

Journey to Wholeness (excerpts)

Table of Contents

Preface	7
Introduction.....	11

Section One

The Journey Begins: Becoming a Christian

Chapter One	13
Experiencing God's Love	
Chapter Two	31
Recognizing Our Sin	
Chapter Three.....	44
The Rescue Mission	
Chapter Four.....	56
Our Response	
Chapter Five.....	67
The Whole Gospel	

Section Two

Roadmap for the Journey: The Spiritual Disciplines

Six	75
Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines	
Chapter Seven.....	86
The Prayer of Examen	
Chapter Eight	97
Overcoming Desolations	
Chapter Nine	109
Hearing God	
Chapter Ten	122
Confession	
Chapter Eleven.....	133
Scripture	
Chapter Twelve.....	144
Spirituality in Everyday Life	

Chapter Thirteen.....	158
Church Life	

Journey to Wholeness

Chapter Fourteen.....	171
Stewardship	
Chapter Fifteen	180

Suffering

Section Three

Side-trips on the Journey: Questions that Puzzle Us

Chapter Sixteen	193
How Can We Make Wise Decisions?	
Addendum.....	203
The Wesley Quadrilateral	
Chapter Seventeen	206
How Can We Discover God's Will for Our Lives?	
Chapter Eighteen	217
How Can We Believe in God?	
Chapter Nineteen.....	228
What Happens When We Die?	
Chapter Twenty.....	240
What Happens When We Die?	
Chapter Twenty-One.....	252
What Is Idolatry?	
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	260
What about Miracles?	
Bibliography.....	269

Preface

Nine years ago a thirty-second phone call changed my life. I was hosting the annual Christmas luncheon for our staff when I slipped out to get the results from a recent blood test. The voice on the other end of the line announced, “Your PSA is 3.5.” The blood drained from my head as a bowling ball dropped into my stomach. Usually any number below 4.0 is considered normal. But I had undergone a prostatectomy six weeks earlier. My PSA should have been zero. No one had anticipated this. Everybody, and I mean everybody, had told me I would be fine. After all, the cancer had been caught early and my numbers were relatively low. But a retest a few days later confirmed our fears. I had metastatic prostate cancer for which there is no cure. My wife, my family and I were devastated.

As I sought to absorb this disquieting news, I was troubled by how fearful and anxious I felt. When I reached into my spiritual satchel for consolation, all I found were pennies, lint and a bus token. As a pastor, I thought I would be able to face such a trial with peace and confidence in God. In their absence I realized that my spirituality was a mile wide and an inch deep. Although I had observed daily devotions for decades, my prayer life, scripture study and overall discipleship were anemic at best.

This disease set me out on a pilgrimage to deepen my spiritual life. I began a quest to sift through a small mountain of books from the second to the twenty-first century. I drank deeply from the wells of wisdom dug by spiritual giants of the past, both ancient and modern. I have not “wasted my cancer” as pastor/theologian John Piper put it. As a result, I am in a different and better place. I have grown in my relationship with Christ, my understanding of the Gospel and my practice of spiritual disciplines. I have a deeper grasp of the Gospel and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. I identify with Augustine

who confessed, “Late have I loved you, O Lord, late have I loved you.” It is not an exaggeration to say that this illness has proved to be the worst thing that has ever happened to me as well as the source of some of the greatest blessings of my life. The passion in the autumn of my life is to share these life-changing discoveries with others that they might enter into wholeness of life as a Christ-follower. The pages that follow offer the gleanings of my discoveries as I have walked this rocky road.

My journey is best summarized in the words of the Psalmist.

“It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy ways.”
(Psalm 119:71)

Introduction

“Our hearts are unquiet, until they find rest in you, O God”
~St. Augustine

We are born with an innate desire for God. We all long to make connection with the Divine. This is true even of those who claim to be atheists. The author Julian Barnes spoke for many when he said, “I don’t believe in God, but I miss him.”

