



JESUS' LIFE *of Love*

Ten Bible Study Lessons from the Gospels

MARY & FRIENDS
Forever-Loved.org

Jesus' Life of Love

Mary and Friends

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Introduction



Have you ever watched an ant colony? The ants move along invisible trails that other ants have somehow marked out. Working together they carry tiny bits of dirt to the top of the anthill. When something falls on the trail or the anthill, they scurry about frantically.

Now suppose you really care about ants and a storm is coming. Without your help the ants are going to die in a flood. You want to save them. You shout at the ants, “Move to higher ground,” but they pay no attention. You take a stick and try to redirect their trail. It doesn’t work. They think you are trying to hurt them.

Your ways are completely incomprehensible to the ants. You live on a different level—higher, richer and more advanced—and they can’t understand what you are trying to communicate. The only way for you to save the ants is to become an ant yourself and use their language to help them in a way they understand.

This is what God did for us.

Jesus came to earth to speak our language—to show us our Father’s heart of compassion and way of salvation. He became like us so we could know and experience God. Jesus took our anatomy as a human being—with a spirit, a soul and a body—so He could reconcile us to God. As a man—as a three-part being—Jesus undid what Adam had done in the fall. He restored us to God’s original design: we were created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27).

In becoming one of us and dying on the cross as a sinless human being, Jesus paid the price the law demanded for our sins. Adam had chosen the desires of his own soul over the will of God, but Jesus chose God’s will over the desires of His own soul. He surrendered His soul to the leading of the Spirit and gave His body to die on the cross for our sins.

In the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross, we are set free to become the people God created us to be. When we invite God into our life, His Spirit comes to live in us and our relationship with God begins. Then, in God’s design, our soul—our mind, will and emotions—surrenders its own desires (will) and comes to rest under the loving leading of the Spirit. In this way, the body (as directed by the soul at rest in the Spirit’s leading) radiates the nature of Christ in earthly, physical reality. And so we become as Jesus was—spirit-soul-body channels through which the love of God floods the earth.

Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). We see the love of our heavenly Father in the stories Jesus told; in the way He stopped to help the sick, interact with

outcasts, and befriend sinners; in His teaching; in His prayers and in His death. We see God in Jesus' life of love.

This Bible study is designed to help you know God as He really is and to direct your heart toward His love. Jesus' life speaks restoration to us. We are valued and cherished beyond measure. We are precious to God. He has a grand and glorious plan for all His people.

God has chosen you. He has made a way for you to be adopted into His family. He loves you with an unstoppable, limitless love. That love came to rescue you completely, to set you free and to make you whole. Jesus came to give you eternal life in heaven and abundant life, here and now, on this earth. God created you to know His love, abide in His love and radiate His love.

Open your heart to Jesus who came to share the Father's love with you.

Lesson One



Jesus: God's Beloved Son

Matthew 3:13–4:11

I was out for a walk in the neighborhood with my four-year-old grandson when he turned to me and said, “God loves me and that is the most importantest thing.”

I cannot think of a statement that is more profoundly true. The grammar may not be correct, but the content is. God loves us; that is truth at its foundation. And it is “the most importantest thing” that we believe and embrace this truth.

“God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). He is the source and supply of all things that are good: mercy, forgiveness, kindness, compassion. Love begins with God. God loves us, not because we did anything to deserve it, but simply because it is His nature to love. He values us. He longs for us. He has our best interest at heart.

That is the truth. But, in order for God's love to become real in our lives, we need to believe it. The only requirement to receiving His love is that we—with trusting, childlike faith—believe. When we believe in God and accept that He values and cherishes us, we come to see Him as He really is. And, as we come to see Him as He really is, we come to be like Him—to radiate His nature of love.

As a human like us, Jesus—the Son of Man—had to know and trust in God's love for Him. To share God's love with us—to show us the Father's heart—Jesus too had to believe in His Father's love. It was through this unbroken, loving relationship that the Father's love had perfect expression in the Son. Jesus said, “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all he does” (John 5:19–20).

Trusting His Father with total assurance of His love made it possible for Jesus to live a life of love. His Father was the source of the love Jesus radiated in His life. Over and over again, Satan tempted Jesus to choose His own will over His Father's. But in every trial and temptation, the Son trusted in His Father—and radiated God's love to the world.

