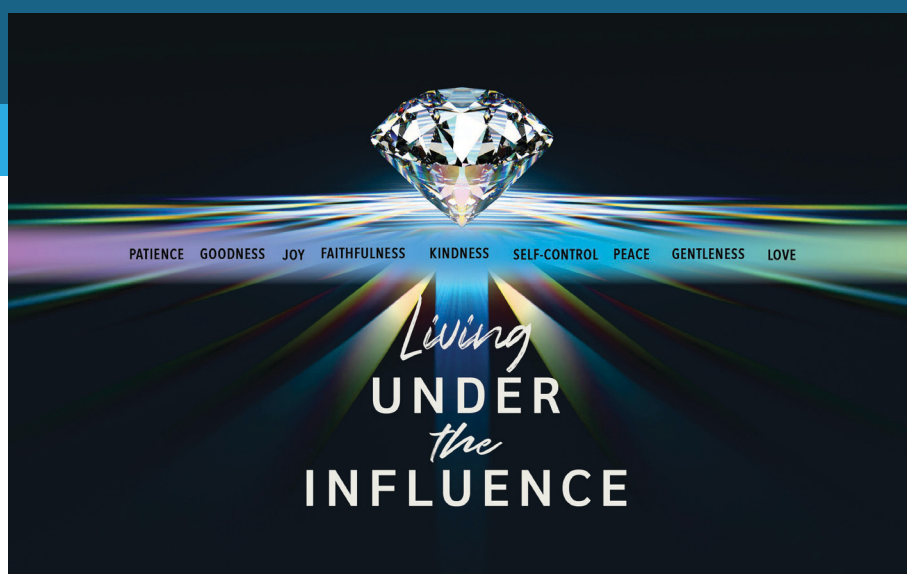


DAILY DEVOTIONAL

A 5-Day Reflection Guide

Joy



SERMON SERIES:
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

WEEK & TOPIC:
WEEK 9 / LOVE

DATES:
AUGUST 31–SEPT 4, 2026

This Week's Big Idea

Love isn't simply another fruit of the Spirit—it is the character of God flowing through everything He produces in us. God doesn't simply have love; **God is love**. Biblical love isn't defined by feelings, agreement, or what we receive in return. It is defined by God and demonstrated perfectly in Jesus. As we remain connected to Him, His love is poured into us by the Holy Spirit and becomes visible through us.

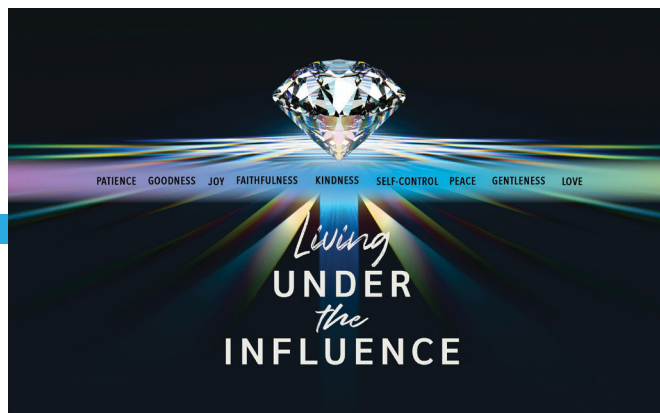
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 1: He Loved First

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

1 John 4:16, 19 (NKJV) "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." "We love Him because He first loved us."

Romans 5:8 (NKJV) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."



TODAY'S SEED

We've reached the final fruit in our Living Under the Influence journey: **love**. But before we talk about how well we love other people, we need to begin where love begins. **God loved first.**

Throughout this series we've repeatedly said, **God gets to define the terms**. That's especially important with love because we use that word for almost everything. We love our family, a great meal, or a song and, of course, we love Jesus. Often our culture defines love by feelings, attraction, agreement, or what someone does for us, but God defines it differently.

John doesn't simply say that God **loves**. He says, **"God is love."** Romans 5:8 says God demonstrated His love toward us **"while we were still sinners."** We tend to operate with reciprocal love: I love you because... Because you're good to me, because you love me back, or you make me happy. There's nothing wrong with those feelings, but that kind

of love can become fragile because it's dependent on the **because**. God's love operates differently.

