

# Unexpected | Week 2

I pray you had a joy filled Easter Sunday as you celebrated Jesus' unfathomable love for us. We worship a God who did the unexpected! The Son of God set aside his divinity, came as a man, died for our sins and was raised from the dead. Because of his sacrifice, human sinners can be reconciled to God, receive his Spirit, and experience new life. The love that the Spirit has poured into us is too wonderful to be kept for ourselves. God intends for us to share it with the each other and the world.

As Christians we have been empowered by the Spirit in unexpected ways. As members of his body, we are knit together with other believers and Christ is our head. With his love coursing through us and his Spirit guiding us, we can make a real difference in the lives of those around us. When we do, we show the unexpected grace and power of God to a watching world.

This week we're going to think about how the love we display as his people and the goodness we do in his name can draw people to our Savior and Lord.

## Day 1

For our Unexpected series we're drawing wisdom from 1 Peter, a letter written to encourage faith and obedience in the early church. Throughout the week, we'll look at a few additional passages to help us consider how we can show unexpected love in our community. Today, read and reflect on our central verses from 1 Peter.

### Read the Word

#### 1 Peter 1:22–23 (NIV)

*<sup>22</sup> Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. <sup>23</sup> For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

#### 1 Peter 2:9–12 (NIV)

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

*<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

- How should believers act toward one another? What reasons does Peter give in these verses?
- How should believers live? What reaction might that have from unbelievers?

## Reflect

There should be something unexpected about Christ's church. Although we come from diverse backgrounds, the love we share in the Spirit should create a beautiful harmony that sings loudly for all to hear. We are God's people, and our collective heart should reflect his. Our Lord came to alleviate suffering, bring dignity to the marginalized, and reconcile the repentant to the Creator. He demonstrated the kingdom of God through his life, death, and resurrection. As his body, we unite to carry out his work by the power of the Spirit. This week let's pray for guidance and empowerment as to do so individually and as his church.

## Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Father, thank you for your love. Jesus, thank you that I am part of your body. Spirit, thank you for power and guidance. Show me what it means to show your unexpected love to my brothers and sisters in Christ and to my community.*

## Day 2

Outside your family, who are you closest to? Many of us form bonds with neighbors, people at work, or people who share our hobbies or interests. While those relationships are a wonderful blessing, we should ask ourselves if we are at least as connected to our fellow believers with whom we share an even deeper bond. Fellow Christians are family. Look again at how Peter describes those relationships.

## Read the Word

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## 1 Peter 2:10–12 (NIV)

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

## 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.*

- Based on these verses, what words would you use to describe what the body of Christ should be.

## Reflect

God created humanity for relationship with him and with one another. Just as the three persons of the trinity enjoy loving communion within the Godhead, we were created to give and receive love. While sin is a powerful force that divides people from their Creator and from each other, Jesus is the great reconciler who repairs broken bonds and brings healing and peace.

The connection we have with other believers is unique and powerful. The Spirit of God lives in every Christian giving us a bond that transcends those formed by bloodline, geography, career, or interest. Because we have experienced new birth and have new life in Christ, our connection to fellow believers is elemental — even more so than those formed by ethnicity, race, or gender. As Christians, our identity is fundamentally rooted in Christ, therefore our kinship with fellow believers is also deeply rooted.

Though technology gives us the opportunity to connect with many others, modern people are lonelier than ever. We all need a level of connection deeper than what fiber optic cables and Wi-Fi signals can provide. We long to be truly known, loved and accepted. The body of Christ can provide that. In Colossians Paul talks about Jesus being our head and his body “supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow” (2:19)

In Christ, we have spiritual brothers and sisters. Each of us has experienced the life-changing grace of God and has been adopted into his family. In the present, we share the desire to love, honor, and obey God with our words and actions. While conflict will sometimes break out between siblings and we will have to regularly seek and offer forgiveness, Jesus is the one through whom all things hold together, and his love can overcome a multitude of sins. The ability to love one another as family in spite of our differences is a testimony to the power of the gospel that will resonate with people in our strife-ridden world.

When we live as his body, we are displaying the love, grace, and beauty of Jesus through our relationships with each other. That is something people will want to be a part of. We can welcome people who are longing for connection into Christ's family.

- How would you describe your relationships with fellow Christians? Are there some with whom you experience genuine connection? Based on what Peter says, why is it important to pursue those relationships?
- How might an invitation into the family of God be meaningful to some of the unchurched people that you know?

### Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Father, I am so grateful to be part of your family. Deepen my relationships with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Help us find true unity and display genuine love. Show us how to share that love with people in our community.*

## Day 3

A lot of stories play on our expectations. The weakest character finds an unexpected strength. The character we thought was good was working with the villain all along. The character we thought was the villain turns out to be the hero.

People who heard Jesus tell the parable of the Good Samaritan would have been surprised by the turn that story took. There was a great deal of animosity between Samaritans and Jews. Jews considered Samaritans apostate "half-breeds." For Jesus to make one the hero of his parable was unexpected.

As you read through the passage below, notice what question prompts Jesus to tell the story and what question he ultimately answers.

### Read the Word

#### Luke 10:25–37

*<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

*<sup>27</sup> He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

## Questions

- Does Jesus answer the question posed to him (see verse 29)? Explain your answer.
- What point do you think Jesus is making by having an unexpected hero?

## Reflect

Yesterday we considered how we should display the unexpected love of Christ in the family of God. We should display that same kind of love to those outside our Christian community. Treating strangers as neighbors sets us apart and glorifies God.