In the passage for this lesson, we hear the Father introduce Jesus: “This is my Son, whom I love.” Jesus let these words define Him, not only at His baptism, but also in the wilderness temptations and throughout His life. He believed and trusted in His Father's love.

Read Matthew 3:13–4:11.**Chapter 3**

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Chapter 4

¹Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

⁷Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Questions

1. Imagine you are present at Jesus' baptism. What do you see as the scene unfolds?

8. In verse 3 of chapter 4, Satan tempted Jesus by saying, "Tell these stones to become bread." Jesus had not eaten in 40 days. Given the circumstances, this seems like a good and reasonable thing to do. Why did Jesus respond the way He did?

9. In verses 3 and 6, Satan preceded his first two temptations with, "If you are the Son of God ..." Why do you think he did this? Satan did not say, "If you are the Son of God, whom He loves ..." Why do you think Satan left out the phrase, "whom He loves"?

10. Jesus overcame each temptation by using the Word of God. Think of a temptation you have faced or are facing, what words from Scripture might you have used (use) to resist that temptation?

11. In what ways do you think knowing the Father's love helped Jesus overcome Satan's temptations.

12. How might knowing the Father's love help you personally in times of temptation and difficulty?

Reflection

Get alone in a quiet, peaceful place. Perhaps you have a favorite chair where you like to sit and look out the window. Perhaps you have a special tree you like to lean against as you watch the sun set or the clouds floating by. As you sit in your special place, ask God for a deeper understanding of His love for you.

After you have sat for a while, hear the Father's voice saying, "This is my son/daughter, whom I love."

Receive these words as best you are able. If you feel yourself resisting the words in anyway, try to discern the reason (lie/fear) behind your resistance. Give the lie/fear to God and hear His words again, "This is my son/daughter, whom I love." Repeat as you feel God directs.

Lesson Two



Jesus Tells the Story of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1–7

People everywhere are desperate to experience God’s overwhelming, never-ending love. The popularity of Cory Asbury’s song, “Reckless Love” is evidence of this deep longing. The song was posted to YouTube on January 19, 2018 and six months later the video had been viewed over 36 million times! To view this song, go to the Forever Loved website (Forever-Loved.org). The song’s refrain reads:

*Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights ‘til I’m found, leaves the ninety-nine
I couldn’t earn it, and I don’t deserve it, still, You give Yourself away
Oh the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God.*

Our heart longs to know of God’s unfailing, unconditional love. Every person’s heart has a raw, gaping hole that can only be healed and filled with the love of God. But even though we long to be loved deep in the core of ourselves, our old Adam nature does not easily accept the love God freely offers. Our minds are not programmed to receive it. And so, like a radio tuned to the wrong frequency, we completely miss the signal.

When Adam sinned and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, it was as if he turned the dial to the wrong frequency. He cut himself off from a loving Spirit-to-spirit union with God and chose instead to be led by his own mind, will and emotions—by his own soul. In this state of separation, God provided a set of rules to guide the independent soul. Through Moses, He gave the Ten Commandments and other laws to clearly define good and evil according to what was best for humanity. But the law did not come with the strength to obey its own commands. The independent soul, cut off from Spirit-to-spirit relationship with God, simply cannot follow the rules; it wasn’t created to. Adam’s independent, sin nature can never inherit the promises of God.

As part of the human race, we inherit Adam’s nature. We are born with our dial set to the wrong frequency and cannot hear the love of God. Instead we listen to the static of the world and think we must work hard according to our own knowledge of good and evil to try and obey the law in order to earn God’s favor, blessing ... and love.

But Jesus made a way for the dial to be reset to the proper channel. The New Covenant that Jesus introduced is not based on law; it is based on love. In the New Covenant our value and worth are based—not on our doing good and avoiding evil—but simply in being loved by God as His children. Amazing as it sounds, He loves us unconditionally and always.

In the verses for this lesson, Jesus introduces us to God's extravagant love. He tells the story of the lost sheep to help us change our minds so that we begin to see God as He really is—full of unconditional love for us. Like a good shepherd watches over his sheep and seeks out the one who has gone astray, so God cares for us.

Read Luke 15:1–7.

