



Student Name

Focus 2024

Overview

i love you

Three simple words—"I love you"—capture the heart of Jesus' life and ministry.

These three words form the bottom line and top drawer of all his teachings. And they remain the three hardest words in the world to get right. Two pronouns and a verb have never been so difficult to grasp, much less to practice.

Popular culture has ruined love's reputation by redefining it first as romance, and then as lust. But it's not just the meaning of the word love that causes so much confusion. To fully understand love, we also need to find out who we are in God's eyes and whom we are commanded to love. Following Jesus can be described as the daily practice of all three words:

I. Love. You.

-The Three Hardest Words

In each of our main sessions we will dive deeper into each word and explore how Jesus calls us to live.

 New Identity

 New Integrity

You New Interactions

Session 1

New Identity

During this session we will unpack our New Identity and purpose, understanding who God is and who He has made us to be. Will we live out what scripture says? What are we focused on?

To come to an understanding that we have a new identity, we need to know who we were before we came to faith in Jesus. In other words, our previous or old identity.

When we come to faith in Jesus we are made new. Every day we live for Jesus, we will become more like Jesus. Every day that we choose not to live like Jesus is a missed opportunity to point someone else to Christ.

Why am I here? Genesis 1:26-27; Psalms 139:13-16

Each one of us was knit together by God the creator of all things in our mother's womb. In the process of forming and fashioning us, He made us either male or female (the only two genders).

Now we would all agree that males are wired a certain way and females are wired a certain way, but even though we are wired differently we were all made in the image and likeness of the same God. **We were made by God for God.** We were designed to reflect our Creator in His righteousness and holiness, but we (humankind) decided to take things into our own hands causing a separation between God and man.

Though we are made in God's image and likeness we tend to like **us** just a little bit more than we like Him, or at least we did until we come to faith in Jesus.

God put you and me here to reflect His image. Sin has distorted the reflection. But Jesus, the perfect image of God, has come to show us how to bear the righteousness and holiness of God.

Who determines my identity?

To identify as anything other than what God created in His image, we choose to become our own god. When the focus is no longer being a representation of God to the world, as we were created, we reject God's identity and accept a self-created identity. We didn't create ourselves and aren't truly able to self-create an identity apart from God.

The self-created identity is in reality a prefabricated identity that comes off one assembly line or another (media culture, self-esteem industry, and so forth). *The Three Hardest Words*

2 Corinthians 5:17

When do I gain a new identity? Romans 3:22-24

Our new identity comes when we fully surrender to Christ. The moment of salvation is when we believe in faith that Jesus is our savior and Lord. Faith is believing everything that God says about me and knowing I don't have to stay where I am but that I can be made new in Jesus' name.

What is different once I am in Christ?

Our actions are a reflection of our identity. Our belief affects our behavior. We go from trying to figure things out to following the One who knows all things. We go from 'if it feels good, do it' to asking if its in line with what honors God.

When our identity is in Jesus then we want to live the way He did. In all things He was Obedient to God the father. Yet not I but Christ in Me is our new way of thinking.

Where is my identity evident? Colossians 3:17

Everywhere, no matter what day of the week it is or the group we're surrounded by. Our true identity doesn't change based on circumstance and environment.

Session 1

How will you respond?

God is in pursuit of you.

"For the Son of Man has come to _____ and _____ the lost." Luke 19:10

"What do you think? If someone has a hundred sheep, and _____ of them goes astray, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and _____ and _____ for the stray?" Matthew 18:12

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they _____ from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. So the Lord God _____ to the man and said to him, '_____?'"

Genesis 3:8-9

Your goodness is running after me.

God has proven His love for you.

"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him." 1 John 4:9

Have you experienced His love? Or have you just seen the evidence of His love around you, but never accepted or experienced it personally? **What is holding you back?**

Consider this imagery from Day 2, *Before You Meet Your Future Husband*

The Creator of this universe wants an intimate relationship with you. He is waiting for you to come to Him. It starts when you open your heart and receive the gift of His love through Jesus.

God has sent an invitation to each of us to come to "the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7). He even calls us "the bride" in the Bible, and Jesus is called "the bridegroom".

Picture yourself as a glowing, desired bride. You are walking down the aisle. Your heavenly Father stands before you. Next to Him stands Jesus, who has paid the ultimate price to make this union possible.

