

# The Bigger Story – Love

## Week Twenty-Eight

*Agape* is almost always used to describe love that is, of and from God. He doesn't merely love but is love, in Himself. (1 John 4:8). He loves the unlovable, not because we deserve to be loved or have, in any way "earned it" but because it is His nature to love and He is true to His nature. Everything God does stems from His great and perfect love (Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 John 3:1). **How is the idea that "love is love" is false, when we have a real understanding of what and WHO love is?**

Though it does not come naturally, we are to love others with *agape* love, not based on fleeting feelings, but the facts of God's love and a joyful resolve to put others above ourselves, if they are enemies (Matthew 5:44) or sisters and brothers (John 13:34, 1 Peter 2:17). We can only love with this *agape* love when we know the source of this love: God! When we become His children, accept His Son as our Savior and have His Spirit within us (Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22). Because God's first loved us, we love one another (see 1 John 3:16).

### **Notes & Discussion Questions on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

1 Corinthians 13:1-2: Love is superior to spiritual gifts in and of themselves.

- Those in Corinth were enamored with the idea of spiritual gifts, particularly tongues... Paul here reminds them all gifts are empty and meaningless without love. **Discuss.**
  - "Tongues of men and of angels" refers to the supernatural linguistic ability given to a believer to communicate (worship) God.
- This isn't an argument of love vs. spiritual gifts, but the goal of our gifts is love. **How is love the motive, goal and starting point of our gifts? How do we draw attention back to love?** (see 1 John 4:19)
- Love – **What is love? How does God love? How are we called to love?**
  - *Eros*: romantic love (husband – wife)
  - *Storge*: family love (parent – child)
  - *Philia*: brotherly love (deep friendship)
  - *Agape*: selfless, giving love, little to do with emotion but actively denying self for the sake of another – this is the type of love use here

1 Corinthians 13:3: Without love, all is profitless

- Some are proud to sacrifice and suffer, describing how they do so. **Combine** this idea with the concepts Paul describes and the humility seen in Zechariah 9 and **discuss.**
- The things described in verses 1-3 are good (tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, sacrifice) but love is so essential, without it, every other good thing is useless. **Discuss.**

### **Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 11:25-30**

Matthew 11:25-27: Jesus praises those who do receive His message.

- This praise should be **compare/contrasted** with the way Jesus pronounced judgement upon those who rejected Him, starting back in Matthew 9 and in the immediate four verses:
  - Matthew 11:20-24: Jesus rebukes the cities that did not repent, though both He and John the Baptist did ministry there.
    - "These cities did not attack Jesus Christ; they did not drive him from their gates; they did not seek to crucify him; they simply disregarded him. Neglect can kill as much as persecution can." Barclay
    - "Unresponsiveness to the voice of God is the characteristics of this generation and will be its downfall." France
- **What do you learn about Jesus' relationship with God here? The wisdom of God? How do these verses remind us that, if we do respond to Jesus, it is God who have revealed this to us...like babes? How do we respond? How do we have joy in Him?**

Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus' invitation.

- **Where do you see Jesus' authority here? What is the invitation?**

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

- “Burden”: things that we take upon ourselves. *What are you troubled with? What is hindering your walk?*
- “Heavy laden”: things that others/the world burden us with: the same ideas as in Matthew 23:4, when Jesus spoke against the religious leaders for placing burdens on others. *What weight are you carrying?*
- “Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me” *How can we come to Jesus, willing to learn and be guided by His yoke? Linked together with Him?*
  - **Connect** the idea “learn from me” with what we have been reading in Psalms 119.
  - **Discuss** the idea that Jesus is “gentle and lowly in heart”
- “Rest for your souls”: **Read Jeremiah 6:16** and discuss Jesus’ invitation.
- “My yoke is easy and My burden light” *Why is the yoke easy and burden light?* Because He carries the load! He bears it with us. Borne alone, it might be unbearable; but with Jesus it can be easy and light.
  - “Easy” in Greek also means “well-fitting”. The yokes in the day were wood, custom fitted with care to not harm or injure the animal.
  - When training new working animals, farmers often yoked the young, untrained, inexperienced animal to an older, stronger one, who bore the burden and guided the young one.
    - This isn’t an excuse to be lazy, there is still a burden to carry, work to be done.

