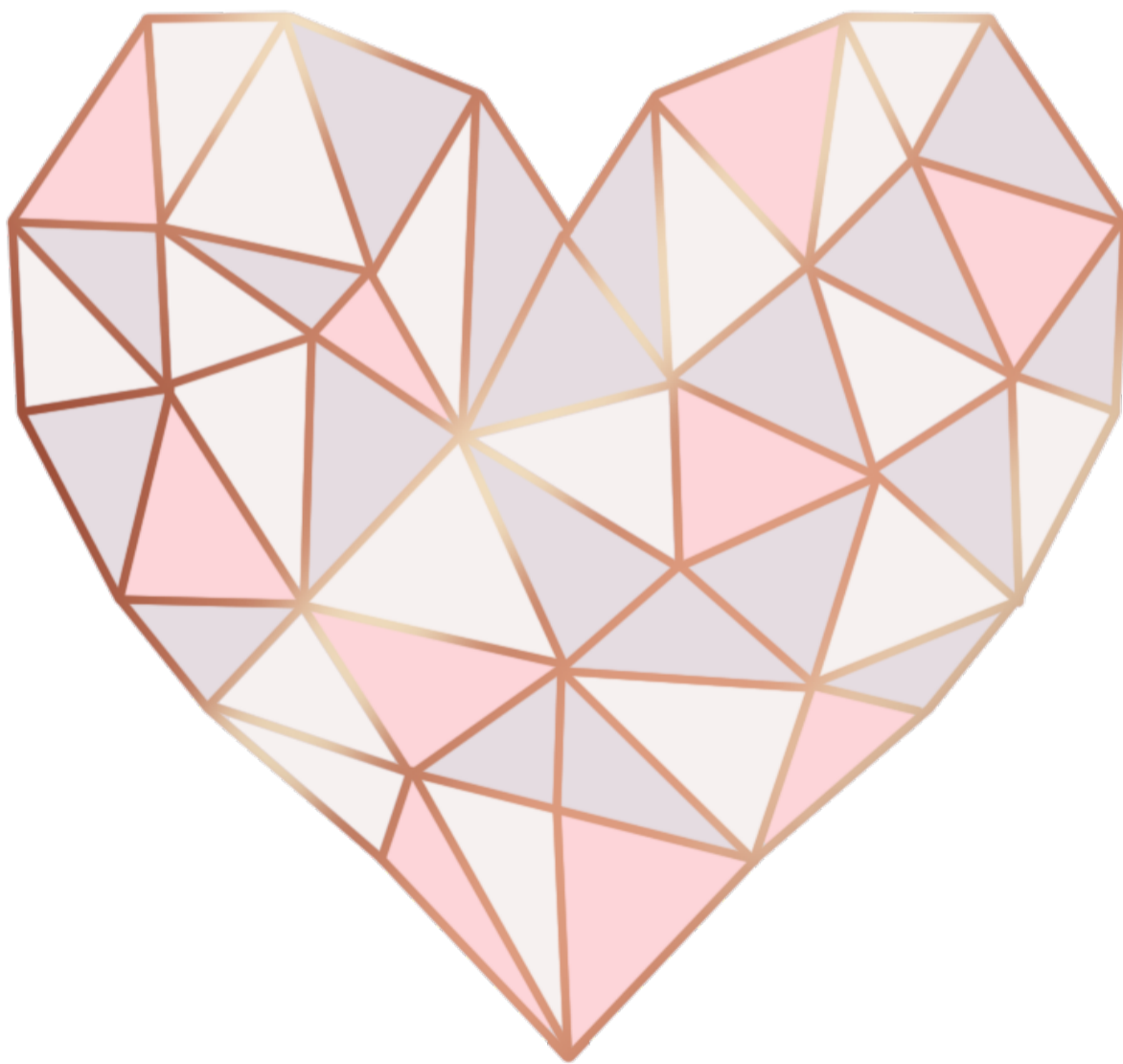


A QUIET TIME SERIES

PERFECT LOVE

"THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE,
BUT PERFECT LOVE DRIVES OUT FEAR."

1 PETER 4:18



THE VACCINE

The unknown. It's ominous. It's overwhelming. These are desperate times amid the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is a time when fears are rampant and legitimate. Many of you reading this may have lost jobs, incomes, security. Our "normals" have been hijacked and disappointment is widespread. Maybe you're concerned with your own health or the well-being of compromised loved ones. Many of us are shut in and feeling isolated and lonely. Although the situation may feel helpless, we are never hopeless because of the redeeming love of God. We don't need a quick fix right now, we need the antidote- we need hope. The vaccine for fear is knowledge of the perfect love of God. It's the acknowledgement of the sovereignty and the attentiveness of our Almighty Father. 1 John 4 reminds us that God is love, in the most perfect and reliable sense. This quiet time series, written by sisters all over the world, will take us through qualities of God's love as laid out in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

"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. LOVE NEVER FAILS."

