Program
Study Guides

For
February 2016
Does Jesus Care?
Mark 4:35-39

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

Life can suddenly come crashing down, causing us to __________ whether the Lord cares. In times of ________, we ask, does Jesus really care about us? We have no doubts that the Bible will give us the ________, so we keep on looking to it for the answers. Our goal is to __________ God because we love Him and we want to be close to Him.

Longing to be close to God is __________, and especially when you’re hurting. The sons of Korah, in Psalm 42, describe the heartache of __________ for God. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul __________ for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’ ”

When tough times come, many times people feel God is ____________. They wonder if the Lord is __________ and if He cares. They ________ for God’s help and comfort. Does Jesus care when our hearts are broken with the loss of a loved one, when the bills pile up, when the children are hungry, or when we can’t seem to get well? Does God hear our ____________?

Nothing, however, __________ the notice of God. Luke 12:6 says that not even a _________ can fall to the ground apart from God’s knowledge. God not only sees what happens outwardly, He also sees the troubles inside your ______________. He knows all about you because He __________ you. There’s never been a single __________ in your life when God hasn’t wanted to be close to you and bless you.


Frightening, life-threatening storms happen ______________ on the Sea of Galilee. In this storm Jesus is __________, with “his head on a cushion.” The disciples cry out “Master, don’t you _______ that we’re perishing?” We all ask questions like this when we’re frightened and we need an __________. We see the world’s agonies and we ____________ if God is paying attention. We need __________ from someone bigger than we are and we need it now.

Jesus didn’t answer their question. Instead, He rebuked the storm and He made the water ___________. Then Jesus asked His disciples, “How is it that you have no ________?” The real question is not whether Jesus cares, but whether we ____________. Of course, Jesus cares. Mark describes how the Lord Jesus delivered Legion, a demon-possessed man, who lived like a beast (Mark 5:1-20). Later in the chapter, Jesus healed a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and then He raised the daughter of Jairus.

Someone objects, “But why doesn’t God ________ every problem? Why does the Lord seem asleep and uncaring?” Are you assuming that if God doesn’t ________ all our problems that He doesn’t care about us? Some folks want God to keep us ________ from struggles or difficulties. It’s tempting to question God’s ________ when we face challenges or disappointments. We think if God really loves us, He’ll __________ us from any and every problem.
Is a painless world, free from any problem, really the _______ world for us? Oh, it may be convenient and it may even be comfortable, but is it best for our ____________, for our growth as individuals? Doesn’t the person who has no problems and has everything his way often get _________ and think the world revolves around him? Don’t challenges _________ us into people of character?

Read what the Bible says in James 1:2-4. We may see our trials and struggles the _______ way. We may not realize that God permits them because He sees a greater _________ with them than without them. Struggles help us to become the ___________ people that God desires. So let’s rejoice in our trials because God uses them to ___________ us into His people.

James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under _________; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” It doesn’t say, “Blessed is the man who has ____ troubles,” but “blessed is a man who perseveres under trial.” He’s the man who won’t _________ on God when things get rough. Because he loves God even in tough times, God will ___________ him with a crown of life.

The Lord demonstrates that He cares in _________ ways. You might ask, “Well how?” First, He shows He understands suffering in that He himself suffered for our ________. He Himself endured the punishment that was rightfully _________. First Peter 2:24 says, “That He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might _________ to sin and ________ to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

God loved His Son, Jesus, but He didn’t _________ the crucifixion. Jesus prayed with _________ in the Garden to let this cup pass, but God sacrificed His Son because He loved you and me, just as He loved His Son. Jesus also prayed, “Your will be done.” Atoning for sin was _________ important to Jesus than freedom from suffering. Have you considered how ___________ our Father suffered in sacrificing His Son? No one has grieved more over human evil than God has. No one has suffered more than Jesus who bore the cross for our sins. He showed unmistakably how much He loved us. This loving God asks us to _________ Him when we cry out for help.

Read what 1 Peter 2:21-23 says. This is what the disciples in the boat needed to do, and what we need to do: and that is to entrust our _________ to God! First Peter 5:7 urges us to cast “all our anxiety on Him, because He _________ for you.”

God inspired Paul to write the book of Romans at a time when the Roman Christians began _________ great persecution. Paul asked, “Who shall ___________ us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we’re being killed all the daylong; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered’” (Romans 8:35-36). Paul answers this question in verses 37 to 39, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who __________ us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the _________ of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Their problems did not separate them from the love of God and my friend, your ___________ won’t separate you from His love either. God didn’t stop the apostles from being _________, Stephen from being ____________, or James from the __________. God didn’t keep
Paul from imprisonment or remove his _______ in the flesh. Yet, not one of these men ever _______ God’s love. They knew God would never put more on them than they could _______.

