

RiCM Fellowship | Sunday, August 9, 2026

Loving Anyhow

Gathering at the Virtual Shared Table

RiCM gathered around the virtual table this Sunday with open hearts and ready spirits. The opening prayer set the tone beautifully - calling on God to let the word be made flesh among us, asking that our hearts remain open, that we be transformed and developed into the image bearers He calls us to be, and that the pastor's tongue be "the pen of a ready writer." From that first prayer to the final priestly blessing, the room held warmth, laughter, honesty, and the unmistakable presence of the Holy Spirit. This was a gathering of people who know each other, love each other, and trust each other enough to tell the truth.

Summary of the Gathering

Rooted in Romans 12:14-16, the fellowship pressed into one of the most countercultural callings of the Christian life - loving people who are hard to love, blessing those who cause trouble, weeping with those who weep, and living in genuine harmony with one another. The teaching drew from multiple translations, letting the text breathe in fresh ways: the New Living Translation's call to "bless those who persecute you," the Easy English Bible's tender charge to "ask God to be kind to them - do not ask Him to do bad things to them," and Matthew 5:43-48, where Jesus raises the standard entirely: *"Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven, for He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike."* The conversation moved fluidly between scripture and lived experience - a man in a Sam's Club parking lot with a Confederate flag on his hat, a gentleman named Robert at Exit 120 who learned to watch for a familiar car, a circle of little girls at camp who discovered they were sisters in Christ. Laughter surfaced alongside tears, and personal stories of unchecked anger, childhood wounds, and God's patient work of healing made the Word feel close and true. By the time the fellowship reached Galatians 3:28 - *"We no longer see each other in our former state - Jew or non-Jew, rich or poor, male or female, because we are all one through our union with Jesus Christ"* - something had settled in the room. This is what Romans 12 is really about: the heart posture of Jesus, lived out through us, one interaction at a time.

Key Themes & Teaching Highlights

1. Blessing as an Act of Spiritual Maturity

Romans 12:14 calls us to bless those who persecute us and to pray for God's kindness toward them - a command that cuts directly against every natural instinct. The Easy English Bible makes it plain: "Ask God to be kind to them. Do not ask Him to do bad things to them." The gathering acknowledged honestly that our first response to being wronged is rarely blessing - our nature pulls toward self-protection and retaliation. Yet the fellowship affirmed that intentionality and purpose, leaning on the Holy Spirit, make it possible to choose a different way. Blessing someone who has harmed us opens a door for that person's life to be changed forever; it shifts the whole trajectory of what could have been destruction into an opportunity for encounter with God.

2. Jesus as the Model: Loving Without Exception

The example of Jesus ran like a thread through the entire gathering. He washed Judas's feet knowing full well what Judas was about to do. He told Peter plainly that Peter would deny him three times - and stayed in a love relationship with him anyway. He had people who wanted him dead, and he never excluded them from his care. Matthew 5:44-45 grounds this in the Father's own character: God sends sunlight to the evil and the good, rain on the just and the unjust alike. The fellowship sat with a profound question: who are we to decide who deserves our grace and mercy when God extends His to everyone without condition? Loving like Jesus requires the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit - it takes God to love like God.

3. Seeing the Image Bearer, Even When the Image Is Hidden

One of the richest threads in the conversation centered on learning to see every person as an image bearer of God, even when their behavior obscures it. The gathering reflected on the concept of "treasure almost trashed" - the truth that people who lash out, push away, or act unlovely are often people in pain, communicating the only way they know how. Forgiving someone, the fellowship agreed, does not always mean immediate restored relationship - it means releasing the handcuff of unforgiveness that binds us to that person until we choose to let go. Galatians 3:28 reminds us that in Christ, the categories we use to separate ourselves dissolve: we are siblings, brothers and sisters through union with Him.

4. Presence as Ministry: Weeping With Those Who Weep

Romans 12:15-16 opened a tender conversation about the ministry of simply being present. The gathering named something quietly powerful - that showing up, sitting

with someone in their pain, rolling down a car window to acknowledge a person the world has made invisible, carries the love of Christ in ways words sometimes cannot. "Presence matters," someone offered, and the room agreed. Being an image bearer means being His hands, His eyes, His voice in the earth - and sometimes that looks like a nod, a hand raised in greeting, a phone call just to say "I hear you." The person who feels unseen, unwanted, unacknowledged carries a wound that genuine presence begins to heal.

