



# LOVE THE STRANGER

DAVE LEVSON

Have you ever been left out of a group or even excluded by a single person, not included, not felt warmly welcomed?

On our part, we should always try to include and warmly welcome people, especially new people! The Lord tells us to love the stranger! Deuteronomy 10:18-19, *"He does execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt"* (The King James Version will be used unless otherwise noted).

In Luke 10:33-35, the Samaritan (who was considered a stranger by many of the Jews, and looked down upon) stopped to help a wounded stranger by the side of the road. He did seven things for him:

1. Stopped to give of his time.
2. Bound up his wounds.
3. Poured in oil and wine for his wounds.
4. Put him on his donkey.
5. Took him to an inn where he could be cared for.
6. Paid for the man's stay.
7. Promised to pay for more stay upon returning.

Jesus also talked to a Samaritan woman, a stranger to many of the Jews (John 4:7-42).

Generally, in safe circumstances, we need to be a church and a people who are warm, loving, and welcoming, and not cliquish. What does it mean to be cliquish? The definition of a clique is a small group of people, with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them.

Cliques are groups that exclude other people, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It can happen with children, young people, or adults at any age or in any type of group. Exclusion can make people feel disliked, unimportant, hurt and/or angry.

Watch these situations and consider what the Lord really wants us to do:

**1. Children and young people, as an example:**

If you are a group playing soccer, or some other sport, and someone comes along, stands nearby and you sense they want to play, include them. Can you try to warmly welcome new people? If you are playing, or visiting with a group of friends, and someone wants to join, include them. Now wisdom is always needed because the scripture also says to *"Prove all things: hold fast that which is good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). There is a saying that is often spoken to children, "Don't talk to strangers." This is just a warning that some strangers can mean harm. Your parents and others can give you guidance.

**2. You are having a party or activity:**

Do you leave out people who would normally be part of that group? Could you invite people who aren't even part of the group? There is the parable in the Bible of invited guests to a banquet not coming, so the hosts went into the highways and byways to invite people (Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:16-24). As an example, at birthday celebrations or Christmas parties, etc. invite people who are lonely, or left out.

**3. Including people who are not like us:**

Do we have a tendency to leave out or look down on certain types of people? If we do, let's change that. Do we leave out people who are older or younger than we are, or not in our age group? All age groups need to appreciate all other age groups. Remember, we are one body in Jesus! We can all learn from one another! Does your family only talk to certain families and not others? What does Jesus want? I believe he wants us to be friendly to all.

**4. Within the family, there can be rejection:**

Think of Joseph (Genesis 37:3-11). Joseph was hated by his own brothers. You see someone who is alone, shut in, or needs a friend. What can you do?



You see people who are not of the same faith, race or culture, etc. as you. Can you and I make an effort to make friends with them?

Warnings to help balance the above:

1. Proverbs 1:16-22 tells us to be careful of those that run to do evil. Avoid scorners and others that are like that.
2. We are to prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
3. We must recognize that each person is unique. Respect those differences. People can have a high wall (a major barrier in relationships) or a low wall (easy to have relationships) in two areas - their family (those close to them) and all people (not in their family or those they don't know as well).
4. We have been warned that running off to evangelize the world and not look after our own family is a disorder (2 Thessalonians 3:10).
5. Jesus was the perfect example. He could talk to everybody and love them. However, he never neglected his family or his disciples. I feel it is just outstanding that Jesus, even when He had all that pain on the cross, took care of His mom by asking John to take care of her and call her mother, and told his mother to take John as her son (John 19:25-27).

What does it mean to be warm and welcoming? Romans 12:9-10, *"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another."* The Phillips translation gives more enlightenment, *"Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good. Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit."*

We need to be a warm church because many people are suffering from the cold within their hearts. Everyone needs to feel accepted and loved. We have to remember we all sin, we're not perfect and we are in all different stages of spiritual growth. A warm, welcoming church includes

the following:

1. Sincere love.
2. Pure actions.
3. Family affection. That is why we call each other brother, sister, etc. We need to treat each other like a loving family.
4. Diligent service. Romans 12:11, *"...serving the Lord."*
5. Mutual support. Be willing to help people and be willing to be helped.
6. Place of blessings. Speak blessings & encouragements to one another.
7. Connection. *"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep"* (Romans 12:15, KJV). *"Share the happiness of those who are happy and the sorrow of those who are sad"* (Romans 12:15, PHILLIPS).
8. Humility (putting others first).
9. Forgive. A great lesson was given by an archery coach. He told them to pick a picture of a person that they didn't like and he would put it on the target. After they all shot, he pulled their paper off the target. Behind each person's paper, there was a picture of Jesus.
10. Harmony. In the passage of Genesis 26:17-22, Isaac dug a well, but the Philistines took it away. He dug another and they took that away. Finally, he dug another well and they left him alone. This should tell us that sometimes we just have to "let it go" or "turn the other cheek."
11. Brother Waggar said that a stranger is just a friend that you haven't met yet.
12. Romans 12:16, in the Living Bible translation, is a good summary of it all, *"Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think that you know it all!"*

Let us all pray to be an inclusive, welcoming people who make a special effort to welcome new people into our midst! ✝

# BUT DANIEL RESOLVED

JERRY SMITH

*"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way"* (Daniel 1:8, NIV)

The book of Daniel starts with, *"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it"* (Daniel 1:1, NIV).

