

sermon study summary

What Love Is

Pastor Mike Schorr

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There is no greater longing in the heart of a person than to be loved and accepted. Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, there has been a void in human heart that only the presence and love of God can satisfy. True love can be found in God alone.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

But HOW do we do that? The essence of the answer is found in verse 5: **“Love ... is not self-seeking.”** When the first couple Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled against God, they essentially removed God from the center of their lives and put themselves on the throne. Ever since then, we are all self-seeking (or self-centered) by nature. That means MY desires and wants, my needs and dreams, matter most.

But God’s love is the very opposite of self-seeking love. Self-centered love is impatient, unkind, irritable, ungracious, envious, boastful, dishonoring, easily angered and bitter. Self-centeredness by its very nature makes you blind to your own self-centeredness. Self-seeking love is the recipe for miserable relationships.

How do we confront our self-centeredness and love the way God calls us to love?

1. KNOW GOD and entrust your life to Him. 1 John 4:7 says, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.” Love is not just something God does; it is WHO HE IS! The greatest picture of love in all of human history is the cross. Jesus was the ultimate expression of TRUE LOVE and selfless sacrifice. Now the Holy Spirit will fill us and begin to transform us into the character of Jesus. Our self-centeredness will begin to fade as we take ourselves off the throne and put Him on the throne.

2. LIVE CLOSE to God daily. True Love that is not self-seeking is experienced only in and through a daily, close relationship with Jesus. As we stay close to Him daily, His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control will live through us! (Galatians 5:22-23). If we want to learn the language of LOVE, then we need to immerse ourselves with the One who wrote that language.

3. FOLLOW the way of Jesus. He didn’t focus on Himself; He focused on loving and serving others. Philippians 2:5 says: “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who ... made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant.”

Bryan Wilkerson defined love this way. “Love is giving yourself for the good of others, even for those with whom you have differences.” Give something that is precious to you. Give financially to a legitimate need. Give your undivided attention to your child. Give a listening ear to someone going through a difficult time. Stop and listen and respond patiently to someone with a question or a need. Volunteer to serve in a good cause.

Extend godly love even to those with whom you have differences or whom you don’t like. You can love them by doing good to them, blessing them, and praying for them. You can’t pray for a person very long and still despise them because you’ll grow increasingly aware of God’s love for them.

sermon study guide

IN – PURSUE RELATIONSHIP

1. What do your t-shirts mostly advertise? What is your favorite love song?
2. If a child asks you what love is, how would you answer?

UP – PURSUE GOD

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. Anyone can strive to live by these verses, but what sets a believer apart from a non-believer in doing so? Which qualities of love do you find most challenging? How does this motivate you to love more like Jesus?
2. Read 1 John 4:7-9. How did God demonstrate His love for us? Why can demonstrating love be difficult for us? Provide examples from Scripture of how Jesus showed love to others, or share a personal experience of selfless love.

OUT – PURSUE MISSION

1. As Christians we gradually move from a self-seeking life to a God-seeking one through union with Christ. Where do you most need God to transform you from your self-seeking nature into his nature? Pray for each other to this end!
2. Luke 6:32-35 says to love not just our friends but our enemies as well. How may you and your group express love this week to someone who is either difficult or an enemy? Share a story of turning an enemy into a friend.

For Personal Reflection / Prayer:

Do you find it hard to love others? If yes, look back at how Jesus loved you first. If it helps, write down how Jesus loved you. Is there something that is preventing you from accepting Jesus' love? If yes, read Mark 15 and remember all that Jesus endured because He loves you.

THE WORD (NIV)

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

1 John 4:7-9

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ 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.

Luke 6:32-35

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

This week's writers: Elsa Henderson, Jorel Quemuel, Gene & Karen Gibbs, David McMillin