, “That is the problem! You hate yourself, and that is why you hate your neighbor.”*

*It is true. You cannot love except from the overflow of receiving that love and loving what God sees in you because you do not have any bandwidth for other people if you hate yourself. It is not a “kind of nice” thing. It is an essential thing that we see how He loves us and that we see ourselves through the lens of His investment into our life. We do not have the right to cast ourselves off, for the Lord says, “Wait a second! You are Mine! I have invested in you and I have a plan for you. You do not have the right to just disregard all of that because I am your Lord and I am your Savior. You have to agree with what I say about you and the investments that I have made in you.” Jesus says, “If you abide in love and see that I actually love you, it will awaken your heart to see yourself differently. You will have an overflow of love in you to give to someone else because you will have joy (15:11).*

* 1. ***My joy will remain*** (15:11): ***God’s joy in us*** includes: the ***pleasure of interacting with Jesus*** (Ps. 16:8; Jn. 3:29; 16:14) and ***a*** ***deep sense of well-being*** and confidence in His leadership (Rom. 8:28). His joy in us especially in times of suffering declares that the reality of relating to Jesus brings us an “all satisfying joy”—this displays the attractiveness of Jesus and makes others want this joy.

*I am not talking about a euphoric, exuberant, every minute kind of joy. I am talking the pleasure of interacting with Jesus and having a deep sense of wellbeing and a deep sense of confidence that God’s eyes are on you and that you matter to Him and, though life has difficult challenges all through life, yet you know that He is watching and that it is going to end well as He is leading you into triumph in your inner man. The result of this is that is Jesus brings us an “all-satisfying joy”—this displays the attractiveness of Jesus and makes others want to know Him in this way and to experience this joy.*

* 1. ***Love one another as I have loved you*** (15:12): Here, Jesus tells us how far He is willing to go in empowering us to love people in the way that He does*.* God’s commands to us include His promise of enabling us to obey them. Love grows in us as we see the image of God in other people and as we see His love towards us. Hisjoy in us sustains us through the sacrifices that consistent love requires—it empowers us to better understand how He sees others (even our enemies).We are filled with gratitude that God loves us in a way that we did not deserve. This empowers us to love others.

*Paragraph D: Verse 12. Jesus’ love for you is the basis that empowers you to see how He feels about other people. Meaning, one reason I can like that guy over there who is even mistreating me is because God says, “I like him.” There are three things that I have outlined here. When I look a person who is mistreating me or someone that is just not easy to love, I remember the image of God is in that person, God likes me in my brokenness, and I see myself through His lens, and then the Lord says, “I like him too, like I like you!” Okay! With that mindset I am positioned now to love at a greater way.*

*God’s commands to us, like this command to love one another, are also the promise of His enabling. Whatever God commands us to do, intrinsic in that command is, “I will help you do it! I really will help you if you will. I will not make you say, ‘Yes’ and align yourself to Me time and time again, but if you will, I will help you, and I will surprise you because I will lead your heart into triumph.”*

*So many believers who are sincere are content to live in spiritual boredom with almost no joy and with depression, though they love Jesus! The Lord would say, “Come on, lean into this! Realign, time and time and time again!” I tell you, there will be a transformation in your own heart. It will not be immediately. It might be, but my history has been that it takes time. Sometimes God surprises you.*

* 1. ***Summary***: Having a kingdom mindset equips us to love others—even those who mistreat us.
	1. We put Jesus’ attractiveness on display by loving people who mistreat us (Jn. 13:35; 17:23).
	2. We see the image of God in others—seeing their great value and dignity (Gen. 1:27).
	3. We see God’s love for us in our weakness and seeing ourself through the lens of grace (Jn. 15:9).
	4. We see God’s love and investment in others—even those who mistreat us (Mt. 25:40; Jn. 3:16).
	5. We will gain more freedom from spiritual dullness by engaging in love (2 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 6:7-9).
	6. We see the beauty of compassion that helps people—they enjoy God and bless others (Mt. 9:36).
	7. We have the assurance of receiving eternal rewards for loving others (Mt. 10:42; Heb. 6:10).

