

love
every
one





message from ethan

I have always wanted to live in a different world. When I was a kid, it was the fantasy worlds of novels and movies. When I was a teen, it was a fantasy world where I was famous or powerful. And even now I want to live in a different world. Or more accurately, I want to live in this world, but I want it to be different.

I bet you want the same thing. And that is what this study is about. How would the world be different if Jesus got what he wanted and we chose to love everyone? And not with platitudes and warm thoughts, but with strategic intentional action? And what if it started with you?

I hope that you will join me in this experiment. Together, let's trust Jesus who says that he came to heal and save the world. And let's obey Jesus who teaches us to love everyone by loving every one.

I still want to live in a different world. And I trust that one day Jesus will finish that work and that will be true. But until I live in that different world, I am ready to do my part to make this world different and I hope you will join me and together we join Jesus in his mission to Love Every One.

Ethan Magness, Senior Minister
First Christian Church

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looking for a group?

Below are some options at the church. Just show up and you will be welcome. And feel free to bring a friend.

Sundays • 11:15 am
Room 104 *(for everyone)*

Wednesdays • 9:00 am
Room 103A *(for women)*

Wednesdays • 6:30 pm
In the CLC

*(Breakouts for men,
women, and co-ed)*

Children's programming provided for all of these groups. Contact Andrea Hodges for more information and for more group options (423-722-7220, ahodges@fcc-jc.org).

how to use this guide

⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
— ROMANS 13:8-10

Daily Devotions *(beginning on page 6)*

If we are going to Love Every One, we will need to practice every day. And that practice begins with an investment in the word of God and in prayer. So set aside some time each day to quiet your spirit, open your Bible and read the indicated passage. Use the devotion to focus your reflections and challenge you into specific action in obedience to God’s word. Then close your time in prayer to God. Trust that this discipline of study and prayer and obedience will be used by God to bless you and those you love.

Group Study *(beginning on page 8)*

The full impact of our decision to Love Every One comes when we do it together as a community devoted to loving each other and the world. So don’t do this study alone. Gather with a few others to study God’s word together and inspire each other to try a lifestyle of love. If you don’t have a group, you can join one or start one. Just contact Andrea Hodges to get connected (ahodges@fcc-jc.org, 423-722-7220).

Here is what you will find in each study.

think

Each section opens with questions to help you connect your lives and experiences to the topic for the day. Use this time to share as a group, to reflect on the Daily Challenges, and to focus on the topic for each session.

The opening questions are followed by a short video segment designed to briefly introduce the topic for the night. Each video is followed by questions for reflection. Don't feel bound to answer each one. The goal is to give each person a chance to respond to the material in the video. The questions are present to assist in that conversation.

study

This is the foundation of each lesson. Having gathered our attention to the topic, we turn to scripture to shape our thoughts and spur us to action.

Invite many people to share in the reading of scripture. Do not pressure those who are not interested. Each reading is followed by questions to help your group understand the text. Don't be in a rush to apply the text. First focus on understanding the text.

plan

In the planning section the questions will shift from focusing on understanding the text to applying the principles being taught. Some of the questions will be for open conversation, but many will be personal exercises.

Don't be surprised if the planning section forces you to make some tough choices about how you will live. Loving every one is a new way to live that comes at the invitation of Jesus. The planning section is your opportunity to recognize what steps you will need to take to permit such a re-orientation in your life.

act

Each lesson ends with a specific challenge to act. Unlike the plan section, each of these is designed to be completed within the next week. These action challenges will be a concrete way for you to respond to scripture. It is in the action steps that God's word can take root in your life.

marks of a great group

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Hospitality

Great groups are places of invitation and welcome. Even after the series has started, they welcome new participants by “bringing them up to speed” on what has gone before. Pray for those people in your group and also pray about those who need to be.

Generosity

Great groups are places of relational generosity. We give each other our attention and respect when people share differing opinions, and we create space for all to participate in the conversations.

Mercy

Respect the privacy of the group. We show love to one another by promising to avoid gossip about what is discussed in the group.

Service

Great groups look for ways to serve each other and serve the world together. You exist to be a blessing and God will give you those opportunities.

Encouragement

You encourage the success of the group with faithful attendance and communication when you will be absent. You encourage one another by praying for them and staying faithful to the challenge.

week
1

love every one

Monday, September 5

 **Read 1 John 4: 7-21**

If you want to get to know a friend, you do what they do. You go with them to their favorite restaurants, try their favorite pastimes, and watch their favorite movies. If you want to get to know God, you do what God does—you love people. You give dedicated time to learning God's favorite thing to do. What can you do this week to give specific time to loving like and with God? Set aside a time, every day, to learn from God's Word through these devotions. Put this time in your calendar and commit to showing up.

Tuesday, September 6

 **Read Romans 12: 9-21**

Biblical love is not a warm fuzzy feeling. Love is a commitment to the good of another expressed through tangible actions that we practice every day. Some of these may sound easy to you; others may sound almost impossible. But all are specific strategies that we can use to love another. Which of these actions are you good or gifted at? Which of these is one you need more practice in? Write down your answers to these questions, and pray for an opportunity to practice these actions today.

