



ALL YOU NEED TO LOVE • Bonding

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Romans 12:9-18

Overview

In the last study, we talked about the need for community in the life of a believer. God created us to have relationships with others. Why? Because we are made in His image - He is, by His very nature, relational. Also, relationships provide the environment we need in order to grow and mature spiritually. Without connectedness to God and others, our souls slowly wither, often leading people into depression and other related emotional problems.

The focus of this study is how to reach out to others, in love, to form the connections that God designed us to have. Basically, how do we put last week's lesson into practice? The answer: through the process of 'bonding'. We will, however, be looking at this processes more conceptually (What is the idea?) than practically (Where do I go/what do I say to form relationships with others?).

Our own heart attitudes and actions have a lot to do with the quality of relationships that we have. This passage of Scripture, filled with commands and exhortations to love, serves as a "measuring stick" to see the ways in which we need to grow in our love for others.

Context

The first 11 chapters of Romans contain a great deal of theology and doctrine. In chapter 12, the content becomes very practical as theology integrates with day-to-day living and loving. It's here that we are challenged to live out what we believe, and nothing is more challenging than living out a sincere love for others.

A New Way to Measure Love

Romans 12:9-18 clearly defines what it means to love another deeply and sincerely, providing us a working model. The study asks the group to look over the list and consider how their family did or did not demonstrate these traits. Why do this? Throughout our lives, our primary model of love and how it is expressed has been our families. We all need to grow into this new model and definition of love, and it can be instructive to consider where we've come from and what our model of love has been as we consider which aspects of our lives need growth. This would involve questions like: "Where has it been helpful?" and "Where has it been deficient?"

Barriers to Loving

The study asks the group to consider what might be holding them back from loving others. Due to many factors, people are often afraid to reach out and

What's the Big Idea?

The capacity to bond with others is contingent on our ability to love sincerely, not selfishly or self-protectively.

What's the Problem?

Our hearts are selfish and self-protective and unable to love people sincerely – from the heart.



love others. One of those factors is “past injury” – where they’ve been hurt in past relationships. We live in a sinful world and all of us have been injured, often by those we’ve loved. As a result, we all adopt ways of coping with the world: we cease being vulnerable, we put on facades, we stop empathizing, etc. – we implement any number of tactics to protect our hearts from being injured again. Jesus wants to create a new heart within us – a heart of compassion and love. We need to recognize our tactics of self-protection in order to allow Jesus to teach us anew how to love.

Qualities of True Love: Empathy, Mercy and Humility

Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” While our hearts might have a proclivity toward self-protection, God enjoins us to emotionally engage in the lives of others. Empathy is a depth of connectedness that causes us to share not only the burdens of another, but to adopt his or her very feelings.

We are told to “bless those who persecute” and not “to repay evil with evil.” Mercy, and not justice, must rule the heart of the believer. We have received God’s mercy in Christ’s death on the cross for our sins and we must extend that same mercy to others.

“Humility” is the accurate appraisal of our own spiritual poverty and the grace we have received. It is the righteous medium between pride (an over-estimation) and low self-esteem (an under-estimation). Only a humble heart is able to love purely, without jealousy and competitiveness and not from its own neediness.

Where Will this Love Come From?

While there are a variety of ways God changes our heart, three are worthy to note from the passage and study. First, in describing a sincere love, the apostle Paul does not leave out the need to love God with zeal and passion. Our love relationship with God fuels our ability to love others.

Second, while almost all of the commands involve our attitudes, Paul does command an action. He calls us to “share with God’s people” and show hospitality. While these certainly express sincere love, they also help produce it. Jesus said, “Wherever your treasure is, your heart will be also.” As we actively give to others, our hearts are taken captive in the process and are redirected toward others.

Third, God changes our hearts through community. The study asks how Christian community plays a role in God changing our hearts. The answers to this are manifold. Perhaps the greatest component of transformation occurs as we experience God’s love through others. You cannot impart what you are not experiencing. True Christian fellowship involves the experience of being known (in all our weaknesses and sin), and being loved, accepted and encouraged in spite of all those shortfalls.

Love for Unbelievers

While most of these commands talk about a Christian’s responsibility toward other believers, verses 17-18 focus primarily on a believer’s relationship to unbelievers. Sincere love must also encompass those outside the family of God.

What’s Our Response?

You want the group to see what it means to love sincerely and you want them to recognize the personal sin and barriers in their own lives that keep them from experiencing this kind of selfless love. This love can not be self-generated, and you must make it clear that such love flows from our experience of Christ and His grace in our lives.

You also want the group to see that this inability to love leads to an inability to be loved and bond with others.

What Are the Questions?

Romans 12:9-18

LAUNCH

How would you define the word “love”? How do you think the world defines “love”?

EXPLORE

1. We all have a desire to love and be loved. How has someone recently shown you that they love you? What did they do?
2. This passage starts off by saying “love must be sincere.” The rest of the passage describes a sincere love. Make a list of the following:
 - Things to do:
 - Things not to do:
 - Attitudes of the heart:
3. What keeps us from loving others this way? Do you think the world would define love in this way?
4. In verse 10, why is humility a prerequisite for loving sincerely?
5. How does your family demonstrate or show their love for each other? How do these methods correspond to the actions and attitudes listed in Romans 12:9-18?
6. How do you feel the model of love you witnessed growing up affect your responses today?
7. Who do you know who truly models some of these aspects of love?
8. How does rejoicing with those rejoicing and mourning with those mourning, express love? Was there a time recently when you did this?
9. What keeps you from actively loving others? What barriers or obstacles stand in your way?
10. How do you find yourself loving others selfishly and not selflessly (sincerely)?
11. What aspect of your personality, or even personal history makes it difficult for others to connect and bond with you?
12. While most of the things listed in the passage deal with attitudes of the heart, what real action(s) are listed that can actually redirect the focus of our hearts?
13. Why do you think Christian community is essential in order for us to see our hearts, attitudes and behaviors change?
14. In verse 17-19, non-believers seem to be in view. Are we to love them the same way we love believers? Can we love them the same way we love believers? How would we express love to them?

APPLY

15. How are we to “keep our spiritual fervor serving the Lord”? What do you do? Why is this connection vital to everything that follows?
16. Responding with grace toward those who mistreat us rather than with judgement requires us to already be experiencing grace. How are you currently experiencing the grace of God in your life?
17. What barriers keep you from experiencing God’s grace? Do you think treating others with grace helps you experience God’s grace?

What Are the Answers?

1. To generate discussion on this topic, ask people to share specific ways they have felt loved recently.
2. These are basic Bible study observation skills. Have the group take a close look at the passage and write down what they see.
3. Allow the group to discuss.
4. See notes under “Humility”
5. See notes under “Barriers to Loving.”
6. Families can show love in various ways: buying gifts, giving money, doing something nice, hugs and kisses, etc. Some have learned to “keep score” – “I’ll do this loving deed, if you do that, etc.” Help the group to see how what was modeled affects how they see love. Then, ask if it is the correct biblical model.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. This is empathizing – caring so much you take on the feelings of another.
9. See notes on “Barriers to Loving.”
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. This is getting pretty personal, yet you want the group to see what hinders them in bonding with others.
12. Sharing with others and showing hospitality.
13. It is in Christian community that we experience God’s love in a deeper way, being manifested by grace, acceptance and encouragement from others.
14. Discuss. Love may need to be expressed differently. Sharing Christ is an excellent example of showing love.
15. See notes under “Where Will This Love Come From?”
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:10