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Questions

1. In verse 1, how did the sinners and tax collectors respond to Jesus?
2. In verse 2, how did the Pharisees and teachers of the law respond to Jesus?
3. Why do you think the two groups responded differently?

4. Pretend for a moment that you are a Pharisee. You are highly educated, very religious and greatly respected in society. You think you are better than others because you obey the Ten Commandments. Even though you are never sure you have done enough, you try hard to please God by being obedient. How might this story impact you?

5. Now pretend that you are a tax collector. You know that you have not kept the Ten Commandments. The religious norms of society tell you that you are evil and unworthy of God's care. You feel your sins and disobedience have put you outside of God's favor and that He will deal harshly with you. How might this story impact you?

6. Reread verse 5. Imagine and describe the scene.

7. Look at the words "joyfully," "rejoice," "rejoicing" in verses 5, 6 and 7. What do these words say to you?

8. How does Jesus describe the shepherd in this story?

9. Describe the image of God you see portrayed in this story. How does God see each individual?

10. How does this image compare with your own personal view of God?

11. Are you one of the ninety-nine sheep safely in the pen, or are you a wandering sheep?
Explain your answer.

12. How might accepting that God values you and takes joy in you affect your relationship with Him?

Reflection

Imagine that you are a little lamb who has wandered away from the flock. Now you are caught in a tangle of brush and night is falling. The Good Shepherd notices that you are missing. He puts the others safely in the pen for the night and sets out to find you. He walks along searching and calling your name into the darkening shadows ... (your name) ... (your name) ... (your name).

When He sees you, His face lights up in a smile. His eyes sparkle with joy over finding you. He kneels on the ground in front of you. Then with gentle, caring hands, He removes you from the brush. He lifts you up in His strong, safe arms and lays you across His shoulders ...

Ponder this experience.

Lesson Three



Jesus Tells the Story of the Lost Son

Luke 15:11–32

One day I was reading Sheila Walsh’s little book, *Outrageous Love*, when her words made me stop. “God’s love doesn’t play by the rules.... It offers unconditional love to the one who knows [he] she is guilty and the one who thinks [he]she is innocent.”

How true! God’s love doesn’t play by the rules. It doesn’t fit with the way our Adam nature is programmed to think. God loves us unconditionally, regardless of what we have or haven’t done. Yes, He wants us to be good and do right, but He doesn’t love us more if we do good things or less if we do bad things.

Even as Christians, after we accept Jesus by faith and are born again into Spirit-to-spirit relationship with God, our soul oftentimes still keeps looking for “good” things we can do to earn God’s favor and love. We easily fall back into the trap of being led, not by the Spirit, but by the independent soul—with a New Testament version of “good” rules to be followed. Under this way of thinking, we either know we are guilty because of our obvious sin or feel we are innocent because of our self-righteousness. Obvious sin causes us to feel guilty and undeserving of love so that we reject God’s forgiveness and compassion. On the other hand, self-righteousness and pride stand in the way of us receiving the love God offers us as a free gift. Deep inside, many of us still think like the Pharisees—like the hard-working, older brother. We try in our own strength to be “good” by church standards. And in doing so, we think we are better than others and have somehow earned God’s favor, blessing ... and love.

But Jesus did not come to bring us a new set of laws to be obeyed. In the New Covenant, we don’t work and strive to be obedient in order to be loved and accepted. Rather, we live our lives from a position of knowing and believing the love God has for us. We are of infinite worth to Him. When we see Him as He really is—full of love for us—we will run repeatedly into His welcoming arms ... until we learn to abide in His embrace.

In the text for this lesson, Jesus tells the parable of the lost son and his older brother to help us understand our Father. Both of the sons think of themselves as deserving or undeserving based on their behaviors—according to their obedience to the law. But the father only has love for both of his sons.

Read Luke 15:11–32.

¹¹Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Questions

1. While away in the distant country, how did the younger son think his father would respond to him when he returned home? Why do you think the son might have thought this way?
2. Have you ever rejected your heavenly Father's love because you felt undeserving? If so, what was that like?
3. Describe the father's actions upon his younger son's return. What do these actions say to you about the father and how he felt about his younger son?
4. Compare and contrast the way you think the younger son saw his father before and after his return.
5. If possible, share a time when someone treated you with compassion and forgiveness after you had sinned. How did that make you feel toward the forgiving individual? About yourself?

