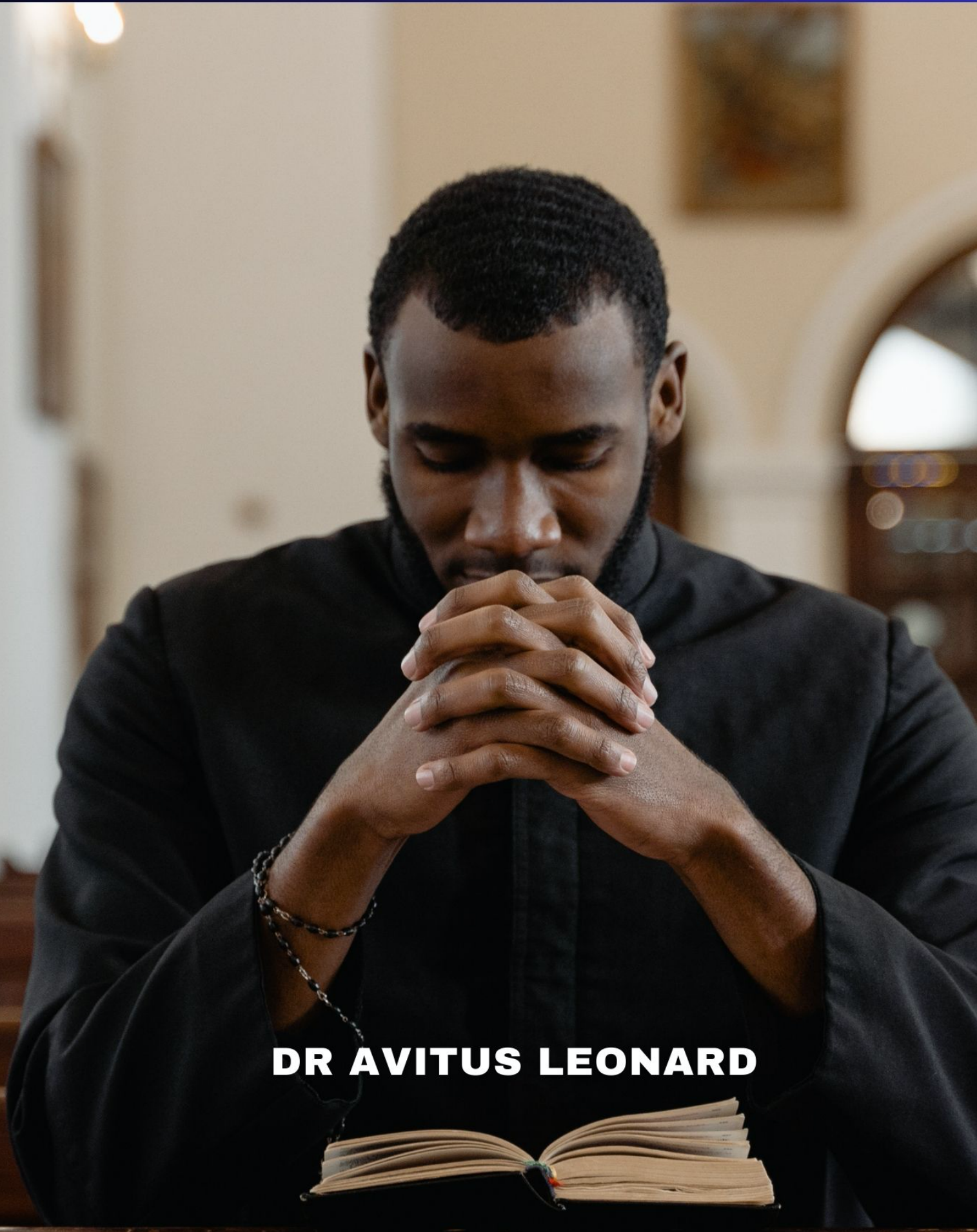


**HOW CAN WE LOVE THE LOST
IF WE CAN'T LOVE THE FOUND?**



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HOW CAN WE LOVE THE LOST IF WE CAN'T LOVE THE FOUND?

How can we love the lost if we can't love the found? A divided and unloving Church is incapable of reaching the lost, sending a contradictory message to the world and undermining the very gospel we seek to proclaim. Just as a cup that is empty cannot pour out its contents, an unloving Church cannot effectively engage with those outside its walls. Therefore, in our zeal to save the lost, we must not overlook the needs of those who are already within the fold.

