

*Lesson One:*

## **The Problem of Lost Love, Christ's Commendation and Complaint, and When a Church Loses Its Love**

1. **In Revelation chapters two and three, Christ gives his evaluation of the seven churches in Asia Minor. List two reasons why Christ's evaluation of these churches should matter to us today.**
  - The problems these seven churches faced are the same kinds of problems churches face today. Christ sees the problems and sins of his churches perfectly, we see only imperfectly. We should begin to look at our own church the way Christ does. Most importantly, we need to grasp Christ's solutions to the problems of the churches.
  - We learn what qualities Christ praises in a local church, and these are qualities we should emulate.
  - "Too often we care more about church-growth strategies on the latest trends than we do about what Jesus Christ thinks."
  - Christ is the "church's founder, head, and judge." What he says matters for eternity. Only he will judge the churches.
  - If we listen to the counsel of those seven letters, we can learn much that will help protect our churches from danger and failure.

Note: suggest that your church teach through the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

2. **In your own words, briefly list the commendable qualities of the church in Ephesus that Christ praises. Of all the positive traits you listed, which one do you think was the church's most commendable quality? Explain.**

The church worked hard and patiently and endured many trials. The church also had "no tolerance" for professing Christians who advocated a loose, immoral lifestyle because of a false interpretation of the gospel. The church could not bear this false gospel and unchristian lifestyle. (See Revelation 2:2.) At the center of Christ's commendation is the church's discernment and discipline of false teachers. They were doctrinally vigilant and courageous. This church cared about truth and sound, biblical doctrine.

Furthermore, for the sake of Christ's gospel, the church endured trying circumstances from false teachers and opposition from the world.

Finally, despite all these problems, the church had "not grown weary." They were faithfully committed to Christ.

The most commendable quality was the church's resistance to false teachers and their false gospel. The church took action to test and reject the claims of itinerant pseudo-apostles. It protected itself from the archenemy of the church—false teachers (Acts 20:28; Phil. 3; Matt. 7).

3. **Despite all the church's commendable qualities, something was dreadfully wrong in the church at Ephesus. In your own words, clearly describe the problem. Be as specific as possible.**

The church had forsaken the love it possessed in its early years as a church family. There was still some love because they were Christians. But the love they originally expressed was gone, and so was the joy, creativity, freshness, spontaneity, and energy they once enjoyed. "Their work had become mundane, mechanical, routine, and their lives the pictures of self-satisfaction" (p. 9).

"Instead of their love abounding, it had been lacking" (p. 9).

"Certain works, which sprang from their former love, vanished" (p. 9).

Some Bible teachers think that "first" refers not to chronology, but to the church's primary or first love. (In this case, the person of Jesus Christ, the church's bridegroom.) In their view, the Ephesians had abandoned Christ, their "first love." But this would make them apostates, which would be a far worse situation than abandoning the love they first possessed. Furthermore, in verses 2-3 Jesus Christ sincerely praises them for their loyalty and for "bearing up for my name's sake." If they had forsaken Jesus Christ, they wouldn't have borne patiently the trials for his "name sake." Thus the problem was not that they had abandoned Christ, but that the love they first displayed toward Christ and one another was waning.

4. **The church in Ephesus "abandoned" its first love. What factors do you think may have caused this otherwise good church to forsake its original condition of love?**

- The scripture doesn't tell us the cause but here are some possible familiar causes: pride, heritage, pride of right doctrine, pride of name. Pride leads to self-deception about their true spiritual condition. They didn't see any need to change and grow. They became self-satisfied.
- Another factor may have been materialism. They thought they could serve two masters, God and possessions (Matt. 6:25-34). This led to self-centered living and lack of loving care for one another.
- Other factors may have been; a loss of concern for Christ's return; over-busy and overcommitted to too many things, bitterness toward one another, or a general indifference toward the church body.

5. **How have the six points about the importance of love changed your way of thinking about love? Which point impacted you most deeply? Explain.**

I can now see the absolute importance of love for God and neighbor. Love is the secret to the Christian life. I must be conscientiously aware of acting and speaking in love at all times.

Love for God is the first and great commandment. Jesus says it! I enjoyed the Mark 12:28-43 passage on this topic most. If we love God totally, everything else falls into place. We want to do His will and love His children.

6. **Why is the doctrine of the Trinity foundational to the Christian doctrine of love? List as many reasons as you can. (See footnote 10, page 16.)**
- According to John 17:24, love existed before the universe was created. God is a society of three persons eternally loving one another. As Kelly Kapic writes, “All love is but a reflection or shadow of intratrinitarian love” (p. 15). (Discuss this quote with the group. There would be no such thing as love if God was not love.)
  - The truth of the triune nature of God is fundamental to many doctrines in the Bible, especially love.
  - Each member of the Godhead loves and is loved perfectly. Read to the group footnote 10 on page 16. God is a personal, social Being.
  - Here is a quote you might want to use by Steven Smalley: “For love comes from the Father (1 John 4:7), it is manifested by the Son (3:16), and it is made available by the life-giving Spirit (4:13-16)” (1,2,3, *John* [Waco, TX: Word Biblical Commentary, 1984], p. 325).
7. **What does the author mean by the statement, “the sum of all God’s commandments and all religious service is love for God”? Is there a Scripture passage to back up this statement?**
- All the Old Testament commandments can be summarized in one commandment—the command to love God wholeheartedly in Deut. 6. Four of the 10 commandments address relationship with God.
  - All the services and offerings commanded by God in the Old Testament can be summarized in the one command to love him first and foremost. See Mark 12:33. The Scriptures are: Deut. 6; Matt. 22; Mark 12; Luke 22.
  - One great theologian said, “Love God and do as you please.” What he meant is that if you love God totally you will do all that pleases and glorifies him.
  - In fact, the laws of the OT expresses what love for God entails.
8. **What does Luke 10:25-37 teach you about the meaning of loving “your neighbor as yourself”? List at least two principles taught by this passage.**

A neighbor is any human being in need, including those with whom we do not share any common beliefs or background and those whom we do not know.