For some, this longing is profound, like that of a thirsty traveler in a parched desert. “As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God” is the way the Psalmist put it. (Psalm 42:1)

For others this desire is more subtle. Theirs is the quiet sense that something is not quite right, that something is amiss.

This book offers guidance for those with “unquiet hearts” to find the wholeness of life that God intends for his children. The path that leads us to this destination begins with conversion to Christianity. The first unit, entitled “The Journey Begins – Becoming a Christian,” is composed of five chapters that explain this process. The pilgrimage continues into the second section called “Roadmap for the Journey – The Spiritual Disciplines.” By engaging in these practices we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit who not only transforms us into the likeness of Jesus, but also into our true and best selves. This is the subject of chapters six through fifteen. The final section, “Side-trips on the Journey – Questions that Puzzle Us” looks at questions commonly raised by those on the pilgrimage. These can be found in chapters sixteen through twenty-two.

Among those with “unquiet hearts” are professing Christians. We might believe in God but have not experienced the fullness of life that Christ offers. Many who sit in the pews every Sunday fit this description. We are practicing what has been coined as “nominal Christianity.” This is the notion that being a Christian is largely a matter of confessing key doctrines and saying a simple prayer so that we will go to heaven when we die. But being a Christian is not merely a matter of believing certain things. It involves the decision to enter into a vital relationship with Jesus and to choose to live as his follower. This path is not always easy, but it is the best way to live. It alone can lead to wholeness of life.

Pope Gregory the Great (540 – 604) was one of the early Church Fathers whose influence charted the course of Christianity for centuries. Gregory was one of the most prolific writers of the Middle Ages. And yet, he never sought to be original or creative. His greatest pride was that he never said anything that had not been uttered first by the great teachers of earlier centuries.¹ Gregory’s genius was to simplify, summarize and apply their ideas to practical life.

In the spirit of Gregory, I cannot claim much originality. The ideas that are shared in this book are the fruit of study and reflection over the past few years, drawing from the spiritual wisdom of the giants of our faith. Many might seem to be novel, but generally they do not represent new thoughts. Rather they reflect the recovery of forgotten and neglected truths.

¹ Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: Vol I. The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row: 1984 p. 247.

Section One

The Journey Begins – Becoming a Christian

Chapter One

Experiencing God's Love

My dad was a Baptist preacher. Throughout my childhood we went to church on both Sunday mornings and evenings. The evening services were informal and often included a time of testimony. The most common and popular testimonies were those where the speaker confessed the sordid tale of being a miserable alcoholic, wife-beater or thief. The storyteller recounted hitting bottom before attending a revival meeting where the gospel message was presented. It was as if a bolt of lightning struck. In the blink of an eye all taste for the bottle vanished, love was rekindled, and promises of restoration were sworn. It was dramatic and entertaining.

But as a young person who had already been baptized, I felt left out. I was a generally good kid, as I recall, who had professed his faith and been baptized at ten. I had never awoken in a gutter or spent the night in the county jail. But neither had I felt the electrical charge of the Holy Spirit coursing through my body. “What was wrong with me?” I wondered.

Although I do not question the sincerity of the testimonies, I am troubled by the implicit message. As a child I was convinced that a dramatic, powerful, instantaneous conversion was the norm. That had not been my experience and I therefore worried about my salvation. Not until later did I discover that conversion can take many forms.

For most people conversion is neither sudden nor dramatic. It is a gradual and gentle process. Methodist professor George Hunter's research reveals that the majority of converts take an average of two and one-half years to make a commitment to Christ. Loving Jesus and giving your life to him is seldom a rush job. This is true for most

loving relationships. Although some people have experienced “love at first sight,” this is the exception rather than the rule. The church has mistakenly lifted up Paul’s Damascus Road conversion as normative.

The first five chapters of this text outline the Gospel story and a process for becoming a Christian. It assumes that the journey of faith takes time, effort and reflection. But this sojourn need not be burdensome. Though there are some challenging stretches, the path is generally pleasant and affirming as we discover our identity as God’s child and the depths of his love for us.