*Some people just kind of grit their teeth and try to love harder. However,* ***we only love more as we see more of the truth about God and how He views us and other people****. Jesus loves you like the Father loves Him*

*I encourage people to change their perspective: see who that person is as an image bearer, then see who you are as God’s inheritance, the beloved. Jesus loves you like the Father loves Him. Then see who that person is. They do not just bear God’s image; God has invested in them as well, even if they are unbelievers, and they have not yet come into the fullness of their purpose, but God could say, “I have been chasing them down! I have been blocking their path. I have been directing them and blessing them. I have been investing in them, I love them! For God so loved the world!”*

1. Loving people who mistreat you: the way to a supernatural inner life
	1. We are to love people who mistreat us as well as those who are not interesting to us (Lk. 6:27-38). We naturally love people who love us and who enjoy the things we enjoy (Lk. 6:32; cf. Mt. 5:46). Luke 6:27-38 is the most detailed description of what it looks like practically to love others in the way God loves and acts towards enemies. We must realign our heart many times to respond in love.

32“…For even sinners love those who love them…35Love your enemies, do good…you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36Therefore be merciful,
just as your Father also is merciful. 37Judge not, and you shall not be judged…forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38Give [mercy, money, etc.], and it will be given to you: good measure…running over…for with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Lk. 6:32-38)

*Roman numeral four: Loving people who mistreat you. Now here we are going to look at Luke 6. We are not going to spend a lot of time on Luke 6 in this session, but we will a little bit in the other sessions more and more because it is a really big passage with a lot of detail. However, I want to say this about Luke 6, which I have just a bit of it here maybe half of it, the part about love, about half of what He says about love in Luke 6. I want to say that Luke 6 is the most detailed description of love in the entire Bible. I want to say that again: it is the most practical detailed description of what it means to love other people. I mean we know 1 Corinthians 13 “Love is kind, love is patient….”*

*Jesus gives significant details in Lk. 6 about practical expressions of love that surpasses what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 and if you want to excel in this, which you do, this is a passage to go deep in, but I am telling you that it is challenging! This is way that God loves. When He says, “This is what love looks like,” He is also saying, “This is also how I treat you actually, and this is what it means for you to cooperate with Me.”*

*However, the key point is not just that the person gets blessed, because a lot of times we might think “Well, I am going to love that person so that it blesses the person” and that is good, but that is not the whole story. Again, when we love that person, we are putting God’s glory on display as He has put His reputation on the line by how we treat them.*

*Not only that, when I determined to go on that long journey of loving even when I am being mistreated or when I am suffering, I am going to respond in love. That trajectory causes a supernatural dimension in my inner man. It is not immediate, and it is not automatic like in one day, but it is like doing spiritual push-ups. We keep realigning to love when our natural man says, “Bah-humbug! I do not want to! He does not deserve it! No! No!”*

*The Lord would say, “No, stop! Put that attitude down and line up with Me!” As we do that, time after time, and I mean a thousand times a thousand, our inner man is actually impacted by the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit. A lot of folks want the supernatural activity on the inside, but they will not re-align with this process time and time again, and the Lord would say, “No, you have got to do it My way! My way will lead you to triumph on the inside, and My way will manifest the attractiveness and fragrance of My Son through you.”*

*Believers and unbelievers will be inspired, angels will be attracted, and even God will be attracted to your responses. You are a fragrance of Christ even to God. I say, “This is what I want, Lord! I want this lifestyle.”*

*Luke 6:32, “If you love those who love you, what credit is it?” I mean, everyone loves people who love them, and we love people that like the same things we like. A lot of folks, even in the body of Christ, look around the church, and they want to find the people who like what they like and who like them. They say, “I will join that group!”*

*The Lord would say, “Well, anybody can like people who like what they like and to like them. It does not take any quality of love to do that!”*

*“Well, I am not really looking for the quality of love. I am looking for some friendships and some affirmations so I can feel good!”*

*The Lord would say, “I understand you are human, and that is okay, but I have something bigger for you. I want you to actually grow in love.”*