God isn’t hiding when our _______ come. He’s faithful! You can _______ Him! Nothing that you’ll encounter today, tomorrow, or at any time will ever be _______ than what God and you together can handle. He doesn’t _______ all our problems; but God does give us the _________ to bear those burdens and challenges. When that problem gets so big that we can’t handle it ________, God steps in so we’ll never get overcome by it. Remember the promise of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you _______. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your _______. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

God sometimes uses the physical struggles that we face to keep us from doing ourselves spiritual _______. God gave the apostle Paul some tremendous, miraculous revelations to _______ him in his ministry. But God didn’t want Paul to ________ himself, and so He gave him that “thorn in the flesh” to torment him and keep him from exalting himself (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul prayed _______ times for the Lord to take away his “thorn in the flesh”; but God refused and said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for ___________ is perfected in weakness.”

Paul had to understand that this thorn was not going away. Was he bitter? No! He _______ something valuable: God’s power is perfected in weakness. Read what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Struggles remind us of our need for God and how God can powerfully work in our lives.

God’s grace is indeed sufficient. Suffering may torment your _______, but it can’t take away your _______. Suffering may open up for you an opportunity to see the great power of God to _______ you sustain yourself even in times of great weakness. Jesus does indeed _______. Just as Jesus _______ with Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus, so He weeps with us. The Lord knows when we hurt and He provides ___________.

Some continue to ask, “Why doesn’t the Lord just stop all evil _______?” If the Lord stopped all evil, wouldn’t that evil also _______ you? If we ask God to stop all evil, we need to _______ the evil things that we do. Your sin _______; it hurts God; it hurts you; and it hurts other people. The Lord loves you enough to show you a _______ way and asks you to ________ your life by repenting.

Repentance is not some punishment, but it’s how we _______. The Lord knows that there’s a _________ person inside of you, wanting to come out. He knows that your repentance will not only bless your _______ but bless all the people that you touch. When you come to Christ and you stop that sin, you bless people that you formerly _______. He graciously gives us _______ to repent; He’s patient. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

Jesus loved us enough to give us a righteous _______ to follow. He showed us how to ________ and how to be forgiven. He gave us his Word to _______ our lives, and He answers our _______. He says, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask Him anything according to His _______ He hears us. And we know that He _______ us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).
Times of crisis call for the ________ in people. Bravery, heroism, love, self-sacrifice—all of these things flourish in times of crisis. People who exhibit such traits are cherished and are honored as having gone “above and beyond the call of duty.” Was this not the very point Christ made: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his __________”? (John 15:13).

The most important question is not “why did this happen to me?” but rather “what shall I do _______?” Some reject and abandon God when ________ comes their way. Some turn inward in self-pity. Others exercise their faith and find that God has ______ forgot them. They entrust their souls to Him and find His promise is true: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Not everything that happens to us is _______, but let’s not assume that the only way God can care for us is to _________ our troubles. God also shows His care and His power by taking the hardest things in our lives and using them for ________, to bless us and to bless others. God has the power to ________; and we have no idea all the harm from which He has protected us already. But God also has the power to take things at their ________ and make good out of them.

So, instead of blaming God for our pains, let’s look to Him for _________. Struggles remind us that God never intended this world to be our _________. We’re pilgrims, and our lives here are brief. Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be ________ with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). So, we too must learn to see with the _______ of faith and trust. The last chapter of our lives has not yet been _________. When Jesus comes again, He will bless and comfort His own.

Jesus cares about you. He wants to be your friend. He cares about your physical welfare, your finances, your family, your soul, and your future. More than anything, He cares about your _______. The Lord Jesus knows all about you, the _______ and the _______. He even knows the number of ______ on your head. In spite of it all, He loves you and cares greatly about every detail of your life.

Sometimes we concentrate so much on our longing for God to _______ that we forget God is longing for a relationship with us. The Lord deeply desires that we _______ ________ to Him. When we forget Him or get caught up in ______, He yearns for His people to come back to Him. The Lord Jesus died on the cross for sinful people, yearning to have a relationship with them.

Do you have a close, loving relationship with God? Does the Lord see you as someone who is truly _________ to Him? In your quiet moments as you look into your _______, do you see yourself as a friend to God?