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IS PATIENT

CLAUDIA TERAN - BEIRUT, LEBANON

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow at keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Peter 3:8-9

God is an endless portion of patience that will never run dry, a patience that surpasses our shortcomings, mistakes, weaknesses and sin. He knows us fully, better than we could ever know ourselves. He sees the full picture of who we are and who we will become and loves us through it all. He is not in the business of disposing of people or plans, He gently and calmly waits for us and meets us where we are at. He is invested in the process, the beautiful exchange of our offenses for his grace, of our flesh for our souls and the world for His love. He is not preoccupied or bothered by our detours and setbacks, our lack of understanding, our fears and doubts or even our repetitive sins. He is not in a rush with you or simply in a hurry to “fix” you. His whole being is invested in you!

As the All-powerful God that he is, He wants our love and will not be satisfied till He gets it. Free as He is, He has let His heart be bound to us forever. As 2 Peter 3:9 mentions, our father never gives up on us but loves us unconditionally, willing to do what it takes to pursue us until we turn to Him. His love and kindness are revealed through this patient process. Through his patience with our brokenness and weakness we are set free to experience the fullness of His glory. To partake in a relationship with the person of “who He is.”

God’s patience is an active patience. God understands all the facts and makes the best decision for our lives. God never vacillates, He always does what is good and just. God’s actions towards us are always just, perfect and holy. He uses His heart, soul and mind together with skill and competence, and invests it all in us. In patience, He devises the perfect plans and wants us to achieve those goals by the most perfect means. He sees the end from the beginning, so there can be no need to guess or conjecture. Patience sees everything in focus, each in proper relation to all, and is thus able to work toward predestined goals with flawless precision.”

Consider for a moment all that God witnesses on earth. All the perversion, atrocities and sin that humanity commits on a daily basis. The corruption and deteriorating of our state causing Him pain and suffering as He watches us exchange his perfect love for cheap idols and self-inflicted pain. Contemplate on how He has been patient with you, whispering great plans for you, seeking your heart only to have you throw it out the window and deny His goodness. But He continues there, patiently waiting for you, transforming you into the image of Jesus. He knows you to the core, He knows the scars the world has caused, yet He believes in you. In Him, you WILL achieve the purpose to which you were called. He is always patiently cheering you on!

CONSIDER:

- Where in your spiritual walk with God do you need to grow in patience towards YOURSELF?
- What sin, situation or calamity in your life seems to have no end?

IS KIND

SARA ENGEL - ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

God is love. Love is patient, love is kind. God is kind. Even though it is a rather simple concept to be kind, it is very challenging to practice at times. It is especially hard during times of uncertainty and high anxiety when we can tend to resort to our raw natures and be on edge. It is precisely at these times that we need kindness. Kindness can work to dispel fear and remind us that we are loved by God and each other. Kindness can almost seem optional, like being 'nice.' However, when you look at the kindness of God's nature, it is life-giving and a true expression of His unfailing love. The Hebrew word used for kindness is 'Hesed'. The meaning of Hesed is significantly deeper than merely being 'nice'; it is a culmination of goodness, love, kindness and mercy. Hesed is God's love and mercy towards humanity, his loving-kindness. We do not want God's kindness to be optional, so ours shouldn't be either.

"My lips will praise you because your loving-kindness is better than life." Psalm 63:3

"For His loving-kindness toward us is great. And the truth of the Lord lasts forever. Praise the Lord!" Psalm 117:2

"They would not listen and did not remember Your powerful works which You had done among them. So, they became strong-willed and chose a leader to return to their hard work in Egypt. But you are a forgiving God. You are kind and loving, slow to anger, and full of loving-kindness (Hesed). You did not leave them." Nehemiah 9:17 (NLV)

God's loving-kindness is better than life! If it were not for his kindness and mercy, we would not be alive, let alone have full access to Him through the grace found in Jesus. Our sins would be the end of us. Nehemiah speaks of the Israelite's stubbornness and forgetfulness and yet God is still kind to them and does not abandon them. He chooses to be kind, patient and forgive them just as he does for us. He not only forgives us, he also shows us how to live! When we are at our worst, he is kind, he gives us the opportunity to get up after we fall, time and time again.

It is essential to remember this kind nature of God when we go through trials. We can feel confused, question why things are happening a certain way or be tempted to doubt him. We need to cling to the truth about his nature and who He is! When we draw strength from God and his good nature, that enables us to be kind to those around us...even to ourselves. We cannot underestimate what seemingly small acts of kindness can do for people. Whether it is a smile, a kind word that makes someone feel seen and understood, lending a hand at the grocery store, or a listening ear, kindness can shed light in dark and lonely places. Kind acts and words can also help people understand God better. Even when people may not deserve kindness, we can remember the many ways that God has given us undeserved Hesed and imitate his love. The impact of kindness can be eternal.