John 3:16 says God loved, **so He gave**. Romans 5 says God loved, **so Christ died for us**. First John says God loved, **so He sent His Son**. God doesn't simply give us a definition of love, **He gives us a demonstration**. And that's incredibly important because the fruit of love doesn't begin with trying harder to love difficult people. It begins by receiving and believing the love God already has for us. John says, "We have known and believed the love that God has for us."

Maybe knowing isn't always the problem. Maybe **believing** is.

Do I really believe God loves me when I've failed? When I'm struggling or if I feel I haven't performed well enough? Because the more securely I receive His love, the more freely I can give His love. **We love because He loved first.**

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Greek word translated **love** in Galatians 5:22 and throughout 1 John is *agapē* (ἀγάπη). In the Greek-speaking world, the word could describe love, affection, goodwill, or devoted concern. But the New Testament gives us the clearest picture of what *agapē* looks like through the character and actions of God. God's love originates in His character, not our performance.

And now Galatians 5:22 tells us that this same *agapē* is fruit the **Holy Spirit produces in us**.

We aren't being asked to manufacture God's love. We're being invited to receive it, remain in it, and allow the Holy Spirit to reproduce it through us.

DON'T MISS THIS

God's love isn't a response to how lovable I am; it's a revelation of who He is.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. When you think about God's love for you, do you tend to connect it to your performance?
2. Is it easier for you to believe that God loves other people than to fully believe He loves you?
3. What does Romans 5:8 reveal about the kind of love God has for you?
4. How might receiving God's love more deeply change the way you love difficult people?

WATER THE SEED

Take a few minutes today and slowly read **1 John 4:16-19** .
Then complete this sentence: **"God loved me first when..."**
Write down several examples from your own story. Don't begin today by asking, "Who do I need to love better?" Begin with: **"Father, help me know and believe the love You already have for me."**

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for loving me first. Thank You that Your love for me didn't begin when I became good enough, strong enough, or faithful enough. You loved me while I was still a sinner, and You demonstrated that love by sending Jesus for me. Forgive me for the times I've measured Your love by my performance or my circumstances. Help me not only to know about Your love but to truly believe the love You have for me. Holy Spirit, pour the love of God into my heart. Let the love I receive from You become the love that flows through me. Teach me to love beyond feelings, convenience, and reciprocity. As I remain in You, produce Your agapē in me. Let my life become a demonstration of the God who loved first.

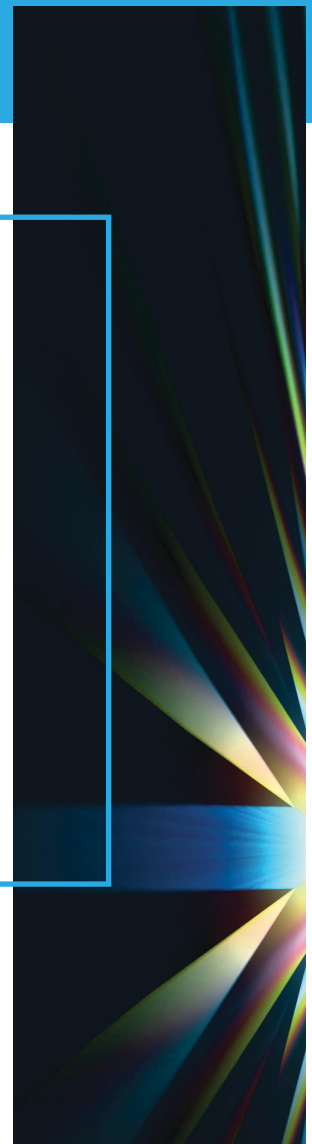
In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Two – Love Has Receipts

God doesn't merely tell us He loves us—**He demonstrates it**. Tomorrow we'll look at the difference between saying "I love you" and living in a way that provides the receipts, because eventually **our lives have to match our words**.



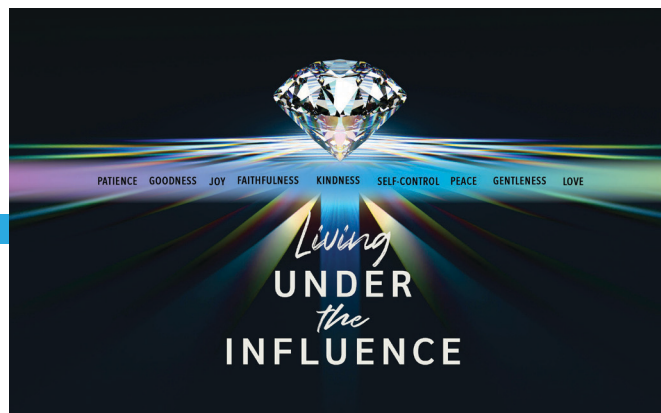
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 2: Prove it

