

# Examining our love to live with heart

WEEK 6



## APR. 2: *Sunday* LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

*“Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” (Luke 10:29)*

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to interpret what it means to love “your neighbor as yourself.” On the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, a Samaritan finds a man beaten by robbers and does not steer clear, unlike others who have passed by. He crosses the road to reach the man in need because as, Luke says, “he was moved with pity.” A more literal translation of the Greek is “his heart was melting.”

Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that justice work requires us to love as people of flesh and blood, to love with hearts that melt when we encounter neighbors who are in need. Liberation, Gutiérrez writes, will not come from cold religious obligation or a charitable sense of duty. It will come not from mechanical rationalizations of our mind but from authentic, fleshy, heart connections. God works among us, freeing us, opening our hearts, helping us become more fully human, or humane, through the relationships that grow between neighbors.



### EXAMEN:

*Recall a human need that makes your heart melt — poverty, hunger, war, incarceration, etc. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.*



### IMAGINE:

*Imagine yourself coming across a stranger in need as you travel. What does this stranger look like? What do they say? What do they need? Allow your heart to melt in this moment. Pay attention to the feeling of compassion, connection and mercy. How does this feeling hurt? How does it set you free?*



### PRAY:

*Free me for love, O God, so I can live with heart.*



## APR. 3: *Monday* LOVE OF SELF

*“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:7-8)*

1 John speaks to us of God’s love in poetic words and addresses us, the readers, as “Beloved.” Love for us exists even before we exist. As “beloved” children, born of God, we are loved even before we are born. No matter what we do, who we are, or who we become, God’s love is behind and before us — surrounding us and our lives.

The greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity or power, but self-rejection. In his book *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen writes about how God’s message of love often gets lost in our own self-rejection: “It certainly is not easy to hear God’s voice of love in a world filled with voices that shout: ‘You are no good, you are ugly; you are worthless; you are nobody.’ These negative voices are so loud and so persistent that it is easy to believe them. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the ‘Beloved.’”

The source of all love names us, “Beloved.” This Lent, let us seek to open ourselves to God’s love and allow ourselves to be loved.

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## EXAMEN:

Recall a situation or an experience that led you to feelings of self-rejection. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

## IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself as one child among many crowded around Jesus, trying to catch his attention. Jesus sees you, leads you out of the crowd so you can be near him. Jesus talks to you as if no one else is around. He pays attention to you and your needs. He loves you. Listen carefully to hear what Jesus wants you to know.

## PRAY:

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## APR. 4: *Tuesday* LOVE OF RESPECT

*"Honor everyone." (1 Peter 2:17)*

"I'm going to do something weird," Malak whispered to Katie, her bunkmate on our interfaith immersion trip to Chicago. Malak and Katie were both students at the college I served as chaplain. Neither knew each other well before the trip. Each practiced a religion foreign to the other.

Malak slipped into her prayer robe, its royal blue flower print covering her head, her arms to her wrists, and her body to her feet. She began her prayers facing Mecca, alternating positions of standing and prostrating herself, forehead to the floor while silently praying in Arabic. When she finished, Katie intentionally took a moment to say, "I don't think it's weird, Malak. I think it's beautiful."

Respect and honor go hand in hand. Both position us to care for and regard another's feelings, rights, wishes, beliefs and traditions. Such respect is beautiful because it recognizes our ability to cross boundaries of difference and grow in mutual understanding.

According to scripture, we are not to pick and choose who is worthy of our regard. We are to respect and honor everyone. It's simple, straightforward and beautiful.

## EXAMEN:

Recall a time when you felt disrespected. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

## IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself interacting with people wholly different than yourself. They speak, believe, act and worship differently. How can you be among these people respectfully? What thoughts, feelings and actions would honor these people as you interact with them?

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## APR. 5: *Wednesday* LOVE OF HONESTY

*“So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25)*

Years ago, I interviewed for a position as the pastor of a small church. We liked each other, the fit felt good. I advanced to the last meeting between myself and the search committee when they asked a question that changed everything. Did I believe gay and lesbian people should be ordained as officers and ministers in the church? I answered honestly. “Yes,” I said, “I believe they should.” My answer ended the interview and any possibility of being called to serve as their pastor.

I’d wanted that job. And I suspected the search committee wouldn’t like my answer. In such situations it’s tempting to “spin” what we say to get to a favorable outcome, or to avoid answering a tough question. But honesty is the foundation of trust. If we can’t be honest, we can’t build trusting relationships — with others, with ourselves or with our God.

Ephesians emphasizes honest talk and a “putting away (of) falsehood.” Truthful speech is the first step in building any relationship, inspired by the way God is honest with us.

