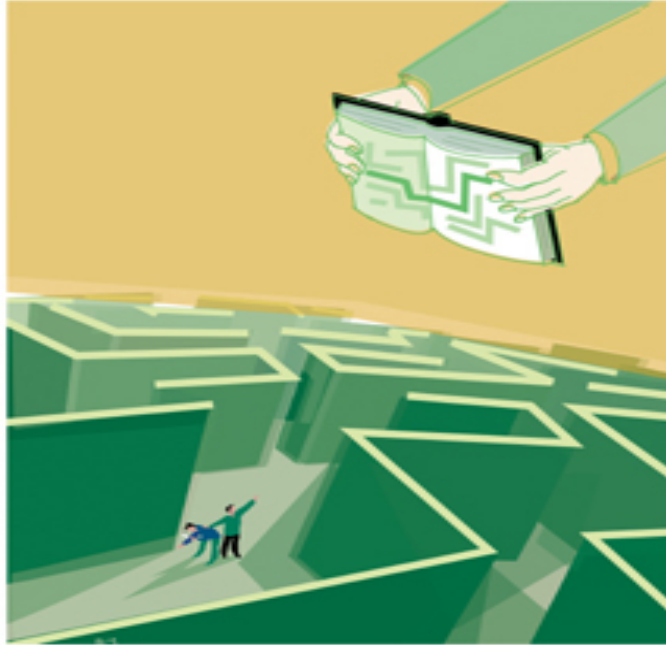


# A Field Guide to Understanding Love and Relationships



**A 14+ week Bible Study for discovering, and applying Biblical precepts to the building of lasting, quality relationships through understanding His Love and Call**

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## Introduction

This Bible Study was designed for small groups. It is divided up in subdivisions, or “sessions,” each with its own questions. The best way to go about this study is without time constants, to allow your group to process this information and the Scriptures at their own pace. Some groups need more time in a particular section than in another. It is best to honor the needs of the group, and go at the best pace for them. If you do have time constraints, just proceed with the study in each session per week, and what you do not finish, encourage your group to finish on their own. To save time, have the group read the sections and answer the questions before the study; there will be more dramatic discussions. This study is Part I of a five-part series on relationships, and what the Bible has to say to us concerning them.

The topic of *Love* and *Relationships* is a very hot topic on the Internet and in many of our churches these days. There is much misinformation at best and blatant heresy at worst. Therefore, we are going to devote this study to help you search and discover what the Word has to say! Some of the subjects to be discussed are focusing on how to prepare yourself first, what to look for, what is Fullness, Biblical love, and Kindness, which lays the foundation for the development of quality Biblical character. Then we will be better prepared to build quality relationships. We will even help you learn some keys for a stable and loving marriage!

This study is not just for young people, or singles! What we are talking about is for all Christians who desire to find, and make good, lasting relationships work. Even if we have done it all wrong, so to speak, God can, and will turn it around for good when our attention becomes focused upon Him, and His precepts--from His Word. We have to know what love is and what it is not before we can be effective in our relationships!

My purpose in this study is to point you in the right direction, and provide for you solid, Biblical insights from my more than twenty years of pastoral counseling and Biblical investigations in this subject. It is my prayer, and plan, to give you a general overview of relationships from the Bible’s timeless perspective. This is not a work based on the latest trends in psychology; rather, the understanding of the underlining Spiritual principles we all need to know and follow. *A Field Guide* is meant to show you the right path to take you through the maze of what all of us are to do, and to be. Consequently, you can learn and gain the most from God’s Word to become better in all of your relationships, and to glorify our Lord.

I did not just wake up one day free from that maze; I had to learn how to navigate it in light of God’s Word. I, too, had to struggle to keep from getting myself lost, and in trying to find my way out of ruthless situations. I had to

overcome my fears from intense teasing as a child, overcome learning disabilities, dyslexia, and a seriously embarrassing speech impediment that caused me to be the butt of many jokes while growing up. I was once engaged, and realized, after a lot of agony and pain, that this would be wrong. I have spent so much time in my pastoral career that I have had, at times, few, and sometimes no relationships of quality or depth. It is my intention to help you find the right path, so you can discover and build healthy, and quality relationships that are centered upon Christ as our Lord. We will begin by looking at how to prepare ourselves with the right mindset, knowing what real love is, and learning about attitude and character so we can be prepared to bring about and build relationships, as well as developing a good personality.

It is my firm belief that God is indeed in control and has a great plan for you. That plan is not hidden, nor is it mysterious; rather, it is found in the pages of His Word, and is ready for you to dig into and apply to your life. If you think, *I cannot*, or, *I have failed*. Fear not! We can learn as much about love and relationships when we fail as we can when we succeed. What is the big mystery that makes this work? It is the willingness to learn and grow. The key is the ability to see what we have done wrong, and learn from it, so we do not repeat the same patterns over, and over again. Relationships are tough; they are difficult, and even foreboding. At times we will wonder if our efforts are worth the hurt we seem to experience from them.

I believe they are!

May the Lord richly bless and keep you in His loving arms, and bless your search to find the relationship God has for you--even the love of your life!

Richard Joseph Krejcir  
Numbers 6:24

# Section I      How to Look for Love and Relationships!

## Session I

One way to look at the world of love and relationships is to see it as a big, dark, and foreboding maze, with many paths we could undertake, each plotted with all kinds of options, potential traps, and dangers. As we venture into this maze, we come face to face with our fears, doubts, and into conflict with all kinds of opportunities and ideas, as well as with others, seeking the same path. When we are faced with so many paths and choices, we can become frustrated, and be led to the possibility of wrong decisions. This, in turn, can become a string of lost, and broken friendships that further direct our lives toward conflict and strife. Or, perhaps we find the right path, by chance, leading to a life of contentment, harmony, and love. Do we stay away? Or, do we proceed? If we stay off the path, we end up in loneliness and despair. If we take our chances, we can get lost and hurt. So, what do we do? We need to be willing to choose a direction, and move ahead on that path. Then, the questions become, *what is that direction? How can I find it? We may ask, and even plead, what do I do? Where do I go? With whom do I share my life? Is there a Divine plan for me? Do I need to prepare myself first, or can we just dive right in and stay, on our own whims? Or, Do I seek God's precepts, so I can take the path with more confidence?*

The key is to take seriously what God's Word has to say, His timeless, tested, and righteous path on which we can walk. We can go into that dark maze armed with the Light of His Word so we can take risks, and make right decisions; we can find, and form friendships that work! After all, the meaning of the Christian life is relationships, first with God, and then with the others around us. That is why we are on this earth. This is the only experience we take with us into eternity. When we are walking on His path, with His Light, we will experience the wonder and excitement of life. Let us be willing to look up and experience His Wonder!

Believe it or not, it has been my experience, as a pastor and counselor, that few Christians ever seek God in their relationship choices; they just dive into a pool that usually has no water in it. Choosing the right path through that maze of dark apprehensions will be the most important decision we ever make, because this is what will echo into eternity. Relationship choices are far more important than our other daily decisions, including what school or career to undertake. Yet, few take this seriously.

When we venture into the confusing maze of relationships, the options confronting us will cause us either to embrace others with eagerness, or become fearful, and alone. One path may make us content, the other bitter. These trepidations are a natural defense mechanism warning us away from dangerous situations. Added to these natural fears are all the various attitudes of our culture, and the desires of our will, all diverging with one another, causing chaos and

conflicts. Meanwhile, Christ is seeking us, beckoning us to follow Him out of that deep, dark, dangerous maze to a path of solid, lasting relationships, close friendships, dating, love, finding the right spouse, even developing a healthy marriage.

Relationships are important. Yes, there are other activities and goals that preoccupy us in life, such as our jobs, cars, hobbies, money, and having fun. However, consider this thought: when you are at the end of your sojourn on this earth, what will you have received from it? What will you take with you? Will it be that successful career? What about that hobby that took all of your time? Would it be the wealth that you accumulated? I am not saying these things are not important to pursue; rather, they are just a few of the means to do what really is important, and that is, *Relationships!* Career, material accumulation, activities, money, and having fun are not the goals in life; they are only portions of the means to the goal. The reason for, and meaning of life is, again, *relationships!*

**Read Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 14:1a; Colossians 1:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; 1 John 4:7-21 then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. What do these passages teach us about love?
2. Is there something that one or more of these passages are saying to you, perhaps something that needs your attention?
3. Have you ever felt you were in a dark maze when it came to understanding love and relationships? If so, why?
4. Have you ever felt, *I cannot, or, I have failed* in relationships? Why did you feel that way?
5. How can these passages help you develop the mindset to fear not, and trust Him? How does this apply to how you understand and handle love?
6. What are some of the experiences you have had in relationships?
7. What role does love play in relationships, in general? What about in your relationships?

8. Relationships do include a variety of options and challenges. We can easily see many choices. What can we do to investigate them with a Biblical mindset, and not in a worldly manner?
9. Why do so many Christians fail to incorporate Biblical precepts when it comes to love and relationships, such as, *whom will I date?* or, *who will be my best friend?*
10. What do these passages tell us about how to navigate oneself through the maze of conflicting wordy ideas on love, and refocus our attention on God's precepts?
11. Fear, and being overly cautious, also plays a big role in relationships. Some people fear being hurt, so they stay away. Have you ever felt so fearful that you decided not to proceed?
12. One of the things I have learned is, if we stay out of the maze, we end up in loneliness and despair. If we take our chances, and go for it without a map, we can get lost and hurt. So, what do we do?
13. Do you believe you can find God's real purpose and plan for your life?
14. Do you have confidence that there is a Divine plan for you? If not, where do you place your hope and trust?
15. So, what do we do? How do we proceed in this maze?
16. What we need is a Tour Guide; so, who, or what will it be for you? How can this choice be crucial to the developing of good and lasting relationships?
17. How can these passages serve as a map for your life and purpose?
18. What have you learned from these passages?

19. What can you do to make sure you do not forget, so that these passages stay with you, always?

20. Which passage(s) should you memorize, so it is always on your mind when you meet, and get to know people, and develop your relationships?

**Start to pray as a group, and individually at home, about how all we have talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships! The more time you spend in prayer, the more active His precepts will come alive in you!**

### **Additional Thoughts**

When we have prepared ourselves to better know ourselves, and what God has to say to us, we can start to find and make relationships work. We can start to see life as a pleasurable and exciting adventure, not a gloomy journey to endure, hoping something better comes along one day. When we find people with whom we can bond, we can start to see His dwelling of love and contentment emerges in our lives. Yes, we will have ups and downs, but the main anchor in our lives will be our solid, growing relationship with Christ, and His transforming presence employing us to empower others.

Once we learn how to get ourselves on the right path, we will discover helpful tips and Biblical ideas on how to form, and build healthy, quality relationships. We can even learn how to find the love of a lifetime and be able to keep it. Where our relationships are centered upon Him, because our life and mindset has been aligned to His, His best is available to us. This happens because we have yielded to Christ as Lord of our lives all of the time, so we can see His path through the maze and receive His best. We also must realize that sometimes we make the wrong choices and get ourselves lost. However, if we are willing to seek His help, Christ will help us through it, and work our wrong choices for good.

Some stay put in that land of choices, because it is fun, it is a party, and they enjoy it. Others feel that if you do that, you will put yourself in dangers that may lead into bad relationships. So, what do we do? How do we proceed?

What we need is a Tour Guide, rooted in timeless Biblical values that are true and real for you. It is my endeavor to show you how God's Word is a sword--a machete--that will cut that path for you.

The key to navigating the maze is seeking the directions from God's most precious Word, the right way to proceed into that maze of developing friendships, to dating choices to building family and marriages. We will help prepare you to come through life not only with the right decision and the love of your life, but with the tools, character, and ability to make godly, Christ-centered relationships

work, filled with God's blessings and purpose! Remember and take comfort in this even if you have done it all wrong, so to speak, God can, and will turn it around when your attention becomes focused upon Him and His precepts, from His Word.

### **Additional Questions for Singles:**

**Read: 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 10:24**

1. What qualities should we be looking for in our soul mate?
2. What should we avoid?
3. How do we find that love that will last a lifetime?
4. Is finding the right mate a matter of just being lucky, or, being in the right place at the right time?
5. Is it possible that someone else stole him, or her, from you?
6. Does God really care, and, does He have that special someone for you?
7. How do you find out?

Did you know that the current dating model most people use, from pre-teens to older adults, is ineffective at best and dangerous at worst? Our dating traditions result in a 50%+ divorce rate, which is the same in the church as it is in secular society (statistics are consistent from the United States Census Bureau, Barna Research and Focus on the Family). This means people who attend a religious institution, claiming to be a Christian, have the same divorce rate as people who do not go to a church, as people who hang out in bars, showing their contempt toward God. This translates that as Christians, we have a problem with building and maintaining relationships. And, the relationships that do tend to last have major problems too. Just ask any counseling Pastor or Christian marriage counselor and they will say that a significant amount of the marriages that stay together are mostly miserable and dysfunctional. Something is definitely wrong.

What should we do? What do we need to consider and to avoid?



For this quest, let us venture into God's most precious Word, and examine the Scriptures carefully to find His Will. The Bible holds the truth for life today, including how and with whom you should be building a life. If you feel that the Bible is not the paradigm for your faith and practice, or for your standard for relationships, then you will find yourself disappointed and hurt in life. The perspective we are to have is a desire for what God wants, not what we want. Our focus is to be on Him, because He has the best plan for us! Our plans will only lead us to make the wrong decisions and miss out on the best opportunities and situations He has for us.

The first thing we have to realize is that God does care, and has a plan for you, even when you cannot see it. So, be willing to learn and develop your character. Study the Word, seek wisdom, be prudent, and lean on the strength of the Lord! These things do not come to you by chance; they come by knowing and following Christ (Proverbs 12:4; 28:20; 31:10)!

Consider this: Without the right attitude and perspective on life, without glorifying God, and following His Will, you will not find the real quality love relationship for your life! You will be taking a gamble with what is priceless and precious, that you get it right.

## **Section II Preparing for Relationships with the Right Mindset**

**The Biblical principles in this study are the template for showing us where our focus is to be!**

Session II (This section is divided up into sub-divisions, or “sessions,” each with its own questions. The best way to proceed is without time constants, allowing your group to process this information and the Scriptures at their own pace. Some groups need more time in a particular section than in another. It is best to honor the needs of the group, and go at the best pace for them. As a result, this section may take three to six or more sessions.)

One of the best activities I ever did when I was a Youth Pastor was taking youth to Rest Homes. I would assign to each of them an elderly person to interview. They would find out what was important in that person’s life, what they learned, what they would have done differently. Did they have regrets? Did fear keep them from making good decisions? Did they throw away what was important, such as friends, a spouse, or children? Then, we would discuss their findings, and determine what they could learn and apply to their lives. I would ask them to think about what they did **not** hear the person say that could be important.

During these countless interviews, over a span of twenty years, I never encountered a person who regretted spending too much time with their family, not having enough time for their hobby, or needing more money. In fact, after interviewing congressmen, industrialists, tradesmen, clergymen, businessmen, mothers who had never held a job in society outside the home, and many others from all walks of life, the biggest regret expressed was spending too much time at work to make money. They regretted the distance between them and their children, the lost relationships with friends, the spouse they let go, and they wished they had a better disposition and personality. They all wished they could live their lives over, spending more time with relationships, keeping their friends, and not losing out on what they finally figured out was important in life!

It is my goal that we can carry out our lives with the right mindset of what is really important in life, so we do not end up in loneliness and regret. I wanted to let those youth know while they were still youth that they do not need to wait until they reach the age of seventy or eighty to see life in the right perspective; they can do it now. We do not need to miss out on what God has for us. We do not need to spend all of our energies chasing after what is fleeting while ignoring what is good.

