



St Barnabas Cray

Love One Another: Belonging in Christ

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - Created in Love, Called to Love

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is something deeply moving about the fact that the call to love is not a New Testament innovation. It echoes through the oldest pages of Scripture, through the ancient Torah written some 3,500 years ago. Moses stood before God's people and declared what was to be the very heartbeat of their existence: love the Lord your God with everything you are. This was not a suggestion or an aspiration. It was the defining orientation of a life lived in covenant with the living God.

And yet, how easily we forget. As the sermon so honestly reminds us, how often do we set out with good intentions, only to find that by mid-morning we have already let ourselves down? We are the same people Moses was speaking to. We need the same constant reminders. The ancient instruction to tie these words on your hands, to bind them on your foreheads, to speak of them when you sit, walk, lie down, and rise up, was not religious superstition. It was a profound pastoral wisdom: we are forgetful creatures, and the love of God must be woven into the very fabric of our daily rhythms if it is to shape us.

The foundation of all Christian love begins here — not with our effort, but with the recognition that we are first loved. We were created in God's image. We are his very good creation. We belong to him. This belonging is not a burden; it is a gift. It is the source of our identity, our security, and our capacity to love others at all. Before we can love well, we must know deeply that we are loved. Before we can give ourselves to others, we must be anchored in the One who gave himself for us.

Today, let this ancient command land freshly. Not as law, but as invitation. You are God's. He loves you. Now — with all your heart, soul, and strength — love him back.

Reflection Question

In what areas of your daily life do you find it hardest to keep the love of God at the centre of your thoughts and actions, and what might help you build in more intentional reminders?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Unlike much of contemporary society, unlike, sadly, many of our family, our neighbours, our work colleagues, we believe that we were created in God's image, male and female. He created them. God saw what he had made and it was very good."

Today's Application

Begin this week with a simple but intentional act of re-orientation. Take five minutes this morning to write down one truth about God's love for you — perhaps from a verse, a memory, or something that has moved you recently. Place it somewhere you will see it throughout the day: on your phone's lock screen, on a sticky note by the kettle, or in your wallet. This is not a gimmick; it is the ancient wisdom of Deuteronomy made practical. Throughout the day, when you notice it, pause and let it speak. In the evening, ask yourself: did this reminder shape how I treated anyone today? Did it soften my impatience, prompt a kind word, or help me choose grace over frustration? Begin to build the habit of letting God's love for you be the first thought of your morning and the last reflection of your night.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, I come to you this morning as your creation — made in your image, known by you, loved by you. Forgive me for the many times I forget this, when I live as though I must earn my place or prove my worth. Anchor me today in the truth that I am yours. Let your love be the foundation from which everything else flows. Teach me to love you with all that I am — not out of duty, but out of delight. And as I go through this day, may that love shape every word, every decision, every encounter. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Returning to the Foundation

Evening Reflection

As this day draws to a close, it is worth pausing to ask: where did love show up today? Not the grand, dramatic kind — but the quiet, daily kind. A moment of patience in a difficult conversation. A choice to think of another person's needs before your own. A small act of kindness that cost you something, even if only a little time or energy.

The ancient command of Deuteronomy was never meant to be a single dramatic declaration. It was meant to be lived in the ordinary — when you sit, when you walk, when you lie down. This evening is one of those moments. You are lying down at the end of a day, and God is present in it. He was present in the moments you handled well, and he was present in the moments you wish you could take back. His love for you did not waver through either.

Rest tonight in the knowledge that you are his. You belong to the God who created you and called you very good. Tomorrow is another opportunity to love him back — with your whole heart, soul, and strength. But for now, simply rest in being loved.

Evening Reflection

Where did you notice God's love at work in your day today, either in your own heart or through someone else?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you for this day. Thank you that your love for me did not depend on how well I performed. As I rest tonight, let me simply receive your love — and wake tomorrow ready to give it away. Amen.

