

WEEK 5

OVERFLOW

THE FATHER'S LOVE



A man with short brown hair and a beard is shown in profile, looking down. In the background, a church service is taking place with people seated in pews. The text "WEEK 5" is centered above a horizontal line.

WEEK 5

BELONGING TO
THE FAMILY
OF GOD

THE LOST SONS & DAUGHTERS ARE WAITING TO BE EMBRACED BY OUR FATHER. WILL WE WELCOME THEM HOME?

Let us revisit the Parable of the Lost Son

While Jesus shared many parables, none has so captured the imagination of artists over the centuries than the moving story of a son who seeks mercy from his father after squandering his inheritance (see Luke 15: 11-32). One attempt to visually depict the tenderness of the father at his son's homecoming is found in the painting by Italian artist Il Guercino, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. At first, a tear streaming down the son's face arrests the viewer's attention. However it is the expression in the father's eyes powerfully portrayed by Il Guercino that becomes the dominant feature of the work. It is this mingling of sorrow and love that gives illumination to Christ's words "his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him" (Luke 15:20 NIV).

Four hundred years earlier to Jesus sharing this parable, the prophet Malachi described the days that would come where the reconciliation as noted between the father and his lost son, would be witnessed on a much larger scale on the earth.

"He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction." Malachi 3:16 (NIV)

We are living in times where a move of God grounded in a revelation of the Father's love is being unleashed. As believers, our heart needs to be positioned to celebrate with our Father the return of our brothers and sisters who will come out of spiritual death into eternal and abundant life that is found only in restoration to the arms of Abba, Father.

Are we ready to also embrace the lost sons and daughters?

The older brother is notably absent from the banquet held by his father in the youngest son's honour. We are told by Jesus that it is the extravagant grace and love shown by the father to the younger brother that provokes the older son to anger. He is resentful and at the root of the son's grievance, is the feeling that his father has shortchanged him somehow, withholding blessing from him even though he has been a dutiful son. The father is grieved with his older son's reaction at his brother's return, especially when he has not kept anything from him. In the father's words to his older son "...everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31 NIV). Are you like the older son and have never fully tasted the joy of being at home with the Father? Have you not yet taken hold of your spiritual inheritance?



Do we have a sense of belonging in His Body?

When we are saved, we become part of the family of God. The Bible describes this as becoming adopted as sons and daughters of the Father (Ephesians 1:5). Every spiritual blessing is ours in Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). All of a sudden we have brothers and sisters in Christ, a bond stronger than friendship as we share the same Heavenly Father.

“We love because he first loved us.” – 1 John 4:19

The same love that sustains the universe also nourishes and sustains the body of Christ. It is a transcendent and redemptive love, bringing wholeness to lives on earth as the Father's love is lavishly poured out (1 John 3:1).

Those who have walked with the Lord for many years should be able to think of long-standing Christian relationships that have expressed the love of the Father and have been built on prayer, sharing communion, and carrying each other's burdens. This fellowship is a sweet reminder of God's love for His church. Fruit-bearing relationships in the Lord are a microcosm of the church. In every region and city there is unlimited potential for life infused relationships.

When God the Father is not at the centre of our relationships all we have to offer is our natural affection and our love quickly depletes. When we abide in Christ, spending time with Him and learning of His ways, we will have fellowship with another, walking in the light as the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).



“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13:34 (NIV)

God did not create you to be isolated. He has a desire that we connect with His body. Despite our feelings about the church, or hurtful experiences we may have had with other believers, this command from Jesus is non-negotiable. As a disciple of Christ we are to love other disciples with the same love demonstrated to us. This does not mean that truth is compromised. It is the truth that God has forgiven us through the death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus that sustains us in being kind and tenderhearted towards one another (Ephesians 4:32).

How can we foster holy community?

It is God's will that His church be known as a holy community on the earth. One of the hallmarks of the early church was their joy and sincere hearts in coming together daily to break bread (Acts 2:46). Celebrating the Lord's supper marked the early church as a sacred community, set apart for God. Should it surprise us that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47)?