CONSIDER:

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." -Mother Teresa

- List some ways that you see God's Hesed towards you in your life.
- How can you grow in your loving-kindness during this time?

DOES NOT ENVY

DAWN RUSSELL - LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

One week before the quarantine I was preparing to return to “regular” life. I had just “survived” three weeks of going stir crazy caring for my newborn. I was ready to put on regular clothes, book my hair appointment, get my eyebrows and nails done and restart my dance classes. After not being around people for three weeks, I was excited to return to church on Sunday mornings and reconnect with the women in my college ministry. I’m a planner, so I was using my last week of maternity leave to plan meetings and hangouts for the upcoming weeks. Then the unimaginable happened. I, just like the majority of the world, am now under mandatory quarantine. My quarantine is not by choice anymore, as it was just a weeks ago in order to protect my newborn. The choice aspect of it all, is what has been the hardest for me personally. In life, whenever choices are taken away I find myself questioning God.

In 2011, after a tough breakup and losing my father, I read a book called *This Doesn't Feel Like Love* by Roger Lamb. It was a time in my life when I was questioning God's love more than ever. I literally screamed to God one day, “You have taken everything from me!” In 1 Corinthians 13:4, it says that love does not envy. It may seem obvious that God's love is not envious, but I have found myself reasoning, “God took _____ away because he is a jealous God” or at my worst “God doesn't want me to be happy.” Only an envious person takes something away from someone out of spite and if I'm vulnerably honest, I have felt God has done that at times.

Now, being a bible believing Christian, although I have felt God has been out to get me, I have known that was the furthest from the truth. The book title alone, *This Doesn't Feel Like Love*, was a validating life saver for me. It helped me change my dialogue with God from “You obviously don't love me anymore!” to “I know you love me but, this doesn't feel like love.” I then began to search the scriptures to understand just how God does show his love. There are a few truths that I discovered and held onto:

1. God's love is nothing like human love: John 14:27

- We are never going to feel loved by God if we don't understand that his displays of love, are nothing like ours.

No man, no matter how romantic and perfect he is, can promise to give you peace. Not even Jack Pearson can do that! (If you know you know)

2. God does not treasure what we treasure: Matthew 6:19-21

- We will feel loved by God when we love the things he loves. In fact, we must love HIM above all else. We will find ourselves in a constant state of disappointment and frustration as we pray, beg and plead with God to “comply” with our desires. It will go well for us to align our treasures with God's. I have found that the things God treasures are actually what my heart has longed for all along!

3. God's greatest showmanship of love is giving HIMSELF: John 15:13

- I believe that self sacrificing love is so rare, that it is hard for us to appreciate Jesus laying down his life for us. Although it is hard to understand, it is not impossible. It will take a lot of “work” on our part to grasp God's sacrificial love, but nonetheless essential. God will never show us love by giving us everything we want, making us immune to hardship or doing whatever it takes to give us “warm fuzzy feelings for him.” If his self sacrificing love is not enough for us then nothing is.

There are many other ways God displays his love. God's word is such a useful tool during times like this. No hardship is too challenging for God! It may be harder during times like this to feel his love but not impossible. It is worth doing the hard work of fighting to grasp the love of God so that we can stand firm and secure no matter the storm.

CONSIDER: What display of God's love helps you the most to trust in him during these uncertain times?

DOES NOT BOAST

ADENA WRIGHT - GUADALAJARA, MEXICO

What first comes to mind when you imagine a boastful person? For me, I think of kids on the playground, proudly showing off a new toy. Maybe those kids grow into adults whose outlet for attention is social media or class reunions or family Christmas parties. Sometimes it's easy to identify boastfulness, but difficult to counteract it, especially in our own lives. Fortunately, Jesus is not only the perfect example of self-effacing love, but also provides us with the encouragement and tools to imitate him.

Philippians 2:5-8

Jesus loves fiercely, but he also loves intimately and quietly. He could have come down to earth and immediately declared his kingship, provided dazzling displays of his power and holiness, cured every illness in the entire world with a snap of his fingers. How thrilling would it be to encounter this man? The one everyone loved and adored and wanted to be around? But that's not the position Jesus took when he came to earth. He humbled himself and chose to live among us and beside us. He didn't rain down gifts from some distant place above; he met us in the middle of our sinful, messy lives. He was a carpenter from a tiny town in Galilee. He wasn't a celebrity, he had no name to name drop, and often went unrecognized. It was not a glamorous life. But how much more wonderful and powerful is this humble love of a friend, someone with shared experiences, who understands the struggles of humanity and meets those needs perfectly? He took on a lowly position, but one that would have the most impact.