Tuesday - Belonging to Christ: The Gift of Identity

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We live in an age deeply preoccupied with identity. Questions of who we are, where we belong, and what gives our lives meaning are pressing concerns for many people — perhaps especially for younger generations. And yet the Christian answer to the question of identity is both ancient and radical: you belong to Christ. The Greek word *Christianus*, from which we get the word *Christian*, literally means belonging to Christ. Our identity is not something we construct or discover within ourselves. It is something we receive.

The Apostle Peter's words are breathtaking in their generosity. He is writing to scattered, often marginalised believers — people who had every reason to feel insignificant, displaced, or forgotten. And he says to them: you are chosen. You are royal. You are holy. You are God's special possession. These are not titles earned by moral achievement or social standing. They are gifts given by grace, rooted in the love of a God who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

This matters enormously for how we live. When our identity is secure in Christ, we are freed from the exhausting need to prove ourselves, to compete, to perform. We do not need to grasp for status or significance, because we already have it — given to us by the One who made us and redeemed us. This security is what makes genuine love possible. It is very difficult to love others freely when you are anxiously protecting your own sense of worth. But when you know you are God's special possession, you can afford to be generous, humble, and patient. You have nothing to lose and everything to give.

Today, let your identity in Christ be the ground beneath your feet. You are not defined by your failures, your reputation, your productivity, or your relationships. You are defined by whose you are.

Reflection Question

How much does your sense of identity depend on things that can be taken away — status, approval, achievement — and how might anchoring your identity more deeply in Christ change the way you relate to others?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Belonging to God gives us our identity. That's a special thing about us who are in this building today."

Today's Application

Today, pay attention to the moments when you feel the pull to prove yourself or seek approval from others. It might be in a work meeting, a conversation with a friend, or even scrolling through social media. When you notice that pull, pause and silently remind yourself: I am God's special possession. I am chosen. This is not arrogance — it is the truth of the gospel, received with humility. Then consider one relationship in your life where insecurity has made you guarded, competitive, or unkind. What might change if you approached that relationship from a place of security rather than anxiety? Write that person's name down and pray for them today. Ask God to show you one concrete way you can serve or encourage them this week — not to earn anything, but simply because you are free to love.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that I belong to you. Thank you that my identity is not something I have to construct or defend — it is a gift you have given me. On the days when I feel insignificant, overlooked, or uncertain of my place, remind me that I am your chosen, your royal, your holy possession. Let that truth settle deep into my heart today. Free me from the need to prove myself, and fill me instead with the freedom to love others well. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Resting in Whose You Are

Evening Reflection

There is a kind of tiredness that comes not from physical exertion but from the effort of maintaining an image, managing impressions, or striving for approval. If you have felt that kind of weariness today, this evening is an invitation to lay it down.

You spent yesterday reflecting on God's love as your foundation. Today you have been invited to consider what it means to belong to Christ — to receive your identity as a gift rather than an achievement. As you look back on the day, you may notice moments when you forgot this. Moments when you slipped back into striving, comparing, or performing. That is simply the human condition. It is why we need daily reminders, daily returning.

But you may also notice moments when something was different. A conversation that felt less guarded. A choice to be generous rather than self-protective. A quiet confidence that was not your own. These are the fruits of an identity rooted in Christ, and they are worth noticing and giving thanks for. The more we pay attention to these moments, the more we recognise God's grace at work in the ordinary texture of our days.

Evening Reflection

Were there moments today when you felt genuinely free to love or serve someone without needing anything in return? What made that possible?

Evening Prayer

Father, I am yours. That is enough. Thank you for the moments today when I glimpsed what it means to live from that truth. Forgive me for the moments I forgot. As I sleep tonight, let me rest in your love — and wake tomorrow a little more secure in whose I am. Amen.

Wednesday - The Fellowship We Were Made For

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is a telling illustration in the sermon: you can kick a football against a wall on your own, but it is far better to play it on a pitch as a team. It is a gentle, almost playful observation, but it carries real theological weight. Human beings were not designed for isolated faith. We were made for community — for the kind of belonging that can only be experienced when we gather, share, struggle, and grow together.

