

## INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST THE REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# SESSION 3 CELEBRATING CHRIST

## HIS GRACE IN COMMUNITY—RADICAL LOVE

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### Charity Born of Character

- ❑ The Ten Commandments As Foundational
- ❑ Three Uses of The Ten Commandments
- ❑ The Ten Commandments Fulfilled in Christ

### Christian Sanctification

- ❑ Spiritual Disciplines
- ❑ Spiritual Dynamics

### Values in Action

- ❑ Ten Values By Which To Live
- ❑ Values—A Case Study

### Handouts

- ❑ A Rule of Prayer
- ❑ Applying Radical Love

**B**eing a Christian, of course, is much more than giving intellectual assent to certain convictions. The authentic Christian life is lived as these convictions enflame the heart. This is what we mean by **radical love**. The reality of Christ's love for us transforms us and enables us more and more to love others in a way that was never possible before. The charity we want to express as a community is born of character. It is not a program or project. It is an expression of the work of Christ in our lives.

Character has to do with who we are, the real stuff of which we are made. As Christ transforms us, our character, being infused with mercy and love for the unlovable, gives birth to charity. We cannot fake it; real love and compassion for others springs from experiencing that love personally ourselves. Nor can we do it perfectly. We always fall short of loving our neighbors as ourselves. We are talking about *radical love*; it is more than we are able to do on our own. Yet Christ is at work in us, enabling us through His Holy Spirit to sacrifice ourselves and put others first.

## CHARITY BORN OF CHARACTER

What exactly is loving? How do we define it? Love is blind—hard to define—and therefore needs the law for its eyes. The law shows us *how* to love God and our neighbor because it is given to us by the very God of love. Christ placed these two loves in the context of God's law<sup>1</sup> and thereby helps us define love by something more absolute than passing feelings. In fact, Jesus said that it is impossible to love God without also loving others. The two are inseparable.<sup>2</sup> Let us look at the summary of God's law found in the Ten Commandments.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:29-31

<sup>2</sup> John 15:12-14

## The Ten Commandments As Foundational (Exodus 20)

1. *“You shall have no other gods before me”* (v. 3).  
God comes first—nothing else, not power, pleasure, possessions, relationships, sex, or money. God is to be our chief priority as well as our chief delight. Our *highest aspiration* is not personal freedom or fulfillment but, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever” (Q&A #1).
2. *“You shall not make for yourself an idol...”* (v. 4)  
We must never imagine God to be like ourselves, or lower. Rather, we must love God as He has revealed Himself. We have not been given the option of redefining who God is and how to serve Him. We are called to worship and serve God only in the ways He has taught in the Scriptures.
3. *“You shall not misuse<sup>3</sup> the name of the LORD your God...”* (v. 7)  
We must never trivialize God, but rather take Him seriously. We must treat His name with reverence, honoring Him with our thoughts and with our language. We should realize that His honor is at stake in *everything* we say. When we encounter untruths about God, it is our calling and privilege to guard His reputation by winsomely standing up for the truth.
4. *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”* (v. 8)  
Sabbath rest is more than just a Sunday nap. In a culture that says that time is money, we must remember that time is *holy*. We are to treat all time as “God’s time,” and invest it wisely for His kingdom. We are called to set apart time for worship and to celebrate the rest which Christ has won for us, especially on the Lord’s Day.
5. *“Honor your father and your mother...”* (v. 12)  
We must treat our parents—and all those in positions of honor and authority—with proper love and respect.
6. *“You shall not murder.”* (v. 13)  
Human life, made in the image of God, is sacred. Therefore we are commanded not to be people of malice, cruelty, violence, or revenge. As God’s redeemed humanity, we should struggle for the oppressed. As both the Torah and Jesus taught, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves in all situations.
7. *“You shall not commit adultery.”* (v. 14)  
Contrary to our culture, we Christians profess that sex is sacred. We are to honor it as God created it—an act of intimacy, love, communication, and (when it is His will) procreation between a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage. Other expressions of sexuality do violence to us as humans. Christian couples should see this as a positive command to seek to serve, please, and fully give themselves to one another.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the rendering in the New International Version (NIV). Others use the phrase, “take in vain” but the meaning is the same.