### EXAMEN:

*Recall a moment when you weren’t honest with someone. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.*

### IMAGINE:

*Imagine yourself talking to a friend and they ask casually, how are you today? How would you typically answer this question? Pause to consider your thoughts and feelings so you can answer their question as honestly as possible.*

### PRAY:

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## APR. 6: *Thursday* LOVE OF OPENNESS

*“We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is not restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.” (2 Corinthians 6:11-13)*

I give you the end of a golden string;  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at Heaven’s gate,  
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.

William Stafford often quoted these poetic lines by William Blake when he described his own writing process as a poet. Stafford believed that any detail, set to language, becomes the end of a golden string — the sound of a barking dog, the memory of your mother’s hands, the crack of a tree branch. These details will lead you to Heaven’s gate – which might take the form of a beautiful poem – if you are open to following that golden string.

The stance of the poet must be one of openness. He or she is to be susceptible and ready. There can be no preconceived notions. The writer is not to impose his or her ideas on the poem, but simply follow the golden string.

This is beautiful wisdom for us as followers of Christ, too. Paul speaks of his openness to the Corinthians. He meets them where and as they are, with no expectations, no restricted affection. Such openness is a stance of love, and a position of trust. These people might lead you to Heaven’s gate. One never knows. But only if we are open will we be able to discover the gold they have to offer.

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## EXAMEN:

Recall a moment in your life when you felt stuck, unable to discern what to do or what direction to go. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

## IMAGINE:

Imagine you are out for a walk and discover a golden string on the ground. Pick up the string and follow it carefully. Don't pull or tug on the string, just wind it in a ball as you follow. Notice where the string is leading you. Pay attention. Breathe and let go of all your expectations. What do you discover?

## PRAY:

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## APR. 7: *Friday* LOVE OF HUMAN LIFE

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” (Matthew 1:23)

When we consider humanity, we might quickly think of all the atrocities and sins we have committed — our wars, genocide and violence; our degradation and devaluation of our natural environment; our disrespect and dishonoring of those who are different. But God loves humanity. God loved us enough to become one of us.

God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus Christ reveals our Creator's extraordinary love for us. As Cynthia Rigby writes in her book *Holding Faith*, God's dramatic entrance into our lives as Jesus Christ reveals the Divine's desire to be with us and for us. It's a relationship of Lover and Beloved.

Through Jesus Christ, our human potential is also revealed. Yes, we sin and fall far short of God's expectations. But we can also be courageous and caring. We can choose love in the face of hate, good over evil, right instead of wrong. Pause today to recall the best examples of humanity. Set these Christ-like models before you as evidence of your potential and marks of God's love.

## EXAMEN:

Recall a moment in your life when you acted faithfully, a moment you look back on and feel good about because you embodied your best, most Christ-like self. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

## IMAGINE:

Call to mind people who you admire as Christ-like. Hold these people in your mind. Consider their qualities. Consider how they came to be who they are. Give God thanks for these Christ-like models.

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## APR. 8: *Saturday* LOVE OF GOD

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”  
(Deuteronomy 6:5)*

Our family eats dinner together as often as possible. We’ve never explicitly made a rule about screens at the table, but we honor this time with our attention and shut down our distracting devices. Sometimes, when we come together around the table, we’ve had a bad day and are feeling grumpy. Other times, my kids have been fighting and don’t like each other very much. Our conversations aren’t always happy, or deep. Talking with teenagers often gets responses like “Yeah” or “Sure”, a nod or an eye roll. Yet, still we gather. It’s our ritual of love that keeps us bound together as a family.

As we come to the close of Lent and the last of these daily devotions, I pray this time spent with God has born faithful fruit. Today, think back on your Lenten journey. What did you learn about yourself along the way? What did you learn about God? Would you like to continue practicing examen? Loving God means honoring our Savior with our time and attention. Not every day’s devotional practice will yield deep thoughts or life-altering epiphanies. But love is a choice we make every day, a relational practice that requires us to show up — just like Christ shows up for us. May God bless you in your continued faith practice. May you love and be loved.

### EXAMEN:

*Recall a time when you gathered with people you love. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.*

### IMAGINE:

*Imagine yourself setting aside time to spend with God, sitting at a table with your Savior. Sit in God’s presence and breathe deep. Recognize God’s full attention on you, on your life and your concerns. Love God with your attention. What do you notice in this moment? What do you feel? What do you learn?*

### PRAY:

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## APR. 9: *Easter Sunday*

*“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples.’”  
(Matthew 28:5-7)*

Through the interior work you have done this Lent, what have you noticed in your outward life? Has your interior work benefited how you walk through the world, how you carry yourself, how you are with others? Are you more open, accepting, ready to follow or trust?

On Easter we celebrate resurrected life. As soon as the women at the tomb became aware of Jesus’ resurrection, the angel told them to go and share the good news. I pray this Lenten journey has raised, or resurrected, awareness of who you are in relationship to God. I pray this interior work has blessed your outward living in ways that send you ready to share the Good News.

### PRAY:

*Free me through Christ, O God, so I can live a resurrected life, ready to share the Good News. Amen.*