



St Barnabas Cray

Connected in Love: Serve One Another

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - We Are the Church: Connected to One Another

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:5 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is something quietly profound about a group of people waving to one another across a church building. It seems a small thing — almost playful — and yet it carries within it a deep theological truth. We are not isolated individuals who happen to share a postcode or a Sunday morning habit. We belong to one another. That is not a sentimental idea; it is a doctrinal one. Paul, writing to the church in Rome around AD 57, was not composing a motivational speech. He was articulating the very nature of what it means to be the Body of Christ.

The church is not a building that people admire from the outside. It is a living community of devoted followers of Christ, trying to live out his teaching in their daily lives. The walls, the architecture, the website photo — these are not the church. You are. We are. And that means our connectedness to one another is not optional. It is constitutive of what we are. To be in Christ is to be in relationship — with God, yes, but also with every other person who bears his name.

This is both a comfort and a challenge. A comfort, because it means you are never truly alone in your faith. There are others who belong to you and to whom you belong. A challenge, because belonging to one another means being responsible for one another — rejoicing together, mourning together, carrying one another's burdens. It means that the person in the pew whose name you have not yet learned, the one who worships upstairs, the one who joins online from their kitchen — they are yours and you are theirs.

As seasons of change approach in any church community, this truth becomes all the more vital. Connection is not merely a nice feature of church life. It is the lifeblood of it. When we stay connected to one another, we stay connected to Christ, who is the head of this body.

Reflection Question

Who in your church community do you feel genuinely connected to — and who might God be calling you to reach out to this week, someone whose name you know but whose life you have not yet entered?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Keeping connected to God and keeping connected to our world is enormously important but actually keeping connected to one another is of immense importance. We are the Church of St. Barnabas... we are the church. We are church ourselves."

Today's Application

Begin this Monday with a deliberate act of connection. Think of one person in your church community — perhaps someone you have not spoken to in a while, someone who worships differently or sits in a different part of the building, or someone who joins online and may feel on the periphery. Send them a message, give them a ring, or write them a short note. Not because there is a crisis, but simply because you belong to one another. If you find yourself hesitating — wondering whether they would welcome it, or whether you have enough in common — let that hesitation be a prompt to pray. Ask God to give you a genuine love for this person, and then act. Inner formation begins here: ask yourself honestly whether you tend to see church as something you attend or something you are. Let the answer shape how you approach the rest of this week.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that in Christ I am not alone. Thank you that you have placed me in a body — a community of people who belong to one another because they first belong to you. Forgive me for the times I have treated church as a place I visit rather than a people I am part of. Open my eyes today to those around me who need connection, encouragement, or simply the knowledge that they are seen and valued. Help me to be the kind of person who builds up the body rather than taking it for granted. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Belonging, Even When It Is Difficult

Evening Reflection

As this Monday draws to a close, take a moment to reflect on the connections you made — or perhaps missed — today. Did you reach out to someone? Did you notice a moment when belonging to one another felt natural and life-giving? Or perhaps today was one of those days when community felt more like a burden than a gift — when a difficult relationship surfaced, or when you felt unseen yourself.

Paul's vision of the church as a body is not a romanticised one. He wrote it to a community that had real tensions, real differences, real struggles. Belonging to one another does not mean everything is always harmonious. It means staying committed even when it is hard. The body does not discard a limb because it is weak or troublesome. It tends to it, supports it, and waits for healing.

Bring whatever today has held — the warmth of connection or the ache of disconnection — and offer it to God. He is the one who holds the body together, and he is faithful to do so even when we are not.

Evening Reflection

Where did you experience a sense of belonging today — and where did you feel the cost of it?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you for the gift of community, even in its imperfection. Where today was hard, bring your healing. Where I failed to connect, give me another opportunity tomorrow. Hold us together, Lord — for we cannot hold ourselves. Amen.