8. “*You shall not steal.*” (v. 15)

Martin Luther said, “Love to your neighbor requires you to hold sacred not only his person (6th commandment) and his marriage (7th commandment), but also his property and his due.” God calls us to be impeccably honest; we are not to steal time from our employer or to cheat on our taxes. Rather, we are to pay our debts and to use our money for the relief of the poor and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.

9. “*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*” (v. 16)

Truth is sacred. We are never to be insincere; we are never to gossip, lie, or put a “spin” on things so that reality is distorted or our neighbor is harmed. We are always to speak the truth in love, and to speak up for our neighbor’s good. God calls us to be peacemakers and always to be zealous for our neighbors’ reputations. Without being naïve, we should always try to put the best possible construction on things.

10. “*You shall not covet...*” (v. 17)

We are to be content with what God in His wisdom has chosen to give us. We are commanded not to lust for more than we have or for what others have. We are called not to worry or be anxious, but to delight in the love of Christ, and to seek His kingdom and righteousness. Christian living is eucharistic,<sup>4</sup> so we must be thankful for all God’s providences in our lives.

## Three Uses of the Ten Commandments Today

We live in a culture that is uncomfortable with the idea of *commandments*. In fact, in all cultures, men and women have been uncomfortable with God’s law. It’s part of sinful human nature to respond to God’s requirements by saying, “Who do you think you are?!” The answer is simple: God knows exactly who He is; He is God! We can see three<sup>5</sup> primary uses of the law:

1. Show us our guilt and so point us to Christ.
2. Restrain evil in society at large.
3. Instruct us in our daily progress of radical loving.

It is this third use that we are concerned with here. You might call it character building for radical love.

## The Ten Commandments Fulfilled in Christ

The Ten Commandments begin with an expression of good news; “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Historic Christianity does not say, “Obey God’s law in order to earn your salvation,” but rather “Obey God’s law in joy and thanksgiving for the fact that you have *already received* your salvation.” By His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has rescued us from slavery to sin; we respond with grateful obedience. Jesus did not destroy, but rather fulfilled the law; He emphasized its positive

<sup>4</sup> From the same root as Eucharist which means to give thanks.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin outlined these three uses in his *Institutes* Book II chapter 7.

demands and brought it to its ultimate fruition.<sup>6</sup> *The Ten Commandments are for gospel-centered Christians!* As we seek to obey them in loving God and other men, we find that we are more and more brought back to the foot of the cross. We must repent of all the ways in which we do not keep His law and run to the only One who is able to, so that He might more and more enable us to radically love Him and those whom He has brought into our lives.

## CHRISTIAN SANCTIFICATION

So as we seek to love, we learn that our devotion to God must be exclusive for it to be genuine (i.e. commandments 1-4). We find that honoring our parents, respecting life, and remaining sexually pure are necessary for us to love our neighbors (i.e. commandments 5-7). The more we dig into the commands of Christ not only set forth in Exodus, but as explained in the Gospels, the more we see the very radical nature of His call for us to love one another. Our growth in loving God and others is often referred to as sanctification.<sup>7</sup> We will investigate spiritual disciplines and dynamics and discuss how this should affect how we love.

## Spiritual Disciplines

The Christian life is a *dependent* life, in that we are constantly trusting in Christ, but it is not a *passive* life. Throughout history, the church has taught that there are certain disciplines which are essential to spiritual growth and development. A detailed list of spiritual disciplines could be quite extensive,<sup>8</sup> but the church has historically put them all under three headings, called *the means of grace*. These basic disciplines are avenues through which God enables us to love radically. We will also see how these disciplines are practiced within the community of the church and are not simply individual activities.

### 1. The Word of God

We grow spiritually as we read, study, and meditate upon the Holy Scriptures. Here are some specific disciplines involved in centering our lives more and more in God's Word:

- personal reading, study, memorization, & meditation;
- studying the Bible in small groups;
- hearing preaching and teaching of the Scriptures by men who have been gifted for and called and ordained to this ministry;
- sharing it with others. (Yes, evangelism is a spiritual discipline!)

