LOVE

Core Value #2: LOVE
By living in love, we will grow closer to God and each other. We believe that love is an action word that manifests itself through integrity, loyalty, honor, forgiveness, compassion, and respect. It is the heart of our core and the value that supports all that we are and all that we do. We love God, others, and ourselves. We are committed to the reconciliation of relationships among all people. Within the local church, loving relationships produce unity and accountability–including loving discipline– and are a powerful demonstration of God's presence among His people. (Luke 10:27; John 13:35; 2 Peter 1:5-7)

Living a Life of Love as a Christian:

Beginning With Receiving God's Love
Before Christians can love God and others, they must first receive and rest in the love God has already given.

Scripture repeatedly teaches this order.

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Christian love is a response to grace, not an attempt to earn it.

A Biblical Vision for the Modern Church
Christian love in the New Testament is **active, formed, and visible**. When we place Luke 10:27, John 13:35, and 2 Peter 1:5–7 together alongside early church history, we see love expressed in four interconnected directions:

1. Love received from God through Jesus
2. Love directed toward God
3. Love expressed toward fellow believers
4. Love formed through spiritual maturity
5. Love lived outward toward the world

1. Receiving God's Love Through Christ

The Foundation of the Christian Life
The gospel begins with the truth that **God loved us before we loved Him**.

"God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
(Romans 5:8)

Receiving God's love means:

- Accepting forgiveness through Christ
- Trusting God's grace rather than our own righteousness
- Allowing our identity to be shaped by being loved by God

This changes the motivation for love. Christians do not love others to prove their faith — **they love because they have already been loved.**

Early Church Example
The early Church constantly returned to the story of Christ's sacrificial love:

- Preaching centered on the cross and resurrection.
- Baptism symbolized entering into Christ's love and new life.
- Communion reminded believers of Christ's self-giving love.

Their community life flowed out of remembering ***what Christ had done for them****.*

2. Love Begins with Total Devotion to God

Luke 10:27 — The Foundation of Christian Love

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind… and your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus teaches that love is not partial — it involves the **whole person**.

What This Meant Biblically

- **Heart** — affections and desires aligned with God
- **Soul** — identity and worship centered on Him
- **Strength** — actions and daily labor offered to God
- **Mind** — thoughts shaped by truth

Love for neighbor flows *out of* love for God. Without this vertical relationship, Christian love becomes moral effort rather than spiritual transformation.

Early Church Example
Early Christians ordered life around devotion to God:

- Daily prayer rhythms
- Scripture teaching
- Worship even under persecution

Their love for others was rooted in shared allegiance to Christ, not personality compatibility.

Modern Church Application
Living a life of love today means:

- Spiritual disciplines that shape affection for God
- Worship that transforms daily living
- Viewing vocation, family, and service as acts of love toward God

Love starts as **orientation**, not activity.

3. Love Is the Visible Mark of Christian Identity

John 13:35 — Love as Witness

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus does not say people will recognize Christians by knowledge, worship style, or moral superiority — but by relational love.

Early Church Reality
Historical observers consistently noticed Christian love:

- Caring for sick during plagues
- Supporting widows and orphans
- Crossing social and ethnic boundaries

Tertullian recorded pagans saying: "See how they love one another." Love functioned as **evangelism embodied**.

What This Looks Like Today

In the modern Church, love becomes visible through:

- Unity amid disagreement
- Forgiveness instead of division
- Practical care during crisis
- Emotional presence and empathy

Christian love makes the gospel believable before it is explained.
The Church's credibility rises or falls on relational love.

4. Love Is the Result of Spiritual Formation

2 Peter 1:5–7 — The Growth Ladder of Christian Character

"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."

Peter describes love as the *culmination* of spiritual maturity: *Faith → Virtue → Knowledge → Self-control → Perseverance → Godliness → Brotherly affection → Love*

This passage reveals something important: **Love is cultivated, not automatic.**

Key Insight
Biblical love (agape) grows through transformation:

- Character precedes consistency.
- Discipline produces compassion.
- Spiritual maturity deepens relational capacity.

Early Church Formation
The early Church intentionally formed believers:

- Catechesis (structured discipleship)
- Accountability within house churches
- Shared suffering that shaped perseverance

They understood that loving community required **formed people**.

Modern Church Application

Living a life of love means pursuing growth in:

- Self-control (especially speech and conflict)
- Perseverance through difficult relationships
- Godliness that reshapes motives

Love is not merely being nice — it is Christlike character expressed relationally.
Mature love is the fruit of a transformed life.

5. Love Moves Toward Others Sacrificially

The Early Church as a Living Example
Acts and early Christian history show love expressed through action:

Radical Generosity
Believers shared resources so no one lacked (Acts 2–4).

Hospitality
Homes became centers of belonging and worship.

Care for the Vulnerable
Christians gained a reputation for caring for:

- the poor
- abandoned children
- plague victims

They loved beyond convenience or reciprocity.

Theological Meaning
Christian love mirrors Christ's self-giving love:

- Initiating rather than waiting
- Serving rather than consuming
- Sacrificing rather than protecting comfort

Modern Church Expression

Today this looks like:

- Showing up in suffering
- Practicing forgiveness repeatedly
- Serving without recognition
- Choosing unity over preference

Love becomes real when it costs something.

6. Love Integrates the Inner Life and Community Life

Putting the passages together gives a full picture:

Scripture	Dimension of Love	Expression
Luke 10:27	Love toward God	Whole-life devotion
John 13:35	Love within the Church	Visible unity and care
2 Peter 1:5–7	Love through formation	Spiritual maturity
Early Church	Love toward the world	Sacrificial action

Christian love is therefore:

- **Vertical** (toward God)
- **Internal** (toward believers)
- **Formational** (within character)
- **Missional** (toward the world)

7. What Living a Life of Love Looks Like Practically Today

Daily Posture

- Seeking God first
- Practicing patience and humility
- Speaking truth with gentleness

Within Church Community

- Confession and forgiveness
- Bearing burdens together
- Protecting unity

Toward the World

- Compassion without agenda
- Hospitality toward outsiders
- Justice and mercy lived out locally

A Simple Biblical Definition

To live a life of love as a Christian is to be so shaped by Christ's love for God that His character flows outward in sacrificial devotion to others for their good and God's glory.