Wednesday, September 7

Read 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

This beautiful passage makes a striking claim. All the things we think are important to our lives and our faith—knowledge, right beliefs, and right behavior—all pale in comparison to the power of love. In other words, practicing the specific actions of love should be first on our to-do lists. What would the world look like if we all lived out this passage? How would it be different? This is the world God has called us to. Pray that God will use this study to teach us how to put love above all other things.

Thursday, September 8

Read Philippians 2: 1-11

Practicing love always requires sacrifice. It takes time, space, and energy that could be directed elsewhere. The trade-off between my interests and the interests of others is the essence of love. This is the way that Jesus loved you and how you love others. When do you see that your selfishness prevents you from loving others? What could you give up today to help you love another well?

Friday, September 9

Read John 15: 9-17

Practicing love is scary. There is always the risk that our love won't be returned. On the night he would be crucified, Jesus gave his disciples the final instruction to love each other. And, he gave them specific promises that empowered them to carry it out. They were called friends; they were chosen; and, though they couldn't see it yet, they would receive the greatest love: he would die for them. How does it empower you to love courageously if you know you have already received these promises? Spend some time in prayer; tell God what you are afraid of as you start this journey to Love Every One, and ask God for peace and courage.



think

Welcome to Love Every One! Before you begin your conversation, take a minute and introduce yourselves. Invite someone to open with prayer asking that God will bless your time together and use it to help all of us love more.

The 1960's classic hit makes the simple claim, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love!" Where do you see the truth of that claim in your world today? Think about our world and nation but also think about your local and personal realities. What are some of the places where your world needs more love?

Maybe someone has a story of hope to inspire the group. Can anyone tell a story of a time that one person's decision to love brought transformation to a situation?

Watch Video 1: "Love Every One" fcc-jc.org/everyone

1. According to the most famous verse in the Bible, what is the motivation that lies behind God's sending of Jesus to the world? How does this help us trust the instructions of Jesus and his followers?
2. How can the call to love everyone trick us into treating love as a vague emotion or warm feeling? Where do you see people fall prey to the temptation to love generically and theoretically?
3. According to the speaker, what is the secret to following Jesus' pattern of specific and practical love?



study

The gospel of John records one of Jesus' final instructions to his followers before his crucifixion. It covers many beautiful topics, but one of the central themes is the promise of Jesus to be with his followers and the command of Jesus for his followers to continue his work.

 **Read John 15:9-17**

In verses 11, 12 and 13, Jesus tells us the purpose of the command, he gives the command and he explains the command. Identify those elements.

The Purpose:

The Command:

The Explanation:

How does Jesus' teaching that love is an act of obedience differ from how we commonly think about love?

The early church took this command from Jesus very seriously and it was repeated in almost all the biblical letters to the church. Romans 12 presents a typical example. After a long letter of important theological teaching, Paul (the author) turns practical, and he talks about living a life of love.



Read Romans 12:9-21

Let's start by using our imaginations: Look back through the text, and imagine a community that lived out these instructions. What would be your favorite part of living in such a community?

How do Paul's instructions break our habit of making the call to love generic or theoretical?

Notice that some of Paul's instructions are for grand challenges of self-sacrifice and some are for the simplest acts of kindness. How have you benefitted from loving acts both simple and magnificent?

Sometimes we think of acts of love as soft or weak when compared with the hard world we live in. How does Paul's conclusion to this paragraph make it clear that he thinks our acts of love are world changing powerful acts? How might that inspire a boldness and hopefulness to our acts of love?

plan

Throughout this series we will be looking at the ways that we are positioned by God to love specific people in specific ways. And that opportunity for love starts right in this group. We will be better equipped to Love Every One if we start by loving each other.

Take a look at page 5. There you will find the marks of a great group. These are practices that help us show love to each other.

Which of these marks is most important to you? (Give everyone a chance to answer.)

If you haven't already, take a minute to fill out the contact sheet on page 4, so that you can remember each other's names, and stay in touch throughout the group process.

Finally, you probably know someone who could benefit from a group that loves each other and is thinking strategically about how we can love others. If you have some people in mind, share that with the group so we can pray for one another to have the confidence to make an invitation to each of them before the next gathering.

Write down their names here as a challenge to yourself to follow through on this plan.

act

Each week in this series we will face specific practical challenges to enact love in the world around us. We will not shrink back from this opportunity, but we will step into Jesus' invitation to love all people by loving one person at time.

This week our challenge is personal. Each one of us is challenged to go all in on this study:

- Keep up with the devos
- Make our gathering a priority
- Invite those who could use a loving community
- Be ready to accept the challenges to come as we seek to Love Every One.