God turns to His only, beloved Son and says, "Jesus, do You take this woman to be Your bride and love her forever?" Looking you in the eye with a heart overflowing with pure love, Jesus says, "I do."

Now God turns to you, "My daughter, do you take Jesus to be your bridegroom to love forever?"

And you say...

What is your response?

Would you say, "I want to try out some other options first, but maybe later?"

Or would you open your heart to an intimate, never-ending love relationship with the one who will never leave you?

You can't know **love** until you first lay down your **EGO** (Edging God Out). You can't be full of Jesus until you're empty of **"I"**. Pride is our greatest enemy, and humility is our greatest friend. First we need to cross out the **"I"** and make a **†**, a cross that we take up as we follow Jesus.

Is this the song of your heart?

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now
I give you everything

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me



11

Session 2

New Integrity

God not only gives us an *identity* for life;
He calls us to live a life of *integrity*.

In-teg·ri·ty /in'tegrədē/

1. the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness.
2. the state of being whole and undivided.

To be a person of integrity means that you are undivided—that all parts of your life line up with the other parts.

What are some parts of your life that don't seem to line up with the rest?

What are some general examples of integrity?

How does loving God shape your integrity?

"How you understand the character of God shapes how you evaluate His commands. If you don't truly believe God is good, you'll tend to view His commands as oppressive and controlling. On the other hand, believing God is good sets you free to trust Him and His plan as the best path to both giving and receiving genuine *love*. Loving this good God motivates obedience to Him." -Sean McDowell

The way you act reflects whether or not you know God. Integrity is having a genuine *heart* in your motives.

It starts with the heart.

What does the Bible say about our *heart*?

- 1 In our corrupt and fallen state,
"The *heart* is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

What is your heart full of?

Who or what is keeping you from being in a *fully* committed relationship with the Lord?

Is any shame, guilt, or sin weighing you down or preventing you from fully running into the Lord's arms?

What is the hardest thing for you to let go of? Why?

- 2 Once we say YES to Jesus's invitation for salvation, we gain a *new* identity in Christ. God says,
"I will give you a new *heart* and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your *heart* of stone and give you a *heart* of flesh." Ezekiel 36:26

Once we have emptied ourselves, we need to be filled with Christ. Accepting Jesus's love—and getting to know Him intimately—fills you up.

Read Ephesians 3:17-19. How can we be filled with all the fullness of God?

The two central attributes of God are His holiness (1 Peter 1:14-16) and His *love* (1 John 4:8,16). These attributes should also characterize those who believe in Jesus and seek to be filled with all the fullness of God.

3 As we grow in our relationship with Christ, we should protect our new *heart*—

“Above all else, guard your *heart*, for it is the wellspring of life.”
Proverbs 4:23

Why is it important to guard your *heart*?

Because your *heart* is the wellspring of life.

Your *heart* overflows into thoughts, words, and actions. In the same way your physical *heart* is a vital organ that pumps blood to all parts of your body; it is vital to life.

Read Luke 6:45. What does the overflow of your *heart* reveal about you?

Because your *heart* is extremely valuable.

You don't guard something you don't value. Your *heart* is the essence of who you are. It is where all your dreams, your desires, and your passions live.

What lies have you believed about your value and worth?
What does God's word say about those lies?

Because your *heart* is under constant attack.

The Enemy uses all kinds of weapons to attack our *heart*. These attacks may come in the form of some circumstance that leads to disappointment, discouragement, or even disillusionment.

In what ways does the enemy attack your *heart*?

How do you guard your *heart*?

Guard /gärd /

1. watch over in order to protect or control.
2. protect against damage or harm.

Prayer is the best place to start.

Think of all the times you've asked God to forgive you and cleanse your *heart*. The refreshing change will be short-lived unless you guard your *heart*. You must be the one who sets boundaries and guardrails in place to keep all the bad stuff outside.

What are specific ways you can guard your *heart* from...

self-sabotage _____

lies and half-truths _____

bitterness _____

inappropriate thoughts _____

sexual temptation _____

compromise _____

the urge to control everything _____

an unhealthy need for acceptance _____

destructive relationships _____

What are other things you personally need to guard your *heart* from that are not listed above?

