

What is Love?

God's Love

Lesson 1 Sermon



Overview

Summary

In the small group lesson this week, you and your students unpacked one of the most misunderstood topics in our culture: love. Scripture tells us that God is love, so we looked at him to define love for us, not culture and not ourselves. We look at God's very nature to show us what love is like. Love is illustrated perfectly through the Trinity, where we see a picture of generous love that celebrates others and delights in their joy. Jesus perfectly demonstrated this love through his life of submission and sacrifice.

Key Takeaways

1. Students will have a true understanding that God is love. We are to receive his love and share it with others like Jesus did.
2. Students will define "glorify" and describe how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit glorify each other and how that relates to their understanding of love and loving others.
3. Students will reflect on God's amazing love for them and the beautiful, counter-cultural truth God offers us: that in *giving* love freely to God they can share this love with others.

Scriptures

John 5:20 / John 14:31 / John 17:4-5 / 1 John 4:7-10 / John 15:9-17



Sermon Script

Introduction

What is Love? What things come to mind when you think about what you love? How would you describe the word “love”? Maybe some in the room immediately thought of the song, “What is Love?” (Baby don’t hurt me, don’t hurt me, no more!) Others thought of your favorite food. Who loves tacos? What about a band you love, or a song? Love is a word that we use a lot! We use it for our most meaningful relationships and also our most trivial whims. Let me ask you this question: With all the ways we love so many different things, do you think it is possible that we have lost the true definition of love all together?

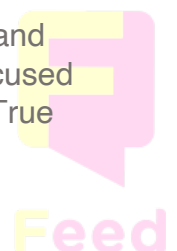
When researchers asked, only 1 in 10 people your age said that they hold to a scriptural view of sex and marriage. 48% of teens believe that marriage should not exclusively be between a man and a woman. 63% of non-religious teenagers believe that gender, marriage, dating and all of the above are based on feeling and attraction. I share those statistics not to get into the nitty-gritty of marriage, but to show how there are a lot of definitions, understandings, and beliefs about love.

If everyone is holding onto their own truth, then how do we determine what is really true? If we do not understand the reality of true love, then we’re bound to get confused. In today’s world, I think we could make the case that we have no concrete definition of love at all. We throw the word love around when talking about our parents and our favorite restaurant! Love is based on feeling or attraction for many people. However, what happens when attraction or feeling fade? What happens when your favorite restaurant is no longer your favorite? What you love will inevitably change! The truth is that love is not based on feeling. To find out what it is based on, we need to look in God’s word.

Let me ask you this question: who created the Star Wars universe? That’s right! George Lucas! George Lucas is the creator of Luke Skywalker and Han Solo and Darth Vader, so she named them. I use that example to show that if we want the true definition of love, we have to ask the author of love. To understand love in its truest form, we have to ask God.

Point #1: God is Love

Scripture clearly states that God is love. The better we come to know God, the better we will know and live in true love. To say that “God is love” is to say that God’s very essence, the core of his identity, is a loving relationship. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have eternally existed in a relationship of mutual, dynamic, other-focused love. And when God created humanity, he invited us into that relationship of love. True love comes from God and follows the pattern that God demonstrates.



We see this truth laid out in numerous scriptures such as *John 5:20* in which John writes, **“For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing...”**

Jesus also shows us how the Trinity works in perfect love when in one of his darkest hours before going to the cross, he said, **“I will do what the Father requires of me, so that the world will know that I love the Father...”** John 14:31, and **“I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began...”** John 17:4-5

Finally, Jesus also spoke to the third part of the trinity, the Holy Spirit. He promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and reveal how the Holy Spirit works in perfect love with God the Father and God the Son.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, ‘The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.’...John 16:13-15

We can see through all of these passages that the way that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together in perfect love is by glorifying one another. To “glorify” means to praise, to serve, and to pour love into one another. In the simplest way, it is the opposite of being self-centered! When we look at the Trinity, we see this firsthand. God the Father laid down his only Son for you and I. Jesus (the Son) submitted to the will of the Father, even to the point of death. The Holy Spirit comes and speaks only what Jesus speaks as the Holy Spirit serves & praises God.

