

# Immersed in God's Word, X2B following Jesus – together

*They took note that they had been with Jesus. ~ Acts 4:13*

Let's dive into a brief look at love in the Bible, the first of the fruit mentioned that comes by the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:19 says, *we love because He first loved us.*

All three foundational fruit – love, joy, and peace –

LOVE  
JOY  
PEACE

work that way. Rooted in God's love (joy, peace), we can produce the fruit of God's love (joy, peace) toward Him and others. One of those key words for love is pronounced *hes-ed*. As you will see below in Lamentations 3:22, it defies simple explanation. Check out the complexity evident through these various translations:

- Because of the LORD's great love (*hesed*) we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (NIV)
- [Because of] the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for His mercies never end. (CSB)
- The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; (ESV)
- It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. (KJV)
- God's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love couldn't have dried up. (MSG)
- The LORD'S loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. (NAS)
- that the grace of ADONAI is not exhausted, that his compassion has not ended. (The Complete Jewish Bible)



Prayer for the week of devotions: LORD God, ADONAI, teach us about Your great, faithful, loyal, and steadfast love, Your mercies, grace, and loving-kindnesses. Every morning anew, Let us rootedness be deepened in that *hesed* love so that we may produce the fruit of *hesed* love as agents of your grace.

## Monday, Jan 8 Theme: The Foundational Fruit of LOVE

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.*

*And what does the LORD require of you?*

*To <sup>1</sup>act justly and to <sup>2</sup>love mercy*

*and to <sup>3</sup>walk humbly with your God.*

וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד

~ Micah 6:8



**Pondering Point:** We start our theme on the fruit of love

with two Hebrew words for *love* (above right) that – one time only – are found next to each other in the Bible. The word pair, *ahavat* and previously mentioned *hesed*, are in Micah 6:8. They are often translated as “love mercy” or “love kindness,” trying to capture the idea of loving *the concept* of treating other people lovingly. In this triad of verbs (act, love, walk) we get three godly adverbs (justly, ?????, humbly). The middle phrase is akin to “love lovingly” – or to use other words for *hesed* – to love faithfully, loyally, kindly, or mercifully. God is calling His people to love the concept of loving people. *Act* justly – “do the right thing,” – and *love* being a loving person as you *walk* humbly with God.



**Prayer:** Father God, You love loving people – to the point of giving us Your own Son and having Him die for us – even while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). Inspire our love to be sacrificial as well, rooted in our relationship to you and poured out in our relationships with others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Check out Bible Project’s Loyal Love (*Hesed*) video

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/loyal-love/>



*“Hesed* is forever in search of a translation into other languages because of its wide range of meaning. This Hebrew word carries the sense of an enduring connection that brings life and all good things into a relationship. *Hesed* is a kind and loyal care for the well-being of another. 80, Wilder, Hendricks, *The Other Half of Church* (Hereafter WH, *O½ofCh*)

## Tuesday, Jan 9: God's Mission in Matthew 14:12-21

*When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat*

*privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this,*

*the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

Matthew 14:12-21

TRANSFORMATION

**TUESDAYS**



**Pondering Point:** Read Matthew 14:12-21. Both Jesus and the disciples had already been doing ministry to the point of weariness, as Mark's Gospel describes (6:31-33). On top of that, He was experiencing personal grief over John the Baptist's death. Yet, with minimal time to retreat, reset and restore, Jesus' compassion is pouring out again – and the disciples were right there with Him all day. But Jesus still had much to teach His closest disciples – a life-altering lesson about supply and demand for both the crowds and the disciples.

God bless our time in His Word this week as we see love in action through godly compassion. May the lessons learned lead us to godly transformation in us so that others can see love in action through godly compassion on our part.



**Prayer:** Father God, continue to root us in a loving relationship with You and our brother and sisters

In Christ. From there – knowing that we have limitations physically, emotionally and mentally – help us muster compassion when called for. Let it be one way we can live lives of glory for You – full of love – in the name of Jesus our Lord, our Savior, our example. Amen.

*It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

John 13:1



**Pondering Point:** Read John 13:1-5. How does Jesus show love to His followers “to the end” – or as another version puts it, show “the full extent of His love?” He washes their feet. He serves them in a simple, even menial, way. Of course, He will soon serve them in the most profound and majestic way possible by dying on the cross. Both actions show deep love and a great heart for His friends – His disciples! Have you become familiar with this extensive and expensive love from God? Have you become a sharer of such extensive and expensive love from God?