*Instead of only looking for relationships with people who like what you like and people who really appreciate you, look around and say, “Holy Spirit, who do you want me to invest in?” I do not mean a one-time, one-hour situation. I ask, “Who would You like me to invest in more than just a one here or there?”*

*He might surprise you. They may not like what you like. They may not like you! They may whisper behind your back. They may be really judgmental and critical about you and two-faced, and the Lord says, “That is okay! You are going to put My glory on display if you stay in it! It will transform you. It really will!”*

*He says that unbelievers like people who like them. There is nothing supernatural about that! Verse 33, “If you do good to those who do good to you, sinners do that!” Verse 35, He gives the challenge, “I want you to love the people that mistreat you.” Jesus calls them enemies.*

*I often use the word adversaries, because when we think of enemies, we think of someone really entrenched, someone really evil and a real enemy. I’ve said, “I don’t know if I have enemies, but there are about ten people that really bother me—that is who we are talking about right now, adversaries—that are resisting me and blocking my plans and standing in the way of my tranquility, and the Lord would say, “That is who I am talking about!” I like to use the word, “adversaries,” because then we can think of three or four people. When we just think of enemies, we think, “Well, that one guy but it has been a few years since I have seen him.”*

*The Lord would say, “No, there is a handful around you right now who are not helpful to you. They are actually causing you hassle. You live with some of them, you work with some of them, you are in the Church with some of them, and you are on the team with some of them. I want you to actually be a manifestation of My attractiveness not just to them but also to the people around who are watching you love them.” Yes, it is blessing them, but it is also inspiring believers and unbelievers who are watching it all unfold.*

*He says, in effect, “Here is what I want you to do: I want you to do good to them. I want you to lend them money and do not hope that they will pay you back.”*

*Like, “Jesus, come on!”*

*Jesus would say, “I want to promise you this: the reward will be great!” It is not just for reward in heaven. That for sure, but the transformation of your emotional chemistry will be great! Over time you will look back a few years later, and you will be a different person. However, it is so unnatural to move in this direction, to move in the opposite spirit of someone resisting us. Because we see that they are image bearers, that they bear the image of God, and we see that God is really kind to us when we are not doing that well with Him, but He is patient with us, that creates gratitude, and we know that God loves that guy too!*

*The Lord would say, “Okay! You got the package, so be a vessel of My love to them whether they accept it or not. It will change you, and it will impact other people around you who are watching it. It will be the very fragrance of Christ.”*

*Jesus said, “You will be the sons of the Most High!” What that means is, you will live as true family members of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and His family. The sons of God, the daughters, the bride of Christ, you will be proof that you are connecting with Him. That is what it means that “you will be sons of the Most High.” It does not mean that you will be born again, because they are already born again, the people He is talking to through Church history. It means you will put on display what it means to be somebody connected to your heavenly Father. You will be proof that God really loves broken people like He does when you love people like that. You will be a trophy in the grace of God to unbelievers because God is kind to unthankful and evil people.*

*I mean, it is easy to be kind to people who like you, even to be kind to people who are neutral, but to be kind when they are unthankful? When we have helped them, and they return it with slander and criticism or worse? They are evil; they are plotting and planning to bring harm to your life. The Lord would say, “Yes, yes, yes, that is the guy I want you to love! You will give proof to others that God loves humans this way. You will give hope to other people that there is such a God like this because you will be a living picture of it, a trophy of the grace of God.”*

*This is a nice passage to make a poster out of, but this is actually the entry way into a life in the Holy Spirit which transforms our inner man, where we triumph on the inside, and the Lord says, as it were, “I am leading you into this spiritual success if you will go with Me, and it will be worth it. The reward will be great, and the transformation in your heart now and over months and years, as well as the way God will answer you when you stand before Him on the last day, the way that the Lord will respond to you will be with great rewards!*

*I look at that, and I say, “Oh my goodness! Jesus said that the reward will be great, but I can’t just ignore this passage. It is too glorious! I have too much sanctified selfishness to just ignore this verse! I want this greatness!”*

*The Lord says, as it were, “Here it is! Anybody can do it, but I am not going to make you do it. However, I will set up your life and lead you into places where you can do it, and I will also lead you into triumph in those places if you will say yes.”*

*I have found over the years that I really do say, “Yes. Yes, yes…no for a minute, no for a minute. Yes, yes, no, not now, next time! Yes, yes! No!” How many of you know what I mean about that? I mean it [my Yes], but my consistency is not what I had wish it had been all of the time. But that I am not giving up on it is the point that I am trying to make.*

* + 1. We will receive God’s help as we act in the opposite spirit of our enemies—by loving them.
		2. Seeking to love those who mistreat us ushers us by the Spirit into a supernatural inner life—
		it releases God’s fragrance every place we go, and it puts God’s glory on open display.

