

Love Defined

The Challenges We Face Today

The challenge that many followers of Jesus face is being able to love as Jesus loved.

- We don't really understand the kind of love that Jesus had.
- We find it difficult to love certain people in our lives, even though we know we should.
- We often treat others in an unloving way or have unkind or unloving thoughts towards them.
- The Bible commands that we love God with all our heart but we do not know how to love Him to this degree.
- Our understanding of love is more often based on feeling rather than action.

These spiritual challenges must be faced head on and dealt with by coming to a clear understanding of what love is and what it looks in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

Lesson Truth

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. There are many definitions of love and many ideas about love. It is important to understand God's standard of love and to love according to that standard.

Lesson Goal

The goal for this lesson is for you to understand and accept God's standard of love as your own personal standard for how you love Him and how you love others.

Lesson Discussion

Love Defined

The dictionary defines love as "a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another."

Affection is defined in the dictionary as "fond attachment, devotion, or love."

If we consolidate these definitions we see that the definition of love is a tender and passionate attachment or devotion to another.

What does it mean to be tenderly and passionately attached or devoted to another? The dictionary defines attachment as "a feeling that binds one person to another. It is a feeling you have that you belong with or are apart of someone else."

The dictionary defines devotion as "to devote wholly and earnestly, as to some person or purpose."

When we put the whole thing together we get a clearer understanding of the definition of love. It simply means this: To love someone is to tenderly and passionately devote myself wholly to them and treat them as if they are an important part of my life.

There are many characteristics of love and many ways we can demonstrate love to those we say we love. Unfortunately, most people's idea of love, especially younger people, is the Hollywood definition of love – infatuation, attraction, and indulging one's desires and needs through relationship with another.

That type of love does not last very long and is evidenced by the fact that every other marriage ends in divorce. Just look at all the broken relationships between parents and children and you can easily see that we have lost the ability to truly love our children and parents.

Today the word love is used very loosely, and the common phrase, "words are cheap" still applies today. We accept infatuation as the

evidence of love instead of what the true definition of love is. Love must be more than infatuation or a feeling for it to last.

Love originated from God. God is love and His love is pure and perfect. The love of the world is not the same as God's love. The love of the world is impure and imperfect.



1 John 4:7 ESV “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”

The only way we can love as God originally intended is by allowing God to live and manifest His life through us. Only when this happens are we able to love as God loves. Only then can our love be made pure, perfect and complete.

God's Love Defined

What is God's definition of love and how does that differ from the world's definition? For one thing, God's love is first and foremost unconditional. Unconditional love is a love that is not based on what the beloved does or does not do.

Unconditional love is not dependent on the feeling of love being there first. Unconditional love acts on behalf of the beloved, always for the beloved's best, regardless of the actions or behaviors of the beloved. Unconditional love never stops loving.

God is able to love unconditionally because His nature is love. The Bible teaches us that God is love. It also teaches us that God so loved the world that he gave the life of His precious, only Son, for the sins of the world. He did not do that because the world was good, but because His nature is love.



1 John 4:16 ESV “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

John 3:16 ESV “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Since God created all things, He has the right to set the standard for what love is and is not. The world has chosen to set its own standard for love and it lives by that standard. Those who claim to belong to God must live by His standard.

As disciples of Jesus, we must not live according to the world's standard of love, but according to God's standard. That means we must learn to love unconditionally. God has made it very clear in His Word what it looks like to love as He loves.

Even though God's love is unconditional, He still expects us to be obedient to Him and live according to His standard. Even if we reject God and His love, it does not change His nature, which is always and forever more, love.

Those who reject God and His love will experience the consequences of His justice and judgment. We might call this “tough love”. It is a love that holds the beloved accountable for their actions and allows them to experience the consequences associated with those actions.

God Commands Us to Love

The most important love relationship from God's perspective is our love for Him. God's greatest desire for us is that we love Him above anything else in our lives. He created us so that we could have a love relationship with Him.



Matthew 22:37-40 ESV “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

According to the dictionary, a commandment is a “command or mandate”. The word “command” means to direct with specific authority. By the authority that God possesses over his creation, we are directed to love God and to love others.

God’s law consists of many commandments. The one that is most important to God is that we love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all of our mind. If we do not love God to this degree, we are living in disobedience to Him.