### 2. Prayer

The second principal means of spiritual growth is spending time with God in prayer, which takes many forms:

- private prayer, as part of a time set apart for prayer and Bible reading;
- quick, short prayers offered spontaneously;<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Rev. David Wilcher for the development of this material.

<sup>8</sup> An excellent overview is found in Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (NavPress, 1991). Also helpful are Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper, 1988), and John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> See Nehemiah 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

- prayer with others, one-on-one or in small groups;
- prayers in public worship, whether led, sung, written, responsive, in litanies, etc.

### 3. The Sacraments

**Holy Baptism.** How does baptism help you grow?

- First, the Scriptures teach that God really blesses those who are rightly baptized.
- Second, we grow when we practice what the Puritans called *improving* one's baptism.<sup>10</sup> We are to remember and meditate upon all that God has done for us in uniting us to Christ, which is signified in baptism. Baptism reminds us who we are in Christ.
- Third, baptism is a community event in which we all take an active part.

**Holy Communion.** This sacrament is the central act of Christian worship, and a chief way in which we grow spiritually.

- When we receive Holy Communion, Christ feeds us with Himself, deepening our union with Him. Just as bread and wine strengthen and refresh us physically, so the Eucharist strengthens and refreshes us spiritually.
- Communion is also a time to examine our life, confess our sins, celebrate the gospel, and renew our commitment to Christ.<sup>11</sup>

These three—the Word, prayer, and the sacraments—are the primary means of grace, and, in gratitude for the gospel, we grow spiritually when we make *disciplined* use of them. We depend upon Christ even as we use them and we need one another to properly practice them too. Note that there are three basic patterns of spiritual disciplines:

1. The Scriptures teach that basic to the Christian life is the *weekly* pattern of using the means of grace in the context of corporate worship on the Lord's Day.<sup>12</sup>
2. The Bible also teaches the vital importance of *daily* prayer and Bible study.<sup>13</sup>
3. And while not explicitly taught in Scripture, the church has traditionally followed an *annual* pattern that reminds us of the central truths of the gospel. That's why at *Christ the Redeemer Presbyterian Church* we follow the traditional church year (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and the season after Pentecost).

Even in the midst of our frenetic culture, where time is a precious commodity, we must discipline our lives so that we are practicing the historic spiritual disciplines. Without these means of grace, our spiritual lives will become shallow, superficial, and banal. We must invest our time in that which is truly important—knowing God, being formed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Busyness is the enemy of spirituality.  
— Eugene H. Peterson<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Romans 6:1ff

<sup>11</sup> See 1 Corinthians 11:17ff.

<sup>12</sup> See Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25

<sup>13</sup> See Daniel 6:10

<sup>14</sup> From *The Contemplative Pastor* (Eerdmans, 1989).

## Spiritual Dynamics

If you've ever tried to follow a pattern of spiritual disciplines, you know how easy it is to run out of steam. Where does the strength, the determination, the motivation, come from to practice the spiritual disciplines? How do you keep it from deteriorating into rote legalism? The answer is easy to say and hard to do; it is *gospel-living!*

Even the practice of spiritual disciplines can lead us astray. We need to trust in Christ alone as we seek to obey Him. Obedience by itself is never enough. God is concerned not only with our actions, He wants all of us.<sup>15</sup> Doing these things by themselves is not the answer. Neither is ignoring them. We are called to obey passionately, joyously, with our whole hearts.

We're going to look now at four aspects of what it means to be a Christian, including some "test questions" to see if we have really grasped the significance of these wonderful truths.<sup>16</sup>

1. **Justification:** God loved me so much that even while I was His enemy, He sent His Son to fully pay the price so that I might live at peace with Him<sup>17</sup>
  - **Test Questions:** *Whom does God love more, Billy Graham or me? Does God love me more when I am good?*
2. **Sanctification:** "God loves me so much that nothing can ever separate me from him, yet He also loves me so much that He will not allow sin to destroy my life. He will do whatever it takes to produce *holiness* in my life."<sup>18</sup>
  - **Test Questions:** *Do I realize that God is more committed to my restoration than I am? Do I realize that He is perfecting me in the image of Christ? What is God doing to make me holy?*
3. **The Holy Spirit's Indwelling:** "God Himself lives within me, unleashing His presence and power in my life, making me holy and making me effective in ministry."
  - **Test Questions:** *What is God doing to change my life? What is God doing to change someone else's life through me?*
4. **Authority in Spiritual Conflict:** "Neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil have any authority over me. Christ is making me both more humble and more bold than I have ever been before."
  - **Test Question:** *Am I overcoming temptation/spiritual depression by looking to the cross? Am I more and more able to proclaim the gospel without fear or self-righteousness?*