### **Notes & Discussion Questions on Zechariah 9:9-12**

The Book of Zechariah was likely written between 520 and 470 bc and describes how God uses His prophets to teach, warn and correct His people. This book illustrates that salvation may be accepted by anyone who follows God, the last chapter describing different people from all over worshipping God. God is sovereign over all the world and sees all that has happened and will happen. We are responsible for the choices that we make (and there are ramifications of our actions) but God offered salvation available through the shed blood of Jesus, who died in our place for our sins. If we reject that sacrifice, we cannot be reconciled to God: Jesus is the way (John 14:6). See also Acts 4:12 and 2 Corinthians 6:2 and *discuss*.

*Where is Jesus?* There are many prophecies about Jesus in Zechariah, some include:

- The Messiah will come and dwell in our midst (Zechariah 2:10-12 – Matthew 1:23)
- Jesus is Savior, His blood covers our sins and He offers salvation (Zechariah 13:1 – 1 John 1:7)
- He will Return (Zechariah 12:10 – John 19:33-37)

Zechariah 9:9: The coming King and His deliverance

- This verse references Jesus’ first coming, prophesizing the triumphal entry of Jesus when He rode into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:5). *Why did the people rejoice?*
- “On a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” this repetition emphasizes the animal is a purebred and much different than a royal stallion.
- *Why didn’t Jesus ride the triumphant stallion of a conquering general? The customary mount for royalty? Why did He choose to be humble and lowly?*
- “Brethren, let us be lowly. Did I hear one say, ‘Well, I will try to be lowly’? You cannot do it in that way. We must not try to act the lowly part; we must be lowly, and then we shall naturally act in a humble manner. It is astonishing how much of pride there is in the most modest.” Charles Spurgeon
- *How can we be humble?*

Zechariah 9:10: The strength and the authority of the Messiah’s reign

- This verse references Jesus’ second coming, when He comes in power to reign over the earth for 1,000 years with righteousness.
  - When He reigns, there will be no more war and His reign will be universal and the whole earth will be under His authority (Ps. 72, Isaiah 2:2-4, 11:4-9, Jer. 23:5-6, Luke 1:32-33, 19:12-27, Matt. 5:18)
- *How does the knowledge of His return and reign impact and/or inspire you?*

Zechariah 9:11-12:

- This covenant likely describes the Covenant of Moses (Exodus 24:1-8). As *Israel* turns to God, He will turn to them and rescue them as if they were trapped in a dry cistern. *Discuss this imagery.*
- Because of His faithfulness, because He keeps His promises, even those who are prisoners are “prisoners of hope” and they can return to Him, a “stronghold”
  - Stronghold: both in a military sense and a spiritual sense. *How does He offer security, strength, stability and rest?*

### This Week's Readings

2 Chron. 10-13    2 Chron 14-17    2 Chron 18-19    2 Chron 20-22    2 Chron 23-24    2 Chron 25-27  
Acts 13                                  Acts 14                                  Acts 15                                  Acts 16  
Zechariah 9:9-12, Psalm 119:49-56, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Matthew 11:25-30

### Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God's Word and the blessings of Scripture.

**G. Zayin ז:** The power of God's Word to both comfort and strengthen

Psalm 119:49-50: God's word brings comfort and life

- God never forgets his word. *How can we know His Word and state it back to Him, reminding ourselves and Him of His promises?*
- *What does God's Word bring?*
- This section was written during a time of affliction: *How does God's Word comfort us in times of affliction?*

Psalm 119:51-52: God's Word adds strength to comfort

- The psalmist is mocked for his love and trust in God's word. Those who love God and trust in the truth of His Word are mocked. *Have you seen, read or experienced this? What does it mean? How do you respond?*
- *Yet how does the psalmist respond?*
  - *What harm is done when believers capitulate under derision? Have you seen this? What should we do instead?*

Psalm 119:53-56: The comfort and strength the Word of God brings.