The writer to the Hebrews was addressing a community under pressure. Some were drifting away from the gathered fellowship, perhaps out of fear, perhaps out of weariness, perhaps because it simply seemed easier to believe quietly on one's own. And the writer's response is not condemnation but pastoral urgency: do not give up meeting together. The word used for encouraging one another carries the sense of coming alongside, of being present with someone in a way that strengthens and steadies them. This is not something you can do alone.

The sermon reflects on the fact that there are people of genuine faith who, for various reasons, do not gather with a church community. That is indeed something to hold with sadness and prayer. Because the Christian life, as the New Testament envisions it, is irreducibly communal. We are not a collection of individuals who happen to share the same beliefs. We are a body — connected, interdependent, mutually responsible. What affects one affects all.

This is not always comfortable. Community means friction as well as warmth, challenge as well as comfort. But it is in precisely this friction that we are formed. It is in the real, sometimes difficult, always imperfect fellowship of the church that we learn what love actually costs — and discover that, by God's grace, we are capable of more than we imagined. The church is not a building. It is a community of people learning, together, what it means to belong to Christ.

Reflection Question

In what ways do you actively contribute to the life and fellowship of your church community, and are there ways in which you have been withdrawing — physically, emotionally, or spiritually?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together. Let us encourage one another. You can play football kicking a ball up a wall, but I am told that it's much better to play it on a pitch as a team. That's why we're here, isn't it?"

Today's Application

Today, think of one person in your church community whom you have not spoken to in a while — perhaps someone who has been absent, someone who is going through a difficult season, or someone who tends to sit quietly on the edges. Reach out to them today. It need not be elaborate: a text message, a phone call, or a note. Simply say that you have been thinking of them and wanted to make contact. This is the ministry of encouragement that Hebrews calls us to — and it costs very little but means a great deal. Then reflect on your own patterns of engagement with your church family. Are you a consistent presence? Do you arrive ready to give, or only to receive? Ask God to show you one way you could invest more intentionally in the community of believers you belong to this week.

Morning Prayer

Lord, thank you for the gift of your church — imperfect, sometimes frustrating, but utterly precious. Thank you that I do not have to walk this journey of faith alone. Forgive me for the times I have pulled back from community, when I have prioritised comfort over commitment, or independence over interdependence. Help me to be the kind of presence in my church family that encourages and strengthens others. Show me who needs to hear from me today, and give me the courage to reach out. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Blessing of Being Together

Evening Reflection

Midweek is often when the busyness of life presses hardest. The initial energy of Monday has faded, and the weekend feels still distant. It is perhaps a fitting day to pause and reflect on the gift of fellowship — the people God has placed around you who share your faith and your journey.

Building on Monday's reflection on God's love as our foundation, and yesterday's invitation to receive your identity in Christ, today's theme has been the communal dimension of that identity. We belong to Christ together. We are not merely individuals who believe the same things; we are a body, a family, a holy nation.

This evening, let your thoughts drift to the people who make up that community for you. The faces you see on a Sunday. The people who have prayed for you, encouraged you, or simply sat with you in difficult moments. There is grace in that. There is the love of God made tangible in human form. Give thanks for them tonight — by name, if you can.

Evening Reflection

Who in your church community has been a particular gift to you recently, and have you told them so?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for the people you have placed around me. Thank you that faith was never meant to be a solitary endeavour. Bless my church family tonight — those who are struggling, those who are joyful, those who feel unseen. May we be, for one another, a glimpse of your love. Amen.

Thursday - Faith That Works: Love in Action

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10 NIV)

Devotional Thought

It is a striking phrase: do good to all people. Not just to those who deserve it, not just to those who will return the favour, not just to those who share our faith — but to all people. And yet Paul adds something equally striking: especially to those who belong to the family of believers. There is a particular responsibility that comes with belonging to the same community, the same body, the same household of faith. Love is not abstract. It is enacted, specific, and costly.

