

TRANSFORMED

BEING EVERYTHING GOD WANTS ME TO BE

"Love"

January 22-28, 2012

PRAYER: Begin with a few moments of sharing thanks and praises in prayer.

Leaders, it's your call; you may choose to incorporate more information/scriptures as time allows for your small group lesson. **Reflection:** Love is probably the most misunderstood word in the world. Part of the problem is that we use this one word to describe many things. We water down its meaning by overuse. I love my wife. I love America. I love pizza. I love my dog. I love you. I would love to have my back rubbed. We use the word love in so many different ways that it has literally lost its meaning. Giving or receiving love is difficult when we don't even understand what it is. Let's see what God's Word says about how a transformed life should love others.

Opener:

*What was one of your favorite love songs when you were a teenager?
When in your life have you felt the most loved?*

The Bible is clear on what love is but there are many misconceptions. What are some misconceptions you've noticed?

Most people think love is a feeling – a sentimental knot in the stomach, a quiver in the liver, an ocean of emotion. True, loves does produce feelings, but it is more than a feeling.

Love is uncontrollable. "I fell in love" – as if you had tripped? We talk as if love is uncontrollable, but the Bible says love is controllable. In fact, Jesus commands that we love others. His words indicate that we do have control over whom we love and who we do not love.

The Bible tells us there are certain steps we need to take to learn to love people.

Read: Ephesians 3:17-19

Circles the words, feel, understand, and experience in that passage. *First, before we can love others, God wants us to feel His love, and He wants us to understand His love. Why?* (When I do not feel genuinely loved, I do not feel like giving love. We have to experience God's love ourselves. Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12. That is the model.)

Secondly, in learning to love others we must forgive those who have hurt us.

Read: Colossians 3:13

Is it possible to give total love when your heart is divided? (Anytime you resent someone, you give that person a piece of your heart, a piece of your attention, a piece of your mind.) Do you want that person to have that? No... so take it back by forgiving. Forgiving instead of rehearsing that hurt over and over, release it. *Why is it important to let go of the past?* (Forgive those who have hurt you...for YOUR sake, not because they deserve it. Do it so your heart can be whole again. The people from your past cannot continue to hurt you today unless you allow them to hurt you by holding on to resentment against them.)

Another step in learning to love others is to think loving thoughts.

Read: Philippians 2:4-5

What does it mean to think loving thoughts? (It means we begin to focus on other people's needs, hurts, problems, desires, and goals, not just on your own. Hurt people hurt people. We need to look beyond people's faults and see their needs.)

Everyone needs love. If a person can't get love, he will strive for attention. And if he can't get positive attention, he will work at attracting negative attention.

Fourthly, in learning to love others, we need to act in a loving way.

Read: Luke 6:27-28;35-36; Ephesians 4:2

How do we do good to people we don't even like? (We look for ways to give to them. How can we serve them... help them...and help them benefit? We can go the second mile. We can offer practical help. We can do them a favor. We can discover their needs and respond to them. Read Proverbs 12:18. When we act lovingly – when we are patient, gentle or kind...we are displaying the fruit of the Spirit.)

Lastly, learning to love others may be difficult but we need to expect the best of even those you don't like.

Read: I Corinthians 13:7

Love expects the best. Have you discovered that we tend to live up to what people expect of us? When we expect the best, we bring out the best. This is loving by faith and loving by faith is the greatest force in the world. Love is contagious, and it changes people. It can transform a personality!

You may be thinking, "Well, I would like to change my mate." Do you want to know how to do that? The secret is in one sentence. This is how you change anyone – your mate, your children, a coworker: *treat that person the way you want him or her to become!* Do you want your mate to succeed? Treat your mate as if he or she is a successful person. Do you want your children to be smart? Treat them as if they are intelligent, not stupid. Do not do this as an act of manipulation but because you genuinely believe in them. Love expects the best.

Plan for Action:

Do you know that it is possible to love someone you do not even like? Remember, for God to teach us to love, He puts us around some unlovely people. It is easy to love people who are kind and lovely, but if God is going to teach us to love, He will bring some hard-to-love people into our lives. The fact is, our lives are full of people we don't like. We do not like the way some people talk. We do not like the way some act. We do not like the way others dress. But most of all, we tend not to like people who do not like us.

Love is not simply the first fruit mentioned; it is actually the fruit. All the other fruits are simply expressions of love. Love is patient, Love is kind. Love is joyful. Love is the basis of all positive actions.

Picture in your mind the person whom you find hardest to love – an obnoxious relative, a troublesome neighbor, or a disagreeable coworker. How can you learn to love this kind of person? What steps will you take?

How are you doing with your commitment to daily devotions and/or scripture memory? Share your thoughts on how you are doing with the group.

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