

Love's Tremendous Importance

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(Study is based on a book by Sharon A. Steele called Loving as Jesus Loves)

Read and reflect on Matthew 22:34-40. What question does the expert in the law ask Jesus? Why do you think he asked that question? What was Jesus' answer? Why did Jesus give two answers instead of one? How are these linked?

In answering Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. How was this significant given the audience? What does the added statement in verse 40 say to you?

Read Romans 13:8-10. What do these verses say to you about the call to love? What is love intended to look like/sound like? How is the person who loves described in these verses? What happens when we fail to love? How does this passage inspire/convict you?

Read and reflect on Luke 10:25-28? What question is posed to Jesus here? Why does Jesus answer a question with a question? Reflect on the legal expert's answer. What does it mean to love God in the way described here? How are heart, soul, mind and strength involved in our love for God? Do you think these same aspects of your being are to be involved similarly as you love your neighbour and yourself?

Note: *Heart* refers to the center of one's emotions. *Soul* refers to the inner self or personality. *Strength* refers to one's physical being. *Mind* refers to the intellect.

How does Jesus react to the man's answer (verse 28)? What is the connection between love and life? Have you experienced that? How does loving God relate to salvation (eternal life)? How does loving others relate to salvation?

Take time to honestly assess your love for God. Are there ways in which your love could grow? Pray for that Spirit to guide you in pursuing that depth and breadth of love that these passages call for.

Read and reflect on Luke 10:29-37. What new question does the legal expert pose to Jesus? What was his motive in asking it? Is this surprising? How does Jesus answer this question? Why?

Reflecting on this well-known parable, look for the evidence of love or lack of love throughout. Are there situations or relationships in which you are more inclined to be like the priest or Levite? Why? How does this parable convict and inspire you? Are there situations or relationships in which you are more inclined to be like the Samaritan? Why? How does this parable convict and inspire you?

What concrete, practical acts of love did the Samaritan offer the man on the road? Why do you think he offered this help and what did he gain by helping? How does this story define 'love'? How does this story define 'neighbour'?

Read and reflect on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. What gifts of the Holy Spirit are mentioned? What is the result when a person exercises these spiritual gifts, but lacks love? Why are these gifts ineffective if not accompanied by love? It's apparent from this passage that the readers were eager to have spiritual gifts, but weren't so eager to love? Why do you think this was the case? Can you relate? Why is the building up of love in our lives of primary importance? How often do you struggle with making and keeping this your priority?

Read and reflect on 1 John 2:9-11. What does this passage tell us about the person who hates? What does it tell us about the person who loves? What is meant by darkness here? What is meant by light here? What is the outcome for the one who loves? What about the one who hates? How does this passage inspire and convict you? What should we do about the hatred in our lives? Pray about any feelings of hatred that you are harbouring, asking that God would bring you victory.

Read and reflect on Luke 6:27-31. What kind of love is commanded here? What words are used to describe it? What words could be used to capture the way the person who loves is described here? What impact does this kind of love have on the giver and the receiver? How hard is it to offer this kind of love? What stops

you from doing so? Is this something you could pray about? Think of 1-2 ways that you could practically apply verse 31 today, and do them!

Read and reflect on Romans 12:17-21. What actions of love are commanded here? What makes it difficult to live these commands out? How can one overcome those challenges? How does this passage inspire and/or convict you? Can you think of a relationship where this kind of love is needed today? What might you do about it?

Return to Luke 6 and reflect on verses 32-36. With what actions does Jesus credit sinners? Do you agree? In what ways are we (believers saved by grace) to be different according to Jesus' teaching here? How hard is this? What is the promised reward? Can you think of someone in your life today who could be categorized as an 'enemy'? What specific action/s is this passage asking of you in relation to that person today? How will you respond?

What does this passage teach about God's love? Why does Jesus stress this here?