If you haven’t given yourself to the Lord, today is the right day to come to Him. Come to the Lord in ________, trusting in Him and in His Word. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. In repentance, make Jesus your Lord; and let Him _______ your life. Having done these things, be _________ in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. In baptism, the Lord will cleanse you from sin (Acts 22:16); He’ll cause you to be born again (John 3:5); and He’ll give you newness of life (Romans 6:4). In baptism, the Lord will add you to His church (Acts 2:47).

When you become a Christian, you’ll find the strength and the grace to deal with all of life’s struggles. God cares enough to give us the strength to bear what He does not take away. Trust Him! Trust Him!
God’s Love for Us  
Ephesians 3:14-19

If we could but grasp how greatly God loves us, it would ___________ our lives. No one loves you like the Lord Jesus. From start to finish, the Bible is God’s supreme _________ of love and redemption. The more we read the Bible, the more we can understand the _________ of God who created us and sustains our very existence. Though mankind can be _________ to love, God has never faltered in wanting to _________ those who seek His face and draw near. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

God hasn’t hidden His love for us; God has displayed it beyond dispute in the ___________ of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Read what the Bible says in Romans 5:6-8. We were weak, ungodly, and sinners; but Christ was still ____________ to die for our sins, to wash us clean by His blood. Such love is truly abundant and beyond comprehension.

Jesus bore the cross to ___________ us of our sins and then to open a door for us to have a loving relationship with our Father in Heaven. The Lord loved us when we were _________ and couldn’t save ourselves. He helped us when we were ungodly and had little ___________ of Him. He died for us while we were ____________ who had offended Him. Christ loved our _________ when we didn’t deserve it, when we didn’t understand it, or even appreciate it. Such amazing love!

Our reading today comes from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 3:14-19. The Old Testament uses a rich and amazing word to ____________ the love that God has for His people. The Bible says that God is ______________ in this kind of love. Some versions call it “steadfast love,” some “lovingkindness,” and some simply just “mercy.”

Read Psalm 103:8-14.

“Steadfast” love is the deepest and best love; it’s the kind of _________ love that doesn’t let go and doesn’t fail. It’s loyal, faithful, kind, and good. It’s compassionate and merciful. This type of love is _________ upon a voluntary covenant, an everlasting commitment to those who are in His favor. Psalm 86:15 says, “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Because the God of Heaven is kind and good, He’s _____________ to pardon and forgive our sins if we remain ____________ to Him.

When you consider all that Jesus gave up in bearing the cross to save us from sin, you cannot ____________ His love. If anything, the magnificent love of Jesus was stubborn, unfailing, and utterly unselfish. Jesus didn’t merely give up something; He sacrificed Himself _____________. On the cross the ____________ Lord Jesus sacrificed everything. He kept silent and did nothing while men slandered Him, falsely accused Him, condemned Him, scourged Him, mocked Him, and crucified Him. Read what 1 Peter 2:22-24 says.
Jesus bore the punishment and death for our ______, and it’s the punishment that we should have borne. He bore it personally in his own ______. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). His suffering was __________ and ___________. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew _____ sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Everything that Jesus did, He did out of an undeniable and pure _______ for us. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to know that he would __________ scourging and crucifixion? According to Matthew 26:38, Jesus was greatly troubled and sorrowful, even to the point of death. Luke 22:44 says, “And being in agony He __________ more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

They didn’t simply bind Jesus; they ________ His hands and feet to a rugged cross and suspended Him in the most agonizing position. As they crucified Him, He prayed that the Father would ___________ them. They mocked Him, insulted Him, and did their very ___________ to Him. Through all of His suffering, Jesus remained ________; He uttered no threats. He didn’t even revile them in return. He didn’t call for the twelve legions of angels to wipe them out. No! The Lord’s stubborn love lasted for _______ long hours on the cross. No matter how ugly men were to Jesus, Jesus’ steadfast love held Him to the cross. He loved us to the end!

First Timothy 2:3-4 says, “This is good, and it’s pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires ______ people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his ____________ as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that ______ should perish, but that _____ should reach repentance.” God doesn’t want anybody to be lost, but our heavenly Father grants us the ____________ to choose Him or to choose sin. You can’t make someone love you by _________. God wants us to know Him, and to know the truth, and to love Him freely for Who He is. This means we must be free to __________ Him or ________ Him. God loves everyone, but His blessing and grace are ____________ for those who choose to love Him. We must freely and lovingly choose to __________ in Him, to ___________ of our sins, and to ___________ Him.