Take time to read Lamentations 3:19-32 to deepen this devotional point. Dwell on the great, faithful, loyal, and steadfast love of God in the person of Jesus – His mercies, grace, and loving-kindnesses being poured out in this Passover festival – and Passover death. Here is Micah 6:8 *hesed* love in action – all three parts in action.

That is God’s mission: That you experience His love through Jesus Christ and that you extend that love to others in the name of Jesus Christ. Remember that this evening of foot-washing sees Jesus tell His disciples to *love one another* as He loved them. That love ranged from foot-washing to life-giving moments. Be ready to give and receive such love in similar (or radically different) moments.



Father God, teach me how to receive acts of love as well as to give them. Inspire me to give them as well as receive them. Help me take a page out of Jesus' book and love people “to the end” as it were -- to the fullest extent -- and may You be glorified in it all. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.



## Micro-Group Connections in the Discipleship Lifestyle



**Micro-Group Moment (MGM):** My time in ministry, particularly since focusing on discipleship, has brought out this lesson: Christians making the

greatest impact on others spiritually – and in doing so fulfilling their God-given purposes – are personally involved in one or more healthy, active MGs. These MGs are more impactful than worship attendance (though they often do so regularly), more impactful than SG participation, more impactful than personal Bible study and spiritual commitment (as awesome as these discipline are!).

MGers are being disciplined **by the Holy Spirit** through groups (as well as by God directly in prayer, meditation, study, etc. and through worship and personal study). To live without fostering such groups in your life is to greatly inhibit your journey with Jesus. Most Christians **already** operate with these types of groups present; they simply don't use such language to describe it.

That said, many Christians could be more intentional at developing them – enabling them to further enhance their (and the church's) lives of discipleship. We hope that you will strongly consider **IMMERSING** yourself into a lifestyle that incorporates MG components into your life of discipleship under Jesus.

### **Micro-Relationship:**

A connection you have with one, two, three, or four other people.

### **Spiritual Micro-Group:**

A connection with one to four others that acknowledges God.



“My prior experience of community centered around shared interests – humor, partying, skiing, running, and playing jazz... My new community was different. The glue holding us together was not primarily shared interests but shared love.” Michael Hendricks, 78, WH, *O½ofCh*

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

~ Apostle Paul, Ephesians 2:10

- **In Christ we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**



**Pondering Point:** If you have not yet built this teaching into your spiritual mindset, do so now. Pause on it. Ponder it. Consider its implications. You are God's handiwork – His *poiema* in Greek, from which we get *poem* and *poetry*. It is foundational to who you are as a follower of Jesus – who we all are. Of course, We are not finished works of art just yet. Think of the old adage, "Be patient, God's not finished with me yet." He has fully justified you through faith in Jesus. He is willing to work on fully sanctifying you through the work of the Spirit in you. And it is through the Holy Spirit that we are able become more like Christ and live out the good works prepared for us to do by the Master Artist. May that work continue till, as Philippians 1:6 says, *He brings it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*



**Review:** Build this into your faith-in-Jesus foundation:

- I am God's handiwork, His poetry.
- I am created in Christ to do good works.



**Repent if necessary** of belittling God's handiwork in you (or others), or of neglecting to live out the good works God has prepared for you to do.



**Return as necessary:** Thank God for making you His poetic handiwork through Jesus. Ask for help in carrying out the work He has in mind for you. This prayer helps voice this.



**Prayer for the day:** Thank You Heavenly Father for making us new creations with new hearts and renewed minds. I pray that these hearts and minds work with Your Holy Spirit

to carry out Your will to love well, being compassionate and showing kindness as You desire. Help us to see others (including ourselves) the way You do – with compassion. Then we can better reflect You in day-to-day life, enabled to do the good works You have prepared for us to do to Your glory and to the benefit of Your people. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

**Friday, Jan 12:**

**Discipleship Point**

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” **But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?...”***

**Luke 10:25-29**



**Pondering Point:** Read Luke 10:25-37, then revisit v. 29

(in bold above). Note that the man wants to justify himself regarding his love for others. Do you find it ironic that his love for others is actually about himself? The sinful nature of humanity can turn anything, including love for others into something about ourselves. Even our confessed love for God can be self-absorbed. But here’s another thought to contrast that reality: God can turn our self-absorbed love of others into truly sacrificial love for others – a Jesus-like quality to be sure.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, deliver us from merely

“loving others” in order to virtue-signal or to persuade ourselves that we are loving people. Instead, by Your Holy Spirit, enable us to (1) love You in a manner worthy of You. and (2) to love our neighbors because You have said so. Build in us a thirst to love others well for Your sake and for their sake, not for our sake. In Jesus’ name I pray for me and my fellow disciples. Amen.