- See the wicked, those who forsake God, can make us indignant. Especially when they lead others to do the same. *Describe* an example of this.
  - Yet Jesus describes the penalty for those who lead others astray (Luke 17:1-2) and we trust Him and His perfect timing and judgement.
- Instead, we sing with joy and confidence, dwelling in His word.
  - Read the example of Paul and Silas singing in the middle of suffering (Acts 16:25).
  - *How can we pray in the darkness? How can we sing in the darkness? How does this glorify God? Who can you sing with?*
- *Discuss:* "in the night:" How does God comfort us in the dark? Why must we declare Him, keep His Word in the brightness of day and in the secret of night?
- "Because I kept Your precepts." He isn't claiming perfect obedience (see Psalm 119:57-58) but lives a life generally in faithfulness to God's Word. *Discuss.*
  - "What makes a man a Christian is not something that he does. It is something that God has done". Martin Lloyd Jones

### Love Next Week's Readings:

2 Chron. 28-29    2 Chron 30-32    2 Chron 33-34    2 Chron 35-36,    Ezra 1-3    Ezra 4-5  
Acts 17                                  Acts 18                                  Acts 19                                  Acts 20  
Zechariah 9:9-12, Psalm 119:49-56, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Matthew 11:25-30

# The Bigger Story – Love

## Week Twenty-Nine

Review from last week's notes: *Agape* love is the selfless, acting love God shows and is. God's love is seen in the sacrifice of Jesus for us (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9-10). We do not earn God's love, we are not worthy to receive it, but He gives it anyway (Romans 5:8). We serve God out of love for Him, His love equips us to obey Him and be free, fearless and filled in Him (John 14:15, 1 John 5:3, 4:18). Our human and secularized understanding of love is flawed, weak, self-focused, feeling-based and incomplete.

The more we look at Jesus, the better we understand true, sacrificial love (1 John 3:1, Ephesians 1:6). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus (John 10:29, Romans 8:38-39).

### Notes & Discussion Questions on 1 Corinthians 13:

1 Corinthians 13:4: Love's characteristics – *Why is love described by action words? How do each of these describe God?*

1 Corinthians 13:4-6: *What isn't love?*

- **Discuss** Biblical examples of envy: Genesis 4:3-8, 37:11, 28, Matthew 27:18
- **Discuss** the sin of pride, arrogance (puffed up, self-focused), rudeness, etc. (see also Romans 12:10, Philippians 2:4)
- “thinks no evil”: literally “does not store up memory or wrongs”
- “rejoices in truth” Love can always stand with/on truth, because love is pure and good like truth. **Discuss.**

1 Corinthians 13:7: *What is love?*

- “All things” covers everything! **Discuss. Why is this so much harder than bearing “some things?”**
- “Bears all things” or “covers” (see 1 Peter 4:8) “Believes all things” **How can we choose to believe the best while also always following the truth?** “Hopes all things” **How is love confident in the future?**
- “Endures all things” **How can we keep on bearing, believing, hoping?**
- How can we best understand these things by looking at the life and example of Jesus?
  - Replace “love” with the name of Jesus or God and reread the chapter.

### Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Matthew 13:1-3: Jesus teaches with parables

- Parable: “to throw alongside of”, placing a lesson next to a known example for greater understanding. A truth set into a story or “earthly stories with heavenly meaning”

Matthew 13:3-9: A farmer sowing seeds...

