



Our Easter program this year is called, "Love Lives."

John writes, "Children let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. Put love in action." Love lives in our lives when we put it in action and serve other people.

Week 5 May 9 - May 15

SUNDAY

This is the fourth week of our series Love Lives. Jesus' resurrection teaches us that love is stronger than sin and death. Our faith teaches us that even though love looks like a loser's strategy at times, in the end love lives and is victorious. Love lives in the person of Jesus Christ who gives us the power to love others.

This week we are looking at two aspects of love that seem to be opposites but actually go hand in hand. They form a kind of double-edged sword to love. To really love people we need both these things. One half of love is acceptance. As human beings we crave acceptance and so to put love in action we must communicate acceptance to others. On the other hand, love also challenges us with the truth. Both are required to love others.

Ask the Spirit to show you how you can grow to be a person that loves others to both accept them and challenge them with the truth.

MONDAY

Beloved, see what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 1 John 3:1

John teaches us this amazing truth. God the Father calls us his children. This was an astounding revelation. The almighty Maker of heaven and earth invites us into a relationship with him. And it is pure gift. He simply "bestows on us" the gift of being his children. Other translations say, "See what love the Father has lavished upon us."

God gives us the gift of being his sons and daughters before we can do anything for him. He accepts us even though we still have faults and failures. God doesn't say that before we have a relationship with him we have to clean up our act. God doesn't say that I'll love you if you get to church every week or two times a month. God loves and accepts you because God is love.

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a deeper appreciation and understanding that you are the beloved child of your heavenly Father. Pray that truth will deepen your mind, in your heart and in your soul.

TUESDAY

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 JN 3:2-3

John tells us that we are God's children now, but we still not all God wants us to be. We are being more and more conformed to the image of Christ. One day we will be perfect images of Christ, but we are not there yet. Our role is to cooperate with God as he sends opportunities for us to mature into a Christ-like character, to be pure of heart and sincere in our love as Jesus is.

God loves us so much that he accepts us as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way. God knows we will not be truly blessed and content and happy until we are perfectly formed into the image of his Son. Love accepts, but love also challenges with the truth.

Thank God today that he accepts you as you are but loves you too much to leave you as you are.

WEDNESDAY

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as the only begotten Son from the Father. John 1:14

Jesus, the word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. He came with both grace and truth. He was full of both. Jesus gave grace to people. He accepted them as they were. He accepted Zaccheaeus, Matthew and the woman caught in adultery. He accepted them, but then challenged them to grow.

To love like Jesus means we have to bring both grace and truth to the people around us. Usually, they go in that order. People must feel acceptance first. They must know that we are giving them grace and that we are for them before we can challenge them with the truth.

Pray today to be more like Jesus. Pray for the ability to bring both grace and truth to all your relationships.

THURSDAY

Accept one another, therefore, as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:7

Paul writes to the Romans to accept one another just as Christ had accepted them. This was a hallmark of the early Christian community that allowed them to grow. People came to the community and felt loved and accepted. As a result of the acceptance, they began to change and live for God's glory.

Acceptance paves the way to influence. As Rick Warren says, "You can only win your friends to Christ, you cannot win your enemies." If a friend, a family member or co-worker feels like you don't accept them, then you will never be able to positively influence them.

Who is someone you want to positively influence, but keeps pushing away from you? Pray for the wisdom of how to communicate acceptance.

FRIDAY

*Therefore, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. **Ephesians 4:25***

Paul writes to the Ephesians about how to be children of the light. He wants their community to stand out as a source of light in the dark world. One of the key ways is through their honest interactions with one another. The Christian community would be full of people who would be honest with one another. They would share challenging truths because they understood they belonged to one another.

Love accepts others, but it also delivers difficult truths. We all have blind spots and need others to point out the ways we need to grow. Love lives in us when we are willing to risk sharing a brutal fact with a person about their behavior.

Is there something you have been holding back from someone else because you don't want to hurt their feelings? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom to know if, when and how you should bring the truth to him or her.

SATURDAY

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
His right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

Psalms 98

Group Discussion: Week 5 of “Love Lives”

Questions:

1. People are God's Plan to meet our needs and to experience his love. What are your thoughts on that statement?
2. When was a time you experienced love and support from being part of a community?
3. 1 John 4:18 says that perfect love casts out our fear. What fears do you have at the moment?
4. How can perfect love cast out those fears in your life?
5. What does it mean to you to say that ministry is a way to express love for others?
6. How does this impact your view of volunteer ministry?
7. What is something this group can do to help you to be an instrument of God's love right now?

Scriptures:

- ❖ “Beloved, if God loved us, we ought to love one another.” -1 John 4:11
- ❖ “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit.” -1 John 4:12-13
- ❖ “And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.” -1 John 4:14-15
- ❖ “So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them.” -1 John 4:16
- ❖ “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so we are in this world.” -1 John 4:17
- ❖ “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfect love.” -1 John 4:18
- ❖ “Those who say I love God and hate their brothers are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” -1 John 4:20-21