As you reread the story of the Good Samaritan, ponder the extent of the Samaritan’s self-sacrifice for an unknown suffering human being. This story is an unforgettable illustration of Christian compassion and mercy. The Good Samaritan treated the dying man the way he would want to be treated. That is the “golden rule” (Matt. 7:12).

Ultimately, Jesus is the Good Samaritan.

9. In light of the Old Testament commandments to love God and neighbor (Duet. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18), what is “new” about the “new commandment” of Jesus (John 13:34-35)?

The New Commandment Establishes a New Standard of Love

Love is not new. The Old Testament Law required love for God and love for neighbor. What is new is the scope and depth of this love: “love one another: *just as I have loved you*.” Jesus’ display of humble, self-sacrificing love on the cross is the new standard of love (John 15:13).

The New Commandment Provides a New Motivation to Love Others

Christ’s self-sacrificing love should motivate us to self-sacrificing love for others. What was true only of Jesus’ love while on earth was now to be true of the disciples’ love for one another after His departure. John writes, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

The New Commandment Depends on the New Power

The new commandment is new because it is tied to Jesus’ promise of the coming Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18), a central element of the new covenant era. Only by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit can the disciples possibly carry out the new commandment. As Carl Hoch remarks, “The Holy Spirit is the great motivator for the church. He works to produce the fruit of love in Christians so that they can fulfill the new commandment.” (*All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995], p. 143.)

The New Commandment Validates the New Message

The new commandment is tied to the witness of the gospel. In the words of Christ, “By this [love for one another] all men will know that you are My disciples.” The new commandment is meant to be a powerful evangelistic tool. The love relationship among the believers is to be the observable evidence of the reality of the gospel message and of the mutual love relationship existing eternally between the Father and the Son (John 14:31). “Our churches,” remarks Bruce Milne, “are to be ‘love centres’ where relationships between members are a persuasive reflection of the mutually supportive, utterly loyal and eternally accepting love of the Father and the Son.” (*The Message of John*, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], p. 248.)

10. First Corinthians 13:1-3 is considered to be one of Paul’s most skillfully written passages.

What is the main point of this literary masterpiece?

No matter how great one’s giftedness is or the extent of one’s service, if it is not motivated and colored by love, it is nothing. It is bankrupt spirituality. See page 16 and 17, especially the quote by Maurice Roberts on page 17. You can read this quote to your group.

11. Make two columns on a sheet of paper. On the left, list wrong attitudes that ruin the Christian spirit or atmosphere of a local church. On the right, list as many correct biblical attitudes and qualities as you can. If you can, list Scripture to support your answers.

<u>Wrong attitudes and qualities</u>	<u>Correct biblical attitudes</u>
Pride Selfishness Unforgiveness Jealousy Anger	Humility Self-sacrifice Forgiveness Gentleness Patience Servanthood Joy
1 Cor. 13:4-7; James 3:14; Gal. 5:20	James 3:13, 17; 1 Peter 3:8

- a. Why is it important that a local church have a proper New Testament church atmosphere? List at least two reasons.

For people to grow healthy spiritual lives there needs to be unity and peace in the church. To have a bright witness for the power of the gospel, the local church must reflect the truths of the gospel. It is essential to evangelism (John 13:34-45) for the church to be a beacon of love. It is an example for our children to follow. It pleases the Lord Jesus Christ.

- b. Why are prideful attitudes about correct knowledge and denominational distinctions so destructive to the spirit of a local church?

Pride of knowledge leads to people competing with one another, becoming jealous of one another, and trying to show off one's superior wisdom. Pride of knowledge leads to self-deception. It also leads to division among people and contempt for people who don't have the same opinions or belong to the same group. Pride of knowledge does not build others up it only puffs up one's self (1 Cor. 8:1). See 1 Corinthians 13:9-12. Those who are truly knowledgeable are humble because they understand their own true lack of knowledge.

12. Below is a list of ways to help develop and maintain a deeper love relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Carefully read these statements and answer the questions at the end.

(1) by a personal commitment (with the Holy Spirit's help) to obey "the great and first commandment" to love God unreservedly and to love the Lord Jesus Christ preeminently above all others. Deut. 6:4-5; 13:3; Jos. 23:11; Ps. 27:4; Matt. 10:37; 22:37-38; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; 14:26; John 21:15-17; Phil. 1:21; 3:13-14).

(2) by reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word, the Scriptures, in order to know Him as the great God that He is (Deut. 17:18-20). D. A. Carson doesn't hesitate to say,

but I doubt that it is possible to obey the first command without reading the Bible a great deal....

How on earth shall we love him with heart and mind if we do not increasingly know him, know what he likes and what he loathes, know what he has disclosed, know what he commands and what he forbids (D.A. Carson, Love in Hard Places [Wheaton: Crossway, 2002], 32)?