1 John 3:1

Trying to understand Jesus' self-effacing love is a huge undertaking in and of itself, but how can we display the same kind of love for others? We're by no means perfect people, but we do have a perfect source to draw from. It's the love that God lavishes upon us that we're called to share with others. We can't boast in this love, because it's not ours to begin with. Despite our earthly gains and achievements, we simply don't have enough to give if we go at it alone. But we are called children of God, and have been given the gift of sharing in that inheritance. In his commentary, Matthew Henry notes that even disciples are "exposed to the common calamities of earth and time." Instead of letting difficult times cause anxiety and emotional isolation, let's use them as a way to relate to others who are enduring similar hardships, just like Jesus did. In order to share the love of Jesus, we have to know people well enough to understand their needs, whether it's a neighbor, a family, or a societal group. In these uncertain times, let's share life's burdens and do our best to love fiercely and intimately and quietly, whether we're seen or not.

CONSIDER:

- Who is someone in your life that you look up to as a great example of self-effacing love?
- Have there been times when you've loved sacrificially and received no recognition?
- What was your response and in what ways can you draw encouragement from Jesus during these times?

IS NOT PROUD

CLARISSA HØECKE - KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

“Pour out all your worries and stress upon him and leave them there, for he always tenderly cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7 (TPT)

I’m amazed by the picture of godly love that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians. When I think of how love is not proud, to me that means that my expression of love should be rooted in an others-first mindset (ie. “It’s not about me!”) while at the same time recognizing how much I need authentic relationships in my life. Something that can get in the way of me connecting with God and others is when I’m tempted to protect and guard my heart. This can show up as me not being as open as I ought to be with what’s going on in my mind and heart or not expressing my needs. At times I can find myself numbing my emotions in an attempt to protect myself from feeling disappointed, discouraged or experiencing emotions like fear or anxiety. But when I think of the time we find ourselves in, how our whole world is gripped with so much panic and worry, I definitely need the reminder that humility in love is all about not holding back, not trying to protect myself but rather letting others in and seeking out connection.

I’m so grateful that I can look to Jesus’ example for inspiration on how to love without holding back. During his last days on earth, Jesus likely experienced his own version of anxiety and fear knowing the fate that awaited Him. He easily could have chosen to walk down the path of suffering all alone, to guard his heart knowing he would soon be taken away from those he loved but instead He chose to demonstrate what humble love can look like when we reach out to God and to others to share what we are going through (see Mark 14. 32-36). I think a big part of loving God with humility is to go to him often and share what’s on our minds and hearts knowing that in these unprecedented times, we need a deeper connection to God and others more than ever!

CONSIDER: Take some time to reflect on this scripture “Pour out all your worries and stress upon him and leave them there, for he always tenderly cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7 TPT). Remember that God cares for you deeply and wants to hear about your deepest fears, worries, and anxieties so He can lighten your load and refresh your heart. Try to think of some ways that you can express your thoughts and emotions to God and share with others as well. As we reach out for deeper connection, it’s encouraging to think about the opportunities that God will provide for us to be a light to others during this difficult time while He encourages our hearts as well!

DOES NOT DISHONOR OTHERS

SONIA LOUIS MASILAMANI - JAKARTA, INDONESIA

Dishonour in the original Greek is *aschēmoneō*, which means to not act 'unbecomingly', that is, to avoid shaming or disgracing others. When we think of a God who 'honours' us in his love it is overwhelming—especially knowing that God honoured us most by sending a part of himself, his nature, his presence in Jesus (Col 1:15). He could have sent Jesus as a man 'straight from heaven', ready to love and complete his ministry. Instead, God chose to send a part of himself to be born like each one of us, as an infant: growing, developing, learning and discovering just as we do. What a way for God to honour his own creation! Jesus' development as a human was God's way of saying 'I do not just want to save you, I want you to know that what I created was beautiful and perfect— so much so that I will let my very being come to life in the same way on earth. I want to relate to you—to be the closest I can possibly be, not just emotionally and spiritually, but physically.'

God's way of honouring his creation surfaces all the more as we read about Jesus in the gospel of John. God honoured his family in chapter 2 when his mother requested Jesus' help at the wedding they attended in Cana. Actually, Mary did not even ask for this particular favour. She simply stated, 'they have no more wine'. Jesus' reply was truthful and honest in saying 'my time has not yet come'. Yet what was the outcome? By the end of the account, he granted Mary's request. He honoured her, he was willing to be flexible. God changed his plans for a seemingly 'small' matter.

How else did Jesus bestow honour? This has to do with the Greek translation previously mentioned: He took away all disgrace. In John 4 and John 8 there are the accounts of Jesus interacting with the Samaritan Woman and the Woman caught in the act of adultery. I love studying these interactions in parallel with each other. What is one common denominator? He took away their shame. He had a genuine conversation with them, he was gentle, thoughtful and mindful of their circumstance. There was no condemnation but a call to leave their sin and repent. John 9 shows his disciples asking a potentially judgmental question: 'Jesus, why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or the sins of his parents?' They were trying to, like most of us, find a 'reason' for an unfortunate incident. Jesus lovingly responds, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.' When the world dishonoured women, Jesus embraced them. When the common people despised tax collectors, Jesus ate with them. When the Jews practiced 'social distancing' with lepers, Jesus touched them. These are all beautiful examples without even mentioning how our Lord washed his disciples' feet and ultimately died for us. He did everything he could to show us, guide us and ultimately save us...