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

1 John 2:5-6 (NKJV) "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

1 John 3:18 (NLT) "Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions."



TODAY'S SEED

Throughout this series we've used fruit as evidence. You don't have to convince anyone an apple tree is an apple tree once apples start hanging from its branches. Eventually, what's happening on the inside becomes visible on the outside. The same is true of love. It's easy to say, "I love God." It's easy to say, "I love people." But John makes an uncomfortable connection between what we **say** and how we **live**. In 1 John 2, he essentially asks: **Does your life match your words?** That's a powerful question.

If I say I know Jesus, but consistently treat people nothing like Jesus treated them, there's a disconnect somewhere. If I say I'm living under the influence of the Holy Spirit, eventually there should be evidence of His influence. That's the proof. But let's be careful. We're not talking about **perfection**, we're talking about **progression**. We're all growing, we all have moments when our reactions don't look much like Jesus. But eventually, **showing up in church, should result in growing up in Christ**. John says that if we abide in Christ, we should increasingly **"walk just as He walked."**

And how did Jesus walk? He noticed people others ignored. He touched people others avoided. He forgave people who failed Him. He served people who couldn't repay Him. He spoke truth even when it was uncomfortable. Ultimately, He gave His life for people who didn't deserve it.

Jesus didn't merely talk about love, **He demonstrated it**. And now that same love is supposed to become visible through us. That's why 1 John 3:18 says, "Let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions."

Love isn't proven by intention, it becomes visible through action. Sometimes the proof is dramatic, but more, it's ordinary: it's forgiveness when you've been hurt, kindness when someone is difficult, faithfulness when walking away would be easier, or gentleness when you could have drawn the sword. Come to think of it, that sounds a lot like the Fruit of the Spirit, because when God's love is growing inside us, eventually **something shows up**.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

In 1 John 2:5, John says God's love is being **"perfected"** in the person who walks in obedience. The Greek word translated perfected is *teleiōō* (τελειόω), it's the idea of bringing something toward completion, maturity, or its intended goal. John isn't saying, "Behave perfectly and God will love you." Instead, the love we've already received from God is reaching an intended purpose as it begins shaping the way we live. That's why verse 6 matters: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." Love received becomes love lived.

DON'T MISS THIS

Love isn't proven by what I say I believe; the receipt is how increasingly my life begins to look like Jesus.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. If someone watched the way you treated people this week, what would they conclude about the God you follow?
2. Where is God's love becoming more visible in your life than it was a year ago?
3. Is there an area where your life isn't matching your words right now?
4. What would "walking as Jesus walked" look like in one difficult relationship?

WATER THE SEED

Choose **one tangible action of love** today. Don't just think about someone, do something, send an encouraging text. Make the phone call, serve without being asked. Show kindness to someone who cannot repay you. Give love a receipt today.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You that You didn't simply tell me You loved me—You demonstrated Your love by sending Jesus. Help my life match my words. Forgive me for the times I've talked about love without living it. Holy Spirit, continue Your work in me so that the love I've received from You becomes visible in the way I treat people. I don't ask for perfection, but I do ask for progression. Help me walk more like Jesus today than I did yesterday. Make me patient when love requires patience. Kind when love requires kindness. Faithful when love requires endurance. Gentle when I want to react. Give me the self-control to choose what reflects You. Let my life become a receipt that I've been with Jesus.

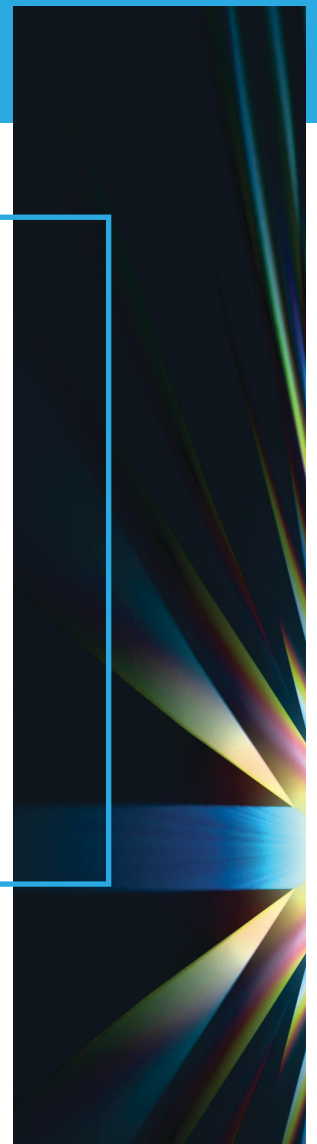
In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Three – Put It On

