

# Session 1: Love

**QUESTION 1:**

*What foods do you like best straight out of the oven?*



## THE POINT

Let love permeate every relationship.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Nobody likes the ends of the bread loaf. I have four kids who can make a sport out of arguing, but the bread heels have never been among the things they have fought over. Kids want the fresh stuff. And so do adults.

Relationships are a little like those heels of bread. Over time, they tend to harden and become stale. But marriages and friendships don't have to follow this downward spiral. Fortunately, the Bible gives us a surefire method to keep our connections with others from going stale. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have the power within you to produce incredible freshness in the lives of others. This method for growing phenomenal relationships is foolproof, but it's not free. This deep connection is love.

Are you disappointed in the way your relationships are turning out? Are you sick and tired of watching people walk out of your life? Do you long to go deeper with those around you? If so, listen to the words of Jesus as He explained the dynamics of love.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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## JOHN 15:9-10

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.

I woke up one morning craving coffee so fiercely that I sprinted to the coffee maker. As I waited impatiently for my drink, the tiny screen on the coffee maker told me: YOUR TANK IS LOW. It needed water. In short order, I *poured in* so that something beautiful would *pour out*.

Jesus made it very clear in John 15 that there is an ocean-sized reservoir of love, but it doesn’t begin with us. Love is found in God. We must drink from the deep well of the heavenly Father’s supply if we ever hope to pour meaningfully into the lives of others.

Take note of the word *remain* in this passage. This is a key word in John 15. To remain somewhere is to dwell there continually. Jesus’ followers certainly might achieve intimacy with Jesus through regular prayer and study of the Scriptures, but this soul-deep intimacy with God comes through more than a consistent quiet time. Faithful obedience to God’s Spirit and His Word is the key.

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### QUESTION 2:

***How would you describe the connection between remaining in God’s love and obeying His commandments?***

Obedience to God is the crucial factor in bearing fresh fruit in the lives of other people.

Notice how Jesus tied the knot tightly between love and obedience: “If you keep my commands you will remain in my love.” If you do what Jesus tells you to do, then you will feel the full force of His affection and be able to pour it into others.

Consider a real life example. Brett was the rising star in his company. He was hired as a front desk helper, but over a period of eighteen months, he outworked his competition and relished every promotion. However, his zeal to climb the company ladder was beginning to compromise his relationships at home.

It all began when he volunteered for an additional project at the office. His wife, Lindsay, was supportive at first, but now she doubted Brett’s motivations. She knew in her heart that his obsession with work wasn’t about the family; this had become all about Brett. Even his two sons began to ask why dad seemed so serious all the time. The family was in crisis.

Brett’s story is a tragic story of disobedience. A love for Jesus had taken a back seat. Consequently, his love for position in the company took priority over his love for his family. And everyone suffered, including Brett.

Remaining in Jesus’ love is the key to all success, especially in relationships with others. When we ignore the Spirit and chart our own selfish course, we are disobedient, we sabotage our personal success, and we sour relationships. We must stay close to the Lord.

**JOHN 15:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> “I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup> “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you.

Have you ever met a man who claimed to be a Christian but forgot to inform his face? Week after week, he plods into the church building with a scowl and a grimace and makes a beeline to his pew. He is an oxymoron.

Living in Christ should produce joy in the heart! Obeying Him is not a grim, teeth-clenching exercise. Quite the opposite! In verse 11, Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” Is the joy of Jesus inside you? If so, submission to Christ is not a road of misery, but a road to freedom. When you discover your debts are paid and your sins have been erased, you walk with a much lighter load.

In his book, *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis told of his unusual conversion to Christianity. Wounded deeply by his mother’s death, Lewis drifted from God for decades before surrendering his life to his Savior. What caused this brilliant intellectual to come to Christ? The answer: joy!

Throughout his life, Lewis experienced unforeseen, fleeting pangs of intense inner joy. He came to realize those occasional pokes in his heart were the touches of the Holy Spirit, whispering God’s love, and urging him to follow the trail to heaven. Unfortunately, Lewis’s prideful resistance was strong.

God continued to work on Lewis, soon calling him to a personal relationship with His Son. In Jesus, Lewis found the fullness of joy and spent the rest of his life writing about it.

Do you exhibit the joy of the Holy Spirit? Is your outlook on life refreshing to those around you? If not, ask the Lord today to restore the joy of your salvation (Psalm 51:12). Notice in John 15:12 that once the love of Jesus is dwelling inside you, it can never be bottled up. The love of Christ must flow in *and* out of you: “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you.” The gift of Christ’s love came with this instruction: share it! As recipients of a rich inheritance, we are not to hoard grace; instead we are empowered to give grace to others.

**QUESTION 3:**

***What does it look like to love others in the same way Jesus has loved us?***

Jesus did not leave the command to love nebulous or vague. He directed us to love people in the specific way He loved. How did Jesus show His love? He gave. He forgave. He pardoned. He was gracious, kind, merciful, sacrificial, and intentional. When you love people as Jesus does, you begin to break down their defenses. The spark of relational fire is found in unforeseen moments of love.

**QUESTION 4:**

***How have you experienced the joy of loving others as Christ loves you?***

“MILES MAY COME BETWEEN US,

AND WE MAY DISAGREE ON CERTAIN THINGS,

BUT LOVE WILL ALWAYS REMAIN.”

*Shannon DeGarmo*



**JOHN 15:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Every year on the afternoon of Mother's Day, Charlie makes a dash for the nearest convenience store in search of a last minute card. With only three cards left in the rack, he is forced to buy the cartoonish card that he has jammed inside the wrong-sized envelope. In spite of this, Charlie soothes his conscience by thinking, *Hey, at least I made an effort.*

This example raises a couple of relevant questions: What is *the least* amount of energy required to pay the bill of love? How much does a person have to pay to expect good relationships with those around him?

Jesus set the price high, defining love by supreme sacrifice. The best way to build a relationship is not by offering clearance cards that cost less than loose change. Rather, the way to build a relationship is often through pain and suffering. How much pain are you willing to endure for another person?

"No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends." Little did the disciples know that, even as Jesus taught them how to love, this would be lived out in their own lives. In the years that followed, those in Jesus' inner circle would sacrifice all for their Savior. Church history indicates that, with the exception of John (and of course Judas Iscariot), Jesus' apostles were martyred for their faith. They were willing to die as a measure of their love for their leader. These men, who once ran from

the sword (Mark 14:46-50), now showed the supreme level of love by laying down earthly treasure of their own bodies. No higher form of love has ever been known.

**QUESTION 5:**

***What opportunities do you have to lay down your life for others?***

Take inventory of the relationships in your life. Ask yourself the hard questions, and be honest. How strong is your relationship with your spouse? With your children? With your extended family? With your friends? Do any of these relationships need work? If so, what would you be willing to pay for better relationships?

While it is sometimes wise to avoid "sweating the small stuff," this concept should not necessarily be carried out in relationships. The little things do matter. A willingness to die for those we love often translates into the daily need to stifle our own self-importance and study the lives of those around us. What does this person need that I could supply? Could I write a note of encouragement to lift his head? Could I provide a meal to fill a belly? Love beckons us to pay a price—sometimes large, sometimes small—for the other person.

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## LOVE REVEAL

*Fill in the blanks to complete the sentences below, then respond to the question that follows.*

**I struggle to love people when** .....

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**If I know I'll be around someone hard to love, I usually** .....

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**I might be hard to love when I** .....

.....

*How does identifying your own personal shortcomings shift your thinking toward a person you struggle to love?*