Occasionally people speak of God’s “unconditional love.” Yes, I know Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 that God “makes his ______ rise on the evil and on the good, and sends ______ on the just and on the unjust.” God is certainly _______ to all! Jesus didn’t bear the cross for us because we were so good and deserved it. No, Jesus died for us because we were sinful and _______ saving. In that sense, He unconditionally took the initiative’ but we cannot for that reason assume that to remain in God’s love we can do whatever we _______. We can’t assume God’s love for us will ________ to bless us if we turn from Him.

The Lord’s steadfast love, His covenant love of promise, has ______________. Read what the Lord Jesus said in John 14:23-24. God promises His love and He promises His abiding presence to those who love Him and ________ His words. A person who doesn’t love God won’t _______ about keeping God’s words.
It’s a fantasy to think that we can sin all we wish and still count on the ________ of God. It’s fantasy to think that we can __________ against God and still be right with Him. It’s fantasy to think that we can remake God in our own image and still __________ Him. It’s fantasy to think that we can rewrite His commandments, ignore His holiness, corrupt His character, and forget His justice but still ________ on His love.

Read what Hebrews 10:26-31 says. Oh friend, we must never take the love and grace of God for ___________. It’s too ____________ to squander.

You might be thinking at this point, “Phil don’t you remember that the Bible says, ‘God is ____.’” Yes, I know 1 John 4:8. But picking a passage out of the Bible and ignoring other verses that are just as inspired isn’t accurately _______________ the Word of God. We shouldn’t understand 1 John 4:8, “God is love,” without also consulting 1 John 1:5-7. Read 1 John 1:5-7.

As J. I. Packer said in his book, Knowing God, “the God who is love is first and foremost ________, and sentimental ideas of his love as an indulgent, benevolent ____________, divorced from moral standards and concerns, must therefore be ruled out from the start. God’s love is ________ love. The God whom Jesus made known is not a God who is indifferent to ________ distinctions, but a God who loves righteously and righteousness and He ________ iniquity, a God whose ideal for his children is that they should ‘be perfect. . . as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Matthew 5:48). He will not take into his ____________ any person, however orthodox in mind, who will not follow after holiness of life.”

Hebrews 12:14 says, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the ____________ without which no one will see the Lord.” Some might wonder if God loves us, why would He ________ on our living holy lives? Some think that if God loved us, He wouldn’t ________ that we live by all those rules. But let’s stop here and think. Is God trivial? Are His laws petty? No! God insists His people live holy lives so as to ________ us and give us peace. We should consider the righteous way of life that Jesus commands as a precious ________, not as a burden or something petty or trivial. God isn’t being ________ when He asks us to treat others kindly or to refrain from evil. Everyone ________ when we live good lives. God’s goodness is one of the ways that He shows His love.

When we sin against God by breaking His commandments, He ____________ us with love. Godly discipline is not abuse; it’s ____________ given for our good. Proverbs 3:11-12 says, “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he ________, as a father the son in whom he delights.” The book of Hebrews explains in Hebrews 12 verses 10 and 11 that God “disciplines us for our ________”, that we may ________ his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems ____________ rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been ____________ by it.” God disciplines our sins that we may ________ in His holiness and ________ with Him. He acts for the long-term good, not simply for the ____________.
Our society ____________ discipline, thinking love leaves people alone to do anything they want. They believe that ____________ against any behavior is mean-spirited and judgmental. But God speaks against sin out of love, not meanness. Remaining ____________ about sinful behaviors that ruin lives is far more cruel than simply ____________ someone. God speaks out against sin because He ____________, and He wants to ____________ us.

Why is this important? Because the Lord created you for ____________ than what takes place in this life. God loves you and is interested in your life here on ____________ and in the hereafter. He wants you to live with Him forever in ____________. Along with Paul, we pray “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through ________; 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 ____________, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

The Lord Jesus touched ________ throughout His ministry. He healed the sick, the lepers, the blind, and the deaf. He raised the dead, walked on water, stilled the storm, and fed the multitudes. When men did their worst to Him, He ____________, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” Peter described Jesus in Acts 10:38 as One who “went about doing ________ and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” The Lord Jesus is ________ doing good in the lives of men and women. He leads them out of ____________ to sin to become ____________ of God. He leads them out of ________ into hope, out of _________ into faith, and out of ________ into love.

We need the love of God in our ________ every day! The more we grasp how much He loves us, the more we’ll determine to ____________ that same kind of lasting, committed love. Knowing the love of God will ____________ better fathers and husbands, better mothers and wives, better citizens, better children, and better friends. God’s love ____________ us patience and kindness, compassion and forgiveness, and forbearance and loyalty. Love ____________ us to be holy and faithful. It teaches us how to love the _________ and to live with integrity and virtue. We need God’s love to become _________ people.