We talk about **falling in love** as though love is something that happens to us. But Paul uses very different language: **"Above all these things put on love."** Tomorrow we'll discover why biblical love isn't something we wait to feel—it's something we intentionally choose to wear.



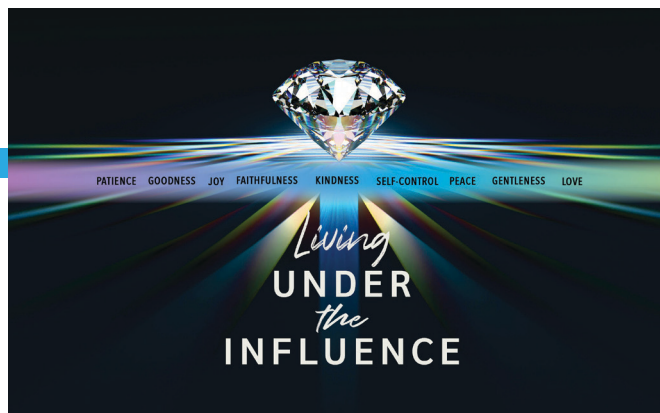
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 3: Put It On

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Colossians 3:12-14 (NKJV) "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Romans 13:14 (NKJV) "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."



TODAY'S SEED

We talk about love as something that **happens to us**. "I fell in love." And apparently, if we can fall **into** love, we can fall **out of** love. That makes love primarily an emotion—something we experience when the conditions are right. But Paul uses very different language. **"Put on love."**

That's intentional. You didn't accidentally get dressed this morning. You opened the closet, made a choice, and put something on. Most likely you got dressed whether you **felt** like getting dressed or not.

Paul says love works something like that. There will be mornings when I don't feel patient, or particularly kind to that person. **Put it on.** I don't feel like being gentle after what they said and I certainly don't feel like loving them today, so I have to **put on love**. Putting on love doesn't mean pretending to feel something we don't. Biblical love isn't hypocrisy—it's obedience. We can't always command a feeling, but we can choose an action. We can choose kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, service, patience, and blessing.

Love is more than something we feel. **Love is something we wear into our everyday relationships.** Paul takes it even further in Romans 13:14: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Colossians says, **Put on love.** Romans says, **Put on Christ.** It's the same idea because **God is love.**

We usually dress for where we're going—the gym, work, a wedding, or a Minnesota January. But spiritually, we can't allow our environment to decide what we're wearing. Don't walk into an angry environment and put on anger, or an offended environment and put on offense. Just because somebody else is wearing bitterness doesn't mean you have to **match their outfit.**

So maybe tomorrow morning, before asking, "What am I wearing?" Ask a better question: **"WHO am I wearing?"** Before I see my family—or I walk into work—put on Christ. Before I respond to that text—put on Christ. Before I deal with that difficult person—put on Christ. **Love isn't something I wait to fall into. Love is something I choose to put on.**

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The phrase **"put on"** in Colossians 3 comes from the Greek verb *endyō* (ἐνδύω), meaning **to clothe or dress oneself**. Paul intentionally uses clothing as a picture of Christian living.

And notice what he tells us to wear: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness—and then: **"Above all these things put on love."** Love doesn't replace the other qualities. It **binds them together**. **Patience** is how love waits. **Kindness** is how love moves toward people. **Faithfulness** is how love keeps showing up. **Self-control** is how love restrains itself. **Love is the garment that holds the whole outfit together.**

DON'T MISS THIS

I don't have to wear what the people around me are wearing—I can choose to put on Christ and let His love determine my response.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Do you tend to think of love primarily as something you feel or something you choose?
2. What do you usually “put on” when someone comes at you with anger, offense, or criticism?
3. Is there someone you’re waiting to feel differently about before choosing to love them?
4. What would putting on Christ look like in that relationship today?