As Jesus was teaching His disciples, He gave them a new command, that they should love one another. Although the command to love was not new, the emphasis on them loving each other was.



John 13:34-35 ESV “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

We cannot have a right relationship with God and with one another if we are not living in obedience to these most important commandments to love.

If we are not walking in obedience to His command to love, we will find that our relationships with God and with others will be in need of constant mending and our lives will be out of order with God’s purpose and will.

The Apostle Paul tells us that of the three greatest things in the Christian life: faith, hope and love, that love is the greatest of all.



1Corinthians 13:13 ESV “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

The Apostle Paul also tells us that it does not matter how many great things we might do in our life. If we are not acting and living in love, all that we do counts for nothing from God’s perspective.



1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am 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.”

If we are to walk in obedience to the supreme command to love, we must understand what love is and how to love as Jesus taught. We must learn to love not just in word but in action and truth.

Everyone is capable of loving and can learn to love as God loves. The Holy Spirit helps us love as we submit to Him. Love is a fruit of the Spirit, and as we trust God and walk in obedience to Him, we will find that we can love as God loves.



1 John 3:18 ESV “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

The world’s concept of love and God’s concept of love are very different. God’s love is unconditional, offered freely and available to anyone. The world’s concept of love is often

performance based, or is based on infatuation, or even obsession.

The first step to learn so we can love according to God's standard is to define what love is from His perspective. As we learn God's standard for how to love others, we can then hold ourselves accountable to live that standard.

Characteristics of Love

Everyone wants to be loved. It is easier for most people to receive love than to give love. Some people seem to be able to love others more easily, while others find it difficult to love others outside immediate relationships.

As a disciple of Jesus we are commanded to love others unconditionally, even our enemies. We are only able to love unconditionally as we allow His life to live through us. Our own personal relationship with the Lord will have a direct impact on our ability to love others.



Matthew 5:43-45 ESV "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."

The Bible has a lot to say about unconditional love. There are many examples in the Old Testament of how God demonstrated unconditional love toward His creation.

Love never precludes accountability. God does not and will not tolerate sin. Even though He loves His creation, He still holds His creation accountable for obedience to Him. God will allow us to experience the consequences of our sin if we continue to live in sin.

Paul the Apostle wrote an entire chapter on Love. The Apostle John talks a lot about love in his letters. By examining Scripture passages

about love, we can get a clear understanding of the characteristics and behaviors of unconditional love.

Many thousands of books have been written on the topic of love, both from a secular and Biblical perspective. Yet love seems to elude our culture in America. It is not more books we need. We simply need to start loving according to the standard in God's Word.

What we need is to intend to live a life where loving others according to God's standard is of highest priority in our lives. We must put aside our own wants, needs, expectations, and demands towards others, and love as God has commanded.

We can fool ourselves, thinking that we love others, when our actions show otherwise. As we examine the characteristics of love in the following passage, these characteristics must become our standard of unconditional love towards others.



1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ESV "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

If we can just focus on these characteristics of love as a first step, and begin practicing them regularly, we will see a noticeable change in our lives. We can begin by focusing on one characteristic at a time until we are practicing it regularly.

Love is Patient

Patience is the behavior of not being hurried, frustrated, or stressed. It can easily wait its turn, let others go first, and patiently endure situations, events and people because it knows God is in control at all times.

Patience values others above itself and sees other as more important and therefore finds it easy to give up its own rights. Patience forbears and accepts every situation and event as coming from God Himself.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, which means that as we keep a right relationship with the Lord and as we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way in our lives, we will find the ability to be patient in any and all circumstances.

Love is Kind

Kindness is simply having a nature or disposition that expresses good will or kind feelings toward others. Kindness is demonstrated by doing acts of kindness, not because others deserve it, but because it is the right thing to do.

Kindness is difficult to demonstrate if our thinking is always self-focused. When our thinking is “me first” and our life revolves around what we want and expect, we can find it difficult to be kind to others.

Kindness must be demonstrated in spite of whether or not we feel like being kind. Often we may not feel like being kind, but we do acts of kindness whether we feel like it or not. Pretty soon it will become a habit and the desire to be kind will follow.

Love Does Not Envy

Envy is a feeling of discontentment or covetousness towards another’s advantages, success, or possessions. When we envy others, we become dissatisfied with our own life and it becomes difficult to love the one who is the object of our envy.