In times of calamity, confusion and frustration—we can forget that we have a God who honours us. In fact, we can swing to extremes in our thinking and feel that God must be punishing us personally, inflicting 'pain' on the disobedient or maybe He has lost hope for our cities entirely. Let's take a closer look at the life of Christ. What can we conclude from His character and how He handled difficulty? Surely, we can see that our God is a God who lifts us up and honours our imperfections, so His love can shine all the more (John 9:3). Having a God who honours us in this way convicts me in my approach to God in prayer and how I see others.

CONSIDER:

- How does God still show honour to his creation today, in 2020?
- How can knowing this aspect Jesus/Gods character deepen your prayer life?
- What practical decisions can you implement in your thinking or actions to reflect a response to the honour God bestows upon you?

IS NOT SELF-SEEKING

ALEXIS KOHLER - COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

Read: Matthew 26:36-46; 27:32-50

What a powerful and perfect example of what selfless love is! Not only was Jesus selfless in the sacrifice of his body, but let's look at the sacrifice God makes here. Can you imagine hearing your one and only son pleading and begging you to provide a different way to save the world? To hear the anguish in his voice? To see the sweat and blood pouring down his face out of great fear? To hear him cry out for you, but be unable to rush out to meet him because of the sin he carries? It would be devastating and heart breaking to see and let him go through that. So why? Why did God sacrifice Jesus in this way?

In Hebrews 2:14-15 it describes how Jesus became human to fight humanity's greatest fear- our fear of death. He did this so that we don't have to live in fear. He did this so we can have freedom on earth, confidence in His great love, and hope of an eternal kingdom. God selflessly allowed Jesus to die so that we can have security in knowing we get to have eternity with God. What a selfless and loving Father we have!

It reminds me of a time when I was a kid and my family lived in Puerto Rico. There are a lot of bugs and particularly mosquitos in Puerto Rico. I must have had some sweet blood, because night after night I'd wake up covered in new mosquito bites. I was scared of going to bed at night for fear of getting bitten. As much as those pesky bugs liked me, they loved my dad even more. So one night he came into my room as I was complaining of the mosquito bites all over my body, and he decided to sleep next to me. For that whole night, the mosquitos bit him instead of me.

That simple act of staying with me and taking my pain showed me the selfless love that God has for each of us; how Jesus came to this earth to take our place of the pain we deserve for our sin. Galatians 5:13-14 describes how Jesus gave us this freedom from death so that we can now serve others selflessly. So, how are you doing this today? In what ways are you looking to selflessly serve others and meet their needs? In Matthew 25:40 Jesus reminds us that whatever we do for someone else, it is actually serving God as well.

CONSIDER: In Matthew 28:20, Jesus explains that he came for the purpose to serve others rather than be served. As followers of Jesus, we're called to make this our life's ambition as well. We're called to imitate this amazing quality of our Creator and our Redeemer and therefore become just like them- how can you practice selflessness today?

IS NOT EASILY ANGERED

AYUMI MEADE - UPLAND, CALIFORNIA

Have you ever struggled with losing your temper? I have a confession to make. I am an easily angered mom. With having two small kids constantly undoing everything I am trying to do around the house, I am angry all the time! The most crazy thing is, I am not easily angered by anybody else except my own husband and my kids whom I love with all of my heart.

A few months ago, I went to go watch a movie called "little women", and one of the lines in the movie stuck with me forever. It was one of the scene when a daughter was asking her mom, "why are you never angry?" And the mother responds and say, "I'm not, by nature." We so easily lose our temper by nature. Have you been feeling defeated by your own sinful nature of losing control of anger? What is the cost of "easily angered"?

An American pastor MacArthur once said, "It does no good to protest, Well, I lose my temper a lot but it's all over in a few minutes. So is a nuclear bomb," he said. "A great deal of damage can be done in a very short time. Temper is always destructive and even small temper bombs can leave much hurt and damage especially when they explode on a regular basis. Lovelessness is the cause of temper."

Did we all get that? Lovelessness is the cause of temper and Love is the only cure. It was the love of Jesus on the cross that cured our sin. Love puts the breaks on anger. And who better to learn this kind of love from but Jesus himself? Jesus had every opportunity to be justly angry with humanity, and us as individuals, but has instead chose to extend grace, mercy, and kindness.

But how am I going to be NOT easily angered? Here are the 3Ps to love like Jesus!

