

## "What Love Means"

The highest calling of life is to love God and other people, but what does it mean to love? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're exploring the meaning of love, so stay with us.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The God of the Bible is the God of love, who loves us in spite of all our weaknesses. How thankful we should be for the Bible, because it's the Bible that reveals all that God has done to bless us now in this life and in the life to come. God's word records His plans for us and His promises. And the more we learn about God, the more we'll love Him. By studying God's word, we'll grow in our faith and our devotion to Him. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verses 1 to 3, that "If I speak in the tongues 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 nothing. If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." Love is the very foundation of our relationship with God. Without love we're nothing and we gain nothing.

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

Friends, we offer this study free about love. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free online at our website [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org).

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 1 Corinthians 13 verses 4 to 8, and we'll explore what it means to love.

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verses 4 through 8. "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." That's a reading from God's holy word in the bible. Let's pray. Father, we're thankful that You not only have loved us so greatly and shown us what love is, but You've also taught us how to love others. Father, help us to love You and to love other people. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

What does it mean to love? Well the love that we're talking about isn't the same thing as physical affection, though many call that love. No, "love," as it's used in the Bible, is the surrender of the self for the best interests of others. Love takes place when people put other's needs 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 mere feelings, though love involves feeling. Love is an intentional act of the will; love determines to put self aside and bless the object of its love. Love sacrifices. Love pays whatever cost, gives whatever gift, and runs whatever risk to do what is best for another. It gladly gives without complaint. Love will act even when difficult things are required. Love will bear the harsh and the demanding load. Love is like a candle. It makes no noise but it softly gives itself away to be a blessing to others.

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

Living without love means that our hearts will be empty and indifferent. We won't care about anything but ourselves. We'll be like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan; we'll just pass by on the other side of the road and leave others to perish. A life without love means that we'll turn inward in selfishness, wanting only to fulfill our own lusts and desires. We'll be like the foolish, rich farmer whose land, you'll remember provided abundantly but all he could think about was hoarding it up for himself. You see, living without love means we'll forget how to be thankful for what we have or how others sacrificed to bless us.

Living without love means that we won't have a relationship with God. In 1 John 4 verses 7 to 8 the bible says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows 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 angry at every offense and we plot to get even. Without love, hate flourishes. 1 John 2 verses 10 to 11 says, that "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause 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." You see, hate fills everything with darkness, and fear, and violence. A world without love is a miserable place.

On the other hand, living with love means living with care and compassion. We see a need and we fill it, we see a hurt and we comfort it, we see an opportunity to bless and we seize it. God is the great model of love. And so what we want to do is see how God loves:

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

Second, God's love is forgiving. Psalm 103 verses 8 to 12 says, that "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

My friends, we can understand a God who would forgive friends who ask for mercy. But we have a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them. He must possess an extraordinary love to do that! You see it's the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for lost people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. And if you feel far from God, don't despair, because God is searching for you.

Third, God's love is eternal and beyond measure. Romans 8 verses 38 and 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 separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Oh these verses contain comforting promises. You know believers have always had to face hardships in many forms: persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. And these problems could cause them to feel abandoned by Christ. But Paul explains that these things cannot separate us from Christ and His love. God profoundly loves His people.

And Paul bowed his knees before the Father and he prayed in Ephesians 3 verses 17 to 19 “that Christ may dwell 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.” If we could grasp—even a little—the immeasurable love of God for us, oh we would love Him and love others so much more.

Well how then should we love others? Well people are not “born lovers” any more than people are born chefs. They have to learn how to cook and they also have to learn how to love. You may have the deepest of feelings, but you see love is a verb, it's an act of the heart and soul. And loving somebody means that you've paid enough attention to their needs and their desires, that their needs and their desires become more important than your own. The Scriptures teach us why to love and how to love.

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

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

Now if we become distracted with how people treat us, we'll miss how we treat others. Love means setting ourselves and our wills aside so that we can bless other people. The Bible says in Ephesians 4 verses 31 and 32, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

The devil leads people to be arrogant, to be offended easily, 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 in Matthew 5 verses 43 to 48, “You have heard that it was said, that ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray 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 reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

God calls us to be His children and He expects us to grow beyond a purely selfish mindset. The Lord God sacrificed Jesus on His own. We didn't cry out for Him to send His Son. No, He gave Jesus because He first loved us. 1 John 4 verses 9 to 11 says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live 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 ought to love one another.”

The Lord God forgave us, not because we deserved it but because He is so loving. He calls us to forgive—even when people don't deserve 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, and that's the way God is.

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

Love means ending our selfish, self-centered ways so we can sacrifice ourselves to serve God and to serve others. Life without love is empty and useless, it's sad and lonely. And people who turn away from the love of God may not realize how much they've hurt themselves or what a precious things that they have lost when they lose love. When people lose love, God's love, they also lose His forgiveness, they lose His ear in prayer, they lose a room in His eternal house. My friend, do you love God? Will you love God? Will you give yourself fully to Him? Let's pray together. Oh Father. Help us to love You with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And to love our neighbors as we do ourselves. Father help us to be the kind of children that You're proud of. And may Your will be done on earth as it is heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

After that wonderful chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, comes the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1, which simply says, “Pursue love.” Now to “pursue” means to go after something until you seize it. Paul isn't speaking here about finding someone to love you; he's urging us to pursue the practice of loving someone else. Pursuing means regularly giving of ourselves in time and effort to do what is best for others. 1 John 3 and verse 18 says, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Love means caring enough for others to tell them about Jesus and about His love. We preach Christ each week because we love you. When people get to know Christ, they learn to love in the fullest sense of the word. They truly put other people before themselves. They won't hurt God or others by living sinful lives when they love God. You see, God's love and His kindness moves us, motivates us to repent of our sins and to live moral lives. Love won't let us keep on sinning against God or sinning against other people. God loves you, and He greatly wants you to be His child. And so if you open up your heart, and you begin to love God the way that He loves you, you'll change your life. You'll draw

close to God and 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. And 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 He makes you His child (Galatians 3 verses 26 and 27). Now as God's child, He will hear your prayers, He'll give you an inheritance in heaven. And 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 your life to Him?

Well we hope that today's study about what love means has stirred you to consider God's love for you. If you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons online at [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org). There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you contact us, don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you to get to heaven.

Please worship and get involved with a church of Christ. The Lord Jesus shed His blood to purchase the church. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.