

7 Steps to Change the World

Courtney Deacon Lalotra



BlueRose ONE INC.
S t o r i e s M a t t e r
New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

Copyright © Courtney Deacon Lalotra 2026

All rights reserved by author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

BlueRose Publishers takes no responsibility for any damages, losses, or liabilities that may arise from the use or misuse of the information, products, or services provided in this publication.



BlueRoseONE
Stories Matter
New Delhi • London

For permissions requests or inquiries regarding this publication,
please contact:

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

www.BlueRoseONE.com

info@bluerosepublishers.com

+91 8882 898 898

+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7310-515-4

Cover design: Aman Sharma

Typesetting: Manisha Rawat

First Edition: January 2026

Dedication



In loving memory of my first-grade teacher,

Mrs. Cindy Stier, who always told me, “*I’m going to read your book one day.*” She dreamed a dream for me that I didn’t even have for myself.

May her legacy continue to inspire teachers and leaders everywhere to see the hidden potential in every child, to believe in them before they believe in themselves, and to nurture the seeds of greatness with love and faith—changing the world, just as she did.

Support The Cindy Stier Memorial Fund:

<https://give.donationpay.org/charitysmith/cindymstiermemorialfund/>

To the children of *One Life to Love* —
your laughter is my song,
your courage is my teacher,
your dreams are the seeds of a better world.

To the faithful volunteers of *One Life to Love*,
more than helpers, you are family. Thank you for loving our
children sacrificially, with hearts that give beyond measure.
Your presence is the living proof that love can change the
world.

To Yogesh,
whose steady, unspoken witness has taught me more than words
ever could about working for the healing of hearts and lives...

To Adi and Bhavani,
who fill my world with joy, and whose laughter, curiosity, and
courage inspire me in everything I do...

To Mommy and Daddy,
who planted in me, from a young age, the belief that we were
created for bigger things, and who never let me forget it...

To Faith & Ben,
from whom I have always learned — through their love, their
kindness, and their grit...
-You all are the roots beneath my every step
and the wind behind my every leap.

And to the One who called me,
whose hands hold both the whole world and my fragile heart:
Every word, every story, every act of love is for You, because
You first loved us.

Introduction:



I first made the decision to move to India indefinitely in 2010. And I thought I was coming to help change the world. I had a heart full of passion, a suitcase full of hope, and a long list of ideas. But the truth is, India changed me long before I ever made a difference here.

I remember walking through the narrow lanes of a slum in Uttar Pradesh, hearing the sounds of rickshaws, temple bells, and children's laughter all mingling in the air. I was greeted with smiles that came from people who had far less than I did in material wealth, but an abundance of joy and hospitality. Women would invite me in for chai even when they didn't have enough milk for their own family. Children would grab my hands like we were lifelong friends. Their love and acceptance—in all its simplicity and purity— stirred something inside me.

I came to teach, to serve, to give — but I quickly realized I had so much to learn. I learned that changing the world isn't about starting with big movements, grand speeches, or thousands of followers. It's about starting small. It's about presence. It's about loving the person in front of you.

Over the years, I've sat in hospital waiting rooms with frightened mothers, played silly games in dusty courtyards with children who'd seen more pain than most adults, and listened to the whispered stories of girls who needed safety and someone to believe in them. These moments weren't on any stage. No one applauded. They didn't go viral. But they mattered — deeply.

This book, *7 Steps to Change the World*, is not a manual for activism or a blueprint for building a platform. It's an invitation to live a life that changes the atmosphere around you — a life that brings light into dark places, one act at a time.

The truth is, you don't need a platform. You need *presence*.

You need to start with yourself, listen deeply, take the small opportunities, live open-handed, create ripples of kindness, build real community, and root yourself in what is eternal.

Every chapter in this book comes from my own journey — the missteps, the lessons, and the small victories I've witnessed here in India and in my own heart. You'll read about children who have changed my life, stories from my faith and from cultures around the world, and practical ways to take the next small step toward being the change you want to see.

If you've ever felt like your life is too small to make a difference, I want you to know — the smallest seed can grow into the tallest tree. You are not too small, and your love is not too simple.

So let's begin — not with a plan to change the whole world at once, but with a willingness to love well, here and now.

Because that's how the world changes — one sacred, unnoticed act at a time.

Contents



Step One: Start With Yourself	1
Step Two: Listen Before You Speak.....	6
Step Three: Do the Small Thing	13
Step Four: Live Open-Handed	16
Step Five: Receive Before You Give	21
Step Six: When Giving Feels Heavy.....	28
Step Seven: Root Yourself in Something Eternal	32
Conclusion: One Sacred Act at a Time	37

Step One: Start With Yourself

*"The biggest change starts in
the smallest space — inside you."*

I used to think changing the world meant doing something *big*.
An event. A movement. A headline.