(3) by communing regularly with Him in prayer: “Be constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12). This will include confession of sin, praise, and intercession for others.

(4) by living in obedience to Christ’s commands: “For this is the love of God [love for God], that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3).

(5) by not loving the world and its idols: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father [love for the Father] is not in him” (1 John 2:15; also James 4:4).

(6) by loving and serving God’s people: “For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:20-21; also 4:11-12, 20; James 1:27).

(7) by worshiping him in song, praise, thanksgiving, and “in remembrance” of his substitutionary death through the elements of the bread and cup (1 Cor. 11:23-32; Rev. 5:9-14).

a. Of these seven ways to deepen your love relationship with God through Christ, which two are the most difficult for you to practice consistently? Explain why.

For me, it would be (2) and (3). The fast paced, busy demands of Western society make quiet time with God a struggle. In order to pray and read God’s Word, I must resist many distractions that fight for my time.

b. Of these seven ways to deepen your love relationship with God through Christ, which two help you most to maintain your relationship with Christ? Explain.

For me, it would be (5) and (6). These are fundamental daily disciplines that draw me into daily contact with Christ: The Word of God increases my knowledge and appreciation of him, and prayer lets me talk to him.

c. Of these seven ways to deepen your love relationship with God through Christ, which one needs your immediate attention? Describe several steps you can take to improve.

For me, it would be (2). I need to continue cultivating a heart that delights in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. This requires daily, honest confession of disobedience and seeking, through his Word, to know and love him more.

*Lesson Two:*

## Christ's Remedy and Study Love

1. The author states, "External religious performance can insidiously replace true, inner faith and heartfelt love." Give an example (preferably from your own church experience) of what the author means by this statement? For help, see Luke 11:42 and Matt. 23:23-28.

When I was young I attended a church that strongly emphasized the idea that women should not wear makeup or slacks because these things were considered worldly behaviors. This became a badge of a truly spiritual women. Yet many of these women had bad attitudes and were jealous gossips. They looked down with contempt at women who used makeup to make themselves look attractive. They didn't see their own pride and divisive attitudes. They needed to read Matt. 7:1-6. They weren't spiritual women at all, only religiously pompous.

2. In what way is Revelation 2:4 a vitally important wake-up call to all churches?

We all tend to focus too much on the externals (moralistic rules, denominational distinctives, rituals, or doctrinal correctness) and neglect the right motivation-- a heart of love for God and people. But Revelation 2:4 tells us that a church with right doctrine and a rich heritage can be utterly displeasing to Christ because of lack of love.

Revelation 2:4 is a wake-up call to churches that are being deceived by their external righteousness while remaining blind to their inner emptiness of love for God and neighbor.

3. Why is it difficult to restore lost love to a local church? List as many reasons as you can.

This "is a problem that is often difficult to identify or explain until it is too late. Yet it must be identified and corrected because love for God and neighbor lies at the very heart of genuine spiritual life" (p. 19).

Revelation 2:4 alerts churches to a very common problem and provides a remedy. Every church needs to teach this passage to the congregation.

4. Jesus commands the Ephesians to "remember therefore from where you have fallen" (Rev. 2:5). What is the purpose of remembering from where they had fallen? What good would it do?

To make them see that they are fallen and backslidden. It can be difficult to see the reality of our own sick condition.

"These memories will guide the church's present action and provide future direction. They will set the standard and will motivate change..." (p. 21).

The true good that will come from remembering the past is that the church will face their sin and repent. Furthermore, they would be acting in obedience to Christ's remedy for restoration. Only if they do what Christ commands can they hope for full spiritual restoration and avoid divine discipline.

5. On pages 21-22 the author lists five bullet points explaining what repentance would entail for the church in Ephesus. Read each of these five points and make a brief note on the meaning of each one in order to be prepared to discuss each point with your study group. As a group, discuss each point so that every member understands clearly what is involved for a church to repent of lost love. This exercise will help you to grasp the full meaning of the New Testament word repentance. Also, reread D.A. Carson's definition of repentance.

The church must fully agree that Christ has evaluated its spiritual condition perfectly, even if the evaluation hurts.

The church not only agrees intellectually with Christ's evaluation, but it owns its sin and failures. It judges itself deserving of divine discipline. It truly judges itself as sinful, disobedient, and backsliding. The church doesn't try to soften or excuse its sin. The church trembles before Christ's Word, fears the word of the Lord, and sees its sinful condition.

The church has godly sorrow over its failure. It grieves over loss of love for its loving bridegroom, Christ, and for one another.

Read 2 Cor. 7:8-10 to the group at this point.

The Church seeks to change its course of action and attitude and return to past glories. The church seeks radical transformation and restorations of its past condition of love. There is a complete turn around and about-face.

At this point read to the group D.A. Carson's quotation on repentance. (p. 21)

The church will take appropriate action to do the deeds of love it once did. It will love in "deed and truth" 1 John 3:18. It will bring both "fruit in keeping with repentance" (p. 21) see also Matthew 3:8.

Repentance is only empty words if there is not a change of deeds and choices.

Note: This is not just individual repentance but group repentance. All the members must together repent. Sadly, we seldom see a church repent.

6. What do you think were some of the "first works" of love that needed to be revived? List as many works as you can and be as specific as you can be. Be creative in your answer.