The love of God should make you want to become a better Christian. When you become a Christian by placing your trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, when you are turning away from sin, when you’re confessing Christ before others, and when you’re baptized into Christ, you become a Christian. When you’re baptized, the Lord washes away your sins; He adds you to His family, the church. And nothing you will do today is more important than becoming a Christian, and professing Your love for God. Won’t you become one today?

Get involved with a church of Christ in your area. They’re the reason that we don’t ask for money. If you’re looking for a church home, a Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ love and they want guests to come and worship with them and if you go and worship there, you’ll be glad that you did.
Our Love for God

God loves us greatly, but have you considered that God wants ________ to love Him greatly? When you love God, you’ll also love His ________ found exclusively in the Bible. The Bible tells the ________ of the amazing love and grace of God, how God has watched over us all through the years. It’s more than a simple love letter; it reveals His ____________ love towards us and what He expects from us. The Bible teaches us ________ to love God.

Love begins with a decision, but ________ love for God cannot remain with simply a decision. It must grow until it becomes the ________ priority. Love starts in the ________ but shows in the ________. True love will not stay ________; it’ll prove itself by the way that it behaves. Love must ________. Romans 5:8 says, “God shows his love for us in that while we were ________ sinners, Christ died for us.” God demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to the ________. The Lord Jesus sacrificed His life on His own initiative when we didn’t ask for it, didn’t deserve it, and didn’t quite understand it. That’s true love.

The word “love” is often ________. For instance, people say that they love something when what they really ________ is that they like or enjoy it. They may enjoy it greatly, but it certainly isn’t the ________ of their lives. Loving God can never be on the same ________ as loving ice cream. Many say they love God when truthfully they only ________ Him. They’ve never taken God seriously enough to make a lifelong, ________ commitment to Him. They never let God make a difference in their moral or spiritual ________. They love the ________ of the grace and forgiveness of God as long as God doesn’t mess with their lives. They love Him but want to do as they themselves ________.

Our reading today comes from Mark 12:28-31. That’s from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I asked you if you loved God, how would you ________? Many people would quickly answer yes, but how does your love for God ________ itself in your life? It’s easy to ________ that you love God. The Lord, however, defines love in ways that may ________ from the common understanding of love. We use and misuse the word “love” so frequently that it’s hard to define ________ love. Today let’s explore how love for God demonstrates itself.

First, I would ask you, do you ________ God? Love begins with _________. Genuine love for God pays attention to the love that ________ has shown. Have you considered all of your blessings that come from God’s hand and are you ________ thankful? Love and thanksgiving intertwine; you can’t have one without the other. The person who counts his blessings grows to appreciate and to love, and the person who loves won’t fail to ________ the kindness and goodness of the Lord.

I’ve always loved the words of Jeremiah that are found in the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah wrote this book at the time when his ________ was falling apart. He saw the love of God in ________ times and in the ________ of times. The Babylonians had once again invaded Jerusalem

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PO Box 371, Edmond, OK  73083    1-800-321-8633
This study sheet is prepared by Jerry Campbell – www.searchtv.org; jerry@searchtv.org
in 587 BC; and they tore down the _______________ and destroyed the city. Yet Jeremiah could say in Lamentations 3:22-24, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will ________ in him.’”

Jeremiah never gave up on God. True love never ___________. We live in a society ready to ________ on anyone they don’t like for any reason. Many keep a remote in their hands, ready to change channels the moment they hear something that doesn’t _________ them. Some feel God is only _________ of our love as long as He does what we want or what we agree with. Instead of ______________ God, many feel God ought to obey us. They judge the God who created them, forgetting that He’s the ______________ of every blessing they have. The air they breathe, the water they drink, the food that they eat come from His hand. They selfishly _________ appreciating and acknowledging the God who made them and sustains their lives.

Many _________ God if anything in their lives turns sour. They even blame God for the heartaches that they ________ for themselves. We should never suppose God has forgotten us or has stopped loving us because times are ______________. Read what Paul said in Romans 8:31-32 when the Roman Christians were going through some rough times. When times are tough, instead of forsaking God, let’s _________ ________ to Him.

Second, do you _________ God? Are you interested in Him? Do you _________ to draw close to Him? When people love each other, they want to spend _________ together. The Lord wants to spend time with you, and He wants you to spend time with Him. Can you imagine loving someone but _________ communicating with that person? When you consider the time that you spend with God, how loved do you think God ________? We hear God’s heart and message by a close _________ of the Word, and we share our hearts with God when we _________. Our relationship with God deepens as we ______________ Him. Love involves _________ and communication. Do you read your Bible, pray, and worship God ______________?