The first verse indicates that there is drama coming. Daniel is among the best of Jerusalem that have been taken from their homes and moved a great distance to Babylon against their will. The king, Nebuchadnezzar, wants these young men to be at their best even after they have walked for

months to Babylon. He wants food given to them that will bring them to their best form. He wants to feed them from his own table. Daniel and his three friends are given new names that represent them while in captivity. The four young men are likely around 16 years old. They are dedicated to their faith. They know that what the king is asking of them is against God's law. This is the back story. What comes next is where we have the most to learn and apply to our lives. The three words that give us direction are: "But Daniel determined" or resolved. These words demonstrate to us so much about commitment once we accept Jesus into our lives.

"But," the first word of verse 8 shows Daniel's commitment to God. He knows what is expected of him by the king and he knows what is right.

He has made a decision. He knows that his next move is going to define his future and likely put him in danger. The word “but” or “nevertheless,” as another translation puts it, indicates that there is a choice to be made. At this point, Daniel has made a commitment. He knows that there is no avoiding the choice. He knows the better way. It isn’t the food so much as it is the food off of the king’s table. By taking a stand he is saying that he is different from the world around him because of his love of God. Daniel makes a decision to follow the teachings of his people and follow what he knows to be right. When people see us as we go about our lives, we can be seen doing what the rest of the world is doing or we can be seen following Christ. The way we treat others around us, the things we do, or the words we use reflect back on us and our love of Christ. At work or at school or playing a sport, people are watching and noticing how we react to the stress of the situation. They see our boundaries. Like Daniel, we say “no” or “but.” We don’t compromise. We say, “No, not for me.” We give Christ the honour and the glory.

“Daniel” is the second word in the title of this drama. It names our hero, and it uses his real name which means “God is my judge.” The king gave Daniel a different name, *Belteshazzar*, which means “Bel protects his life.” The king wanted him to have a name that showed Daniel conforming to the ways and gods of Babylon. Daniel was born, raised, and named to honour God. The name that the king wanted for him was to honour the gods of Babylon. As we come to know Christ, we have the same knowledge. We are in a relationship with Him. When the opportunity comes to make a choice to follow Him or to eat from the king’s table, so to speak, we are seen by those around us. They see Daniel or any one of us and how we reflect our walk with God. Those around us see our commitment and our actions. Our name becomes like Daniel’s and shows that God is our judge. We spread the message of Christ in the same way that Daniel was called to do. We are all faced with decisions on a daily basis where we know what we are to do and what the world wants us to do. We know that God is watching and cheering for us. We have committed our lives to Him and

when we say, “but or nevertheless” to the world around us we are making a statement. In this way, we are like Daniel, so we can place our names in place of Daniel’s. When we dedicate our lives to Christ, we are like Daniel. We put aside the things of this world. We refuse the food from the king’s table, and we refuse to be identified with the names of the world.

The third word in the title of this essay is interpreted as: “resolved, determined, or purposed.” Daniel had made a decision. He knew his God and was in a relationship with Him. There was no question as to what he would do. It was more than the food that the king was telling him to take part in. Complying was becoming part of his court. The king wanted Daniel and his three friends to conform to his world. Daniel refused. He remained true to what God told him to do. Christ calls us to be different, to be seen by the world around us as His. In Daniel’s case, it was the food on the king’s table where he was called to take a stand. With us, it may be what we do or where we go or what crowd we associate with where we may need to take a stand. The king’s table could be so many things, and I suggest that we should know when we come across them. Our relationship with Christ will guide us as to the places where we need to make the stand that Daniel made.