Tuesday - Love Must Be Sincere: Beyond Sentiment to Action

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:9-10 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We live in a culture that uses the word 'love' with extraordinary looseness. We love coffee, we love a good film, we love sunny autumn mornings. And because the word is used so freely, it can begin to feel as though love is simply a warm feeling — something that comes and goes depending on our mood or the behaviour of the person in front of us. But Paul, drawing on the deepest currents of both Jewish wisdom and the teaching of Jesus, will not allow love to be reduced to sentiment.

'Love must be sincere.' The Greek word behind 'sincere' carries the idea of something without hypocrisy, without mask or pretence. It is love that does not perform for an audience. It is love that persists even when no one is watching, even when the person being loved is not particularly loveable at that moment. C.S. Lewis put it memorably: 'Love is not an affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained.' That is a demanding definition. It moves love from the realm of emotion into the realm of will and commitment.

This matters enormously for how we relate to one another in the church. It is possible to be outwardly warm — to smile at people, to shake hands, to say the right things — while inwardly remaining closed, judgmental, or indifferent. Paul calls us to something far more costly: devotion. The word translated 'devoted' in verse 10 comes from a family word — the kind of love that exists between close relatives who did not choose one another but who are bound together nonetheless.

And then comes the challenge that cuts most deeply: 'Honour one another above yourselves.' We are, by nature, the centres of our own universes. Placing another person's honour, dignity, and wellbeing above our own is not natural. It is supernatural. It is the fruit of the Spirit working within us, reshaping our desires and our habits of attention.

Reflection Question

Is there someone in your life towards whom your love has become more performative than sincere — someone you treat politely but have not truly sought the ultimate good of?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Do not waste time bothering whether you love your neighbour. Act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of life's great secrets. When you're behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."

Today's Application

Today, identify one relationship — in your church, your family, or your workplace — where love has grown thin or habitual. Rather than waiting to feel more warmly towards this person, choose one concrete action that seeks their good. This might be listening to them properly rather than waiting for your turn to speak. It might be resisting the urge to correct or criticise them. It might be praying specifically for their flourishing — not just their salvation in a vague sense, but their actual, daily wellbeing. Notice too how you speak about this person when they are not present. Sincere love does not say one thing to someone's face and another behind their back. If you have spoken poorly of someone recently, consider whether an apology or a correction of the record is needed. Love in action is often found in these small, unglamorous choices.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, you loved us not because we were loveable, but because love is who you are. Forgive me for the ways I have reduced love to a feeling — something I offer when it is convenient and withdraw when it costs me something. Today, help me to love sincerely: to seek the genuine good of those around me, to honour others above myself, and to act with devotion even when devotion does not come naturally. Renew my heart, Lord, so that what begins as a choice becomes, in time, a delight. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Slow Work of Sincere Love

Evening Reflection

Reflect this evening on the moments of love — sincere or otherwise — that marked your Tuesday. Perhaps you managed to act with genuine care for someone who is not easy to love, and discovered something of what C.S. Lewis promised: that acting as if you love someone can, over time, produce the very love you were imitating. Or perhaps today revealed just how self-centred your instincts still are — how quickly you moved to protect your own comfort, your own reputation, your own time.

Neither discovery should discourage you. Both are useful. The moments of grace remind you that God is at work within you, shaping you slowly into the likeness of Christ. The moments of failure remind you that this is not a project you can complete in your own strength. Sincere love is not a human achievement; it is a divine gift, received in prayer and practised in community.

Bring both the grace and the failure to God now, and rest in the knowledge that his love for you is entirely sincere — without mask, without condition, without end.

Evening Reflection

Where did you notice the difference today between performed love and sincere love — in yourself or in others?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you that your love for me is utterly sincere. You are not performing kindness; you are kindness itself. Help me to receive that love more deeply, so that it flows more freely from me to others. Where I fell short today, forgive me. Where I surprised myself with grace, thank you. Amen.

Wednesday - Faithful in Prayer: Resisting the Appetite for Distraction

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12 NIV)

Devotional Thought

Of all the instructions Paul gives in Romans 12, the call to be 'faithful in prayer' may be the one that most exposes the gap between who we intend to be and who we actually are. Most followers of Christ believe in prayer. Most would say it matters. And yet, for many of us, prayer remains the first thing displaced when life becomes busy — and life is almost always busy.

