



## a prayer to restore true love . . .

Father, we affirm again our love for You and at the same time confess we have formed a picture of love that has limited our ability to feel and receive Your love in the multitude of ways You express yourself. We repent and ask Your forgiveness for the smallness of our vision.

We give to You our picture(s) of love. (*Name those you know.*) We ask You to cause us to be aware of any others. We give them to You and ask You to bring them to death—the positive as well as the negative. We see how we have defiled our spouse, family, friends and coworkers because we could not receive the ways they expressed caring. We insisted they fit into our molds, not allowing them to be themselves. (*Identify those defiled and ways you are aware of defiling them.*) Forgive us, Father, for our idolatry.

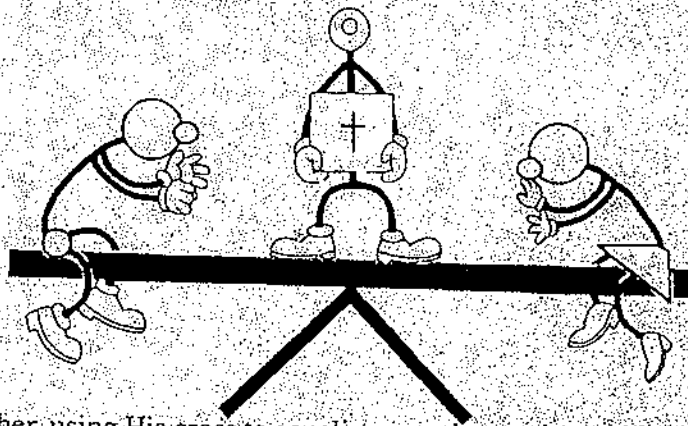
Cleanse us with Your love; lift away our false identifications and implant Your vision of love for us. Open our eyes to see You and each other in new and surprising ways. Help us to hear Your words of love to us and through one other. Grant us boldness to say and do the things that will love and bless others, and the courage to go outside our comfort zone to draw nurture from You, Your creation and those You have placed in our lives to bless us.

**IMPORTANT:** These sample prayers are not formulas; rather, they offer ideas and direction. Be led by the Holy Spirit, and use the substance of this prayer as a guide. Also, please acknowledge these prayers as sample narratives, in which gender-exclusive references are used as they would be used in a real situation. For this reason, some prayers are for a female and others for a male. All are interchangeable.

## I. Jesus Counters our Common Counterbalances

Sometimes, when we were children and wanted to play on the teeter-totter, we couldn't find a playmate just our size. If we got on with someone roly-poly, we got catapulted to the top while our rotund friend remained seated unhappily on the ground. So we would say, "Move in, you're too heavy," and we'd scoot out to the end as far as we dared. But even so, neither got a very satisfying ride. If our friend got disgusted and jumped off, we came down with a jarring thud — and then we were really angry!

But if we saw big brother nearby, we'd call out, "Hey, come help us!" If he stood in the middle and used his strong legs to swing the seesaw up and down we'd both get a good ride.



Jesus is our big Brother, using His cross to equalize us and smooth our ride in life. But that can happen only if we invite Him daily, momentarily, by prayer — petitions that include our death on the cross with Him, and resurrection life that lets Him live in us, as us, for us.

### Common Counterbalances

gregarious, talkative	silent, withdrawn
earthy, plodding	mystical, dreamer
absent-minded, impractical	practical, attentive
emotional, demonstrative	non-demonstrative, controlled
permissive, placative	disciplinarian, authoritative
pious, prayerful	worldly, unbelieving
workaholic, serious	laid-back, fun-loving

Until Jesus balances us, we drive one another to extremes.  
When His cross sets us free, our differences no longer drive or threaten;  
they become the fun and spice of life!

## II. The Idolatry of Unregenerate Love

*Idolatry substitutes signs and symbols for what is real.* Idolatrous worshippers seek the forms of worship rather than the Lord Himself. Liturgies, intended to escort us into His presence, become what is sought and experienced: Theologies *about* Him become more important than loving and meeting Him. Fundamental tenets of faith justify a judgmentalism which separates people from each other and from Him. Images and icons are worshipped as though God were living inside them. The faith of idolatrous worshippers cannot transcend signs and symbols to truly find God.

*Idolatrous societies believe God lives in the idol.* People in such societies have little or no trust that they will find God, or that God will truly come to them, so they create idolatrous forms and ways to make Him appear. The real issue of idolatry is control. Lack of trust causes seekers to be unable to rest with a God who acts in His own time and ways, who insists on being *GOD*. So they fasten onto idols they can control—their idols will always be there for them, always the same: dependably dead, but offering at least self-congratulations of worship and service. Such believers (actually unbelievers) don't have to worry about truly meeting and responding. Obedience to laws and forms is quite different from submitting oneself to a Lord who is terrifyingly real and present.

*Likewise, those who have false identifications of love believe it comes in that particular package—and only in that form.* What they understand as love has become an idol which they serve and try to force others to obey. They have little or no trust that others will love them without some kind of control. They hold on to their “package” and try to make others give them the love they recognize within that idolatrous form. Unfortunately, they cannot fully comprehend any love found outside that package.

Most people, especially our teenagers, don't want to be satellites locked into orbit around us. Granted, we can sometimes coerce adults to share in our own idol worship, although they suffer tremendous damage to who and what they themselves are. Our children often rebel against our control because they need to individuate, to be themselves, and they find they can't be as long as we're around. For this reason, the Scripture says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, *it remains by itself, alone*; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Thus we remain alone until our idols die and people can feel free to be themselves in our presence.

God is love. He wants to meet us personally, to have opportunity to express and receive love. Our identifications of love, our idols, prevent that—with Him and with our human loved ones. Death on the cross is the answer: “... whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:24). The sooner we nail those false idols to the cross, and let Jesus' freeing love live in us, the sooner we will experience the love which the Father designed us to have—and to give away.

# Identifications of Love

Take a few minutes to answer these 2 questions.

What tells me (or makes) you feel loved?

Or asked a different way.

What behaviors from loved ones most assure you that you are loved?

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What do you do to elicit “love packages” from others?

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