

“Growing Love”

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 & Isaiah 55:9-13

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Prayer for Understanding Holy Spirit thank you for giving us life. Guide us in truth, enlighten us and set our hearts ablaze so every moment of our lives can be illumined with your amazing grace, steadfast love and abundant life. Amen.

How do you daily, deliberately, grow in love? God created us with the ability to receive and share love, to be blessed and be a blessing, to know Christ and show Christ. You are designed to love in magnificent, spectacular and extravagant ways. God’s love flowing through you can move mountains and make earth as it is in heaven. There is always an infinite amount of ways you can grow in love. Together our love will bring all people together in harmonious community. All people will be included. All people will be healed, whole, complete. All people will have all their needs provided. All people will rejoice. You are the way we get to utopia, paradise, heaven on earth. Your striving to grow in love, is a partnership with God that will do abundantly more than your grandest dreams.

Jesus tells a parable of four ways we can daily expand our love. Imagine the farmer is God, the seed is love and you are all four types of soil.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 MSG “Jesus left the house and sat on the beach. In no time at all a crowd gathered along the shoreline, forcing Jesus to get into a boat. Using the boat as a pulpit, he addressed his congregation, telling stories. “What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As they scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn’t put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond their wildest dreams. “Are you listening to this? Really listening?” “Study this story of the farmer planting seed. When anyone hears news of the kingdom and doesn’t take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person’s heart. This is the seed the farmer scatters on the road. “The seed cast in the gravel—this is the person who hears and instantly responds with enthusiasm. But there is no soil of character, and so when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it. “The seed cast in the weeds is the person who hears the kingdom news, but weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it. “The seed cast on good earth is the person who hears and takes in the News, and then produces a harvest beyond their wildest dreams.”

God is inviting us to constantly grow in love. God continuously, abundantly sows seeds of love in our lives. God sows seeds of love everywhere, even where it is highly unlikely that we will receive the love and grow in love. God even sows seeds of love where we are hard heartedly, blind and unaware. God even sows seeds of love in our rigid thoughts where we justify our lack of love.

Your first soil, the impervious road, requires cultivating an open mind to grow in love, because you are unaware of your lack of love in these areas. I now love in ways that I didn’t even know I should love in the past. Therefore, I know there are numerous ways I should be loving and will discover in the future. We always should be seeking to see our blind spots, to expand our love.

When I was 13, I discovered that sins of omission, failing to love, is as destructive as sins of commission. Sins of omission are things that you should do, but you do not do. Sins of commission are things that you should not do, but you do anyway. Some sins of omission that I have struggled with is not protecting someone who is being bullied, not taking sabbath time from work to rest, recharge, be still and know God, not being fully present in my listening, not living in the present, not thinking carefully, caringly before I speak, not pointing out to others how their actions, speech and lifestyle is dehumanizing.

When I was 23, I discovered to love another, involves learning the ways a person prefers to receive love. Years later, the book “The Five Love Languages” explained what I was learning. Thankfully, Leslie is patient with me as I am slow to discover how to show love. When I was 29, I discovered that God calls me to love through community. All of us are inadequate in love if anyone is hungry, homeless, oppressed, without healthcare, denied freedom. I am called to change my community, my world, with love so all enjoy love. When I was 32, I realized how

when something goes wrong my first impulse is to blame another, instead of owning the situation and changing my behavior. When I was 36, I realized how when someone present a new idea that I have not anticipated, my first impulse is to reject it. When I was 41, I discovered that applying old solutions to current challenges is easy, ineffective and fails to love the victims of the issue. I learned from my Spiritual Director, theory U, how to define the issue, create space for new innovations to emerge and implement fresh solutions. When I was 48, I learned to love with the word “and”. There are as many perspectives on every issue as there are people in the world. All of these perspectives have value, insights and solutions. I try to avoid the word “but”, binary thinking and good, better, best. I am striving to grow in love from all perspectives.

Recently I have learned how I am a part of systems and institutions that dehumanizes others. I am examining my speech to be more loving, avoiding racist and sexist words that I once used like master bedroom, cakewalk, man up.

I know there are numerous ways I should be loving, yet am unaware of the opportunity to show love in these other ways. Everyday I strive to discover at least one new way to love.

God sows love every moment in all the areas where we have a closed mind. There are endless ways that you can expand your love. Maya Angelou said. “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

God continually sows love in the gravel areas of your heart. Areas where for a moment you embrace love then waver in your striving to grow this aspect of love. Some ways to keep your focus on loving is keep a journal, post reminders, ask friends and family to remind you to love in this area. Join an accountability group. Regularly dialogue with a Spiritual Director or Counselor. I encourage couples to discuss ways that they want their love to grow and write these ways down and revisit them regularly.

God continually sows love in the weedy areas of your heart. These are areas where you know you should love and the cost of loving makes it difficult. Perhaps the cost of sharing money, time, resources. Maybe the hesitancy to speak up when someone uses dehumanizing words. Perhaps, loving when you don’t feel like loving. Maybe loving when another, or your own thoughts, urge you to be anxious, fearful, disengaged, impatient. Perhaps expanding empathy, seeing more of the situation. Love is learning the dance of loving yourself and loving others.

Hope pushes back the weeds from your love. Hope is a confident expectancy that the promise of God’s love will prevail, grow and complete all. Push back the weeds that demoralize you, the weeds that say the world is getting worse, more divided, more difficult. No matter how many weeds, no matter how dense and ominous the weeds, love will ultimately prevail. Love will make all glorious.

God continually sows love in the ways where you excel in loving. God supercharges your love growing supernatural results. God exponentially multiplies your love. Rejoice, be glad, celebrate the love you have received and shared. Sometimes your love is a seed planted for another that may take decades to sprout and grow. Often your love heals, transforms, invigorates, unites. Your love is producing magnificence beyond your grandest dreams.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace striving to expand your love and celebrating the wonderful, spectacular loving person you are today. Love endures forever. Each person adds new ways of loving to the cosmos. All of us will enjoy every expanding love for eternity.

All of this applies to each of us as individuals and as a church. The Annual Report expresses some of the ways we are striving to expand our love, how we are striving to know Christ and show Christ. The Annual Report celebrates how God has multiplied our love yielding supernatural results.

The prophet Isaiah explains that God’s love is immense beyond our ability to comprehend, savor and celebrate. God’s word shows us how to love. Love will perfect you, make you whole, make you complete. Love will perfect the cosmos, make the cosmos whole, make the cosmos complete. Embraced with love, inspired to love, propels us on our journey, enabling us to be at peace, to rejoice and perceive the cosmos cheering our expanding love.

The prophet Isaiah declares. **Isaiah 55:9-13 MSG “For as the sky soars high above earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think. Just as rain and snow descend from the skies and don’t go back until they’ve watered the earth, Doing their work of making things grow and blossom, producing seed for farmers and food for the hungry, So will the words that come out of my mouth not come back empty-handed. They will do the work I sent them to do, they will complete the assignment I gave them. “So you will go out in joy, you will be led into a whole and complete life. The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song. All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause. No more thistles, but giant sequoias, no more thornbushes, but stately pines—Monuments to me, God, living and lasting evidence of God.”**