Most young people do not look up to see what is really important; therefore, confusion and dysfunction have taken over their mindsets. Most live in the world of coffee houses, clubs, internet dating, singles clubs, and personal ads. These things have become cultural icons, and are booming in our society. People are dazed and confused on who and what to look for in finding friendships and intimacy. Even the quest to find the love of one's life can be all consuming. This boom has even infiltrated the church, as we can easily see countless ads for Christians seeking Christians, and Christian dating services on the Web, radio, and newspapers. There are even personal ads in church bulletins. As people are so busy in this fast-paced society, there seems to be no time to date or even to make friends. There is no time to look up and see God's plan. Of course, in saving time by not looking up, we just end up spending decades in wrong choices and dysfunction. This mindset translates to all of our relationships, and cheapens them—from the office to the bedroom. Too many of us are seeing the world and love through glasses of the wrong prescription!

Perhaps people have been hurt, and do not want to do as they have done before. Many are fed up with the traditional dating scene, and are searching for an alternative; perhaps this is true for you. If you think your busyness keeps you from finding the right people, once (and if) you do find someone, will you have time for a relationship? Almost certainly not! Something or someone needs to change. That someone is you, and that something is your attitude and outlook on life. No, we do not like to hear those words, do we? But, we do need to hear them. I know I do!

The answer is not in the latest fad, or service, it is in getting our priorities straight, then seeking out relationships! If your call and desire is to have a committed relationship, you will have to make room in your life for one. That means you will need to be willing to prepare yourself, emotionally and mentally, with the right Biblical attitude and mindset. If not, then you will be gambling with the second most important decision and choice you will ever make. And, when it comes to a marriage, your choices and attitudes will have lasting repercussions for many people, and for many generations to come. It will become a crapshoot with much greater and higher odds for the "house" than for you, where the "house" is a regretful and discontented life.

We all desire and seek love and companionship to fill that empty hole we think we have. For some singles, this is the driving force in their life, as it was for me at one time. Yet, as Christians, our primary purpose in life is to grow in our relationship to our Lord. We need to serve and glorify God, and fulfill the call and the destiny that He gives us. This also translates into who we are and how we should be in Christ. This is true in the arena of all relationships, even for finding the "love of your life." Thus, we need to find out what God's plan is for relationships, and then follow it. It seems simple on the surface, and it really is. The problem is that we have clouded God's plan with our superficial culture and desires. We seek that crapshoot rather than the stability of impacting faith and

Godly values.

### **Building your Foundation with Right Biblical Mindset from Galatians 2:20-21:**

The goal--from finding friendships to finding the “love of your life”--is to live in undivided surrender and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord, meaning that He is in charge of all areas of our lives. He is our first and primary love! That means your life must reflect the glory of God, and serve as an example in a world of temptation and evil. Since He represented us in life and death, and imparts to us His grace, this is our driving force, our number one reason in life and in eternity to come. Because of what He has done for us, we should have the desire to assemble our lives to glorify Him. That means to also strive to the best of your ability to achieve fullness in relationships. We have to be willing to take this to heart: His Will supercedes ours, as His is the best, whereas our will and desires are limited in our understanding and knowledge. By surrendering our Will to His Will, we can build a foundation of trust, reliance, and obedience. These actions become the foundation upon which to build the rest of the house of character, values, and fortitude, where a Christ-centered relationship can live and grow.

You will then be able to make healthy and wise decisions because the Lord, through His Word and the Spirit, is your Guide, as opposed to what the media, friends, your passions, and emotions may dictate. Because you are seeking His truth, you will be able to discern who is right for you. Following these timeless Biblical precepts will help you make the right decisions, and avoid making the wrong ones. If for some reason you decide God’s ways are not for you, be forewarned, as you will lose yourself into the maze realm of wrong decisions and you may never receive what He has and what is best for you. Thus you may face the unpleasant prospect of venturing into a life of misery and strife. So, why do that?

We need to learn four primary attitudes that lay the foundation for building effective relationships. These are like the footers to a skyscraper—massive, concrete platforms where the steel girders that hold up the entire building are placed. Just like the crossbeams that are bolted and welded on those girders, each of these aspects needs to be bolted upon one another. Each one produces the next one and is dependent on the previous one, thus they all work synergistically tighter, and together, to form us into the Person God has called us to be. These lay the groundwork for constructing the character, maturity, and willingness to make right decisions and to continue to assemble those relationships in the right direction. These will be the foundation to understanding God’s Will. The remainder of the precepts we investigate will build the skyscraper of relationships.

**Read Galatians 2:20-21; Philippians 3:1-16, then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. What are some of the key words from these two passages, that jump out at you?
2. What roles have surrender, and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ played in your relationships?
3. What role should it play?
4. What would your relationships look like if your life was centered on these Scriptural precepts?
5. What blocks these precepts from working in you?
6. What do you need to learn here?

**First: Understanding the Kingdom of God** (Matthew 3:2; 4:23; 5:3,10,19-20; 6:10; 33; 7:21; 10:7; 13:24-47):

Two penetrating questions that have pondered humanity since the dawn of time are, “who are you?” and, “what do you want?” These form the foundation of the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies, affecting the humanities, sociology, and, of course, psychology. These questions fuel what directs us, and who motivates us to do what we do and to be who we are. This is the *meaning of life* stuff. Through understanding Christ and who we are in Him, these two ageless questions come alive to help sustain us and direct us in the right direction. As a result, we will center our motivations and directions on Him, on what is perfect and pleasing, and not what we think. Our answers will only serve to get us lost. However, the key is to understand the answers to these questions that Jesus asks us in His Word. If we get the answers wrong, we get lost in that maze of life; if we get them right, we stay on the right path. Are you thinking, *hey, that is not fair*, or, *is life just a big test*? Take this to heart; you have the answer sheet--His Word. He has written the answers in creation, in our hearts, and revealed them in His Word. We have no excuse not to know, but because of our fall, the fog of our Will and desires obscures them from view.

Take comfort in the awareness that God is not hidden, nor, is His Will so mysterious we cannot find it. God's influence, glory and presence are all around us; this is called "mediated revelation". This is not *pantheism*, which teaches that everything is God, that creation itself is God. Rather, God is *all present*,

"omnipresent", and we have no escape from Him. He reveals His presence to us in countless ways.

These *meaning of life* questions also mean that we as humans are religious by nature and seek a higher purpose and order. God uses that nature to make Himself known. "Immediate revelation" means that God plants an innate sense of who He is in each of us, even without the Bible or missions (Psalm 19; Isaiah 44:9-20; Acts 14:8-19; 17: 16:34; Romans 1:18-23; 2:14-15; Colossians 3:5, However, remember that missions and evangelism are still a mandate from our Lord!) Coupled to God's revelation in nature and in our hearts, we have "special revelation," which is the Bible that God directly inspired, and is the ultimate source and superintendent of the original manuscripts, without any error. He used humans as the authors, and as a tool, a word processor. Thus, this gives us His Will for our faith, and practice of life, duty, law, grace, His plan, and our purpose (Psalm 119; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

Why the theology lesson? We have to know from whence our direction in life comes. This is foundational for all aspects of who we are, what we do, and where we are going. What motivates us and creates in us our actions and behaviors will translate in our relationship with God and how we are with those around us. If you do not get this, that God has a plan for you, you will have tremendous issues and obstacles that you may never climb over to become the person that God desires and calls you to be. The best plans and the best adventures and contentment and joys we can ever have in life can easily be missed because we have become stubborn, and refuse to look up at Him.

Here comes some more theology, essential theology to know so you can get yourself on the right path, to know God better, and to receive His direction.

Throughout recorded human history, humanity has gathered for trade and protection, as well as for organizing the gathering of food, for hunting, and for forming relationships within a structure, which translates into control and government. The word *Kingdom*, in the *Kingdom of God* or *Heaven*, means government; it is the need to be organized for purpose and direction. Some people lead, others strive to obey, while others seek to destroy. That is a result of our fallen nature and criminal element. Nevertheless, we need leadership and direction to succeed in building a society, and building relationships. Biblically, we are called to have a civil government and obey it—within the parameters that there is actually only one true government and leader—and that is, God. This means we are to yield to the implementation of our God's "Lordship," that He is our King, hence, the name, "Kingdom of God." He is sovereign; He is the absolute monarch of the universe. His rule is absolute. When we refuse to be governed and controlled, anarchy and chaos will result because of our sinful nature, and will cause harm to others (Romans 1:21). Thus, it is our responsibility to obey God, and the others who have responsibility over us (Romans 13:1-7).

This theme, the *Kingdom of God*, is found throughout Scripture, and links the two Testaments. It exists now with God's reign of His people, and it will come in the future (Psalm 10:16--18; Daniel 2:44; 4:34; Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 3:1-12; 4:23; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 11:20; 16:16; 17:21; 22:16-30; John 18:36; Acts 20:25; 28:23-31; Colossians 1:13; 28-29; Galatians 3:16; 26-29; Ephesians 2:11-18; 3:6-15; Hebrews 1:8-14; Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9; 17:14; 19:16). Yes, a lot of Scriptures, indeed; now you can start to see how important this is!

John the Baptist announced the *Kingdom* to us, with a sense of urgency, at the inauguration of Jesus' ministry on earth. It is now in its beginning, and will be fulfilled, as Jesus said, in the future. Thus, it is already running, and there is more to come with Christ's second coming. Exactly what, we do not know; we only have a glimpse. What we do know is that it will be consummated.

Jesus preached the *Kingdom of Heaven*, which is here and is to come (Matthew 3:2; 4:23; 5:3,10,19-20; 6:10; 33; 7:21; 10:7; 13:24-47). The term, the *Kingdom of Heaven* in Matthew, is the same thing as the *Kingdom of God* in the other three Gospels. They both mean God's rule and sovereignty. They point to our eternal future and the church today. Matthew used the expression, *Kingdom of Heaven*, almost exclusively, whereas the other gospels use the term *Kingdom of God*. The distinction lies in who the audience was. The Jews, to whom Matthew wrote, were reluctant to say the name of God because of their high reverence for His name. To the Gentiles and Greeks it did not matter. The Kingdom of Heaven will culminate with our Lord's second coming, bringing in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13-14; Revelation 21-22).

What does this boil down to? Our task in the church is to proclaim Christ as Lord, and His character, righteousness, peace, and joy, all by the Holy Spirit. This will effectively be the catalyst to build quality, lasting, and effective relationships. The "coming of the Kingdom" in the Old Testament meant that a new stage in God's redemptive plan was coming--CHRIST. For us, it means our personal identification and relationship to our Lord and Savior! Our need is to bow to His Lordship for our betterment and growth! This will keep us going on the right path through that dark, foreboding maze of the pandemonium of life!

**Read Matthew 5:3; 6:10-13; 7:21; 13:24-33 then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. What are some of the points in this section that have gotten your attention, and, why?
2. "Who are you?" and, "what do you want?"

3. What does *poor in Spirit* mean to you?

(*Poor in Spirit*: (Psalm 9:18; Romans 9:30-31) may conjure up ideas of physical and social poverty, but it actually means total dependence on God, realizing our sinfulness (Psalm. 40:17; 86:1; 109:22; Jeremiah 22:15-16)! *Poor in Spirit* means to be humble and surrendered, where we do not look to ourselves, but to God. It is the realization that we are sinners, having no righteousness of our own. We are saved by the grace and mercy of God alone (Isaiah 57: 15; 66:1-2; Luke 18:13; Galatians 2:20-21; Ephesians 2:8-9)! The cure to physical and spiritual poverty is the realization of what really is important, and who we are in Christ!

The opposite of this concept is being prideful and self reliant, to the exclusion of allowing Christ to work in you, or allowing Him to use you to help others. In so doing, you are keeping yourself, and others, in spiritual, and physical poverty, and oppression (Luke 18:9-14; Rev. 3:17-19)!

4. How can the Lord's Prayer be a focus for your life?

5. Jesus places a premium to do His will! So, what is His will?

Did you know God's Will is not about programs or activities; it is not about jobs, school, or what color socks to buy? It is about our growth and maturity in Him. His will is for us to know Him, make Him known, and grow in Him. Yet, few of us Christians place our efforts there; we focus on careers, power, and various opportunities—all of which are important. However, that is not what He considers premium!

6. What do you consider premium?

7. How does understanding the Kingdom of God translate to how you live your life?

8. The Kingdom of God means our yielding to our God's "Lordship," acknowledging that He is our King. What does this mean to you? What should it mean?

9. What does this section boil down to? How will it be the road to understanding your purpose in life?



10. Why would understanding our life's purpose help us in love, and relationships?

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

### Session III

**Second: Applying the Mind-Set of Fullness** (Mark 7:1-13; Matthew 5:6; 16:24-27; Romans 6: 12; 19-23; Galatians 2:20-21; 5:19-21; Ephesians 5: 15-21):

Fullness equals knowing who you are in Christ, and what He did for you on the Cross—that we are complete in Him! This is paramount, because, all you do as a Christian is a response to what He has first done in you (1 John 4:19). With this knowledge, you will have the proper attitude and discernment to make correct decisions, based on God's Will. With this knowledge, you will ask the right questions and look for fullness, not merely fulfillment! The difference is that fullness seeks Christ as Lord; fulfillment is seeking someone or something to meet your needs and wishes, or seeking to fill your own desires or lust! Fulfillment is seeking what we want, and that often is not the best for us. It is filling our emptiness with the wrong filler. It is much like putting gasoline in a diesel-fueled truck; it is fuel, but it will not work, and will damage the engine. These passages testify to such as this. Sin and the desires of our lust can, and will consume us, taking us far away from God and His goodness. So, this pursuit of fulfillment will end up bringing us nothing but emptiness, the very thing we try to avoid. Sin will dig in us, causing our thinking to be skewed, and our decisions flawed.

Galatians, chapter five, gives us two sets of fruits that we can choose to produce. There are the ones in verses 19 to 21 that are the rotten scum of life that create division and strife, or verses 22-23, what will produce goodness as we build one another up. In addition, verses 24-25 give us the reason for our motivation and pursuit. God's Word tells us that we choose the ways of adultery, fornication, and impure thoughts, which make us eager for destructive behaviors, and pronounce them to be pleasure. These are what the Bible calls uncleanness. These are what create relationships filled with hostility, quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfish ambitions, and divisions between people and God. The focus is on envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and all kinds of sin. One's attitude conveys the idea that everyone else is wrong, and those who will agree with you become the desired allies! The Bible gives us a harsh warning that if we pursue these things, then workable relationships cannot be built. Nor can one be formed with God, as

you will impede His presence with you. You will not inherit the kingdom of God (Matthew 7:13-14; James 1:22-25)!

Fullness is first seeking Christ and His work in you (Matthew 6:33-34), so you are pursuing righteousness and all that is good, as a way to glorify Christ as Lord. What you need to be doing is seeking someone to be your complement—a helpmate in your service and mission for His glory. And, this is to be the same in friendships, on to dating. This is real, authentic fullness that is essential—not only in our faith development, but also in how we are to prepare ourselves to build relationships and interrelate with others.

This is serious business, as “The Kingdom of Heaven” directly relates to fullness as the quintessential aspect on earth we are to pursue, our salvation by what Christ has done. This was “inaugurated” for the Christian Church at Pentecost and is spiritual in nature for the time being. It will “culminate” when Jesus returns where it will involve the *day of judgment* and the *new heavens and new earth*, where we will be with God and Jesus for eternity (Matthew 13:40-43; 25:31-34; 28:18; Colossians 1:9-14; 15:23-28; 2 Timothy 1: 12,18; 4:8; 2 Peter 1:10-11; 3:10-13; Revelation 1:9; 21:1-22:5)! Both fullness and the Kingdom of God exist, and are concentrated in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36; Acts 2:36; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 1:20-23). This means He is the One to rule our Will and heart on earth, climaxing in eternity. This is where are fullness must reside! The Kingdom of Heaven produces the fullness.

