

WARMING UP

1. Think of a person who has “fallen in love.” How are his or her attitudes, priorities, and other relationships affected?

DIGGING IN

2. Read Luke 7:36–50. How would you describe the setting of this story (the place, the people present, the atmosphere, and so on)?

3. In what ways does the woman demonstrate lavish devotion to Jesus (vv. 36–38)?

4. Imagine yourself at Simon the Pharisee’s dinner table. What might you feel during this woman’s interruption?

Why do you think her actions offend Simon (v. 39)?

6. What does it cost this woman to publicly show her love for Jesus?

What are the costs for you?

7. What point does Jesus make for Simon in the parable of the two debtors (vv. 40–43)?

8. Why does Jesus contrast Simon’s hospitality with that of the woman (vv. 44–46)?

9. What further blessings does the sinful woman receive from Jesus as a result of her faith (vv. 48–50)?

10. With whom do you relate more: Simon the Pharisee, who knows the Bible and is very active for God, or this woman, who loves God with reckless abandon? Explain.

11. Why is a passionate love for Jesus so vital if we are to have healthy, loving relationships with others?

12. What obstacles in your life are hindering you from a single-minded devotion to Jesus?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Take a few minutes now to focus your heart and mind on Jesus in prayer, expressing words of affection and adoration to him. Then ask God to help your love for him to be as lavish as his forgiveness.

Love:

Building Lasting Relationships

By Peter Scazzero

Study 2: Loving God's Family

WARMING UP

1. Is it more difficult for you to serve some people than others? Why?

DIGGING IN

2. Read John 13:1–17. How do verses 1–3 set the stage for what is to follow?

3. What three things does Jesus know (vv. 1, 3)?

In light of this, why are Jesus' actions so extraordinary?

4. How does knowing who you are, where you've come from, and where you're going enable you to better serve others?

5. Imagine yourself as one of the Twelve, reclining at the table with Jesus. What might you have seen, heard, and felt as Jesus rose to wash your feet?

6. Foot washing in Jewish eyes was something even Jewish slaves were not required to do. This was a task reserved for Gentile slaves, wives, and children. (Prior to Jesus, women and children did not hold a very esteemed place in Jewish society.) What, then, did Jesus' action demonstrate?

7. Read the dialogue between Jesus and Peter in verses 6–10. Why does Peter reject Jesus' ministry to him?

8. Peter is thinking of literal washings. What do you think Jesus means by his statements in verses 8 and 10?

9. Most Bible scholars see the bath as the washing of forgiveness at conversion and the foot washing as the cleansing of daily dirt (sin) we pick up along the way. How do these acts beautifully illustrate our relationship with Jesus Christ?

10. What point does Jesus powerfully drive home in verses 12–17?

11. Jesus says, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (v. 15). How do you think Jesus expected the disciples to follow his example?

12. What does it mean today for you to "wash someone's feet"? (Give practical examples.)

13. Why do you think Jesus says that to do this will bring blessing (or happiness; v. 17)?

14. Jesus knew that Judas was a traitor and his enemy. Yet he washed his feet too. Think of one or two people who might be difficult to serve. In what practical ways might you "wash their feet" by serving them?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray that God would cause the servant heart of Christ to be formed in you, that you wouldn't simply do acts of a servant, but that you would *be* a servant.

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Study 3: Loving Your Neighbor

WARMING UP

1. How do you respond when you are approached by a stranger asking for money? Explain.

DIGGING IN

2. Read Luke 10:25–37. In verses 25 and 29, the expert in the law asks two questions. What do they reveal about him?

3. Experts in the law were the undisputed judges of the Old Testament. As a result, they were highly esteemed and honored by the common people. Why do you think this man wanted to “justify” himself (v. 29)?

In what ways do we tend to water down God’s commands in order to justify our lifestyle?

4. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho descends about thirty-three hundred feet in the course of seventeen miles. It runs through desert and rocky country and was noted for being filled with robbers. What was the condition of the man after the robbers attacked him (v. 30)?

5. Jericho was one of the principal residences for priests. What might be some of the reasons the priest and Levite passed by on the other side of the road?

6. What are some of our reasons we sometimes pass by those in need?

7. When the Samaritan saw the man, he “took pity” (or “felt compassion,” New Living Translation). This same Greek word is often used to describe Jesus’ heart toward those in need. What did it cost the Samaritan to help this man (in terms of money, time, risk, and so on)?

8. Why do you think Jesus picked a Samaritan, someone the Jews hated, as the example of someone loving his neighbor?

What do his actions the next day, when he has to resume his journey, suggest to us about him?

What ethnic or religious group, nationality, or person do you think Jesus might have chosen to make the same point to you?

9. After studying this parable, who would you say is your “neighbor”?

In what ways might it cost you to be a neighbor like this?

10. Jesus, during his brief three-year ministry, was surrounded by enormous spiritual, physical, and emotional needs, many of which he didn’t meet. How do you think Jesus lived with that tension (see John 5:19–20; 17:4)?

11. Most of us pass by far more needs than we can possibly meet. In light of this parable and the example of Jesus, what are the key issues for us in loving our neighbor?

12. In practice, what does it mean for you to obey the command to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37)?

13. What long-range issues and changes in lifestyle might you need to consider? Explain.

14. Think of one person who seems to be on the side of the road like the man in this parable. How can you be a neighbor to that person?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray that God would give you eyes to see the preciousness and glory of those around you.