What will be the result of your *heart's* health if you do these things?

Take some time to read through the following devotion
from Day 29, *Before You Meet Your Future Husband*

It doesn't take much to get off track from living a life of integrity. We tell ourselves that it's okay to tell a half-truth so we don't get in trouble. And it's not that bad when we gossip about someone, because everyone does it. Or we argue that we can enjoy popular music while ignoring the lyrics. The problem is that the media we consume soon starts to consume us. Our focus shifts away from God to the things the world considers popular. Soon we find ourselves wrapped up in our favorite TV stars and musical artists (who happen to be called *idols!*), and we spend less and less time focusing on God.

It takes moral courage to choose not to focus on what's popular in the world or to mimic the actions of those who don't follow God. When it comes to the media we consume, it's important to ask, "Is this leading me closer to God's ideas or the world's ideas?" When we consider telling a half-truth or gossiping, we can ask, "Is this what a person of integrity would do?"

The closer you draw to God's ideas, allowing yourself to be guided by integrity, the more you're able to offer hope, faith, and wisdom to the world. As a result, you'll become the type of person to whom others will be drawn.

Are there any actions described above that describe your life right now? If so, which ones?

What impact do the actions you're currently taking have on who you are as a person and how you interact with others?

Journal

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Session 3

Flip the Script

Questions asked:

1. If a guy says or does something that is not within the boundaries you have established for yourself, are you willing to "call them out" or are you going to compromise?
2. What are your boundaries? (Do you have any? / Have you thought about them?)
3. What are your expectations for yourself? For him?
4. Who else are you willing/ wanting to be your husband's first?
5. Who else are you willing to allow to date your future husband? Would you be eligible based on the boundaries and expectations that you have set in place and are keeping?
6. Are you willing to pray and not pursue?
7. If you are leading in your relationship now, how are you going to let your husband lead in the future? (It will be hard, or you won't)
8. If you are dating "you are not playing house" yes, the man will lead in the relationship, but this is to happen in the bond of marriage between a man and a woman. (you are not married...so don't act like it and don't do married people things at any level).
9. If you are dating, are you dating well? What does this mean? What does this look like?

Notes

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Session 4

New Interactions

As image bearers of God, we are a reflection of Christ in every *relationship* we have. The only way to reflect Christ is to know Him. To know Him, we must spend time with Him.

Prayer
The Word
Community
Service

- ³³ Teach me, LORD, the meaning of your statutes,
and I will always keep them.
- ³⁴ Help me understand your instruction,
and I will obey it
and follow it with all my heart.
- ³⁵ Help me stay on the path of your commands,
for I take pleasure in it.
- ³⁶ Turn my heart to your decrees
and not to dishonest profit.
- ³⁷ Turn my eyes
from looking at what is worthless;
give me life in your ways.
- ³⁸ Confirm what you said to your servant,
for it produces reverence for you.
- ³⁹ Turn away the disgrace I dread;
indeed, your judgments are good.
- ⁴⁰ How I long for your precepts!
Give me life through your righteousness.

Proverbs 119:33-40

What are some relationships that you have?

Do you think you have influence?

Out of all of your relationships, who has the greatest influence on you?

When you are weak, you falter. Where do you go when you find yourself on shaky ground?

What happens when you feel weak?

When do you feel strong?

How can you ensure that your foundation is strong?

Do you have someone you are accountable to?

If so, who is it? How often do you meet with them?

Love the Word

Psalm 119:1-2, 9-12

Avoid Evil

Proverbs 8:13

Proverbs 29:27

Love One Another

John 13:35

1 Corinthians 16:14

1 Peter 4:8

1 John 4:7

1 Thessalonians 5:11

1 Corinthians 6:18

2 Peter 1:5-7

Honor Your Parents

Ephesians 6:1-3

Proverbs 15:20

Proverbs 20:20

Proverbs 28:24

1 Timothy 5:4,8

Meet Together

Hebrews 10:23-25

Our *identity* must come from an internal knowledge of who we are in Christ Jesus. If we lack this internal knowledge we will draw our *identity* from external things.

When we draw our *identity*/value from external sources we allow *relationships*, possessions, achievements, and circumstances—rather than our Creator—to bring us worth.

Journal

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