- During this time, seed was scattered then the ground was plowed
  - **Who is the Sower? What is the seed? Where does the seed come from?** Before it can be thrown, it must be received.
- The wayside: The path, hard from repeated footsteps/use
- Stony places: A thin layer of soil, then rocks, (sound familiar?!) the seed would grow, but never take root
- Thorns: fertile soil, but filled with thorns
- Good ground: fertile and weed-free

Matthew 13:18-23: The parable explained – different responses to the Kingdom

- The wayside: Those with hardened hearts who will not absorb the truth. It never penetrates. **Discuss.**
  - **How is the evil one at play here? How does he keep people in the dark, from understanding?** (see 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)
  - “Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word...He is always afraid to leave the truth even in hard and dry contact with a mind.” Charles Spurgeon
  - **How can we allow the Word room in our lives and hearts?**
- Stony places: Those who first respond enthusiastically, but then wither, unable to endure. A problem of depth. **Discuss.**
  - **What does it mean to endure? How can we endure? Keep our first love?**

- “Tribulation” suffering from the outside
- “Persecution” deliberately inflicted, implying a religious motivation for the abuse
- “Stumbles”, “falls away”, “tripped up” – not a gradual loss of interest but a collapse under pressure
- Thorns: Those who respond to the Word and grow for a time, but their growth is stopped by competition, distractions, unspiritual things. **What chokes out spiritual growth?**
- Good ground: Some respond rightly to the Word and bear fruit. **Discuss. How can we allow the Word to bear fruit in our lives? What fruit do you see in others’ lives?**
  - Each grows a generous harvest, though varying in number – God is in control and harvest will come. **How is this encouraging?**
- **How can we benefit from seeing traits of ourselves in each of the four soil types? How can we prepare our lives (hearts, minds, homes) to be the right kind of soil? How does this parable invite action?**

### Notes & Discussion Questions on Isaiah 55:1-13

Isaiah 55:1-2: An invitation to be richly fed, to receive blessing

- “Ho” – a loud, clear call, that all can hear. “Everyone who thirsts”: an invitation to everyone (see John 7:37)
- **If we don’t bring money, what do we give God? What satisfies?**
- The invitation is open, the offer made, everything open, but we must:
  - Listen carefully to God, which requires attention
  - Eat what is good, which requires discernment
  - Let your soul delight in abundance, **what does this require?**

Isaiah 55:3-5: An invitation to be wonderfully led

- Whoever “feast” on the Word must consciously “incline” his/her ear to what God says. **How? To what benefit?**
- For those who listen to the Lord, God promises a covenant. He provides: mercy, leadership, witness, etc.
  - Davide was a leader *for* the people, not *of* the people. **Discuss. Discuss** God as leader.

Isaiah 55:6-9: An invitation to be forgiven

- God can be found when our hearts are inclined to look for Him...and even that first inclination is from Him!
- “Return to the Lord” Repentance is turning from our own way to God’s way, returning to the Lord.
  - “Wickedness...way” and “The unrighteous man his thoughts...”
    - Wickedness may be seen in our actions and unrighteousness in our very thoughts
    - **How do we love God with our mind, body, strength...?**
  - God doesn’t think or act the way we do. Do we expect Him too? **Discuss.**

Isaiah 55:10-11: **Discuss** the power of God’s Word – which always fulfills His purposes.

- God can be found when our hearts are inclined

Isaiah 55:12-13: When we turn to Him, listen to Him and His Word does His powerful work in us. We are blessed with restoration, joy and peace

- “The thorn” a previous reminder of the curse, now a beautiful and useful tree... God takes the dead and brings it to life. The barren and curse to beautiful and fruitful. **Discuss.**

### This Week’s Readings

2 Chron. 28-29	2 Chron 30-32	2 Chron 33-34	2 Chron 35-36,	Ezra 1-3	Ezra 4-5
Acts 17	Acts 18		Acts 19	Acts 20	
Zechariah 9:9-12, Psalm 119:49-56, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Matthew 11:25-30					

---

## Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God's Word and the blessings of Scripture.