Aldous Huxley, writing in *Brave New World*, described 'man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.' Those words, written decades ago, feel startlingly contemporary. We live in a world of relentless noise and stimulation — notifications, news feeds, messages, screens in every room and pocket. The question is not merely whether we are distracted, but whether we have begun to love our distractions. Whether, as Huxley warned, we have come to 'adore the technologies that undo our capacities to think.' If we cannot sit quietly for ten minutes without reaching for our phones, we may find that we struggle to sit quietly before God for ten minutes either.

But Paul's call to faithful prayer is not merely about carving out a quiet slot in a busy day. It is about a posture of the whole life — a sustained orientation towards God that underlies everything else. The three phrases in verse 12 belong together: joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Hope sustains joy even in difficulty. Patience endures suffering without despair. And prayer is the thread that holds all of it together — the ongoing conversation with God that keeps us anchored in his reality rather than swept away by the world's.

There are people in every church community who understand this instinctively — who persevere in prayer for those who cannot pray for themselves, who intercede faithfully and quietly, week after week. Their ministry is often invisible, but it is among the most vital work the church does. And each of us is called to it.

Reflection Question

What does your prayer life honestly look like at the moment — and what is the one thing most consistently crowding it out?

From Sunday's Sermon

"There is so much noise and activity going on around us all the time that sometimes I think we find it quite hard to think, to listen, to hear God speaking to us... Most of us live in a world of constant distractions. Do we find it difficult to focus and concentrate on anything, let alone on God?"

Today's Application

Today, make one deliberate decision to protect time for prayer. This does not need to be dramatic — even fifteen minutes of genuine, unhurried attention to God is transformative when it becomes a daily habit. Consider where in your day you might create this space: early morning before the noise begins, a lunchtime walk without your phone, or a few minutes before sleep that are given to God rather than a screen. If you find your mind wandering during prayer — which it will — do not treat that as failure. Gently return. Pray for someone who is suffering and cannot easily pray for themselves. Pray for those in your community who are in pain, grief, or exhaustion. And ask God honestly: 'Show me what is good and pleasing and perfect. Renew my mind.' That is a prayer he delights to answer.

Morning Prayer

Lord, I confess that I am more distracted than I would like to admit. The noise of the world is loud, and I have sometimes preferred it to the quiet where you speak. Forgive me. Today, help me to be faithful in prayer — not perfectly, but genuinely. Teach me to be joyful in hope, patient in whatever difficulty I face, and persistent in turning back to you. Renew my mind, Lord. Show me your good and pleasing will. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Quiet Where God Speaks

Evening Reflection

How did Wednesday go? Did you find the space for prayer that you intended — or did the day, as days so often do, fill up faster than you expected? Whatever happened, this evening is itself an opportunity. You do not need to catch up or compensate. You simply need to be here, now, with God.

One of the gifts of an evening reflection is that it slows us down. The day is behind you. The demands are quieter. And in that quietness, it is often possible to notice what the busyness obscured — a moment of grace you nearly missed, a nudge from the Spirit you brushed past, a question God was asking that you did not quite stop to hear.

Paul's instruction to be 'faithful in prayer' is not about achieving a perfect prayer record. It is about the orientation of a life — a steady turning towards God, again and again, through the ordinary texture of every day. Each time you turn back, even after a long absence, you are being faithful. That turning is itself a prayer.

Rest in that tonight.

Evening Reflection

Where did you sense God's presence today — even if you did not stop to acknowledge it at the time?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for this quiet moment. I bring you the day — its busyness and its stillness, its noise and its grace. Teach me to find you in both. And as I rest tonight, let my heart remain turned towards you. Amen.

Thursday - Blessing Those Who Hurt Us: The Hardest Kind of Love

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. (Romans 12:14, 17 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is a moment in Paul's list of instructions where the demands become almost breathtaking. We have moved from the relatively accessible — be devoted to one another, share with those in need — to something that strikes at the very core of our instincts. 'Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse.' Do not repay evil for evil. Forgive, and keep on forgiving.