*Seeking to love those who mistreat us allows our inner man to experience the supernatural renewing of the Holy Spirit. In addition, when I set to my heart to love people in this way, it exposes my own fear and bitterness. I think I am doing pretty well until that guy comes in, and I respond with, “Augh!”*

*The Lord says, “No, no, no! Not Augh! No! It is the exact opposite!”*

*And I struggle with it, “Oh, well, I guess I am not quite there yet!”*

*The Lord says, “Okay! I am exposing your own bitterness and your own spiritual dullness, but I am doing it as a gift because I like you! I am not exposing you to condemn you, but to liberate you!” However, if we dodge all of those circumstances and just act in the same spirit towards them as they do towards us, then we never, ever see the same insight and exposure of our inner man, and then we just stay content to just live in this dull state!”*

* 1. God loves people while they are unthankful and evil (Lk. 6:35); He loves by providing sun and rain to wicked men. God blesses evil people because it is His nature to love perfectly (Rom. 5:10).

*Jesus talks in verse 35 about being kind to unthankful people. I mean, “Unthankful people? Being kind to them? Really? Being kind to evil people?”*

*The Lord would say, “Well, I am! I do it all of the time. I did it with you on the front end!”*

*“Oh! Oh, I didn’t think about it that way!” Now He is going to break down, in verses 36 to 38, what it means to be kind to ungrateful people. He says, “Here is what I mean, be merciful to them.”*

*“But they are ungrateful!”*

*No, show mercy because God gives you mercy. Let that inspire gratitude in you, the way God treats you so mercifully. Do not judge them. That does not mean that you do not understand that they are ungrateful, but do not talk about them. Do not try to put them down in other places. Don’t judge them, do not condemn them, but forgive them.*

*Then the famous verse 38, “Give, and it will be given to you.” He is actually not talking about money per se, although it also applies to money, but He is actually saying to give mercy. Give forgiveness, do not condemn, and if you will do this to other people, the Lord says that “with the measure that you use to ungrateful, evil people God will see that it is measured back to you that way” He is actually talking about giving mercy.*

* 1. ***Sons of the Most High:*** In loving this way, you are proof that you are receiving God’s love.
	This is the most convincing way to prove that God is a Father who loves broken people, even those who are ungrateful and evil. You will be a trophy of grace that displays the attractiveness of Jesus.
	Alfred Plummer (1852-1916), a Church of England pastor, said, *“To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human and* ***to return good for evil is divine****.”*

*Paragraph C: You will be sons of the Most High. I have already mentioned that. By loving in this way you give proof that you have received the Father’s love, and you have given proof that God loves broken people that way because He loved you that way. He empowered you to love that other guy that way, that ungrateful person. You give proof in a dark world that God loves that way which gives a lot of hope to people.*

*Our natural mindset is, obviously, “If you do something bad to me, I will do something bad to you! If you do something good to me, I will do something good to you!” But that is not a kingdom mindset, and our heart will never become a vibrant heart with that mindset. This quote from Alfred Plummer says, “To return evil for good” ­—if you treat someone evil when they have been good—that “is devilish. To return good for good, that is human but to return good for evil, that is divine,” and that is the kingdom of God. That is the power of God.*

* 1. Actively loving our enemies includes our ***words*** (bless), ***deeds*** (do good), and ***prayers***.

