



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

The True
Meaning of
Love

Love in
Action

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

Every Piece
Matters

2016

September

Session 1 – The True Meaning of Love

This month our small group sessions will lay a foundation for our Fall Family Day this October. Additional information on Fall Family Day can be found on our website.

In preparation, we are going to discuss this month why Christ is the reason we love and serve others, and in this first session, we are going to look at the definition of love.

The word “love” has a vast range of uses in our language. We tell our parents or our significant other that we *love* them, and then we turn around and tell our friends that we *love* their shoes or that we *love* a certain food. So if the word “love” is used to express our affection for such a wide array of things, can we really pinpoint exactly what love means? And, how does human love compare to God’s love?

Let’s start by looking at the love we share with God and the love we share with other people. For humans, love is just one part of our nature, and we sometimes turn that characteristic off when we are around people we don’t really care for. God, however, doesn’t have love as a characteristic; He *is* love. And His perfect love extends equally over everything; it is the same for all of His children. In 1 John 4:7-8 it says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” We cannot know God if we do not love because He is the very definition of love. We want to work towards loving everyone as God does, equally and perfectly. Because we are imperfect humans, we will never truly be able to love as God loves, but we can strive towards a purer love.

1 Corinthians 13 offers possibly the most well-known exposition of love. Let’s start here to look at the different aspects of a pure, perfect love. You may want to read this chapter with your group after the video.

The first to third verses start with an underlying truth that without love, our actions and faith have no meaning. We can have all the faith and wisdom in the world, but if there is no love behind it, we are nothing. We can help the poor or make sacrifices to help others, but if we do not do those things with love in our hearts, then we’re not acting in the mind of Christ. Just as we hear in James 2:26 that faith without works is dead, similarly, works without love have no meaning. Paul even instructs in 1 Corinthians 16:14, “Let all that you do be done with love.” If love isn’t our motivation for doing something, then we must ask ourselves what is. We must always look for ways to increase our love for each other.

If love should be the basis of all that we do, then we can look to the fourth to seventh verses of 1 Corinthians 13 for a good frame work of what our love for others should be like. Our love for others, and for God, must be kind; it is not jealous; it is not prideful; there are no evil thoughts associated with our love; it is not immoral; it finds joy in sharing truths with one another. With love, we can find strength to endure through tough moments, and we can see the hope in all situations. This is what a pure love looks like. Think of the last time you said “I love you” to somebody. When you said this, what did you mean? A godly love has all of these meanings attached to it, so when we show or tell people that we love them, it means we feel kindness toward them; we don’t think we are better than them in any way; we’re not envious of anything they possess; we’re joyful in our openness with them; and we believe and hope in our relationship with them that we can overcome any struggle.

Are you having trouble loving every person in your life in this way? When our love resembles all the different aspects laid out in 1 Corinthians 13, it has the power to transform our own lives and the lives of others. How can we make this kind of love come alive? The first thing we need to do is look to Christ. Think of how Christ’s display of love through His sacrifice has transformed your own life. We want to love others because He loves us so much that He gave His life for us. We can also work towards having a pure and selfless love by helping and serving others. Our love for each other doesn’t necessarily need to be displayed in grand actions, but in the sacrifices we make to help others or in the sincerity in which we serve. When we can help with no self-serving motivation behind it, we build the type of love that Paul talks about.

This is when we have the opportunity to discover and share the true transformational power of loving one another as Christ loves all.

In next week's session, we're going to delve further into the connection between loving and serving one another.

Session 2 – Love in Action

Welcome back. We're now in our second week of preparation for Fall Family Day and in this session we will focus on Jesus' teaching found in Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus speaks of the future when He will separate people into two groups, one on the right, the other on the left, the way a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats. As Jesus unfolds this scene, we learn that the groups have been separated into the "righteous" and the "cursed" based on how they had responded to their fellow human beings who had found themselves in need. The "righteous" acted and helped those in need, and the "cursed" failed to act and did not help. However, Jesus confuses both groups by saying that they had either done or not done those acts of help to *Him*: the righteous group fed *Him* and gave *Him* drink; they took *Him* in; they clothed *Him*; they visited *Him* when He was sick; and they came to *Him* when He was in prison. The other group did none of those things. Yet neither group can remember any of this happening to Jesus.

Then, finally, Jesus explains what He means, saying to the group that acted, "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." To the group that failed to act, He said, "inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." He concludes with these words: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

So what are we to make of this?

Is Jesus speaking literally? Is Jesus really teaching that, to the extent of our ability, we are to provide food to other human beings who are, quite literally, hungry? The book of James says, "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (James 2:15-16).

Or, is Jesus speaking figuratively? Is He simply using physical human conditions we can relate to as a metaphor for spiritual conditions? Jesus does this elsewhere in Scripture, describing Himself as the "bread of life" (John 6:35) and admonishing us to "not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because His Father has set His seal on Him" (John 6:27).

The answer is that Jesus is speaking both literally *and* figuratively – a conclusion reached by examining His life.

The Gospels record Him feeding the hungry: consider the miracles where He once fed five thousand and another time, four thousand. From the Gospel accounts we know that He healed many people – lepers, the blind, the lame, and He even brought back to life a few who had died. As for taking in strangers – He was criticized for keeping company with publicans and harlots, and He broke social custom when He engaged in conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. Furthermore, the early church engaged in the practice of helping brothers and sisters, as described in Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:32-35. God even permitted several of His apostles and servants to be imprisoned, allowing them to preach the Gospel to other prisoners and guards alike (Acts 16:25-32). We can make a very good case that Jesus was bringing a literal message to care for those in physical need.