12. What does this parable say to you personally about God, your heavenly Father?

Reflection

Scripture tells us that “We all, like sheep, have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6). This includes straying like the younger son (who was aware of his sins) and straying like the older brother (who did not recognize his sins). Acknowledging that we have gone astray is the first step toward reconciliation.

Reread verses 11–24 putting yourself in the story as the lost son. Perhaps a specific sinful or self-righteous action or thought comes to mind. Now you are ready to share that with your Father. Now you are returning home.

In your mind see your Father coming to welcome you ... tell Him everything ... and receive His joyful welcome.

Lesson Four



Jesus Heals a Lame Man John 5:1–20

Mother Teresa showed her understanding for the deep need of every human being when she said, “Hunger is not only for bread. Hunger is for love, to be loved, to be wanted.”

When she was 38, this devout nun left her job as a teacher at a Catholic girls’ school and began working amongst the poorest of the poor on the streets of Calcutta, (now officially Kolkata) India. Her goal was not to prolong life, convert people or help individuals escape from a life of poverty. Her desire was simply to unconditionally love people with the love of God. Mother Teresa understood that the deepest need of the human soul is to be loved.

God is love and we were created to be in unity with Him. But Satan opposes that. Through our inability to obey the commandments of the law, he thunders, “Guilty!” “Condemned!” “Sinner!” “You are unworthy of God’s love!” With intense fury the devil seeks to keep us from believing in the love of God. If our minds can’t believe it, we won’t be free to live loved and be the people God created us to be. And so, using the law as his impossible-to-obey measuring stick, Satan rages on with his legalistic attack.

Jesus came to renew us in spirit, soul and body. He came to show us a new way of thinking and living—in Spirit-to-spirit union with the Father. His desire is for our soul (mind) that thinks and lives by the law to be transformed, so that we think and live in love. Seeing Jesus’ person-to-person interactions with broken humanity helps us be transformed in this way.

In John chapter 5, when Jesus heals a lame man, we get a picture of our Father through the compassionate actions of His Son. We see God’s heart as Jesus reaches out to this lame man lying helpless on his pallet. Then, when the Jews confront Jesus over the healing, we see how they used the law to directly oppose the love of God.

Read John 5:1–20.

¹Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ²Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [⁴] ⁵One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

¹¹But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

¹²So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

¹³The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

¹⁶So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” ¹⁸For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁹Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.”

Questions

1. Imagine the lame man beside the pool, waiting and waiting ... for 38 years. What might that have been like?

2. How do you think the lame man felt about himself as he lay helpless beside the pool?
How do you think he felt about those who had stepped into the waters ahead of him?
How do you think he felt about God?

3. In your own words, describe Jesus' interactions with the lame man.

4. What do you think motivated or compelled Jesus to act as He did?

5. How might Jesus' interaction with the lame man have changed the way this man thought and felt about himself? Others? God?

6. Recall and describe a time when you were treated with unexpected love and respect.
How did that affect you?

7. How did the Jews respond to the lame man's healing?

8. What in their heart might have caused them to act this way?

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9. In this passage, how does the legalism of the Jews oppose the love of God?

 10. Jesus used the response of the Jews as an opportunity to speak truth. In what ways do Jesus' words in verse 17 simultaneously address their complaint and expound on who He is?

 11. What is verse 20 saying to you personally?

 12. Recall and describe a time when you treated someone with God-led compassion. How did that experience affect you? How did the other person respond?

Reflection

Put yourself in the lame man's place. You are helpless on your mat beside the pool. For 38 years you have lain there—lonely and uncared for. Thousands have passed you by ... but Jesus stops ... He bends down ... He looks into your eyes ... with compassion He speaks, "Do you want to get well?"

Allow your heart to respond as the scene unfolds in your mind.

Lesson Five



Jesus Rescues a Woman Caught in Adultery John 8:2–11

Pope John Paul II once said, “We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures. We are the sum of the Father’s love for us.”

Do you believe it? Can you personalize his words and say, “I am not the sum of my weaknesses and failures. I am the sum of my Father’s love for me”?