44I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you…45that you may be sons of your Father… (Mt. 5:44-45)

*Paragraph D: Now, we are going to look at the Matthew 5 version of Luke 6. Luke 6 and Matthew 5 are the same message. However, I wanted to highlight three different practical responses to people who mistreat us. We are going to actively love our adversaries. He says in verse 44, “Love your enemies.” That is the command. Now He is giving three ways. Luke 6, which we went over quickly, gives six or seven ways, but here is the more abbreviated and easier way. This is kind of an easier on-ramp. I mean, Luke 6 is intense. We are going to look at that later in this series. I am just inching our way forward here.*

* + 1. ***Love your enemies***: Enemies are adversaries who intentionally seek to hurt or hinder us.

*Matthew 5 has three ways we love our enemies. Luke 6 has about six or seven, depending on how you count them.*

* + 1. ***Bless those who curse you***: We are to speak words of blessing to them and about them.

*He says, “Bless those who curse you!” They are slandering you, but use your words to bless them. Don’t lie about them and say that they are amazing with virtues which they do not have. Find something that is a strength in them which you can actually talk about and bless their strengths in as much as you see them. It is not talking about flattering them or lying and being syrupy about them. Be truthful. Look for something that is a virtue within them that you could talk about when someone brings up their name up because their name is going to be brought up a lot if it is known that they have been mistreating you because there are plenty of people in the body of Christ who are going to let you vent. They might be your friend, but they are not really being helpful to you when they do that, because that is just going to lock your spirit into dullness and into spiritual boredom.*

*One of the ways that you will love your enemy most is with your words. Not only your words, but you will have more opportunity with your words than you will with your actions. You might do something good for them here and there, but words you will have plenty of time to be asked about them. Do not slander them. Speak words of blessing. What I have found over the years—and again, I have not done this perfectly but I have done this intensely for many, many years—I have had lots of folks say a lot of things about me, and the Lord says, “No, bless them! Say what I say about them!”*

*And it is still not perfectly easy, but it is easier now than it was years ago where I would say, choking, “Augh!....bless…” and the Lord would say, “No, no, come on! Your heart will get free if you get your words in agreement with Mine! You go that other way like all the folks around you, and you will be stuck in spiritual boredom and lethargy! You will be stuck with a dull heart and no joy. Is that what you want? I want to lead you in triumph! I do not want to leave you stuck there, but it starts with words!”*

*Words are the thing that we will have the most opportunity to use to free our hearts by speaking about them in ways opposite of how they are speaking about us.*

* + 1. ***Do good to those who hate you***: We are to look for practical ways to do good to them.

*Then occasionally you will have opportunity to do good to them. The “doing good to them” is not so that they will be enriched—they might get enriched—but doing good to them is to liberate your heart. God is after your heart by you exercising that muscle to be good to them. Then say words to God; pray for them.*

* + 1. ***Pray for those who use you***: By praying for an enemy, we stand in the gap before God for them. This increases our love. It is impossible to pray for someone without loving them.

*Now, I have found in my experience over the years that I have had lots of opportunity. I mean anyone my age has had plenty of opportunities to do this. I remember when I was about twenty years old, and the Lord spoke prophetically and said, “You are going to have many adversaries. You are going to have to bless them.”*

*I thought, “I don’t even have one that I know of!”*

*The Lord said, “Well, just hang in there. You will have plenty of chances to do these spiritual pushups of blessing people who mistreat you!”*

*I have found the easiest was to pray for them—it was not easy, but it was easiest—I would start by saying, “God, don’t bless him. Bless his kids. How is that? Bless his kids. Yes, that is good. I can do his kids. They are innocent. They didn’t do anything. Bless his kids! However, not too much so that he gets the idea that You are happy with him.”*

*The Lord would say, “No, no, just ask Me to bless him.”*

*Here is what happens—I love this discovery because it was a surprise—you cannot bless somebody without eventually having warm affections for them. Whomever you pray for, you will love eventually, and if you pray for them, then your heart gets tenderized. I have done that in various situations and was surprised because I had real tender emotions and thought, “Where did that come from?”*

*“I am leading you in triumph, and My fragrance is being manifest through you a little bit.”*

*When you can pray for them, then you can say kind words about them when people bring them up. Again, if it is a situation where people are aware of the conflict, you will have plenty of Christians who are willing to give you every chance to vent. I want to say this again: that is not helpful. Though they may be comforting you, they are actually keeping you stuck in spiritual boredom.*