But when I first stepped into that small hut in India — mud walls, no windows, a thin mat on the floor — I realized something else: the biggest change starts in the smallest space. Inside you.

I was teaching in a school in a small village outside Vellore. I had big plans—I would teach them something, change them somehow... make a difference. But there was a small boy, no more than 8 years old. Though his frame was fragile, his anger towered strong.

He wouldn't sit still, nor would he let anyone else focus. The whole class was distracted. I found myself so frustrated—he was messing up all my plans!

Then one day, I looked into his eyes, and instead of defiance, I saw a broken child. Later, I would learn that he had lost both his parents to malaria, and his elderly grandmother struggled to care for him. Most days, he was left alone in the village, fending for himself. In that moment, my frustration melted into compassion.

I realized how much we perpetuate suffering when we think we are in control—when we cling to our plans and measure success by whether things go our way. And when life disrupts those plans, our world shakes. That day, I had to face my own wound: the deep need to control came from fear—fear of not being enough, fear that without results I would have no value.

So I chose differently. I softened my voice. Instead of demanding obedience, I invited him to help me—passing out pencils, leading games, drumming on the desk to start songs. I stopped seeing him as a problem and began seeing him as a person.

Something shifted. His anger didn't vanish overnight, but he began to meet my eyes with trust instead of resistance. He started sitting closer, leaning in during lessons. And in my heart or somewhere deep down in my soul, something healed. I learned that true transformation is never born from control, but from surrender—surrendering my need to prove myself, and choosing instead to love. In that space, both of us began to change.

The Inner Work Nobody Sees

Before I came to India, I thought my “qualifications” to help were my skills and my passion.

I didn't realize my greatest gift to others would be a heart that had been broken, healed, and softened again.

I learned that if we really want to change the world, we need to start with this slow, hidden work:

- Healing from the wounds you carry. (See more about this below)
- Surrendering your need to control. (See more about this in Step Four)
- Allowing yourself to be transformed by love before you try to share it. (See more in Step Five)

It's not glamorous. No one applauds when you sit in stillness and let God untangle your fears. But a life that radiates love is louder than any sermon.

Healing isn't forgetting. It's remembering differently. For years, I thought the only way forward was to “be strong” and push past the hurt. But unhealed wounds leak into everything — your words, your choices, your relationships. Unhealed wounds are the thief of joy.

If you want to experience the fullness of life we need to dig deep and heal our inner wounds. Here are some practical steps:

Name the wound.

Stop pretending it doesn't exist. Write it down. Speak it to God. Tell a trusted friend. When I began writing down my wounds — along with the fears and hurt that rippled from them — I found I could face them head-on.

Feel it fully.

You can't heal what you refuse to feel. Tears aren't weakness; they're release. I remember being deeply upset about something, venting to my husband repeatedly for days. Finally, he said, *"Just take a moment to feel the pain, anger, and frustration from this. Sit with it — as long as you need. Feel it fully."*

When I gave myself permission to dwell in the feeling, something shifted. Eventually, it lost its grip on me, and I could move forward in my healing journey.

Invite help.

Healing is rarely a solo journey. Let a counselor, mentor, or friend walk beside you. In One Life to Love's Girls' Education Program, we held a session on mental health. As the girls opened up, it became clear: they just needed someone safe to talk to. We encouraged each one not only to find a safe person, but to be that safe person for someone else. We need each other.

Choose forgiveness — even daily.

Forgiveness isn't excusing the hurt. It's refusing to let it own you. Holding onto bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies — it only harms us. Our ego tells us to cling to pain for protection. Forgiveness doesn't take away our

safety. In fact, it protects our well-being and renews our strength.

Let time do its work.

Scars form slowly. Be patient with yourself. Healing is not instant, but it is certain when we keep showing up for it.

Your Turn

Take a breath. Ask yourself:

What needs to change within me so I can be a light in the world?

You don't have to have all the answers. Just start with one honest thing. One place in your heart where you need grace.

Because here's the secret — when you change yourself, you change your presence. And your presence is the catalyst from which every ripple of change will flow.

Practice for Today:

Find seven minutes to sit in stillness- just seven minutes. No phone. No music. Just you, your breath, and God's presence.

Step Two: Listen Before You Speak

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." – Stephen Covey

There's a funny story about a man who went to the doctor complaining that his wife had a terrible hearing problem. He insisted she could hardly hear a word he said. The doctor suggested a simple test: "Stand a few feet behind her and ask a question. Keep moving closer until she responds, and we'll know how bad her hearing really is."

That evening, the man stood across the room and asked, "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. He moved a little closer. "Honey, what's for dinner?" Still nothing. Finally, he stood right behind her and repeated the question. She turned around, exasperated, and said, "For the third time, I said chicken!"

The man thought his wife had a hearing problem, but the problem wasn't with her ears—it was with his listening.