### **Heth 7: Hurrying to God with all my heart**

Psalm 119:57-58:

- "My portion" is the idea of a satisfied soul. *What does it mean that the Lord satisfies? How has the Lord given us the ability to enjoy Him and the strength to keep His words?*
- "Your favor" literally translated means "Your face" (see Numbers 6:24-26)

Psalm 119:59-60: A life directed towards God's Word \_

- Time spent in the Word has encouraged the psalmist to reflect on his own life, gave him the insight to turn in the right direction.
  - *How/why is it vital to understand our way, turn and go in God's way? With haste?*
- "Did not delay" describes an indecision of mind, a positive action being suspended, because the mind is unable to decide. The same word used to describe Lot lingering, reluctant to leave Sodom (Genesis 19:16).

Psalm 119:61-64: Faithfulness to God's Word in adversity and friendship with those who are friends of God's Word

- The psalmist was afflicted by adversaries but clung to the law of God, rising in the night to offer thanks to Him. *What can we learn from His posture and prayer?*
- The psalmist enjoyed fellowship with those who also keep God's Word. *How does love of God unite believers?*
- The psalmist saw the whole earth as the Lord's, full of His mercy. Understanding God's mercy increases his desire to learn and follow God.
  - *Discuss this cycle:* The pursuit of God through His word leads to satisfaction and blessing... which leads to a deeper pursuit, leading to even more satisfaction and blessing.

### Love Next Week's Readings:

Ezra 6-8,  
Acts 21

Ezra 9-10

Nehemiah 1-3  
Acts 22

Nehemiah 4-6  
Acts 23

Nehemiah 7-8  
Acts 24

Nehemiah 9-10

Deuteronomy 7:6-9, Psalm 119:65-72, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, Matthew 22:36-40

# The Bigger Story – Love

## Week Thirty

*Is the key to happiness self-love? Can we be complete with just the right amount of self-care, self-help and self-love? Or does chasing these vain pursuits leave us empty and unfulfilled? Where is fulfilled? Where is love?*

The answer to our insufficiency isn't self-love but God's love, entering into relationship with Him, accepting Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We are instructed to love God, to love others as ourselves. This isn't a command to love ourselves, but to honor and follow God and put others' needs before our own. Jesus – Others – Self = **JOY!**

### Notes & Discussion Questions on Deuteronomy 7:6-9

This chapter contains commands to conquer (the Canaanites) and to obey (God's commands and laws)  
Deuteronomy 7:6-9:

- Israel was set apart by God in His choosing... then they were called to live as God's holy and chosen people. **Discuss** how God calls, gathers, chooses, loves...
- **What is motivation for obedience?** Love. When we believe God loves us, we find it a joy to obey, and to remove (destroy) anything that would damage this primary relationship. **Discuss.**
- **How do you know God? His faithfulness? How do you obey Him?**

### Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God's Word and the blessings of Scripture.

**Teth ט:** God's word brings benefit from a time of affliction.

Psalm 119:65-66: Start with praise, then move into petition

- This section begins with gratitude. **How can we remember all the ways God has dealt with us? Called us? Rescued us? Loves us?**
- Then there is a petition for wisdom. **How does reflecting on God and His will and ways grow our desire to live a life of good judgement?**
- The Psalmist wanted God to teach him because he believed in the commandments of God. **If we believe in His Word, shouldn't we want to be taught? Obedient?**

Psalm 119:67-68: Seeing the goodness of God...in His corrections

- **How does being astray, estranged from God bring affliction? Have you experienced this? What lessons did you learn?** See also Hebrews 5:8
  - "Often our trials act as a thorn hedge to keep us in the good pasture, but our prosperity is a gap through which we go astray." Charles Spurgeon
  - Yet, we are not bitter towards God but can see His goodness and gentleness (He is good and does good) even in corrections, leading us to deeper reliance upon Him. **Discuss.**

Psalm 119:69-72: See His goodness, even when adversaries prowl and there is affliction