The sermon points to the community fridge as a vivid example of faith put into action — the church building buzzing with people coming to receive practical help, tangible care, real food. This is not peripheral to the gospel. It is the gospel made visible. When Jesus told his disciples that the world would know they were his followers by their love for one another, he was not describing a feeling. He was describing a way of life that would be observable, recognisable, even surprising to those watching from the outside.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to a community wrestling with exactly this question: what does the gospel require of us in practice? And his answer is unambiguous: it requires doing good. Celebrating with those who celebrate. Mourning with those who mourn. Shining like lights in the world. These are not optional extras for particularly zealous Christians. They are the natural overflow of a life rooted in Christ's love.

There is a gentle challenge here for all of us. It is easy to hold the right beliefs about love. It is considerably harder to enact them — especially when we are tired, when the person in need is difficult, or when our own resources feel depleted. But this is precisely where the grace of God meets us. We are not called to love in our own strength. We are branches connected to the vine, drawing life from Christ himself. His love flowing through us is what makes the impossible possible.

Reflection Question

When you think about the practical ways your faith is expressed in service and care for others, are you satisfied with what you see — or is there a gap between what you believe and what you actually do?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Belonging to Christ requires putting faith into action. So much of that is done here. Faith is put into action. We need to demonstrate practical love — agape — caring for those in need, those who are sick and troubled. In other words, putting what we believe into action."

Today's Application

Today, look for one concrete opportunity to do good to someone — and act on it. This might be within your church community: visiting someone who is unwell, helping with a practical need, or simply spending time with someone who is lonely. It might be in your neighbourhood or workplace: a conversation with someone who is struggling, an act of generosity, or a moment of genuine attentiveness to someone who is often overlooked. The key is specificity. Do not settle for a vague intention to be more loving. Identify one person, one action, one moment — and do it. Then, in the evening, reflect on what it cost you and what it gave you. Love that costs nothing teaches us very little. Love that costs something forms us into the image of Christ.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the one who came not to be served but to serve, and to give your life as a ransom for many. You are the pattern of love in action. Forgive me for the times I have kept my faith safely inside my own heart, unexpressed in the lives of those around me. Today, open my eyes to the person who needs what I have to give. Give me courage to act, generosity to give, and the grace to do it without counting the cost. Let my life be a visible declaration of your love. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Love That Costs Something

Evening Reflection

As you reflect on this day, you may be aware of a moment when you had the opportunity to do good and took it — and perhaps also a moment when you had the opportunity and let it pass. Both are worth sitting with honestly.

This week we have been building layer upon layer: the love of God as our foundation, our identity as those who belong to Christ, the fellowship of the community we share, and now the outward expression of that love in practical action. These are not separate things. They are one movement — from receiving God's love, to being formed by it in community, to giving it away in the world.

Michael Owen's comment in the sermon is worth returning to this evening: he assumed his actions would show his children that he loved them. There is something honest and even admirable in that. Actions do speak. But so do words. And so does presence. The fullest expression of love is one that holds all three together — what we do, what we say, and who we are with people. Ask God to show you where you might grow in this.

Evening Reflection

Did you find an opportunity today to do good to someone? What did it feel like — and what did it require of you?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for every opportunity today to love someone in your name. Where I took those opportunities, thank you. Where I missed them, forgive me and give me grace for tomorrow. May my life increasingly become a visible expression of your invisible love. Amen.

Friday - The Greatest of These: Love That Endures

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We come to the end of this week's journey, and we arrive at the summit: love is the greatest. Not greater than faith — for without faith it is impossible to please God. Not greater than hope — for hope sustains us through the darkest valleys. But greater than both, because love is the very nature of God himself, and it is the quality that will outlast everything else. Faith will one day give way to sight. Hope will one day give way to fulfilment. But love — love endures.