Becoming a Christian involves more than saying a prayer, signing your name at the bottom of an evangelistic tract, or “Liking” Jesus on Facebook. A Christian is someone who has entered into a vital relationship with Jesus, knowing him as friend, Savior and Lord. But how does that happen? The process begins when we start to grasp how deeply we are loved by God.

Even those with only a nodding acquaintance of Christianity know that for Christians “God is love.” (I John 4:8). It is one thing to say this, it is quite another to experience it. God’s love is something we might believe in our minds, but not know in our hearts. Deep down we sense that God could not be bothered with the likes of us.

Church historian Richard Lovelace wrote,

Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many...have a theoretical commitment to the doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification...Christians who are no longer sure that

*God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons.*²

How can we come to know that we are loved by God; that we are God's beloved children? It takes some effort. This chapter offers three exercises that will help us know God's love in a personal way. These suggestions have been gleaned from the wisdom of spiritual guides over the ages. An experience of grace will probably not happen all at once. It is a gradual process. But little by little we will come to know God's love for us.

Many evangelistic techniques do not begin here. Their preferred method is to start by focusing on our sinfulness. But in scripture God's love and grace always precede any confrontation of sin. For example, in the book of Exodus we read that God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt *before* he gave them the Law. He did not announce, "If you are very, very good and offer me lots of sacrifices, I will set you free." No, he set them free first and then gave instructions on how to live. We therefore begin our spiritual journey by getting in touch with the love of God.

Step One

Pray for an Experience of God's Love

The first and most important step is simply to ask God to reveal his love. God does not force himself on anyone and will not enter where he is not wanted. Our task is to seek, ask and open our lives.

The good news is that this is the kind of request God loves to grant! Paul tells us that "...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:5) One of the primary works of the Holy Spirit is to fill us with the love of God. The process, as Augustine

²Lovelace, Richard F. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1979) pp. 101, 211-212.

envisioned it, is that as we kneel in prayer for an experience of God's love, the Holy Spirit stands behind us and pours it into our minds and hearts. We are simply to open ourselves to the experience.

Give God an opportunity to reveal his love. "Make space for grace" by withdrawing from the noise and clutter. Seek out quiet and stillness. Take a hike in the woods or walk along the beach. Sit in a garden or take a drive in the

country. The Benedictines advise doing mindless work, such as gardening, painting or dishwashing. Pay attention to the gentle ways in which God whispers his love. We are to be alert to ideas that pop into our minds or impressions that are laid upon our hearts.

An illustration of how this works is shared by Jesuit

“Neither knowing God nor knowing self can progress very far unless it begins with a knowledge of how deeply we are loved by God. Until we dare to believe that nothing can separate us from God’s love...we remain in the elementary grades of the transformation.”

David Brenner

Spiritual Director William Barry in the story of a forty-year-old priest. The Father came to participate in a thirty-day retreat, somewhat against his will. He had grudgingly agreed, but the prospect of praying four or five hours a day for a month seemed daunting. More significantly, the idea that God would speak intimately to him was foreign. About the fourth day, however, he was “surprised by joy” to use C.S. Lewis’s phrase. He woke up and sensed God saying, “You are precious in my eyes.” Over the next few days he saw-sawed between believing and doubting what had happened. But on the eighth day the reality of the experience sank in. Here was an encounter with God that he had long hoped for but did not expect.³

³ Barry, William A., S.J. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001) pp. 45, 46.

He experienced God's love because he persisted in opening himself to it.

Step Two

“Marinate” in the Stories and Promises of Scripture

The second step is to “marinate” in the promises of scripture. This term comes from Fr. Gregory Boyle who for years has worked with gang members in Los Angeles. On one occasion he was talking with a young man named Rascal about the love of God and read him some passages of scripture. The gang banger responded, “I’m gonna take that advice and I’m gonna let it marinate,” pointing at his heart, “right here.”⁴

We all need to “marinate” or soak in the stories and promises in the Bible. The Bible is known as God’s Word. God speaks a personal message to us in and through it, if we take the time to listen.