How long has it been since you _________ the Bible at length? The Lord Jesus said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by _________ _________ that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We need every word that God says. It nourishes our _________; it keeps us going in the right direction; it builds us up; and it gives us hope. Oh, I tell you if there was ever a time, we need the Bible.

Let me ask you, when was the last time you spent just a half-hour in _________? When was the last time that you worshiped at _________? Many of you attend church, I know; but do you _________ worship there? Is your worship focused; is it sincere and true. Read what the Lord Jesus said in John 4:23-24. I fear many folks go to church, have a good time as a spectator, visit friends, but may _________ to worship God. Loving God means focusing on what He has done for us and on what He _________ us.

God hears our worship and looks into our ______________. God complained through Malachi, the prophet, that the Jews were making _________ that were polluted. They substituted animals that were blind, and sick, and lame, and blemished for the _________ ones. Worship was no longer
Read what they were saying in Malachi 1:8. Today, in place of worship, many __________ entertainment or meaningless rituals.

Some think that God ought to be __________ with whatever we offer Him, but is He? Loving God means paying enough attention to Him so as to do what __________ Him. Don’t you want God to pay ____________ to your requests? Why should you think that God is willing to __________ whatever we offer?

We need hearts that ________ for God. The sons of Korah wrote, “As the deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1-2). They longed to worship God, to be _______ to Him. David too had that kind of ________ for God. David said, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1). We love God by _________ Him and drawing close to Him. We should love Him so much that we can’t spend not even one day without Him.

Drawing close to God means that we ________ righteously. The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be ____________” (Matthew 5:6). Hungering and thirsting is common for food, but do you hunger—I mean, really hunger—for righteousness? If you truly love God, you will long to be ________ with Him. No one wants to be in __________ with the person that they love. Loving God also means loving what He loves. He loves what’s good and right, but God despises what is hurtful and wrong. God despises sin because He loves you and knows how sin will ________ you. Loving God means loving righteousness.

In Matthew 6:33, the Lord said, “But seek ________ the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Many want God but don’t understand that having God necessitates being “right” with God. You can’t have the grace and favor of God and then just ____________ in sin. Romans 6:1-2 asks, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that __________ may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

Third, are you ____________ to God? True love involves commitment. Many want the joy of love but without any strings attached. That isn’t love—it’s selfishness. Love without commitment is fickle and can’t be __________. We live in a society that’s __________ of committed love. Millions of couples live together without the commitment of ___________. They want the better but not the worse, the richer but not the poorer, the health but not the sickness. Love without commitment is a ___________. Without a commitment, lasting love isn’t possible.

People talk much about placing ________ in God, and so we should. God is utterly trustworthy. But trusting God means you’re __________ to put yourself into His hands. May I ask you, “Can God trust you? Are you trustworthy? Can God trust you to love Him for a lifetime? If you want God to be committed to you, are you __________ to be committed to Him?” Someone says, “Well I don’t like to be tied down.” The Lord Jesus wasn’t tied down; He was __________ down. He didn’t merely __________ about love and commitment; He demonstrated it.
Loving God fully and wholeheartedly means putting Him ________, before anything or anyone. Read what He said in Luke 14:26-27. The word “hate” here does not mean to despise but means to ________ ________. If you compare your love for Jesus to your family or even yourself, you will love Jesus more.

Commitment to the Lord means staying away from _________. Read Romans 12:2.

Love also means ________ myself to what is good. James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” Pure religion means helping those who are in _________. We show our love for God by loving and helping people.

Committed love means ________ to the Lord and _________ His commandments. The Lord Jesus simply said, “If you love me, you will ________ my commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus wasn’t putting a ________ on us that He didn’t bear Himself. The Lord said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. And if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15: 9-10). Love listens; love pays attention; and love submits to the ________ of the One that we love.

Read 1 John 2:3-6. My friend, you can’t ____________ obedience from the love for God. Love means living the way Jesus lived, caring for others as He cared, forgiving as He forgave, and doing what is right just as He did.

Why are we asking and talking about all this? Because God wants us to love Him the ________ that He loves us. God has loved us with a great love and He ________ us to love Him with a great love. When we consider His grace and forgiveness, His daily blessings, His guidance in the Word, and the eternal home that He has prepared for us in heaven, how could we ________ but love God with all of our hearts, and all of our souls, and all of our minds, and all of our strength?