When we are just self-seeking, we are selfish and unconcerned with eternal values or with serving our Lord. By doing so, we fall into a trap, not because of God’s vengeance, but because we are not doing as we should. As a result, natural consequences will take over. God’s precepts are for our benefit and protection, and are what is best, just as loving parents would have for their child. Fullness makes a relationship real, centered upon Godly directions. Fullness will seek the love of 1 Corinthians 13, and will compel you to desire to share your fullness and self with others. So, out of your fullness in Christ, you build yourself up in Him, casting away what is wrong, and replacing it with Biblical character and values. This will be the foundation to create the lasting bonds with others, as you glorify our Lord.

Ephesians 5:15-21 gives us a picture of walking in that fullness, as people who are wise in the ways of the Lord are also on their guard to the ways of the world. We are to be careful how we live, so we treat our lives and others with dignity and respect. We ought not to be careless with what is precious. We are to make the most of our lives, and the opportunities He gives us. To waste it away is what a fool does; so, let us not be fools! When we understand what the Lord wants us to do—and, by the way, this is not hard—we will do good in life. It is not hard because what God is concerned with is our character. We form our character from understanding, and putting into practice this fullness.

Verse 18 tells us that we need to be filled with the Spirit, which means having great joy from our commitment in God (Nehemiah 8:10). It also means we are to seek His power with joy for the overcoming of our sins, and for the courage to witness and do ministry, even to people we do not like. This will flow into attitude number three. This joy means *radiant joy* that fills us up with the joy that flows among the Persons of the Holy Trinity. That very love which God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit (One God with three personalities or manifestations, not three Gods) have for one another will be in us. And, it will overflow from us to others around us! If we follow the first part of verse eighteen, we will miss out on what Christ has, because our purpose and direction become cemented in sin, and not in Him.

This *joy* in Ephesians will become sealed in us as we mature in the faith and are filled with His Word (John 14:16-26; 16:12-15; 17:17; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; Colossians 3:15-16). It is the power to enjoy Him in worship as a lifestyle that affects all aspects of our life and the lives of others around us. It then empowers us, for His service, for His glory. It literally means music flowing from our hearts!

This fullness creates joy. This is what will fuel our friendships, our search to find our love, and in making the right decisions. This is what we are to seek so it can be repeated; we are not to seek it for our betterment or attention completely, rather, for Christ's sake! It is a fullness that we are to be filled up with. This translates into *joy* that comes from being in His Word, and because we are in Christ! This is the extra power He gives us to glorify and serve Him, and the extra power that we need to make sure we are on the right track!

Will you be controlled by drunkenness, which is any kind of sin that takes you away from God? Or, will you allow yourself to be controlled by the Spirit? Remember, He does not force you; the choice is yours—and so are the consequences and rewards. We can ruin our life, or grow in fullness. Also, remember that what you do does not affect just you, but, will touch all those around you, too.

**Read Matthew 7:13-14; Ephesians 5:15-21; Colossians 1:9-14; 3:15-16; James 1:22-25 then Discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. What are some of the points in the section that have gotten your attention, and why?
2. What is the difference between fullness and fulfillment? Why is this important?

3. How can knowing who you are in Christ, and what He did for you on the Cross, navigate you through the maze of life?
4. What have been some of the wrong fuels or fillers you have tried to use in your relationships? What was the outcome?
5. Have you ever considered that all you do, as a Christian, is a response to what He has first done in you?
6. How can this knowledge of Fullness help you have the proper attitude and discernment to make relationships work better?
7. What have the two types of fruits produced in your relationships?
8. What role has *self-seeking* played in your relationships?
9. What can you do to facilitate fullness, creating joy in your life?
10. What would your life be like if you were completely controlled by the Spirit? Does this scare you, or motivate you? What are you going to do about it?

**Third: Reconnection and Confession** (Romans 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:9-21; Colossians 1: 9-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8):

Take another look at those two ageless questions of “who are you?” and, “what do you want?” So, what do you want to do in your life? Does it correspond to God’s Word? Our call in life is to please God. Will you seek His Kingdom; will you be filled with fullness? This can be our joy as well as our stumbling block. We have to realize that the Fall defaced everything in this world, including our thinking, relationships, and sexuality! Our sin will block any attempt to seek our Lord; that is why the cross was, and is, so essential. That applies to everyone; even those of us who are fortunate to be saved by Grace are affected by sin. Christ’s atonement means He covered the sin, but it still remains, lurking, destroying, and causing our thinking to replace good with bad.

This essential third attitude will allow us to recognize, then, confess our sins. Confession will motivate us to yield to the work of the Spirit within us. Our

confession helps remove the blockage, to allow His work to flow. His work is there; it is done. He can force it, but, normally, He will not. Yes, God did so with the apostle Paul, but who of us is Paul? We still have to respond to it by faith. Sin and confession are not popular subjects; who wants to be bothered, confronted, let alone be convicted? But, for us to grow and mature we must, we have to, lest we remain in those sins—and how sad that would be! The sin will cloud everything. It will blind us to truth, and from seeing the Will of God for our lives. We will, instead, be lost in that maze of despair, and, end up making very poor choices for our lives, especially with relationships! Fullness will be chocked off, as well as His Kingdom, making it too distant for us to go to.

We have to be willing to declare: *I, as a follower of Christ, bought and paid for by His shed blood, must acknowledge my own sinful nature.* If this is not in your practice and in your mindset, you will fall way short on His plan and possibly even His redemption for you. All of humanity is fallen from God, and, we are corrupt in our thinking and actions. Unless God's Grace is not only flowing in us, but is also being emphasized and utilized, we will fail to make the right decisions. Our sinful nature directly relates to friendships, marriage, our sexual choices, and even finding our true love, if you are still single. Each of us must commit to ongoing confession in this area, from selecting relationships to battling lust.

The Israelites during the time of the Judges were at a curial juncture, as the Philistines had occupied their land and killed them by the thousands, while God was neglected, His law was refuted and His people were in bondage, all because they refused to acknowledge Him as their Lord, instead, prostituting themselves to foreign gods, who led them into sin and ruined their lives. They lived their lives *as they saw fit*. So, God raised up Samuel to be their leader and help them see that what they saw as *fit* really was not. He further showed them how false gods and pride devastated them, so, they could turn from their sins and back to Him. Samuel calls to them, after many defeats and hopeless situations, to turn back to God. And, to do this, they had to renounce all of their idols and false gods, repent, and turn to the God who serves, loves, and protects them. So, the Israelites repented and recommitted themselves to God. Thus, the people were spared from the Philistines and became ready to receive the blessing of God, for the land to be healed, and for prosperity to come (Judges 17:6; 1 Samuel 7: 2-10).

To be willing and able to confess sin will renew your mind and prepare you to be more effective in relationships, as you have given yourself to God, mind and body. Just think through what He has done for you, the incredible amount of forgiveness you have received, and your response to what He has done. It should be gratitude that leads you to desire to purge yourself of sin. When we do as we see fit, all we bring on ourselves is strife and confusion that leads to endless hurt. When we have purged the sin, and continue to do so as an ongoing venture, we will have no desire to copy the evil ways of the world. Rather, we will desire to be further transformed and renewed by God. We will be a new person,

infused by the Spirit, so that all we think and all we do is pointed in His direction and call. Because of this renewal, we will know what He desires for us, what is best, what is pleasing and perfect.

Therefore, we have to make a commitment to acknowledge our fallen nature, and be willing and able to confess our sin and repent, which means we do not do it again. It also means to have someone hold you accountable, and that you confess your sins to God (Romans 14:12-13; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians. 6:21; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

When we are not accountable, we are free to sin, which will lead to social and physical disaster. The sin of the Israelites led to their occupation and the loss of countless thousands, all from their desire to do *as they saw fit*, which was the refusal to see their sin and recant it. Their sin was pride, and it is the root of most sins. Refusing to deal with your sin will lead to pornography, flirting, inappropriate lust, jealousy, and, then, sexual encounters, relationship breakdown, and, perhaps, the break up of a marriage that God brought together. Just think how devastating sexual addiction can be. If you think because you are single you are OK, or, you have a good marriage and you do not need this, know this: it will lead you to betray your spouse, your future spouse, our Lord, and you may even acquire a disease and die!

Living a surrendered, redeemed life is about seeking the Lord's Will, and seeking to glorify Him!

**Read Romans 12:1-3; 14:12-13; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians. 6:21; 1 Peter 4:10-11 then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. What are some of the points in the section that have gotten your attention and why?
2. What do you want to do, or where do you want to go, in your life?
3. Have you ever confessed your sins to someone? Why, or why not? If so, what happened afterward with your attitude?
4. Confession will motivate us to yield to the work of the Spirit within us. So, why would we not desire this? What are the things in life that block, or might block you from going to a trusted pastor, or mentor to confess?
5. Why do you suppose sin and confession are not popular subjects today, in

the Church as a whole?

6. What does sin do in our lives?
7. How can confessing sin renew your mind, and prepare you to be more effective in relationships?
8. The sin of the Israelites led to their occupation and the loss of countless thousands, all from their desire to do *as they saw fit*, which was the refusal to see their sin and recant it. Why do people like to do as they see fit? What happens in your life when you do as you see fit?
9. Refusing to deal with your sin will do what in your life?
10. How can you start to live a surrendered, redeemed life, so your motivations are about seeking the Lord's Will, and seeking to glorify Him?

## Session IV

### **Fourth: Be willing to Learn about yourself** (Proverbs 1:5-7; 3:11-12):

One of the themes of the book of Proverbs is the contrast between the wise and the fool. The Word tells us the right and just way, and, then, the wrong and irrational way. We need to see the value and importance of being willing to learn and be taught. Otherwise, we will keep repeating the same patterns of wrong thinking and doing over, and over again. By refusing to learn and grow, we place ourselves in the realm of what the Bible calls the fool! I hope it is not your desire to camp in that area. Because, when we do, we delude ourselves into taking the wrong direction in life, missing God's best for us.

We have to ask ourselves, *why would I want to be a fool and miss out on so much? Why would I want to do as I see fit, hanging on to patterns and ways that do not work, going from broken relations to more failures and more broken relationships, causing hurt and pain, lonesome and depression, dysfunction and strife? Why? Just to hangout in our own pride? Do people actually find fulfillment in this? Perhaps we get so blinded by our pride we just never look up to see what God has to offer us in the areas of growth and leaning. So, why be the fool, and miss out on so much? Just to have a little fun? To do as you see fit? Remember, that did not work for the Israelites. Did it? Have you ever seen it work? In over*

twenty years of pastoral ministry and counseling, I never have!

Just read through Proverbs, and let God's Word reveal to you what will happen. By reading just one chapter a day, you can get through it all in one month. You will spend less than five minutes a day, and be far wiser too! The sad fact is, too many of us will not spend the time needed in the Word. Too many Christians will put their minds in the ways of the fool and not in the ways of the wise. So, we do miss out. What makes a fool a fool? The fool refuses to learn; he does not want to be told what or why something is right or wrong, he just wants to do his own thing. This may sound like fun, but the lifestyle of the fool results in consequences and misery we should all pray might never happen to us.

Wise people are those who are willing to grow and improve themselves. It is not an IQ thing; intelligence has nothing to do with wisdom. Some of the most intelligent people I have hung out with in college and *grad* school, even in Mensa meetings, did some really stupid things, and led lives of self-destruction. I have also seen people with little education, who lived their lives with real, practiced wisdom. The wisest people are not perfect and they make mistakes; but, there is one key aspect that keeps them wise and blessed. They are willing to learn. They are willing and able to look at their behaviors and past mistakes, and brainstorm through the guidance of God's Word, how to develop the needed skills of life, and be better than they were before. By doing this, they learn how to avoid those same mistakes in the future. The fool will keep repeating his mistakes over and over. This is why so many go into numerous, varied relationships and marriages, from one that does not work, to the next one that does not work, and so on, and so on. They seem to never learn; they do not strive to make it work.

If you see yourself here, do not be dismayed. The fact that you can recognize your pride, and your past refusal to learn, becomes your first step. You must be willing to commit to improving yourself. These improvements are in the realm of our character, values, and ability to relate to others better, especially to our spouse and family.

You must be willing to learn about your personality, and what you need to improve and work on. We will look at several key components of character in the coming chapters that will pave the way to building good, quality relationships, and a lifestyle that is pleasing to the Lord.

How do I begin to be a person who learns? Be a person who listens! Those of you in your teens and twenties listen to your parents. Yeah, I know how hard that is! Most of the time, they know you better than you know yourself. Do not rely only on your friends, especially if they are less mature than you. Rather, seek older people to whom you can talk. Parents need to talk to children about their sexuality, about God's plan for them, and to help them improve their character development. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children." The



commandments referred to here are the Ten Commandments, which include the very one about sexuality that Jesus alluded to in the Sermon on the Mount. God's design is that sex education happen in the family. This does not mean to have just one talk about the facts of life, and get it over with. It involves an ongoing conversation about their bodies, physical changes they are going through, dating, marriage, how they feel about people of the other sex, and, responding to questions. It involves different kinds of conversations at each stage of our season of life and spiritual development.

So, no matter if you are 15 or 115, commit yourself to listen to others, and take the time to observe your own behaviors. You can do this by finding a good Christian mentor of the same sex as you, with whom you can talk with, and learn from. If you do not have parents that are mature, if you already missed that season of your life, or if growth and leaning did not take place in you, do not be dismayed. It happens this way with many people. Make the commitment to grow. The classic disciplines of the Christian faith are your key, too, as well as devotions, getting into the Bible, Bible study, good Christian fellowship, and being in a quality church where you can worship, and where God's Word is proclaimed with conviction.

**Read Proverbs 1:5-7; 3:11-12 then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. Why do many Christians refuse to learn and grow? What about you? What blocks your efforts of learning and growing?
2. Have you ever felt that you have missed out of something important in life when you have refused to learn from a particular situation?
3. What makes a fool a fool?
4. What is the end result of the lifestyle of the fool?
5. What is one key aspect that keeps us wise and blessed?
6. You must be willing to learn about your personality, and, what you need to improve and work on.
7. How do I begin to be a person who learns?

8. How important is *listening* to you? How much do you need to be listened to? How much effort do you spend to listen to others? (Take the time to observe your own behaviors!)
9. How can you recognize your pride, and, your past refusal to learn? (have some doubts about pride? Then, just look up “pride” in any concordance)
10. What do you need to do to look up, and see what God has to offer you in the areas of growth and leaning? How would it improve your life?

**Additional Discussion Questions:**

1. Once we get ourselves properly lined up with God and His Will, a whole new world opens up. What would that world look like for you?
2. Do you honestly believe maturity is important in order to share yourself with someone else? Why is this important?
3. How have you tried to line up with God, and His Will?
4. Do you believe that if you only seek what you can get, you will end up in despair? If so, how are you practicing this? How can you?
5. God does not call you to do anything that He has not empowered and enabled you to do! How can this fact encourage and empower you in relationships?

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

Session V

**Putting it all Together**

Ask yourself, *am I really mature enough to share myself with someone else for the long run? Do I spend too much time at work? Are there other things cluttering my time and attention that are wrong, or need to be cut back? Are there unresolved issues? Am I clear of my past? Is my attitude and relationship with Christ employing and empowering me, or is it my Will and determination? Are the first three attitudes permeating my life and infusing me with the Holy Spirit? If not, what is in the way?*

Once we get ourselves properly lined up with God and His Will, a whole new world opens up. We will build the right character, maturity, and mindset. Then, His plan starts to become clear as we become more comfortable, and able to make the right choices in our relationships.