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<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-5

<sup>16</sup> This material is adapted from two books by Richard F. Lovelace, both published by InterVarsity Press: *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (1979) and *Renewal as a Way of Life* (1985).

<sup>17</sup> "Justification is the act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours. Justification is received by faith alone." This definition comes from *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English*, ed. Douglas Kelley & Philip Robinson (P&R, 1986), Q&A #33. The Shorter Catechism, long used as a doctrinal summary by Presbyterians, was written in the 1640s.

<sup>18</sup> "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace by which our whole person is made new in the image of God, and we are made more and more able to become dead to sin and alive to righteousness" (Q&A #35).

Where do we find the strength to live the Christian life—not simply to practice spiritual disciplines, but joyfully to serve Christ in every area of life? We find it in the gospel. The gospel is the dynamic, the power that enables us to grow spiritually and to live for Christ.

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 (NIV)

How then do you practice this spiritual dynamic? You must learn, more and more, to find the center of your life—your very identity—in the gospel. The more you see yourself as a redeemed sinner, without hope apart from divine intervention, and the more you come to be amazed by the love and mercy that the Father has lavished on us in Jesus Christ, the more you will be motivated to know, love, obey, serve, and proclaim the glories of God! How do we love our neighbors with reckless abandon? That is what the gospel sets us free to do.

## VALUES IN ACTION

So we see what it means to love in the commands and we are enabled to keep them more and more through the disciplines and the dynamics help keep us from legalism, but now our question is where do we start in loving our neighbor? We as a church have identified several values that help point us to a starting place as we seek to live this out.

We believe that service rendered to Christ that is rooted in grace will ultimately be far more glorifying to the Lord (He obviously doesn't appreciate a begrudging attitude), helpful to the church, and enjoyable to you. With this perspective in mind, we challenge you to roll up your sleeves and zealously serve the Lord at Christ the Redeemer!

## VALUES TO LIVE BY: *What do we value week to week?*

### 1. We Are Committed to Being A Redeeming Church

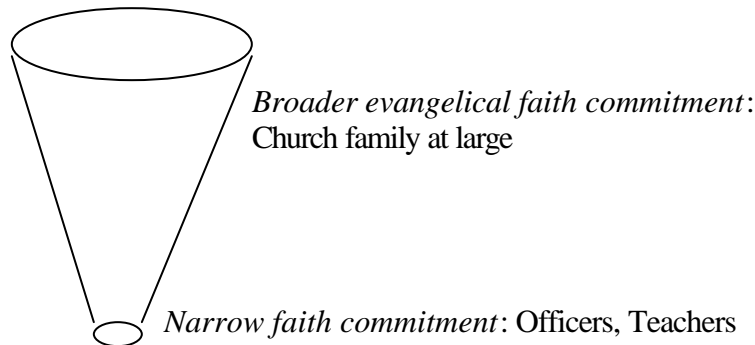
Christ is our Redeemer and His work of redemption is central to all we are and do. Every educational opportunity (from children to adult), sermon, and worship service will seek to be grace (or cross) driven. *We will seek to expose our present needs to the work of Jesus Christ so that our dark hearts may be genuinely transformed.* A life of repentance and faith, clinging to the cross and the gospel of grace define not only the way to Christ, but also the daily life of the Christian.

## 2. We Are Committed to Being A Biblical Church

We rejoice in reading His story of our collective redemption in **God's Word, the Bible**. We need to understand it and see how it applies to our lives for real growth in grace. We gladly submit ourselves to Scripture as authoritative in all matters to which it speaks.