WATER THE SEED

Before getting dressed tomorrow, stop for a moment and let the ordinary act of choosing your clothes remind you of Colossians 3. As you get dressed, pray: **“Holy Spirit, help me put on Christ today.”** Then intentionally choose one thing to wear spiritually: Patience. Kindness. Gentleness. Forgiveness. And **above all—love.**

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You that Your love for me isn’t dependent upon changing feelings or circumstances. Thank You for showing me what love looks like through Jesus. Holy Spirit, help me intentionally put on love today. When I encounter anger, keep me from putting on anger. When I encounter offense, keep me from putting on offense. When someone is difficult, help me not to simply match what they’re wearing. Teach me to put on Christ. Clothe me with compassion, kindness, humility, patience, gentleness, and forgiveness. Above all, help me put on love. Let the people I encounter today experience something of Jesus because of what I’m wearing.

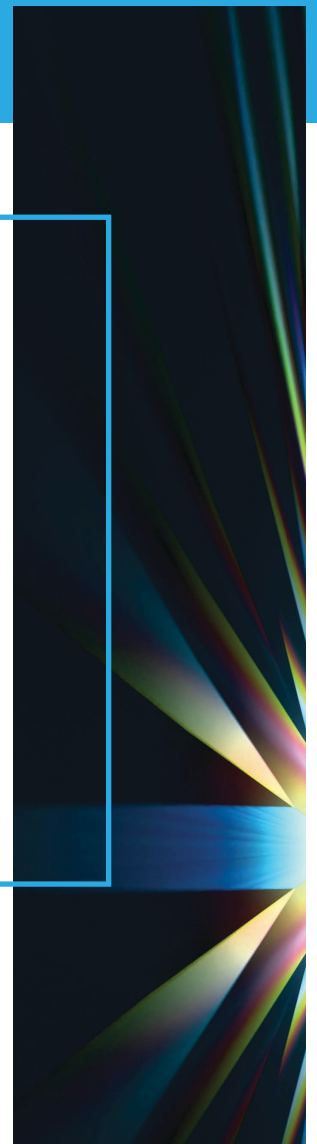
In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Four – Love Goes First

It’s easy to love people who love us back—Jesus said **even sinners do that**. Tomorrow we’ll look at the love that makes Jesus different: love that moves first, loves enemies, does good, and doesn’t wait for something in return.

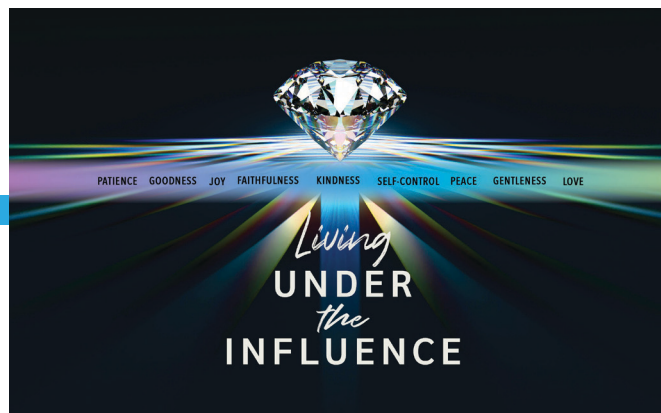


LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 4: Love Goes First

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:27, 32, 35 (NKJV) "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you..." "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil."



1 John 4:19 (NKJV) "We love Him because He first loved us."

TODAY'S SEED

As Jesus said, it's easy to love people who love us. You love me—I love you, you're kind to me—I'll be kind to you. There's nothing wrong with that, but Jesus says there's nothing particularly **supernatural** about it either. It's an exchange, or reciprocal love. God's love is different, God's love goes first.

God didn't love the world because the world was pursuing Him. He didn't wait until humanity started behaving. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us **while we were still sinners**. God didn't love us because we loved Him. **We love Him because He first loved us.** That's the order.

And now Jesus says the love we've received should begin showing up in the way we love others—even our enemies.

This is where love becomes fruit. In Luke 6, Jesus says, "Love your enemies, do good..."