The famous passage from 1 Corinthians 13 is, as the sermon notes, a great reading for weddings. But it is so much more than that. It is a portrait of the character of God, and an invitation to be transformed into that character. Patient. Kind. Not envious, not boastful, not proud. Not rude, not self-seeking. Not easily angered. Keeping no record of wrongs. These are not merely virtues to admire. They are the daily disciplines of a life shaped by the love of Christ.

One of the most challenging phrases in the passage is this: keeping no record of wrongs. The sermon touches on this with disarming honesty — we store resentment in the backs of our knees. We carry it in our bodies, in our memories, in our reflexes. And it is hard to let it go. But this is precisely what love requires. Not the pretence that wrongs did not happen, but the costly, grace-enabled choice not to keep score. To forgive as we have been forgiven. To release what we are holding, because we ourselves have been released from a debt we could never repay.

This kind of love is not natural to us. It is supernatural. It is the fruit of remaining in the vine, of being connected to Christ who is himself the fullest expression of patient, enduring, self-giving love. We cannot manufacture it. But we can ask for it, practise it, and trust that the One who commands it will also provide it.

Reflection Question

Is there a record of wrongs you are keeping against someone — a resentment you have been carrying that it is time, by God's grace, to release? What would it look like to take one step towards forgiveness today?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Keeping no record of wrongs — that's very, very difficult in life. We store resentment in the backs of our knees. Resentment is a very difficult thing because we do store up a lot, don't we? We really do. And it's hard to let that go. But it's something we have to do."

Today's Application

End this week with an act of intentional forgiveness. This does not require a dramatic confrontation or a difficult conversation — though sometimes it might. Begin in your heart. Bring to mind someone against whom you have been keeping a record of wrongs — someone whose offence you have replayed, whose name brings a tightening in your chest. Pray for them today. Not a prayer that God would change them or vindicate you, but a genuine prayer for their wellbeing. This is the beginning of forgiveness, and it is often the hardest part. Then, if appropriate, consider whether there is a practical step you could take — a message, a conversation, a gesture of goodwill. Ask God to show you whether now is the time. And if the wound is deep and the forgiveness feels impossible, bring that honestly to God too. He does not ask you to do this alone. He asks you to do it with him.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the one who, from the cross, prayed for those who nailed you there. You are the one who keeps no record of my wrongs, who has cast my sins as far as the east is from the west. I am humbled by that love. And I confess how hard I find it to extend that same grace to others. Today, I bring to you the resentments I have been carrying. I do not want to hold them any longer. By your grace, help me to release them — not because the wrongs did not matter, but because your love is greater than all of them. Fill me with the love that endures. The greatest of these is love. Let it be the greatest thing in me. Amen.

Evening Devotion**Love That Lasts****Evening Reflection**

You have walked through a whole week with these themes, and as this Friday evening settles around you, it is worth pausing to notice what God has been doing in you through it all.

You began on Monday with the ancient call to love God with everything you are. You moved through the gift of your identity in Christ, the blessing of Christian community, the call to put faith into practical action, and today you have arrived at the enduring summit: love is the greatest. Not as a feeling that comes and goes, but as a way of life that is patiently, humbly, persistently chosen — day after day, in the ordinary moments and the extraordinary ones alike.

This is not a journey that ends on Friday evening. It is a lifelong pilgrimage. But you are not walking it alone. You are connected to the vine. You are part of a community of believers. You are held by a God whose love for you is patient, kind, and keeps no record of your wrongs. That is the love that sent his Son. That is the love that calls you forward. That is the love that, by his grace, you are slowly being transformed to reflect.

Let us continue to meet in fellowship together — and let the greatest of these be love.

Evening Reflection

As you look back over this week, what is the one thing God has been most clearly saying to you about love — and what will you do differently because of it?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for this week — for your Word, your Spirit, your community, and your patient love. I am still learning. I am still being formed. But I am yours, and that is enough. May love be the mark of my life — not perfectly, but genuinely. Not in my own strength, but in yours. The greatest of these is love. Let it be so in me. Amen.