Please close your group in prayer for the faithfulness to complete this challenge.

week
2

love your family



Monday, September 12

 **Read Exodus 20:12**

One arena in which we have a unique opportunity to love comes from one of the earliest instructions given to God's people—the Ten Commandments. In Ephesians, Paul calls this instruction, “the first commandment with a promise.” This teaches how central loving our families is to God's plan for our lives; God promises that this unique opportunity for love will yield a unique blessing. For some of us, loving our families is easy. For some of us, this is really hard. The Bible acknowledges this and invites all of us into loving our families in the ways we can. Take a moment in prayer to commit to showing up this week for the learning and opportunities God has for you through these devotions and in your family.

Tuesday, September 13

 **Read John 19: 25-27**

When Jesus was being crucified, one of his final acts was to knit together a new family. Jesus asked one of his closest friends, who had traveled with Jesus for years, to care for Jesus' mother as his own. The deep friendship between Jesus and this disciple knit the disciple into Jesus' family and gave him the unique opportunity to care for Jesus' grieving mother. Who has Jesus brought into your family? What is your unique

chance to love them? Make a list of some people you consider family. Circle one who you have an opportunity to love in the next three days, and commit to doing it.

Wednesday, September 14

Read Ruth 1:1-18

Ruth and Naomi were not blood relations—still, Ruth could love Naomi like family. The holy promises that existed between them provided Ruth the unique opportunity to love Naomi through a season of grief in the way that only family can. Who in your family—by blood or by promise—can you love through a difficult season? Send them an encouraging note/text or schedule a time to meet up with them before you move on with this day.

Thursday, September 15

Read Luke 7: 11-17

While this story is certainly a story of physical healing, it also shows us something else: Jesus' heart for the restoration of families. Jesus specifically restores the family of a family-less widow; his act of compassion puts her family back together. Like he saw this woman, Jesus sees you and sees the woundedness that is in your family. Don't be afraid to pray for the wounds in your family and the families around you. Ask Jesus to continue healing families.

Friday, September 16

Read Mark 7: 9-13

It's hard to love our families. It's easy to use the next career milestone, the old ego-bruising disagreement, or just the more fun thing to do to get around this instruction. However, Jesus tells his listeners that even dedicating your money to God doesn't excuse you from the commandment to care for your parents. Make a list of the activities, challenges, or grudges that get in the way of loving your family. Lift them up in prayer, one by one, and ask God to show you an appropriate way to love your family.



think

1. Many of us have a memory of a particular family member who demonstrated powerful, generationally impactful, love. Who is that for you?
2. Who is one person who has been able to love you in a way that no one else could?
3. In your experience, what kinds of relationships or situations create unique opportunities to love someone?

 **Watch Video 2: “Love Your Family”** fcc-jc.org/everyone

1. Consider that definition of family: “the people bound to you, in love, for life, by holy promises.” How do you react to that?
2. Who is your family by that definition? Make a list below.

3. When you hear “Your family cannot replace you,” how do you feel? Challenged, intimidated, encouraged?

The speaker contends that family love can only be maintained by ongoing practical expressions of love. To what degree do you agree or disagree with that claim?

study

The book of Ruth tells the story of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. In the opening of the story, we meet them, recently widowed, grieving, and far from their homes.

Read Ruth 1:1-18

1. Take a moment to re-read Ruth's promise to Naomi in verses 16-18. What do you notice? Discuss:
 - a. How was this declaration an act of love to Naomi?
 - b. How does this promise help us understand what family relationships should look like? What specific promises does Ruth make?
2. If you were to write a promise to the people you consider family, what would it look like? Take a moment to write down what your promise might say. Share if you feel comfortable.

3. This challenging situation created for Ruth an opportunity to show love to Naomi. How was Ruth in a unique position to love Naomi? What about their relationship or circumstances made Ruth's act of love particularly necessary, meaningful, or powerful? How do our family relationships create similar situations?
4. Look at what Naomi says about God in Ruth 1: 20-21. Then, look at what is said about Naomi in Ruth 4: 13-17. In between these two verses, Ruth returns to Naomi's homeland with her. While there, Ruth marries Boaz, a relative of Naomi's late husband, giving Naomi financial security and her first grandson. Discuss:
 - What is revealed about God to Naomi in this story? How is the love of her family an expression of the love of God?

plan

Like God used Ruth to reveal God's love to Naomi, God still uses people today.

1. Who has God used to reveal God's love like this to you?
2. Who could God be wanting to use you to show this love to?
3. Who in your family has God given you a unique opportunity to love?

We know that loving our families is unique opportunity to love every one. We know the names of the people we are called to love. Now, we can turn our attention to what that looks like practically this week. The video gave us a list of five practical actions that we can use to express love. Let's review them:

- **Generosity:** Give your resources.
 - **Encouragement:** Extend support or hope.
 - **Mercy:** Demonstrate forgiveness.
 - **Serve:** Tangibly meet a need.
 - **Hospitality:** Open your home (or your schedule).
4. Take a moment and discuss this list with your group. Every family has natural strengths and weaknesses. Which expressions of love is your family good at? Which ones are harder? What do these look like in the context of family?

act

As much as we've talked about loving our families, we won't see real, God-honoring, life-changing impact of loving every one in our families unless we actually put it into action.