Too often, we approach people the same way, assuming they don't hear us, when in reality, we're the ones not listening.

The more time I spend in the dusty streets, on the broken steps outside someone's home, or in the crowded classrooms of our community schools, the more I realize:

People aren't starving for my advice.

They are starving for my ears.

There was one afternoon in particular — the kind where the air is heavy, the sun presses down on your shoulders, and the whole world feels slow. I was visiting a mother whose daughter had just joined one of our programs. She poured me tea and began to talk. At first, I thought she was giving me "background information" about her life. But as she spoke, I realized she wasn't asking for my opinion. She wasn't waiting for a solution.

She just needed someone to *hold her story*.

So I sat. I nodded. I asked gentle questions. I let the silences stretch longer than felt comfortable. And somewhere in that space, her eyes filled with tears. She told me things she had never said out loud — about her fears, her shame, her hope for her children.

By the time I left, nothing about her circumstances had changed. But her shoulders seemed lighter.

That's when I learned: listening *is* doing something.

Jesus, the Listener

The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35)

After His resurrection, two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, heartbroken and confused about Jesus' death. Jesus joined them, but they didn't recognize Him.

Instead of immediately interrupting or correcting them, He began by asking a simple question:

“What are you discussing together as you walk along?” (v. 17)

They poured out their grief, disappointment, and confusion — explaining everything they had seen and hoped for. Jesus listened without rushing them, allowing them to express their feelings fully. Only after they finished speaking did He respond, gently explaining the Scriptures and revealing the truth about Himself.

Jesus created space — He let them talk first, showing He valued their perspective. He drew them out with questions — His questions invited deeper sharing instead of shutting them down. And He responded with understanding — His answer built on what they had said, showing He had truly heard them.

True change doesn't start with speeches or action plans. It starts with presence.

Most people are carrying stories they've never told anyone, because they've never been given the space.

When we listen, we tell someone they matter- we let them process pain out loud instead of in silence. And we give them a mirror to see themselves and look into their own truth.

How to Listen With Compassion

Listening isn't just staying quiet while someone talks. It's leaning in with your whole self.

Try this:

1. **Put everything down.** The phone, the notebook, the mental to-do list.
2. **Look them in the eye.** Show with your face that you're here.
3. **Let silence be your friend.** Sometimes the deepest words come after the longest pause.
4. **Ask open questions.** "How did that feel?" instead of "Did that upset you?"
5. **Resist the urge to fix.** Your job is to hold the space, not solve the problem.

Listening has softened me. It's made me slower to speak, slower to judge. It's shown me that every person I meet has a depth I can't see until I'm willing to go there with them. When I listen, I don't just hear their words. I hear the cry of the poor, the stories of the hurting, the silence of the lonely. And each time, I'm reminded that the Kingdom of God grows in these quiet, unseen exchanges — one listening heart at a time.

I remember one day, a young girl came to me, her eyes darting nervously, her small hands clenched into tight fists. She had

been through things no child should ever have to endure, and she was looking for safety.

At first, I wanted to tell her everything was going to be okay, to map out a plan, to fix everything right there on the spot. But something in me — maybe the Spirit, maybe that gentle example of Jesus on the road to Emmaus— reminded me to stop.

So I sat with her.

I let her talk.

I let the silence stretch when she needed it.

I didn't rush in with solutions. I didn't tell her what to do next. I simply listened to her story, to the pain she had carried for so long without anyone to hear it. And as I listened, I realized something beautiful: she wasn't just a "girl in need." She had strength. She had insight. She had dreams. She carried a depth that silenced my need to fix her —wisdom carved by pain, courage held together by threads of hope. She carried storms and sunlight at once.

And in that moment, I realized she was not only being healed by being heard; I was being healed by hearing her.

That day, I understood what Jesus showed on that road: listening doesn't just protect someone, it restores their dignity. It reminds them that they are not just a problem to be solved, but a person who carries something worth offering.

Being Loved for Who I Am

When I first started One Life to Love, I thought I had to prove myself — to God, to donors, to the world. I believed my worth came from measurable results: how many children we helped, how many programs we launched.

Then came the day I had no energy left. I sat on the floor with a group of kids and just... listened. They told me about school, about their favorite games, about the monsoon rains. They didn't care about my "impact" — they just wanted me present.

That's when I understood: I am loved for *being*, not for *doing*.

The most freeing truth I've learned is this: God doesn't just see what we *do* — He sees who we *are*. As humans, we measure others' by their resume, their situation, their wealth, or even their mistakes. But God sees deeper. And we must aim to see others on a deeper level as well.

Many children show up at our gate at One Life to Love in need of help. They all touch our hearts in some way or another. I remember in particular when a young girl stood outside our gate barefoot, her dress torn, holding the hand of her little brother. A neighbor had brought her, saying she had nowhere safe to go. Before the girl said a word, I could feel her fear and her hope all tangled together. I didn't ask for her backstory immediately. I just sat with her, offered water, and listened.

