

The Cruciform Life: Cruciform Love

Jan. 21, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Lectio Divina

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Read through 1 Cor. 13 slowly, out loud. Ask everyone to close their eyes as you do so. Ask people to listen for one thing that really jumps out at them about the character of God as the chapter is read. Have the group pray prayers of worship based on what they heard, as an opening prayer time for your group.

Icebreaker

What is the last rom-com movie or TV show that you saw? What did you like about it? What did you dislike?

Text for Discussion: I Cor. 13

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

The biggest problem relationships encounter today is our misunderstanding of love. We romantically believe love is meant to be both instinctive and intuitive. We “just know” we’re in love; those who love us “just get us.” We end up looking for, waiting for, and not settling until we find someone who will meet all of our needs and satisfy our every yearning. The great enemy of love and good relationships is self-righteousness. It’s so intuitive to think the real problem is the other person.

These mistaken beliefs lead to our placing impossibly high expectations on one another, sabotaging our relationships. We need to reexamine our distorted view of love. Because maybe we’ve never really learned what it is – or how to show that love to each other, let alone to strangers or our enemies.

The Bible teaches that love is the sum of all of God’s law (Matt 22:37-39), meaning the whole duty of humanity is contained in the command to love. The point of everything is to become people who love. Everything else is secondary. But this also means the greatest failure in life is the failure to learn how to love (1 John 4:7, Gal 5:6, James 2:20, John 13:35). Even if we possess everything, if we lack love, we have nothing. So, we need to pause and ask ourselves: We may be gifted, knowledgeable and educated... but do we love God? Do we love people?

This question should trouble us. Like the ancient Corinthians, our egos crave to be filled. We yearn for status, to be significant and set apart. We might even be spiritually gifted, touched by the very Spirit of God. But if we lack love, we cannot truly be Christians. We know *about* God... but we do not know God. 1 Corinthians 13 is meant to wound us – to lay us low – but this is a life-giving wound. The admission that we have been deluded is helpful, healing and hopeful.

Love is a skill, not a matter of enthusiasm. It’s something we have to learn, requiring so much of us: generosity, forbearance, imagination, and above all empathy. We must willfully work to appreciate why others act the way they do and have the patience to meet our disappointment with compassion. Through all this, we will come to understand that compatibility is an achievement of love, not its precondition.

But even as we realize that our desire for others to love us completely is an impossible expectation, we still hope and yearn for a perfect love. Why does this desire exist? Because we were created with it by a perfect being – One who can meet our deepest needs. And we must place the full weight of our desire to be fully loved on the only One who can bear it. Because the deepest truth about love can be found in the Incarnation: God with us.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How can you tell the difference between a romanticized view of love and agape love?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening questions...

- Break your group into groups of 3-4, and ask each group to look up one set of the following verses...
 - Matthew 22:37-39
 - I John 4:7-12
 - Gal. 5:2-6
 - James 2:1-4
 - John 13:1-5
- Have each group identify 2-3 characteristics of agape love they see in the passage (Agape love is goodwill, benevolence and willful delight in the object of love). How do these examples of love seem different than the typical understanding of love we see in our culture?

Digging Deeper/Application...

- Thinking through the examples of love we see in these scriptures, why do you think it is hard for us to live it out? Specifically, why is it hard for YOU to live it out?
- What are some spiritual practices that can help us learn to love as God loves?
 - How could prayer help us learn to love? How could fasting help us learn to love? How could service help us learn to love? How could giving help us learn to love? How could worship help us learn to love?

Experiment of the Week

Have each person choose one spiritual practice that they would specifically focus on in the week to come, and ask them to pay attention to how it helps them to love throughout the week. How does it shift their attitudes? How does it form their soul? Ask everyone to write a paragraph about their experience and bring it to the group next week.

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Ask the group: Is there a specific person you have in mind that you've had a hard time loving? How can we pray for you?
- Alternate: Have people share the spiritual practice they will undertake in the week to come. Ask – "What do you think your biggest barrier to doing this practice will be this week?" In a time of group prayer, have the person next to them pray for strength for them as they engage. Then ask each person to specifically pray for the person next to them throughout the week. (Perhaps they could even send the person a text mid-week to encourage them.)