

D GROUP LESSON: HOW TO GROW A LOVING CHURCH

Sermon Series: Better Together: A Study of Christian Unity

Sermon by Paul Gearhardt

Text: Romans 12:9–21

Date of Sermon: August 9, 2026

Big Idea:

Concrete love is how we live out the gospel together—sincerely, devotionally, hopefully, hospitably, compassionately, humbly, and kindly.

HOOK — LOVE IN THE CONCRETE

Opening Illustration

A psychology professor who had no children of his own was always telling his neighbors how to raise theirs. One day, while repairing his driveway, he caught a neighborhood boy stepping into his freshly poured concrete.

The professor rushed toward the boy, ready to discipline him. The boy's mother called from the window, reminding him, "You must LOVE the child!"

The professor replied, "**I do love him in the abstract, but not in the concrete!**"

Opening Question

We often say things like:

- "I love my church."
- "I love people."
- "I love my brothers and sisters in Christ."

But what does that love actually **look like**?

Discuss:

1. What is one way someone has shown you "concrete love"—love that was demonstrated through an action?
2. Why do you think it can be easier to say we love people than to actually demonstrate love toward them?

Transition:

Romans 12 shows us that Christian love isn't merely an emotion or an idea. Because of what Christ has done for us, love becomes something we **practice**.

LOOK — WHAT DOES CONCRETE LOVE LOOK LIKE?

Read **Romans 12:9–21** together.

Paul wrote to a church made up of Jewish and Gentile believers who had significant cultural differences and tensions. In Romans 1–11, Paul explains the gospel. In Romans 12, he begins showing believers what the gospel should **look like in everyday life**.

Paul gives us a picture of a church where love is not just talked about—it is lived.

1. Concrete Love Is Sincere

Romans 12:9

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."

Sincere love is love without a mask. Paul calls believers to love without hypocrisy—to be genuine rather than simply putting on a Christian appearance.

At the same time, genuine love doesn't mean approving everything. We are called to **reject sin without rejecting people**.

Discuss:

- What does "love without a mask" look like in a Christian community?
 - Why is it sometimes difficult to be genuine with other believers?
 - What does it mean to hate what is evil while still loving the person?
-

2. Concrete Love Is Devoted

Romans 12:10

Paul describes believers as family. We are to be devoted to one another and honor others above ourselves.

Church isn't supposed to be a collection of consumers who leave whenever they don't like something. We are the family of God, united through Christ.

Discuss:

- What is the difference between treating church like a family and treating church like a product or service?
 - Why does conflict sometimes make us want to distance ourselves from people?
 - What would it look like to "honor one another above yourselves" this week?
-

3. Concrete Love Is Hopeful**Romans 12:11–12**

Paul connects our enthusiasm, hope, patience, and prayer to our relationship with the Lord. Our joy isn't ultimately based on circumstances going our way. Our hope is based on Christ. Because Christ is our hope, temporary difficulties don't have to steal our joy.

Discuss:

- What circumstances most easily steal your joy?
 - How does confidence in Christ change the way we face difficult circumstances?
 - Why is prayer essential to maintaining hope?
-

4. Concrete Love Is Hospitable**Romans 12:13**

Hospitality is more than entertaining people in our homes. It means sharing our time, resources, abilities, and lives with others.

Sometimes the most meaningful hospitality is simply noticing someone who is alone and choosing to sit with them.

Discuss:

- What makes hospitality difficult in today's culture?
- Who is someone you could intentionally welcome or include?
- What time, resource, skill, or ability do you have that could bless someone else?

D Group Challenge:

Think of one person you could invite for coffee, lunch, dinner, or simply spend time with this week.

5. Concrete Love Emotionally Supports Others**Romans 12:14–15**

Paul says:

- Bless those who persecute you.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice.
- Mourn with those who mourn.

This requires empathy.

Sometimes loving someone means celebrating their blessing without jealousy. Other times it means sitting with someone in their pain without trying to fix everything.

Discuss:

- Which is harder for you: rejoicing with someone or mourning with someone? Why?
 - Why can jealousy make it difficult to genuinely celebrate someone else's success?
 - When someone is hurting, why is listening sometimes more loving than giving advice?
 - Who might need someone to simply "be with them" right now?
-

6. Concrete Love Is Humble**Romans 12:16**

Paul calls the church to live in harmony, reject pride, and associate with people regardless of their social position.

In Christ, our differences in age, education, income, background, or social status do not determine our value.

Discuss:

- What kinds of social barriers can exist within a church?

- Who do you naturally gravitate toward? Who might you unintentionally overlook?
 - What would it look like to intentionally build a relationship outside your normal social circle?
-

7. Concrete Love Shows Kindness

Romans 12:17–21

Paul's instruction is radical:

Don't repay evil with evil. Pursue peace. Return good for evil.

This doesn't mean ignoring abuse, removing appropriate boundaries, or refusing legitimate justice. It means surrendering our desire for personal revenge and trusting God to be the righteous judge.

Paul's ultimate example is Christ.

We treat others with concrete love because **Christ has treated us with concrete love.**

Discuss:

- Why is revenge so appealing when we've been hurt?
 - What is the difference between forgiveness and allowing someone to continue hurting you?
 - What might it look like to return good for evil in a specific relationship?
 - How does remembering the way Christ has treated us change the way we treat difficult people?
-

TOOK — PUTTING LOVE INTO PRACTICE

The goal isn't simply to understand Romans 12. The goal is to **live it**.

Take a moment and look back over the seven characteristics of concrete love:

1. **Sincere** — Love without a mask.
2. **Devoted** — Treat God's people like family.
3. **Hopeful** — Let Christ, not circumstances, determine your joy.

4. **Hospitable** — Share your time, resources, and life.
5. **Emotionally supportive** — Rejoice with others and mourn with others.
6. **Humble** — Tear down social barriers and value everyone equally.
7. **Kind** — Refuse revenge and return good for evil.

Personal Reflection

Which one of these seven areas is God challenging you in most right now?

Why?

One Concrete Step

Complete this sentence:

"This week, I will show concrete love by _____."

Be specific.

It might be:

- Calling someone who is hurting.
- Inviting someone to coffee.
- Sitting with someone who is alone.
- Encouraging someone instead of criticizing them.
- Celebrating someone else's success.
- Serving someone without expecting recognition.
- Reaching out to someone you've been avoiding.
- Forgiving someone and releasing your desire for revenge.
- Including someone who is outside your normal circle.
- Offering a resource, skill, or ability to someone who needs it.

Group Challenge

Before your next D Group meeting, **do one intentional act of concrete love** toward someone.

Then be prepared to share:

What did you do? What happened? What did God show you through the experience?

CLOSING THOUGHT

Church unity doesn't happen simply because we attend the same church.

Unity grows when ordinary Christians make extraordinary choices to love one another the way Christ has loved us.

We may have been hurt by people. We may have reasons to build walls and keep others at a distance. But protecting ourselves from every possibility of hurt can also keep us from experiencing the depth of Christian community God intended.

The church becomes more loving when God's people put love into the concrete.

Closing Prayer

"Lord, thank You for loving us with a love that was not merely spoken but demonstrated through Jesus. Help us take off our masks, love Your people like family, remain hopeful in difficult circumstances, practice hospitality, carry one another's burdens, walk in humility, and respond to hurt with kindness instead of revenge. Show each of us one person we can love concretely this week. Make us a church that looks different from the world because we love the way Jesus loves. Amen."