

Love is Accepting

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Read John 13, then take time to specifically reflect on verses 34-35 in its full context. Jesus says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” How did Jesus love His first disciples? What does John 13 tell us about the kind of love He offered them? How does this impact our understanding of how we are to love each other?

Jesus declares in verse 34 that this is a “new” commandment, yet from the earliest days God commanded His people to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). In what ways are Jesus’ words here “new”? What makes His command different from the earliest command to love?

Read Romans 5:8. According to this verse, how is God’s love for us demonstrated? How difficult is it to mirror that kind of love, especially when others are sinning in ways that hurt and harm you? Does God’s accepting love inspire you to love them despite their sinfulness?

Take time to read and meditate deeply on John 3:16-17 and 1 John 3:1. What do these verses tell us about God’s love and acceptance? What is made possible for us because His love? In what ways do these verses emphasize the vastness of God’s love? Do you struggle to accept that this love is offered freely to you? to all? If so, why?

Read and meditate on Ephesians 2:4-9. How is God described here? How is His love described here? What does God’s love do for us, according to this passage?

Read Luke 15:11-24. What actions of the younger son would make it difficult for you to love and accept him? What caused the son to return home? What 'welcome' was he anticipating? How do you think he felt when the welcome he received was so much more than he hoped for? What do you think prompted that welcome? What did the father do to demonstrate his acceptance of his son, even before he sought it? What lessons can be taken from this parable to inspire you to love and accept others?

Now read Luke 15:25-32. What was the older brother's reaction to the younger son's return and welcome? What was behind his reaction? How did this attitude impact the older brother? What might have happened to the younger son had the father responded as his brother did? How did the father demonstrate his love for the older brother?

The father figure in this parable captures God and His love and acceptance of sinners. What aspects of that love do you need to claim today? Are you able? Pray that you would experience that love and acceptance fully today.

Reflecting on the parable again, why do you think the father (God) did not send aid to his son while he was still making a mess of things in that far-off land? Why did he choose to wait for the son to return home? How hard would that have been for him ... to simply wait, believing he would return? Is there a lesson here for you, in regard to your understanding of God's love for you? in regard to your understanding of how you are to love others?

Read and reflect on Romans 14. What does verse 1 command us to do? Why? What does this passage teach about accepting different viewpoints/perspectives? How difficult is it to love and accept others (believers and non-believers) who hold different views than our own? How do we overcome those difficulties?

What does this passage teach about judging? Why is it important not to judge others? What behaviours are you most inclined to judge? Are there people that

you find difficult to love and accept because of those behaviours? What can you do to move from judgement? How important is love and acceptance to you? Why?

What actions, to be taken for the benefit of the weaker brother or sister, are commanded in this passage? Why? Are you prepared to make those kinds of sacrifices? Why? Why not?

In your interactions with newer / not-yet-mature believers how do you tend to respond to their spiritual immaturity? Are you able to recognize that they are 'works in progress' or do you lean towards impatience and/or judgement? Is there any need for confession?

According to this passage, in what ways can our failure to accept and sacrifice for others destroy the work of God? What does this passage have to say about the proper balance between freedom in Christ and love for others? Have you found it?

What are we commanded to do in verse 19? Identify 2-3 specific actions that you can take to accomplish that this week.

Read and reflect on Romans 15:1-7. What actions of love are captured here? How does this passage seek to define "acceptance"? What standard for acceptance is identified (see verse 7)? How do we live this standard? How does our acceptance of others bring praise to God?

Read Luke 6:37-45. What actions are commanded? What are the results? What do you think verse 38 is saying? How does it relate to love and acceptance and to judgement and condemnation? What important truths concerning our words and actions are captured in verse 45? What challenges can you take from this passage today?

Read Philippians 4:8 in relationship to this call to love and accept others. What does this verse command? What might help you to love and accept others, even

those who seem unlovable? What might help you to love and accept yourself, especially when you feel like you've failed or messed up big-time?

Take time to reflect on those relationships where you find it easy to offer love and acceptance. Give thanks for those people – to God and to them. Take specific actions to show your love for them this week. Take time also to reflect on those relationships where you lean towards judgement and condemnation. Ask God to free you from that judging spirit and move you towards love and acceptance. Take specific actions to sincerely love those people this week.

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