Many, however, are handicapped by a negative image of God. We envision him as an ogre, a grumpy parent or a vindictive judge. Some think of him as cold, indifferent and aloof. It is hard to feel love from a character like that!

Reading the Bible can change that picture. For example, I Corinthians 13 is known as “the love chapter.” It is read at nearly every wedding. But it can be used in another way to great profit. Someone observed that since “God is love” (I John 4:8), we can substitute the word “God” every time we encounter the word “love.” Now the chapter reads, “God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud. God is not rude or self-seeking. He is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs.

⁴ Boyle, Fr. Gregory, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010) p. 22.

God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.” That is the God that I would like to know better!

But perhaps the best way to experience God’s love in scripture is to “marinate” in the stories of Jesus. Contemplate the incarnation, that is, that God became a human being in Jesus. How much love must it have taken to leave heaven to be born in a stable and grow up in a poor carpenter’s home? Contemplate Jesus’ teachings, especially stories like the parable of the Prodigal Son. Contemplate Jesus’ deeds, particularly his healings and the friendship he extended to outcasts. Finally, contemplate Jesus’ cross, the supreme demonstration of his love. Jesus took upon himself the shame and punishment we deserve. It is as if he walked into an oncology ward and said, “Give all your cancer to me. Give me your nausea, your weakness, and your fear. I will take it and suffer and die in your place.”

Contemplating the cross can have a profound effect. The story is told of a group of young men who were horsing around outside of a cathedral. One of them dared another to enter the church and offer a false confession to the priest. Taking him up, the young man entered the confessional and began sharing some outlandish sins. At the end, he said to the priest, “Father, I need you to know that everything I just told you was a lie. It was all a joke. My friends bet me that I wouldn’t do it and I had to prove them wrong.” The priest thought for a moment and replied, “You seem to be a young man who likes a challenge. Very well, I will give you one. I dare you to go to the front of the sanctuary, stand before the crucifix, look Jesus in the eye and say out loud, ‘You died for me, and I don’t give a damn.’” The young man left the confessional, walked up to the altar, and stood silently before the cross for a few moments. Then he turned around and reentered the confessional. “Father,” he said, “I am ready to make my confession.”

The second step to experience God's love is to marinate in the stories and promises of scripture.

Step Three

Pay Attention to Our Lives

The third step is to pay attention to our lives. God's love is more easily *seen* than *felt*. That is to say, we experience the love of God by his actions more than by mystical feelings. That is the way it is with love. For example, my parents were not demonstrative in their affection and seldom hugged or said, "I love you." And yet I know that they did. I know that because every day my dad packed my lunch. Mom and Dad attended all of my concerts, plays, and cross country meets. They provided me with a safe and secure home. Their love for me was seen, rather than felt. But it is in remembering and contemplating those acts of love that I feel their affection.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. God's love is better seen than felt. This is why we need to open our eyes to the many ways that God shows his love in everyday life. Paying attention to these gifts of love, along with gratitude for them, are the portals that open us up to a deeper relationship with God.

In an ancient monastic tale, a traveler begged the Teacher for a word of wisdom. The Teacher, who had taken a vow of silence, smiled and wrote a single word on a sheet of paper. The word was "Awareness." The traveler was a bit perplexed and said, "That is far too brief an answer. Can you not expand on it a bit?" The Teacher took the paper, turned it over and wrote, "Awareness, awareness, awareness." "But what does that mean?" demanded the traveler. The Teacher

reached for the paper and wrote, clearly and firmly, “Awareness, awareness, awareness means...Awareness!”⁵

God is far more present and involved in our lives than we could ever imagine. Every day he sends gifts of love. In fact, the Bible says that *every* good and perfect gift comes from above. But he likes to operate incognito. His gifts tend to be small, everyday blessings that can be easily overlooked. Things like a morning conversation with our spouse, a hug from a child, the taste of a juicy peach, an “Atta boy” from the boss, a yellow daffodil in our garden, an orange sunset, etc. He lavishes his love on us. As former Fuller Seminary President Richard Mouw is fond of saying, “God is not stingy, but generous.” He does not dispel his love with an eye dropper but pours it out in buckets.

