

Cruciform Love: Love Is...

Jan. 28, 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: And Can It Be by Charles Wesley

(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)

And can it be that I should gain An interest in the Savior's blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God shouldst die for me? Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?	Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night Thine eye diffused a quickening ray I woke, the dungeon flamed with light My chains fell off, my heart was free I rose, went forth, and followed Thee Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?
He left His Father's throne above So free, so infinite grace Emptied Himself of all but love And bled for Adam's helpless race 'Tis mercy all, immense and free For O my God, it found out me! Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?	No condemnation now I dread Jesus, and all in Him, is mine Alive in Him, my living Head And clothed in righteousness divine Bold I approach the eternal throne And claim the crown, through Christ my own Amazing love! How can it be That though my God, shouldst die for me?

Icebreaker

What is your favorite love song? Why do you like it?

Text for Discussion: I Cor. 12:31b-13:1-13

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Love is the sum of all virtues, the most distinguishing mark of Christianity. According to Jesus, all God requires of us is comprehended in one word: Love. If we aren't learning how to love and be loved, whatever else we may yearn to accomplish or accumulate amounts to nothing. So we had better make sure we know what love is!

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Love is therefore a reflection and result of God's Spirit in our lives. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes sixteen different but interconnected facets of love. We cannot have some aspects of it while lacking others, but by focusing on each we can gain a greater understanding of the whole.

Love is patient. Patience is an opportunity to face trouble or disappointment with grace, bearing injuries received from others with forgiveness and forbearance. It requires humility – having a keen sense of our own shortcoming – as well as gentleness, staying present and engaged (Eph 4:1-2). We don't react seeking vengeance, nor should we harbor resentment or nurse a grudge. We will see ourselves becoming more patient when our contentment is no longer held hostage by the carelessness of others. Ultimately, a patient person begins to prize offering forgiveness and being a peacemaker more than being proven right. When given the choice between being right and being kind, a patient heart chooses kindness.

Love is kind. While patience is about our response, kindness is proactive. It means to have compassion as well as empathy: the hard, imaginative work of stepping into another's shoes and appreciating why they act the way they do... and then meeting their selfishness, anger or foolishness with compassion and understanding. A kind heart notices people, moving toward them without judgement, giving them the benefit of the doubt. It is gentle though not weak, tender but not feeble. It takes great power to be kind, for it risks being misunderstood and opens us up to

being exploited. But it is not a people-pleasing acquiescence. Nor is it a blank check that allows abuse or condones others persisting in such harmful choices. Kindness does not give up on people. Kindness stays.

If we want to know what love is, we must look at Jesus. “By this we know love: that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16). Jesus was patient, moving toward us in the midst of our unworthiness. He was long-suffering, even unto death. Grasping this, not only will we experience what love is, it will overwhelm us with the truth: God has been infinitely patient with us (1 Tim 1:12-16).

This revelation opens the door for the Holy Spirit to come in. Nothing makes Christ bigger and shine brighter in our hearts. Nothing makes the sins of others toward us smaller and more manageable than turning toward God in repentance, humility and gratitude. And because we have Christ in us, we are now enabled to be patient and kind – to love others as He first loved us. Our lived theology gets played out in our relationships. Every conflict is an invitation from God to rehearse the Gospel. For our life is but a breath, and our love is the only thing that will last, the only thing our lives will be measured by.

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.)

What is love and how do we learn how to love as Christ did?

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...

- Knowing that Jesus is our ultimate example of how to love, break your group into groups of 3-4, and ask each group to look up one set of the following verses...
 - John 13:1-20
 - Matthew 14:14-21
 - Mark 10:13-16
 - Luke 7:11-17
 - Luke 19:1-10
- Have each group identify ways Jesus loved people. How was He patient and kind? How do these examples of love seem different than the way the world would treat people in those circumstances?

Digging Deeper/Application...

- Think of one person in your life who is difficult to love. What are some practical ways that you can be patient and kind with them this week?
- Rankin said that the way we treat people reflects how we view God. Think about how you are treating people and how that might be affecting the way you view God. In what ways might you need to ask God to renew how you view Him and treat others?
 - Knowing this, how might it change the way that you view others and in turn help you to be patient and kind to them?
- How can we as a community help each other to be patient and kind with one another?

Experiment of the Week

Do a specific intentional act of service for someone this week that shows kindness. Spend 5 minutes as a group at the end of the session in silent prayer, asking God to place one person in your heart. Think about a specific act you can do, don't just hope an opportunity presents itself. Have everyone share the first name of that person with the group (if possible) before you pray together. Begin next week's session sharing about how the acts of service went.

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 to be patient and kind with them this week?
- Thank God that He loves us perfectly and completely.
- Pray Rom 5:5 that God's love would be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.