

## What Love Means

The highest \_\_\_\_\_ of life is to love God and other people, but what does it mean to love? Today, we're exploring the \_\_\_\_\_ of love. The God of the Bible is the God of love, who loves us despite \_\_\_\_\_ our weaknesses. Let's be thankful for the Bible because it reveals all that God has done to \_\_\_\_\_ us now and in the ages to come. God's Word \_\_\_\_\_ His plans for us and His promises. The more we know about God, the more we'll love Him. By studying God's Word, we'll \_\_\_\_\_ in our faith and our devotion to Him.

Paul wrote, "If I speak in the \_\_\_\_\_ of men and of angels, but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am \_\_\_\_\_. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I \_\_\_\_\_ nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Love is the \_\_\_\_\_ of our relationship with God. Without love we're nothing and gain nothing. Without love, we're empty and lonely souls.

Imagine waking up in a world \_\_\_\_\_ love, a world where people don't care—and they don't care that they don't care. Small offenses would start fights because no one loved enough to \_\_\_\_\_. People would become selfish and ambitious, stepping on others to \_\_\_\_\_ themselves. It's a world where the life of the unwanted is cheap, where children and the aged are forgotten, and where people sit silent while evil takes place. A world without love is without \_\_\_\_\_ and filled with all the ugly substitutions that people find to take love's place.

### **Our reading today comes from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.**

What does it mean to love? The love that we're talking about isn't the same thing as physical affection, though many \_\_\_\_\_ that love. No, "love," as it's used in the Bible, is the surrender of \_\_\_\_\_ for the best interests of others. Love takes place when people put others' \_\_\_\_\_ above their own. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Love is more than \_\_\_\_\_ feelings, though love involves feeling. Love is an intentional \_\_\_\_\_ of the will; love determines to put self aside to \_\_\_\_\_ the object of its love. Love sacrifices. Love pays whatever the cost, gives whatever gift, and runs whatever risk to do what is \_\_\_\_\_ for another. It gladly \_\_\_\_\_ without complaint. Love will act even when \_\_\_\_\_ things are required. Love will \_\_\_\_\_ the harsh and demanding load. Love is like a candle. It makes no noise but softly gives itself \_\_\_\_\_ to be a blessing to others.

Sometimes love is \_\_\_\_\_ others. At other times love means allowing the kind will of someone else to \_\_\_\_\_ us. Love knows how to give, but love also knows how to \_\_\_\_\_ the love that others graciously give. Peter didn't want the Lord to wash his feet in John 13:8, but his objection to allowing the kindness of Jesus meant he had no \_\_\_\_\_ with the Lord. Love means allowing others to enter into our lives and to be \_\_\_\_\_ to us.

Living without love means our \_\_\_\_\_ will be empty and indifferent. We won't \_\_\_\_\_ about anything but ourselves. We'll be like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan; we'll pass by on the other side of the road and leave others to \_\_\_\_\_. A life without love means we'll turn

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**Longer quotations may not appear in the Study Sheet, but can be read in the accompanying transcript.**

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\_\_\_\_\_ to selfishness, wanting only to fulfill our own lusts and desires. We'll be like the rich farmer that was foolish, whose land provided abundantly but all he could think about was hoarding it up for \_\_\_\_\_. Living without love means we'll forget how to be \_\_\_\_\_ for what we have or how others have sacrificed to bless us.

Living without love means living without a relationship with \_\_\_\_\_. First John 4:7-8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and \_\_\_\_\_ God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Living without love means living with bitterness. Without love we grow \_\_\_\_\_ at every offense and plot to get even. Without love, \_\_\_\_\_ will flourish. First John 2:10-11 says, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no \_\_\_\_\_ for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Hate fills everything with evil, fear, and violence. A world without love is miserable.

On the other hand, living with love means living with \_\_\_\_\_ and compassion. We see a \_\_\_\_\_ and we fill it, we see a \_\_\_\_\_ and comfort, and we see an opportunity to bless and seize it. God is the great \_\_\_\_\_ and teacher of love. So let's see how God loves:

First, God's love is \_\_\_\_\_. John 3:16-17 says, "For God so loved the world, that he \_\_\_\_\_ his only (or only begotten) Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be \_\_\_\_\_ through him." The entire gospel comes to focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the \_\_\_\_\_ for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you're willing to pay dearly for that person's responsive love. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest \_\_\_\_\_ that he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the \_\_\_\_\_ for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the \_\_\_\_\_ with others, our love must be like Jesus' love. We must be willing to give up on our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Second, God's love is \_\_\_\_\_. Psalm 103:8-12 says, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast \_\_\_\_\_. He will not always \_\_\_\_\_, nor will he keep his anger forever. He doesn't deal with us according to our \_\_\_\_\_, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who \_\_\_\_\_ him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

We can understand a God who would forgive friends who ask for \_\_\_\_\_. But a God who tenderly searches for \_\_\_\_\_ and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love! This is the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for \_\_\_\_\_ people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel \_\_\_\_\_ from God, don't despair. He's searching for you.