There is a purpose for this gifting. St. Francis of Assisi taught that every good thing comes *from* God and is designed to lead us *to* God. To paraphrase something he said, “The beauty and wonder of nature are footprints that lead us to God.” We can expand this to say that every gift from God is a footprint that leads us to God. God’s good gifts are like the trail of Reese’s Pieces that Elliot left for E.T. to lead him to his bedroom.

Although every day God lavishes his love, it might be missed in the moment. God’s gifts of love are most easily seen in retrospect. It is in looking back and examining our lives that we begin to notice the many ways that God has showered his love in tangible, concrete ways both great and small.

We can come to recognize this by simply retracing our steps throughout the day. Notice those times when something good

⁵ Chittister, Joan, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 68.

happened. Remember, these are often small things. See them as a gift of love from our Father in heaven. Look upon them as evidence and reminders of God's goodness and care. The Prayer of Examen, which we will look at in depth in a later chapter, is a tool that many have found to be of immeasurable help in recognizing God's daily gifts of love.

On a larger scale, we walk through the years of our lives, recalling significant events. We look for things such as people who touched us and changed our lives, accomplishments of which we are proud, times when we were rescued from danger or death, disappointments that turned out to be great blessings, doors that unexpectedly opened or closed, surprises and "flukes" that redirected our lives. Those are examples of God working in our lives.

We can accomplish something similar by walking the Labyrinth. Nearly every community has one, usually at a Roman Catholic or other liturgical church. A Labyrinth looks like a circular maze, but one in which we can never get lost. Following the twisting and turning path will eventually lead us to the center and then out again. The Labyrinth is a tool for contemplation. It offers a way of literally walking through our lives. At each twist, we pause and recall a turning point in our lives. In our early lives it might have been a teacher, a friend or a move to a new city. We continue on throughout all of our years. We seek God's hand in these moments.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters have a wonderful practice that we can adapt. At the Passover meal they sing a song that is called "Dayenu." The word means "It would have been enough." The lines include a litany of all the things God did to deliver them. They sing, "It would have been enough that we escaped from Egypt, but he gave us the gold and silver of our captors. It would have been enough to allow us to pass through the Red Sea, but he also provided

bread, water and meat in the wilderness...” Walk through your life and compose your own Dayenu. “It would have been enough that God gave me life, but he also gave me a healthy body. It would have been enough that I was accepted into college, but he also provided me with a scholarship...”

As you look back over your life you might find yourself joining with Jacob who dreamed of a stairway leading to heaven. When he awoke, he said, “Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not.

Exercises

Step One: Ask to Experience God’s Love

- Pray that the Holy Spirit would fill you with God’s love
- Open yourself to this experience by stilling your mind and finding a place of quiet and solitude
- Pay attention to ideas that come into your head, impressions that enter your heart, or anything else that whispers to you of God’s love

Step Two: “Marinate” in Scripture

God speaks a personal word to you in and through the pages of the Bible. He wants to address you personally in countless passages. The verses that are listed below offer good starting points to experience God’s love. Take time to slowly read and reread each day’s verses. To which words or phrases are you drawn? Which ones gently stand out or “shimmer” for you? Meditate on that word or phrase. What is God saying to you? If helpful, use the questions below as a guide or

starter.⁶ (These exercises are based on the “Principle and Foundation” step of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola.)

Day One

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called Children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

- In what way or ways is God’s love “great”?
- How has God lavished his love on you?
- What does it mean that you are a “Child of God”?

Day Two

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you might be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

- What does it mean when it says God’s love is wide? Long? High? Deep?
- What does it mean to be “rooted and established in love”?
- What do you think is “love that surpasses knowledge”?