Our struggle to believe in the truth of God’s great love for us is the battle of the ages. Old Covenant versus New Covenant, the scribes and Pharisees versus Jesus, law versus love—it is the war of wars. From Adam’s fall until this present hour the fight rages. What rules in our hearts and minds? The old way of soul-leading through the law or the new way of Spirit-leading through God’s love?

When we are born into this world, we inherit Adam’s sin nature that thinks according to the knowledge of good and evil—according to the law. It isn’t that we were taught the wrong thinking; it is more like we caught it. We caught it from repeated early experiences with parents, caregivers and others who caught it from their parents who caught it from their parents ... clear back to Adam and Eve.

Such early patterns of thought are not easily changed. They can’t simply be replaced with facts—regardless of the truth of those facts. We can’t experience God’s love as a fact. We can’t experience His love by reasoning. For example, when we read in the Bible, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,” we may think, *God loved the world. I am part of the world. Therefore, God loves me.* But this reasoning is still only a fact. God wants us to know the fact of His love, but for change to occur in our lives, we must also experience His love through a personal relationship with Him.

Over and over again we need to experience the essential truth that God values us beyond comprehension. In relationship with God and others who share His love, our minds and hearts are transformed. God’s love becomes real to us so that our whole nature and way of thinking changes.

In the text for this lesson, Jesus’ interactions with a woman caught in adultery shows us God’s love in a powerful, relational way that speaks to our hearts. The scribes and Pharisees bring the woman to Jesus. The law says she should be put to death. But Jesus responds with forgiveness and compassion ... while at the same time turning the law back on the scribes and Pharisees ... so they might consider their own sins ... and need for a loving Savior.

Read John 8:2–11.

²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Questions

1. For what reasons did the teachers of the law and Pharisees bring the woman to Jesus?
2. How might the teachers of the law and Pharisees have thought of themselves in comparison to the woman?
3. As she waited to be stoned, how do you think the woman felt about herself? About the teachers of the law and the Pharisees? About God?

10. In this situation, what do you think Jesus' words and actions convey to the woman?
To the teachers of the law and the Pharisees?

11. How might this event have changed the woman's perceptions of herself? Of God?

12. What is this passage saying to you personally?

Reflection

Imagine painting a picture of the law. What does it look like? If there are people present in your painting, consider their expressions and hidden attitudes.

Now imagine painting a picture of God's love. What does it look like? Consider the nuances of shading and color. If people are present in your picture, reflect on their expressions and the feelings behind those expressions.

Sit with these two contrasting images. Let the painting of love overshadow the painting of the law.

Lesson Six



Jesus Shares the Secret of Life with a Pharisee John 3:1–17

Billy Graham once said, “God proved His love on the cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, ‘I love you.’”

With these simple words, one of the greatest evangelists in the modern era summed up the heart of the Gospel. How clear. How pure. Jesus came to share God’s love with the world.

The way of life Jesus lived and taught is fundamentally different from all other world religions. Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists ... all believe that humans are expected to follow certain laws or traditions in order to earn favor with their deity(ies). But Jesus does not demand or even suggest that we, through self-effort, obey a set of laws, even if they be of God’s design (as were the Ten Commandments). He desires that we come into a loving relationship with Himself—that we are born-again of the Spirit. Only then, by change on the inside, will our lives come into conformity to His design.

God created humans to have a spirit, a soul and a body. Before the fall, Adam and Eve’s spirits were in perfect connection with God who is Spirit. Through Spirit-to-spirit connection, the first couple received from God all that was needed for life.

But in the fall, Adam broke spirit connection with God. By eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam chose his own will over God’s. He chose to be led by his own soul. After the fall, the soul—the place of our mind, will and emotions—was in charge. But God didn’t create the soul to lead us with its knowledge of good and evil—by following good rules. God created the soul to be led by the Spirit. He created us to live in complete Spirit-to-spirit unity with Himself.

In order for God to restore humans to the life they were created to live, we first had to be “born of the Spirit.” Once God brought life to the spirit, living by faith—living through a relationship with God—could begin.

In the Scriptures for this lesson, Jesus doesn’t just show us God’s love. We are actually given an invitation to join Him in a loving relationship. God’s love and way of life is for everyone. And so Jesus explained to Nicodemus—He explained to a Pharisee—about being “born again.”

Read John 3:1–17.