1. **Pause** in the moment

- Take a pause on your emotion in the moment you are being provoked. Take a deep breath. Consider the cost. Learn to take control your emotion and anger.
- James 1:19-20
"Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

2. **Pray** in the Spirit

- Learn to rely on the Holy Spirit with your emotion. Ask the Spirit of God to calm your anger and give you His supernatural peace.
- Philippians 4:6-7
"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

3. **Practice** in expression

- Practice expressing managed anger. It is ok to express, "I am angry."
- If you acted in your anger and hurt someone, simply say, "I am sorry." When you choose to be humble and apologize, we end the war with the devil.
- Ephesians 4:26-27
"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS

JOSIE ZIEGLER - SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

In this unstable moment in history, feelings of fear and uncertainty are widespread throughout the globe. As women of God, we know that only God's perfect love can truly comfort us and keep us secure. Wrapped carefully in the arms of God's love, we can take in deep breaths of peace, knowing that his love for us is unending, unconditional, and unchanging. A constant refuge for me lately is God's promise to wash away all my sins and make me white as snow. God promises that He, being perfect in love, will 'keep no record of [my] wrongs'.

My favorite passage illustrating this aspect of God's heart is in Psalm 103:8-12.

"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so

great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

God, in his infinite knowledge, placed such an encouragement to us in this psalm. Where exactly does the east stop and the west begin? When does a traveller stop heading east and begin traveling west? It is impossible to say! Earth is round! (lol) 'As far as the east is from the west' is an immeasurable distance! Maybe God got a laugh out of writing that one down. He uses hyperbole to express to us this powerful sentiment: we are no longer tied to our sin, not even in the slightest. Jesus triumphed over death on the cross and, therefore, sin has no say in our place before God! Though this world may be thrown in chaos and fear right now, this passage grounds me. It reminds me that my future with God is secure. In Christ I can stand faithfully before God with confidence, joy, and peace.

CONSIDER:

Which part of this concept of God's Grace can be hard to accept for you?

What sins are you tempted to chain yourself to, even though God has washed them away?

What characteristic of God grounds you during this time of uncertainty?

Further encouragement: Isaiah 43:25, Hebrews 10, Romans 8:1,
Romans 8:31-39, 2 Corinthians 5:21

REJOICES IN THE TRUTH

MELISSA ABELLO - COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

"...Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

1 Corinthians 13:6

Read: Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, & 2 Timothy 2:13

God is trustworthy. He always tells the truth. What He promises stands and we can place our hope in His Words. I love how Hebrews 6:18 tells us He does not even know how to lie! We do not have to worry about getting misinformation from him. God is SO faithful. His love and promises stand. He is the same God who took the Israelites out of slavery, who walked with them in the desert, who followed through on His promise to send Jesus to redeem His people, and who promises He will take care of us.

In this day and age when everything is constantly changing and moving it is easy for us to want to put our hope in our circumstances. In the information we can read about on the internet. We want reassurance from what we can see in front of us. I am guilty of seeking peace through seeking information, which leaves me feeling more unsure and uneasy every time. I am finding that the more I try to focus on the truth of my circumstance the more I find myself feeling uneasy and anxious.

When we feel scared or unsure we tend to go to those that we trust. Those that are consistent. Those that do not change. These are the people we can really let our hair down with and be ourselves around. They are worthy of our trust. This is who God is for us. We can let our hair down with him and tell Him how we really feel right now. We can rejoice (be glad) in His character and in His Truth. They are facts that have always stood the test of time and circumstance.

Take some time to remember all the ways that God has been faithful to you in your life and spend some time being glad (rejoicing) in prayer with Him about these things.

CONSIDER: What is one scripture you can cling to today? How can you rejoice in that truth?

ALWAYS PROTECTS

CHANELLE CATUOGNO - SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

There is nothing and nobody who will ever love us as deep as our God loves. God's love is unconditional and unending. Then why at times do we feel unheard or unprotected by God? Maybe we feel as if his hand is no longer watching over us, or we feel we are being knocked down more than we are helped up. There are many of us struggling through deep and difficult hardships and can't find a sense of safety, a peaceful place to lay our head. It is hard to be at peace when we feel we are constantly defending ourselves. The question is, where are we seeking protection? The answer seems obvious, but are we really finding comfort in knowing God is our ultimate protector? Through sickness, relationships, loss of jobs, financial crisis, grief, and the like; are we seeking and finding comfort solely in knowing how powerful our God is?

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." Psalm 46:1-3

This is a beautiful passage on God's love and I encourage you to read the full chapter to gain more understanding. We see that God is our forever refuge, our unfailing and constant source for strength and fulfillment; how incredible! Our human heroes in movies and in real life all reach a point of exhaustion, becoming weak and fearful, but our God never does! This scripture shows us how big our God really is and how he longs to protect us. Through roaring waters and earthquakes our God stands firm and untouched.