If you only seek what you can get, you will end up with despair! You will not be able to build quality relationships, or compliment each other because you are not seeking to bring yourselves into the relationship as much as you are seeking to take or get from it. What we bring must come out of a life filled with Christ. Whether you are in ministry professionally or not, we all have the same job—to know Christ, to grow in Christ, and get the word out about the Word. To help you further in this pursuit, seek people who will bring out the best in you, and be your partners and companions in the exciting adventurous journey of life. This is especially important when it comes to that special someone who will be your spouse. If you are married, make your spouse that special someone!

What we have been talking about may seem difficult, and even overwhelming, but take this to heart: *God does not call you to do anything that He has not empowered and enabled you to do!* The cross is the proof text of how far He will go for you.

Our God has rescued you from your sin through an event we can never fathom the depths of. We are not good enough on our own, but He makes us good enough! Our sins have built a chasm that totally cut us off from a relationship and salvation with Him. In our election in and acceptance of Jesus as Savior, by faith alone, making Him Lord over all, we freely obligated ourselves to die (get rid of) to our old nature (sin), and be totally reborn (recreated) in the new nature that He offers us. His living a sinless life in our place, and His death on the cross to pay our penalty of sin, not only purchased our redemption, but it also allowed us to identify with Him in an intimate way.

Thus, God Himself, from His immeasurable love, paid our debt and freed us from His wrath. So, we must ask ourselves, *what now? What do I do? How will I live? Will I do as I see fit (God will let you), or, do I go it His way, the best way?* Do we allow Christ's love to motivate and control us, or do we go it alone? If we really, truly believe in Him, with sincere trust and obedience, then, it will produce a result. We must allow that result of fruit (Galatians 5:22-25) be in us.

I firmly believe that the stimulate of life that becomes our prime directive, our model to follow, and what we are to show to others is the Love He has demonstrated for us. We are secured in eternity; our life here is a learning experience, molding us for our life to come. What we do here will echo throughout eternity, so, let us make the most of it! This motivates us to be much more than we can ever be on our own, by focusing on what is important. And what is it? *Relationships!* To live out our lives, centered upon His glory, so our lives ooze Christ-like character, and personal growth, striving for greater heights, good works, and personal growth, is what is important. So, our goodness by what He has done for us becomes intertwined with distinction for one another. It is not because we earn anything, but because we are flied with gratitude which translates into compassion, and friendship with others (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 John 4:7-21 then discuss this section and answer these additional questions:**

1. Do you feel that you are really mature enough to share yourself with someone else for the long run? Such as a spouse, if you are single? What about work relationships, family, etc.? (We are not to hide ourselves from others; rather, we have to work on ourselves first, before we can effectively engage others in a righteous manner.)
2. How do these passages relate to your life now? How can they be used to transform your life? (Spend some time in this question, and if you get stuck, ask these additional questions to the texts: 1. What does it say? 2. What does it mean? 3. How can I become a changed person from this? 4. How can this apply to my life?)
3. Do I spend too much time at work? Are there other things cluttering my time and attention that are wrong, or, need to be cut back?
4. What do you believe are the unresolved issues in your life you need to deal with?
5. Do you feel you have effectively learned from your past?
6. Is your attitude and relationship with Christ employing and empowering you, or, is it your Will and determination?

7. Are the three attitudes permeating your life and infusing you with the Holy Spirit? If not, what is in the way?
8. What can you do with the knowledge that all that we learn, and do on this earth will echo throughout eternity?
9. How can this mindset of eternity help you make the most of your life?
10. What will your life look like with these three attitudes working and infusing all that you are and do in your life? What would your workplace look like? What about church, marriage, friends, family.....?

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

## **Section III      The Quest for Authentic LOVE**

Have you ever wondered what LOVE really is?

### **Session VI**

In the maze of life and relationships, especially in marriage and the dating world, one of the key, essential paths we need to be on is that of love. But, what is it? How do we find it? Without knowing what to look for, we will not be able to navigate away from the dangers of life. We will confuse falsehoods of lust as love; we will rely on feelings that mimic love, but, are not love. We will build our relations on confused feelings from false data, and, in so doing, we will not be able to build competence and eminence in our relationships. We will be left with shallow, meaningless, self-centered, one-way associations, without depth or real meaning.

If we get love wrong, or confuse it with something else, we will end up with loose associations. What we will not have is in-depth relationships. We have to know what love is. This is essential to the world of relationships! This is the spotlight that will light our path thorough the maze, as Christ lights up our life. This will act as a spotlight to guide and show us where to go, where to turn, and what to avoid. This is paramount for all serious relationships, and essential in marriage. This is the light of love to show you the right path, and allow you to understand and practice real authentic love. You need to be able to find, build, and maintain relationships and community, because you cannot practice what you do not know.

But, what is love? Have you ever wondered if your understanding of love is the right understanding? Most people are emphatic that they know what love is, but, if you ask them to define love, you will get either silence or lyrics from love songs. Whether you think you may be right, or you feel you may not understand love at all, we all need to have a solid Biblical view of love before we can effectively proceed to engage in, or build on a good, loving, Christ-centered relationship. If not, we will just rely on our feelings, and what others and the media have to say. This will cause distortion in our thinking, creating disorientation and confusion that will adversely affect our ability to love, and even to discern who is right for our mate selection, or how we deal with our spouse. And, when we do get into a relationship, an unhealthy attitude of love will adversely affect our growth, and ability to build that relationship. True love will be absent—in the giving or receiving of it!

So, what is love? So much poetry and beautiful prose have been written over the millennia of human experience to try to capture its purpose and meaning. All of humanity, in all cultures, places, and times has sought out the meaning of love. We have the incredible depth of the Shakespearian Sonnets,

and poetry from master wordsmiths. But, even the greatest writers have defused their views through their personal experiences, emotionalism, experimentation, and the seeking of desires, trying to add logic and reasoning to it, and seeking a higher being, to name a few. We hear contemporary songs that have no real, ponderous thinking to them at all, just mindless dribble from confused minds seeking rhymes and an audience—not real, authentic meaning.

In my experience with marriage counseling, most Christian couples and few pre-married couples have no real grasp on what Biblical love is. Thus, they would be diving in the shallow end of the pool without the deep waters of real love to smooth the impact.

Perhaps you are thinking that the relationships you seek will fill that void of loneliness, and add meaning and purpose to your existence. And, if you are married, or dating, this comes as a foundation to how you are and what you do. Perhaps you have a favorite love song that motivates and thrills you with feelings of anticipation and excitement. But, will you be practicing love? Will that be real authentic love? The media, and our culture, have many people enslaved, and confused in thinking that they know what love is. Have you considered that what our culture has to say about love is just a façade, with no real backing behind it? Like a house on a movie set, just the front part is built; so, there are no real rooms, no working plumbing, no utilities, no roof—when it rains, you get wet. Yes, it may look good, but, there is nothing there to make it a home, not even a bed. Not having real love will leave you empty and alone in a house that is only a façade, and not a home.

When we are seeking, from friendships to romantic love and fullness, we will apply what we think love is, causing our relationships to be skewed. This will also flow to other areas of our thoughts and lives, causing further harm and confusion. We then pass all of this on to our progeny and others around us. This quest of love will eventually cross into theological love if we really desire to seek and apply what God has to say. But, we have to get this right, too. As many people have said, *God Himself is pure love*, to the point that all God is, is love. They leave out the rest of His characteristics. Thus, love runs the full spectrum from romanticism and the quest for personal satisfaction, to God, and the meaning of life. And, when you have the wrong idea and definition of love, it will adversely impose on all those areas in your life.

The other end of the quest for love is to ignore it, or use it wrongly. Not loving, or loving the wrong thing, will lead us far away from God's truth and perfect plan for us. The wrong use of love can be sin. When we do something wrong against God, it not only affects us as an individual, but, it also affects everyone around us such as our family, friends, and the rest of the body of Christ. Even God Himself, who is not affected by, but is hurt by our practice of sin, is included. God is Holy. His character and who He is remains un-affected. However, He is saddened that we choose to ignore Him and seek false truths

and created things over the Creator. Sin is a disease that spreads and builds, one into another, just like cancer. It starts with a single cell that mutates, builds upon itself, then multiples and mutates further until it starts spreading into, and throughout the whole system. Malignancy occurs because the spread is not reversible, and soon affects the entire body. In the case of the Christian, false love and pride will affect the whole life of the person—not just the physical body, but, also the body of Christ. What does sin affect? What does improper love do? The body of Christ, the people who claim Jesus as Lord, and those with whom we are in fellowship together, can be affected, and even destroyed. Then, the Gospel and the Truth are muted!

**Read again 1 John 4:7-21 (you can never read this passage enough!) then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. Have you ever wondered if your understanding of love is the right understanding?
2. What do you think love is? How would you define it personally, without Biblical influence?
3. How does the world and the media determine love?
4. How does God's Word help us define and understand Love?
5. How does understanding real, authentic love help make you complete?
6. That world sees "love" as exciting and inviting, and, is only found in another person. Yet, these ideas, from love songs and friends, leave you not knowing what love is, but, thinking you do—or you are confused. How can you keep from being confused between what the world says and, what God says?
7. How do you find love?
8. What are some of the falsehoods of lust that either you, or others you have seen, confuse as love?



9. Why is it impossible to build competence and eminence in our relationships without a good understanding of the *Love* the Bible shows us?
10. Why do you suppose, that if we just rely on our feelings, and what others and the media have to say about love, we may fail in our relationships?
11. How can an unhealthy attitude of love adversely affect your growth, as well as your ability to build that relationship?
12. Shakespearian Sonnets and poetry from master wordsmiths have influenced how we see love. Even though they may have wondrous things to say, why are they unreliable?
13. What can be some of the dangers of trying to add logic and reasoning to love?
14. In my experience with marriage counseling, most Christian couples, and a few pre-married couples, have no real grasp on what Biblical love is. Why, and how do we get ourselves in this predicament of saying we are in love, then soon fall out of love—yet, we tend not to know what love is?
15. How can having an improper view of God's love and characteristics affect our love and relationships?
16. Why do so many people ignore love, or refuse to learn about it?
17. How can the wrong use of love be sin? How have you seen relationships destroyed by its misuse?
18. Have you ever sought false truths and created things over the Creator? If so, what were your motivations or reasons? What have you learned?
19. If you know a friend or relative who is in a relationship, and has a skewed sense of what love is, what can, or should you do?
20. What do you think you need to do to apply what God has to say about love?

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

## Session VII

### **How is Love Spelled Out in the Bible?**

There are four Greek words that we translate as *love*, two of which are found in the Bible. The four words are *agape*, *phileo*, *eros*, and *stergo*. The first is *phileo*, which means to have a brotherly love for others. It implies a deep-rooted affection. It is from the Greek, which means brotherly love, and is where we get our word for the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia (Matthew 19:19b). *Phileo* is companionship—as in a relationship that grows, and benefits from the friendship. It is a word picture of a good marriage where each one is uplifting and encouraging the other. This type of love implies that we go beyond superficial relationships, and strive for the deep, without being shallow or pretentious.

The second word for love in the Bible is *agape*. This word was used in Classic Greek literature to refer to someone who was generously favored by a god. It conveys the idea of a person giving all his or her love, or favor, to someone else other than one's self. It is a love that is not earned; rather, it is relational and given freely. It also refers to parents giving all of their love to their child. In the New Testament, *agape* love is used to make a similar point, as God gives each of us all of His love. It is a love that gives without expectations, or a response from the other. It takes the initiative, as Christ did with us, and fosters the Fruit of the Spirit and brotherly love. *Agape* love is also the most common word used both as a noun and a verb in the New Testament. The greatest example of *agape* love is what our Lord Jesus Christ did, when He died for our sins. God showed His love by taking our place, and the wrath and punishment for our sins. He paid that price through His sinless life, and His sacrifice on our behalf. Consequently, God's *agape* love rescued us from the punishment that we deserved. We deserved punishment, yet, we received His favor without earning it (Mark 12:30; John 3:16, Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; John 13:34-35; Romans 1:31; 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:8; 3:6; 12; 4:9-10; 5:8; 13; 2 Timothy 3:3).

There are two other types of love in the Greek that are not found in the Bible. The first one is *eros*, which usually refers to sex, and the love between a husband and wife. It is more than just sexual ecstasy because, in classic Greek, it also includes embraces, yearning, and caring. This type of love is based on physical attraction and desire; it has a need to be fulfilled, it is self centered and

unconcerned with the other. But, in passages such as Ephesians 5:25 where we are called to love our spouse romantically, the word used is not *eros*, rather, *agape*! So, as a Christian, we are to have a deeper love than what we see in the media and society, one that is not based on eroticism. *Eros* has noun and verb forms that we do find in the New Testament for *lust*, such as, *epithumeo* (1 John 2:16).

The second love that is popular in evangelical circles is *stergo*, and, this is not in the Scriptures in its noun or verb form, either. It does occur in Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3 in its negative form *astorgos* referring to *unloving*. It normally refers to family love, as in the love between parents and children, or the love between people and their leader who has responsibility over them, from parents to civic authorities. What we learn from these Greek words *agape*, and *phileo*, used in the Bible, is their emphases of real, authentic love, without pretensions or expectations (1 John 4:7-11). They show the goal to be developing maturity and character in oneself, and in others. The other two words imply strings attached, expectations needed to make them work. They refer to lust, which is a pretender to love, the reason they are not used for *love* in God's most precious Word. They refer to a connection that must already be there, such as a parent and child. The parent does not love another's child as he does his own.

**Read Mark 12:28-31; John 13:34-35 then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. What do these two passages teach us about love?
2. What happens when we do not follow His call?
3. How do those four Greek words help you see love in greater depth?
4. What does it mean to go beyond superficial relationships, and strive for the deep, without being shallow or pretentious?
5. Why do you think God chose not to use the world's *eros* or *stergo*? Why is this important?
6. Knowing that God gives each of us all of His love, and that His love rescued us, how can this fact help motivate you to replicate that kind of love to others?

7. Do you put conditions on love? Why, or why not?
8. Why would conditions be wrong? Or, do you think they are not? Why, or why not?
9. Remember this important point; we received His love without earning it! Yet, in our human terms, we put conditions on love, such as, others have to earn it, or, they have to do this or be this.... Why are our ways of love wrong?
10. How can we get over the self-imposed rules we generate by putting conditions on love?

**So, what is love? Well, let us find out by seeking love through God's Word in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13.**

When a computer is programmed, the program runs because the language has mandated what the program is to do. Within this language of computers, there are operational instructions called *parameters*, which tell the program what it can and cannot do. Thus, the program can only operate within its own guidelines, or *parameters*. In contrast, a virus is designed to do the opposite. That is why they are so destructive, and can eradicate all of your files as well as your computer! We must look at this passage as our parameter, our guideline as to how we must execute the gifts we are given, exercise the passion of what Christ has done on our behalf, and proclaim the truth. Our operational parameters in relationships—how we operate and relate—is to be love. We must stay clear of viruses that will destroy it.

This passage is our template on how we must behave toward one another. We can do our best in trying to be a good person; we can be in a good church filled with wonderful programs, and staffed with gifted people. We can be in a magnificent cathedral, reaching upwards, manifesting, and pointing to the glory of God. We can be pouring out our time and resources in serving Christ. However, if we are doing it for ourselves, out of selfish gain and not out of real love, we end up accomplishing nothing. We become just an annoying noise to the neighbors we are called to reach. Even having great faith is useless, and probably not even real, if love is not coupled to it. Without love, our relationships will be shallow and ineffectual. And, we can even become the hated "x" in the relationship. We can become a person who is broken or confused, prideful or arrogant, steeped in bitterness and dysfunction, all from failing to embrace what Love is. Therefore, we will have haplessness, hopelessness, loneliness, and hurt as our guild, as our identity. And, how sad that can be!

