

Extend
Session 4

Love is a
Process

Updated: June, 2013

The final chapter in our Lifestyle of Love.

Already we have come to realize that our love for God and for each other is based upon the covenant which we share in Jesus. We had a great time remembering and re-pledging our covenant together at the Lord's Table.

And, we have understood that the love Jesus calls us to is not a “gushy” feeling, but a “gutsy” lifestyle. It is a commitment to act out our love toward one another motivated by that love rather than by whether we feel like doing it or not - the same motivation we see in Jesus' life.

But, how in the world am I going to be able to love like Jesus loved?

- * People I don't know or even like
- * When it's the last thing I feel like doing
- * When they have never shown love to me

How can I be what Jesus wants me to be??

Tonight, we turn to the “Process” in our life of love

*Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it—
because it does!—I Corinthians 14:1 (The Message)*

Jesus knows and understands that our love-walk with Him and with our brothers will be a growing walk.

Illustration:

We don't expect immediate proficiency from our own children;
Just so God doesn't expect it from us.

So, there is a process to this love learning.

LOVE IS A PROCESS

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LOVE—LEARNING

Love is developed through **practice**. It is:

Not a “gift” that is given
but a “fruit” that is produced.

Love does not **grow in a vacuum**.

but rather in the midst of intimate relationships.

“JUST AS MUCH AS I LOVE YOU” John 13:34

Example — Jesus and His Disciples

1. They were men of **His choosing**.
2. There were not **3000** but only **12**.
3. They spent **3 1/2** years together.

TWO INITIAL LABORATORIES — Where love can be “actualized.”

1. **Our family**
2. **Our fellowship group**

Jesus wants to teach us through all our relationships that we are to “live out our love in a concrete way, day in and day out, regardless of how we feel about it or about them.

*Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender hearted mercies,
kindness, humility, meekness longsuffering; bearing with one another and
forgiving one another even as Christ forgave you, so you must do.*

—Colossians 3:12-13 (NIV)

*Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it
all you’ve got, be resolute, and love without stopping.*

—I Corinthians 16:13-14 “The Message”

LOVE— LEARNING

Love is developed through **practice**.

- * Learning a new skill or acquiring a new attitude always requires a training period.
- * Some Christians think they will just sit around and it will happen. Not so.
- * Love is not a gift. You don't receive it by the laying on of hands or by just asking for it like you do healing, miracles, tongues, etc.
- * If we could receive love in that way, there would be a line all the way from here to New Delhi to receive it.
- * No, Love is a fruit; A fruit that generates and grows within us. And, it does not happen overnight either.

Love does not **grow in a vacuum**.

- * Covenant love is never experienced on an island all alone. Rather, we must let the Holy Spirit put us deeply and closely with the people He is calling us to love.
- * In this way our growing love can be tested and manifested as we get intimately involved with these people.
- * Jesus' kind of love only grows in the type of relationships that breed love.

“JUST AS MUCH AS I LOVE YOU” John 13:34

“Just as” means the same manner, same degree, same actions and same ways!!

Now that's a scary proposition.

Who has ever lived as Jesus lived?

- * Laid down His life
- * Served with utter selflessness
- * Loved those hard to love (the unlovely)
- * Loved even His enemies

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As always, Jesus is our example. Notice the context in which He gave this commandment.

1. They were men of **His choosing**

Jesus disciples were a motley crew! Normally they would have had nothing to do with each other. But, He chose them and put them together.

- * Simon the Zealot, the ultra-nationalist, the guerrilla of his day.
- * Matthew the Tax collector, called a “scab” by his peers.
- * James and John, the Sons of Thunder
- * Judas, the Betrayer

Let me tell you a secret:

You’re not always going to choose who you will associate with. Jesus knows how to bless or afflict you with those who will best train you in the “art of loving.”

(Often there will be an “extra special love required” person to really help form up His life within you.)

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2. They were not 3,000 but only 12

- * With 3,000 it is impossible to love each one deeply; with 11 others, we can do it.
- * When you were first born again, you may have had the desire to love everybody, but you didn't have the ability to do so.
- * You soon discovered that you just couldn't love everyone in the whole church in the same manner and to the same degree.
- * If love were just an emotion, then "yes," you probably could love all 350 in our congregation at the same time.
- * But, if your love involves a series of actions, being personally committed to each individual, then you can't. Your love would only be a thin veneer if you tried to spread it around that far.
- * Jesus modeled this for us:
 - He loved the crowds, yes.
 - But then He gave special training and more of Himself to the 70.
 - Closer still to Him were the 12.
 - And, even amongst them there was an inner circle of 3.
- * God will put us with some at a greater depth and closeness than others. Is this unfair? No, it's just reality.
 - A sociologist at the Univ. of Delaware claims, "After your group becomes more than 12, some are 'by-standers'."