We don't want you to leave without a strategic plan to Love Every One, starting this week. To that end, we have developed a tool to help you put your plan in action. Below, you'll see a grid. Take some time to fill it out. In the top row,

fill in the names of three or four people in your family (by blood or promise). Then, ask yourself: what do they need this week? Generosity, encouragement, mercy, service, or hospitality? You don't need to write down one of each for every member of your family. For each person, fill in at least one block with a practical act of love you can accomplish this week to love them.

(Since this is your first time using the grid, you may want to consult the appendices on page 36 and 38 for more clarification and sample grids.)

People to Love	(name)	(name)	(name)
Generosity			
Encouragement			
Mercy			
Service			
Hospitality			

Remember that the way we love everyone is to love all people one at a time. Don't be discouraged that you can't love your whole family the way you want to. Instead, be committed to these three specific acts of love. That is how we Love Every One.

Please close your group in prayer for the faithfulness to complete this challenge.

week
3

love your church



Monday, September 19

 **Read John 15:1-17**

On the night he was crucified, Jesus gave his disciples a final instruction: love one another. This was the rule for living that would identify them as his followers; they would be set apart by their love for one another. What do you think the Church is known for today? What would it look like for our church to be known for how well we loved each other? Take a moment to ask God to show you your part in building a church known for its love.

Tuesday, September 20

 **Read Acts 2:42-47**

This description of the early Church shows us a specific example of love in action. This church was identified by their generosity with one another. They shared their resources; they shared their homes; they shared their time, and they shared encouragement. What has God given you that you could share with your church? Choose one thing God has blessed you with, and commit to sharing it in the next week.



Wednesday, September 21

Read Acts 6:1-7

The church in Acts faced a problem that sounds familiar: there were people that their ministry had overlooked. Even the most well-meaning churches sometimes overlook or leave someone out—maybe you’ve even felt left out at church! When the church in Acts noticed this, they immediately made a plan to love the people they had left out. Who is someone you know that may feel overlooked at church? Before you move on with your day, send them an encouraging text or schedule a time to catch up.

Thursday, September 22

Read Acts 9:36-42

While this story is certainly one of a miraculous healing, there is another element worth noticing: the character of Tabitha. She was surrounded by women who loved her—widows she had clothed. She used her skills to meet their needs, and she was known as a faithful woman by that act of generous love. What skills do you have that could meet a need? Grab a notepad and make a list of your gifts. Pick one person you could practically bless with that gift.

Friday, September 23

Read Colossians 3:15-17

Peace and gratitude define this picture of the Church. Yet, we know this can be a hard vision to achieve. We often disagree with each other on how to worship, what to teach, and what’s most important—all things that can get in the way of living at peace with one another and celebrating each other’s unique giftings. What gets in the way of you sustaining peace and gratitude? Spend some time thanking God for the unique gifts others bring to the Church.



think

All of us have different experiences with the local church. Some have been part of one for years and others have no experience with the church. How would you describe your connection to the church today? If you are connected with First Christian Church, what brought you here?

What was your early experience with the church like? Did you grow up going to church? If so, what did you think of the church as a kid? If not, did you have any opinions or experiences of the church as a child?

Is your experience with the church today mostly positive or negative? What are some of the ways you have seen the church be a place of love?

 **Watch Video 3: “Love Your Church”** fcc-jc.org/everyone

1. How is a communal love a part of the church’s testimony about Christ? What happens to this testimony when the church fails to be a place of love to one another?
2. How much of this pattern of love can be accomplished by the staff of the church and how much depends on the daily interactions of the people in the church?
3. The speaker shared a quote from a Roman Emperor who recognized that the love of the church was the center of its witness. How do you see that truth in action today? What are places you worry that the church falls short of this mandate to love?

 **study** **Read Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37 and 6:1-7**

As you read these texts, notice the many varied actions of mutual love undertaken by the early church. Write down the ones that stand out to you.

1. What do you notice about this list? What stands out to you? How does this list make you feel? (encouraged, intimidated, inspired, skeptical)
2. Have you ever seen a church act like this today?
3. Acts 4:34 says “there were no needy persons among them.” According to the text, what made this possible?
4. In Acts 6, the Twelve realize that even though they love everyone, they aren’t loving every one. What is their strategic response?



plan

When we think about loving the church, it can be overwhelming. How can we possibly meet every person's needs? How can we love them all? We may wish to spend time with every lonely widow and desire to feed every hungry college student or to give money to every family in financial need, but that's just not possible for one person. It can be easy to become overwhelmed as we're burdened to Love Every One.

But what if we did for one what we wish we could do for everyone? The church is a unique community that only works if all of us are loving someone. We saw in the Acts passages how the church can truly love and care for everyone, if everyone is loving and caring for someone. If all of us love one in the way we wish we could love everyone, then together we can Love Every One.