This passage, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, shows us the path and way for our Christian life and walk. As Christians, we are to imitate Christ, and work within His parameter, which is, love. This passage is a character description of who Christ is, and it must be our character description of our actions, of our behaving responsibly in all that we do.

The proper building of relationships, as a Christian, is always within the parameters of love with no strings attached, just as God Himself works through all of His characteristics in love. By understanding love, we can also understand God, and who we are in Him, as God is the source of love, and the example of what it is in Christ (1 John 4: 7-12). This is the love that binds us together in Christ, both with each other, and with the One to whom we commit our lives..

**Read carefully 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 then answer these additional questions:**

1. Why does Jesus put such an emphasis on telling us to love?
2. What are the parameters you use to determine love?
3. Have you ever considered that our wrong exercise of love is like a computer virus that is self replicating, self relocating, and very damaging?
4. What have been some of your guidelines for love?
5. How can a passionate relationship with Christ, and knowing what He has done on your behalf, help you?
6. Why is it when we do our best in trying to be a good person, we will not please God?
7. How would you describe an *annoying noise*?
8. Why would having great faith be useless? Is this contradictory? Why, or why not?

9. What would happen to your spiritual life if you had great faith, but refused to love?

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

**Session VIII** (this session may also take more than one session, the more time you spend in it the more value you will get a hold of from it)

This passage shows us the path and way for our Christian life and walk. As Christians, we are to imitate Christ, and work within His parameter, which is, love. This passage is a character description of who Christ is, and it must be our character description of our actions, of our behaving responsibly in all that we do.

The proper building of relationships, as a Christian, is always within the parameters of love with no strings attached, just as God Himself works through all of His characteristics in love. By understanding love, we can also understand God, and who we are in Him, as God is the source of love, and the example of what it is in Christ (). This is the love that binds us together in Christ, both with each other, and with the One to whom we commit our lives.

**Read these two passages again in different translations (1 Corinthians 13:1-8; 1 John 4: 7-12) such as the KJV, New Living Translation, also try to find at least one of these Bible paraphrases, “Phillips,” “Message,” “Amplified,” or “Moffit” from your pastor or church library. Then go through these verses below and ask these questions to each stanza:**

1. Discuss your thoughts on this aspect of love.
2. Give a positive example.
3. Give a negative example.
4. How is this type of love working in you?
5. Why is this love not working in you?
6. What blocks this love from being exhibited in you?
7. What would it take to get this love working in you?

8. What are you willing to do about it?

**Make sure that you pray as a group and individually about how you can be a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

### **What Love is, What Love Means, How Love is an Action!**

When God tells us that love is patient, He means love endures a long time. Love helps us endure extreme hardships, keeping our eyes upon our Lord. It is longsuffering, with the focus on accommodating others and not ourselves. So, we can give others room to grow, and time to accomplish the work that God is doing in them. When someone is abrupt with us, or when someone treats us wrongly, we are called to be patient, because we cannot have everything our way all the time, every time. *We cannot allow ourselves to become angry when others fail to live up to the expectations that we set for them.* When our spouse angers us, or disappoints us, we are not to give up on him/her. Because God is patient with us, and God loves us, then, we are to show patience with others. We need not become angry, but be content, for this is love (James 3:17). **Authentic Love endures, never giving up on others!**

Q: Why does real love not give up?

When God tells us that love is kind, He means it looks for a way to be constructive and useful, to invest honor, and declare others valuable. We are to look for the best in other people. We are to spend our energy and time encouraging, and building up one another, not tearing others down. We are to bring the best out of our friends and spouse by always treating them with kindness. We are to tell them the truth in love, and with care. You see, God takes the circumstances of our lives, and uses them in a constructive way for personal growth, and for better support for one another. God is not treating us as an object to be manipulated or controlled, because, He has given us free will. We should do the same with one another. Therefore, we need to always be seeking the healing of relationships, and be cautious in our judgments toward others (Romans 12:10; Ephesians 4:11-15, 32; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; 1 Peter 4:10; Hebrews 10:24). **Authentic Love cares more about others than it does about self!**

Q: Why does real love care more about others than me? But what if everyone did that would you feel negated?

When God tells us that love does not envy, He means we need to be happy for whom we are, and what we are. We are not to be comparing ourselves with others, nor are we to be jealous, spiteful, or possessive of others, because, God is in control, and He has a unique plan for you and me. When we hear that a

friend receives a promotion before we do, or gets something we wanted, we are to be happy for him/her. If we have a sibling who excels, we should be happy with him/her. If our neighbor has a brand-new car, we should be happy for him/her, and be thankful for the old wreck that we may drive. When our spouse is doing better than we are, we are to be happy for him/her. In other words, we are to be happy for someone else who has something we do not have, even if we do not like it. We must not become possessive, or control freaks, especially where it concerns others and our relationship with them. Being possessive, and attempting to control others, will cause the destruction of a church very quickly. We will soon lose our contentment, and run ourselves off into that maze of despair, dejection, and desolation. At the very least, this will compromise its effectiveness. Love is letting go of our desires and wills for a greater love we cannot receive on our own—grace (Proverbs 14:30; 1 Corinthians 12:15-16; Philippians 4:12-13; James 3:16). **Authentic Love does not desire that which it does not have!**

Q: Why does real love not covet?

When God tells us that love does not boast, He means we are not to go around bragging about our accomplishments and abilities. When this love is working, we will have no desire to impress others. Thinking that we are important is foolish, and distracting to our call and purpose in life. We are not to go around showing off our possessions. In so doing, we are patronizing to those who do not have such things. We are not to be so full of our accomplishments that we fail to see what others have accomplished. Because God loves us so much, we should have no need to impress one another. We are not to condescend to our spouse, or anyone, for that matter, with pride, criticism, or contempt, nor are we to withdraw from them when we think they do not meet our approval. We must allow God to impress us with His greatness, because He is God and we are not. We can so relax and enjoy who we are in Christ, and that we are approved by Him, we do not have to be in control or be the life of the party to feel secure. Nor, do we need the say-so of others since we have the approval of God, the Creator of the universe. Love is the security we have in Christ that needs nothing else for fulfillment (Proverbs 13:10; 16:18; Matthew 7:5; 1 Corinthians 12:25-25; Ephesians 3:18-19; 1 John 1:6-7). **Authentic Love does not strut around!**

Q: Why does real love not have a need to empress?

When God tells us that love is not proud, He means we are not to have inflated ideas about our significance, or ourselves. Being vainglorious is having a conceited mindset—the quintessential thing that God hates the most—so we must not be that way—period! Christ means, we must be willing to be in relationships with all kinds of people, especially those outside our perceived likeness, such as background, and/or race. We must not let our fears hold us back from one of life's most precious gifts, friendship. Not being proud means that when we make a mistake, we can own up to it, and we can admit that we are



wrong. We can go to our spouse with open hands and seek forgiveness. Pride will create contempt, arguments, misunderstandings, resentment, loss of community, and indifference. Because God loves us, He is on our side, and wants us to grow and mature in His love. We do not have to have an inflated ego about the perceived importance of ourselves. We need to seek others first and their well-being, not our arrogance and egocentric mentality (Job 41:34; 2 Chronicles 26:16; 32:26; Psalm 10:4-5; 18:27; 31:18; 56:2; 59:12; 62:10; 73:6-12; 101:5; 131:1; 6:17; Proverbs 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 21:4; 24; 29:23; 30:13; Isaiah 2:11-21; 13:19; 16: 6; 23:9; Ezek. 28:2; Obadiah 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 5:12; 7:4; Galatians 6:4; --and these are just a few!). Love lifts up God, not us. **Authentic Love does not puff up the giver, or parade itself!**

Q: Why does real love and pride unable to occupy the same room?

When God tells us that love is not rude, He means that we must treat others with the respect and dignity that we would like in return. We are not to lack concentration to courtesy for people and property. We are to strive to have good manners, and model distinction and admiration for others. We are to treat our friends, and especially our spouse, with the utmost dignity and respect. Because God loves us, He sent His Son to cover us, and protect us from His wrath. Therefore, when we make everyday mistakes—or even the big mistakes—lightening bolts do not zap us. Because we are loved by Christ, we are not consumed by God’s wrath, as we deserve. So, in return, we should not go around with pride or commencing judging, zapping others with evil looks, spitefulness, or condescending comments, thinking that we are “high and mighty,” and better than everyone else. Never think of yourself as the capstone or the most important piece of the puzzle, because you are not. We should be grateful that God chooses to use us. Our goal is to worship Christ with passion and distinction. In so doing, we are to work together and not be little dictators, especially in our relationships. Love cannot be in the same room with pride or apathy (1 Corinthians 11:18-22; Philippians 2:1-5). **Authentic Love does not force itself!**

Q: Why does real love not force itself?

When God tells us that love is not self-seeking, He means that we are to never take advantage of others. We are to place others first, and ourselves after that. We are to be considerate, appreciative, and never critical. We are never to plot evil, or allow insults to get to us. We are to give allowances for the shortcomings of others. Our call is to lift one another up, and be dignified, having good conduct, yet never dictating to one another our standards, or demand or manipulate others to get our way. Rather, we are to model Christ-like character so it is contagious and inviting. Because God loves us so much, He never had a self-seeking attitude. If He had, He would never have sent His Son on our behalf. Every Christian must respect the rights and dignity of other people, and never force our will and thoughtless behaviors onto others. We cannot force

expectations or demands to our friends, or our spouse. We need to be happy when others around us experience success and growth, and never be jealous. Love is the seeking of His truth, and finding a way to bring it to others (Proverbs 10:12). **Authentic Love does not have a "me first" attitude!**

Q: Why does real love not take advantage of others?

When God tells us that love is not easily angered, He means just that. We are not to be touchy, easily provoked, fretful, resentful, suspicious or oversensitive with our feelings. We are to be very slow to get angry, and we are not to let little things cause us to "fly off the handle." Because God loves us so much, He did not allow His anger to wipe us out of existence when we so much deserved it. Instead, He allowed His drama of redemption to unfold throughout history, climaxing with the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to try to understand other people, and place ourselves in the shoes of another, respectfully. We need to listen, and not allow our hostile feelings to get the best of us. We are not to let the sun set before we extinguish our anger with our spouse. Since God is patiently working in us, we should reciprocate with the understanding of the debt we owe to God and the unfathomable love and concern He has for us. Love put us in another's shoes (Proverbs 12:16; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:22; Romans 12:19; Ephesians 4:26-18; James 1:19-21). **Authentic Love is not touchy or resentful, and does not "fly off the handle!"**

Q: Why does real love not anger easily?

When God tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs, He means we do not go around with a list, writing down the faults of one another. Rather, we are to look for the positive things that happen in our relationships, and to affirm others. We are to seek reconciliation and forgiveness, never strife or dissention. We should not go around with a negative attitude, but, rather, with one that is positive, enthusiastic, and equipping to God's people. We are not to keep track of the mistreatments we may receive from friends or our spouse. Because God loves us so much, He does not keep a scorecard of our sins as long as we honestly repent of them. We do not need to reflect or gossip about the flaws of other people in order to elevate ourselves. God refuses to do that to us. Love lets things such as resentment and anger go, so they do not build up and destroy us and our relationships (Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; Hebrews 13:21-21). **Authentic Love does not keep a scorecard!**

Q: Why does real love not keep score?

When God tells us that love does not delight in evil, He means we should not enjoy it when bad things happen to others. When others plead or grovel, we should feel their plight and act upon it. We not only do not need to enjoy doing bad things to each other, but we must refuse to allow evil to happen. We should

feel badly when we see others being hurt. Compassion is one of God's great characteristics, and we should strive to our fullest to model it to one another. We must be filled with compassion in all of our relationships, especially those with our family and spouse. We are to refuse to think evil, or let any harm come to them, by word, or deed. Because God loves us so much, He is deeply grieved when we do not follow His example and His will. We are not to put others down in order to make us feel good about ourselves. Love is hurt even when an enemy is down (Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 9:36; 18:12-13; 23:37; Mark 1:41; Hebrews 4:15; 5:2). **Authentic Love does not delight in evil!**

Q: Why does real love not delight in evil?

When God tells us that love rejoices in truth, He means when we see injustice corrected, and people treating others with respect, kindness, and honesty, we should feel wonderful. Because God loves us so much, we should live our lives so that we reflect a God of truth and justice. Thus, we should find delight when we see justice being played out in others. As Christians, we should get excited when justice prevails, and we should be mad enough to do something when injustice occurs, and we see the rights of others being violated. We should realize how much God rejoices when we personally stand up to the pressures of life, and prevail with integrity and truth. We should stand up, and affirm and support our friends and spouse, never lie to them, or manipulate situations. God's Word is His love and truth. When we get into it and live it, we are showing Christ the Love He deserves (Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 2:17; James 2:1-9). **Authentic Love takes pleasure in truth!**

Q: Why does real love rejoice in truth?

When God tells us that love always protects, He means we should allow love and trust to endure. We are to accept and stand with others, believing in the best in others. We can swallow the bitterness that some relationships can bring us by coating them with the sugar of love. With this kind of love, we can feel protected, and, in return, protect those around us. This does not mean we become security guards; rather, it means our actions and attitudes should be such that they project protection, and not destruction. Because God loves us so much, He does not forsake us, even though others may do so. People will always disappoint us, and we will always be disappointing to those around us, but God will never disappoint us. Love perseveres, and is an easier route than running off and abandoning relationships to which we have made a commitment. We need to be able to protect our friends and spouse, and realize that even though they will disappoint us, we should deal with it using the right, encouraging attitude. We should realize how much God is grieved when we fail to walk in His path for our lives, and when we do not trust His protection. Love is always on the lookout for the best interests and protection of others, where gossip and strife cannot function (Isaiah 42:2-3; Matthew 11:28-30; John 14-15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 7:6-7). **Authentic Love has staying power!**

Q: Why does real love protect others?

When God tells us that love always hopes, then we should be assured He will give us a future. We should be confident that when things are going bad, they will always get better, and that there is hope because our circumstances will always change. We should never lose hope. Because God loves us so much, He always has hope for us. God is patiently working in us, and when we understand what God has truly done for us, then, we should have as much hope as we could ever need. We need to see the potential, and how we can bring our relationship with our spouse to a deeper level of love and commitment. Love will see the potential in other people, what they can accomplish and become, and not hold them back out of our jealousy (Psalm 31:24; 33:22; 71:14; Jeremiah; Romans 12:12; Hebrews 6:11-12; 18-20; 17:7). **Authentic Love always is enduring and points to the future!**

Q: Why does real love have hope?

When God tells us that love always perseveres, He means that real love has staying power; it will last, and not fade nor weaken. Thus, we can have confidence in God, and others, to hang in there and keep going strong, especially when things get tough. Because God loves us so much, He will stand with us, and even carry us through our difficulties and upsets. Even when we feel we have reached rock bottom and have no hope, when we are filled with despair, God is carrying us because He loves us. Real love will never fade or become obsolete. It will remain standing when all else has gone to ruin. This love will destroy rumors, and gossip, and cause us to believe the best about one another until proven otherwise—by facts. We will be able to maintain our relationships with friends, and with our spouse, and not give up in times of dire stress and confusion. Love carries us to the ultimate hope, and points us to the cross, and the eternity to come. This love will show us that what we do and learn here on earth will echo for eternity (Psalm 86:12; Matthew 5:16; John 13:34-38 Romans 5:5; 15:7; 1 John 4:7-12). **Authentic Love refuses to quit!**

Q: Why does real love never quit?

**God's love must be our model for life**

## Session IX

God through His Word is pronouncing to us that the effects and results of love will live far beyond the moments of our life. When we pass on into eternity, and our frail, mortal bodies are laid into the grave to rot, what we have done on this earth, and who we were will still echo to all those whom we have touched. Such deeds of love will never rot. When real, authentic love is in our lives, it is

endowed with an eternal quality, because God is empowering that love (Romans 5:1-5; 1 John 4:7-12).