As she slowly settled down, in between bites of a hot meal, tending to her siblings' cries, and playing with the toys we offered her, I learned her story. It was heartbreaking—but what mattered most in that moment was that she knew she was safe and that someone saw her, not just her situation.

Sometimes listening is the first step to changing a life, because it tells a person, "You matter. Your voice matters." In that safe space, healing can begin, and a person can start to believe in their own worth and find hope again.

Listening may seem small, but it is one of the most powerful acts of love. It creates room for pain to breathe and for dignity to rise. It bridges the gap between despair and possibility.

Listening doesn't cost us anything but our time and our presence, yet it has the power to give someone everything—the courage to heal, the strength to dream, and the hope to keep going. When we choose to listen, we don't just hear stories; we help rewrite them.

Practice for Today:

Listen to others. Whenever you feel the urge to interject with solutions and advice, pause and listen more. Ask questions and be intent on listening without the background noise in your head attempting to rationalize and solve their issue.

Step Three: Do the Small Thing

*“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that
your strength lies.” -Mother Teresa*

It's not about grand performances. It's about faithful, hidden love. A smile across a crowded street. A hot cup of chai shared with a neighbor. A text that simply says, "I was thinking about you."

The world changes in the unnoticed spaces.

Sometimes the small thing is the *only* thing you can do. When I was a young mother, physically exhausted and running on fumes, I thought I had nothing left to give. My health was faltering, my joy felt buried under layers of worry and fear. It was then I realized — God wasn't asking me to carry the whole world. He was asking me to carry the moment right in front of me.

One morning, while juggling breakfast dishes and school uniforms, my son looked up at me with sleepy eyes and simply said, "Mom, will you sit with me?" I almost brushed him off because the to-do list was screaming. But something in my heart whispered: *This is the small thing. This is the holy thing.*

So I sat. We didn't solve world hunger or broker peace treaties. We just sat together, sharing a few quiet moments before the day began. And yet, in that moment, love had the final word.

There's a story in Buddhist tradition about a poor woman who came to give alms. The wealthy gave bags of rice, but she brought only a single, small coin — all she had. The Buddha received her gift with the same honor as the greatest offerings, because he saw her heart. He taught his disciples that the size of the gift matters far less than the spirit in which it is given.

In Hindu tradition, there's a story about Krishna and a humble villager named Sudama who longed to offer him something but had no riches. All Sudama had were a few grains of rice. With trembling hands, he gave them to Krishna. Krishna smiled, received them with delight, and blessed Sudama abundantly. The act was tiny in material terms, but to Krishna, it was overflowing with love.

It's the same lesson Jesus taught when the boy offered five loaves and two fish (John 6:9). On its own, it was almost nothing. But in the hands of Jesus, it became a feast for thousands.

Small acts are not *less than*. They are the building blocks of real change!

And in every tradition — whether the Buddha, Krishna, or Jesus — we are reminded that God does not measure by the size of the gift but by the heart of the giver. And I see this truth lived out every day in our own community.

One of our students' mothers has a small patch of land where she grows vegetables. She doesn't have much, but whenever the vegetables ripen, she brings a basket to the school and donates them for the children. Other mothers will come to sweep the classrooms, wash dishes, or stitch torn uniforms. These are not things we ask of them; they are offerings born out of love.

It may look small in the eyes of the world — a broom, a needle, a bundle of fresh okra. But together, these acts create an environment of care, dignity, and belonging. They are the hidden bricks that hold up our community.

Mother Teresa's words ring true: "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." These mothers remind me that strength is not in grand gestures, but in the quiet, faithful giving of what little we have. And when we offer even the smallest thing with love, it multiplies into abundance for all.

Reflection:

- What is one small act of love I can give today?
- Am I overlooking something God has already placed in my hands?

Step Four: Live Open-Handed

*"Let come what comes, let go what goes.
See what remains"*

— *Ramana Maharshi.*

I like things neat, planned, predictable. But love doesn't grow in tight fists — only in open hands. Surrender doesn't mean giving up. It means giving over.

There's an old story of a man who slipped off the edge of a cliff. On his way down, he managed to grab hold of a tree branch. There he hung, trembling, knuckles white, calling out for help.

A voice answered from above: "I will help you. But first, you must let go."

The man clung tighter. "Let go? Are you crazy? If I let go, I'll fall!" Hour after hour passed, his strength fading, his grip weakening. Finally, exhausted, he released the branch—only to find solid ground just a few feet beneath him.

So many of us live like that man, grasping at control, holding on to what feels safe—our plans, our possessions, even our pain. But when our hands are clenched shut, nothing new can enter. We cannot receive.

Living open-handed does not mean carelessness. It means trust. It means loosening our grip on the illusion of control and allowing life to surprise us with what remains when we let go.