Holy community is only built when we let go of the judgements and prejudices that divide and grieve the Holy Spirit and freely love those around us. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906- 1945), German Pastor and Theologian wrote:

“The person who is in love with their vision of community will destroy community. But the person who loves the people around them will create community everywhere they go.”

It's a slippery slope when we start to pick and choose who we can love in the body of Christ. A pursuit of perfection in others can bring the exact opposite. Life and healing are substituted with death and destruction. A sober reminder of this is seen in the 1920s movement that emerged within the German Evangelical Church called the Deutsche Christen or 'German Christians'. Built on the antisemitism that was widespread in Europe at the time, this group sought to establish a 'perfect church' and embraced many of the nationalistic and racial aspects of Nazi ideology. How many of the German Christians would have foreseen that their embrace of an antisemitic agenda would later contribute to the Holocaust, where 6 million Jews were brutally murdered and where countless Christian brothers and sisters (including Bonhoeffer) met with a similar fate, who opposed Nazi rule?

A doctrine of "perfectionism" in the church, that is based on man's agenda can have nightmarish results on individuals, groups and cults. Trying to be our version of perfect and trying to be perfect in our strength leads to conformity rather than unity; domination and fear rather than godly submission to one another. The truth is churches are filled with people that will make us feel uncomfortable in the flesh, cause us inconvenience and even mistreat us while Christ is being formed in them. As Tim Keller, Founding Pastor of Redeemer Church in New York puts it:

"The mistaken belief that a person must "clean up" his or her own life in order to merit God's presence is not Christianity. This means, though, that the church will be filled with immature and broken people who still have a long way to go emotionally, morally, and spiritually."

How can we make ourselves continually vulnerable to a community that can at best test us and at worst, cause us deep wounds? There is perhaps no better guidance for living with the reality of broken and fractured relationships in the church than in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

A richly gifted church, the carnality of the Corinthian believers was in their way to healing and Christ-centered relationships. They were prizing spiritual giftedness over character and elevating human leaders above their exaltation of Christ. The Corinthian church had not learned yet to operate as a body and the bad fruit included divisions, sickness and even early death (1 Corinthians 11:30).

The Apostle Paul makes very clear the pathway forward to life and purity. In his famous passage on the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul redirects the Corinthians' attention to the way of love which never fails.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 (NIV)

The way of love involves keeping short accounts with one another and becoming imitators of Our Father who has forgiven us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:32).



We need to live as one

When we are one with God, as Jesus prayed in John 17, we will be one with those who are one with Him. Learning to love God and live in His presence is our first command. His Spirit will lead us, as sons and daughter who reflect His likeness, to love others and to be able to be one with them. Then the hidden ones - the persecuted, sick or lonely - will be found and embraced into the body of Christ.

We don't want a spirit of uniformity - where we all look the same and speak the same lingo. Unity of the Spirit, is evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit, where fear of man and control are replaced by love and freedom in Christ. No matter how spiritually gifted an individual or a group of Christians are, it is still only one part of a greater body where all parts are needed to function. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church:

“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don't need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don't need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.” 1 Corinthians 12: 21-23 (NIV)

When we unite as the family of God in love, a great power for evangelism can be unleashed. The family of God can live its high calling of being light in darkness, as we become a living testimony of Christ's undivided body. Only then can we love and so reach a broken and dying world. As Jesus assures us:

**“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
John 13: 35 (NIV)**

Here are the 3 activations for this week

ACTIVATION 1: LOVE AS YOU HAVE BEEN LOVED

Jesus has revealed the Father to us. He said to His disciples "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:7 NIV).

Do we see the Father through Jesus Christ? Put another way, do we recognise that Jesus' compassionate kindness is a reflection of our Father's love and tender mercies? (John 3:16).

The classic hymn "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross" reflects the sorrow and love that met when Jesus died at Calvary. He is the perfect reflection of the father's compassion described by Jesus in the parable of the Prodigal Son. His whole body on the cross "...His head, His hands, His feet" was a reflection of this costly love.

Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

Will you forgive and love brothers and sisters in the church who have offended you?

Sometimes the biggest barriers to us stepping out and embracing other believers is that we have forgotten the mercy shown to us through God the Father. We can be unwilling to show grace to brothers and sisters who seek God's mercy and forgiveness even though we enjoy the riches of our Father on a daily basis.

Unforgiveness in our hearts towards a brother or sister in Christ corrodes our life in Christ and robs us of fellowship where Christ is in our midst. It is interesting that Jesus tells his disciples to forgive a brother (or sister) if they sin against you "seventy times seven" right after he notes the power of unity in prayer (see Matthew 18:18-22).

Listen to the hymn When I Survey The Wonderous Cross

Spend some time alone with the Lord meditating on the work accomplished by the Cross. Ask Him to reveal to you anything in your heart (pride, judgement, bitterness etc) that has blocked you from fellowshiping with other believers. Give any pain and hurt to our Father that may come up during this time and leave it at the foot of the Cross. Watch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDkuxElcpdl>

ACTIVATION 2: BRINGING THE GENERATIONS TOGETHER

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"
Galatians 3: 28 (NIV).

Here are the 3 activations for this week

Divisions in the body of Christ can become great hindrances to spiritual growth and life in Christ. While there are many divisions that can creep into the body of Christ, none has a more powerful effect on breaking down the blessings that come with family than the division between older and younger generations.

Building multigenerational communities where all can flourish and grow in their knowledge of Christ is in the heart of the Father. There are benefits of older and younger generations working together. Our differences can become strengths allowing us to more effectively reach the culture.

Are you actively encouraging someone younger and older than you?

Ask the Lord to show you someone you can sow into - someone from your local church or Christian community who is of a different generation than you. Seek the Father on ways you can encourage them through prayer, hospitality or sharing a constructive word.

If you are a new believer, do not feel like you cannot encourage someone who has been a Christian for many years. Chinese Church leader Watchman Nee (1903-1972) notes that he was amazed by the insights from the Scriptures shared by new believers but how this showed that all parts of the body of Christ were needed to function properly.

ACTIVATION 3: LEARNING TO STAY

Authentic relationships between believers in Christ were won for us at Calvary. Intuitively we know that genuine love for one another is priceless. Walking this out, day by day, with other believers however can bring challenges as Christ as formed is formed in one another. If we are not careful, we can become easily offended and wander from Christian community to Christian community looking for the 'perfect church.'

We also live in a time where the online world makes it easier to become distracted with what is happening in other ministries or churches and stop us from being fully present in our local communities. We can be tempted to run from where God has planted us because we don't want to miss out on what God is doing elsewhere. Missionary to Hong Kong, Jackie Pulling says "We need people who will go, and stay until the end."

Where has God called you to be? Are you doing the works he has called you to in this place?

Spend some time with the Lord and ask Him for a fresh vision of the city or town you are planted in. The Apostle Paul says "godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Timothy 6:6). Ask Our Father to help you remove any distractions that are robbing you of contentment in Him and are stopping you from being an effective witness in your local community.



26

31 March 2019

Praise God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Jesus.

27

1 April 2019

Give thanks to God our Father who predestined us for adoption of sonship through Jesus Christ and praise Him for His grace that He has freely given to us to the One he loves.