So, we need to take this seriously, and with confidence, to allow love to flow into us from Christ, and, in return, flow out from us to those around us. God's love is the ultimate power for the Christian. Character, and the love that infuses it will be the only thing we produce that we will take with us into Heaven, the only thing that matters. Love has power that transcends human logic and emotions. So, while we remain here on this earth, let us perform our life with love! Allow your relationships to be built on love, and not the pride and spite we so often reel out, instead.

If you are thinking, *wait, I might get hurt. Or, I have been rejected after I spent so much of my time and energies on so-and-so.* Well, take to heart this valuable point; you did not waste your time. God has born your hurt, too!

When love is practiced, our relationships are certain to succeed. When we practice love, we are both trusting and obeying our Lord, doing His prime will. We can take to heart that the love we give will never be defeated, no matter how poorly people treat us in return, or, only appear to be playing their part. When we give love and it is not returned, the hurt and rejection we receive is not in vain. We may feel hurt, confused, and not understand what has happened or why we did not succeed. But, in God's eyes, we did succeed. Our time of giving love did not go to waste! We all, at some time, will experience love for someone who did not return it to us; perhaps you were even the one who did not return it to someone else. There are a multitude of reasons for that. Maybe the love was not meant to be; perhaps he/she was the wrong person for you. Maybe you got your singles crossed, or maybe you were too afraid to take the chance. Maybe the fear of being rejected consumed you, so, you are alone now. Your hurt has become your identity, while love and relationships go unmet and undone. If this is your life, remember what God's Word has to say: *Love is never offered in vain. Your hurt has not been borne alone.*

Once we fully realize that the love of Christ has been poured out in us, we then can identify ourselves in Him. We will be able to identify Christ's interests in others over our own interests (John 15:3; Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 9:22).

Just think this through: how much would your marriage, your family relationships, friends, people at school or at the office, improve if you were practicing these love truths, even if they were not! The world says that love must flow two ways, but God says otherwise. Yes, it is better when both parties in a relationship are practicing the elements of 1 Corinthians 13, but we are called to love, even when they do not!

We are to be fueled and empowered by love through all situations. Christian love is the turning of our backs to self-concerns, and facing forward to

our relationships with family, friends, and neighbors. It is the surrender of our will to His. Because, if love does not take us beyond our self-interests, then what we have is lust, and not love! Then as the passage says, we are just noise that has no reason or purpose. Out of true love, God the Father gave us His Son, and the Son gave us His life in replacement for ours. The Son sent the Spirit to save us, and we should be literally overwhelmed—consumed with extreme joy and gratitude by what God has done for us. Then, that can turn and spill onto others around us too. If not, then read Romans 1:21!

**Read Romans 1:21; 5:1-5; 9:3, then discuss this section and answer these questions:**

1. Do you know people who are very optimistic? How do they make you feel when you are “down,” and feeling upset?
2. How can *our riches/glory*, be translated into being a wonderful Christian, filled and overflowing with love, hope, joy, and grace?
3. How does knowing that love will live far beyond the moments of our life improve your relationships?
4. Why is it so hard to love people who treat us with contempt or who do not see us as valuable enough to care for?
5. What is the role of repentance? How do you keep repentance in your “queue” that is on top of your mind?
6. What must you do to encourage the desire to create growth and maturity in your life?
7. Our confidence is in Christ and His character, not in self-esteem. So, how do you apply this “Christ-esteem”?
8. How can, and why, do trials work in favor of us, (Romans 8:28) and not against us? How can trials promote spiritual growth?
9. We must be careful that our faith and love is developed from God's nature, and not ours! So, how can you do this?

10. How much would your marriage, your family relationships, friends, people at school, church, or at the office improve if you were practicing these love truths, even if they were not?

11. Reread 1 John 4:7-12, then, write out your own paraphrase.

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

We cannot prove love; we can only respond and obey it!

## Section IV      The Character of Love

### Session X

Most people assume that love is the most important thing in a marriage, or the most important reason to get married! You will frequently hear people in TV, in the movies, out on the streets of life and even in the church saying, *I do not need to work on love and relationships, it will just happen. And, if not, it was not meant to be, and I can get out of it if it does not work out.* How sad that philosophy is! But, when you carefully examine love from the Bible, you will find that it is a choice over and against any feeling or aspiration of what we may want it to be or mean (Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; 5:8-13).

Love is a choice that also happens in a seemingly magical and metaphysical way, as poets have tried to explain it throughout the millennia. But, is that it? As we discovered in the last chapter, the Bible tells us that love is more than a feeling; it has segments and characters to it. Love is also a choice, a decision that must be perused and worked on. In our human mind, we may see it as magical, as if it “just happened,” but, without pursuing its true meaning and character, it will dispel and waste away. So, when we do receive that spark of love that we cannot explain, to keep that magic, that romance, that spark going requires us to do something about it. If we do not work on it, the spark that was once there will vanish as quickly and as suddenly as it came. It will fade into the night, leaving us in the darkness of the maze of relationships, lost and confused. The way we keep that flame from blowing out is our understanding and modeling the character of love. So, as it becomes contagious and spreads, it flames and excites, burns and grows, so the winds of the ups and downs of a relationship will not blow it out!

We do not necessarily *fall in love* as the love songs and movies proclaim, because, you may well fall *out* of it, faster than you fell *in* it! If you never choose to make it a commitment, with love, you will never have it, or, if you do, you will not keep it! Love is a verb; it requires action that is implied for being a verb, action to do something with it. What are you doing with it? Are the precepts of 1 Corinthians 13 being put into action with your friends, family, acquaintances, and your spouse? If not, what is in the way of that verb action?

If you ask most couples who are thinking about marriage, or who are already engaged, why they are getting married, they usually will say: “Why, we're in love.” It has been through studying the Word, plus, over twenty years of pastoral counseling experience, that has prompted me to question the validity of this motive. Yes, love is essential and powerful! However, if that is all you have, you will end up with nothing! The number one mistake people make when they date is to look just for love. The number one mistake married couples make is thinking that their love is all they need. This puts their brains “on hold” from



everything else. Yes, love is putting the precepts of 1 Corinthians 13 into action, but most people, including Christians, do not even know what real love is! Choosing a life partner should never be based on love alone. A marriage cannot last on love alone. This may sound like crazy talk, but think it through. Have you ever seen a relationship work with just love? No, not for movie or TV stars who have everything going for them, not for the singers who sing about it, and not even for the Beatles! Because, they do not know what love is, nor do they really put it into practice.

Have you ever known someone to get married to someone they did not love (other than Anna Nichole Smith, the model born in 1967 who married the billionaire oil tycoon J. Howard Marshall II, born 1904; married June 27, 1994; who was many decades her senior and who died a few months later)? Most, if not all, people who get married do it for love, yet, according to most statistical evidence, fifty percent will divorce in less than five years. So, what happened to the love? If love is all we need, should not it have worked? Why did it not work? Because, there never was real love, they misunderstood what love is, or, they had nothing but love. Perhaps they let that spark of love flame out in neglect, so that there was a huge vacuum in their relationship! Love should not be the horse in front of the cart. Love alone cannot influence a relationship. Love needs to be a result, not a cause, for getting married. Love is the result of a good marriage, not the fuel to make it. Love is an attitude that is followed by action; when this does not happen, love will sit and go nowhere.

**Read Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; 5:8-13 then Discuss this session and answer these questions:**

1. Most people assume that love is the most important thing in a marriage, or the most important reason to get married. How do you feel about this statement? In light of the Scripture, what would be God's answer?
2. Why would a Christian say, *I do not need to work on love and relationships, it will just happen. And, if not, it was not meant to be, and I can get out of it if it does not work out?*
3. Do you believe that the Bible tells us that love is more of a choice rather than any feeling or aspiration of what we may want it to be, or mean?
4. If love is more than a feeling, why do almost half of Christian marriages end in divorce (According to "Focus on the Family" and "Barna.org")?

5. What part do feelings play in love?
6. Love must be pursued and worked on. If we put forth any endeavor to examine the relationships around us, we would realize this fact; so, why do most people, including Christians, give up way too soon?
7. Love is a verb; it requires action. What are the actions that are missing from your relationships? Focus on your part.
8. What is in the way of that verb action?
9. Why is it that if all you have is the feeling of love, you will end up with nothing?
10. Write a love letter to your spouse, or, if you are not married, to a pretend spouse, with the points you have learned so far.

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

**Session XI** (This session may take more than two weeks, pace yourself and take your time.)

Love is a spiritual fruit that is built from real, godly character and commitment. It is the fiber of our moral center that stretches throughout our being, embracing and holding together our relationships when it is sealed as a choice and commitment, and not just a feeling. Love will synergistically combine with the other characters of our Lord to promote our ability to relate and grow in our relations, to better others as well as ourselves. Let us take a quick look at the main characters that flow from love. These flow from the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). A fruit is made up of more than one substance; it has juice, pulp, segments, and seeds, all held together by a skin or rind, and attached to the tree by a stem where its nutrients flow in. If you just eat of the pulp or juice and throw out the rest, how can you use the seeds to grow more? If you take the fruit off the vine, it will wither and rot; if the vine is not cared for, the tree will die. So it is with love. It requires our tending, and it is more than just one substance; all of its substances combined are greater than the sum of its parts.

**Here is a list of godly characters that He calls us to emulate and put into our relationships. These are essential to growing a healthy and lasting relationship. You can examine the descriptions, look up the Scriptures, and then ask yourself these six questions:**

1. Is this character working in me?
  2. How do I now exhibit this character in my daily life?
  3. How can I use this character to develop a better willingness to respond to others—especially to the ones I love—with a sense of awe, and fear of God, and respect for people?
  4. What blocks this character from working and being exhibited in me?
  5. How can I make this character function better, stronger, and faster, even in times of uncertainty and stress?
  6. Think through the steps you would take to put this character into action in a specific instance, or, to improve it. Consider the examples from the passages in God's Word.
- **Love** (John 13:1; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 13:3; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John) will enable us to appreciate our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and, of course, our family and others around us. Love is taking the initiative to build up and meet the needs of others, without expecting anything in return.
  - **Joy** (Psalm 32:7-9; Proverbs 15:13; John 15:11; 17:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 4:13-19; Hebrews 10:34) will allow us to enjoy our relationship with Christ, His creation, others, and our circumstances, with an expression of delight, and real, authentic happiness from and with harmony with God and others.
  - **Peace** (Isaiah. 26:3; Matthew 5:9; Luke 19:42; John 14:27; 16:33; Romans 5:1; 12:18; Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7) is surrendering and yielding ourselves to the Lord, to be in His control, for He is our ultimate peace! Allowing tranquility to be our tone, control, and our composure. This will be fueled from our harmonious relationship with God, handing over control of our heart, will, and mind to Him. Once we make real peace with God, we will be able to make and maintain peace with others.
  - **Patience** (Hosea 2:19-23; Psalm 33:20; Matthew 27:14; Romans 5:3; 12:12; Galatians 5:1; 5:22-23; Colossians 1:11; James 1:3-4,12; 5:10-11) is showing tolerance and fortitude toward others, even accepting difficult situations from them, and God, without making demands or conditions. Patience allows us to

endure a less than desirable situation, to make us better, more useful, and even optimistic and prudent. Hence, its other name, longsuffering. It allows us to put up with others who get on our nerves, without losing other characteristics of grace.

- **Kindness** (Romans 2:1-4; 12:9-21; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 John 3:16-23) is the medium through which Christ's love becomes tangible through us. It is practicing benevolence and a loving attitude towards others. Kindness is the essence that shows the world that we are a Christian, like the fragrance coming from a flower. It is being convicted with God's Word, and then modeling it to others. Kindness is the subject to the object of who we are in Christ!
- **Goodness** (Amos 5:15; Proverbs 25:22; Matthew 19:16; Romans 12:17; Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 5:8-9; 1 Peter 3:11; 2 Peter 1:3-8) displays integrity, honesty and compassion to others, and allows us to do the right thing. It is doing the right thing, even when it does not feel like we should, as Joseph did. He was betrayed and sold as a slave, yet, he chose to make his situation into something good, and to help and treat others better than he needed to. Goodness is the model for people to repent and accept Christ.
- **Faithfulness** (Psalm 119: 89-90; Matthew 17:19; 25:21; Romans 1:17; 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22-23; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:24) is the application of our faith in action, fused with being dependable. It is not faith itself, rather, the fruit and character of faith. It is the "gluing" fruit that will preserve our faith, and the other characters of the Spirit, and identify God's will, so we can be dependable and trusting to God and others. Faith is the one fruit that we give to God, whereas faithfulness and the other fruits and characters are from the Spirit working in us! Faithfulness is authenticity, the power and motivation for Christian living. Because God is trustworthy with us, we can be faith-worthy in Him!
- **Gentleness** (Isaiah. 40:11; 42:2-3; Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4: 5; Matthew 5:5; 11:29; 12:15; Ephesians 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:7) is the character that will show calmness, personal care, and tenderness in meeting the needs of others. It is to be more than just a personality; it is to be who we are, from the work of the Spirit within us.
- **Self-Control** (Proverbs 16:32; 25:28; Romans 13: 12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:25-27; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 5: 22; Titus 2:12; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:5-7) is allowing God to be in control of our will and heart, and seeking the Spirit to enable us. Then we will know what not to do, and guard the areas in which we are weak. This will allow us to have discipline and restraint, with obedience to God and others. It is not allowing distractions to

derail or remove us from His will and plan, so we will not be held back from what Christ called us to do.

- **Forgiving** (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 23:34; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13) is the realization of how much we have been forgiven by Christ. This enables us to forgive the insignificant things that are done to us. It involves not being resentful to others, and ignoring the wrongs that we have received, so we can heal relationships by expressing Christ's love.
- **Humility** (1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 25; Luke 22:27; Colossians 1:18; Philippians 2:8; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:3-5) minimizes arrogance and removes pride. It is the understanding of our fallen nature and weaknesses which cause us to think we are better than we are, and that cause us to strive to lift ourselves above others and God. It is admitting that others, and most importantly God, are responsible for our achievements. Humbleness will enable us to be a teachable person, one who is willing to have the attitude of submission and servant-hood, a person who confesses sin, and remembers how Christ served us! Humility is not self-hatred, or having a "poor me" attitude.
- **Fairness** (Psalm 73; Proverbs 17:26; Matthew 7:12; John 7:24; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; 10:12; James 2:1) sees a situation from the viewpoint of each person involved, and not just our own. It seeks the best, just, equitable solution, even if it hurts us. It does not seek to please one over another, nor does it seek more than is needed. Fairness is not insisting on having our rights over someone else's!
- **Courage** (Deuteronomy 31:6; Josh. 1:9; Psalm 23:4; 31:24; Proverbs 28:1; Phil. 4:13; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 John 4:4; 18) realizes that God has given us the strength to face any situation, trial, or peril. It is the ability to react, knowing that God is in control, that, "He who is in me is greater than he who is against me."
- **Friendship** (Proverbs 18:24; 27:17; Matthew 5-7; Luke 15:1-2; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9) is the companionship and closeness we are to have with one another. It is the commitment to build relationships by getting to know others, and helping them form the other characters, so they can, in turn, help you. Relationships are essential to life, and to being a Christian; it is our number two priority, besides our growth in Christ! This is not to be feared, but embraced, even when it hurts!
- **Honesty & Truthfulness** (Psalm 15:2; 25:5; John 16:6; 17; 2 Corinthians 8:21; Ephesians 4:15; 25; Philippians 4:8) means being straight and honest with others, and doing what is right. This trait will allow us to earn trust by being accurate with facts and situations.