- **If God does us good, is good to us, who does us evil? Why?**
- A heart that is "as fat as grease" is unhealthy: spiritually and physically. It is dull, insensitive, desensitized by luxury and ease. **Compare/contrast** this with a whole heart who delights in God's law.
- Affliction, under the wisdom/guidance of God's word, did genuine good in the psalmist's life. **How? Why?**
- "I never knew the meaning of God's word until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters." Martin Luther
- This does not mean that seasons of affliction automatically make one "more godly"...but that there is value in dependence to God, reliance on His Word, on Him. God can use anything to achieve these ends.
- **Do you prefer the Words of God more than silver or gold?**

<b><u>This Week's Readings</u></b>					
Ezra 6-8, Acts 21	Ezra 9-10	Nehemiah 1-3 Acts 22	Nehemiah 4-6 Acts 23	Nehemiah 7-8 Acts 24	Nehemiah 9-10
Deuteronomy 7:6-9, Psalm 119:65-72, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, Matthew 22:36-40					

### **Notes & Discussion Questions on 1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

1 Corinthians 13:8-10: Love outlasts the other gifts.

- The Corinthian church was hyper focused on Spiritual Gifts...throughout this chapter, Paul is showing love should be emphasized more than gifts as those gifts are temporary. ***Why does it come back to love? How do we emphasize love?***

1 Corinthians 13:11-12: In Heaven, when we can fully see Jesus (not like a poorly reflected mirror image), the need for the gifts will have vanished, so the gifts will pass. The gifts of the Holy Spirit will be made unnecessary by the presence of Jesus, just like when the sun rises, we turn off the lesser lights. In Heaven, there are no more barriers between us and God (see 1 John 3:2).

- During this time, Corinth was known for making renown polished bronze mirrors. Yet, even at their best, newest and cleanest, these mirrors couldn't reflect a clear vision, illustrating the type of perfect fellowship we will have in the future with God. ***Why can't we see like this now?***
- We couldn't fathom or handle this type of knowledge. ***Why?***
- "If we knew more of our own sinfulness, we might be driven to despair; if we knew more of God's glory, we might die of terror; if we had more understanding, unless we had equivalent capacity to employ it, we might be filled with conceit and tormented with ambition. But up there we shall have our minds and our systems strengthened to receive more, without the damage that would come to us here from overleaping the boundaries of order, supremely appointed and divinely regulated." Charles Spurgeon

1 Corinthians 13:13: Abide in faith, hope and love

***What is your Christian life focused on? How can it be focused on these things: faith hope and love?***

- Paul is not outlining a choice or competition but emphasizing how love is the chief motivator – ***why is that?***
- Love is a trait of God (1 John 4:8)
- Love continues to grow: In heaven, face-to-face with God, faith and hope will be complete...but our love for Him (and others) will continue to grow (see also 1 Peter 1:21-22, Colossians 1:4-5)

### **Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 22:34-40**

Matthew 22:34-36: ***Which is the greatest commandment?***

- With 613 commandments of the law, categorized into greater and lesser areas, the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus into showing neglect for an area of the law.
  - ***What are some tactics used to "trap" Christians today?***

Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus' answer: Love God and your neighbor

- Jesus reduced the law to its core principle: Loving God with everything and loving your neighbor as yourself.
  - ***Why is it our natural instinct to love ourselves?***
  - ***How can we show our neighbor love, taking care of them?***
  - ***What does it look like to love God with all your heart, soul and mind?***
  - ***Why does Jesus answer in this order?***

<b><u>Live Next Week's Readings: Freedom</u></b>					
Nehemiah 11-13 Acts 25	Esther 1-2 Acts 26	Esther 3-6	Esther 7-10 Acts 27	Job 1-3, Acts 28	Job 4-7 Romans 1
Isaiah 44:6-8, Psalm 119:73-80, Galatians 5:1-14, Matthew 13:44-52					