## Saturday, Jan 13: Scripture's Story for the Week

### Jesus Displays Compassion Mark 6:30-44



**Pondering Point:** This story reveals the compassion of

Jesus in action both for His disciples and for the crowds who clamor to Him. Compassion looks different depending on who you're dealing with. In one case, it means accommodating people and altering potential plans, in another, it means planning time away from those same people. It's not likely that God wants us all to act the same in every situation, but it is likely that He wants us all to act compassionately in every situation, even ones where we've been misunderstood, hurt, or mistreated.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, as I seek to love mercy, please let my compassion be Spirit-driven and pervasive enough to touch all people and situations. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.



**HOOK QUESTIONS** *(for use with your group when you are using Bible stories as central to your time together)*

Share a recent experience of someone showing you compassion. Also share how you reacted.

#### **Bible Storying's Core Questions:**

1. What did you like (or learn new) about the story?
2. What did you not like (or not understand) about it?
3. What are the various people doing in the story?  
With whom do you identify within the story?
4. What is God doing in the story?
5. What might God be asking of you triggered by this story? How is He challenging you?



## Sunday, Jan 14: Call to worship God, to gather together

*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

*May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.*

~ Apostle Paul, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 2 Thessalonians 3:5

*I Am  
Blessed...  
To Be A  
Blessing*



**Pondering Point:** Maybe the word 'blessing' is not the most fitting here, but would it not be a blessing to see your love for others increase and have the Lord direct your heart into His love and into a perseverance equal to Christ's. Ask Father God for fulfillment of these 'blessing' during the upcoming week for you and others.

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## Be kind and compassionate to one another

*Be kind and compassionate to one another*

~ Apostle Paul, Ephesians 4:32a



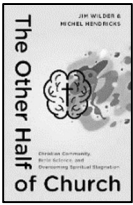
**Pondering Point:** Here it is, very simple. Be the face of kindness and compassion in the name of Jesus today to everyone you meet. Put something in your pocket or on your wrist or mark your hand as a reminder throughout the day to do so.

Ponder these four questions with God (and maybe someone else):

1. Who was compassionate to me this past week? Thank God.
2. Who lacked compassion toward me? Forgive and pray for them.
3. To whom did I fail to show compassion? Seek forgiveness.
4. To whom did I show compassion? Praise God for faithfulness.



**Prayer prompt:** Lord Jesus, be glorified in my life through my acts of kindness and compassion. In Your name I pray and live today. Amen.



Once a week, there will be extended quotations from this book for your benefit. We will work through the book over the summer months. Here is your first:

Jim [Wilder] and others believe that an Enlightenment model of transformation has influenced our churches, and this is why joy and love are no longer the central characteristics of Christian discipleship. According to Enlightenment thinking, the formula for transformation is:

transformation = truth + good choices + power.

It is easy to believe that if our Christian communities have solid biblical teaching and doctrine (truth) and we are encouraged to apply the teaching to our lives (good choices), the Holy Spirit will enable us to understand the truth and make good choices (power). We expect this will lead to transformation. The formula looks reasonable to modern eyes, but it has a fatal flaw. It is missing the most important variable. Love, the primary mover of character, is absent without *hesed*, we see little transformation.

I will carefully remind you, we are not suggesting that truth, choices, and power have no place in discipleship. We are restoring *hesed* to its central place. In their book, *The Solution of Choice*, Jim Wilder and Marcus Warner explain the role of love in discipleship.

When *hesed* replaces truth as the foundation of discipleship, the whole model self-corrects. Placing love at the core of the transformation process allows truth, choice, and power to play their proper roles and not bear a weight they were never intended to carry... Developments in modern brain science have made it clear that any model of transformation and character change must be anchored in the development of a love bond with God and his people. 85, WH, *O½ofCh*