1. How do you wish you could love everyone in the church? What actions do you wish were possible? What actions could transform the lives of the church?
2. What's something you can do for one person? What actions are you actually able to take? What's something you can do for one within the church?

act

Last week, you were introduced to this grid as a tool to help guide us to love everyone.

Take some time to fill out the grid below. First, think through the people in the church you interact with. Perhaps the people in your small group or on your serving team. Maybe even someone you've regularly chatted with in the lobby whose name you don't even know. Who in the church are you uniquely positioned to love? List a few of these names in the top row.

Now look at the rows. We've been using the framework of hospitality, mercy, encouragement, generosity, and service to help us consider how we can love everyone by loving every one.

How are you equipped to love these specific people? Is there someone you can welcome to your home for a meal? A person you can show generosity to? Someone who could benefit from encouragement or forgiveness? (If you have forgotten how to use the grid, please consult the appendix on page 38.)

People to Love	(name)	(name)	(name)
Generosity			
Encouragement			
Mercy			
Service			
Hospitality			

Please close your group in prayer for the faithfulness to complete this challenge.

week
4

love your neighbor



Monday, September 26

 **Read Mark 12:28-34**

When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, he couldn't pick just one. This is because loving God and loving your neighbor are inseparable: you can't have the first without the second. To Jesus, loving your neighbor was the most important expression of faith. If you were asked the same question, what would you have answered? What tends to come before or get in the way of loving your neighbor for you? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to help you put love first this week.

Tuesday, September 27

 **Read Luke 10:25-37**

If you had asked the priest and the Levite—two religious leaders who would have known these critical commandments—whether or not they loved their neighbors, they would have said, “Of course I do!” Yet, this story shows us what really counts: not general good feelings, but the practical act of stopping and giving time, energy, and resources. Pick a neighbor you need to love, and put in your calendar, right now, the way, time, and place you are going to love them this week.

Wednesday, September 28 **Read Romans 13:8-10**

In this passage, we see the entirety of the law—all the religious rules that matter—boiled down to one question: what would love have me do here? If all our actions towards our neighbors were governed by that rule of love, then we would be walking the way of Jesus. Think of a difficult, tense, or confusing situation with a neighbor in your life. Take a moment and ask God: what would love do here? Spend some time covering your situation in prayer.

Thursday, September 29 **Read James 2:14-18**

This passage delivers a striking truth: there is no way to follow Jesus without practical, specific actions of love for our neighbors. Our response to the love of God through Jesus must be an active outpouring of that love—meeting their needs, bearing their burdens, and caring for them the way God cares for us. What has the love of God done for you—encouraged you, comforted you, supported you? How could you be a blessing to the world and carry that love forward to others?

Friday, September 30 **Read Luke 19:1-10**

Zacchaeus' dishonest dealings had pushed everyone away. But, Jesus takes the first step towards him; Jesus sees and cares for Zacchaeus. Immediately, Zacchaeus gets it: the way he has just been loved is the way he needs to love his neighbors. While Zacchaeus' neighbors are still calling him a sinner, he takes the first step towards loving them generously and making amends. This is repentance. To walk in a new direction based on love. Where in your relationships do you need to do that same thing?

think

1. What intentional acts of love have you been up to over the past weeks? Take a minute to share and celebrate!
2. Where is your favorite place you've ever lived? What made it awesome?
3. Who is the best neighbor you've ever had? Someone from your childhood neighborhood, your first apartment, your dorm, or even your desk neighbor at work?

 **Watch Video 4: "Love Your Neighbor"** fcc-jc.org/everyone

1. How do you react to the definition of neighbor as "the brother or sister you can see"? What is surprising, challenging, or encouraging about that?
2. Who is your neighbor by that definition? Make a list below.

3. Think about the idea that "proximity is a unique opportunity for loving presence." What does that mean to you? In what ways might that be true? What are some of your high proximity relationships that are easy to ignore as opportunities for love?

study

We're going to take a look at two different letters, written to the early church. They're each written to different communities with different specific contexts and needs, but they have the same instruction: love your neighbor. Loving your neighbor is an essential function of the Christian life, and we are called to put it into practice.

 **Read 1 John 4: 7-21**

1. 1 John tells us that, in order to love God (who we cannot see), we have to love the brother or sister we can see. How does thinking about the people we literally see prevent us from turning love of neighbor into a generic feeling for people in general?

2. This text describes how God in Jesus came to us and became our neighbor. Why do you think that is? How does it change our relationship to God that God has gotten close to us?
 - a. What words do you associate with the word “presence”?

 - b. What does it look like to be present with someone?

 - c. What is a neighbor — someone close in proximity — uniquely equipped to do? What acts of love does proximity open up?


3. The Bible repeatedly teaches us that we love others with the same love God has given us. Try to fill in these sentences as a prompt to loving action for those in proximity to you.
 - a. Because God loved me like _____ ,
I love my neighbor like _____ .

 - b. Because I received _____ from God,
I can give _____ to my neighbor.