- actively pursued the knowledge of God,
- delighted to worship the Lord and praise him in song,
- communed with the Lord in prayer and prayed earnestly for one another's needs,
- delighted in being with one another,
- opened their homes freely to one another in Christian hospitality,
- generously shared with brothers and sisters in need,
- gladly spent time visiting the sick among them,
- had compassion for their lost neighbors and sought ways to demonstrate Christ's love to them,
- loved to help missionaries,
- enjoyed teaching new believers the doctrines of the faith,
- greeted church visitors with sincere delight,
- empathized with weaknesses and problems,



- rejoiced with the joyful and wept with the sorrowful,
  - wanted to tell of God's greatness or write songs and poems to Christ,
  - thought creatively about advancing the gospel.
7. **In Part Two of the book, the author lists six suggestions on how to cultivate love. Why did the author start with the study of love?**
- Because all that we know of what God SAYS about love is in the Bible, and the Bible alone.
  - For the Christian, "the Bible is the standard for defining divine love and for correcting our false notions about love" (p. 27). The knowledge of God's love can be found only in the Bible.
  - The Word of God and the Holy Spirit together "can awaken our desire to love and transform our sinfully selfish hearts to love as Christ loves. If the Scriptures don't convince us of the importance of love and God's requirements to love, then nothing will" (p. 27).
  - Where else would we start our study of Christlike love?
8. **According to each of the verses below, what responsibilities do we have in regard to cultivating love? Feel free to use Bible commentaries about the following verses to help you answer the questions.**

**John 15:9-10**

We are to abide or remain in Christ's love. We do this by obeying Christ's commandments. As the old hymn says,

Trust and Obey,  
For there is no other way  
To be happy in Jesus  
Than to trust and obey

**1 Corinthians 14:1**

Pursue love! The word has a strong meaning like a hunter pursuing his prey. We also are to pursue love actively and persistently. We are not to give up our pursuit.

**Ephesians 5:1-2**

We are to imitate God our Father, as his children should. Specifically, we are to live a life of Christlike love. We are to live a life of love like the Son.

**Hebrews 10:24**

We are "to think creatively of ways to 'stir up one another to love'" (p. 46). We are to make a conscious effort to stir up other people to love.

**Jude 21**

We must keep ourselves in God's love by obedience, prayer, and spiritual watchfulness. We are to make a conscientious effort to remain in God's love.

9. Why do we need the Bible to understand love? List as many reasons as you can.

- We are influenced in our thinking about love by Hollywood movies more than by God.
- We can easily confuse love with physical lust.
- We are so inherently selfish that we pervert love and use the word love to justify our own selfish choices and sins. Like the man who divorced his wife and deserted his children because he “fell in love” with another woman. As a result, he claimed he had never been so close to God before as with his new wife and his unencumbered life. He even thought about becoming a pastor.
- As Leon Morris says, “We cannot know or understand God’s love without God revealing the nature of his love to us in his Word, the Bible.”
- We cannot know or understand God’s demands of love without his Word, the Bible. Think of the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).
- We cannot know or understand Christ’s love displayed at Calvary for the sins of the world without the Bible.

10. Read the biblical passages on love in Appendix B and answer the following questions.

a. Which Old Testament text most spoke to you about God’s amazing love for his people?

Number 10--Hosea 3:1

b. In your estimation, which Old Testament text best reveals that God is Love?

Number 9—Jeremiah 31:3 (Although number 1 is a close second)

c. What does Romans 13:8 teach you about your obligation to love?

It is a debt I owe to people. I owe them love as I owe people in authority respect and the bank my regular debt payment.

d. Which New Testament texts most comfort your heart when facing difficult trials and tragedies? Explain your answer.

Number 20—Romans 8:35-39 because no problem, devil, or even death can separate me from God’s love in Christ. I am safe and secure from all harm in his faithful, unconditional love.

e. Which one New Testament text from the list would you choose for a life verse if you were asked to choose one? Explain your choice.

Number 3—2 Corinthians 5:14, 15. It is Christ’s love for me that “controls” my life. Since he died for me and saved me, I must conclude as did Paul—I am not my own. I can no longer live for myself but for Christ.

11. How would you go about encouraging another believer (church member, family member, friend, or missionary) to start studying biblical love?

I would give them this book to read and ask them to complete the study guide.

I would organize a study group and ask key people to participate.

I would tell people how the study of biblical love has changed my life.

I would challenge a person to meditate slowly on the fifty key texts on love during their devotional, quiet time.

### *Lesson Three:*

## **Pray for Love and Teach Love**

1. **Why is it *necessary* to pray about growth in Christlike love? List as many reasons as you can.**
  - Because we are perversely selfish and cannot love as Christ loved without the help of the Holy Spirit.
  - Because to grow in Christlike love we need the Holy Spirit's aid to understand more fully Christ's vast love displayed on Calvary for us.
  - We need to confess to God our lack of love.
  - Our natural tendency is to grow cold and unfeeling toward others. We don't like to change or grow. We are spiritually lazy. At heart we are disobedient to God's commands, even the love commands.
  - Prayer is the means God ordained to "work in us and accomplish his purpose in our lives" (p. 39).

2. **Before answering this question, have someone read Ephesians 3:14-19 to your group. Why does the author emphasize the extreme importance of understanding Ephesians 3:18-19 in order to grow in love?**

The more we understand Christ's self-giving love for us, the more we will love him and others.

The logic of Scripture is this: "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:11,19).