*You do not have to rebuke them by saying, “Why aren’t you helping me bless this guy?” Don’t do that either, I have done that a few times, and that has backfired. Ask the Lord for ways you can help them. Maybe it is money; maybe it is doing them a favor.*

* 1. God promised that our inner man will be strengthened and renewed with His glory. Glory in this age includes a liberated heart with joy; in the age to come, it includes eternal rewards. We are not content to live in spiritual dullness but are zealous to experience more of glory. Being faithful when persecuted and loving those who mistreat us is the necessary path to experience more of His glory.

16Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17For our light affliction…is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory…
(2 Cor. 4:16-17)

*Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16 that our inner man is renewed day by day. Now, I do not mean dramatically every day. However, this affliction, this difficult situation, whether it is a circumstance or a relationship, it is working in you—that is the phrase—it is working in you a far more exceeding eternal weight of glory! It is working glory in your inner man if you will line up and stay with it. Glory in this age, which is a liberated heart that has joy, and glory in the age to come that has rewards for obeying God by loving and being a trophy of His grace that causes others to be attracted to Jesus.*

* 1. Embracing this progressively ushers us into a supernatural lifestyle. We lose much good in our relationship with God by neglecting actively love enemies. If we get preoccupied with those who mistreat us, then we become far more vulnerable to being weighed down by offense and bitterness.

*Paragraph F: Embracing this—I am just saying it again—ushers us into a supernatural lifestyle. Again, it is progressive. It is slow. I call it spiritual pushups. You are aligning your mind a thousand times, times a thousand, but over time it changes the way your heart is. We need to set our heart to love difficult people, even those who are manipulative, lazy, unresponsive, insulting to you, and critical, judgmental, and complain much.*

1. the manifestation of God’s glory: revelation of His Loving emotions
	1. Moses prayed to see God’s glory. God answered by promising to reveal His goodness and proclaim His Name (His personality and emotions) to Moses. God has the best personality. He is the most kind, good, pure, happy, smart, passionate Person that exists.

18Moses said, “Please, show me Your glory.” 19Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you…” (Ex. 33:18-19)

*Moses prayed, “Show me Your glory!” in Exodus 33.*

*God said, “Okay, I will show you My glory, but I am going to change the terms. Instead of calling it My glory, though it is My glory, it is My goodness, and it is the revelation of My name and of My personality. My glory is my goodness, and it is My personality. My name and personality are the same thing.” And so He said, “Okay, Moses. I will proclaim My name to you, Moses, and I will show you My goodness!”*

* 1. The very pinnacle of God’ glory is when He reveals and manifests His loving emotions (Ex. 34:6).

6The Lord …proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering,
and abounding in goodness and truth…” (Ex. 34:6)

*Paragraph B: Then a couple of verses later, the Lord says, “Here it is Moses, My glory! I am merciful! I am gracious! I suffer long with people who resist Me and hate Me. I abound in goodness! This is My glory!” The reason I am saying this is that when God’s glory is revealed, He shows His kindness.*

* 1. ***The Lord is merciful***: The Lord is tender in relating to us in our weaknesses and sin. Mercy is the first aspect of His personality that He revealed to Moses; it is the one we need first and most. The Lord delights in mercy. It is one of His favorite things to do in leading the universe (Mic. 7:18).

18Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity…He delights in mercy. (Mic. 7:18)

*Paragraph C: The attribute that He mentions first—and He does this often—it says “He is merciful or kind!” God’s glory is not His muscles or that He can create the universes. That is His glory, of course, but God’s glory is His kindness toward people who resist Him. I mean, He has all power and all wisdom,* ***and*** *total kindness. “That is my glory, Moses, that I am merciful!”*

*My point is, when I read this, I think of God being this way to me! He says, “Good, but now in this context I want you, Mike, to be that way to others. Be merciful to them. Be gracious to those people.”*