We can stand only so many flowing through our lives at one time.

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3. They had spent 3 ½ Years together. - They were not new believers.

They had eaten, slept, learned, ministered and spent most of their time together. A strong relationship had been forged.

* Now, Jesus says, “All right, you 12, here is my major commandment, I want you to love each other as I have loved you.”

- We often lay this on people when they are only 3 months old in the Lord. You are to love everybody you are in association with just like Jesus did (your family, all those at work, all in the church, etc.).

- But they are totally incapable. They haven't grown to the point where they can begin to do this.

* Jesus issued this command only after they had been discipled and had lived together for 3 ½ years.

* Why did He wait that long?

- Because what He was commanding was not just a nice feeling for all those in the house of God, but it was to be a committed, life-laying-down-by-their-actions love.

- It was the kind of love we have been talking about these past two weeks.

- An “as He did” love – sets aside our own desires, concerns, schedules and self-will to do it.

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TWO LABORATORIES -- where love can be “actualized.”

1. Our Family - It starts here, where love must be actualized vs. theorized!

- * This is the hardest place, but it must be the 1st place.

Here they know us so well, and we know them so well, that it will be hard to get away with pretense. Usually things are real at home.

- * Marriage is the testing ground.

There are too many Christian leaders who look great in the public eye, but their family is in sad shape! (They're inconsistent when at home, the parents are not demonstrating love to each other and the children are fighting among themselves.)

- * The New Testament indicates –

IF IT DOESN'T WORK AT HOME, DON'T EXPORT IT!

2. Our Fellowship Group (F.L.C. is a good model. Here one discovers the value of regularly meeting with people, coming to know them, trust them and love them.)

- * Many Christians join the larger church group without ever finding and giving themselves to the smaller group where they can experience deep relationships. Perhaps they never grew up in a family that was close.

- * The Bible says we are “members of one another.”

- It's in the small groups where we can work our love down deeper than ¼ inch; we can get it into the core of our being: test it, prove it, let it become genuine and then we can export it!

- His love will then become further “incarnate” in the world through us.

- If you learn to truly love in the group to whom you are committed, then I will get some of the overflow, because your capacity to love keeps growing. Your love will begin to touch others, too, as it moves out in ever expanding circles.

Any marriage where the capacity to love is not growing, is sad!

Any church where the capacity to love is not growing and flowing, is sad!

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THE LOVE LEARNING PROCESS WILL REQUIRE:

1. **Transparency** - Nothing will be hidden. You can see through me.

* Take off your mask --

- Whatever it is you're facing, "Rejoice" in it or "deal" with it!

Illustration: If people really knew who I am.

Stop it! That's the enemy talking!! Your family loves you – so will your brothers and sisters in Christ; and sometimes even more deeply than your natural family.

* "Walk in the light....." I John 1: 7

- Light dispels darkness

Illustration: flip the switch and a child's fear of the shadows is gone.

- Light promotes fellowship; darkness squelches it.

It's not that we don't sin. It's just that we immediately deal with it when we do sin. (See I John1: 8-10)

* Risk coming into the light.

- Let God's love and presence penetrate and illumine every part of your situation.

- When you are not denying, or hiding or covering; but rather you are repenting, then you will want God to deal with you and change you. What freedom results in your relationship with God and with you brothers as well!!

The Other Side

* Let others take off their masks and walk in the light too!

DON'T

- Turn them off
- Shut them down or
- Talk behind their back

Transparency creates the atmosphere where we can be who we really are, and others can be who they really are too.

THE LOVE LEARNING PROCESS WILL REQUIRE:1. Transparency I John 1:7

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

- * Take off your masks and just be yourself.
- * Fellowship is in the light, not in the shadows.
- * Come to accept each other as we are, not as we might like each other to be.

2. Vulnerability

- * Participate—you can never really be loved until people know who you are.
- * Risk getting close enough that people can know your hurts and speak into your life as needed.
- * Learn to freely give and receive verbal and physical expressions of love.