Love __________ makes a commitment. You can say “I love God” when you’re _________ to make a lifelong, serious commitment to Him. Loving God requires ________ than words. God doesn’t want fair-weather friends or nominal followers. He wants people who ________ love Him fully, freely, and faithfully. He wants people who will ________ for His cause, who won’t give up when things get tough. He wants people who will follow His ____________, love His ____________, and not compromise the faith.

Will you decide today to be His ____________, to deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow Him? If you want His love and grace to ________ you, commit yourself to Him. We become Christians by putting our ________ in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Our faith isn’t private; we must ________ it before others. With our faith, we must ________ from sin to righteousness, from error to truth, and from evil to good. Repentance means ________ from sin to the Lord and His will.

Our faith, and love, and repentance will lead us to ________ the Lord in baptism. Baptism is biblical; it’s how God ________ us with Christ and saves us. Read Romans 6:4-7. Oh, let God free you from sin, be baptized!
Loving Others
Colossians 3:12-15

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

The highest _________ of life is to love God and to love others. How well are you fulfilling that calling? God’s way brings __________ and __________. It leads people to __________ each other fairly and kindly. God’s way is humble and compassionate. It’s never selfish, never callous, and never hateful. God’s way __________ up rather than puffs up; it __________ with hope and comfort rather than manipulate with doubt and fear. The more you know about God, the more you’ll love Him and His __________. The more you follow His ways, the more __________ you will see. Don’t push God out of your life or let others ________ you away from Him. Love Him, serve Him, and lead others to love Him, too.

The Christian __________ can be summed up in two commandments of Jesus found in Mark 12:30-31, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your ________, with all your ________, with all your ________ and with all your ________. The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment __________ than these.” In fact, every commandment in Scripture is really an explanation of how to love God and how to love people. You simply can’t follow the Lord __________ loving Him and loving others.

The Lord Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, gave us what some call the __________ rule. The Lord said, “In everything, therefore, treat people the ________ _____ you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). Righteous people, who love the Lord, ask the question, “How do ____ want to be treated?” They treat others the way that they would like to be treated. If everyone followed this_______, wouldn’t our society be a better place?

Our reading today comes from Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians 3:12-15.

Love is our highest calling. Nothing is more __________ than loving God and loving other people. Read what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Without love we can’t fulfill our __________ in life; we become empty; and we gain nothing. If love is that important, then we ought to __________ what love is and how it behaves. Let me make these suggestions:

First, love warms a cold _________. The opposite of love is not _______ but apathy or indifference. A cold heart can ________ on by and never get involved. Negative and hurtful experiences can ________ the heart, can depress the spirit, and can drive away compassion. Love warms your heart, makes you ________, and causes you to feel and to act.

Selfishness and apathy lead people to sit by and do nothing, while others __________. Read 1 John 3:16-18. Love starts in the heart, but it doesn’t end there. Love doesn’t merely ________ about doing something. Love ________!
Many people today live ________, isolated lives. One-fourth of all the households in America have only ______ person in them. Researchers say that 40 percent of people relate ______ with others over a cell phone or a computer than they do in ______ life. Many family gatherings have little conversation and lots of ______. I visited a home recently and the first thing the host did was ban all use of smart phones. He wanted us to talk. I recently read that the number of people who have no one to ______ important matters with has tripled in the last twenty years. Loneliness can ______ to depression and illness. We need each other; we need to love and to be loved. It’s essential to life.

Second, love _________ its will and itself for another’s best interest. Love is never self-seeking or self-serving. First Corinthians 13:5 says love “does not ______ its own.” Another version says “it doesn’t insist on its own way.” Love puts itself ______ and others ______. Love seeks to ______ more than it seeks to win. Love tries to understand by seeing things through another’s _______. Read what God urges us in Philippians 2:3-4.

Many years ago, Francis of Assisi prayed a prayer worth remembering; he said, “Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.”

Third, when ________ and ________ arise, love seeks reconciliation. The Bible says, “If possible, so far as it ________ on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18). God has always wanted His people to have a compassionate and understanding ________. Philippians 4:5 says, “Let your ________ spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.” We need a gentle spirit, one that is sweet and reasonable rather than one that stays _______ and grows ________.

Sometimes that means humbly and sincerely apologizing to those whom you have ________. Read what the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 5:23-24. If you know you’ve offended someone, don’t ______ until that person confronts you; go to him or her and get it straightened out.