Read to the group D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' quotation on page 34, footnote 12.

3. **List as many reasons as you can why Christians should never stop growing in their love.**
  - Because our love is to be like Christ's love--and his love is boundless.
  - When we stop growing in love we start sliding backward and our love grows cold.
  - Because understanding God's love in Christ is a never-ending pursuit for a Christian.
  - God desires that we continually grow in Christlike love.
  - A healthy Christian is one who is growing in love.

4. **Maurice Roberts writes, "the best believers find their progress [in love] slow and their attainments meager." Why is it difficult to grow in our love for God and neighbor?**

Because we are by nature selfish and don't want to love others as Christ did.

We are spiritually lazy and growth in love takes work, effort, and discipline.

We are too busy with our own activities to be concerned about growing in our love for God and others.

Sometimes, we don't want to grow in love.

The devil hinders us from trying to grow in love.

5. The author says, “These Spirit-inspired prayers [1 Thess. 3:12; Phil. 1:9; Jude 2] are wonderful models to pray for ourselves and for others.” How would you put these scriptural prayers into your own words in order to pray for yourself, your family, your local church, and your missionaries? How would you put Ephesians 3:18-19 in your own words in order to pray this prayer for yourself?

1 Thess. 3:12; Phil. 1:9

Lord, we are selfish creatures. Help us to grow in our love for others. Help us also to not only grow in love, but to abound and overflow in love by the power of the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit produce abundant fruit in our lives.

Lord, you must help us, we are powerless to do these things on our own.

Make us love one another more and more, and love all people.

This is my prayer for myself and my family and church family.

Eph. 3:18-19

Heavenly Father, we ask you to strengthen and enable us, by your powerful Spirit, to understand and appreciate the vast depths of your Son’s love for us.

Forgive us, Father, for not appreciating more your Son’s death for us. Forgive us for being so ungrateful and spiritually neglectful.

Open our blind eyes and hard hearts to grasp the incomprehensible sacrifice of your Son upon the Cross.

Protect us from loving this world and all its many material idols more than Jesus Christ and his precious Word.

Father, enlarge our hearts to love you more for all you and your Son have sacrificed for us.

6. After reading the fifteen descriptions of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, which two of the negative statements about love do you think are most destructive to relationships within a local church? Explain your choices.

Love does not insist on its own way (v. 5). This is the heart of so many problems. Self-seeking, selfish ambition, wanting one’s own way at the expense of others.

Love is not arrogant. Pride and a superiority complex deceive a person and divide people.

Both of the above negative statements are the exact opposite of Christ’s attitude as explained in Philippians 2:5-8.

7. Which two of the fifteen qualities of love do you need to be most concerned about in order to improve your love and character? Explain your choices.

Put in your own personal answer.

8. Why do you think family relationships at home provide the best testing ground for the practice of Christlike love? List at least three reasons.
- We can't easily fake love at home because we are exposed for what we really are before those who know us best. The home is a twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, test of our love.
  - The home environment can place difficult stresses on our love for our spouse and children.
  - Marriage especially exposes how selfish and proud we are, and we don't like the exposure of our sin.
  - The home is to be preeminently a place of love and care. The home provides endless opportunities to practice love all day.
9. In order to cultivate love, it is vital that you understand Hebrews 10:24-25. Look up these verses in your Bible and answer the following questions.
- a. What does the word "consider" mean? What are some English synonyms? To help, use Bible commentaries or a dictionary.  
"To think about carefully, envisage...notice" (BDAG page 522). All this implies concentrated thought, time spent contemplating, and effort.
  - b. What does the phrase "stir up" mean? What are some English synonyms?  
Provoking others to action, encouraging people to love, to spur on towards love, to stimulate others to act, to motivate people, to arouse.
  - c. Who is to do the "considering" and "stirring up"?  
The entire believing community, not just the leaders.
  - d. Why does neglecting to meet regularly with the church family hinder growth in love?  
Because love demands two: a subject and an object; the one loving and the one loved. We need others to learn how to love and to love. Read to the group the quote by Paul E. Billheimer (see page 46).
  - e. In what ways is life together in the local church a means of testing and building Christlike love?  
In the local church, we must love people who are not easily loveable, those who we would normally avoid. "By dealing with difficult people, facing painful conflicts, forgiving hurts and injustices, reconciling estranged relationships, and helping needy members, our love is tested and matured" (page 46).
  - f. List one practical way you can stir up another person to grow in love.  
Take a person with you to visit a nursing home or someone suffering in the hospital. This often stirs people to compassion and sharing their time with others.
10. List a few key Scripture passages that show that every single member in the local church, not just the leaders, is responsible for building up the church in love. (For a list of Scripture texts, see footnotes 32 through 34, page 47.) Which one passage is most convincing to you? Explain why.
- Ephesians 4: 7-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-30.  
1 Peter 4:10-11—This passage clearly teaches that each believer has a gift and is charged to use that gift so that God might be glorified.

**11. Explain how Christian love is different from the natural, human love, which all people feel for friends and relatives. Why is it critically important to understand this difference?**

Christian love is the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). We now have a supernatural capacity to love as Christ loved because of the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can love our enemies and bless those who persecute us. We can love the unlovely and people we don't even know but are in need (Luke 10:30-37).

This is important because some Christians confuse their natural love for friends and relatives and those that agree with them, with Christlike love for all people, even with people outside their church circle. These Christians think they are loving Christians, but their love is a limited, natural love for those who are agreeable with them or in their church fellowship.