This is not Paul's invention. He is directly echoing Jesus, who said in the Sermon on the Mount: 'You have heard that it was said, love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' Even the disciples must have struggled with this. Love the Roman masters who controlled their lives? The tax collectors who exploited them? Those who threatened their communities? Be reasonable, Lord.

And yet Jesus was entirely serious. And so was Paul. Because the logic of the kingdom of God runs in precisely the opposite direction to the logic of the world. The world says: protect yourself, defend your honour, return what was done to you. The kingdom says: absorb the wrong, release the debt, pray for the one who hurt you.

This is not passivity or weakness. It is one of the most demanding forms of spiritual strength there is. Proverbs 20 puts it plainly: 'Don't take it upon yourself to repay a wrong. Trust the Lord and he will make it right.' The releasing of vengeance is an act of trust in God's justice. It is saying: I do not need to be the one who settles this account, because God is both just and faithful.

Perhaps there is someone in your life — in your family, your church, your past — who has wronged you and whom you have not yet blessed. Not because what they did was acceptable, but because carrying the weight of unforgiveness is costing you more than you realise. Forgiveness is not the same as pretending it did not happen. It is choosing not to let it define the future.

Reflection Question

Is there someone you have been withholding blessing from — someone whose wrongdoing you have been nursing rather than releasing to God?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Forgive and forgive, however difficult that sometimes is, and we know it is. Paul is echoing the words of Moses — 3,000 years ago, Moses said God's words: do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself."

Today's Application

Today, bring to mind someone who has wronged you — someone you have found it difficult to forgive. You do not need to contact them or pretend the hurt was not real. But take a deliberate step towards releasing them. Begin by praying for them — not asking God to change your feelings (though that may come), but asking God to bless them. Pray for their wellbeing, their family, their flourishing. This will feel strange, possibly even hypocritical at first. Do it anyway. Notice too whether there is a situation in your church, your family, or your community where a dispute has been allowed to fester because neither party was willing to make the first move. Consider whether you might be the one to extend an olive branch — not because you were entirely wrong, but because peace is worth more than being right.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, you prayed for those who nailed you to the cross. That is the measure of the love you call me to — and I know I fall so far short of it. Today, help me to bless where I have been tempted to curse. Help me to release what I have been clutching tightly. I trust you with the wrongs that have been done to me. You are just, and you are faithful. Give me the grace to forgive, not once, but as many times as it takes. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Freedom That Forgiveness Brings

Evening Reflection

Forgiveness is rarely a single moment. It is more often a direction — a repeated choosing to release, to bless, to refuse the pull of bitterness. Today may have stirred something in you: a memory, a relationship, a wound that you thought had healed but has not quite. That stirring is not comfortable, but it is the work of the Spirit, gently leading you towards freedom.

The ancient wisdom of Proverbs, echoed by Moses and amplified by Jesus and Paul, points to a truth that has been tested across three thousand years of human experience: revenge and grudge-bearing do not heal us. They bind us to the very thing that hurt us. Forgiveness, costly as it is, is the path to freedom — for the one who is forgiven, yes, but also, perhaps especially, for the one who forgives.

As you end this Thursday, notice how you feel. Lighter, perhaps, if you took a step towards forgiveness today. Or perhaps still carrying something heavy. Either way, bring it to God. He is not in a hurry. He is patient, and he is with you in the long, slow work of learning to love as he loves.

Evening Reflection

Did anything shift in you today as you reflected on forgiveness — even slightly?

Evening Prayer

Father, forgiveness is hard. You know that better than anyone — it cost you everything. Thank you that your forgiveness of me is complete and unconditional. Help me to receive it more fully, so that I can extend it more freely. Hold me in your grace tonight. Amen.

Friday - Living Sacrifices: True Worship in the Everyday

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We have spent this week dwelling in Romans 12 — in the rich, demanding, life-giving territory of love in action. But before Paul gave any of his instructions about how to live together, he grounded everything in a single, foundational call: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice. This is your true worship.