¹Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

⁴“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Questions

1. Why do you think Nicodemus came to see Jesus? Why do you think he came at night?
2. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. As teachers and followers of the law, the Pharisees were in direct opposition to Jesus’ way of love. Yet, Jesus took the time to thoroughly answer Nicodemus’s questions. What does this tell you about Jesus?

9. What does Jesus promise us if we believe (or have faith) in Him?

10. What does this promise mean to you personally?

11. John 3:16 begins, "For God so loved the world ..." In what ways is God's love key to understanding this passage? In what ways is God's love at the center of what He has done for us?

12. Give an example of how you have personally experienced God's love.

Reflection

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a teacher of the law. Yet he came to Jesus because he recognized that God was with Him.

Think back to when you were first drawn to Jesus. Relive that time in your life. Recall your fears and hesitations. Recall your joy. Recall His faithfulness.

As you remember this time in your life, let your heart sing to God in praise.

Lesson Seven

Jesus Commands a New Way of Love

John 13:1–17, 31–35

“God created us to love and to be loved.”

“The most beautiful thing in the world is to love one another as God loves each one of us.”

“We must not be afraid to radiate God’s love everywhere.”

Mother Teresa not only spoke these words; she lived them. She loved people with God’s love. People dying forgotten in the streets, disabled children left abandoned, those shunned because of leprosy or AIDS, Mother Teresa cared for those others had forsaken. Regardless of age, sex, race, religion, illness or mental ability, she had compassion on them. And Mother Teresa knew that our love for others flows out of God’s love for us.

This truth may be clear to you, but it wasn’t always obvious to me. For the first 40 plus years of my Christian life, I falsely believed that loving God and others started with me—by my obedience to the law. I thought God was demanding that I love Him and others in my own strength. I had twisted something Jesus said about the Old Covenant law and thought it applied to me. Let me explain.

When a Pharisee came to Jesus asking, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment *in the Law*?” Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. *All the Law and the Prophets* hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36–40).

These two commands sum up the *Old Covenant law*. And like all Old Covenant commands they are impossible to obey in our own efforts. The independent soul, cut off from Spirit-to-spirit relationship, can’t love God or others as required. We can’t produce the love. We weren’t meant to. God designed us to radiate His love, not to generate our own. The New Covenant makes it clear that “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

In John chapter 13, Jesus gives His new command to fulfill the Old Covenant commands. First, He shows the new command in action—by washing the disciples’ feet. Then He says: “A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

Read John 13:1–17, 31–35.

¹It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." ...

³¹When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Questions

1. Verse 1 says, Jesus "loved them to the end." Today we understand that Jesus was about to be crucified, but the disciples did not. Knowing what we do now, how did he love them to the end?

8. Earlier, in response to a question asked by a Pharisee, Jesus had summarized the two greatest Commandments in the Old Covenant (see Matthew 22:36–40, as quoted in the introduction to this lesson). What similarities do you see between these two commands and the new command that Jesus gave?

9. What differences do you see between these two greatest Old Covenant commands and Jesus' new command?

10. What differences would it make in your life if you tried to live by obedience to the two Old Covenant commands versus if you lived by following Jesus' new command?

11. Elsewhere John says, "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). How does this relate to John 13:34?

12. According to verse 35, as disciples of Jesus, what is to be our defining mark? In what ways do you think you are living as a disciple of Christ according to this definition?

Reflection

Sit in a quiet, comfortable place and put your bare feet into a stream, lake, tub or container of water. Imagine Jesus coming and washing your feet.

Sit in quiet openness to Jesus' love for you. Hear His words of life to you: "I love you. I love you. I love you. Love others as I have loved you."

Imagine Jesus' words bringing life to your spirit, soul and body. Imagine yourself freely receiving from God and overflowing with love for others.

Respond to God's love by letting His love in you flow out to all those who come across your path today.

Lesson Eight



Jesus Is the Vine John 15:1–13

When I was young, my mother taped a hand-written note to the refrigerator door: “God doesn’t love us because we are good. He makes us good because He loves us.”

As a teenager growing up, I couldn’t believe those words. They seemed too wonderful—too amazing. I wanted to believe them, but I just couldn’t.

But now I know they are true! This is the freeing truth our souls long to know; it allows us to become the good people God created us to be. Incredible as it sounds, God makes us good as we live in His love.

