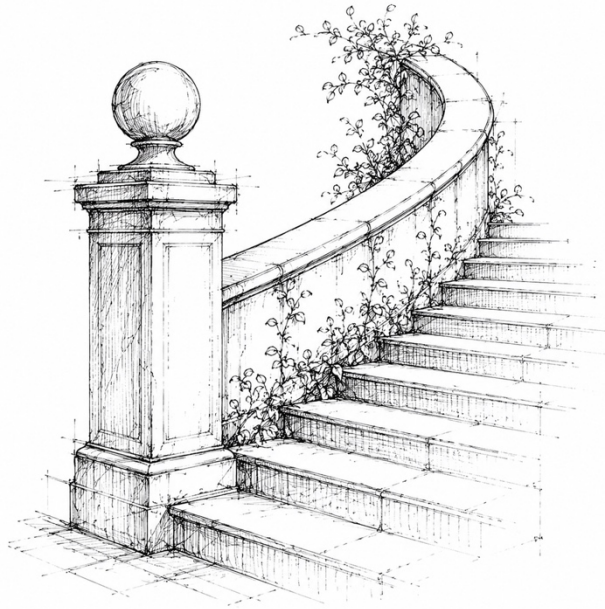


Chapter Seven

BUILT UP IN LOVE





LIFE WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD

Scripture Focus: Acts 9:32-43

Every summer, our family likes to slip away for a few days by the lake. Nothing long. Nothing grand. Just a quiet place where the water rests close, the days slow down, and we can breathe a little easier together.

For years, it was simple enough. Find a place. Pack some clothes. Gather a few groceries. Go.

But families have a way of growing, don't they?

Children grow up. They marry. Grandchildren come along. And suddenly one small cabin is not quite enough anymore. We need more beds. More chairs. More towels. More room for shoes by the door and little ones running underfoot and conversations happening in every corner.

And then there are the meals.

What will we eat? Who will cook? Who will clean up afterward? How do you feed a growing family without one person spending the whole vacation standing over a stove?

So this year, we tried something different. Each couple took one meal. Just one.

No one had to carry the whole load. No one had to do everything. Each couple simply planned one meal and brought what they could to the table.

And it was one of the sweetest parts of our time away.

One meal was hearty and familiar. Another was something new. Some thought through the little details. One couple kept things simple and practical by ordering pizza. Each meal reflected the people who prepared it.

Their care.

Their thoughtfulness.

Their uniqueness.

Their love.

Plate by plate and meal by meal, I was reminded of life within the household of God. From the very beginning, He designed His people to grow together, encourage one another, serve one another, and help one another follow Christ.

As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, He unites us in ways that reflect His wisdom and care.

This is where love becomes so important.

It's not merely something we do.

It's evidence of God's work within us.

As we walk with Christ, His love begins changing the way we see others. We become more patient. More forgiving. More willing to serve. More concerned with the needs of others than with our own comfort or recognition.

The Apostle Paul writes, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work " (Ephesians 4:16).

What a beautiful picture of life within God's family.

Paul doesn't say the body builds itself up through talent, achievement, or personal success. It grows as believers learn to love one another. Love becomes the atmosphere in which God's people mature, serve, and flourish.

When we place our faith in Christ, we are brought into a family that

*Love isn't merely
something we do.*

*It's evidence of God's
work within us.*

includes people from different backgrounds, different personalities, and different stages of spiritual growth. We will not always agree on every detail, and we will certainly not mature at the same pace. Yet we gather around the same Savior and share the same hope.

No one earns a place in God's family by being perfect. We belong because of grace.

The same Spirit who brings believers together also equips them to serve one another.

Scripture teaches that God gives spiritual gifts for the good of the whole body. Some are gifted to teach. Some to encourage. Some to lead. Some to show mercy. Some serve quietly behind the scenes. Others meet practical needs that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Peter reminds us, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

Though the gifts differ, they share a common purpose: strengthening God's people and bringing glory to Christ.

These gifts were never intended to draw attention to ourselves. They are expressions of God's love working through His people.

When someone teaches faithfully, serves quietly, offers encouragement, extends mercy, or meets a practical need, the household is strengthened. In this way, each believer contributes to the growth of the whole. What a beautiful display of God's wisdom.

No one has been called to do everything, and no one has been given every gift. Each believer depends upon the others, just as every part of the body depends upon the whole. This dependence reminds us that God's household is built upon grace, not self-sufficiency.