That phrase — 'true worship' — is striking. We tend to think of worship as something that happens on a Sunday morning: the singing, the prayers, the breaking of bread. And all of that is genuinely worship. But Paul is pointing to something larger. He is saying that the whole of your life — your work, your relationships, your rest, your money, your daily choices — is the arena of worship. When you love your neighbour sincerely, you are worshipping. When you bless someone who has wronged you, you are worshipping. When you persevere in prayer rather than reaching for your phone, you are worshipping. When you share what you have with someone in need, you are worshipping.

A living sacrifice, unlike the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, does not die once. It lives — and it keeps on being offered. Every morning is a fresh act of consecration: 'Lord, today I give you this day, this body, these choices, this work, these relationships. Use them for your purposes.' That is what it means to not conform to the pattern of this world — to refuse to let the world's values and priorities shape your life by default, and instead to be transformed, day by day, by the renewing of your mind.

As this week of reflection draws to a close, and as you look towards Sunday — perhaps a Sunday of baptism, of reaffirmed vows, of shared faith — consider what it means for you to be a living sacrifice. Not a perfect one. Not one who never stumbles. But one who keeps returning, keeps offering, keeps choosing the way of agape love: selfless, sacrificial, unconditional.

That is the church at its best. That is what the world needs to see from us.

Reflection Question

What would it look like, practically and specifically, for you to offer this coming week to God as an act of worship — not just Sunday morning, but Monday through Saturday as well?

From Sunday's Sermon

"My friends, offer yourselves as a living sacrifice dedicated to the service of God. That's the overriding priority we have in our lives, more important than anything else... our true worship is our service to God."

Today's Application

As you close this week's devotional series, take time today to do a brief review of your life in light of what Paul has been teaching. Consider each of the areas you have reflected on this week: your connection to your church community, the sincerity of your love, your faithfulness in prayer, your willingness to forgive and bless. Where has God been at work in you this week? Where do you sense an invitation to go further? Write down one commitment for the coming week — one specific, actionable way you will offer yourself as a living sacrifice. It might be a relationship to invest in, a prayer habit to establish, a forgiveness to pursue, or a service to offer. And on Sunday, if you are able to be present for a baptism or a service of worship, let it be a moment of personal renewal — a reaffirming of your own vows, a fresh offering of yourself to the God who gave everything for you.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this week — for the richness of Paul's teaching, for the challenge and the grace woven through every instruction. Thank you that you do not call us to perfection, but to faithfulness. Help me to offer my life to you — not just in the moments of worship on Sunday, but in the ordinary, unremarkable, beautiful texture of every day. Renew my mind. Transform my heart. Show me your good and pleasing and perfect will. And give me the courage and the grace to follow it. In the name of Jesus, who is the greatest living sacrifice of all. Amen.

Evening Devotion

A Week of Living Sacrifice: Offering It All to God

Evening Reflection

As this Friday evening settles around you, take a few minutes to look back over the week as a whole. You have thought about belonging to one another, about loving sincerely, about faithful prayer, about the hard grace of forgiveness, and about what it means to offer your whole life as worship. That is a great deal to carry, and it is entirely possible that you feel both stretched and encouraged — perhaps even a little overwhelmed.

That is a good place to be. Growth in grace is rarely comfortable. But look back with gratitude rather than guilt. Where did you see God at work this week — in you, in those around you, in the small moments you might have overlooked? Where did love, however imperfect, find expression? Where did prayer happen, even briefly? Where did you choose blessing over bitterness?

Paul ends his great passage on love in action not with a final demand, but with a vision: 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.' That little phrase — as far as it depends on you — is full of pastoral wisdom. You cannot control everything. You cannot force reconciliation or manufacture peace. But you can choose, within your own sphere, to be a person of peace, of love, of faithful service. That is enough. That is the call. Go in peace.

Evening Reflection

What is the one thing from this week's reflections that you most want to carry forward into the week ahead?

Evening Prayer

Lord, I offer you this week — its moments of grace and its moments of failure, its connections and its distractions, its love and its struggle. Thank you that you are faithful even when I am not. Send me into the week ahead as a living sacrifice — yours, wholly and gladly. Amen.