We also know that Jesus – True Man and True God – did not come to earth to eradicate hunger, poverty, disease, or wrongdoing. While Jesus walked on earth, people went to bed hungry, they were poor, they got sick, they committed

crimes, and some were treated miserably as outcasts and victims of injustice. The same things happen today, as He foretold to His disciples, saying, "... the poor you have with you always..." (John 12:8).

Jesus' mission was not to give humans a carefree life, but a path to eternal life. He did not come to eradicate evil from this world, but to pave a way to salvation – eternal fellowship with God in a place where evil does not exist. Thus it becomes important for us as Christians not only to reach out to our neighbors to provide help for their physical, temporal well-being. That is only half the equation. We are also called to introduce them to God's plan of salvation and Jesus' sacrificial love. After all, people of all faiths – and of no faith – offer humanitarian aid to their fellow man. Only we as Christians can introduce them to God's plan of salvation and the love Jesus Christ has for them. Thus it becomes important for us to see Jesus' teaching in both its literal and figurative contexts.

Let's consider some other interesting aspects of these verses.

Each one of the people Jesus spoke about was in need. They were hungry and thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick, or imprisoned. Their need was of an undetermined duration. What does it mean to be hungry and thirsty, to be naked, to be sick, or to be imprisoned in the figurative, spiritual context?

Large numbers of refugees are migrating to Europe hoping to find a home there. For our European brothers and sisters, taking in "strangers" has a very definite literal and figurative context. What about here in the United States? What would Jesus' definition of a "stranger" be for us, literally and figuratively? How can we "take them in"?

In His discourse in Matthew 25, Jesus tells us what each group did, or didn't do, but does not tell us why. That is left for us to figure out.

Jesus does not address the following questions:

- Did those who acted expect any reward or payback?
- Was it convenient for those who took action?
- Did those who act feel particularly gifted or passionate about the work they did?

What parallels can we draw, through these questions, to our own serving?

One final thought for your consideration. In the end, the righteous inherit eternal life not because of their works, but because their hearts were transformed by the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That transformation is shown in part by their compassion for, not indifference to, the "least."

Please, take time now with your group to discuss the questions asked in this video and see where the Holy Spirit leads your understanding of love in action.

Session 3 – Every Piece Matters

During our midweek sessions this month, we have been talking about how our love for God inspires our desire to get involved and help others. Every person in our congregation has been called with a purpose, with a role to play, to help the congregation work towards its mission. Sometimes knowing what to do isn't so clear and from time to time, we may feel like we have nothing to offer in the activities of the congregation and mission of the church. Let's take a look together at the experience of the feeding of the 5,000 documented in the Gospels and learn together to think big and that every person has something to give to serve God and others.

Jesus had journeyed with His disciples to a deserted place, and they were followed by a great multitude of people. Jesus spent the day teaching the group many things, and when the day had been well spent and evening was setting in, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him to disperse the group so they could walk to the nearby villages and get something to eat. Jesus had a different idea. He had a desire to teach them all that He is the bread that gives eternal life. So He tells His disciples that the people “do not need to go away. You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:16). Jesus had a much greater vision than His disciples. What about us? Do we think too small? Do we all too often look at situations in pessimistic ways? Do we back away from situations because we feel that we have nothing to give or that it is impossible to help? Do we sit back and wait for others to jump in to assist? Jesus told the disciples to give the people something to eat because He knew that the disciples had what they needed in order to help.

In response to Jesus’ exhortation for them to give the people something to eat, the disciples looked at what they had available to share with the group. They found a young boy who was willing to give the five loaves of bread and two fish that he had brought with him. But the disciples did not see how it would be possible to feed so many with so little. When they brought what they had before Jesus, they may have expected Him to agree with their original wish to send the people away, but Jesus instead instructs them to have the people “sit down in groups on the green grass” (Mark 6:39). Jesus then took the five loaves and two fish and “looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.” They all ate to their fill.

There are a few things that we can learn from this part of the story. First, let us learn from the young boy who had come prepared for the day with a meal. The Gospels simply tell us what he had brought and that it was used by Jesus to feed everyone. The boy simply played his role, gave what he had, and stepped out of the way. Let’s follow the young man’s example in our lives. Be willing to give what you have and then simply allow Jesus to use it to help someone. Sometimes we try to do too much when we only have to lay the groundwork for Jesus and the Holy Spirit to impact the hearts of others. And second, recognize what you already have been given by God and be willing to get involved. Have you ever felt inclined to get involved but stopped yourself because you felt you weren’t equipped to do the work? God has gifted all of His children with tools to do Kingdom work. Don’t hold yourselves back, waiting until you feel like you have enough to share. When the Holy Spirit prompts you to take action, be confident in God that He has given you what you need. Remember, when Christ dwells within you, you always have something to share.

Initially, the disciples were worried that they wouldn’t have enough food to feed all who were there, and perhaps they even feared that they wouldn’t have enough to satisfy their own appetites. But the Gospels tell us that after all had eaten to their fill, the disciples were able to gather up twelve baskets of leftovers. Do you stop yourself from getting involved out of the fear that there will be nothing left for you or that you’ll lose your place in the Kingdom to someone else? Place your trust and confidence in God and be confident that as you care for others, He will care for you, and when it comes to the love of Jesus Christ, there will always be more than enough for all.

Our congregations are blessed to have people from different backgrounds with a variety of gifts to offer. As Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 12:4-6: “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them....” We are united by a common goal – to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people. We demonstrate our love for others by sharing with them the love that God has shown us. Each one has a significant role to play, and we pray that you have been encouraged by this series of sessions to think big, get involved, and to share with others what you have been blessed with.