This passage also does not state that the storms stopped, in fact it shows us that in spite of all the mess, God is there loving and protecting us as our refuge. God's way of protection is not always by taking away the storms or immediately calming them. Even though he has the power to stop the storm, he at times will allow it to roar. Most commonly, it is during these times we feel we have lost our great protector. I have wrestled with this for many years and although some of my questions have led to a deeper understanding of God's love and promises, these same questions have also led to believing Satan's lies in telling me God isn't who he says He is. That He can't calm the storm if He desired, or that He didn't love me enough to do so. In those harder times, I have learned it is not always my place to question, but to obey. And what an amazing, loving, and grace-centered God we get to submit to!

In a different light, many of us won't find the soul-peace we are looking for during this lifetime and "easy" has never been promised. Many of you reading this have experienced life altering circumstances of loss and trauma. From a worldly perspective- this is a complete loss of hope; however, through Jesus we can rejoice in knowing we have an eternal protector!

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-5

CONSIDER: Are you living in the comfort and confidence of knowing God as your ultimate protector? Practice meditating on these scriptures, replace your name and make it personal. Allow the word to renew your perspective on God's power. I encourage you to pray through these and grow in understanding the true power and love of our God.

ALWAYS TRUSTS

BRI GRIMES - SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

"... if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." 2 Timothy 2:13

From time to time, most of us are tempted to question God's love for us. Is it reliable, is it true, is it constant, is it earned? From the beginning of time, Satan has constantly tried to get us stuck here. His very first act toward man was to question God's goodness, to question his trustworthiness, to question his love and commitment to us. In any relationship trust is irrefutably necessary for it to succeed. Without trust life is a constant battle of doubt, fear, paranoia, and looming disaster.

I have had friendships and relationships where there was little trust and my heart never felt secure. I always felt hesitant to give my heart for fear that it would be used, abused, and left broken, and because of that there was no intimacy or depth. Intimacy depends on trust; security depends on trust.

I find great security in the Bible knowing that God has always done whatever he said he would do, and He has never done something he said he wouldn't do. God has integrity. He is honorable, faithful, trustworthy, and unapologetically and unconditionally loving. He just is. The times we wrestle in trusting the love of God are the times we are not looking at the Love of God.

Jesus went where no man would ever go to prove his love to us, to prove his love is trustworthy. Jesus took a risk in his relationship with us. He put his life on the line to show you just how much he cares, to prove that his love is one we can count on and trust. He put all his cards on the table; he gave every ounce of himself to build a trust that we could never question or doubt. The greatest expression of God's love is in Jesus. Before Jesus came, we stood before God as his enemies, we were ungodly, powerless, it even mentions we follow Satan, the ruler of the air. None of us are deserving or earning of God's perfect love, demonstrated through Jesus dying on the cross.

This is a love we can trust. Why? Because it has nothing to do with us but everything to do with who God is. He is Love. He is Faithful. Hebrews 13:8 says, Jesus is the same yesterday, and today, and forever! I am someone who hates change- I love my routine, I know what to expect, I feel in "control" (even though I know I'm not). I CAN TRUST that God does not change, He is who he is, and in so many ways I know what to expect. I can trust his love never to change, I can trust his grace in keeping with repentance, I can trust time spent with him will result in closeness with him.

His perfect love brings forth trust. Because of His love, we can be free of fear, doubt or paranoia about what may happen. When we look at the faultless true love of God our souls find rest. There is no more wrestling, doubting, or questioning because God's love always trusts.

CONSIDER:

What area in your life are you afraid to trust God in?

How can looking at the cross, and what Jesus did for you, help you to trust Him moving forward?

ALWAYS HOPES

AMBER RODRIGUEZ - NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS

Hope is a four letter word. It's a dangerous word because what if it doesn't go the way you 'hoped'? Why do you think we say things like this all the time- "Don't get your hopes up." "A hope deferred makes the heart sick." I think I'm happier in my pessimistic outlook on life. At least that way I can balance out the disappointment when things inevitably go the way I expect them to...right?

If you're anything like me, hope feels like a huge risk. Yet, when the Bible talks about hope it seems to be stubbornly bent on us being people of hope. So how? How do we become faithful people who extend their trust so deeply that hope defines how we look at life? How do we live out imitating our God as 1 Corinthians 13 calls us to 'always hope'? A closer look into scripture reveals a different process than what I originally thought.

Read: Romans 5:1-4, Romans 15:4-6

Romans 5 seems to explain that there are a few stops along the path to hope. Among them- suffering, perseverance, and character. Seems the journey to hope is a challenging one. It takes time, effort, and deliberate perseverance. If this surprises you it might be good for you to take a moment to think about what you're actually putting your hope in. The Bible tells us that hope in God is forged through the fires of faith. It's much easier to find hope in circumstances or people, things we can see that are right in front of us. While this kind of hope is momentarily fulfilling, I can tell you from experience that a time will come when you feel like there's nothing left to hope in, unless your hope is in God.

Romans 15 explains that the scriptures teach us endurance and give us encouragement to be able to find hope. Everything you need to have hope can be found in God's word. With everything that's happening in our world right now I think people are looking for hope now more than ever. People are looking for hope in our world's leaders, in the CDC, WHO, even in toilet paper!! But what about you: What are you putting your hope in?

