

"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." 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 despite all our weaknesses. Let's be thankful for the Bible, because it reveals all that God has done to bless us now and in the ages to come. God's word records 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 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.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:1 to 3, "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 I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." Love is the foundation 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 without 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 forgive. People would become selfish and ambitious, stepping on others to better 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 hope and filled with all the ugly substitutions that people find to take love's place.

Friends, we offer this study free. And if you'd like a printed copy 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. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

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

Our reading today comes from 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 4 to 8. This is a very familiar passage and is frequently read at weddings, but actually it talks about every aspect of life. Let's read. "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; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away." That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray together. "Father help us to be more loving in our lives toward You, and in our lives toward others who are around us. Help us to love those who love us and help us to love our enemies and those who do not take thought of us. Father help us to be the kind of people that when You look down You can be proud of. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

What does it mean to love? 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 to bless the object of its love. And love sacrifices. Love pays whatever the 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 demanding load. And love is like a candle? It makes no noise but 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 serve us. Love knows how to give, but love also knows how to receive 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 share with the Lord. Love means allowing others to enter into our lives and to be kind to us.

Living without love means 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 pass by on the other side of the road and leave others to suffer. A life without love means we'll turn inward to selfishness, wanting only to fulfill our own lusts and desires. We'll be the foolish, be like the rich farmer that was foolish, whose land provided abundantly but all he could think about was hoarding it up for himself. Living without love means we'll forget how to be thankful for what we have or how others have sacrificed to bless us.

Living without love means living without a relationship with God. 1 John 4, verses 7 to 8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. And 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 plot to get even. Without love, hate will flourish. 1 John 2:10 to 11 says, "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." Hate fills everything with evil, fear, and violence. A world without love is miserable.

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 comfort, and we see an opportunity to bless and seize it. God is the great example and teacher of love. And so let's see how God loves:

First, God's love is sacrificial. John 3:16 to 17 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only (and some say 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 saved 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 basis 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 price that he could pay. 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' 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 forgiving. Psalm 103, verses 8 to 12 says, "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 doesn't 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 towards those who fear 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 mercy. But a God who tenderly searches for sinners 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 lost people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel far from God, don't despair. He's searching for you.

Third, God's love is eternal and beyond measure. Romans 8:38 to 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." These verses contain comforting promises. 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 these things cannot separate us from Christ. God profoundly loves His people.

Paul bowed his knees before the Father and prayed in Ephesians 3:17 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 but grasp—even a little—the immeasurable love of God for us, we would grow in our love for Him and for other people.

Well how then do we love others? 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 verb, 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 own. The Scriptures teach us why to love and how to love.

Many want to be loved, but they don't understand the higher calling of loving others. Love isn't merely affection that we receive from others; 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 13:34 to 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 to the world 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." True Christianity calls us to sacrifice ourselves for others.

If we become distracted with how people treat us, we'll miss how we treat others. Love means setting what we want aside so that we can bless others by filling their needs and wants. Ephesians 4:31 to 32 says, "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."

Now the devil leads 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 in Matthew 5:43 to 48, "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 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 expects us to grow beyond a purely selfish mindset. The Lord God sacrificed Jesus on His own. And we don't cry out for Him to send His Son. He gave Jesus because He first loved us, He initiated it. 1 John 4:9 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. That's the way God is.

Colossians 3:12 to 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 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." 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 serve others. Life without love is empty and useless, sad and lonely. And people who turn away from the love of God may not realize 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?

Let's pray. "Father help us to be loving people who care for the needs of others and make others more important than ourselves. Forgive us our sins and help us to forgive others just as You have forgiven us. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

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 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 and the skill of loving others. Pursuing means regularly giving ourselves to do what is best for others. 1 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 telling others about Jesus and 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. They truly put others before themselves. They won't hurt God or others by living sinful lives. God's love and kindness moves us to repent of our sins and to live moral lives. Love won't let us keep on sinning against God or others. God loves you greatly and wants you to be His child. If you open your heart to God's love, and to His word, you'll change 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 and 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?

We hope 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 want a free printed copy 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. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area at searchtv.org. Now you can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! We ask that you subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." And as you watch the programs be sure to push that like button; so that the programs you watch will spread to others. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses, we'll send them to you, you fill them out and you send them back. We'll grade them and then we'll send them back to you. Now if you get a hold of us don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

So focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. And everybody needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.