In His love we become good and right from the inside out. As we dwell in God’s love—as we abide in it—the love of God we know in our Spirit-to-spirit relationship with Him becomes real to our soul as well. We believe the love God has for us, and our soul—our mind, will and emotions—comes into alignment and agreement with our belief. Then our body manifests the soul’s loving nature to the world. In this way, God’s love pours through our spirit-soul-body channel, flooding the earth with His goodness.

God designed us to abide in His love—to let His love permeate our being so that it flows out of us to others. When we remain in His love, we bear fruit—we radiate the nature of Christ. Fruit of the Spirit is God’s nature expressing itself through us. Scripture tells us, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23). In this way, as God’s nature bubbles from us, the world sees Christ through us—just as it saw the Father through the Son.

In the verses for this lesson, Jesus uses the analogy of the vine and the branches to illustrate how God planned for us to live. We are branches; we live and bear fruit only because of our connection to the vine—Jesus. The Old Covenant is about abiding by the law. But the New Covenant is about abiding in love. Jesus says, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love” (John 15:9, NKJV).

Read John 15:1–13.

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Questions

1. In this illustration, who is the vine? The gardener? The branches?
2. Verse 2 says, “every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” In what ways have you experienced God’s pruning in your life?
3. What fruit is promised to branches that remain in the vine? (See Galatians 5:22–23 in the introduction to this lesson).

Lesson Nine



Jesus Prays for Us

John 17:18–26

Around 190 AD, St Irenaeus wrote, “The glory of God is man fully alive.”

Think about that quote. What is glory? What does it mean to be fully alive?

When Moses asked God, “Now show me your *glory*,” God responded by saying, “I will cause all my *goodness* to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence” (see Exodus 33:18–19). The glory of God is the same as the goodness of God, which is the same as the loving nature of God. We glorify God when we live abiding in His love and take on His loving nature. It is a whole new way of living life on earth.

Many Christians today understand that eternal life in heaven is completely a gift of God’s grace given to all who believe in Jesus. But when it comes to living life on earth, all too often we fall back into relying on a mix of God’s grace and self-effort. We have our own “good” laws that we try to obey: go to church, read the Bible, pray. But, even with a born-again spirit, the soul, with all its knowledge of rules, can never make us to be “good” as God designed. God has a grand and glorious plan for our lives on earth. He wants to share His glory with us!

We believed to receive eternal life. Can we also believe that we are meant to live our lives on earth filled with the glory and loving nature of God? That promise may seem too good to be true, but it is just as much a part of God’s plan as eternal life. God created us to radiate His glory—to manifest His love. In the beginning, when God created Adam, He said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). We were created in the *image of God*!

Paul states it clearly. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the *image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, *he also glorified*” (Romans 8:29–30). Then, a few verses later, Paul expounds on God’s love—the basis for all of His promises to us.

In John chapter 17, Jesus prays for those promises to become a reality in our lives. Jesus asks for us to be like Him in this world. He prays that we would be in unbroken relationship with our Father—just as He has been. He asks that the love of God would be in us—just as it was in Him. And Jesus petitions His Father that the world would see God’s love through us—just as it has seen it through Him.

Read John 17:18–26.

¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Questions

1. Who is Jesus praying for in this passage?
2. In this prayer Jesus mentions at least five ways (see verses 18–23) that He and His disciples are similar. What are some of those ways?
3. What do these similarities between Jesus and His followers tell you about God’s intent for humanity?

Lesson Ten

Jesus Surrenders to His Father's Will

Matthew 26:36–46

My heart sings along with the opening lines of the song “Worthy Is The Lamb”:

*Thank You for the cross Lord.
Thank You for the price You paid.
Bearing all my sin and shame
In love You came
And gave amazing grace.
Thank you for this love Lord
Thank you for the nail pierced hands ...*

(To see and hear a recording of this song as performed by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, visit the Forever Loved website, Forever-Loved.org.)

Such unfathomable love that Jesus would take our place and die a sinner's death on the cross. And so we respond, “Thank you for this love Lord.”

Truly we see the love of God in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Throughout Jesus' life, in the stories He told, in the healing He performed, in the life-giving words He spoke and in the prayers He prayed, Jesus showed us the Father's heart. And, as He faced death, we see the price Jesus paid to make a way for us to live in God's love.