3. Accountability

- * Rejoice in the encouragements that comes from having others “stand” with you.
- * Be willing to share both your successes and your failures.
- * Be responsible to others for your actions and your progress.
- * Learn to yield what you want and what you think for the good of others.

As you meet regularly to share, pray, stimulate, and enjoy one another, the Holy Spirit will begin to work Jesus love down deep into the core of your life and prepare you to be fruitful in extending His kingdom into the lives of many others.

2. VULNERABILITY - I am willing to risk

*** Participate**

Illustration: “But, nobody loves me”

They can’t love you. They don’t know who you are. You have never opened your mouth to share anything about yourself for 3 or 4 months

*** Risk**

Get close enough to those who love you so that you can be touched, challenged and found out.

You can fellowship the back of people’s neck for 20 years and never grow a bit in your love. If you are going to grow in love for people you have to be face to face with them in situations where they can:

- Touch your tender area
- Help you face your fear
- Find out about your temper
- Know about your burden which is so heavy you can hardly talk

If you are not found out, there is a good chance that you will never deal with it; and it is assured that you will never have their loving support in dealing with it.

Sometimes the most intimate relationships can become the most painful. When those closest to you disappoint or act unloving it almost kills you, it hurts so much. But, that is the price of love learning!

*** Avoid Band-Aids**

It is not always comfortable to be around people who are being vulnerable.

Illustration: The “Mercy” people are apt to respond, “Oh, it’s not that bad.”

Illustration: How do you deal with a boil? – puss and blood. Let it bleed!

Don’t ever be cold or detached when people share needs. Hug them and then you might say something like, “That took courage to share. I’m so glad you trusted us. Let’s pray and see God do something about this.”

The Other Side

Some aren’t vulnerable enough to be free in giving and receiving hugs

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.” - Romans 16:16

We all need to be in a fellowship with people whom we can trust enough so that they can hug us and in turn we can hug them and say, “I really love you!”

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3. ACCOUNTABILITY

* There is growth that just won't happen in our lives until we are in a group of brothers and sisters where we are held accountable.

- The Church needs to be the most important of all the support groups in your life. Most of us just don't have enough inner discipline. So often we take the way of least resistance.

Illustration: the accountability among the Elders of Redeemer Fellowship

* "Accountability involves a willingness to share our life as it is.

- You are accountable whether you have been promoted or you have been fired; whether you have been given \$100 or you have had to pay a \$100 speeding fine.

* Don't let pride keep you from being accountable.

- If your group has been praying for you all week in regard to a matter, then you will be accountable to tell them what has transpired this week in that area – either good or bad.

"Rejoice with those that rejoice, weep with those that weep"

- Accountability means that you are standing together. You are fighting the thing through together. You Pray! You Weep! You Rejoice!

The Other Side

Since you are accountable to those you love, there will be times when you will submit and yield to what the group wishes, rather than follow your own wants and desires.

Illustration: We're planning a picnic; - But, I hate ants

* Because you are vulnerable, you will let them know how you feel.

"Can't we go someplace where there are not a lot of ants?"

* Because you are accountable, you'll go even though it's the last place you would personally choose.

CONCLUSION

As you regularly share, pray, stimulate, and enjoy one another, the Holy Spirit will begin to work Jesus love down deep into the core of your life and prepare you to be fruitful in extending His kingdom into the lives of many others.

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FULL LIFE IN CHRIST - Group Leaders Suggestions
EXTEND - “Developing Our Witness” - Session #4

FIRST - “Weekly Show-N-Tell”

- Share any new answers to prayer from their prayer list.
- What has God been communicating to you this week?
 - from listening
 - from journaling
 - from “feeding” on the Word

NEXT

Go over their responses to the questions on last weeks assignment. Collect the sheets and give them to the instructor.

NOW

Let the group share practical examples of what they feel might be involved for us to love one another “as” Jesus loved His disciples.

THEN - Discuss:

1. The reasons why people “protect” themselves and hide behind masks. What kind of an atmosphere must exist for people to be open and vulnerable?
2. The value of being “accountable” for our actions and spiritual growth.
3. The importance for every growing believer to be a part of a small face-to-face group.

FINALLY

- Pray for each other specifically that the Lord will take each one on into the next steps that He knows will contribute to a constantly growing walk with Him.