28

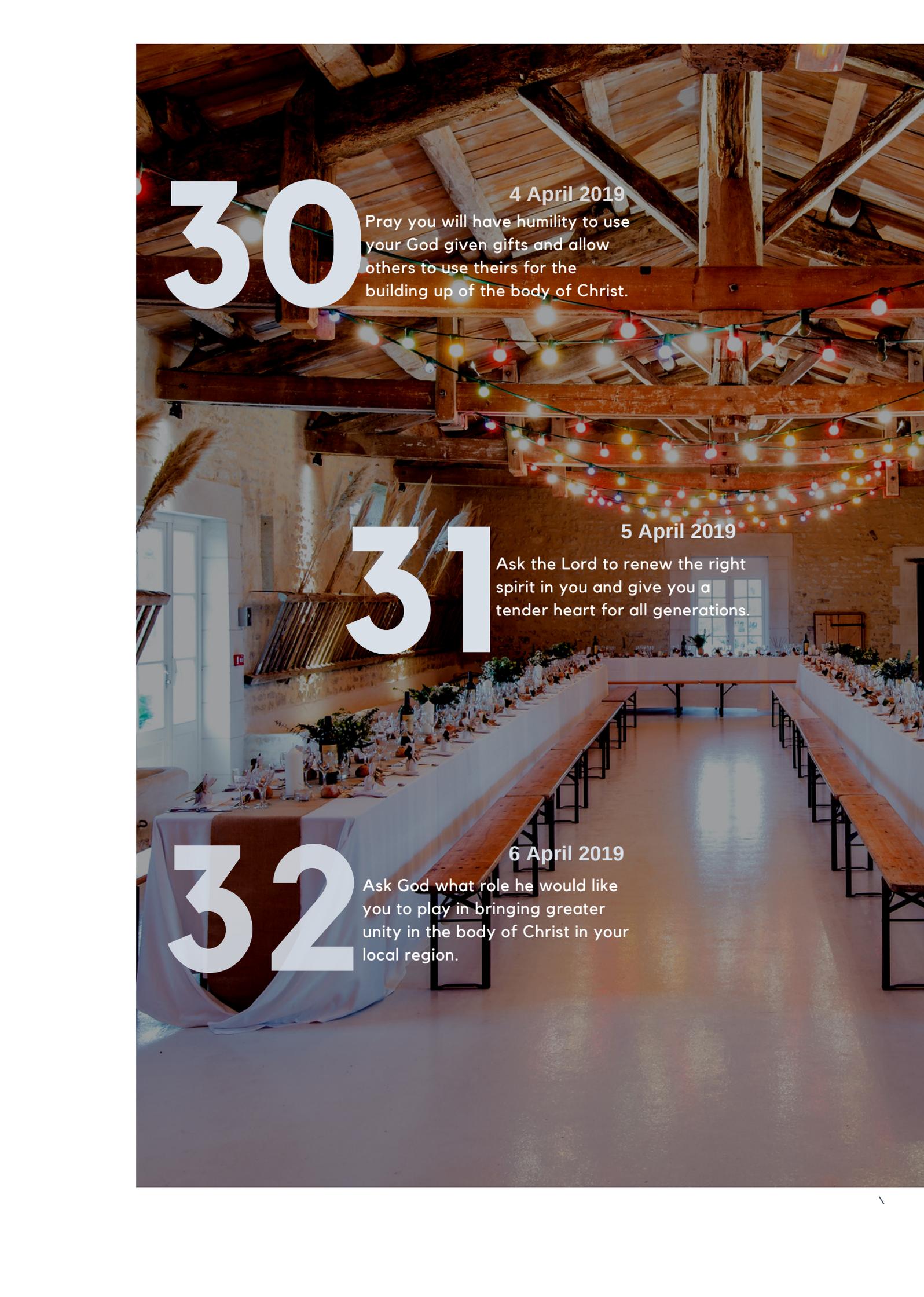
2 April 2019

Ask our Father for a revelation of His loving kindness and let His presence wash you and overflow you.

29

3 April 2019

Ask the Lord to forgive any hardness in your heart where you have held unforgiveness against a brother or sister in Christ.

A rustic dining hall with long tables covered in white cloths, wooden beams on the ceiling, and string lights hanging from the ceiling. The room has a warm, inviting atmosphere with natural light coming from windows on the left.

30

4 April 2019

Pray you will have humility to use your God given gifts and allow others to use theirs for the building up of the body of Christ.

31

5 April 2019

Ask the Lord to renew the right spirit in you and give you a tender heart for all generations.

32

6 April 2019

Ask God what role he would like you to play in bringing greater unity in the body of Christ in your local region.



Partners in Prayer
& Evangelism