– Dr Avitus Leonard

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the critical relationship between loving the found and reaching the lost, arguing that a divided and unloving Church is fundamentally incapable of effectively engaging with those outside its community. As Jesus instructed in John 13:34-35, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* This scripture highlights that internal love among believers serves as a testimony to the world. The paper also examines 1 John 4:20, which states, *"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar,"* emphasizing that claims of divine love are undermined by a lack of love toward fellow believers. Further, Galatians 6:2 instructs, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ,"* demonstrating the importance of mutual support within the Church. Matthew 28:19 calls Christians to *"go and make disciples of all nations,"* reinforcing that effective outreach is supported by a loving and unified community. Additionally, 1 John 3:17 challenges believers: *"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"* By fostering a thriving, loving internal environment, the Church enhances its capacity to fulfil its mission and demonstrate the gospel's transformative power to those outside its walls. In conclusion, while the mission to save the lost remains a vital priority, it must not overshadow the imperative to nurture and love those within the Church.

KEYWORDS

Christian Love, Ministry Outreach, Community Care, Personal Transformation, Biblical Teachings, Effective Leadership, Church Growth

• INTRODUCTION

If we can't love the found one, how can we love the lost one? Dear friends, this question challenges us to reflect deeply on the nature of love, its implications, and our responsibilities as believers. In our Christian faith, love is the central commandment. Love is not merely an emotion; it is an action, a commitment to the well-being of others. Jesus emphasized this when He said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another"* (John 13:34, NIV). This command extends not only to those who are lost but also to those within our Christian community. The Apostle John reminds us, *"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or*

sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20, NIV). Our love for one another is a testimony to the world of Christ's love. Paul also encourages us to *"bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2, ESV). If we fail to love those closest to us, our fellow believers, how can we genuinely extend Christ's love to those who do not yet know Him? Loving the found—those who are part of our spiritual family—must be the foundation upon which our outreach to the lost is built. As Jesus prayed for unity among His followers, *"so that the world may believe that you have sent me"* (John 17:21, NIV), He highlighted that our love and unity are essential to our witness. Therefore, let us strive to love one another deeply, for *"love covers over a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8, NIV), and from this love, let it overflow to reach the lost with the same compassion and grace that Christ has shown us.

• NATURE OF LOVE

Christian love is a profound and multifaceted concept that extends far beyond mere sentiment. It is an active, deliberate commitment to the well-being of others, encompassing both those within the faith community and those outside of it. The Apostle Paul provides an illuminating description of this love in his first letter to the Corinthians: *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, NIV). This depiction of love highlights its sacrificial, selfless, and unconditional nature—qualities that reflect the very heart of God. The love Paul describes is not passive but active, engaging deeply with the lives of others and striving for their highest good. However, this love is not confined to those who are lost but must also encompass those who are found—our fellow believers. Jesus Himself underscored the importance of this holistic love when He said, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13:35, NIV). Our love for each other within the Church is a testimony to the world of the love of Christ. *If we cannot love those within our own community, how can we genuinely claim to love those who are outside of it?* This question compels us to examine whether our expressions of love are genuinely reflective of Christ's love or merely superficial gestures.

The challenge of loving the found—our fellow believers—can often be underestimated. The found ones are those who have been reconciled to Christ and are part of the spiritual family. Yet, these individuals are often the ones we take for granted. We might assume that because they are *"found,"* they do not need the same level of care, attention, and love as those who are lost. This assumption is not only flawed but contradicts the teachings of Christ. The Apostle John warns us of this misconception, saying, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen"* (1 John 4:20, ESV). Loving the found is indeed a true test of our faith. It is relatively easy to profess love in the abstract, to express concern for distant or unfamiliar individuals. The real challenge lies in loving those who are close to us—those with whom we share daily interactions, worship together, and may experience conflicts or differences. It is in these intimate relationships that our love for God is most authentically demonstrated. The Apostle Peter exhorts us to *"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8, ESV). This call to persistent and earnest love implies that our commitment to one another should endure through trials and difficulties, reflecting the depth of our Christian character.