5. Growing Up Into Love: From Reaction to Response

The closing portion of the gathering turned toward spiritual maturity with remarkable honesty. The fellowship reflected on Matthew 5:48 in the Amplified translation - *"You therefore must be perfect, growing into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity as your heavenly Father is perfect"* - and 1 Corinthians 13:11, *"When I was a child, I thought as a child, but when I grew up, I put away those childish things."* Members shared honestly about old patterns of reactivity, the internal boiling pot that overflows and scalds, and the work God has done to transform reaction into response. The Holy Spirit, the fellowship agreed, keeps pressing: what was acceptable at five years old does not serve the call at 56. Growing into love means going consistently to the One who is love, yielding to His formation, and trusting that He does the work in us through every circumstance as we give Him permission.

Closing Charge

Go from this table knowing that the heart of Romans 12 is the heart of Jesus - and that heart now lives in you. You carry His hands into every room, His eyes into every encounter, His voice into every moment someone needs to hear that they matter. The decision to love, to bless, to forgive, to show up - that decision belongs to you, and you can make it right now. The work of transformation belongs to God, and He will do it faithfully through every circumstance, every difficult person, every moment when your flesh pulls one way and His Spirit calls you another. Stay close to Him. He is the best thing that has ever happened to you - and He is too important to let anything build a wall between you and His presence.

Go now - and may the Lord bless you and guard you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and enlighten you, and be gracious, kind, merciful, and give favor to you. May the Lord lift up His approval and countenance upon you and give you peace, tranquility of heart, and life continually. In Jesus' name - and may it mess you up a whole lot. Amen.

Walking It Out

1. Pray intentionally this week for one person who has caused you pain or frustration - ask God to bless them and to show you how to see them as His image bearer.
2. Practice presence. Make one phone call, send one voice message, or roll down a window to acknowledge someone who often goes unseen.
3. When you feel the pull to react, pause and ask God: *What do you want me to say? How do you want me to move in this moment?*
4. Sit with God long enough to listen - morning prayer that includes silence, waiting to hear, not only speaking.
5. Keep each other, our families, friends, neighbors, and the nations lifted in prayer.

Weekly Prayer

Father, thank You for Your word that lives and breathes and meets us exactly where we are. Teach us to bless when everything in us wants to retaliate. Teach us to see the image bearer behind the hard face and the hard words. Give us the courage to show up - to weep with those who weep, to sit with the hurting, to roll down a window and say *I see you*. Forgive us for the unforgiveness we have carried, and set us free from every handcuff that keeps us tied to what we have not yet released. Do the work of maturity in us, Lord - move us from reaction to response, from milk to meat, from the old self to the new. We come to You because You are love, and we cannot walk this out without You. You are the best thing that has ever happened to us. We put You first - above everything. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture Reference List

- Romans 12:14-16 (New Living Translation, Easy English Bible)
- Matthew 5:43-48 (New Living Translation, Amplified Bible - v. 48)
- Galatians 3:28 (The Passion Translation)
- 1 Peter 3 (referenced - do not repay evil for evil)
- Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 (a time for every activity under heaven)
- 1 Corinthians 13:11 (when I was a child, I thought as a child)
- Numbers 6:24-26 (Aaronic Blessing - spoken over the gathering at closing)

RiCM Teaching Themes

1. **Healing, Forgiveness, and Restoration** - The gathering moved deeply through the terrain of unforgiveness, old wounds, and God's patient work of setting us free. This session offers rich content for this theme.

2. **Being Transformed from the Inside Out** - The conversation about growing from reaction to response, from childish patterns to godly maturity, speaks directly to renewal of the mind and spiritual formation.
3. **Seen, Loved, and Held by God** - Stories of acknowledging the unhoused, the overlooked, the little girls at camp, and personal testimonies of encountering God's protecting love all anchor beautifully in this theme.
4. **Faith for Everyday Life** - The teaching stayed grounded in ordinary moments - a parking lot, an interstate exit ramp, a childhood fight, a circle of girls at camp - making this session a strong fit for content about living faith where life actually happens.