As soon as people disagree or leave their church, they think they can hate, shun, and reject them.

**12. In order to change a church's attitudes, behaviors, and works, why is it necessary to teach the Scriptures on God's principles of love?**

Scripture is God's Word. God has ordained it to change lives through his Word preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the divisions of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb. 4:12)

Scripture reveals the knowledge of God and God's principle of love. Without the Scriptures, we wouldn't know God's principles of love.

The Scriptures convict the heart and mind of sin and the need to change.

The Holy Spirit works in our hearts through the Scriptures.

God speaks to us through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit together.

*Lesson Four:*

## Model Love and Guard Love

1. **Why did Paul feel so strongly about the need to model the Christian life for his new converts?**  
(For help, see 1 Cor. 4:16-17; 11:1; Phil. 3:1-18; 2 Thess. 3:7-10.)

Paul knew people need role models to follow. We all follow someone.

New believers need to see Christian truth lived out and practiced in daily life. Many people learn better by seeing and hearing than by reading.

Paul imitated the life of Christ and he expected others to follow his example of Christlike living. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul knew believers needed a godly example of Christlike living in order to counteract worldly lifestyles that some believers were living.

2. **King David is a biblical role model of love for God. What specifically did David do that demonstrated his total love for God? List several of David's acts of love for God.**

- David brought the ark of God into the city of Jerusalem so that God's presence would be at the center of the city's life. He wanted worship of the LORD God of Israel to be accessible to the people.
- He organized and put the priests and Levites to work. Up until this time many had little to do in the service of God.
- He filled "the city with music and songs of praise" (p. 53). He organized Levitical musicians and singers to form instrumental and vocal praise to God.
- He wrote "many poems and songs of worship to God" (p. 53). These are used by God's people for worship.
- He led the nation in fervent worship. He loved the worship of God.
- He sought to obey the law of God concerning worship.

3. **What did David do that you can also do to show the priority of love for God in your life and ministry? Be specific and practical in your answers.**

- We can sing praises to God everyday. We can listen to Christian music throughout the day.
- We can join the Lord's people on Sunday to corporately worship our great God and Father.
- We can obey the law of God in all its details.
- We can meditate on God's Word day and night (Psalm 1).
- We can lead others in worship. We can model for others worship to and reverence for God.
- We can consistently pray daily.

4. **Why are biographies of Christians helpful in challenging people to grow in love? Have you read a Christian biography that has challenged you to grow in love? If so, share this with your group.**

“A message of love for God and people is at the heart of Christian biographies” (p. 53).

Biographies exert a powerful influence over people. They provide specific examples of love in action, and they provide role models of love to follow.

Encourage people to read the short booklet of the life of R.C. Chapman, *Agape Leadership: Lessons in Spiritual Leadership for the Life of R.C. Chapman*. *See footnote on page 42.*

5. **Why is it important for church leaders to model love? List several reasons.**

People especially “need role models of love that they can see and hear...in their own church” (p. 55). People learn best by seeing love modeled by their spiritual leaders.

Leaders “set the tone for the church community” (p. 55).

“If local church leaders love, the people will love” and “flourish spiritually” (p. 55).

“Even other churches may see and be spurred on to greater love (1 Thess. 1:7)” (p. 55).

6. **What are some specific things church leaders can do to influence the atmosphere of the church to grow in love?**

- Teach what Scripture says about the church and love.
- Call the church to pray for growth in love.
- Organize structures for people to serve needy members and a needy world.
- Be sure you are personally growing in love and good works.
- Model kindness, thoughtfulness, generosity, and care for people.
- Live a life of obedience to the Word of God.
- Talk with other leaders in your church and plan how to “influence the atmosphere of the church to grow in love.”

7. **How can you, whether you are in a position of leadership or not, influence the atmosphere of love in your church? Be specific.**

- First and foremost, be sure I am growing in love for Christ and others.
- Confess my own selfishness and self-centeredness to God as sin.
- Regularly pray for growth in love.
- Start a study group to study love.
- Be friendly and caring to all in my church.
- Call those in the church who need a word of encouragement.
- Open my home for hospitality.
- Visit the sick or hospitalized.
- Reach out in a friendly matter to new people in my church.
- Be a part of whatever mercy ministry your church has organized for the care of needy people.
- Send cards to those who need to be remembered and prayed for because of illness or sickness.
- Be a practical model of love in action.



8. **Why can parents and grandparents influence their children to become lovers of God and people more than anyone else?**
- They “have the greatest opportunities to teach and model God’s love to impressionable children and adolescents” (p. 55).
  - They are the first people from whom children learn and experience the tenderness and beauty of love. Love begins in the home.
  - They are with the children most of the time.
  - For the most part, children follow the example of their parents.
  - Children love their parents and want to please them.
  - God has ordained that children learn the great and foundational lessons of life in the home.
  - The home is the first and most basic school of life.

9. **Jesus told his disciples to “abide in my love” (John 15:9-10). Practically, how do we abide in Christ’s love? Be sure to read the passage in John before answering the question.**

By obedience to the words and commands of Christ, and his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

By following in Christ’s footsteps.

By enjoying fellowship and communion with Christ.

By trusting his Word.

By confessing sin and turning away from all idols that would come between Christ and our love for him.