- **Dependable** (John 15:13; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 1:10) is being constantly reliable and trustworthy. It will allow us to continue in our commitments, even if it means personal sacrifice. This will allow others to build trust in us, and point to the One who they can put the most important trust in, Christ as Lord.
- **Gratitude** (Luke 17:11-19; 1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:18) is an attitude of being thankful, even when we do not see all that we have. This is an aspect of worship, expressing to God, and others, how they have benefited our lives, and by showing them support, appreciation, and benevolence. Because His blood has redeemed us, we are grateful.
- **Responsibility** (Romans 14:12-13; Galatians 6:1-5; Eph. 6:21; 1 Peter 4:10-11) means to know and do what God, and others, expect of us. The Christian is called to remain steadfast, with honesty, and, when we do something wrong, we own up to it, admit our wrong, and do all that we can to fix the problem we caused, and the relationships that have been harmed. Responsibility shows us the need to guard our weaknesses.
- **Contentment** (Proverbs 16:9; 19:21; Romans 9:19-21; Philippians. 4: 10-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-9; Hebrews 13: 5) is the attitude of accepting whatever God provides, and being happy with it. It does not seek for gratification what is not needed, and does not seek happiness in the shallow things of life. When you are more concerned with how others are doing than how you are doing, you will be on the right track.
- **Generosity** (Deuteronomy 16:17; Proverbs 11:24-25; 13:7; Matthew 10:8; 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15) allows us to give to others because God has given abundantly to us. It is the wise use of stewardship and the attitude that all possessions belong to God. We are merely the caretakers for His purpose. It will see the Lord as the Source of true blessing, not our selfish desires.
- **Purity and Holiness** (Matthew 5:8; Philippians 4:8; 1 Timothy 1:5; 5:22; James 4:8) mean being set apart for God's use, which is holiness in action. It will keep us from being contaminated by, or interfering with others in their growth and relationship in Christ. We must see our sins and weaknesses, and be humble before the Holiness of God. We may not be able to overcome all of our sins, but our desire is to go in the right direction.
- **Confidence** (Proverbs 3:25-27; 14:26-27; Job 13:15; Philippians 4:13; Hebrews 4: 14-16) enables us to rely on the Lord for all things in our life. We can push forward in the direction that we are called because He is governing, and He is sovereign. As we look to Him with trust, and not to others or ourselves, we have the God of the universe in us. Nothing is greater than that! We can live our lives in holiness and Christian character, and react to all the situations we encounter with the focus on who we are in Christ, as He is

our confidence. Confidence also makes us realize we are not responsible for the results—only the faith and obedience.

- **Encouragement** (Psalm 119:28; 143:3; Matthew 3:17; John 14:1; Colossians 4:7-8; 1 Thessalonians. 5:11-14; Hebrews 10:25) will lift, support, and help others through difficult circumstances, all from God's perspective. Being in Christ means living our lives for Him, with excitement, in all times and all places. This is influence; this is what encourages others.
- **Availability** (Isaiah 6:8; Mark 1:17-18; Luke 16:10; Acts 16:10) is being willing to adjust our own schedule, agenda, and plans to fit the right desires of God and others. It makes personal priorities secondary to the needs of God and others. It is to reflect God's priorities, so we are always available to Him, and others, when we are serving.
- **Attentiveness** (Proverbs 12:15; Mark 4:21-25; 16:24; Hebrews 2:1; James 1:19-25) will recognize the value of other people by giving them listening ears, respect, courtesy, and total concentration. This means paying attention to others, not just listening to our own needs and desires, and, also, giving genuine contemplation to God's Word, and His call to respond to others.
- **Wisdom** (Deuteronomy 4:6; 1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 119:97-98; Matthew 6:33; Romans 12:3; 1 Timothy 1:18-20) truly desires the knowledge of God's Word and its proper application to our life. Wisdom is rooted in doing the will of the Lord; to forsake His Word is to forfeit wisdom (Jeremiah. 8:8-9). Wisdom will enable us to make good judgments and decisions. We will seek what is right and true, based on God's will, not how we may feel or think.
- **Compassion** (Job 29:13; Isaiah. 40:11; Mark 1:41; Luke 10:25-37; 19:4; 1 Peter 3:8) will allow us to feel the pain and plight of others, to see from their perspective and situation in life. It will enable us to convey a deep feeling of love and concern that moves us to meet their distresses, struggles, and needs. This all flows from our understanding of who God is, and our obedience, trust in Him, and gratitude for what He has done for us. (Luke 10:36-37; Eph. 4:23). Our lives must be motivated by who we are in Christ, and nothing else!
- **Enthusiasm** (Matthew 5:16; Romans 12:11; Galatians 6:9; Colossians 3:23; 4:7-8) will enable us to overcome disappointments and setbacks, so we can be positive, optimistic, and keep up our interest, attitude, and zeal, even when situations are harsh. Enthusiasm is the fuel that empowers the Christian, his/her testimony, and gives him/her the love for the call that he/she has been given. Enthusiasm is the pipe through which flows the earnest endeavor of our work and service. Along with this passion comes the natural desire to do our best for the glory of God.

- **Initiative** (Proverbs 22:29; Ephesians 5:8-14; Philippians 3:14; 4:13-15; Hebrews 10:24-25) will take the challenge, to recognize and do what needs to be done before being asked to do it. This character will help power us through setbacks, failures, adversities, persecution, oppositions, injustice, ingratitude, and the old excuse, "we have never done it this way before." It is not about being a leader as much as it is motivating yourself to grasp what Christ has for you. It is the moving of yourself, using your resources and ingenuity to serve. We cannot stand for Him, or move for Him, if we do not arise, and get off the couch. We must make the move and get on with the life that Christ gave us. Christ said for us to rise out of our sleep!
- **Diligence** (Proverbs 10:4; Ecclesiastes 10: 10; Luke 16:10-12; Romans 12:11; Colossians 3:23) allows us to function with our best for His highest, and with excitement and passion, in order to complete our work and call from the Lord. It is practical obedience in action, which is the loving of our call and the pursuing of our work so we are doing our best for His glory. Diligence also helps facilitate us to develop a good attitude, in addition to confidence, patience, forgiveness, values, loyalty, integrity, and to be in a place to build, develop, and display a positive and attractive disposition to those with whom we work.
- **Thoughtfulness** (Philippians 1:26-30; 2:3-4; Colossians 3:13-17; 1 Peter 3:7-12) considers others, and gives attention and care first to their feelings. It helps us take the load and focus off ourselves, so we can see the needs around us. It is a form of love that seeks to uplift, and do good to others whenever possible. It is the opposite of selfishness, yet, it does not cause us to neglect ourselves, because, that would be unkind to God's child—you! It is especially appreciated when it is not expected. Bring thoughtful will disallow schedules to take priority over people.
- **Efficiency** (Psalm 90:12; 1 Corinthians 14:26-35; 40; Ephesians 4:23; 5:15-16; 1 Peter 4:10) means being well organized, competent, and resourceful, making the most of every situation, doing our best, and always seeking better ways to be a Christian in all that we do. It means knowing that God will hold us accountable for what is presented to us, as well as for all we do with it. So, we need to be better stewards of our time, and make our lives well-organized, enabling us to do our best to serve God and others. With this character, we can function in a more orderly way, continually seeking the best way and means in all that we do—from errands to organizing our worship services—in order to achieve the greatest effectiveness.
- **Discretion** (Psalm 112:5; Proverbs 2:11; 22:3; Romans 12: 2, 9; 14:19, 22) keeps our minds and focus on sound judgment, giving serious attention and thought to what is going on around us. In that way, we can choose our words, attitudes, and actions more carefully so as to model goodness and righteousness for any given situation. Thus, we can avoid words and actions



that could result in adverse consequences. With this character, we will be able to recognize and avoid wrong attitudes that might create objectionable words, actions, etc., which would appear condescending to others, and could bring serious consequences to relationships.

- **Optimism** (Proverbs 4:23; Luke 21:18; John 16:33; Romans 8:25; 28; 15:13; Colossians 3:1-4) combines hope and faith into synergy (the combination supercharges and become more than just the sum of its parts), so as to be positive for Christ. It is a heartfelt confidence that everything will come out for the best, no matter what happens, as Paul proclaimed. It will help us to think the best of and be positive with people and situations, even if we are proven wrong.
- **Obedience** (Deuteronomy 13: 4; 1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 19:16; Acts 5:29; John 14:14; 15:14; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Hebrews 13:17) is submitting to what God requires of us. This character motivates us to keep seeking our Lord and cleaving to Him, regardless of the circumstances, so we will be able to keep His precepts, and be loyal to His call. It is also recognizing authority and direction from others, such as the pastor and church, so winning situations can result.
- **Reverence** (Psalm 89:5-18; Proverbs 1:7, 29: 3:5-9; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Peter 2:13-14; 3:15a) is the true response that leads to worship for all who come before God. It is recognizing and honoring the authority of God with awe and fear, because, He is God, and He is more awesome than anything or anyone—period! It also means respecting people, not just because of their position, authority, or personality, but as brothers and sisters in the Lord, being aware that He loves them too!

And, there are dozens of more godly characters, emulated in the Bible, which God calls us to embrace, and apply into our lives! Remember, these all synergistically combine to help create the mature, Christ-like Christian. What Christ gives to us in grace, and how we respond towards others around us are essential in all of our relationships.

When the other ingredients of a good relationship are right, then the love will come. Love does not stand alone, it needs to be in synergy with good character, attitude, and reverence, so we can stroll through the maze of relationships with confidence, and the assurance that Christ is lighting our path.

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

There are over 50 complete Character studies on the Into Thy Word Ministries Website at [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org) on the Bible Studies and Sermons Channel.

## Section V: The Myths of Love

### Session XII

Myths are powerful influencers in most cultures and societies, Americans perhaps, being the most allured by them. You may think myths are just for primitive tribes of people living in the jungle, but, if you think it through, we are all succumbed by myths at some time and point. Most anthropologists and sociologists say that all belief systems have myth at their core, and start, and it is that myth that fuels the beliefs and faith of the religion and item being adhered to. I am not going to take the time to challenge that assumption as applied to Christianity, because, it is my belief we do not have myth, but, rather, fact at our core and start. But, this idea of myth does play into most people's mindsets.

Take love for example. The average *Joe* and *Joann* have certain ideas, certain presumptions about love that fuel their opinions and beliefs, and which effect their actions. Most of the time, what we think about love is not fact, as we found out in the last two chapters. So, consider that your idea of love and that of most people, are, perhaps, rooted in ideas that are myth. That is, they are not based on fact, but on feelings and desires derived from songs and the media, or maybe from friends. So, are you ready to be challenged about what love *is not*? If so, you will be in a much better mindset to practice and develop real, loving relationships!

When the religious leaders challenged Jesus on what was the most important Law, Jesus quickly pointed to Deuteronomy 6:5. This is what is called the "*Shema*," meaning, *here the Lord is One*. The Israelites used this word to proclaim our monotheistic God, God is One. Thus, we respond to God with all of our being, including our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Jesus then has us focus on one of the primary emphases of the purpose of life, which should be our pursuit of real, authentic love. This love is to be directed to God, then to others around us. But, if we have it wrong, we will end up just spilling *junk* to God and *dysfunction* to others!

#### Opening Questions:

1. Why do you suppose people are succumbed by myths?
2. How have myths played a role in your life and relationships?
3. How can our certain ideas and presumptions about love affect our relationships?

4. Where do your opinions and beliefs about relating to people at school, work, and church come from?
5. How do these opinions affect your relationships at home, with family, and close friends?
6. Have you had trouble making and keeping friends? If so, why? If not, why?
7. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9, how does this passage come into play in your daily life? How can it? What would be the results?
8. Why is God so emphatic that we memorize this passage to the point that it becomes a part of our house and wardrobe?
9. What happened to the Israelites when they ignored this passage, and failed to tell their kids? What would happen to you and your relationships?
10. How do you demonstrate your love to God? What can you do to do a better job at it? (Remember, our love to Him is demonstrated in how we worship, and worship is not a service on Sunday; rather, it is a mindset and a lifestyle!)
11. Reread 1 Corinthians 13 in a different translation. If you have time (or assign as homework), write out verses 4-8 in your own words.

**Pray as a group and individually at home about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

## Session XIII

**Reread 1 Corinthians 13 in a different translation than before. Then read the following section discussing it and take your time answering the questions:**

We have already explored what love is, and what God's Word has to say. But, what about the other influencers that may be rattling around in our heads? Does it measure up to Scripture, or is it a myth? Let us look at some of the common sayings, from American culture, portraying love:

- Love conquers all!
- Love is enough.
- All you need is love! (By the way, that did not work for the Beatles, did it?)
- If it is true love, you will know it right away!
- If you love me, you will \_\_\_\_\_.
- I want to know what love is!
- The perfect Mr. or Mrs. "Right" will fulfill you completely!
- Having a strong sexual attraction is a sign of true love!
- I'll do my half if you \_\_\_\_\_.
- If you really love someone, you will have sex with him/her within the first month of dating!

Music, TV, movies, friends, and fairy tales all teach us, in different and creative ways, how to love. But, have you considered that they teach us the *wrong* ideas of love and relationships?

### **A look at some "sayings":**

**Does love conquer all?** Well, this is just not so! If it were, we would have a very low divorce rate, because, I have never seen a marriage take place where the couple were not *in love*, or at least thought they were in love. Yet, over fifty percent of them are divorced within five years! If love were enough, those marriages would have worked out; obviously, love is not enough! Love, by itself, cannot hold you together. As we discovered in the last few chapters, most people do not know what love is, nor are they able or willing to apply the characteristics of love that we discussed in the last chapter. They forget that love will place the interest of the other first; but, they do not. The feelings and ideas of what they think love is takes the place of working on the relationship. So, communication, as well as understanding and the willingness to work together to solve problems, is left out of the relationship.

In reality, there is no *happily-ever-after* or, riding off into the sunset together. Relationships require effort to make them work; they just do not happen. So, our favorite movies, and the romance novels do not give us proper reality; in fact, they corrupt our perspectives and thinking so we make faulty decisions. When our reality is in line with God's, and we are following His precepts, then, the adventure of the relationship becomes fun, and we can ride off into that sunset. We can enjoy life better. Just know that that sun will rise the next day, and you may still be in the maze, lost and confused—perhaps, even hurt. The effort you put in will help keep you on the right path of developing that good relationship, as well as finding, and keeping the love of your life.

1. Does love conquer all?
2. Have you seen this work? Why not?
3. What are some of the things that help love to conquer?

**Is it true that all you need is love?** Well, again, no! This is a big myth! When the friendship-seeking and dating adventure is over, and you find yourself outside of the maze and on the right path, you still need to build your house of love. The house of love is built on the precepts of character and love that were already discussed, and further constructed with the materials we will be looking at in the coming chapters.

If all you have is love, and, let's say that it is real, authentic, Biblical love, yes, you will be doing good; however, as I have already said, most people, even committed Christians, do not operate in all of those precepts, all of the time. You will get bored when your friends never develop that relationship any further, and, you will, perhaps, go on to many more, skipping from one to another, and so forth. After you marry, just about the time you move in together, you will discover that you have traded your loneliness and quest of finding a mate, which you thought was your biggest problem, for a whole, new set of problems—Bigger Problems—unless you see it as bigger opportunities.

How are you going to relate to each other all of the time—from the toothpaste and toilet seat, to sleeping together, sharing personal items, friends, relatives, in-laws, pets, cars, your future, career—and, in addition, handling money, and rearing children? You are no longer in the dating and friend scene, where you can go home to do whatever you want. You have gone from being strangers to each other to a committed relationship, with responsibility! Change can be very difficult for some, and, if you made the wrong decision to live together first, you entered into an entire, additional set of other problems, as well. Love is *not* all you need, especially if you do not know what love is!