And this is where faith once again takes center stage. Faith trusts that God has placed us where He wants us. It serves even when our efforts seem unnoticed. It loves when it would be easier to withdraw. It continues investing in others because it trusts the Architect's design.

As we do, the household grows stronger.

Relationships deepen.

Lives are encouraged.

Christ is glorified.

And little by little, the love of God becomes visible through His people.

One day, God's family will gather in the home He has been preparing from the beginning. Until then, we continue building one another up in love, trusting that the Holy Spirit is accomplishing far more than we can presently see.

Word Study: Joined Together

In Ephesians 4:16, Paul describes how the body of Christ grows as it is "joined and held together" by every supporting part.

The Greek word translated as "held together" is *συμβιβάζω* (*syμβιβάζω*). It means to bring together closely, unite carefully, or fit together in harmony. It describes parts joined in a way that allows them to support and strengthen one another.

What a beautiful picture of life within God's household.

The Lord never intended His people to walk alone. Through the Holy Spirit, believers are brought together as one body and one household. Though each person is different, God joins hearts, gifts, burdens, and strengths in ways that help the whole family grow.

As the Spirit continues His work, believers learn to encourage one another, bear burdens, extend grace, and serve with humility. In this way, the household is strengthened and the character of Christ becomes increasingly visible. And little by little, the living stones learn to rest closely together beneath the care of the Master Craftsman as He prepares us for the home that awaits us.

? Read Ephesians 4:11–16 and 1 Peter 4:10. What do these passages teach about spiritual gifts, and why does God give different gifts to different believers within His family?

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A Quiet Strength: Tabitha

God never intended for His people to walk through life alone.

From the very beginning, His plan has been to gather believers into a family—a community where faith is strengthened, burdens are shared, and love is demonstrated through everyday acts of service. Within the household of God, each person has a unique place and purpose. As the Holy Spirit works within us, He not only shapes our individual lives but also teaches us how to care for one another.

Tabitha provides a beautiful example of what life within that household can look like.

We meet her in Acts chapter 9, where she is described as a disciple who was "always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36). Scripture tells us very little about Tabitha, but the few details we're given highlight something both simple and profound. She loved people well.

Day after day, Tabitha used her abilities to care for those around her. The clothing she made for the widows stands as a quiet testimony to a life marked by generosity and service.

The impact of her life became especially clear after her death.

When Peter arrived, the widows stood around him weeping and showing him the robes and other clothing Tabitha had made while she was still with them. Their tears revealed the depth of her influence. The garments they held in their hands were reminders of a woman whose faith had been expressed through practical acts of kindness.

What a beautiful testimony.

Tabitha's influence was not measured by prominence or position. It was measured by the lives she strengthened through faithful acts of love.

Her story reminds us that the household of God is built up in countless ordinary ways. A word of encouragement, a helping hand, a meal shared, a prayer offered, or a need quietly met can have a lasting impact on the people God has placed around us.

God doesn't shape living stones to stand alone. He prepares them to become part of something greater than themselves—the household of God. Once stones are gathered and shaped, they are brought together according to the Architect's design. In the same way, believers are joined together by the Holy Spirit to form a community marked by love, service, and mutual care.

The same Holy Spirit who worked through Tabitha continues to work through His people today. And as we serve one another in love, we become part of the beautiful life God intends to flourish within His household.



Faith in Action

Take a few moments today to encourage someone in God's family. It might be a phone call, a note, a prayer, a word of encouragement, or a simple act of service.

As you do, remember that God has not called any one person to carry the entire load. He has designed His people to build one another up in love. Ask the Lord to show you one practical way you can strengthen someone else this week, trusting that even small acts of faithfulness have a place in His greater purpose.

 Read Acts 9:36–42 and Galatians 6:9–10. What do these passages teach about serving others within the household of faith, and why do seemingly ordinary acts of kindness matter in God's kingdom?

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 When you think about your place in God's family, do you tend to serve with confidence, comparison, or hesitation? How might this chapter encourage you to trust the role God has given you?

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The Prayer Closet

Think of one relationship within the church where frustration, disappointment, or distance has quietly settled into your heart. Ask the Lord to help you view that person again as a fellow living stone still being lovingly shaped by the same Craftsman who is shaping you.

Father in Heaven,

Thank You for placing me within Your family and for surrounding me with fellow believers who encourage, support, and strengthen my faith. Thank You that none of us are finished yet, and that You continue working in each of our lives through Your grace.

