

SOMETHING LOVE WOULD DO

Moving From Aspirational to Actual

"What do you want your church to be?"

The pastor looked at me. *"What do you mean?"*

"Tell me. What do you want your church to be?" I wanted to hear what was on his heart without steering his answer, so I waited.

"Faithful," he said.

"Faithful. That's great. What does that look like specifically?"

"People following Jesus with all of their hearts."

"Great. What does that look like specifically?"

"Well, they're reading Scripture, praying, and investing in each other."

"What does that look like specifically?"

There was a reason I kept asking. This pastor wanted his church to become more Harvest Forward. Yet, as we explored what that would look like, the people in the harvest hadn't come into view.

We cared about the harvest, but our words still lived *inside* the church. That's when I realized we needed to move from *aspirational* to *actual*.

Each answer gave us something else to explore. We were beginning to move from a word we both valued toward a picture we could actually see.

That was where I wanted our conversation to go. Into Monday morning, Tuesday afternoon, Thursday evening. Into the lives of people following Jesus when they were at work, at home, with their neighbors, or sitting across from someone who had never opened a Bible. What would faithfulness look like there?

We have a lot of beautiful words in the Church. Faithfulness. Community. Worship. Discipleship. Mission. We use them in conversations, put them on websites, and build vision statements around them.

Love God, Love People, A Place to Call Home, Belong-Believe-Become, No Perfect People Allowed, etc.



These statements look and sound right. And they express things that matter.

But what do they mean at the most personal level?

“Love people” takes on a different weight when the person asking for a seat at your table is having an affair, when the person who publicly humiliated you needs someone to stand beside them, or when your neighbor’s political opinions make every conversation uncomfortable. The statement gives us something to aspire to. Exploring these particular moments begins to show us what love could ask of us personally.

And then there’s, *“No perfect people allowed.”* It sounds welcoming. But what does that look like specifically? How broken can a person be before their presence makes us uncomfortable? What happens when their struggles become visible, their questions remain unresolved, or their healing takes longer than we expected?

These are the moments worth imagining together. What would welcoming this person look like? How would we walk alongside them? What might we need to learn?

Agreement about a statement can give us the impression that we share a picture. We don’t always. Ask a room full of people what community looks like, and some will describe a Sunday gathering. Others will describe a small group. Someone else will tell you about the friend who showed up at the hospital at two in the morning. The words come easily. The picture takes a little more exploration.

“What does that look like specifically?” gives us somewhere to begin. And we can ask it more than once.

How we ask matters. A gentle voice, an unhurried pace, and genuine interest give someone room to think. We can stay curious long enough for an answer to emerge that neither of us anticipated. Sometimes that answer begins with, “I’ve never really thought about it before.” That’s a valuable place to arrive. Now there’s something to uncover.

“We want our people to love their neighbors.”

What does that look like specifically?

“We want them to build relationships.”

What does that look like specifically?

And we keep exploring until we can picture someone learning the name of the person next door.

Making time for a conversation after a workout.

Uncovering that a coworker is caring for an aging parent.

Sharing a meal with someone whose experience of Christians has left them with more suspicion than curiosity.

Now we have faces. Places. Ordinary moments in which love can take shape.

Jesus often brought things into that kind of focus. When a man asked, “*Who is my neighbor?*” Jesus told a story about a wounded traveler and the person who stopped to care for him. Then He asked which person had acted as a neighbor and said, “*Go and do likewise*” (Luke 10:25–37). A question about love became a picture of mercy someone could practice.

Specifics bring responsibility with them. Once we can picture something, we can begin to consider what living it would ask of us. Time. Attention. Availability. A change in our plans. But they also uncover possibility. Something that sounded enormous can become a conversation we could have today.

The question belongs in our own lives, too.

“I want to follow Jesus more closely.”

What does that look like specifically?

“I want to be more present with my family.”

What does that look like specifically?

“I want the people around me to encounter the love of Jesus.”

What does that look like specifically?

Give yourself time to answer. Then stay curious about your answer.

Who comes to mind?

Where do your lives already overlap?

What could faithfulness look like the next time you’re together?

That’s where the aspirational begins to become actual.

Someone.

Somewhere.

Something love would do.