Read to your group the words of the hymn “Trust and Obey”

10. **Before answering the next few questions, have someone read Luke 10:38-42 to your group. In what ways are we all like Martha?**

- We become overly busy and overcommitted so there is little time for sitting at Christ’s feet.
- We are easily distracted by life’s many distractions.
- We like our work and pride ourselves on doing a good job.
- We don’t keep our priorities straight.
- We have “Type A” personalities.
- We worry too much about things we don’t need to worry about.
- We enjoy being busy and find it difficult to stop to read God’s Word and pray.
- We are so busy for God that we don’t have time to be in communion with God.

11. **What is the “one thing” that Jesus says is necessary in life? What is the “good portion” which Jesus says will not be taken away from Mary?**

It is reading and studying Christ’s words and teachings in the Scriptures. When we do this we spend time with him. His word is living. It speaks to us. He meets with us by the Word and the Spirit.

12. How did Mary show her love for Christ? List as many things as you can.

- By leaving the kitchen when enough was done.
- By sitting at Jesus' feet.
- By enjoying listening to him speak.
- By giving him her full attention.
- By putting him first in her priorities.
- By putting him before her work.
- By enjoying his presence.

13. What practical steps can you take to fight the "Martha syndrome" (over-busyness and wrong priorities)?

- Plan to set aside time every day to read his Word and pray.
- Turn off the TV.
- Learn to say "no" to many of life's distractions.
- Keep focused on what is most important in life.
- Clean out the clutter in my life and simplify as much as possible.
- Have a family meeting to address overbusyness and wrong priorities. Hold each other accountable in the fight to defeat the "Martha Syndrome."

*Lesson Five:*

## Guard Love and Practice Love

1. Name some of the hostile enemies to your love relationship with Jesus Christ that you must be aware of at all times. Can you think of any Scripture passages that help you identify these love killers?
  - Love for material possessions and money. (Matt. 6:19-33; 1 Tim. 6:4)
  - False teaching about the person and work of Jesus Christ. (Col. 2:8; Gal. 1:6-9; 3:1; 5:7; 1 Tim. 4:1; 5:15)
  - Unconfessed sin of any kind. (1 John 1:8-10)
  - Overbusyness, no time for Christ. (Luke 10:38-42)
  - Idols of self-love, self-comfort, self-exaltation. (Matt. 23:5-7)

2. What practical steps can you take to guard your love relationship with Christ? Of the steps you listed, which one step is most important to you personally?
  - Deal with my sin immediately by confessing it and turning from it (1 John 1:9).
  - Plan to set aside time daily to commune with Christ in prayer and listen to his words in Scripture.
  - Celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly with God's people. Remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross for my sins.
  - Be an active and responsible participant in the life of my local church community.
  - Don't let TV, movies, or secular music govern my attitudes, values, thinking, or choices. Love not the world (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4)
  - Sing his praises often.

My most important spiritual discipline is to set aside time each morning to sit at Jesus' feet and hear his words and speak with him in prayer.

3. What does Oswald Chambers mean when he says that we should be "carefully careless about everything else"?

Although our relationship with God is to be "the dominating concentration of" life (p. 60), we still live in this world and must attend to many practical matters. We must earn a living, provide a home for the family, mow the lawn, maintain a vehicle, eat three times a day, etc. In all these practical matters of daily living, we must be attentive, responsible, and diligent, this brings honor to the Lord. Yet, in all these daily matters, the Lord our God is still to be first and foremost on our minds. See Matt. 6:33.

4. What most discourages you from loving people as you should? What can you do about the problem?
  - Spending time helping people only to see them leave the church or complain that enough wasn't done for them.
  - People's selfishness and lack of responsiveness to love.
  - The busyness of life makes it hard to find time for people and to lovingly serve them.
  - I find I am much more selfish than I dreamed I was. This is very disheartening. I am a selfish creature who needs to confess my selfishness and self-centeredness to God daily. I seek his forgiveness.
  - As I read the Word of God, I am reminded and encouraged to love as Christ loved.

- Taking communion at the Lord's Table speaks to me of Christ's selfless, self-sacrificing love for me. I am challenged to give myself afresh to loving and serving others as Christ did.
- The more I reflect on the cross the more it helps me to love.
- Daily confronting my love for self-comfort and self-interest, and taking up the cross and denying self.

**5. If you sense your love for people growing cold, what actions can you take to fan the flame of neighborly love?**

Take action immediately: "the longer you wait, the harder it will be to awaken the spirit of love" (p. 62).

The Scriptures are God's means to revive our sleepy souls. So open God's book and refresh your soul and awaken your love.

I always go back to the cross, to the sacrifice Christ made for me. I like to reread 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

I like the counsel of Jerry Bridges: "preach the gospel to yourself everyday" (p. 62, note 53).

Stop thinking about myself so much.

I like to reread the life of Robert Chapman, the apostle of love.

I remind myself that it is my duty as an obedient child of God to love God and neighbor.

Read to the group the quote by Jonathon Edwards on page 63. Then read to the group Jude 21.

**6. What does Jerry Bridges mean by "preaching the gospel to yourself every day"? How could you benefit from preaching the gospel to yourself every day? (See footnote 53.)**

Every day, especially in prayer, thank God for the cross, for Christ's sacrifice for your sins, for forgiveness of sins, for deliverance from hell, for the indwelling holy Spirit, and for heaven.

Remind yourself everyday of all the benefit you have received because of your belief in the gospel.

Read gospel texts like 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 to yourself daily.