Sometimes others ________ us. Love moves us to want to remain _______ and to forgive; so it’s willing to go privately and humbly to the other to work things out. The Lord Jesus said, “If your brother sins (some versions say, sins against you), you go and show him his fault in ________; and if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matthew 18:15). Our world would be a much ________ place if two people at odds with each other would follow this teaching. Instead of trying to ________ an issue, many grumble and gossip. Proverbs 16:28 says, “A perverse man ________ strife, And a slanderer ________ intimate
friends.” Others seek ________ to get even. Instead of making the problem worse, love ________ to get along for reconciliation. Love values talking _____ someone rather than talking ________ someone. Gossip is still gossip no matter who’s doing it or who’s hearing it.

   We can solve many problems by simply ________ some questions. People often assume the worst about others and accuse them of wrongdoing before they know the ________ ________. Proverbs 18:17 says, “The first to plead his case seems ________, until another comes and examines him.” We may get hurt or angry when we hear ________ of the story but don’t know all the facts. Sometimes hearing the rest of the story can ________ us to understand what really happened and why. A few more facts can ________ our thinking entirely.

   **Read the story about the husband pushing his wife as a car was approaching.**

   Fourth, love knows how to ________. **Read what the Bible says in Ephesians 4:31-32.** Knowing that God had enough love to forgive us of our many, many sins, we should be ________ to forgive others of their few sins. God’s Word simply says, “love ________ a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Love ________ to put offenses behind us and to go on. First Corinthians 13:7-8 says, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” Love never quits.

   Whether you can forgive another is not some small matter; it actually affects your ________. God ________ you to forgive, if you wish to be forgiven. **Read what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:14-15.** People who want to experience the ________ of God have obligations to show ________ to others. James 2:13 says, “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” If we wish to be forgiven, we must ________ to forgive.

   When God forgives us, He no ________ holds our sins and trespasses against us. Sometimes we ________ forgiving with forgetting. You can forgive a sin, even if you can’t ________ it. Forgiveness is not forgetting; it’s forgetting against. Second Corinthians 5:19 says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses ________ them.” Our sins are a matter of ________. God’s grace touches our hearts because He ________ with our sins rather than because He ignored or denied them. Because Jesus suffered for our sins, God doesn’t ________ them against us. The fact is that our sins have not disappeared; the ________ for our sins has. God has forgiven us.

   Fifth, love will tell you what you ________ to hear, not what you ________ to hear. God’s Word says, “Faithful are the wounds of a ________, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6). Honesty, even when it ________, from a true friend is far more loving than half-truths and flattery from someone who means to do you harm. The devil will tell you what you want to hear, whether it’s true or not; but the Lord will tell you what you need to hear to ________ your life, even if it hurts your feelings for a short time.
The very best thing you can do for a friend is to ___________ him or her to Jesus Christ and the gospel. The gospel is good news of salvation and ________. People _______ the gospel story of Jesus Christ. They need to know that He died on the cross for their sins; He was buried; and He rose again on the third day. They need to know about His loving grace and His call for them to ________ and ________.

Sixth, loving others means ___________ others. First Peter 4:10 says, “As each has received a gift, use it to _______ one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” Whatever talent we possess we should use it to bless the _______ of others. Galatians 6:10 says, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do ________ to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

**Read the story about the two brothers.**

Why have we spent this time talking about love? Without love in the heart, we are just _______ beings. Without love, our lives are _______ with loneliness and sadness. Without love, we’ve failed our ________ in life; we have no value, and we make no gains. Oh, we need the love of Jesus in our hearts and in our lives so that we may love others.

God’s Holy Word teaches us how to ________ one another. The Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another. And by this all men will know that you are My ________, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). The Lord wants us to love each other the _______ _______ that He loves us. How has He loved us? Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his _______ for his friends” (John 15:13). The Lord Jesus loved us with a great love; He died for us.

When we love one another the way Jesus loved us, people _____ Christ living in us. Loving others like Jesus did _______ us as Christians. It’s not the only mark of a Christian, but it’s a necessary one. Let me ask you, are you _______ to others? Do you _______ others or hold grudges? Are you compassionate or do you have a closed heart? Do you _______ peace or do you get even? Do you have a sweet spirit of reasonableness or are you constantly grumbling? Do you try to ________ conflicts or do you gossip and slander others? Do you love like Jesus?

When the love of Jesus is in your heart, you’ll make a ________ in your life. I hope that you love the Lord enough to ________ Him. To become a Christian you must ________ that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and be willing to ________ Him in the presence of others. You must cease doing evil and follow Christ in ______________. You must be ________ into Christ, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Oh, I pray that you’ll become a Christian today.