



BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY

Study Guide

Study guides for this video series were created by [The Ministry Lab](#), which collects and curates outstanding resources for all aspects of church life and provides free consultation for Minnesota United Methodist Churches.

Rev. Dawn Houser

Grounding Prayer

This practice is intended to invite us to see more clearly the mosaic of God's Beloved Community. Guidance is intended to be suggestive, rather than demanding: allow space for practicing in whatever way is most accessible or comfortable for participants. Leadership suggestions are in italics; the practice, in regular font, can be read through like a script. Leaders may find listening to the recording helpful in establishing both content and mood. If leading in person, let leadership be gentle and inviting throughout.

Preparations

Invite people into a comfortable seated posture:

I invite us to find a comfortable posture of prayer:

Sitting upright with both feet on the floor, the chin slightly tucked, and hands resting gently in the lap.

Name your intent:

Our intent today is to develop a gaze of love, so we can more clearly see the mosaic of God's Beloved Community.

Notice your breath:

I invite us to begin to notice our breath:

Allow each inhale and exhale to lengthen and become even.

Allow awareness of the breath to settle and open the mind and heart.

Return to breath awareness any time the mind or heart wander.

Allow a few moments to settle into awareness.

Practice

Let guidance through the practice be gentle and invitational.

I invite you now to allow your gaze to linger on your reflection in the mirror. If a mirror is not available, simply develop an image of your own face in your mind's eye. Whether reflected in a mirror or created in your mind, let your face become your focal point.

...

Notice particular parts of your face—your:

Eyes

Nose

Lips

Cheekbones

Eyebrows

Ears

Forehead

Hairline

Jaw

[Allow 30 seconds or so of silence.]

Notice particular features of your face:

The tone or color of your skin

Any wrinkles—or their absence

Any scars or freckles

The contours of angles and hollows, curvature, and plains

[Allow 30 seconds or so of silence.]

Begin to look at your own visage without definition: simply gaze on your face—whether reflected or held within your mind. Gaze on your face with no judgment, only openness and curiosity.

[Allow 30 seconds or so of silence.]

Looking at your own face, where do you see Christ?

How does the Divine shine through?

Where, in your face, might the Sacred spark be discerned?

[Allow 30 seconds or so of silence.]

I invite you now to ask the Divine within you to gaze upon your face with eyes of love.

Look, now, with the eyes of God.

As you are able, see yourself as God sees you.

...

I invite you to close your eyes, or allow your self-image to fade.

Hold for a moment the awareness of being seen with eyes of pure love.

...

Imagine yourself looking upon others with this same gaze of love.

[Allow 30 seconds or so of silence.]

Return

Gently return your awareness to the here and now by wiggling your toes and fingers, or giving your neck, shoulders or head a gentle roll.

...

Take a few deep breaths and rest for a few moments in silence.

Avoid rushing here. Allow space for several deep breaths and lingering in silence for several moments. Moving too quickly into speech or movement can be distressing.

After several moments of rest, proceed to reading the Bible text.

Bible Reading

The texts might be shared by a leader, a volunteer reader, or read by verse around the group.

1 Corinthians 13:1-14:1a ([NRSV](#) below; [The Message](#))

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Pursue love.

Opening Questions

Encourage participants to share personal responses to the following questions:

- What from this scripture speaks to you today?
- What question does this scripture raise for you?
- How does this scripture critique values of “perfection,” “rightness,” or even “giftedness?”
- What values does this scripture encourage for individuals and/or communities?
- What perfectionisms, rightness, or giftedness that I/we now know, understand, envision, or “see dimly” might be unlearned or reimaged through a fuller, different, or broader lens of love?
- How might I/we pursue love?

Video

Watch Rev. Dawn Houser’s video vignette.

Reflection Questions

Discuss together:

- In what way do you connect with Dawn’s story?
- What from Dawn’s experience is completely new or different from your own?
- What did you find surprising or new that you would like to learn more about?
- What is God calling forth from you after hearing this story?

Note: This supplemental material may enrich the discussion, expand into additional discussions/groups, or enhance a parallel sermon series: [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#) offers this list, with discussion questions: [The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#) from [Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups](#).

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Close the discussion with the following prayer:

Let us pray:

God of Love, fashioned in your image, we are born to be in relationship with you and all creation. Through Jesus the Christ, you call us into beloved community. Fill us with your Spirit; ground us in your Love, that Love for one another, for neighbors near and far, and for all of your beloved world so that it might grow within and flow throughout all of our being and doing. Build us into your Beloved Community, God of Love. Amen.