CONSIDER:

What suffering could God be using to help you grow to be a woman of perseverance, character, and hope? I pray that we are women that always have hope.

ALWAYS PERSEVERES

PAM SKINNER - TUCSON, ARIZONA

Read Romans 5:1-8

Jesus demonstrates his amazing and perfect love for us by sacrificing his life for us on the cross. The definition of perseverance is: "The continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure or opposition." The Bible teaches that because Jesus loved us despite our weaknesses and failings, we have hope. He pushed through, he fought for us and he didn't give up. He set the example and the standard for what it means to love. His perseverance gives us the opportunity to be forgiven, set free, and have the Holy Spirit dwell within us. He has loved us perfectly. Despite the pain and challenges of dying on the cross, he persevered because he loved us. His love is what motivates us to live our Christian lives. I'll always be grateful for the perseverance shown by the woman who reached out to me. In spite of the fact that I told her that I wasn't interested in "organized religion" and gave her no reason to think I was open, she stuck with me. She continued to be friendly, kind and inviting. In time, her tenacity paid off. I began to show interest and came on a major invitational Sunday service. I became a Christian a few months later.

Our lives have changed because of Jesus' perseverance. He teaches us that to truly love others and grow as disciples, we must persevere. James 1:2-4 says: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds? This is so challenging. If you are like me, I want to avoid challenges, escape and pray they go away. Living like this will leave you and me immature and not complete. Perseverance is necessary in our Christian lives in order for us to grow and become more like Jesus. Again, Jesus' example on the cross can inspire us. The Coronavirus pandemic is calling us toward perseverance. Social distancing, reliance on technology and wondering whether we will find food or toilet paper at the store can test us. As women, we are called to rely on God and imitate his character like never before. Our families, our roommates, and our sisters in our ministry are counting on us like never before. This can be an incredible time of spiritual growth as we fight through our feelings during these uncertain times. My vision is that when we get back together physically as a church community, we will be so much stronger. Prayerfully we will be able to say that as individuals, we dug deeper, drew closer to God and understood his love for us in a greater way. Let's persevere and learn what God wants to teach us and shine brightly in this dark world.

CONSIDER:

- When you are fearful and insecure, what do you turn to first? People, food, wine, Netflix? Let's learn to grow in our spirituality and turn to prayer first.
- Love always perseveres. Are there relationships in your life, whether in your family, at work or in church that you are tempted to give up on? Use this time to recommit to persevering in these relationships.
- Decide daily to focus on the joy and blessings we have as Christians. Write out three things you are grateful for every day.

NEVER FAILS

VIRGINIA WEEKLY - COSTA MESA, CALIFORNIA

"Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life." Psalm 143:8

We are all in a time of uncertainty collectively and individually, and it can feel like every morning we wake up to alerts about new changes, cancelled plans, and different kinds of loss. All of this weighs heavy on my soul and brings about new fears, grief and anxiety about things that I cannot control and don't have the answers to.

I need David's prayer: "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love." It reminds me that, as much as I wake to the pressures and alerts of the world, I also wake each morning to God's unfailing love. As a woman of God, I wake to the confidence that God has never stopped working. I don't have to be consumed by fear and anxiety because God never fails. His love never fails. Don't we all need this reminder? David needed to hear this in the morning to have assurance and to walk with the Lord in the midst of uncertainty. When we choose to trust God's unfailing love, we're provided with direction; His love shows us the way to go. We can entrust our lives to God like David because we know that God's love never fails.

David knew this, and I "know" this, but all too often I can fail to live with this kind of confidence. I can easily reach for my phone when I wake up and get caught up in the anxieties of the world before putting my trust in God. The world may fail, I may fail, our plans may fail, but we can trust that our God never will. Knowing this brings me peace which allows me to face whatever I'm going through. Even when I experience disappointment or failure, I can entrust it all to God.

Romans 8:28 (TPT) says, "So we are convinced that every detail of our lives is continually woven together to fit into God's perfect plan of bringing good into our lives, for we are his lovers who have been called to fulfill his designed purpose."

We can entrust every detail of our lives to God—the victories, the uncertainties, the failures, all of it—because He is continually working for our good amidst whatever we're going through. This brings me so much comfort that God has not forgotten or failed me when I experience hardship or when I mess up. Instead, He is with me in it and is capable of using that hardship to fit into His perfect plan to bring good into my life. I need to reach for this truth every morning and live out of the security that comes from His unchanging love rather than the fear, anxiety or empty promises of the world. My prayer is that we can all experience and share in the confidence that comes from the unfailing love of God.

CONSIDER:

What aspects of your life do you need to entrust to God's unfailing love?

How can you help others to see that God's love never fails?

Further Encouragement: Romans 8:31-39, Psalm 25:10, Ephesians 3:16-21, Isaiah 54:10, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18