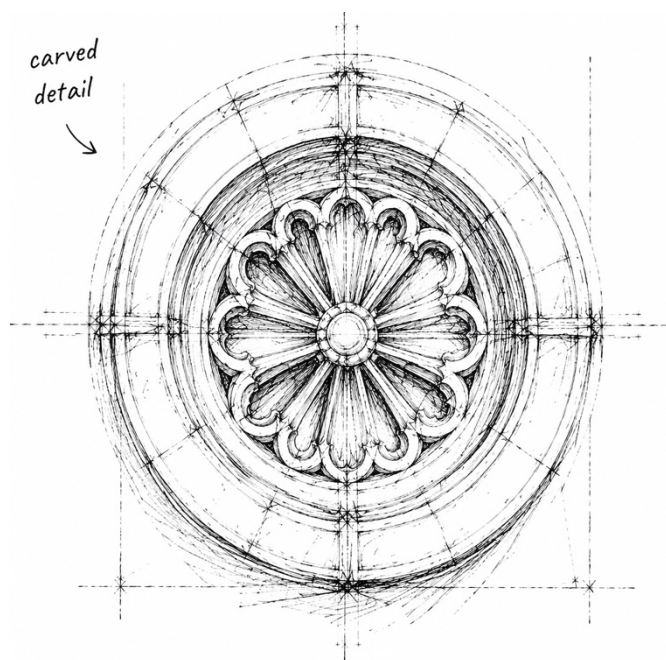
Forgive me for the times I become impatient, critical, or discouraged by the weaknesses I see in others. Help me remember how much I need Your grace as well. Like Phoebe, teach me to serve with humility, faithfulness, and love, seeking to honor You rather than draw attention to myself.

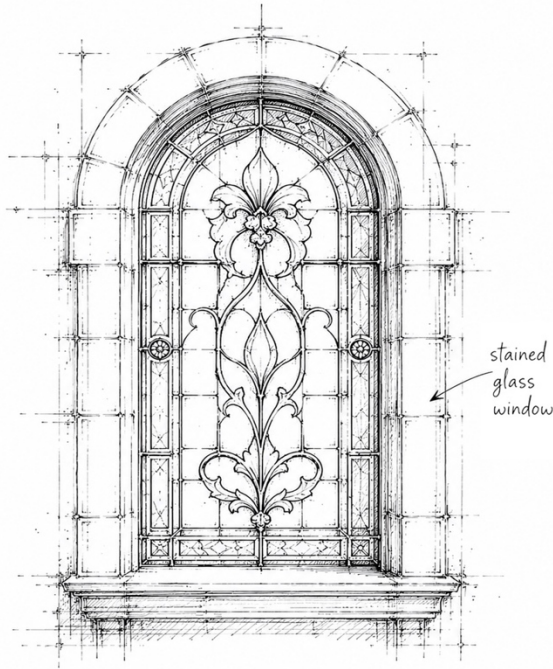
Help me encourage the weary, carry the burdens of others, and extend kindness to those around me. May Your love be evident in the way I speak, serve, forgive, and care for those within Your household.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter Eight

RADIANCE





LIGHT THROUGH THE WINDOWS

Scripture Focus: Proverbs 31:10–31

When my daughter got married, we knew right away where the ceremony should be—Elim Chapel. It's one of the older churches downtown, with the kind of beauty that welcomes you in. Built of pale stone, sturdy towers, and careful detail, Elim carries the quiet reverence of a place meant to endure.

And the arched windows? They have a quiet beauty all their own. When sunlight streams through the stained glass, it's as though Jesus Himself is lighting the room.

There's a lot of work that goes into making those windows. Planning the design. Cutting the glass. Fitting each piece into place. But even the artist will tell you that the art is nothing without light shining through.

On its own, the piece is dull and unimpressive. But once the light streams through the glass, something beautiful happens. Vibrant colors emerge. Patterns appear. The entire window comes alive.

There's an important lesson for us in all this—true beauty shines from within.

The world tends to judge a book by its cover. We notice faces, accomplishments, talents, and success. But God looks deeper within. He looks beyond what others can see and examines the heart. And when He begins His work there, the change doesn't stay hidden.

There's something beautiful about a life that reflects the character of Christ. As the Spirit works within us, God's light begins to shine through us. Little by little, Christ becomes more evident in the way we think, speak, and respond to others.

This is the radiance Scripture points us toward.