The truth is: it is only when we release that we discover the ground beneath our feet.

Henri Nouwen — a Catholic priest, writer, and theologian who dedicated his life to living simply and loving deeply, especially among people with disabilities once said::

"Dear God,

I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!

Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?

Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?

Please help me to gradually open my hands and to discover that I am not what I own, but what you want to give me.”

Living open-handed is not about recklessness or passivity. It's about trust. It's about loosening our grip on what we cannot control and making room for what we cannot yet imagine. An open hand can both release and receive—it lets go of what weighs us down and welcomes what is meant to stay.

And letting go doesn't happen in one dramatic moment. It's a daily practice — sometimes an hourly one. Every morning, I have to choose to release my grip again. I have to choose to let God be God. I have to choose to believe that His hands are far more capable than mine.

I think of Jesus at the well (John 4:5-30), weary from His journey, asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. She was surprised — confused even — that He, a Jewish man, would ask her for anything. But Jesus wasn't seeking water alone; He was inviting her into an exchange. She brought her jar, her ordinary gift, and He offered her living water in return.

That's the picture of open-handed living. Jesus didn't come demanding, nor did the woman walk away empty. In that simple moment of giving and receiving, both were honored.

When I imagine my life in God's hands, I see myself at that well. I hear Jesus' voice: “Will you give me a drink?” And I realize — He doesn't ask because He needs me, but because He delights in what I can offer when my hands are free. And when I give, I also receive the abundance He has been waiting to pour out all along.

You can visit any temple in India and you will leave with an offering known as Prasada. In Hindu tradition, *prasāda* (literally “grace” or “favor”) is food or an offering first given to God and then received back as blessed. The act reminds

devotees that nothing we have is truly ours — everything is first God’s gift, and when we release it with open hands, it returns multiplied with blessing. Living *open-handed* here means recognizing ourselves as stewards, not owners.

In many Native American traditions — such as the Lakota *waspi* or the Pacific Northwest *potlatch* — a “giveaway” ceremony is a profound expression of generosity, gratitude, and community. These gatherings often mark significant life events, honor individuals, or simply celebrate the bonds that hold people together. During the ceremony, possessions are freely given away — blankets, handmade crafts, food, even money — not as loss, but as gift. The act, sometimes lasting for days, strengthens community spirit, teaches respect, and carries a deep spiritual lesson: true wealth is found not in what we keep, but in what we release.

To live open-handedly is to step into the flow of giving and receiving that sustains all of life. Whether it is a mother offering vegetables from her garden, Jesus asking for water at the well, or a community giving away its most valued possessions in ceremony, the lesson is the same: when we release our grip, we make room for grace. Open hands not only let go — they are also ready to receive the fullness of love, peace, and abundance that a closed fist could never hold.

A simple practice:

- Each morning, picture your biggest worry sitting in your hands.
- Physically open your hands and say, “God, I give this to You.”
- When anxiety tries to take it back, open your hands again.

Reflection:

- What am I still clinging to that God is asking me to release?
- How can I practice “unclenching my fists” in one small way today?

Step Five: Receive Before You Give

The internal posture of being filled first

It's easy to talk about love. Harder to live loved.

We often rush to pour ourselves out for others — to serve, to comfort, to give. But what happens when the well runs dry? You can only pour what you've first received. Before you try to fill others, let love soak into you. Let it transform you from the inside out.

Receiving Without Earning

For many of us, receiving feels harder than giving. We're quick to brush off compliments, downplay kindness, or insist, "I'm fine, I don't need help." But love doesn't come with price tags or performance charts. To receive love is to accept that you are worthy simply because you exist.

I think of Sanju, a boy in our community with a learning disability. His early years were marked by neglect and abuse, and those experiences wrote a cruel script on his heart: *You are not enough. You are unworthy. You are broken.*

He carried those words into everything — his schoolwork, his friendships, even the way he held himself.

But then something began to shift. Patient teachers encouraged him. Friends included him. Slowly, Sanju allowed himself to believe that maybe he was worth loving after all. For the first time, he received love without suspicion, without deflecting.

Now, when you watch him, you see it everywhere. In the way he helps younger students carry their school bags. In the pride he takes in cleaning off the white board in the classroom. In the light in his eyes when he greets you. Sanju's life preaches the truth: once you let love take root inside, it overflows into everything you do.

Finding Safe Soil

Love grows best in places where you are seen and safe. Spend time with people who cherish you, not those who diminish you. Step into spaces that allow you to exhale. The soil of safety is where roots go deep, where your spirit can rest and expand without fear of being cut down.

Every heart knows the voice of an inner critic. That voice shouts: *Not enough. Not good enough. Never will be.* But another voice calls louder — the voice of the One who formed you. His words say: ***Beloved. Chosen. Enough.***

To live loved is to let God's voice take center stage, drowning out the critic with truth. This is not wishful thinking; it is reality spoken by the One who knows you fully and still delights in you.

