

Week Four: March 7, 2018 – March 13, 2018



HIS LOVE

I am learning to love God and love others.

“All you need is love, love, love is all you need.” While many people might be able to put the tune to these lyrics and might even have a qualified agreement with the sentiment, it is not hard to see that the word “love” requires some definition. If we look at John 3:16 we find a good starting place to speak about this love that we need. God’s love was expressed by sending his Son. We understand that this involved Jesus dying for our sins. This is love we need.

God is the fountain of true love. The apostle John said it well,

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

We love God because he first loved us. While that is a basic statement of our Christian faith it is the practical matter of learning to respond to God’s love that can be an interesting personal journey. Furthermore, learning to love others may also pose a challenge for us.

The ‘learning’ that is needed is not so much an information discovery as it is an experiential discovery. The latter sort of discovery is the desired outcome of this week in our Way of Jesus training.

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There are some Bible passages that are widely known in western culture. One very familiar account is the parable of the Good Samaritan. What might be less familiar is the situation in which Jesus introduced that parable. Jesus was responding to the question of a legal expert who had asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked him what he has found in the law to answer his own question. He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27)

While his answer was correct he showed his legal skill by introducing a technicality with an immediate question regarding the definition of the neighbour who should be in view. Jesus’ answer was revolutionary and has set the bar for Jesus’ followers. John echoed this when he wrote, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”(John 13:35)

Read and reflect on the following passage. You can record your reflections on the next page.

Luke 10:25-37

Let’s Get Personal:

How are you doing in the care of your neighbours? Many of us find the part of the parable of the Good Samaritan that is quite challenging is the part of those who were too busy with good things to help. What are some ways that you could show love to your neighbours this week?

My Reflections

LISTEN – What did God say to me?

TRUST – What do I have to believe in order to act on this?

OBEY – What are some ways that I should act on this?

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While we might like to think that we have a ready capacity to love our neighbours we often sidestep the actual opportunity to show that love. We believe that the reason for this is that we are busy. Maybe it is also in part because we do not practice giving love enough for it to become habitual. Where should we get this practice? Well, how about practicing on our family? Family members tend to be around quite a bit. After all, love is not simply a feeling but is in fact a practical expression that requires one who gives and one who receives. So, if you are going to be someone who gives love then everyone is a candidate to receive love.

Read and reflect on the following passages. You can record your reflections on the next page.

1 John 3:16

1 John 4:20-21

1 John 5:1-3

Let's Get Personal:

Why is it sometimes more difficult to give love to family members than it is to strangers? Have you found that to be your experience? Find a way to show love to a family member today.

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The story is told of a construction worker who spoke a great deal about his love for children. He didn't have any of his own but he enjoyed spending time with his nieces and nephews. On one job site he was pouring concrete sidewalks and discovered a little late that some children had left bicycle tire tracks before it had set up. He became quite agitated and a fellow worker said, "I thought you liked children." "I do," he replied, "I just don't like them in the concrete."

Love has some straining points for all of us. Even if we become habitual in the practice of love we may find that there are some things that test our capacity. Yet, the idea of loving God and neighbour is not an abstract idea. Love is to be in the concrete (and when people are in our concrete).

How does this relate to loving our enemies?

Read and reflect on the following passages. You can record your reflections on the next page.

Luke 6:27-36

Let's Get Personal:

Consider this statement: "You do not love God any more than the person you love the least." Do you think this is true? How hard is it for you to love your enemy?

How does Jesus' command to love our enemies impact your ideas of whether or not there is ever a 'just' war?

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When we consider how unlovable we have been as people who rebelled against a generous creator we should be reminded that it was God’s capacity to love and not our inherent loveableness that initiated his gift of salvation. The magnitude of that gift also speaks to God’s judgment on the magnitude of our sin. God’s love has reached out to us in the person of his Son. God still reaches out to sinners inviting to receive his gift. What this means to the follower of Jesus is that not only did his love reach to us but it also can reach through us. So, as Jesus followers, we are not limited by our capacity to love. Here is again a place where we practice the dependence on the Spirit of Jesus that we explored in the first week.

Read and reflect on the following passage. You can record your reflections on the next page.

Romans 5:1-11

Let’s Get Personal:

Have you had occasion when you found Jesus loving people through you? Did you have any trouble getting over the idea that their sin was somehow more odious than yours?

Who does God want to love through you today?

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Sermon Notes:

Memory Work for this Week

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:37-40)

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If we needed any more evidence to convince us that love is more than a feeling all we would need to do is consider a theme that John emphasised in both his gospel and epistles. That theme is the relation of loving God and obeying him. With this in view we understand that learning to love God means learning to obey him. While obedience should be understood as the appropriate response to God as our creator it is likewise to be understood as the appropriate response to God as our redeemer. Obedience is a love response.

Read and reflect on the following passages. You can record your reflections on the next page.

1John 2:3

1John 5:3

John 14:15

John 14:21

Let's Get Personal:

What does obedience to God look like for you at this point in your life? This is not a theoretical question. Be honest with yourself and with God and then act. Having done so, you will be in a better position to say, "I am learning to love God." It will likely follow that loving God in this way will overflow in your love to others as well.

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In ‘the love chapter’ of scripture (1 Corinthians 13) the apostle Paul was writing to a church that was so taken with ‘spiritual gifts’ they had lost sight of ‘being like Jesus.’ In their estimation having a notable gift was a cause of spiritual pride instead of spiritual humility. Regardless whether our gifts are believed to be natural or supernatural, the loving way of using them is for the benefit of others. We need to see ourselves as stewards of God’s good gifts and the use of those gifts as a way for us to show our love for God and others.

Read and reflect on the following passages. You can record your reflections on the next page.

1 Corinthians 13

1 John 3:16

Let’s Get Personal:

It is one thing to believe that we would rush in and play the hero in perilous circumstances and another to lay our lives down in daily acts of service. It is the latter that most of us will have the opportunity to do. What are some ways that you have found to lay your life down for the sake of others? What did you have to overcome in order to do that?

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