Notice that love moves into **action**. Jesus isn't asking us to pretend we have warm feelings toward someone who

has hurt us. He's teaching us that God's kind of love isn't controlled by how another person treats us. **Their behavior doesn't get to determine my fruit.** That's what Living Under the Influence looks like. If I'm only kind when you're kind, then your behavior is controlling mine. If I'm only patient when you're easy to deal with, you're determining my patience. If I'm gentle until you become harsh, your harshness has become my influence. But the fruit of the Spirit means **someone else's behavior doesn't get to decide who I'm becoming.**

That's why Jesus' command to love our enemies is possible. I'm not loving them because of who **they** are or because of what they've done, **I'm loving them because of Who lives in me.**

And sometimes God's love flowing through us may be the first glimpse someone gets of a love that doesn't demand something in return. Maybe someone in **your world** needs you to go first too.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Something interesting happens in Luke 6. The Greek verb translated **"love"** in verses 27, 32, and 35 is agapaō (ἀγαπάω), the verb related to agapē—in Galatians 5:22. Jesus says sinners agapē people who love them. Then He tells His followers to agapē their **enemies**. The difference isn't simply the Greek word. **The difference is the source and direction of the love.** Ordinary love operates through reciprocity: You love me, so I'll love you. Spirit-produced love can move first and seek another person's good without requiring repayment.

DON'T MISS THIS

God's kind of love doesn't wait for someone else to deserve it, initiate it, or return it—love goes first.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Is your love for people usually influenced by how they treat you?
2. Who becomes difficult for you to love when they stop giving you something in return?
3. Is there someone in your world where the Holy Spirit may be asking you to go first?
4. What would loving that person look like without pretending their behavior is acceptable?

WATER THE SEED

Identify one relationship where you've been waiting for the other person to make the first move. Maybe you're waiting for an apology, a phone call or a change in attitude. Ask the Holy Spirit: **"What would love going first look like here?"** It doesn't mean ignoring wisdom, boundaries, or truth. It simply means refusing to let someone else's behavior determine whether the character of Jesus flows through you. Then, if the Holy Spirit gives you something to do—**Go first.**

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for loving me first. You didn't wait for me to become worthy, deserving, or even interested. While I was still a sinner, You moved toward me through Jesus. Holy Spirit, produce that kind of love in me. Forgive me for the times I've allowed other people's behavior to determine mine. When someone is unkind, help me remain kind. When someone is impatient, help me remain patient. When someone is harsh, help me respond with gentleness. Give me the courage to love when love isn't returned and to do good without keeping score. Let the people in my world experience something of the God who loved them first because His love is flowing through me.

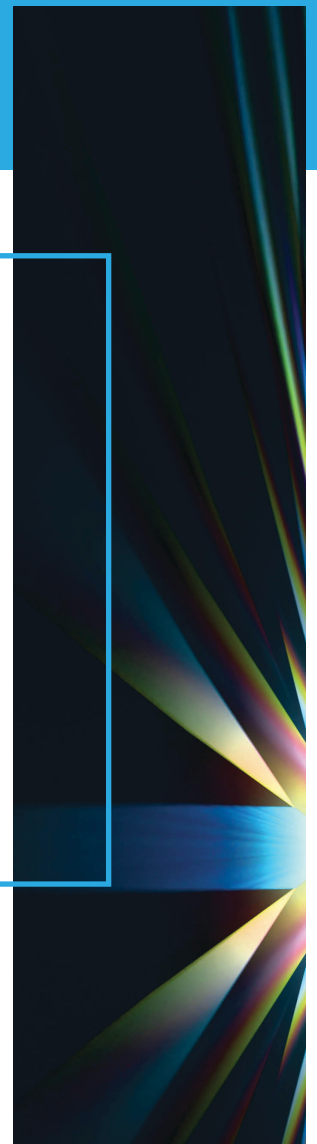
In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Five – Remain in My Love

We've spent nine weeks studying the fruit, but tomorrow we'll return to where fruit actually begins: **the Vine**. Jesus never told us to try harder to produce fruit; He told us to **remain in Him**. We'll finish our journey where it started—connected to Jesus, remaining in His love, and allowing His life to produce the fruit.

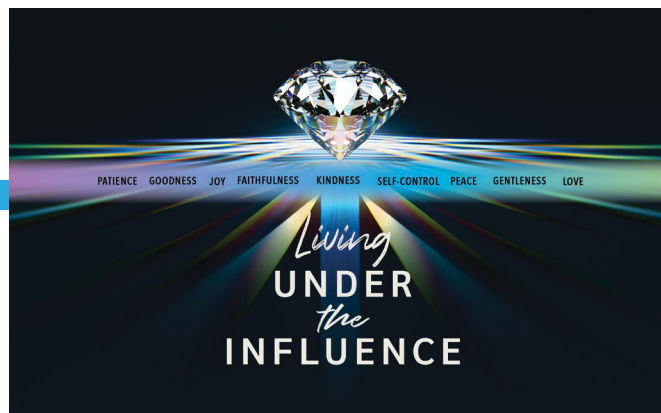


LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 5: Remain in My Love

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

John 15:4-5, 9 (NKJV) "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me... He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love."