Not a beauty that fades over time, but a reflection of Christ that shines from within. A life marked by kindness, humility, patience, and love. Beauty that grows as we grow closer to Him.

Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

A smile, a word of encouragement, a glass of water, a prayer, a text, or a listening ear are just some of the ways we show love and glorify God. But let's not forget where the spotlight belongs.

The kindness they experience.

The encouragement they receive.

The forgiveness we extend.

The mercy we show.

The love we demonstrate.

All of it points beyond us to the One who is transforming us.

Sometimes we become discouraged by our weaknesses, limitations, or the areas where we still need to grow. We focus on our imperfections and forget that God has never asked us to create spiritual beauty on our own.

He calls us to abide in Christ.

As we walk with Him, the Holy Spirit works within us, and the life of Christ begins to shine through ordinary people in extraordinary ways. Kindness becomes more natural. Patience grows deeper. Love becomes more evident.

This is why radiance cannot be manufactured.

It cannot be achieved through effort alone.

It is the natural result of remaining close to Christ and yielding to the Holy Spirit. Just as fruit grows from a healthy tree, Christlike character grows from a life that abides in Him.

Paul writes, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1)

In other words, our lives need to match the gospel we profess. Actions are a powerful force. They will always speak louder than words. But what message are we sending? Are we humble and patient with difficult people? Are we kind when we’re challenged? Are we loving others the way Christ calls us to love, or only according to the way we feel?

*Christlike beauty
is not formed in a
moment. It grows as
we stay close to Him.*

These ordinary moments reveal what is taking place within our hearts. And each one is an opportunity to show the love of Christ, extend grace to others, and allow His character to shine through.

Of course, none of us reflects Him perfectly. There are days when our words come out sharper than we intended, when patience wears thin, and when our hearts remind us how much we still need His grace.

But even then, we aren’t left to ourselves. The same Lord who saved us is the One who continues to shape us.

Christlike beauty is not formed in a moment. It grows as we stay close to Him, return to Him when we stumble, and allow His Spirit to correct what is out of place. Little by little, He softens what is hard, strengthens what is weak, and teaches us to love in ways that look more like Him.

That is the beauty of a life surrendered to Christ.

The light does not begin with us.

It shines through us.

Just as stained glass comes alive when the sunlight passes through it, our lives become a testimony when the light of Christ is seen in us. Not so others will admire the glass, but so they will glorify the One who made the light shine.

Paul reminds us, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8, NIV). That is both our identity and our calling. We belong to Christ, and because we belong to Him, our lives are meant to reflect Him.

So we keep walking with Him. We keep yielding to His Spirit. We keep asking Him to make our hearts more tender, our words more gracious, and our love more sincere.

And as He does, His beauty becomes visible.

A quiet radiance.

A life changed by grace.

A heart through which the light of Christ can shine.

Word Study: Lights

In Philippians 2:15, Paul encourages believers to shine “like stars in the sky” as they live faithfully in a dark world.

The Greek word translated as “lights” or “stars” is φωστήρ (phōstēr). This word refers to a light-bearer, a shining body, or something that gives light within darkness. It was often used to describe the heavenly lights God placed in the sky to illuminate the world around them.

What a beautiful picture of the people of God.

Believers are not called to produce their own light through human effort or outward performance. The light comes from Christ Himself, who dwells within His people through the Holy Spirit. As we remain near to Him, His love, grace, and truth begin shining through our words, attitudes, and actions.

In a world often marked by confusion, fear, and spiritual darkness, even the smallest act of kindness, patience, faithfulness, or encouragement can

point others toward Christ. The Holy Spirit quietly works within believers, allowing His character to become increasingly visible through everyday life.

And little by little, the household begins to glow with the gentle evidence that the Light of the world is still dwelling among His people.

 Read John 15:1–8 and Matthew 5:14–16. What do these passages teach about the relationship between abiding in Christ and bearing spiritual fruit? How do they help us understand the source of the light believers are called to reflect?

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A Quiet Strength: The Proverbs 31 Woman

We’re a work in progress, you and I. And it’s all about growing in the likeness of Christ.

Day after day, the Holy Spirit is at work, patiently shaping our hearts, teaching us to love as Christ loves, value what He values, and respond to others with His grace. Over time, that inward work begins to spill out. Not all at once. Not perfectly. But little by little, the character of Christ shows up in the wisdom of our words and the kindness of our actions.

The Proverbs 31 Woman provides a beautiful picture of this kind of life.