## 3. We Are Committed to Being A Confessional Church

We understand that Christ has not just redeemed us individually, but we are a part of His people universally and we stand in the tradition of the **Christian community's historic creeds and confessions**. We will strive to be *distinctively* but *winsomely* Reformed in our theological commitments. We believe that the defining truths of Reformed theology are critical to a thorough understanding of grace and a proper understanding of the Bible. These truths will be thoroughly embraced by officers and teachers (bottom of the funnel) but we welcome all to think differently on these things. People should think of Christ the Redeemer first as a "Gospel-preaching" church rather than a "Reformed" church. We want to be defined as a church that is *for* Jesus Christ and His gospel of grace rather than *against* those within evangelicalism who think differently than we do.



## 4. We Are Committed to Being A Praying Church

Because we believe that Jesus Christ is building His Church, we are utterly dependent upon Him. We cannot "pull it off" based on human ingenuity, hard work, or previous experience. He is the only One who can save us. Therefore, we run to Him with our every care, need, and joy in **constant prayer**. Therefore, we will be a people on our knees.

## 5. We Are Committed to Being A Loving Church

We want to be a true community where we are all willing to make sacrifices for one another. We want to give others what we have freely received ourselves, so we **offer Christ's love** to one another and others in a gracious and winsome way. We recognize that we need one another. As a church we **value our brothers and sisters** as fellow heirs and rejoice that Christ is using them and the gifts He has entrusted to them to help accomplish His plans for us. We confess our continuing dependence on Him and His church. We are all needy people wrestling with the on-going effects of sin and we must **be honest** with God, one another, and ourselves about our need for Christ's work in our lives.

**6. We Are Committed to Worshipping God in Reverence**

Worship will be the engine of our personal and corporate revival. Our worship services will be God-centered and transformation-oriented. Christ commands us to worship Him, and He meets us there. Therefore, we see the Sunday gathered worship of God as the pinnacle of the week. We seek to engage in **God-centered, celebrative worship services**.

**7. We Are Committed to Pro-Active Relational Evangelism**

We believe that all Christians have the privilege and responsibility to serve as agents of redemption. That is, God has purposely placed us in the family, neighborhood, workplace, and social circles in which we find ourselves. We are to cultivate the relationships in each of those spheres of influence in such a way that we are able to communicate the gospel of grace in ways that connect. We want to learn how to speak one another's languages, to really **communicate the love of Christ**. We are committed to *taking the initiative* to get into the worlds of others to bring them the gospel where they live and then lovingly bring them to the true reality of Christ.

**8. We Are Committed to Being An Anchor Church.**

We exist in the city of Portland purposefully. We desire to be an anchor church in the middle of this city that will, during the next decades, see lives changed, the city redeemed, and the region transformed as **the gospel takes root** and churches are planted. We delight in being a part of the extension of Christ's redemption of Portland, New England and the World. Therefore, we are resolutely committed to being physically located in Portland and to being a kingdom-extending flagship church here and throughout this region.

**9. We Are Committed to Being A Shepherding Church.**

We aim to care for each person in our church, from the youngest to the oldest, in a thoughtful and loving manner. The church is a family with many arms and legs. We will organize ourselves in such a way that people do not "fall through the cracks," but are nurtured, disciplined, cared for, and developed for leadership. The church members—not the paid staff—are the basic unit of care and discipleship.

**10. We Will Be A Fully Engaged Church**

The ministry of this church belongs to all its members. We want the whole congregation to be **actively ministering** to people in their greatest needs and helping them to see that Christ is all that they need. The role of our pastor(s) and staff is to equip the church to engage in ministry in every aspect of their lives.

**VALUES IN ACTION—A CASE STUDY**

What does it mean for us to love God and other people? Let's talk about some practical implications of these commands and values. If we seek to be loving and authentic toward each other (members) and those who visit with us (visitors) what will that look like?

→ “Members” (The way we treat each other):

- Gossip will not be tolerated
- Short accounts will be kept (repent often)
- ‘Cliques’ will be discouraged
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We seek to be a church with an *open door* to those outside of either our church or Christ, and a *clear path* for those who journey toward Him. We do not discourage questions about Christianity, but seek to provide an arena where people can candidly and thoughtfully work through the gospel.