If you find it difficult to truly rejoice and be glad in the success or blessings of others, it could be an indication that envy is having its way in your life. Renounce envy and begin giving thanks for the success or blessings of others.

Sometimes it is simply a matter of redirecting our thinking and getting the focus off our self. We must counter the lie that someone else’s success or blessings somehow diminishes our own by believing that God is the source of all success and blessing.

As we do this we are accepting and allowing God to do as He wills. It gives us the opportunity to accept everything as His will and therefore a good thing that we can give thanks in.

Love Does Not Boast

Boasting is simply speaking with an elevated sense of pride or vanity. It is essentially bragging to others about our possessions, accomplishments, or talents and abilities. Boasting can cause envy or jealousy in others.

We often find ourselves in the habit of wanting others to know of our good fortune or success because it gives us an opportunity to feel valued by others. We must learn the difference between boasting and humbly sharing what God is doing in our lives so that He truly gets the credit.

We counter boasting by realizing that everything we have is a blessing from God that we don’t deserve. Our talents, gifts, possessions or anything else we have of value is from God. He should be the one we are boasting about.

Love is Not Proud

Pride is simply having an inordinately high opinion of one’s self. We can be prideful about our position in life or our success at work, our possessions, and our talents and gifts. Pride can lead to boasting and an attitude of thinking we are better than others.

It is pride that gets in the way of our letting others know we need help. We feel it is a sign of weakness to need or ask for help from others. Pride keeps us from humbling ourselves and seeking help or wise counsel from others.

Humility is something that comes from realizing and accepting that apart from Jesus, we are

nothing and really don't have anything that God values. Humility chooses to consider others as more important than ourselves.

Love is Not Rude

Rudeness is the action of being discourteous or impolite, whether deliberately or ignorantly. When we are rude to others, it demonstrates a lack of valuing the other person and can create resentment.

As we learn to value others as God values them, we will find that the tendency to be rude will begin to diminish. We must immediately apologize anytime we are aware we have been rude to someone. This helps us refrain from rudeness because it is easier to refrain from rudeness than it is to have to apologize.

Love is Not Self-Seeking

Self-seeking simply means to seek one's own interest or selfish ends. It demonstrates to others that my universe revolves around me – what I want, what I expect, and what I need. It is an attitude of what is in it for me. It is me first and me, me, me thereafter.

Putting off the self is one of the most difficult things for Christians to do. As a disciple of Jesus, we must deny ourselves and look after the interests of others before our own interests. We seek nothing for ourselves except to always do what is pleasing to Him.

Love is Not Easily Angered

Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure which creates an aggressively hostile nature, condition or attitude. Anger can be a dangerous, destructive emotion and can result in loss of self-control.

When you have anger towards another person, it is difficult to show love to them. The Bible teaches us not to let the sun go down on our anger. Deal with your anger immediately and get it resolved.

As we learn to love others more and more, we will find that grace and mercy will replace anger. Anger indicates an attitude of things not being how I want. God does not intend things to be as you want and He is teaching you to accept that.

Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

This simply means we are willing to forgive things done to us by others. Many people hold grudges or have bitterness or resentment towards others. They keep a tally of all the wrong things done to them by others.

Those who keep a list of wrongs done to them tend to bring these up whenever they feel threatened or attacked. They never produce a happy ending and often make the situation worse. Forgive and ask God to help you forget.

Love Rejoices With the Truth

When evil things happen to others or we see evil happening around us, we secretly enjoy hearing about it. We may even be glad when evil happens to those we disdain. We must rejoice when truth is victorious and mourn when evil triumphs.

Whenever we see truth triumphant, we must acknowledge and rejoice with it. Whenever we see evil or injustice triumphant we must abhor it and speak up against it.

Love Always Protects

This means we are always looking out for the interests of others as well as for our own interests. We step in to protect the rights of those who cannot stand up for their own rights.

Love Always Trusts

Always trusting others is difficult, especially when others become untrustworthy. Continually distrusting others never gives them the benefit of the doubt to allow them to become trustworthy again.

We can always trust God because He is never untrustworthy. We put our hope and trust in Him and not necessarily in others. Others must earn our trust by being trustworthy.