Let’s put it this way... Imagine a beautiful dance. Three figures circle one another, moving gracefully in perfect time and rhythm. There’s no competition, no concern for who is the best or most beautiful. Their pure delight is found in each other’s happiness and success. This is the way that God works, and it looks very opposite from the world's definition of love! .

If this is the way that God loves, then we are called to do the same! Which brings us to our second point:

Point #2: We are called to love as God loves.

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for **love comes from God**. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, for **God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son** into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. **This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins...**1 John 4:7-10



God did not just say he is love, but, through Jesus, he shows us that he is love! Have you ever heard the saying, “Don’t just talk the talk, walk the walk?” What do people mean when they say that? They are saying, do not just say that you love something, care about something, or are passionate about something... live it out! When God says he is love, he did not just say it and then leave us on our own. He said it and he showed it!

God pursued us before we even knew to look for him; he loved us before we loved him back; he died for us while we were dead in sin. Now we are free to receive his love and pour it out on others. This kind of love is radical, sacrificial, and real! This is the kind of love we are to show those around us!

Many people are discouraged by the church because they view it as people who say they love other people, but then don’t live that love out. What would it look like if we truly loved people the way God did? I think if we did that, we would see people drawn to Christ.

But loving God’s way is hard to live out! When sin entered the world, it broke everything beautiful, including our understanding of love. That is why it is easier to accept a warped definition of love based off of the culture we live in. We can begin to feed into the lie that love is something we earn instead of something we freely receive. In the same way, we can also believe the lie that love is a feeling that is centered around ourselves, rather than a choice to serve and meet the needs of others.

When God created people, he invited us to join that beautiful dance of love...to discover the surprising truth that in *giving* love freely to God and others, we *get* to experience authentic love ourselves. In one of his last teachings to his disciples, Jesus taught about the true nature of love. He said:

I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: **Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.** You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. **This is my command: Love each other...** John 15:9-17

John 15:9-17 helps us move this understanding of love from talk to action. The way we respond to God’s radical love is through obedience and sacrifice. Jesus demonstrated his love for the Father by obeying him. Jesus didn’t obey to earn God’s love; as his Son,



he already possessed it. As followers of Jesus, so do we! Our obedience is a natural response of thankfulness for the love God has poured out on us.

Jesus demonstrated his love for us by laying down his life for us. He calls his followers to love in the same way. That means sacrificing our needs for the needs of others.

When we live out a life of obedience and sacrifice to the Lord, the way we love others is going to look radically different! That is a good thing! The world will never know the love of Christ if we do not show it through loving differently! This is because:

Point #3: The world's idea of love and God's idea of love differ.

Take a moment to think about how the world portrays love. Many of us would go back to our favorite Romantic Comedy, or the way our parents interacted with us. Some will think back to a popular pop song or a crush you had in school. For some, love in the world is portrayed as a feeling, an emotion, a physical response, or something that fills you up. It's all self-centered. What would it look like to prefer someone above yourself? What would it look like to sacrifice, to give, to pour into, and to radically love those around you?

God invites us to personally experience his perfect love *and* to share it with others. If you haven't yet experienced the amazing love of Christ, ask him to reveal it to you through his Word, prayer, and in community with other believers. God has shown us what true love is, and when we experience it, it changes us. What does it look like to share that love with those around you? How can the way God loves you change your interactions with others?

As we close, if you haven't thought of God as loving before, ask him to show you the depths of his love. If you are a follower of Jesus, would those closest to you, like your siblings and close friends, describe you as someone who obeys God and loves them sacrificially? Why or why not? Ask God to reveal areas of sin in your life and trust him to lovingly lead you in obedience. Together, let's look for ways to pursue the good of others before your own and demonstrate the love of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe God's love to a friend who imagines God to be angry, judgmental, or harsh?
2. The Father and the Son pursued one another's glory, and in turn, each was glorified. Can this work in earthly relationships? How can pursuing someone else's joy lead to your joy?
3. Where do you think we can do better as Christ followers to truly love those around us? What would that look like and how do you live that out?