Extending love to the lost is a natural overflow of the love we cultivate within our own community. When we genuinely love the found, this love naturally extends to those who have not yet come to faith. The love we demonstrate within the Church becomes a powerful witness to those outside of it. Jesus prayed for this very unity and love among His followers, stating, ***“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”*** (John 17:23, NIV). This prayer emphasizes that our unity and love are integral to our witness to the world, demonstrating that the love of Christ is transformative and real. The Great Commission further reinforces the need for love to be the foundation of our mission. Jesus commands us to ***“go and make disciples of all nations”*** (Matthew 28:19, NIV). This mission is not just a call to action but one that must be rooted in love. Our outreach efforts should be driven by the same compassion and grace that Christ has shown us, beginning with a genuine love for our fellow believers and extending outward to the lost.

The Apostle Paul captures the balance between loving the found and the lost in his letter to the Galatians: ***“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith”*** (Galatians 6:10, ESV). This verse suggests that our love for the lost should not come at the expense of neglecting those within the Church. Instead, our care for fellow believers equips and empowers us to effectively reach out to those who do not yet know Christ. Neglecting the found while focusing exclusively on the lost can have detrimental effects. It can lead to spiritual burnout and disillusionment within the Church if believers do not feel supported and loved within their own community. Jesus warned against such imbalance in His rebuke of the Pharisees, who ***“neglect the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness”*** (Matthew 23:23, NIV). ***In our zeal to save the lost, we must not overlook the needs of those already in the fold. Additionally, neglecting the found can weaken the Church’s witness. A divided and unloving Church sends a contradictory message to the world, undermining the very gospel we seek to proclaim.*** Jesus prayed for unity among His followers so that ***“the world may believe that you have sent me”*** (John 17:21, NIV). Our love and unity are crucial to effectively conveying the message of Christ.

• **LOVING THE FOUND TO REACH THE LOST**

In the journey of faith and service, there's a profound truth that often gets overlooked: our capacity to reach and impact the lost is intrinsically linked to our ability to love and heal ourselves. This principle underscores a crucial aspect of effective ministry and personal growth—before we can extend our hands to uplift others, we must first tend to our own inner lives. Personal transformation is not just about improving oneself; it is about becoming the person we are meant to be in order to serve others more effectively. This transformation involves a deep, introspective journey where we confront our own flaws, limitations, and unmet needs, requiring us to engage in honest self-reflection and to seek genuine change. The process is often uncomfortable, as it involves acknowledging and addressing our own weaknesses and past hurts. Yet, it is a necessary step for anyone who wishes to be an effective agent of change. Just as a physician must

understand illness to treat others, a leader or minister must work on their own growth and healing to truly guide and support others. There is a paradox in the idea of loving oneself and serving others. It might seem self-centered to focus on our own healing, but this self-focus is not about self-indulgence; it's about self-preparation. Loving ourselves means understanding our worth and our needs and addressing them with compassion and care. When we are whole and at peace within ourselves, we are in a stronger position to extend that same love and peace to others.

Consider the metaphor of a vessel. ***A cup that is empty cannot pour out its contents.*** Likewise, a person who is spiritually, emotionally, or mentally depleted cannot effectively give of themselves to others. We must be filled with love, grace, and wisdom before we can share these with those who are lost or in need. This is not an act of selfishness but of ensuring that we have something meaningful to offer. This idea is echoed in various biblical teachings. For instance, Jesus' commandment to ***"love your neighbor as yourself"*** (Mark 12:31) implies that our ability to love others is contingent upon our ability to love ourselves. This self-love is not about vanity or self-obsession but about recognizing our intrinsic value and allowing that recognition to fuel our love for others. Moreover, in Matthew 7:3-5, Jesus teaches about the importance of addressing our own faults before pointing out the faults of others. This teaching is particularly relevant in the context of ministry and service. Before we can effectively guide and correct others, we must first examine and address our own issues. The principle here is that self-awareness and self-improvement enable us to approach others with humility and understanding. Effective leadership, whether in a religious, professional, or personal context, requires a high degree of personal integrity. Leaders who are not in touch with their own issues or who have not worked through their personal challenges may struggle to lead with authenticity and empathy. Authenticity in leadership is crucial because it builds trust and credibility. When leaders demonstrate that they have faced their own struggles and emerged stronger, they inspire others and create a space where genuine growth can occur.