*“Yes, but they are resisting! They are troublemakers!”*

*“Suffer long with them, and do not write them off! Abound in goodness about them and even truth because there are things about them that are true, that are good, so abound in truth and not just the negative about them. Search for the redemptive virtues in them.” That changes your whole mindset.*

*He is merciful. That is the first thing that God pointed out to Moses. I believe the reason is because that is the first thing that we need from God. If we go back to Luke 6, twenty minutes ago, that is what God said we need to do to other people: be merciful to them. Do not talk negatively about them. Cover them. God delights in mercy, Micah 7:18. I love that passage. God loves showing mercy to people who do not deserve it, but my point is not to talk about God, my point is that God wants you and me to love and delight in showing mercy to people who do not deserve mercy.*

* 1. ***The Lord is gracious***: He does not give us what we deserve. He is generous in how He evaluates our weak efforts to obey and serve Him. He remembers our frailty and does not reject us because of our weakness. We may be surprised and exasperated by our weakness, but God is not.

10He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities… 14For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. (Ps. 103:10-14)

*Paragraph D: He is gracious. He does not give us what we deserve. David said in Psalm 103 that He does not deal with us according to our sins. He knows our frame and He is gracious to us.*

* 1. ***The Lord is longsuffering***: He bears long with us instead of “writing us off” or exposing our failures. He suffers long with our sinful responses and does not lose enthusiasm for us when we fail.

*Paragraph E: He is longsuffering. He does not write us off. We quickly write people off; three strikes and you are out. The Lord says, as it were, “No, it is not ‘three strikes and you are out!’ That is not the kingdom!”*

*“Well I gave them every chance! The other people gave him one strike, and he was were out!”*

*The Lord would say, “Well, I give them seven times seventy! That is the kingdom way!”*

*Again, it is not just kindness to them, though it is, and that is a good point in and of itself, but the point I am talking about today is the heart liberated.*

*I am talking about John 15:9. Jesus said, “God loves God with all of His heart, and that is how God loves you!” Now live in the reality of those two truths, and do it with the Spirit of obedience, then joy will get into your heart, and that joy will empower you to love in a kingdom way. That is what this whole trajectory is all about here. He suffers long.*

* 1. ***The Lord is abounding in goodness***: He overflows with good plans for us. The song that is recorded most often in Scripture is: “The Lord is good. His mercy endures forever” (1 Chr. 16:34;
	2 Chr. 5:13; 7:3; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Jer. 33:11). God will not withhold His best from us (Ps. 84:11).

Paragraph F: He is abounding in goodness. He does not withhold anything good from us. I mean the most recorded song in Scripture is, “The Lord is good! His mercy endures forever!” He does not ever withhold good, but when somebody bothers us, we withhold good from them, and He says, “No, be like Me!”

* 1. God’s personality is loving as defined in Scripture. We are to express His love (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

4Love suffers long and is kind…5is not provoked, thinks no evil...8Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

*1 Corinthians 13 describes the way Jesus loves us, and, thus, the way we are seek to love others. “Love suffers long. Love is kind. Love is not provoked. Love endures all things. Love never fails! Father, that is the way that we want to live. That is the supernatural way that I want my heart to grow and move forward in.”*

*Father, here we are before You.*

*Again, in one way this makes me miserable, and I am saying, “Lord, I am not doing so well on this. I am doing better than I used to do, but I need to do better.”*

*The Lord is saying, as it were, “I am actually setting you up for success. I am letting you be in these situations so that you can triumph. I am on your team! Do not look at it the other way!”*

*Jesus, we say, “Yes” to You!*

*I believe God is going to raise up a generation who are going to live in this reality. God wants this to be normal Christianity, not heroic Christianity. This is the kingdom, what I have shared tonight.*

*Now, everyone in the room needs help on this, I am sure, so I am not going to invite people up who are saying, “I need more of this” because that is all of us if we are being honest with ourselves. However, I want to invite people to come up who would like prayer for anything. Whether it is this, that or the other, you are just saying, “I need prayer tonight,” and when someone comes up, you can whisper to them what you need prayer for: healing of the heart, healing of your body, healing of your family, healing of your hope. Go ahead and come stand on these lines if you would like prayer.*

*Lord, we want to grow in this.*