On the night before Jesus' death, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Satan came against God's Son in raging fury. If the devil could cause Jesus to act apart from the will of His Father—by the leading of His own soul—Jesus' union with His Father would be severed. The Son of Man would fail the test and humanity would remain led by the soul—in bondage to the law. But Jesus chose His Father's will over His own. In this way, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus regained for us what Adam lost in the Garden of Eden. Through His love, as proved on the cross, Jesus made a way for us to live again in the perfect love of God.

In the passage for this lesson, we hear Jesus' agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.... My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Even though His soul was overwhelmed with grief, the Son of Man gave up His will and trusted in His Father's love.

Love won!

Read Matthew 26:36–46.

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. ⁴¹“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

⁴³When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Questions

1. In verse 38, what did Jesus share with Peter, James and John about the feelings in His soul?
2. What did He ask of them and how did they respond?
3. In verse 41, Jesus said to the three disciples, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” In what ways are Jesus’ words in this verse true in your life today?

4. In your own words, what did Jesus pray in the Garden?

5. What do you think enabled Jesus to surrender His will to His Father's?

6. Tell of a time when God asked you to surrender something to Him and you gave up whatever it was. What effect, if any, did that your obedience have on your life?

7. Tell of a time when God asked you to surrender something to Him (or do something) and you did not obey. What effect, if any, did that disobedience have on your life?

8. The number three in scripture represents completion or fullness. For example, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We human beings are of spirit, soul and body. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. In this passage, Jesus brought three disciples with Him to the Garden. Three times they failed to keep watch. Three times Jesus prayed surrendering His will. What does this signify to you?

9. If God really loved His Son, why didn't He save Him from this agony in the Garden and from death on the cross?

10. If possible, recall an incident when hard times caused you to question God's love. What was the situation and how did it impact your understanding of God's love?

11. Ponder again Jesus' words in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." What is this verse saying to you personally?

12. Consider again Jesus' words in John 15:13. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." What is this verse saying to you personally?

Reflection

Each member of the Trinity loves us perfectly. The Father sent His Son (see John 3:16). The Son gave His life (see John 15:13). And today, the Holy Spirit makes God's love real in our hearts. Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Imagine the love of the Father giving His Son. Think of the love of Jesus dying on the cross. Imagine the Holy Spirit pouring that love into your heart ... Your heart is filled ... God's love is flooding out of you to others ...

Ponder and receive ... to overflowing.

Suggestions for Study

About this Bible Study

- The Bible passages included in this study guide are from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. Feel free to use a different translation if you like.
- The study questions are designed to encourage you to think deeply about God's Word and to help you open yourself to more of His love.
- If you cannot print this study guide, you can write your answers on a separate sheet.
- This study can be used individually or with groups.

Suggestions for Individual or Group Study

- Begin and end your reading and study time with prayer. Ask God to help you understand the Bible passages and reveal more of Himself to you. Thank Him for your time together.
- Read and reread the passages as you work through each of the lessons. Reflect on what you have read and see if anything stands out to you.
- Do not feel you must answer the questions all at once or in any particular order. Even choosing a few questions will allow you to benefit from the study.

Suggestions for Group Study

- Each time you gather with your group, come prepared—ready to share, ready to listen and ready to learn.
- As the group leader guides the discussion and encourages members to share their thoughts and ideas, be willing to participate, but try not to dominate. Listen to others in the group without judging them. What the Holy Spirit shows you will not necessarily be the same as what He shows someone else.
- Remember that what is shared in the group stays in the group. Being able to share without fear of being talked about helps create a safe place for honest discussion and healing.

Suggestions for Group Leaders

- Begin and end each group time with prayer.
- Unless the Holy Spirit specifically leads you otherwise, help the group stay focused on the passage being studied.
- Encourage group members to listen and learn from each other without judging.
- Give everyone opportunities to share. Imagine that Jesus is in your group; see how He interacts with other members. Love those around you, being sensitive to their needs and backgrounds. Encourage all to come to a deeper understanding of God and His love.
- As the leader, try not to dominate the discussion with “right” answers. God will teach each member through the verses being discussed and through the insights of others in the group.
- Be assured that the Holy Spirit will guide you and give you the strength and wisdom you need to be a thoughtful, caring leader.