Personal integrity also means living out the values and principles we preach. If we advocate for compassion, forgiveness, and love, but fail to embody these in our own lives, our message becomes diluted and less impactful. People are more likely to be moved by what they see in us rather than what they hear from us. In the realm of outreach and ministry, the principle of personal transformation is vital. Those who are lost or in need often come with complex and deeply rooted issues. To reach them effectively, we must approach them with empathy, understanding, and practical solutions. This is only possible when we have done our own work and are equipped to offer meaningful support. ***When we are grounded in our own healing and growth, we can provide guidance that is not just theoretical but rooted in lived experience.*** We can share our journey and the lessons we've learned, which can offer hope and practical insight to those we seek to help. Our own transformation becomes a testament to the power of change and a beacon for those who are

on their own journey. It's important to recognize that personal transformation is not a one-time event but a continuous journey. As we grow and evolve, new challenges and opportunities for growth arise. This ongoing process of self-improvement and self-care ensures that we remain effective and compassionate in our service to others. It also helps us stay grounded and avoid the pitfalls of burnout or disillusionment.

- **WE CAN'T PRAY FOR ATTENDANCE WHILE WE HURT THOSE WHO CAME TO OUR COMMUNITY**

In the pursuit of church growth and outreach, there is often a fervent focus on increasing attendance and expanding our reach to new individuals. However, a critical aspect frequently overlooked in this pursuit is the well-being and care of those who are already part of our community. We cannot effectively pray for increased attendance or hope for success in our outreach efforts while simultaneously neglecting or hurting those who are present. Genuine care for our current members is essential to building a healthy, vibrant community capable of effectively reaching others. The love must be evident in our interactions with fellow believers. *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35, NIV). Our commitment to loving one another serves as a testimony to the world about the transformative power of Christ's love. If we cannot embody this love within our own community, it undermines our credibility and effectiveness in reaching out to those who are not yet part of our fellowship.

A thriving community is built on strong, healthy relationships among its members. When internal conflicts or issues are left unresolved, they can undermine the community's health and effectiveness. James asks, *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”* (James 4:1, NIV). Conflict and discord can sap the energy and enthusiasm needed for outreach and ministry. Addressing these issues is not just about maintaining harmony; it is crucial for ensuring that our community is strong and capable of fulfilling its mission. Paul provides guidance on dealing with conflicts in Galatians 6:1, saying, *“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted”* (NIV). Restoration should be approached with gentleness and humility, aimed at healing and reconciliation rather than judgment. This approach ensures that our community remains supportive and nurturing, providing a solid foundation for outreach efforts. Creating a supportive and nurturing environment is essential for fostering growth and spiritual well-being. Paul encourages believers to *“encourage one another and build each other up”* (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NIV). This encouragement and support should permeate all our interactions within the Church, helping to create an atmosphere where members feel valued and cared for. Hebrews 10:24-25 underscores the importance of fellowship and mutual support: *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”* (NIV). Regular

fellowship and mutual encouragement are vital for maintaining a unified and strong community, which in turn supports effective outreach. Neglecting the needs of our current members can have significant negative effects on our outreach efforts. A community that is internally fractured or lacking in genuine care struggles to effectively reach out to others. Our outreach efforts must be grounded in a solid foundation of internal care and justice; otherwise, they risk being superficial and ineffective. A lack of internal care can also lead to spiritual burnout and disillusionment among members. This, in turn, hampers our ability to effectively engage with new individuals. Paul warns against becoming weary in doing good: ***“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”*** (Galatians 6:9, NIV). Ensuring a healthy and supportive community is crucial for sustaining the energy and enthusiasm required for outreach. Considering these insights, it is evident that our ministry efforts must be holistic, addressing both internal health and external outreach.

We cannot effectively pray for increased attendance or hope for success in reaching new individuals while neglecting or hurting those who are already present. Genuine care and support for our current members are foundational to creating a vibrant and effective Christian community.

References

Biblical Verses

- John 13:34-35 (NIV)
- 1 John 4:20 (NIV)
- Galatians 6:2 (ESV)
- Matthew 28:19 (NIV)
- 1 John 3:17 (NIV)
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NIV)
- John 17:21 (NIV)
- 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)
- Galatians 6:10 (ESV)
- Matthew 23:23 (NIV)
- Mark 12:31 (NIV)
- Matthew 7:3-5 (NIV)
- James 4:1 (NIV)
- Galatians 6:1 (NIV)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)
- Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)
- Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

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