The Gift of Rest

Exhaustion makes us brittle. We break easier when we're tired, and we mistake running on fumes for strength. But rest is not laziness. Rest is openness. In rest, your heart remembers it doesn't have to earn love — it can simply receive it. Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray. If even He paused, why wouldn't we?

Gratitude as Daily Receiving

Gratitude opens your hands to receive what is already being poured out. A sunrise painted across the sky. The sound of a child's laugh. A stranger who holds open a door. Small gifts, daily miracles. To notice them is to practice receiving. Gratitude softens your spirit, teaching you to see life itself as a gift.

When love takes root in you, it flows out naturally — not as a performance, but as overflow. The best gifts you give the world

are not wrung from you under pressure, but spilled from you in abundance.

To receive before you give is not selfish. It's alignment with the way love works. The open-handed life begins here: letting yourself be filled first, so you can offer something real, something alive, something that never runs dry.

Not “Treat Yourself” Love

It's important to pause here and say what this kind of receiving is *not*.

Our world is loud with slogans like “You deserve it” or “Treat yourself,” often attached to shopping bags, spa deals, or the latest gadget. But that kind of “self-love” is shallow at best. It's not really about nourishing the soul. More often, it's just another commercial tactic, a way to sell us something while pretending to meet a deeper need.

What I'm talking about here is something very different. To receive love is not about indulgence or accumulation. It's not about numbing our emptiness with quick pleasures. Real receiving is about opening your heart to what you cannot buy — grace, belonging, rest, truth, and the steady voice of God that says, ***You are already enough.***

This kind of love costs nothing and yet gives everything. It's what transformed Sanju, not a new possession or a fleeting experience. It's what fills us so that our giving is genuine, not forced or fabricated.

We live in a world that celebrates pouring out — giving, serving, doing — but often overlooks the sacred act of *receiving*. We're told to “be strong” and “keep going,” but rarely reminded that even Jesus sat down at a well and asked for a drink of water.

When I picture that scene, I see Jesus noticing the Samaritan woman — her struggle, her gifts, her pain, her progress. He didn't rush to fix her life. He didn't launch into a sermon. He simply *asked* her for something she could offer. In that moment, she wasn't a project; she was a person with dignity and value.

That image stays with me because I've been the one at the well — tired, dry, trying to serve without first filling up.

For me, one of the hardest parts of receiving is accepting help — even from the people who love me and believe in the work God has called me to.

I have an incredible Board of Directors at One Life to Love. These aren't just people who sign documents or attend meetings; they are people with hearts overflowing with love for the children we serve. They pray for us, advocate for us, and step in when the needs feel too big for me to carry alone.

And yet, I still catch myself resisting their help. It's humbling to admit that sometimes my pride masquerades as independence. I don't want to inconvenience anyone. I don't want to appear weak. But God is teaching me that love is reciprocal. Just as my board trusts me to lead, I must trust them to carry part of the weight. When I refuse help, I'm not just denying myself rest — I'm denying others the blessing of giving.

A Cup of Coffee and an Open Heart

One of our volunteers once told me a story that has stayed with me. She had just moved into a new neighborhood and wanted to be a good neighbor. She imagined herself baking cookies, hosting people in her home, and quickly becoming part of the community.

But the reality was different. She was exhausted from the move, her children were unsettled, and she felt like she had nothing to

offer. One afternoon, her elderly neighbor knocked on the door holding two steaming cups of coffee. “I thought you might need this,” the woman said simply.

Her first instinct was to protest: *Oh no, I should be the one welcoming you! I should be the one serving!* But something in her heart nudged her to just receive. So she sat down at her kitchen table with that cup of coffee, letting her neighbor’s kindness wash over her.

That moment of receiving — without earning, without guilt — changed everything. She realized that being part of a community didn’t start with her giving. It started with her allowing herself to be loved. And that simple act of acceptance gave her the strength to later host meals, care for others, and pour out in the ways she had hoped.

Sometimes the most practical way we can learn to live loved is to stop brushing off help, stop insisting we’re fine, and instead let someone else serve us. Even if it’s just a cup of coffee.

Sometimes, the greatest gift we can give others is the opportunity to give to us.

Practical Ways to Receive Before You Give

1. **Start small.** Accept compliments without brushing them off. When someone offers to carry a bag, say yes.
2. **Name your needs.** Write down what you *wish* someone would help you with — then share one of those with a trusted friend or colleague.
3. **See receiving as giving.** Remember: when you allow someone to help you, you give them the gift of purpose and connection.

4. **Fill your spiritual well first.** Set aside time daily to pray, meditate, or simply be still before God — not to *do*, but to *receive*.
5. **Remember Jesus' example.** If He, the Son of God, could ask for a drink of water, so can we.