→ The way we treat visitors:

- Model the love and authenticity of Christ to a ‘watching world.’
- Bring our friends, co-workers, neighbors.
- Take the initiative with people on Sunday afternoon, to (at a minimum) smile and say ‘hello’ to everyone, especially those who appear to be new to us.
- Actively pursue genuine friendships with those who do not know Christ.
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What commandments or values are involved in any of these specific actions? How do the commandments call you to act differently than you might without them? What about the values?

**T**his is the kind of life which should characterize gospel-centered people—a life of increasing intimacy with and obedience to God, our heavenly Father. Our desire is that the people of Christ the Redeemer Presbyterian Church will be men and women, boys and girls of integrity—seeking to love God and those whom He places in our lives more than we ever imagined. We want to do this both publicly and privately, growing closer, day-by-day, year-by-year, to God our heavenly Father. May the Spirit of God fill our hearts, empowering us more and more to reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

# Handouts

To help you dig deeper into what we believe at  
**CHRIST THE REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

## A Rule of Prayer

### An Introduction to Personal Devotions

For some of you, the very idea of a daily pattern of spiritual disciplines may seem not only odd, but overwhelmingly daunting. Here I've tried to come up with some simple guidelines in order to help you develop this particular holy habit. But one word of advice up front: Don't be discouraged! Many long-time, mature Christians still struggle with these. (I know I do!) Know that God is at work in your life in spite of your weaknesses, and then march on.

1. Make regular, daily time with God a priority. Consider it a daily basic.
2. Try to be as consistent as possible regarding time and place.
3. Should you have your personal devotions in the mornings? That does seem to be best for most people, and if you're new at this, that's the best place to start. However, find what time works best for you.
4. You will need some structure to your personal prayer time. Again, find what works best for you. Here are a few examples:
  - a. You may find it helpful to organize your prayer around acrostics like *ACTS* (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, & Supplication) or *JOY* (Jesus, Others, You).
  - b. Use the Lord's Prayer and personally *expand* on each line.
  - c. Use a prayer book of some type. (Ask your pastor or other mature Christian for recommendations.)
5. It is good to have a prayer list—otherwise, you'll *forget* what you need to pray for. Having lists of things you pray for once a week is also a good idea. ("I pray for this Bible study every Monday.")
6. In your Bible study, don't read too much or too little for what you need right now. (Again, talk to your pastor or other leader for Bible reading plans.)
7. Don't forget to *meditate* on and *memorize* Scripture.
8. What about fasting? It's biblical! Talk with your pastor or other Christian leader for some direction in this area.
9. Keeping a journal can be a true source of joy and encouragement as you look back on what the Lord has done in your life, what He has taught you and how He has answered your prayers.
10. Having a fellow Christian or a small group encourage you to be consistent and hold you accountable for your spiritual disciplines is a great help!

## Applying Radical Love

A Really Rough Outline<sup>19</sup>

Who is someone that I have a hard time loving?

Why is it that I find him or her hard to love?

What commandments have I broken in regards to this person?

*Take time to confess before Christ.*

How do I need to obey these commandments in relating to this person?

*Pray and ask Christ to grant you strength, patience, and a winsome spirit in loving him or her.*

What values as we discussed them would have a bearing on my relationship with this person? List specifics. (I.e. How would our commitment to being a redeeming church affect the way I think about this person? Talk with him? Act towards him? How would being committed to being a praying church change the way that I pray for him? Etc.)

How do you fail in living out these values with this person? Do you agree with these values? How does Christ exemplify these values in His dealing with this individual? How would He have you do the same?

*Spend some time reflecting on how Christ loves this person. Spend some time praising Him for forgiving you for not doing so. Ask Him to give you a love for him.*

*Look for opportunities to work this out in your relationship with that person. Find someone to pray with you and for you about this. BE CAREFUL NOT TO GOSSIP IN THIS. Have that person keep you accountable.*

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<sup>19</sup> We always want formulas, but Christian growth doesn't work that way. This is just to help us think through applying the commandments and values to some specific situations and is not intended to be a step by step process.