1. Is it true that all you need is love? Why, or why not?
2. What is the logical conclusion to just having love, even if it is directly practiced from the precepts of 1 Corinthians 13?
3. How do changes in our lives affect how we handle love and relationships?

**Will the perfect mate fulfill me? NO!** Nothing can fulfill you completely. As we are filled with imperfections caused by sin, so we cannot have a mindset that is perfect and understanding like that of God, who is without sin. When we accepted Christ's gift of grace, we did become complete in Him. But, not as most people think. We become *declared* complete (Galatians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). Thus, in God's eyes, we are pure; but, in reality and practice, our sinful state is still in practice, and is active. We can strive to become more mature, which is an aspect of sanctification, but, nonetheless, we are still imperfect beings. Sin affects all we do, including our mate selection and our relational skills. So, all we do is corrupt, even while trying to fulfill His will to the best of the ability and gifts He has given us. We are not even made for this world, rather, for the life to come (Isaiah. 44:9-20; Colossians 3:5).

1. Why will the perfect mate not fulfill me?
2. How does knowing that we are complete in Him help our relationships?
3. How important do you consider sin to be as a major factor on how you are with people?

**Will my expectations of, "if you love me you will..." or, if you are only willing to do "my" half, help me?** No! Because, you will have no real love—only your expectations to keep you company! These will only develop into pride, and, then, loneliness. If you set conditions, such as saying "I'll do my half if you..." you will stiffen any love that may be there, and your will and pride will take over. You will not be able to develop any kind of godly relationships if you set up conditions and expectations. Love does not put others in a stable made of the fencing from personal desires and expectations. It just will not work; it is not Biblical. All those who try, end up hurt, jumping from relationship to relationship, distancing from friends. Trying this in marriage will land you in divorce court.

If you are only willing to go half way, doing what you think is your part and no further, then, you are refusing to change. Do not go from one friendship to another until you get yourself straight, because, you will cause too much hurt to others. Do not even think of getting married, messing up someone else's life and the lives of generations to come. You will be on the maze road to disappointment, disillusionment, and divorce. Selfishness takes up all of the space of relationships, and has no room in a relationship. Stay alone, buy a cat, and stay single, because you will be far happier. Yes this is harsh, and, it is sad, but, it is true. In addition, you will be saved from a lot of hurt, and from hurting others. Relationships are far too valuable and important to fool with.

You have to be willing to bend; if not, you will break! And, it will not be just you, because, it affects so many others, too. In marriage, it affects the families of both of you, and any kids you might have. You have to be willing to take chances with confidence. If you are operating in God's character, it is a chance worthy to take and make. Look up and see the wonder He has for you! But, you will not be able to, if your vision is skewed with anything except His precepts.

You have to be willing to give at least 95%. If you are not, you need to work on yourself. When you are willing to give that amount, it will not be long until you will be at a 50/50 partnership. But, the key is the effort and willingness to go far beyond what you think your part is! When they feel you are contributing, your friends and spouse will feel inspired to do so, too. You will be able to cut through the tall grasses of conflict, understanding the issues and problems that spring up. Be willing to be the mower of the weeds of fear and pride that cover up relationships.

1. Which would you rather have—your expectations, or real love—to keep you company?
2. If we are unwilling to change ourselves for the better, how can we expect others to do so with us?
3. What are some of the things that keep people from wanting to change and better themselves?

**Since I already know what love is, then, I do not need to learn.** And, there are a lot of people who think this way. It is called "pride," and all you have to do is look up the word, *pride*, in a concordance, and see what God has to say about that! If you think you do not need to learn, then you will find yourself....stupid! Some of the "Post Modern" people have a cynical attitude and feel that *there is nothing I can learn. I will just plug in and do it.* With this attitude, you would have better odds of winning the lottery, and being struck by lightning at the same time than finding happiness and contentment in relationships. You will not learn how to communicate, solve problems, or, be willing to work on the relationship to make it work. You will give up, move on to the next relationship, and so on, and so on! If you are not a teachable person, one who is willing to learn and to work on yourself and your relationships, you will not be able to have a good experience. So, why bother with the stress and strife, when a little work, a little love, and a heart poured out to our Lord will lead you to the happy house of a good relationship. You will be so much happier, your friends and spouse will be so much happier--even your cat will be happier! Everyone wins! It really does not



take as much work as you might think, compared to countless hours of arguments, dysfunction, and chaos!

1. What does it mean to you to be a teachable person?
2. How can you be?
3. How does learning contribute to communicating?

**I cannot love someone unless they will love me first; if....** When you seek to make love conditional that the other person does or behaves as you think they should, you will see a sure sign for a coming disaster! Because, what you are, in fact, doing is telling them, “I do not trust you! I will only like you, or love you if you like or love me first, or, if you.... then I will...” You will be communicating to the person who you claim to love and whom you want to love you, “I do not care about you as a person, your feelings, wants, or needs—only how I think and feel!” And, just think it through; how would you like to be treated in this way (Matthew 7:7-13)? There can be no real love in this mindset! Nor, can you place unreasonable expectations on the other person; we all need to remember what love really is!

The only way your friends, relationships at work, acquaintances, your spouse, or future spouse can know what you feel, need, want, desire, or think, is by your telling them. If you want to be heard, you have to be willing to listen. You have to be willing to put your share of the relationship out on the table first, rather than wait for the other person. Good communication is a must—necessary to understanding one another. We will talk more about expectations in the coming chapters.

On the other hand, there is the opposite trend to think, *well, my friend or mate will change*. Once we get to know each other, he/she will see my position and make a change. Or worse, *once we get married all will change!* NOT! The relationship will only get worse, since the motivation to change has been removed, and replaced with the reward of having the goal of friendship or marriage given to them! Remember this important fact, we humans are motivated by two things—desire and fear—just like dog training! Take away the motivation and the dog will not learn, as it is with you and me!

You can never force a person to change; they have to desire to do so themselves. And, by the way, fear is never a way to motivate love. It is good for discipline when it is in the parameters of love, as with child raising, but, not with friends or spouse. If your future spouse is going out with friends, and partying all

of the time, and you think it will stop once you say, "I do," the simple answer is *no, it won't*. You will just get frustrated and hurt.

He/she will keep doing it. You will both argue. He/she will get more relentless in their lifestyle, because, you are not dealing with it, and it continues, back, and forth. The only person you can change is **you!** Unrealistic expectations will not magically be fulfilled once you say, "I do." Those are not magic words! There are the words to commitment not to change. Good relationships are built on a commitment that both of you are willing to be open, and improve yourself to please the other person. This means compromise, growth, and change. And, most importantly, you will be developing good Biblical character to please our Lord. This will, in turn, develop your relationship with each other!

1. in your experiences, what happens when you, or others in relation to you, make love conditional? Would you want others to treat you in a conditional way? Does God? Do you with others?
2. What role has *listening* played in your relationships? How much do you need to be listened to? How much do you listen to others?
3. Why can we never successfully force a person to change?

## Session XIV

**Read Romans 8, then continue at your groups own pace to finish this section. Start to pray about how what we talked about can make you a changed person, so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

When we accept these love myths as fact, and these pursuits as what we should undertake, we will be heading down dangerous paths in the maze, where we will only find loneliness and hurt. Such myths will block the path of quality relationships that last, especially when it comes to love and dating. They will lead you so far off the godly path that you find yourself falling off the cliffs of life and into the realm of despair and discontent. Your relationships will fall far short from what you could have had. When we have these ideas about love, from troubled sources, as a template on how we evaluate others or select a mate, we will be in as much trouble as the singers and actors who have made these statements.

These false ideas of love will also cause a fairytale mindset rather than a Biblical one, or reality-based thinking. We will think we are in love when we are

actually filled with the wrong idea of love, coupled with lust, and desire. Therefore, we believe these statements are possible, feasible, and real. Actually, they will cause us to make grave mistakes, and mislead not only us, but, also, all those around us!

Still not sure? Just watch the biographies of singers, actors, and other famous people on the cable TV biography shows, or read *People* magazine! Many of those who have proclaimed such statements have not found it to be working out, and most have led very disappointing, and meaningless lives. With all of their wealth and fame, they have more divorces, dysfunctional relationships, and hurt than most of us regular folks. Because they jumped from one marriage to another, one relationship to another, they have never found the contentment or happiness they thought they could have from their philosophy. Rather, they have found turmoil, discontent, and hopelessness, instead. (This is from their statements—not mine!)

Wrong ideas of friendship, dating, and love will have grave consequences that can last for generations, as it affects us, the other person, and, in marriage, any children, both families, the extended families, friends, the church, and, of course, our Lord! Your choice is not just your choice, because, it does not just affect you. Therefore, be careful that you always strive to conduct yourself in the parameters of real, authentic love. In dating, choose wisely; in marriage and friendships, operate in those Godly characters, and be based on Scripture rather than on false ideas and lust!

Yes, our God is a great God of grace, and forgiveness. He will eventually work things out in your life for good (Romans 8)! But, why place yourself in strife, when you can have it so much better when you start early?

Your objective is not just to seek fulfillment or desire, but, to build relationships that last, that are impacting and real. In dating, your commission is to choose a mate with whom you can live, both with unbroken devotion to the Lord. In marriage, our task is to help facilitate His Fullness in both our life, and that of our spouse. From friendships and family to the office, our role is to be seeking Him, growing in Him, trusting in Him, and obeying Him, so our maturity and character are rooted in Him. In this way, fullness, character, and real love are working in His Kingdom, taking us on the way to good, healthy relationships, filled with love, and able to grow. This fullness will be the catalyst to enable us to go through the hard times as well as the fun times. This brings the fullness (we talked about in the first chapter), that will make your house reflect God, serve for His glory, and be an example to those around you (Joshua 24:14 –15).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are some of the precepts you can decipher from Romans 8, that apply to relationships? Consider every verse as significant!

2. We can see how wrong ideas of love and life will drastically affect your relationships. So, what can you do to have a correct, Biblical view, so your life is centered upon Christ, and not false ideas?
  
3. What can you start to apply, from Romans 8, to improve your love and relational life?

A question I am asked a lot in singles groups is, "What about attractiveness?" Well, if you are courting, following the Biblical principles (which we will talk about later), and are not attracted to each other (which, from over twenty years of experience, I have only seen this once or twice out of hundreds of couples), that is a sure sign that something is wrong. This idea of who we consider attractive also affects who we choose as friends, and how we relate to our co-workers. How we perceive people is significant, and if we base it on shallow things, we end up having shallow relationships!

1 Corinthians 7:32-35, gives us a picture of the magnitude and value of relationships, with love in action, both in marriage and in preparing for marriage. We need to see life as an adventure, with no time to waste (Romans 13:11-12). The central focus, paying close attention to verse 35, is not being distracted from things that are false and misleading to us; rather, we are to focus on Christ, and allow Him to provide us the motivation for godly living. His precepts must reign in us so our attention is on the right track. If not, those myths and *cares* of the world—including the myths of love—will overtake us, and bring us down into the world of bad decisions, that lead to bad relationships, that produce bad living.

*What do I do?* Learn about real love, as we previously discussed. Understand that Christianity is about growth. It starts with profession and conversion, and keeps building into maturity. The process of Sanctification comes into play, here. We need to ask ourselves, *am I willing to reduce myself down to merely "ME," as, who I am in Christ?* Are you determined enough to strip yourself of all that you are in the world, in your career, ministry, and church, including what your friends think of you, and what you think of yourself? Are you willing and determined to hand over your true self, your simple, naked self, to God? Once you are, then He can begin to do greater work in you, and, in others through you. Christ will immediately sanctify you completely, and your life will be free of distractions from His character and precepts. You can be determined and persistent toward glorifying God, and Christ as our Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)!

You can start by surrendering to Him in prayer (Galatians 2:20-21; Philippians 1:6; 3:10), *Lord, show me what sanctification means for help me live*

*as my life is yours*. He will show you! Sanctification means being made one with Jesus. Sanctification is not something Jesus puts in you; it is He, Himself, in us (2 Corinthians 1:39). The understanding of Sanctification will allow you to be discerning of yourself, and realize that no mere person can fulfill you! No ideal guy, or gal, no job, no power, no amount of money, or anything else outside of Christ will make you complete, or fill a hole that only He can! No friend can take the place of God.

To completely change the black, dirty oil of our mind with the new, golden anointing oil of His love, we have to surrender ourselves to Christ. As a Christian, the Spirit transforms us completely, all that we are, all that we do, our will, our plans, and our opportunities (2 Corinthians 3:18). However, we cannot do this unless we give our selfish will over to His (Galatians 2:20-21)! The incentive for us to surrender to Christ is, that His way is better than ours! This will directly translate into who you are, and how you are in relationships. This means there can be no perfect person; you can only seek who is best for you and be willing to work on that relationship, and, on yourself.

Remember, most of the ideas people have about love are artificial and insincere. We must be prepared to recognize the real fruit over the artificial one. If not, when we think we have found love, we will only have lust and insincerity. These artificial fruits will turn into hate and indifference. When this happens, we will not be even close to expressing any kind of love, in any form. Do not let this happen to you. Do not let yourself, or the ones you love bite into the wax of fake fruit. Do not allow yourself to succumb to the myths of love that only produce false expectations, and lead into the dark, forbearing maze path of despair! Songs and movies are nice entertainment; but, they are not the reality of life. Remember, relationships are a choice. It is your choice to succeed or fail. Are you willing to succeed, knowing that so many countless millions of friendships end, and marriages fail? Being willing, and able to work to understand yourself, love, and God's precepts will motivate you, and provide commitment to build your house of love. Being willing to make the other person feel they are a priority, special, will make that house content, too.

1. Apply what you have learned so far; how are good relationships built?
2. How do you perceive people? Why is this important to how you go about seeking relationships? Consider any criteria you use, and see if it matches up with Biblical principles.
3. Read Romans 13:11-12. How, and what does this passage teach us about relationships? What can you learn and apply?

4. How does Sanctification affect your relationships?
5. Has the incentive to surrender to Christ hit you yet? Do you fully realize that His way is better than yours? If not, what is in the way? What are you going to do to remove it?
6. Why is the willingness to make the other person feel he/she is important, and a priority, a significant factor with relationships? Consider how you feel when others take the time to make you feel special!
7. After undertaking this study into God's Word, and how He views relationships, are you willing and able to work in order to understand yourself, love, and God's precepts?
8. What will motivate you to proceed, and continue to make fullness, and His Kingdom, your priority?

**How much time has your group, and you, individually, prayed? Without significant prayer that goes beyond a quick five minutes afterward, you may not be able to apply God's style of love, as prayer is the key to unlock His door! Make sure you spend considerable surrendered time in prayer, seeking His face, so you can be a changed person, and so you can apply these precepts to all of your relationships!**

**If you are willing to live out the art of loving, then, you will keep your relationships alive!**

**Remember we do not deserve His love and grace, yet it is given to us anyway.**

Remember these resources are free for you! Most ministries only sell there materials, we feel we are doing what God has called us too, by going ahead and offering the best materials possible for free and seek support for doing so. There is no obligation but please consider supporting our ministry if you are able to do so. As these materials have cost us a tremendous amount of time effort and financial resources that have taken us years to develop for you!

Feel free to pass this around to any pastor who is overseas or on the mission field who may need it! We also have several other “Pastors Training Packs” available in various languages on: “How to Study and Teach the Bible,” “How to Lead and Manage the Church” and many more. As a missions and discipleship organization it is our call to train pastors and provide resources to Christians and Church leaders all over the world. They may printout any information we have posted, reproduce it, make the needed cultural changes and translate it. All we ask of you is to keep us in prayer, keep the name of our ministry and any copyright information on the resources, and tell other pastors what we have to offer. If anyone does translate any of our material, please let us know and give us a copy so we can make them available to others in their language and culture!



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Into Thy Word Ministries

*Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership*

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