Step Six: When Giving Feels Heavy

*External pressures, real-life burnout,
and how to carry love sustainably*

I wish I could tell you that every day in the work of One Life to Love feels like an overflow of joy and purpose — but that wouldn't be the truth. The reality is, even in work born out of love, there are days when giving feels heavy. Love is powerful, yes, but giving is still work. And sometimes, work gets heavy.

I used to think burnout only happened when people gave too much without being refilled. But I've learned it's not just about output. Sometimes the heaviness comes because we never stop long enough to process what we're carrying.

Why Giving Feels So Heavy

Think about the doctors and nurses during the COVID crisis. Day after day they worked double shifts, moving from one emergency to the next. They weren't only treating patients — they were absorbing grief that didn't belong to them but still lived in their bodies. Many didn't burn out simply because of long hours. They burned out because there was no space to *feel* the weight of what they were experiencing.

As Bessel van der Kolk writes in *The Body Keeps the Score*:

“Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body.”

That imprint lingers in all of us when we don't slow down to process. It's the teacher who grows numb to her students' pain, the humanitarian worker who smiles at a donor meeting an hour after holding a grieving child, the parent who keeps moving from task to task but feels like a stranger to their own emotions. It's not just exhaustion that makes giving heavy. It's the buildup of unprocessed grief, frustration, and fear — all stored in our bodies because we didn't give ourselves space to release it.

Sanju's Turning Point

Sanju, whose story I shared in Step Five, carried this same kind of hidden weight. For years, he was told he was unworthy. His learning disability made him the target of ridicule, and abuse left him believing that he had nothing of value to give.

Even in our home, where he was safe, his body told a story his words couldn't: his shoulders hunched as if bracing for blows, his eyes stayed low, and he gave away his belongings as if convinced he didn't deserve them anyway.

It wasn't until Sanju found safe spaces — moments to sit with caring staff who listened without judgment, times in music class when he could express emotions without words — that something began to shift. He wasn't just surviving anymore. He was *processing*. Slowly, love entered where shame had lived. Today, when Sanju smiles, it's wide and unguarded.

When he plays with other children, you can feel the joy radiating from him. His life is proof that when we create space to feel, to release, and to be loved, giving no longer crushes us. It flows freely.

Making Space to Heal

So how do we keep giving without breaking under the weight? We learn to stop, to feel, and to let the body catch up with the soul.

That can look like journaling at the end of the day instead of numbing with screens. It can look like debriefing with a trusted friend or colleague after a difficult experience instead of swallowing it down. It can be prayer, meditation, or even a simple breath before the next meeting.

As Bessel van der Kolk reminds us:

“Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.”

We don’t make space just by stepping away from the work — we make space by stepping *into* connection, safety, and honesty. Without that, the weight piles up silently until we collapse. When we make space, the burden lightens, and giving becomes not just sustainable, but life-giving again.

Micro-Practices for Lightening the Load

- **Two-Minute Reset:** Close your eyes, take five slow breaths, and notice where your body feels tight. Release the tension as you exhale.
- **End-of-Day Check-In:** Write down or speak to a loved one about one moment that felt heavy and one that brought joy. This helps your mind process and your heart recalibrate.
- **Safe Person Debrief:** Identify one person you can speak honestly with after a difficult day. Don’t just recount tasks — share how it *felt*.
- **Sacred Pauses:** Before walking into a new room or into a new task, stop for five seconds. Whisper a prayer, or simply say, “I am here, I am safe.”
- **Shared Burden:** Ask one trusted person to carry a piece of your load — whether that’s a practical task or simply praying for you.

Step Seven: Root Yourself in Something Eternal

*“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our
hearts are restless until they rest in You.”*

—Saint Augustine

Henri Nouwen, in his gentle wisdom, reminds us that life is fleeting, and unless we are anchored in something eternal, we will be tossed by every storm.

When I think about how much energy I have wasted on things that do not last — my appearance, my reputation, my to-do list, other people's opinions — I realize how easily I can drift. The truth is, our ancestors lived with eternity in mind. They planted trees they would never sit under, built homes their grandchildren would inherit, and told stories that would outlive them.

If we want to stay soft in a hard world, we must do the same.
Prayer. Stillness. Gratitude.

***Choosing not to live for applause, but for alignment with
what is eternal.***

The Wisdom of the Banyan Tree

In India, the banyan tree is more than just a plant — it's a living landmark, a gathering place, and a silent teacher. Its canopy can stretch wider than a city block, offering shade to hundreds of people at once.

In many villages, the banyan is the meeting place for elders, storytellers, and children at play.

What makes the banyan so remarkable is how it grows: from its branches, thin aerial roots drop toward the ground. Over time, these roots thicken into new trunks, each capable of standing on its own, yet still connected to the original tree. Some banyans have hundreds of these trunks, giving the appearance of an entire forest — but it's all one living organism.