When we read her story, it’s easy to focus on all that she does. She works diligently, cares for her household, plans wisely, and serves generously. Yet

beneath every action is something even more beautiful. Her life reflects a heart that has been shaped by the Lord.

That inward work can be seen everywhere.

In her kindness.

In her generosity.

In the wisdom of her words.

In the way she cares for the people God has placed in her life.

The way she faces the future with certainty.

Those around her experience the fruit of a heart that fears the Lord.

What a beautiful testimony to God's work within her.

The radiance of her life is not found in outward appearance or personal achievement. It shines through the quiet evidence of God's presence within her. Her character points beyond herself to the One who has been shaping her all along.

And so the Bible tells us,

"Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

Her story reminds us that a radiant life is dependent upon the work taking place in our hearts. And as the character of Christ grows within us, His presence becomes increasingly visible in the way that we live.



Faith in Action

Choose one opportunity today to intentionally reflect the character of Christ. It might be offering encouragement, extending patience, showing kindness, or meeting a practical need without being asked.

Before you do, spend a few moments with the Lord in prayer. Ask Him to let His light shine through you and to help your actions point others toward Him. Then serve quietly, remembering that the goal is not to draw attention to yourself, but to glorify the One whose light shines through you.

 Read Proverbs 31:25–31 and Galatians 5:22–23. Which fruit of the Spirit do you see reflected in the life of the Proverbs 31 Woman?

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 Have you ever seen the light of Christ shining through someone else's life? What qualities or actions reflected His character?

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The Prayer Closet

Think of one person within your home, church, or daily life who may quietly need encouragement, patience, or practical care right now. Ask the Lord to show you one simple way you can reflect His love to that person this week through faithful and gentle action.

Father in Heaven,

Thank You for filling Your household with the light of Your presence and the love of Christ. Thank You for the countless ways You encourage, strengthen, and care for Your people through the kindness of others.

Forgive me for the times I become distracted, impatient, or focused on myself instead of reflecting Your love to those around me. Like Tabitha, teach me to serve with a willing heart, looking for opportunities to bless others through simple acts of kindness and compassion.

Help me remember that no act of love is ever wasted in Your kingdom. Use my words, my actions, and even the ordinary moments of my day to bring encouragement to those who are weary. Keep my heart close to You so that the light of Christ shines clearly through my life.

May everything I do point others to Your goodness and grace.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANSWER KEY



Chapter 7

Read Ephesians 4:11–16 and 1 Peter 4:10. What do these passages teach about spiritual gifts, and why does God give different gifts to different believers within His family?

God gives spiritual gifts to every believer to serve others and strengthen the body of Christ. Different gifts are given so that God's people can work together, grow in unity, and build one another up in faith.

Read Acts 9:36–42 and Galatians 6:9–10. What do these passages teach about serving others within the household of faith, and why do seemingly ordinary acts of kindness matter in God's kingdom?

Believers are called to serve faithfully and do good to others, especially fellow Christians. Ordinary acts of kindness matter because they reflect God's love and often have a lasting impact on the lives of others.

When you think about your place in God's family, do you tend to serve with confidence, comparison, or hesitation? How might this chapter encourage you to trust the role God has given you?

This answer will be different for everyone.

Chapter 8

Read John 15:1–8 and Matthew 5:14–16. What do these passages teach about the relationship between abiding in Christ and bearing spiritual fruit? How do they help us understand the source of the light believers are called to reflect?

These passages teach that spiritual fruit is the result of remaining closely connected to Christ. The light believers reflect does not come from themselves but from Christ working within them.

Read Proverbs 31:25–31 and Galatians 5:22–23. Which fruit of the Spirit do you see reflected in the life of the Proverbs 31 Woman?

Several fruits of the Spirit are reflected in the life of the Proverbs 31 Woman:

- **Love** — She cares for her family and serves others selflessly (v. 27).
- **Kindness** — She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue (v. 26).
- **Goodness** — Her life is marked by godly character and good works (v. 31).
- **Faithfulness** — She fears the Lord and remains devoted to Him (v. 30).
- **Gentleness** — Her words are gracious and encouraging (v. 26).
- **Self-control** — She manages her household diligently and does not give way to idleness (v. 27).
- **Joy** — She can laugh at the days to come because of her confidence in God (v. 25).

Readers may identify additional examples, but these are some of the clearest fruits reflected in the passage.

Have you ever seen the light of Christ shining through someone else's life? What qualities or actions reflected His character?

This answer will be different for everyone.