 - c. Because God did _____ for me, I
can do _____ for my neighbor.

 **Read Romans 13: 8-10**

The “continuing debt” this passage talks about doesn’t arise from how well others have loved us. It arises from the spectacular act of love we received from Jesus, who commands us to love our neighbor. How does this posture change the way we think about loving our neighbors?



One thing this passage teaches us is that the questions we have about how best to handle our relational situations can be answered with the question “What does love require?”

1. What kinds of things make relationships with our neighbors difficult? (Awkwardness, busyness, tensions, etc.)
2. What might love require in those situations? (Be bold enough to name what love requires even if it is hard to imagine doing it.)

plan

We know that our neighbor is anyone we can see, and we know that loving them is being present in their lives through practical actions. Now, we’re going to spend some time making this super tangible: we’re going to take a closer look at who your specific neighbor is.

1. Start by drawing a grid of your neighborhood (or dorm hall, or apartment building) and marking your home. What are the six to nine closest homes to yours? Mark them as well.
2. Now fill this drawing in with as much information as you have.
 - a. What are the names of the people in those closest homes?
 - b. What is one thing you know about each of them?
 - c. What is one prayer request each of them have?
3. Reflect with the group.
 - How many names, facts, and prayer requests could you fill in? How did this exercise make you feel? What did it reveal to you?
 - If you were to make it your goal to fill this map in completely by the end of the year, what would you have to do this week? What is the first thing you would do?

act

By now, you're an expert with this grid, and we just took some time to figure out who exactly our neighbors are. Take some time to fill in the top row with the neighbors you are uniquely positioned to love; list a few people you see at home, at work, at the gym, at soccer practice, at the coffee shop, or wherever you go all the time. Then, fill in the grid with the specific, practical action you are going to commit to in order to love them this week. Remember, the proximity that God has given you to your neighbors means that you are uniquely positioned to love them in Jesus name.

People to Love	(name)	(name)	(name)
Generosity			
Encouragement			
Mercy			
Service			
Hospitality			

Please close your group in prayer for the faithfulness to complete this challenge.

week
5

love your enemy



Monday, October 3

 **Read Luke 6:27-36**

Here, Jesus points out another arena in which we have a unique opportunity to Love Every One: loving our enemies. Jesus emphasizes that this action has a unique power because it reveals through us an unexpected truth about the character of God; when we love our enemies, we show to the world a God of mercy, kindness, and more love than we can imagine. Who might see God's heart if you loved your enemies? Who could that act of love impact? Take some time in prayer to commit to showing up for the work God wants to do this week through your love of enemies.

Tuesday, October 4

 **Read Romans 5:1-11**

As we have seen throughout this series, the love we are called to live is a mirror of the love we have received. And this is the good news, God loves us even when we are living as enemies of God. This is what Jesus came to do: to rebuild our relationship with God even when we were living as enemies of God. And now if you have a relationship with God through Christ, you can be confident that you will be saved from death and receive eternal life. If this offer of salvation is not something you have accepted, God doesn't want you to wait. Reach out to your group leader or to info@fcc-jc.org so that someone can talk to you today about God's love for you.

Wednesday, October 5

Read 1 Peter 3:8-18

This passage confronts a hard truth: when we greet our enemies with love, we still might receive bitterness or hatefulness in return. Yet, this passage has a promise: even if we receive some suffering for trying to do good, we are promised a unique blessing from God on that unique act of love. What act of love would you like to ask God's blessing on? Lift it up in prayer. Tell God what is scary about starting to love your enemies, and ask God to show you God's good plan for that action.

Thursday, October 6

Read Acts 9:1-19

When God worked to change Saul (later known as the Apostle Paul), God didn't use Saul's friends; God used Ananias, a man who Saul had made an enemy. Ananias showed Saul a unique act of love that had special power to transform Saul's life; it showed the mercy and unending love of God in a way a friend never could. How might loving your enemies have a unique power in their lives? Choose one person who falls into the category of "enemy." In your notes app, write down one good thing that might come of showing them love.

Friday, October 7

Read Acts 7:54-60

Stephen's final words point us back to another set of last words: the words Jesus said on the cross about those crucifying him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." When Stephen practiced forgiveness for his enemies, he was walking the way of Jesus. How is it comforting, encouraging, or even challenging to know that when we love our enemies, we live like Jesus? Spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus for showing us the way of love. Ask God what the way of love looks like for you today.

think

What is a trip or experience in your life that managed to both be harder than expected and better than expected? How did those factors balance out in your assessment of the experience?

Most of us look back on some of the fights of our childhood and laugh at how silly they seem today. What is your silliest memory of a childhood argument? How often do you still find yourself in similar situations today?

Is there anyone in your life whose love surprised you? Has anyone ever loved you more or better than you expected? When have you been shown love by someone who could have treated you like an enemy?