The banyan reminds me that true strength isn't in standing tall alone, but in being deeply connected — to God, to our ancestors, to community, to the practices that keep our spirit alive.

How We Can Be Like the Banyan

Send Down Deep Roots

Just as the banyan's roots dig into the earth, we too can ground ourselves in practices that nourish our spirits and sustain us in times of drought. For some, this may be Scripture, prayer, or worship. For others, it may be meditation, yoga, or reading sacred poetry. It might be time in nature, sitting in silence, or cultivating friendships that remind us who we are.

Across traditions, the practice of “rooting” takes different forms. What they all share is the intention to anchor life in something deeper than the surface busyness of the world. When our roots are nourished by love, wisdom, and community, we can stand tall and extend our branches wide — offering shade and shelter to others, just as the banyan does.

Grow Many Supports

The banyan doesn't depend on a single trunk. It grows new roots wherever it needs them. In the same way, we can cultivate multiple supports — spiritual mentors, trusted friends, healthy rhythms, and practices of care — so when one area falters, others hold us steady.

Create Shade for Others

Under the banyan's canopy, travelers find rest and refreshment. We too can be that place of shade for others — offering time, presence, and compassion without demanding anything in return. When we create space for others to breathe, we embody the sacred rhythm of love that restores weary souls.

Stay Connected at the Core

No matter how far the banyan spreads, it remains one living organism. No matter how far life takes us, we remain strong when we stay connected to our Source. The banyan teaches us that connection is not only vertical, to the Source, but also horizontal, to one another. Its branches lean on each other; its roots intertwine beneath the soil. In the same way, our strength grows when we nurture relationships that remind us of truth, when we walk alongside others who bring us back to center.

Staying connected at the core doesn't always mean withdrawing from the world; often it means living *in* the world with a rooted awareness. A Muslim who pauses for daily prayer, a Buddhist who returns to mindfulness with each breath, a Christian who abides in Christ, a Hindu who surrenders through bhakti, an Indigenous elder who honors the land — all are practicing the same truth: we are healthiest when our branches reach outward only as far as our roots reach inward.

And though our paths may differ, when we act in love, when we build unity instead of walls, we find ourselves joined in the same sacred work. Love transcends culture, tradition, and religion; it is the soil that nourishes us all.

For me personally, this love finds its fullest expression in Jesus — whose great love reaches wider than any banyan's branches and deeper than any roots. His love steadies me, shelters me, and calls me to extend the same life-giving shade to the world around me.

Like the banyan, I am learning to send my own roots down daily: through prayer in the quiet of the morning, through returning to Scripture when my mind grows restless, through resting in stillness when my soul feels hurried, lighting a lamp in my home temple with thankfulness.

Sometimes my roots grow in unexpected places — a walk under the open sky, the laughter of my children, a conversation with a friend who reminds me of truth. Each root draws me back to the Source, so that no matter how wide or demanding life stretches, I know where I am grounded.

Practical Ways to Stay Rooted

- Begin your day in silence before checking your phone.
- Memorize a short prayer or verse you can return to during stress.
- Schedule regular times for prayer, gratitude and fellowship — and treat them as non-negotiable.
- Practice Sabbath: one day a week for rest, joy, and reconnection.
- Create “spiritual anchors” in your home — a candle, a cross, a verse — that draw you back to the eternal.

Conclusion:
One Sacred Act at a Time

You don't have to change the world. You just have to love the person in front of you.

That's how the world changes — not through grand strategies or heroic gestures, but through sacred, often unnoticed acts of love.

The *7 Steps* are not a formula for becoming a world-changer. They are an invitation into a way of living — a way of slowing down, listening deeply, creating space for rest, staying rooted in what sustains you, and giving from a place of freedom rather than fear. When lived out, these steps don't just impact global issues in abstract ways; they shape the way we greet our neighbor, comfort a child, care for a friend, or show up in our community.

I've seen it in Sanju, who once felt invisible, but through receiving love now carries it forward to others in quiet, powerful ways. I've seen it in working mothers who somehow still find room in their day to show kindness.

I've seen it in nurses and teachers who, even when weary, offer their presence with tenderness. None of them are trying to *save the world* — but each of them is changing it.

The truth is, the world doesn't need saviors. It needs lovers — ordinary people who are willing to respond to what's right in front of them with compassion and courage.

So as you close this book, take a breath. Release the pressure to do something “big enough.” Remember, the big change always starts small. The ripple always begins at the center. And every time you choose love — even when no one sees it, even when it feels insignificant — you are participating in the quiet revolution of hope.

That's how the world changes...

One sacred, unnoticed act at a time.

A Blessing:

*May your roots go deep into love that never fades, and may
you stand steady, offering shade and rest to those who pass
through your life.*