John 13:34-35 (NLT) "Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

TODAY'S SEED

We've spent nine weeks talking about fruit. Patience. Goodness. Joy. Faithfulness. Kindness. Self-control. Peace. Gentleness, and finally, love. As we finish this journey, we need to remember something important: **The branch produces fruit by remaining connected to the Vine.** He said: **"Abide in Me."** Remain, stay connected, make your home in Me, because fruit is the result of relationship.

That's what Living Under the Influence has been about from the beginning. This wasn't nine weeks of, "Try to be more patient, or have more joy, control yourself." No, it's stay connected to the Vine. When we remain in Christ, His Spirit works in us. His character forms in us and His fruit grows through us. Then Jesus takes it one step further: **"Abide in My love,** and eventually, what's happening inside becomes visible outside.

In John 13, Jesus said, "Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." Notice that Jesus is that it's His love that

is the standard. That's a completely different standard because Jesus loved **first**. And then He says something remarkable: "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples." **Prove it!** How will your family or coworkers know Jesus is changing you? Love. How will your neighbors know? How will **your world** know? Love.

Fruit is something other people get to experience, and that's why all of this matters.

When we're patient with someone who frustrates us, or we act in kindness toward someone who was maybe rude to us, they experience something of Jesus from us. When love chooses to stay, serve, forgive, or give, they experience something of Jesus. **Fruit reveals influence and love reveals Jesus.** So don't finish this series trying harder, instead finish it **remaining closer.** Stay connected to the Vine, remain in His love and let somebody taste the fruit.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The word Jesus repeatedly uses in John 15 is the Greek *menō* (μένω), meaning **to remain, stay, continue, dwell, or abide.** This isn't a momentary connection, instead it's ongoing relationship. Jesus says the branch cannot produce fruit **"of itself."** Its ability to bear fruit comes from remaining connected to its source of life. That changes how we understand the Fruit of the Spirit. The goal isn't to manufacture patience, goodness, joy, or love through greater willpower. We create the conditions—remaining connected to Jesus, surrendering to the Holy Spirit, allowing His Word to shape us—and **God produces the growth.** And notice where Jesus eventually takes the idea of remaining: **"Abide in My love."** The Vine isn't simply the source of our strength. **The Vine is the source of our love.**

DON'T MISS THIS

The goal isn't to try harder to produce better fruit; it's to remain closer to Jesus and let His life produce the fruit through me.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Which fruit has the Holy Spirit challenged you about most during this series?
2. Where can you see genuine growth in yourself that wasn't there before?
3. Have you been trying harder to produce fruit instead of remaining closer to Jesus?
4. Who in your world needs to experience the love of Jesus through you?
5. What would "abide in My love" practically look like for you in the season ahead?

WATER THE SEED

Look back over the nine fruits we've studied and choose one fruit where you sense the Holy Spirit is inviting you to continue growing. Write it down and pray: **"Jesus, I'm not going to manufacture this. I'm going to remain in You and cooperate with what Your Spirit is producing in me."** Then identify one person in **your world** who needs to experience that fruit through you and let them taste it.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for everything You've taught me through this journey. Thank You that You haven't called me to manufacture spiritual fruit through my own strength. You've invited me to remain in Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to transform me. When I become impatient or joy feels distant, draw me closer. When peace is challenged, or faithfulness gets difficult, draw me closer. When kindness, self-control, or gentleness costs me something, draw me closer. And above all, teach me to remain in Your love. Keep growing Your fruit in me—not so I can appear spiritual, but so people can encounter Jesus through my life. Let my family, church, neighbors, coworkers and my world see the fruit of Jesus through my life. May my life become the evidence that I've been living under Your influence.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Next Sunday

This week completes our journey through the Fruit of the Spirit, but **Living Under the Influence doesn't end with a sermon series. It's how we're called to live.** Stay connected to the Vine. Remain in His love. Keep creating the conditions for the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in you—and carry that fruit into **your world**.