Loving your neighbor as yourself was part of the instructions God gave Israel through Moses. “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” God expected his people to “act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). He also forbade the Israelites from mistreating or oppressing foreigners who lived among them, but instead they were to treat them as native-born and “love them as yourself” (Leviticus 19:33–34). This command had never been limited in its application to those inside of the covenant community. Yet, it is an incredibly difficult calling. It shouldn’t surprise us that in Jesus’ day the expert in the law was hoping to define these parameters as narrowly as possible.

In his parable Jesus beautifully illustrates how his followers should treat others. While two members of the Jewish religious elite pass by the man who'd been attacked and left for dead, the Samaritan stops and goes above and beyond to help him. This unexpected hero shows unexpected love to a stranger. Author Tim Keller makes this observation about the parable, "One of the reasons that Jesus puts a Samaritan in the story is that he, by virtue of his race and history, has no obligations at all to stop and give aid. No law, no social convention, no religious prescription dictates that he render service. Yet he stops. Why? He was moved by his compassion"<sup>1</sup>

We should also be moved to compassion by the plight of others, even those who are not in our "tribe." We should see every human being as deserving of love and compassion because that's how God sees us. We show mercy because we have received it. What's more, when we display the goodness of Jesus by acting as he would, those around us may see our "good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 1:12).

- How can you show unexpected goodness to your neighbors? Ask the Spirit to prompt you as you go through your day. Think of some practical ways you can display God's goodness.

### Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Father, I am so grateful that your love and mercy is on full display in Jesus! I am so grateful for everything that you've done for me. Show me how I can show love to others in my day to day life. Use me to help people find and follow Christ.*

## Day 4

When is the last time you were surprised, but in a good way? A time when you were delighted by the unexpected? Maybe you were eligible for a tax refund or your favorite team pulled off a big upset. Or maybe out of the blue a family member, friend, or co-worker did something really thoughtful that made you feel loved or appreciated. One of the joys of life is being pleasantly surprised by the unexpected.

As believers we have the opportunity to do the unexpected and delight people in our communities. The Spirit can use our efforts to help them recognize the beauty of the gospel we proclaim. We can reflect the love of our Savior and display his goodness and mercy to the world. We are called by Jesus to be salt and light.

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Keller, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything*, (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan 2010), 109.

## Read the Word

### Matthew 5:13–16 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

<sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

### 1 Peter 1:12

<sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

## Reflect

Our verses from Matthew come from the Sermon on the Mount. In this section, Jesus uses two metaphors to teach his followers — he tells them that they are salt and light. Salt is something that adds flavor, but in the ancient world was commonly used as a preservative. Salt not only makes food taste better but prevents its decay and corruption so that it can provide nourishment. Jesus’ followers can perform this function in society. We work to preserve what’s good, oppose what’s bad, and improve the flavor of everything in between.

Jesus also calls his disciples the “light of the world.” In a world where people are wandering in darkness, desperate and unsure of where to go, we are a flashlight that illuminates the path to the true Light. We’re not trying to bring attention to ourselves, but direct people to the source of love and life.

Jesus is reminding his listeners that in being salt and light, they are reflecting him. “He was the salt of the earth. He was the light of the world: set up on a hill-top, crucified for all the world to see, becoming a beacon of hope and new life for everybody, drawing people to worship his father, embodying the way of self-giving love which is the deepest fulfilment of the law and the prophets.”<sup>2</sup> As his body, we want our lives to point to Jesus because it’s Jesus that people ultimately need. It is a privilege to display his character in our good deeds so that people will glorify the Lord (1 Peter 1:12).

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Wright, [Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 41.

- Ask the Spirit to guide you in what it means for YOU to be salt and light in your family, job, school, neighborhood, or any other place you find yourself. Get practical. What are some specific and tangible things you can do?

## Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Father, what an honor to be used by you. Spirit, teach me what it means for me to be salt and light in the places where you lead me. I long for people to know Jesus. Use me to point people to him!*

## Day 5

On Day 5 of our guide each week, we reflect on what we've learned and connect it with our lives. Spend some extended time in prayer and consider your next steps in following Christ.

## Reflect

Businesses often run cost/benefit analyses before they embark on a new venture. If the cost in time, money, or resources is greater than what they'll get back in return, they won't move forward. That may be a fine principle to apply to business, but it's an awful one to apply to people. We can't give so that we will get.

There is a sacrificial element to love. It's not "loving our neighbor" to give love or attention only to those who will be willing and able to reciprocate. It's easier to love when it will be returned, or at least we know we'll get some recognition or gratitude. But that kind of love is expected, and God's love does the unexpected. He loves those who are difficult, ungrateful, and selfish. People like me, and people like you.

God loves us lavishly and extravagantly. Jesus came to rescue us, redeem us, and restore us. We can reflect his love back into the world by loving others the same way. As the Spirit transforms us little by little into the image of Christ, more and more we can love as Jesus loves. We can extend grace to others because he extends grace to us.

We all struggle to love those who are hard to love, whether they are people in our family, our community, or our church. Let's be honest with ourselves and the Father about that struggle and continually ask the Spirit to soften our hearts. He can pour his love into us so it will overflow into the lives of others. Let's bring glory to God by loving people well.

## Pray

Spend some extended time in prayer. Praise God for his generous and unfailing love. List some of the ways God has shown his love to you. Reflect on his grace and mercy. Then ask the Spirit to move you to compassionate action and unexpected love. Who are some of the people who come to mind?

### **What's Your Next Step?**

What are some tangible ways you can show love to those in your church family? How can you be more sensitive to their needs? Show greater grace and forgiveness? Treat them as beloved brothers and sisters?

How can you show unexpected love to those in our community? How can you display Christ's mercy and compassion for those living around you? One way is by being a part of Christ Fellowship's Serve Day on May 4. Visit [CFhome.org/unexpected](http://CFhome.org/unexpected) to see how you and your family could be a part!