Ask yourself what it means to be saved. Ask yourself what your life would be like if you were not saved.

The benefit of preaching the gospel to yourself is to keep your life in biblical perspective. You will be encouraged. You will be made more grateful and thankful to God.

You will want to dedicate yourself afresh to the Lord as you think of all he has done for you.

You will love God and neighbor more.

You will hate worldly-mindedness and worldly value (1 John 2:15-16).

7. **What problems do we create in the local church if we only talk about love without practicing the biblical commands of love? List as many problems as you can.**

People will soon see the church as all talk and no reality.

James especially warns of the danger of being mere hearers of the Word and not doers who act (James 1:22-25). To be a hearer but not a doer of the Word means one is self-deceived and not changed (transformed) by the Word of God.

“Only the one who acts is blessed, not the one who sits in church and hears but immediately forgets. James would also remind us that love apart from works is dead” (p. 65). See also Luke 11:28; John 13:17.

John Stott is correct when he says, “A true love for people leads to labour for them; otherwise it degenerates into mere sentimentality” (p. 66).

“Obedience to Christ’s commands to love leads to real growth in love. Disobedience leads to an erosion of love” (p. 66).

We will create an environment of hypocrisy.

God will be displeased.

People will not be properly cared for and loved.

The church will become disobedient, which will lead to further disobedience.

People will no longer take seriously the hearing of the teaching of the Word of God because people do not take seriously the practice of the Word of God.

We will produce a weak church.

8. **What does James Denny mean by calling *laboriousness* “love’s characteristic”? (See footnote 55, page 66.)**

Love works; it acts; it labors. Love is not passive. It is not mere talk. Love serves the needs of others. It bears burdens.

Read the rest of footnote 55 on page 66 to the group. It is Paul’s example of Laboriousness:

“Love set [Paul], and will set every one in whose heart it truly burns, *upon incessant, unwearied efforts for others’ good*. Paul was ready to spend and be spent at its bidding, however small the result might be. He toiled with his hands, he toiled with his brain, he toiled with his ardent, eager, passionate heart, he toiled in his continual intercessions with God, and all these toils made up his labour of love.” (page 28, italics added)

9. Before answering this question, have someone read Romans 12:9-21 to your group. Using Romans 12:9-21, list five acts or attitudes of sincere, genuine love. What two are most needed in order to help your church become a more loving, caring community?

- a. Abhor what is evil (v. 9).
- b. Outdo one another in showing honor (v. 10).
- c. Be constant in prayer (v. 12).
- d. Contribute to the needs of the saints (v. 13).
- e. Seek to show hospitality (v. 13).
- f. Bless those who persecute you (v. 14).
- g. Live in harmony with one another (v. 16).
- h. Overcome evil with good (v. 21).

The two most needed are:

- a. Seek to show hospitality (v. 13).
- b. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (v. 10).

10. What does Alexander Ross mean by the statement, "Love is not an emotion to which we may give expression now and then, as we feel inclined"?

Many people think love is only an emotional feeling. They will love when they feel like it. But love is not just a feel-good feeling of emotion; it is also a divine command. We are commanded by God to love God and neighbor. It is an obligation, a duty. Of course, the duty to love doesn't eliminate emotion or joy.

But no matter how we feel, we are to love God and neighbor. Ideally, we are to love God with all our emotions, mind, and energy, our whole person. Selfish people love only when they feel like it. Real loving people will love others despite their feelings. They love their enemies and persecutors.

11. Explain how obedience to Christ's commands of love leads to real growth in love. Explain how disobedience to Christ's commands of love leads to an erosion of love.

"In Scripture, love and obedience are inseparable companions" (page 66). As we obey the Scriptures to love God and neighbor, this leads to consistent habits and practices of love. The more we love, the more we grow in love and adopt the habits of love. Love spurs on love. As one feeds love, one grows in love.

The same thing is true of disobedience to God's commands. The more selfish we are the more selfish we become. Selfishness breeds selfishness.

James tells us that to be mere hearers of love and not doers of love makes us deceived and also keeps us from experiencing the transforming power of doing the Word (James 1:22-25). Only the doers of the Word are blessed, not the hearers.

12. Explain briefly each verse below and find the common idea in each verse that makes obedience to Christ's love commands possible.

Romans 5:5

God's love has been poured out in abundance into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The key to this verse is that God's love is abundantly poured into our lives. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to connect us to the Father's love.

**Romans 15:30**

The Holy Spirit inspires or prompts love within our lives. He is the source of love and the motivator of love.

**Galatians 5:22**

Love is a fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is what the Spirit produces within us, because the Holy Spirit is God, and God is love. Without the Holy Spirit we do not have divine love within us.

In each of these verses the Holy Spirit is the source of love. We have divine enablement to obey Christ's commands with joy.

**13. What would you say to a person who uses this book (*Love or Die*) to criticize and accuse other believers of not having any love?**

I would say you have missed the point of the book and what Christian love is supposed to do: build up other people (1. Cor. 8:1-12).

I would also say you probably don't love others and are guilty of what you accuse others of not doing.

Most often, people who say that others have no love are themselves the ones most lacking. They think the new commandment says, 'Love me or I'll destroy you and your church.' They sit around waiting for other people to love them. How easy it is to see the speck of lovelessness in another's eye but miss the log of self-centeredness, hypocrisy, and anger in your own eye (Matt 7:3-5).

(*Leading with Love*, pp. 87-88)