Third, God's love is \_\_\_\_\_ and beyond measure. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to \_\_\_\_\_ us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These verses contain comforting \_\_\_\_\_. Believers have always had to \_\_\_\_\_ hardships in many forms: persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. These problems could cause them to feel abandoned by Christ. But Paul explains these things cannot separate us from Christ. God profoundly loves His people.

Paul bowed his knees before the Father and prayed “that Christ may \_\_\_\_\_ in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). If we could but grasp—even a little—the immeasurable love of God for us, we would \_\_\_\_\_ in our love for Him and for other people.

How then do we love \_\_\_\_\_? People are not “born lovers” any more than people are born chefs. They have to learn how to cook and they have to learn how to love. You may have the deepest of feelings, but love is a \_\_\_\_\_, an act of heart and soul. Loving someone means you’ve paid enough attention to the needs and desires of another that their needs and desires become more important than your \_\_\_\_\_. The Scriptures \_\_\_\_\_ us why to love and how to love.

Many want to be loved, but they don’t understand the \_\_\_\_\_ calling of loving others. Love isn’t merely affection that we receive from others; it’s our determination to sacrifice ourselves for the \_\_\_\_\_ interests of others. We love because we choose to love. We love because we see the \_\_\_\_\_ of serving God and serving others.

The Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as \_\_\_\_\_ have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will \_\_\_\_\_ that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). We show that we’re the Lord’s disciples to the \_\_\_\_\_ when we love like He loves. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one \_\_\_\_\_ down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). True Christianity calls us to sacrifice ourselves for others.

If we become distracted with how people treat us, we’ll \_\_\_\_\_ how we treat others. Love means setting what we want aside so that we can \_\_\_\_\_ others by filling their needs and wants. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be \_\_\_\_\_ to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

The devil \_\_\_\_\_ people to be arrogant, to be easily offended, to take revenge, to slander, and to grow bitter inside. The Lord Jesus leads us to be kind, even when no one else is kind; to be tenderhearted, even when everyone else is apathetic; and to forgive, even when the world hates you. The Lord Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and \_\_\_\_\_ for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what \_\_\_\_\_ do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the \_\_\_\_\_? And if you greet only your brothers, what \_\_\_\_\_ are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

God calls us to be His \_\_\_\_\_ and expects us to grow beyond a purely selfish mindset. The Lord God sacrificed Jesus on His own. We don’t cry out for Him to \_\_\_\_\_ His Son. He gave Jesus because He \_\_\_\_\_ loved us, He initiated it. First John 4:9-11 says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God \_\_\_\_\_ his only Son into the world, so that we might \_\_\_\_\_ through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also \_\_\_\_\_ to love one another.”

The Lord God forgave us, not because we \_\_\_\_\_ it, but because He is so loving. He calls us to forgive—even when people don’t \_\_\_\_\_ it, because we are His children. He calls us to love our

enemies rather than hate them, to pray for those who persecute us, and to love those who don't love us. Why? Because we are God's children. That's the way God is.

Colossians 3:12-14 says, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if anyone has a \_\_\_\_\_ against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which \_\_\_\_\_ everything together in perfect harmony." Have you put on love? Can people \_\_\_\_\_ the love of God in your heart and in your behavior? Do you care enough to take up a brother's \_\_\_\_\_ as your own? Do you care enough to sacrifice yourself for a noble cause?

Love means \_\_\_\_\_ our selfish, self-centered ways so we can sacrifice ourselves to serve God and serve others. Life without love is empty and useless, sad and lonely. People who turn away from the love of God may not \_\_\_\_\_ how much they have hurt themselves, hurt others, or what precious things they've lost. They lose out on God's love, God's forgiveness, God's ear in prayer, and that room in His eternal house. Do you love God? Will you love God? Will you love others?

After that wonderful love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, comes the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1, which simply says, "Pursue love." To "pursue" means to \_\_\_\_\_ something until you seize it. Paul isn't speaking here about finding someone to love you; he's \_\_\_\_\_ us to pursue the practice and the skill of loving others. Pursuing means regularly giving ourselves to do what is \_\_\_\_\_ for others. First John 3:18 says, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

Love also means spreading our love by \_\_\_\_\_ others about Jesus and His love. We preach Christ each week because we love you. When people get to know Christ, they \_\_\_\_\_ to love in the fullest sense. They truly put others \_\_\_\_\_ themselves. They won't \_\_\_\_\_ God or others by living sinful lives. God's love and kindness moves us to \_\_\_\_\_ of our sins and to live moral lives. Love won't let us \_\_\_\_\_ on sinning against God or others. God loves you greatly and wants you to be His \_\_\_\_\_. If you open your heart to God's love, and to His Word, you'll \_\_\_\_\_ your life. You'll draw close to God and you'll become a Christian. Because He loved you, Jesus died upon the cross to make atonement for your sins. Don't reject His marvelous gift of salvation.

Believe in Jesus, turn away from everything sinful, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. When you're baptized you'll enter into a relationship with God that can last eternally. In baptism God washes away your sins (Acts 22:16) and makes you His child (Galatians 3:26-27). As God's child, He will hear your prayers and give you an inheritance in heaven. If God loved you enough to send His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins, will you love Him enough to commit your heart and life to Him?