The last thing that Daniel did was show respect to the chief official. He asked permission not to defile himself. He showed consideration for the official’s point of view. He didn’t agree with him, but he didn’t accuse him or judge him. He explained what he had to do and why in as few words as possible. Then he put his faith in God. His challenge was to eat food that was not from the king’s table for ten days and demonstrate his faith in God. It is also important to note that he had a positive relationship with the official. The official trusted Daniel even though it put him in danger with the king. In just a few words we see Daniel’s commitment, his relationship with God, his resolve, and his respect for his leaders and friends. As we move about in these difficult times we are, like Daniel, called to do the same. ✝

# BREATHING THE ATMOSPHERE OF GOD’S PRESENCE

(LEARNING TO REMAIN IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD)

## BRIAN HANNIGAN

### Our Grandson Callum

Since his birth in December 2022, Callum has had many struggles. He spent months in the hospital because he was unable to swallow. This also means he is unable to keep his airways clear. Now, as I write this, he is 9 months old, and at home. He is growing as he should. We are thankful to the Lord for all the prayers on his behalf. Although his swallowing is still in need of prayer, Callum is a delightful little gem in the family.

### Every Parent’s Desire For Their Newborn Child

There are 2 basic things parents want for their newborn child. First, that they can breathe. Second, that they can take food. Both have been challenging for Callum.

### A Spiritual Parallel

This experience has drawn my attention to breathing and eating. I’ve had plenty of time to ponder Callum’s need to eat and the methods used to meet that need. Also, much more concerning, Callum needed help to keep breathing.

As we all know, we eat **occasionally** or from time to time each day. but we must breathe **continuously**.

I’ve wondered if there is a spiritual parallel. I began to meditate on the **spiritual** aspects of eating and breathing. Until now I had thought that feeding spiritually, that is, reading God’s word daily, and attending to



fellowship with other believers, would contain all I needed for growing in Christ.

Now I perceive another essential, **the breath of God**. I have begun to consider that, in addition to feeding spiritually on Christ, in addition to feeding on God's Word, I need to be **breathing spiritually**. I need to be **abiding** in the atmosphere of God's presence. Let's examine what that looks like.

### God Created Us To Breathe Natural Air

Genesis 2:7, *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."*

Thus, God equipped humanity to draw in the air and extract the essential oxygen for life. In natural life, breathing is automatic and **continuous**. We **MUST breathe** continuously!

### Spiritual Breathing

I perceive that God **also** wants us to **learn to breathe** His atmosphere. He wants us with Him, living in the heavenly realms. Jesus invited us to **abide in Him!**

Once we experience the new birth, yes, as soon as we give our hearts to Jesus, God begins to breathe into us a new atmosphere. It's His presence. It's His anointing. We begin to learn what it feels like when our God is close to us.

### God's Life Support

Now I've begun to wonder, "Have I been breathing spiritually all along, since the new birth? Has God been sustaining me with His life support? Ever since I gave my heart to Jesus, has He been assisting me, breathing His Life into me because of His generous kindness and love? Has He been **sovereignly** keeping me breathing?"

### God Wants Us To Relocate Permanently Into His Presence

Let us consider this; God's ultimate goal is that we come to the place of being so connected to Him, so continuously abiding in His presence, that we are **breathing in** His Spirit continuously.

I've heard that in Jewish tradition when you have a guest in your home, you will keep filling their cup to indicate that you want them to linger. If you want them to stay a bit longer, keep topping up their cup. In Psalm 23, verse 5; *"my cup runneth over"* is a loving gesture from God for us to remain with Him forever!

This theme of remaining in God's presence is evident in many great hymns of the church, such as; "Friendship With Jesus, Fellowship Divine" and "Constantly Abiding."

Consider this; while we are **learning to breathe**, He sustains us. We are upheld by His life support until we learn to live **continuously** in His presence.

### What Is Spiritual Breathing?

What instructions do the scriptures have that foster continuous residing in the atmosphere of the Lord? Are there ways that we can abide continuously in His presence? **YES!**

**Prayer in your native language** - Praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

**Prayer in tongues** - Praying in the Holy Spirit - Always being filled with the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20-21).

**Worship** - worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

**Singing** - private and corporate singing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

**Blessing God** - Bless the Lord at all times (Psalm 34:1).

**Praising God** - Let praise be continually in my mouth (Psalm 34:1).

**Meditation** - Meditating on the Lord day and night (Psalm 119:97).

**Rejoicing** - Rejoicing in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4).

**Giving thanks** - In everything give thanks (Ephesians 5:20).

These are ways of drawing nigh to the Lord and to abiding **continuously** in His presence. We believe that it is God's intention for us to come to the place where we become so one with Jesus, with uninterrupted communion, that we will endlessly be abiding in, breathing in, the atmosphere of His life-giving presence.

### Let's Pray

Oh, Lord Jesus; You are so loving and good. You want me to reside continually in Your presence. Lord, take me to the place where I can abide with You forever more, even while living here on this earth. Let me abide in You and You abide in me. Help me to make the changes in my life so that I can breathe the atmosphere of Your presence. This is my sincere prayer. Amen. ✝

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