▶ **Watch Video 5: “Love Your Enemy”** fcc-jc.org/everyone

1. How do you react to the idea of loving your enemies? What is scary, challenging, or exciting about this instruction?
2. How would our cultural context start to change if we began to love our enemies? Even if this new habit was just part of the lives of Christians, what parts of our society would change?
3. The Matthew passage from the video concludes, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” How do you react to this command?

study

As a traveling preacher, Jesus probably preached the same sermons dozens and dozens of times. One theme Jesus came back to again and again is loving your enemies—both Matthew and Luke record versions of this sermon Jesus preached! Let’s take a closer look at one place we see Jesus teaching on this important instruction.

 **Read Luke 6: 27-36**

1. How would it feel to receive an act of love from an enemy? What would you say? What questions would you ask? What would you do?
 - Have you ever received or seen an act of love like that?
2. Read the list of practical instructions for loving our enemies in verses 27-31. Which one sticks out to you? Which one is particularly hard? Which seem particularly powerful or effective at showing love?

What might you add to this list today? In our polarized world what are some real ways someone could show love for an enemy today?

The Bible repeatedly teaches us that, when we love our enemies, we look more like God. Let's look together at this important truth about God's love for us while were living as enemies of God.

 **Read Romans 5:1-11**

1. According to this text, what is the clearest demonstration of God's love for us?
2. Look back at verses 10 and 11. What does God's past action toward us tell us about our future and our present?

This challenging teaching of Jesus was never forgotten by the church. Paul offers his reflections on this command in his letter to the Roman church.

 **Read Romans 12: 17-21**

Consider this command: "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." What practical actions would a person dedicated to living at peace with everyone take...

- At work or school?
- On social media or in conversations?
- In family or political disagreements

This letter also shows us another reason we can love our enemies: God is just. We don't have to give people "what they deserve" because God has promised to accomplish justice in the world.

1. What happens when we all try to give people what we think they deserve? What does that community look like?
2. How is it freeing, challenging, or encouraging that God promises to repay?

Verse 20 instructs us to meet the needs of our enemies. How would this impact our world if Christians did this? What is a practical example from your life?

plan

To finish the Love Every One challenge, there are two plans we need to make this week. The first is we need to plan our next step as a group. We all serve God better when we are in a community that loves us and challenges us to faithfulness to Jesus. Turn to page 40 to look at some of the suggestions there as you plan your next step. Discuss what your next steps may be – both as a group and individually.

The second plan that we need is a plan to love our enemies. We don't like to think that we have enemies—that word sounds dramatic or harsh. But, the truth is that we do have people in our lives who we put in that category: people who we think it's not our job to love because they're too difficult or different. Maybe it's the coworker who disagrees with everything you say, the acquaintance who posts controversial things on social media, the parents of the kid who was mean to your kid, or even someone that you don't like and doesn't like you.

What kinds of situations make people our enemies (or opponents, adversaries, etc.)? Does anyone immediately pop into your head when we start talking about enemies?

act

You're a grid expert by now, so you know exactly what to do here. As we come into this last opportunity to fill in our grids together, take a moment to think about your enemies, adversaries or opponents. Make a note of them in the top row. Then, consider: what do you need to do to love them this week? Do you need to...

- Turn the other cheek?
- Give more than they are asking?
- Live at peace with them?
- Meet a need they have?

Fill in the rest of the grid with the specific actions love requires this week.

People to Love	(name)	(name)	(name)
Generosity			
Encouragement			
Mercy			
Service			
Hospitality			

Please close your group in prayer for the faithfulness to complete this challenge.

APPENDIX 1

five practical expressions of love.

When we think about loving others, it is easy for our ideas to become too theoretical. We reduce love to an inclination of the emotions rather than practical actions that communicate blessing and goodwill. Or we can move the other direction and get so overwhelmed by the lists of specific loving actions that we find in scripture. Those lists cover a lot of ground from praying for someone or feeding the hungry or turning the other cheek when struck by an enemy.

To keep us focused on the practical without descending into minutia, we are suggesting that we can think of our expressions of love in five distinct categories:

GENEROSITY • ENCOURAGEMENT MERCY • SERVICE • HOSPITALITY

Now of course these categories of loving action overlap, and probably you can think of a way to show love that is not covered by these five. Nevertheless, for every person you want to love, these five categories create an easy discipline that we will repeat throughout this series. Prayerfully consider the person you are called to love and ask this simple question: What do they need from me? How should I love them? With generosity, encouragement, mercy, service or hospitality?

GENEROSITY: Give your resources.

One of the simplest ways to show love is to give something to someone. This is sometimes a gift, or a money or a gift card. It could be setting up a meal train or paying off a debt. It may be a gift of time or opportunity to someone who has a need you can supply. Who has God uniquely equipped you to love through giving?

APPENDIX 1

ENCOURAGEMENT: Extend support or hope.

To encourage someone is to give them bravery, support, strength and hope when they are weakened by the circumstances of life. Sometimes all someone needs to keep going is the encouragement of a friend. This may be a note or a phone call. It may be a word of praise or blessing. It may be a testimony of how God has been faithful in your life and will be faithful in theirs.