Love Always Hopes

This means we have a constant hope that everything is going to turn out all right, even though things may not turn out how we expected.

If we ever lose hope, we will find it difficult to go on living. Love keeps hope constant and encourages others by giving them hope.

Love Always Perseveres

We simply keep on keeping on. No matter what the obstacle, no matter how bad things are, we keep on loving others because we know in the long run that love will always win out.

All of these characteristics of love can be lived by anyone whose relationship with God is right. This means we are giving Him full access to our lives and have given up the right to ourselves to Him completely.

When the life of Jesus is living in us and we are allowing His life to manifest out through our lives, then we will find ourselves demonstrating love according to God's standard.

Anytime we are not demonstrating these characteristics of love, it means something is out of order in our relationship with Jesus or with others. We must continuously nurture these relationships and keep them healthy.

The only one who can constantly love unconditionally is God. But when we have His Son in us through the Holy Spirit and He is getting His way in our lives, we will find that we can consistently love others unconditionally.

More Than a Feeling

Unconditional love is more than a feeling. If we only love by our feelings, our love will come and

go and we will soon stop loving others. We must learn to love whether or not we have loving feelings or not.

Many marriages come to an end when the feeling of love fades away. A marriage can only endure when love continues whether or not the feeling is there. The action of loving one another in a marriage, regardless of the feeling of love being there or not, will allow that marriage to endure through the years.

We all experience times when we do not feel love toward one another. We must learn to love whether or not the feeling is there. We do that by demonstrating loving behaviors such as patience and kindness whether we feel like it or not.

Love is the demonstration of passionate devotion, wholehearted and earnest, so that the beloved always feels valued and loved. That can only happen when we put aside our own desires, needs, wants, expectations, and demands that can hinder our ability to love God and others unconditionally.

Many relationships are established on the feeling of love. Over time the feeling begins to evaporate and the relationship falls apart. Bad attitudes and behaviors of the beloved can wear on the feelings of love and they can be lost over time.

Unconditional love is not based on feeling, although the feeling of love can and does accompany unconditional love. Feelings come and go, but the actions of love must persist with or without the feeling.

Unconditional love must not be based on the behavior or attitude of the beloved. It loves at all times regardless of the attitude or behavior of the beloved. I can dislike a bad attitude or behavior and choose to hold the other accountable, but I do it with unconditional love.



One Step for Living This Truth

The foundation of the One Step series that you have been reading is to be able to live God's truth, one truth at a time, one step at a time.

Next we will suggest the specific action steps you can take to allow the truth taught in this lesson to be lived in your own personal life. You only have to do these steps to master this lesson. Your focus and effort should be to make sure you consistently and persistently do the steps as directed below.

You must know, understand and accept God's standard of unconditional love. The other lessons in this series will teach more specific truths regarding loving God, loving others, and experiencing God's love.

ACTION STEP

Review this lesson as needed to remind you of God's standard of love. Continue to spend at least 30 minutes each day in prayer and in the Word.

During your prayer time each day, commit yourself to God's standard of love, accept it, receive it and choose it as your only standard for loving others.

Also focus on how you are living out God's standard of love each day. Seek His and other's forgiveness when the Holy Spirit convicts your conscience that you have acted unloving towards anyone.

You will have completed this lesson when you have fully understood and accepted God's standard of love, and have committed to Him to walk in obedience to His standard.

Here is a prayer you can pray:

Lord, I fully understand your standard of unconditional love – how I must love you and how I must love others. I accept this standard of love as my own personal standard for loving you and loving others.

Please teach me how to love as you love. Help me put aside my own selfish wants and desires so I can demonstrate your love to others around me, whether I have the feeling of love or not.

Continue to read a chapter in the Gospels each day. Write down thoughts or Scriptures that relate to loving God and others.

As you continue to practice living this truth, you may need to come back to this lesson often. Don't be in a rush to start the next lesson.

Even if it takes several weeks to get this truth integrated into your life, keep it as your primary focus until you feel you are living it.

Remember, the most common problem with Christians today is that they know many truths about the Christian life, but are not living them. Make sure you are solidly living this truth before attempting to tackle the next truth.

Bumper Sticker Summary

The greatest character trait of all is love. Loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbor as ourselves. If that kind of love is not there, then the life that is truly life is not there.