WARMING UP

1. Recall a time when you, or someone you know, allowed unforgiveness or bitterness to take root. What were the consequences?

DIGGING IN

2. Read Matthew 18:21–35. Jewish law taught that “if a man sins once, twice, or three times, they forgive him; if he sins a fourth time, they do not forgive him” (Yoma 5.13). In light of this, what does Peter’s question in verse 21 reveal about his view of forgiveness?

What is so amazing about Jesus’ reply (v. 22)?

3. Jesus expands on his answer with a parable (vv. 23–35). How does the servant who owes ten thousand talents (roughly equal to ten million dollars) respond when the king is ready to settle accounts?

How might you feel if you were under the weight of such a debt?

4. Consider the three actions the master takes toward his servant (v. 27). How do they illustrate the way God has dealt with us?

5. How do the master’s actions contrast with the way the servant treats his fellow servant (vv. 28–30)?

6. A hundred denarii was worth about twenty dollars. What point is Jesus making about us by using such a ridiculously small amount?

7. Why do you think the servant failed to forgive after having been forgiven so much?

8. How does the master judge the servant when he finds out what he’s done (vv. 32–34)?

Why do you think God’s sentence against us is so severe if we don’t forgive (v. 35)?

9. Verse 34 tells us “his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured.” In what ways are we tortured when we choose not to release others from the debt they owe us?

How do we affect others when we don’t forgive freely?

10. According to Jesus, what does an unwillingness to extend mercy prove (v. 35; see also Matthew 6:15)?

11. Think of a person who has hurt or mistreated you, whom you have had difficulty forgiving. How can a deep understanding of God’s love for you radically affect your attitude?

12. Jesus began by saying that this is what the kingdom of God is like (Matthew 18:23). Summarize how and why Christ’s kingdom is so different than the world’s.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask for a fresh vision of God’s mercy and love, and pray for help to forgive those who have hurt you.

WARMING UP

1. Do you find it easier to speak words of encouragement and blessing to people or to criticize them? Explain.

DIGGING IN

2. Read James 3:1–12. Why does James suggest we should hesitate before becoming teachers (v. 1)?

3. How do a horse's bit and a ship's rudder illustrate the power of the tongue (vv. 3–4)?

4. James compares the tongue to a fire (vv. 5–6). How does this image illustrate its potential destructiveness?

5. When have you seen “a great forest ... set on fire” by words?

6. James points out that we can tame almost every kind of bird and beast (v. 7). Why, then, can't we tame the tongue (v. 8)?

7. How can words function as a “deadly poison” in relationships and churches?

8. James notes that the tongue can have a positive impact. What hypocrisy, however, does he expose in verses 9–12?

9. What is the result if both fresh and salt water should flow from the same spring (vv. 11–12)?

10. How is loving one another with our words related to worshiping together on Sunday?

11. Ephesians 4:29 states, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” What kinds of unwholesome talk do we commonly indulge in that do not build up or benefit others?

12. What are some constructive ways you can use your tongue to bless those in your church or fellowship group?

13. Think of at least three people with whom you have regular contact. What can you do to love each one with your words?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray Psalm 15:2–4. Lord, make me a person who speaks the truth from the heart, whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to my neighbor, who doesn't slur others, and who honors those who fear you.

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Study 6: Love That Lasts

WARMING UP

1. Think of a person who is loving. In what specific ways does he or she demonstrate love to others?

DIGGING IN

2. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. What gifts of the Spirit does Paul mention in verses 1–3?

3. Powerful and spectacular as these gifts may be, why are they worthless without love?

4. Why is it easy to fall into the trap of serving others and exercising our spiritual gifts without a heart of love?

When and how has this happened in your service to Jesus and others?

5. What preventive measures can you take to ensure that love remains your motive in ministry?

6. The world understands a conditional love with strings attached, such as: “I love you if you live up to my expectations,” “I love you if you make me feel good,” or “I love you if you are rich and beautiful.” In verses 4–7 Paul gives God’s definition of love. What are the eight characteristics that love *is not*?

7. What are the seven qualities of what love is?

How would you briefly define each of love’s qualities?

8. Which quality are you most in need of cultivating? Explain.

Verse 7 says, “[Love] always protects, always trusts [is optimistic], always hopes, always perseveres [doesn’t quit on people easily].” In what present situation do you need to live out that kind of love?

9. According to Paul, why is love superior to spiritual gifts (vv. 8–13)?

10. Why will spiritual gifts, and even knowledge as we understand it, pass away when Jesus Christ appears?

11. Of the three great virtues — faith, hope, and love — why is love the greatest (v. 13)?

12. For centuries Christians have noted that this chapter gives us a picture of Jesus. Reread verses 1–8, replacing *love* with *Jesus*. What fresh insights and vision does this give you of Jesus?

13. Like Jesus, we are to love others *in spite of* their faults, sins, problems, and so on. Why is that kind of love such an awesome force when unleashed in our personal lives and in the church?

14. According to Romans 5:5, “God’s love *has been poured out* [past tense] into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (italics added). Therefore, we already have his inexhaustible love within us! Describe one situation in which you need this 1 Corinthians 13 love to flow from you to another.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray Ephesians 3:14–21, asking that you might know the love of Christ and reflect it in all your relationships.