

Finding *Renewal* in the Love of God

Unit 1: Claiming the life in through Sacrifices of Love

Prayer Prompts: Week 1

I don't try to hide it, but I don't fly it as a banner, either: I was an abused child. When I was two years old, my step-grandfather who had fought with General Patton suffered from severe post-traumatic stress. He was mentally ill. One night my parents walked into the kitchen to find that he had undressed me and parts of himself. There were no signs of invasion, but the incident threw everyone in the household into hysteria. Thirty-five years later, I was still dealing with the effects of that evening. Sadly, though, this grandfather died shortly after the incident, and my grandmother remarried her first husband, my mother's father. As a result, the whole family pretended the other marriage had never occurred, much less the incident. It would have been nice to know. One result of not knowing was that my mother's father repulsed me. He was, after all, the man with my grandmother, and I became physically nauseated in his presence. Though He had never hurt me, he seemed the epitome of evil (he was not a Christian), and I left a wide distance between us at all times.

When I married, my husband did not understand this. He visited with Pawpaw and laughed with him; he *prayed* for him. I just let them talk—better than him being near me. One night, they had come to my home for dinner. I was standing at the stove when I felt a sickening shudder roll down my spine. My grandfather had actually walked up behind me and was putting his arms around my waist. He leaned in, very close to my ear, intensifying my reaction all the more. “Honey,” he began. I could not take any more and began to free myself. Just then, I heard him finish his sentence: “I want Barry to baptize me.” The shame that washed over me in that moment instantly swallowed my disgust, and I broke into tears—tears of surprise, repentance, and joy. Years later, after he was dead, I would learn the reason I had so disliked my grandmother's husband, only to know that the man I shunned was not the repulsive man I disdained.

I am reminded of something I once heard: *If you wonder who it is you truly love, ask yourself this: Who is it you pray for?* I wish I had loved my grandfather; I wish I had prayed for him like my husband did. Prayer possesses the power to resurrect. Never, *never*, *NEVER* believe that *anything—nor anyone*—is outside the reach of our loving Father. Pray!

Today, we want to focus on loving others. John writes:

- We know we have left death and have come into life because we love each other. 3.13
- Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 4.8
- Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person. My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring. 3.17-18
- If anyone sees a brother or sister sinning (sin that does not lead to eternal death), that person should pray, and God will give the sinner life. 5.16

Today, we will pray for others, and we will pray for ourselves that we will be better able to “see” God’s children with *His eyes* and love them with *His heart* and welcome them home with *His arms*.

Prayer leader: Father, we praise you for your creativity, for your love and compassion, your diversity and understanding. In your wisdom, you created all of us in your image...yet we are so different.

Individual group members will contribute, popcorn style—that is, as the name comes to their mind: Thank you for --

- *The group will name those who are on their hearts, thanking God for each one. For example:*
- *(Michael; for the life he has lived; for his example to me or to my children, or...)*
- *(my parents; for the love they showered upon me)*
- *(--, who first introduced me to you and your love.)*
- *Etc.*

Prayer leader: Father, be with *all those that we love*, and teach us to love others as you have loved all of us.

Individual group members will contribute, popcorn style, for example:

- *Father, give us your eyes so that we can see you in others.*
- *Teach me to slow down so that I can know those you put in my life.*
- *Provide me an opportunity to better to know my neighbors.*
- *Stop me cold when I am given an opportunity to show your love*
- *Teach me how to respond when...*
- *Soften my heart towards...*
- *Etc.*

Prayer leader: Father, open the eyes of our minds now, that we may know how and for whom we need to pray. There are so many who are hurting, Lord, from the effects of sin, from emotional pain, from physical ailments or limitations. We bring these before you:

Individual group members will contribute, popcorn style, asking for God to bless the spiritual lives of those we love. You may also pray for physical healing or emotional healing at this time. However, keep it simple and remember that times of silence are opportunities for the Holy Spirit to prompt our hearts to pray for others which do not come readily to mind; listen intently and be still during these silences. Do not rush forward to fill the silence with words. Pray:

- Be with – (period). (No explanation is needed here; God knows *all* the details; trust each group member to pray fervently for every name.)

When there have been no names mentioned in an appropriate space of time, the prayer leader will close the prayer.

Prayer leader: Our God, thank you for being a father who sets His heart to know our hearts, to hear our concerns, to heal those we love, to bring each one, no matter what the situation, to you. Thank you for your patience with us as we attempt to model your love to others on earth. Teach us to be more like you. Teach us to *truly* love, demonstrating with actions the love we feel, giving to others, praying for others, seeing the goodness you have deposited in each one, and encouraging one another.