MERCY: Demonstrate forgiveness.

So many of the practical expressions of love that are commanded in scripture are expressions of mercy. It is mercy when we don't seek revenge to someone who has wronged us. It is mercy when we forgive someone for an old debt. It is mercy when we give a person a second chance who doesn't deserve it. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us as we forgive others." This is the motivation we have to show love through mercy.

SERVE: Tangibly meet a need.

Love is often work. The work of meeting the practical needs of another. This may be feeding the hungry or fixing a fence, or teaching a skill or offering a night of free baby-sitting. It could be an anonymous act of individual service or participation in a serving team. Acts of service feature strongly in the biblical descriptions of practical love. Many people who will never listen to our words of love will start to believe that we love them and God loves them when we show up in service.

HOSPITALITY: Open your home *(or your schedule)*.

The love of hospitality lets someone into our lives. Sometimes this is an invitation to a meal or just to a conversation. It could be welcoming them to a party or offering shelter during the storms of life. Like many types of love, hospitality is described as a spiritual gift. This means that God's spirit empowers us to open our lives and welcome others in. Your welcoming hospitality demonstrates how God welcomes us all.

APPENDIX 2

how to use the grid

To help us move our love from aspiration to action we will be using a simple grid throughout the study. If this tool doesn't help you, it isn't mandatory, but don't miss out on the opportunity to be specific about your plans to show love. Remember, this is how we love everyone, by loving all the people one at a time. So let's figure out the grid.

The top line of the grid starts with you thinking about who you need to love. Each week you may want to pick 2-4 people who God has uniquely positioned you to love. This will be most effective when you write down specific names. Let's imagine a sample together.

Imagine John has three people he wants to love: A family member, an enemy, and someone from church.

People to Love	<i>Uncle Fred</i>	<i>Grumpy neighbor Bob</i>	<i>Sally who visited church</i>
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Once you have identified the people that you want to love, start thinking through the categories of loving action. (Look back at Appendix 1 if you want to think more about these actions.) Prayerfully bring the person before God and seek the wisdom of the spirit for the love that they need that you are able to provide.

Do they need generosity?

- Could you give them food, time, or a gift card?
- What particular resources do you have that could be used by this one you are called to love?

Do they need encouragement?

- Do they need a note or text of thanks and blessing?
- Are they in a place of struggle, in need of a word of hope and solidarity?

Do they need mercy?

- Do they need forgiveness from you for a debt they cannot repay?

APPENDIX 2

- Do they need to know that they are loved by you and by God?

Do they need service?

- Can you fix something, teach something, or help with a project?
- Do they need transportation, assistance or expertise that you can provide?

Do they need hospitality?

- Can you invite them into your home, or community or church?
- Can you look for those who are new and make sure they feel welcome?

And then be bold enough to write down how you plan to love them. Don't plan so much that you know you can't follow through but trust God's spirit to make a bold commitment and mean it. Here are John's commitments.

People to Love	Uncle Fred	Grumpy neighbor Bob	Sally who visited church
Generosity			
Encouragement			Write a prayer note
Mercy		Cancel the lawsuit over the azaleas	
Service	Stop by and fix the screen door		
Hospitality			Invite her to the small group social

next steps for you and your group

You aren't done! None of us are done with our journey to love every one and maybe you aren't done with this group experience. Here are a few ideas about what your next steps might be.

Next steps for your whole group:

If you want to continue the journey of your group, we are ready to make that possible. Here are some ideas about what your next study might be. Be sure to think about what new people you want to invite to join you. When you have a plan or if you need help building a plan, please reach out to the FCC groups team so we can support you in anything you need.

ideas for your next study

Be Still

by Brian Heasley

Anxious for Nothing

by Max Lucado

Hebrews

by Chad Ragsdale

These studies are available on rightnowmedia.com.

Contact Andrea Hodges to get access
(423-722-7220, ahodges@fcc-jc.org.)

Next steps for everyone:

If your group isn't continuing, but you want to stay connected to Christian community we have lots of options. Please reach out to us at Andrea Hodges or consider one of the options below.

How to stay connected

- **Wednesday night Bible study** – CLC at 6:30 pm
- **Wednesday night topical groups**
(5 love languages, etc.) at 6:30 pm
- **Sunday groups** at 9:45 & 11:15 am
- **Men's Breakfast:** 10/15 and 11/19 at 8:30 am
- **Sanka to Starbucks:** women's event, 10/17 at 7 pm

And more! Call us (423-232-5700) for more ways to connect!

First things First:

Going to our next First things First gathering will help you in your journey to Love Every One. Learn more about FCC and how to be involved, along with exploring serving opportunities inside and outside the church. Register at www.fcc-jc.org/firstthingsfirst.

thank you

Thank you for being a part of a Love Every One group! We hope and pray this experience transforms the way you love every one.

What next steps do you need to take?

Unsure about what to do?

Contact Andrea Hodges with any questions
(423-722-7220 or ahodges@fcc-jc.org).





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