



## Kingdom Values - 3 ACCEPTANCE

*ACCEPTANCE - Creating an environment where caring and close relationships are developed and nurtured.*

After tasting the freedom of the Gospel, the founders of our church community dreamed of a loving community – a “church without walls” – where *“everyone really feels welcome because no one is viewed by the members as a ‘backslider’ or an outsider or a misfit, but everyone is seen as a person who needs fellowship.”* On June 28, 1997, at our second meeting in my law office at West Covina (Amar-Azusa), I listed seven “walls” that we needed to tear down in order for Gospel Life to truly become a “church without walls.” Two of the seven walls that I described at that meeting them were:

**The Wall of Lifestyle** - We are known by most of the people we want to win (in the Filipino-American community) for the things that we are prohibited from doing, such as: not eating pork, shrimp and crabs, not smoking, drinking, etc.

**The Wall of Exclusivity** - Many of us have grown in our parents’ religion that had become a subculture of exclusivity. We have viewed non-members as outsiders to be shunned and avoided; they might contaminate us.

These things have erected a wall of separation between us and the people that we are supposed to win and love. We have been perceived as self-righteous and superior to the people of the world. How do we tear down these walls? We saw that we needed to mingle with the people that we were trying to win and lead to Christ, to accept them the way they were, and not to look down on them. They were not our enemy. They were the people that we supposed to love and win. We should become their true friends, meet their needs and earn their trust.

Ever since God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, we have lived in an unnatural environment, a world in which we were not designed to live. We were built to enjoy a garden without weeds, relationships without friction, fellowship without distance. We long for respect and involvement, impact and relationship. We are thirsty for what our soul thrives on. In the desert of a fallen world, our soul is parched. We receive neither respect nor involvement to the degree we deeply crave. We are dependent by nature and we require resources outside of ourselves.

God intended that we warmly respond to the loving strength of another, and what we were built to enjoy, we deeply desire. His plan really is quite simple. Adam and Eve were to turn to God as the strong one, on whom they could depend, and then to each other to both enjoy what the other uniquely provided and to give of themselves to enhance each other's pleasure.

Jesus said, *“I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35 NLT)*

You cannot obey this command by yourself, without being in a community. We need each other in order to grow as lovers like Christ. We cannot make our spiritual journey alone, we need to belong to a connecting community. The Holy Spirit has given gifts and resources in every Christian that, when released from one person and received into another, can promote substantial healing and transformation.

We need a safe place where all the truth about us – including the ugly and the beautiful – can be faced without fear of rejection. We need broken people who will provide safety for us by acknowledging our brokenness; caring people who want us to grow and believe that we can live a Christlike life. Friends who envision what the Spirit can do, who can identify with our pain as we wait for Christ to be formed in us. Friends who are intent not on figuring out how to improve our lives, but on being with us wherever our journey leads. Friends who discern our self-centered passions, hates them and may rebuke them, is hurt by them and may say so, but do not reject us as persons. They share without manipulation, they listen without prejudice, and they decide without self-interest.

Yes, we still live in a fallen world. We still all sin. You will fail to love me and I will fail to love you. Your failure to love me will be painful, sometimes profoundly disappointing. But the Lord's love for me is always perfect. Although His love will not remove the sting of your failure, it will give me all I need to stand as a whole person, capable of loving you regardless of the threat of your further failure. My love for (not yours for me) determines in large measure my experience of joy and my sense of wholeness. I can love because I am loved perfectly and fully by God. And, as I falteringly learn to love you without self-protection, I move toward the longed-for reality of abundant living in Christ's community.