Day Three

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrates his own love for

⁶ Adapted from: Warner, Larry. *Journey with Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. 63-75.

us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
(Romans 5:6, 8)

- In what ways are you “powerless”?
- What are some of the ways God reveals his love for you?
- What does this text say is the primary way he demonstrates his love for you?
- What does this passage tell you about the unconditional nature of God’s love for you?

Day Four

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)

- What difference does it make to you to know that God is your shepherd?
- Imagine lying in green pastures beside quiet waters. What feelings does that evoke?
- What shadows are falling across your path?
- How does God’s rod and staff comfort you?

- Imagine God anointing your head with oil. What does that do for you?

Day Five

But now, this is what the Lord says – he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine; When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:1-3)

- What difference does it make to you to know that you were created by God?
- What difference does it make to know that God has redeemed you and declared, “You are mine”?
- What deep waters and fiery trials are you facing?
- How would your life be different if you knew these promises were true?

Day Six

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-32, 35-39)

- Who or what is against you? How does the power of that threat measure up to the power of God?
- What does it mean to you that God did not spare his Son, but freely gave him for you? How hard would that be? What does that say to you?
- What are some things that are trying to separate you from God's love?
- What difference would it make if you knew in your heart of hearts that there was nothing that could keep you from God's love?

Step Three: Pay Attention to Your Life

- Every day, at the end of each day, walk through your waking hours, looking for examples of God's daily gifts of love
- Take a weekend and spend time retracing the years of your life, looking for evidence of God's guiding hand
- Walk the Labyrinth
- Create your own "Dayenu" prayer

For further reading

William A. Barry, "Letting God Come Close"

Richard Peace, “Spiritual Autobiography”

Larry Warner, “Journey with Jesus” (Part 2 Preparatory Exercises)

Phillip Yancey, “What’s So Amazing About Grace?”

Discussion Guide

1. Tell the students that you are going to help them get in touch with the imaginative/creative side of their brains. Invite them to close their eyes and imagine that they are sitting in a theatre, staring up at a blank screen. As the lights are going down, you will speak a word and ask them to watch what happens on the screen of their imagination. The word is “Fall.” Allow them one or two minutes of contemplation. Ask them to share what they saw. (Typically answers include an autumn day, falling off a cliff or The Fall in Genesis.)
2. Do the same exercise a second time, but this time use the word “God.” Ask people to share what they saw and what they felt. (Typically there will be a wide range of answers from a loving shepherd to wrathful judge.) Ask people where they think this image came from.
3. Point out that the first step in becoming a follower of Jesus is to discover how deeply they are loved by God. This is difficult for many people, since their image of God is anything but loving. Why do so many people know that “God is love” in a theoretical but not an experiential way?
4. Indicate to the group that an experience of God’s love generally requires some effort on their part. One exercise is to simply ask for it. Remind them of Augustine’s image of the Holy Spirit pouring God’s love into us as we pray for it. Also share with them the story of the priest on a spiritual retreat. Ask the group to break up and go to a

quiet corner, praying for an experience of God's love and waiting for it. After a few minutes, gather them back to share. Generally little, if anything, will have happened. This prayer, however, is something that is meant to be practiced on a daily basis. Challenge them to try it for a month and see what happens.

5. Scripture is a tool that reveals God's love. Invite the group to return to the theatre and close their eyes as you slowly read I Corinthians 13, substituting "God" for every time you come across the word "love." Invite them to share their experiences.

6. God's love is more easily seen than felt. He sends gifts of love to us every day. But these are often small gifts that are easily overlooked. Invite the group to retire to a quiet corner and walk through their previous twenty-four hours, taking note of the good things God gave them in the day before. Regroup and share. Typically people are amazed at how much good happened to them. Remind them that these are evidences of God's goodness and love.

7. Return to the theatre one last time. This time the word they are to focus on is "Jesus." How did what they saw compare with what they observed when the word was "God?" Point out that Jesus is none other than the full and perfect revelation of God. The more people know Jesus, the more they will experience God and his love.