

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST LOVED TO LOVE LIFESTYLE



Many of us have had the experience of attending a service or a seminar in which our hearts were filled with a profound sense of God's presence and power. We left the meeting with a joy-filled, overflowing heart! These dramatic explosions of grace really happen from time to time. God is full of surprises. But miracles still seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Many of the stories Jesus told regarding our personal spiritual growth were farming stories. Jesus often communicated that the message of his kingdom is like seed. We grow in our walk with God as we approach life like farmers—planting, watering, weeding, and waiting day by day.

Jesus also gave a new command: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” We have to experience Jesus, (God), love us first in order to love as he has loved us. **The First Loved to Love Lifestyle** is an invitation to begin pouring the water of God's love, Jesus' love, on our heart's soil, day by day, until we begin to feel and experience his loving kindness toward us.

1. Invite God to speak to you personally from Scripture texts that provide timeless revelations of his heart.

Sample: Zephaniah 3:17: *“The LORD your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Personalize & Memorize: “I am the LORD your God and I am with you. I am mighty to save you, (*Your name*). I take great delight in you. I will quiet you with My love and I rejoice over you (*Your name*), with singing.”

Meditate: Speak this personalized Scripture text to yourself, right out loud with passion. Speak it again and again, until the words—like water—begin to soften your heart soil. Invite a friend to speak these personalized words over you. Don't stop meditating (*i.e.*, marinating your soul) until you *feel* God's heart toward you through the very words of Scripture. When time permits, write out the verse using synonyms and antonyms to help his truth penetrate deeper into your heart. And listen to the Spirit to give further words of encouragement.

Synonym/Antonym Sample: “(Your name), I am the LORD, Yahweh, your God. I am always with you, my child. I am never detached or distant. I am here as a warrior to fight for you and to deliver you through the pressures you're enduring. Do not for a moment allow yourself to think that I don't care about you. The truth is I adore you; I delight in the relationship we share. I am eager to console you with my love, my kindness, and my affection. In fact, as I listen to you, I celebrate your life and your faith in me with a mighty, exuberant shout!”

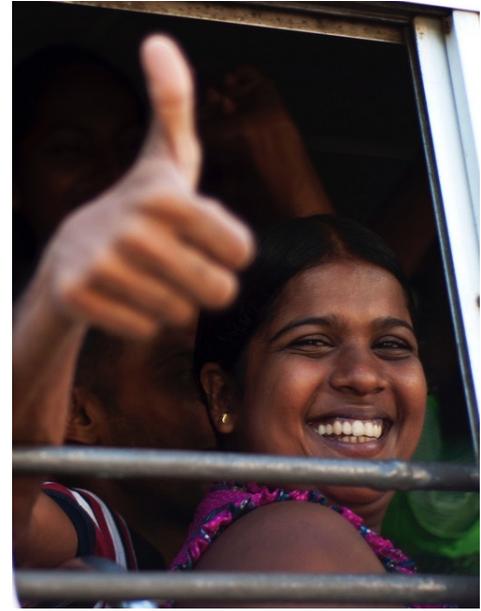


Imitate: Share the verse with someone else to pour God's love into their hearts. Be led of the Spirit to share any additional words of comfort and encouragement.

2. Keep your eyes and ears open for daily *God-Sightings*: loving human interactions that provide windows on God's tender love for you.

Give Thanks for the joy you feel as someone loves you, as you love someone else, or as you witness others showing love. We really do experience God's presence and joy in the loving presence of other Christians. (1Ths. 3:9 "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?")

Imagine God in you or the other person loving you that way and then hearing him say to you, "If you or they can love to that measure on a human level, try to imagine how **much more** I, your Heavenly Father, love you with a perfect, eternal love!" (Mt. 7:11 "If you, then, though you are 'imperfect' know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more** do I, your Father in heaven, give good gifts to you who ask me!).



Meditate on these comparisons and illustrations of God's love for you. Write them down in your journal as God invited his OT people to write down his promises and instruction on their doorposts (Deuteronomy 6:6, 9).

"...loving human interactions that provide windows on God's tender love for you."

- GOD SIGHTINGS

Imitate: Whatever you've seen or heard, learned or received, put it into practice (Phil. 4:9).

3. Decide not to come to church (or any gathering of Christians) empty-handed—as a lukewarm observer. Sing, give, speak and serve with your whole heart (1Pt. 4:10-11).

Prepare your gifts in advance of Sunday morning. Remember, when you bring your gifts, God also distributes other gifts of the Spirit so that when a group of Christians gather, each one giving more than he or she takes, Scripture describes this experience as a *love feast* (Jude 12).

Remind yourself that every gathering is an opportunity to be loved by God and to share his love with others. For many Christians, church is little more than a private experience in a public setting. Make your church experience—from where you sit to who you greet, from what you give to how you serve—all about expressing and experiencing God's love with others.

4. Finally, join a small group.

We need to be in safe, committed relationships in order to process the barriers that may surface in us that may prevent us from receiving and sharing God's love. We have all had many experiences of being "unloved" by life and people or being "unloving" to God, others or ourselves. Sharing and praying with others can help to heal and remove these barriers.