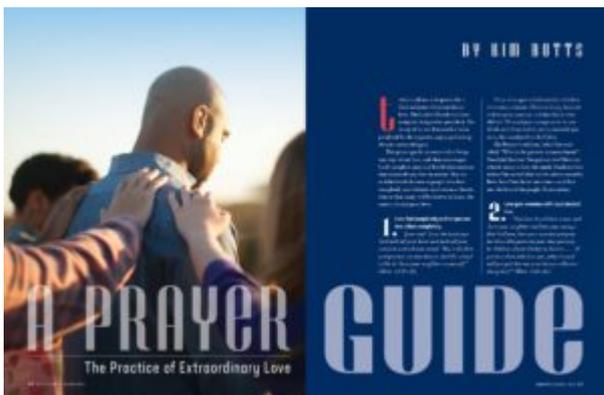


The Practice of Extraordinary Love

A Prayer Guide

By Kim Butts



Today's culture is desperate for a fresh infusion of extraordinary love. The Lord's Church has been uniquely designed to provide it. Yet many of us are distracted or even paralyzed by the negative, angry, polarizing climate surrounding us.

This prayer guide examines what Scripture says about love, and then encourages God's people to pray and boldly demonstrate that extraordinary love in action. May we as believers be known as people who love completely and without reservation or hesitation so that many will be drawn to Jesus, the source of such great love.

1. Pray that you would love God completely so that you can love others completely.

"Jesus said: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37–39).

Many of us agree wholeheartedly with these two commandments. However, living them out with integrity, purpose, and humility is often difficult. We need great courage so we do not shrink away from actively and passionately pursuing this mandate from the Father.

My Prayer: Lord Jesus, when You were asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” You didn’t hesitate. You gave us two! Show me what it means to love this much. Teach me how to love You so well that love for others naturally flows from Your heart into mine—and then into the lives of the people all around me.

2. Pray that you would love your enemies with supernatural love.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. . . . If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” (Matt. 5:43–46).

Scripture tells us clearly that our enemy is not other people: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). We must fight the right battle by refusing to hate those we perceive as enemies. Instead, although it’s completely countercultural, God says we are to love them and pray for them.

My Prayer: Father, I struggle with some of the people in my life who have set their hearts against me, or who have wronged me or someone I love. Remind me daily that these people are not my enemies. Show me ways to pray for them so that my heart will soften and change. Nurture within me a heart filled with forgiveness, and remove any bitterness. I know that in my own

flesh I can't love them extraordinarily, but with You all things are possible. Please give me a supernatural love that transcends my feelings and emotions. I trust You to love through me even when it is difficult!

3. Pray that you would love others without condition.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:9-10). We may casually throw around the words unconditional love yet still put conditions upon loving, such as "if you agree with me, I will love you," or "if you look like I do, I will love you."

This happens often in families and friendships. People are emotionally blackmailed into changing their points of view, lifestyles, or thought patterns to make peace or to receive the love of others. However, if God is love—and He is—His followers must unconditionally extend love to others because He first loved us and commands us to love as He loves.

My Prayer: Heavenly Father, You created each of us uniquely, and I know You want us to love one another no matter the circumstances surrounding our relationships. Teach me what it means to "remain" in Your great love so that You can show me how to supernaturally love those who think, act, talk, or respond differently than I do. Fill my heart with love that overcomes my temptation to marginalize or separate those who are unlike me. Help me to learn to love with a no-strings-attached love that comes from You, the One who is love.

4. Pray that you would love with the genuine love of Christ.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:9–10).

It is much easier to say we love someone than to demonstrate it in a tangible way. We do not have to compromise what is right and good in order to love. We are compelled as Christ-followers to love genuinely: to hate the activity of the devil while still loving even those who carry out his work. Our love for others is to be faithful and fervent, and we are to bless and honor others above ourselves.

My Prayer: God of Grace, sometimes I feel as if I have a heart of stone instead of a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). Please awaken the Spirit of the Living Christ in my heart so that I might love with a sincerity that is true. Show me the evil I need to abhor and the good I must honestly embrace. Establish within me a deep humility so that I can honor others above myself.

5. Pray that you would love through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me” (Rom. 15:30).

Jesus is God’s ultimate gift of love! Jesus lives to intercede for us. He is our continual mediator before God: “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25). Every prayer Jesus prays on our behalf is the perfect will of God for us. It is His gift to us and the example of how we should continually pray for one another.

My Prayer: Father, it amazes me to think that Jesus, who lives

in me, also intercedes before You on my behalf. Your great love for me resulted in the birth, death, and resurrection of Your own Son so that I might live forever. Please awaken within me the love of the Spirit so that every prayer I pray is one I offer from a heart of love in Jesus Christ.

6. Pray that you would serve others in love, not out of obligation or duty.

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (Gal. 5:13).

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2).

When everything we do and say is from the loving heart of Jesus, it becomes extraordinary, supernatural love. When we love well, it changes everything about our attitudes in serving others.

My Prayer: God of Love, I could spend the rest of my life plumbing the depths of Your amazing love. I’m grateful for how specific You are in teaching me through Your Word what love is like. Jesus, I want my love to look like Yours. Give me the grace to embrace the kind of love that “never fails” so that I can serve others in humility.

7. Pray that you would love others in a spirit of unity.

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (Phil. 2:1–2).

The world needs to see the great love believers have for one another. If the world is to take Christianity seriously, believers must demonstrate how such love compels them to go out into their culture. It is then that we become the answer to the prayer Jesus prayed in John 17:22–23: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

My Prayer: Righteous Father, show me what it means to be united in love with those who love You. We are all different in so many ways, and yet You call us to a higher level of love—the kind of love that brings all Your followers together as one in Spirit. Help me, in turn, to demonstrate that life-giving love to a lost world.

Take time to seek ways God wants you to experience His love, and then extend the love He has given you beyond yourself to others.

KIM BUTTS is cofounder and vice president of Harvest Prayer Ministries. She is the author of several books, including *The Praying Family: Creative Ways to Pray Together*, available at prayershop.org.



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