

Life Group Notes 12/22/2024
Pastor Mark Warren 4th of Advent: Love is Central

[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 12/22. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week's footnotes include:

1. [On love.](#)

*****Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. ***

Sureya began prophesying during worship, speaking of what it takes to pull together a service of worship, beginning with rehearsal at home.

1. Have you ever performed? What was it like?
2. Did you perform often enough to have a bad day? What happened?
3. Can rehearsal prepare you for everything that happens on stage?
4. What does rehearsal do?

Mark began his message reviewing the previous messages, and the challenges he faced with this one. He said it was easier for him to talk about "peace," and "hope," and "joy," but to talk about love presents a more personal challenge.

1. Review what this series has brought you personally.
2. Which message to date was most challenging?

Look at how he put it. "When you begin to understand what God's love is, unconditional (which is so mind-blowing for me), He IS love. And we are to receive this love...but we are also to *be like Him* and to love the way He loves, I begin to ask...well how?...What does that look like?"

1. Answer Pastor Mark. How does love behave?
2. How do you behave?
3. Lucy Van Pelt, of *Peanuts* fame, once stood and cried, "I love mankind. It's people I can't stand." What does that make you think?

So Pastor Mark began where there are definitions and clarity. Look at 1 Corinthians 13: [13](#) And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love.

1. What does this mean?
2. What does it mean, to remain? Remain...after what?
3. Love is the greatest what?
4. Great in what sense?
5. Look at the beginning of the same chapter: *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a ringing gong or a clanging cymbal. [2](#)If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have absolute faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3](#)If I give all I possess to the poor and exult in the surrender of my body, but have not love, I gain nothing.* What is love greater than in these verses?
6. In what sense is Love greater than faith?
7. Does the mountain move? Do you benefit from the mountain moving?
8. In what sense is love greater than hope?
9. Pastor Mark suggests that in this season of the Church we're experiencing, "...we're learning how to love one another better." Explain. Do you have a testimony?
10. Look at [footnote 1](#) below. What place does learning have on the pathway to Love?

Pastor quoted C.S. Lewis, who said, "Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not."

1. Explain.
2. Does this suggest that "...love remains?" Remains after what?

Mark points out that, "Not only does God ask us to love the way He loves, but He also sent Jesus to show us the way that He loves. And He also deposits His Spirit in us, so that, because of His Deposit, he is asking us to love the way He loves." He then asks, what is love? How do we apply it during this Christmas season.

Look at Paul's often quoted "love inventory" from 1 Corinthians 13: [4](#) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5](#) It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs. [6](#) Love takes no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in the truth. [7](#) It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8](#) Love never fails.

1. How well does this describe you?
2. Do you use these words when you describe your family? Your friends? ...or do you keep records of wrongs done?
3. Look up Romans 2: [4](#) *Or do you disregard the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance?* Is this true? Did His kindness lead you to repentance?
4. Did God keep records of our wrongdoing? To what degree are we successfully following His example?

Pastor says, "Sometimes we think love is a feeling, but, I'll tell you what, Love is an action."

1. Explain.
2. Do actions last longer than feelings? In what way?
3. Review again closely what Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5: [12](#) *We are not commending ourselves to you again. Instead, we are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you can answer those who take pride in appearances rather than*

in the heart. [13](#)If we are out of our mind, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. [14](#)For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, therefore all died. [15](#)And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again. [16](#)So from now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Although we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. [17](#)Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come! [18](#)All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19](#)that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's trespasses against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Is Paul describing action or feeling?

4. How does love compel?
5. What does love prevent you from doing?
6. Have you ever been compelled by love? Do you have a testimony?
7. What does love foresee? What does love NOT see?
8. Looking at Paul's inventory, now look at Galatians 5: [13](#)For you, brothers, were called to freedom; but do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Rather, serve one another in love. [14](#) The entire law is fulfilled in a single decree: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [15](#)But if you keep on biting and devouring one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another. What do you see?
9. Can you explain how all the commandments are summed up in the Law of Love?
10. Can you see how the Church's mission fails where love does not abound?

Pastor Mark's practical steps: Live it out

- ◆ **Love is not arrogant or rude.** Pastor says, "When the tensions run high at the family gatherings, and you want to say something...you're tempted to let pride and frustration rule, instead seek to listen more than you speak. Apologize quickly. Prioritize unity and harmony over being right." Does that work? Does it work in your situation? Is it time to pray together? Take a deep breath. You have to do it. Love believes in the best of people.
- ◆ **Love does not insist on having its own way.** Love allows for flexibility.
- ◆ **Love bears all things, believes all things, endures all things.** What does this mean? What will it look like? What does love foresee if it believes ALL things? If love bears no record of wrongs, what changes in your own relationships? Look up Romans 5: [6](#)For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. [7](#)Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. [8](#)But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Explain how God's example compels us to emulate His actions. What did God foresee? What is He saying about you right now?

Pastor says, "Love not only transforms us, but it transforms everyone around us."

1. Is that true?
2. Do you have a testimony?
3. Does love put an end to polarization?
4. Look up what Jesus says about this phenomenon in John 13: [33](#)Little children, I am with you only a little while longer. You will look for Me, and as I said to the Jews, so now I say to you: 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' [34](#)A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. [35](#)By this everyone will know

that you are My disciples, if you love one another." What will be the impact of obedience to this commandment on our surroundings? Do you have a testimony?

5. What impact do our beliefs have? ...the super miracles we perform or hope for? ...the Jesus fish stickers on our car? ...the special evangelical license plates?
6. What has impact? How does love manifest itself in order to have that impact?
7. Notice the context: Jesus is leaving, and we cannot follow. What can we do instead?
8. If we obey, what do our neighbors see? Whom do our neighbors see?
9. Has Jesus really left, if we abide and obey Him? How does abiding love change the world?

Pastor presented evidence as to the truth of Jesus' prophecy concerning us. He said, "People come in, say, 'I feel something,' and they feel the atmosphere. Sure, the Presence is here, and we're all enjoying His presence, but did you realize that we are allowing God to change us, and we are becoming more loving toward one another. We are more filled with joy. We are more filled with peace and hope than we have ever been. He is still changing us and transforming us. We no longer have to look too far to see that God is teaching us how to love. We are learning how to bear all things and believe all things."

1. Do you have a comment?
2. Are there moments that come back, that you remember and have remembered?
3. How does the world get to see this as Jesus said they would?
4. Look at Paul's prayer for the Philippians in chapter 1: *9*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, *10*so that you may be able to test and prove what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, *11*filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. How does this fit Mark's message?
5. Take a moment to pray this for your life group...for your family...for the church.
6. How does what is best replace what is good?
7. What does it look like to be pure and blameless?

The Follow-up Application

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. In your gratitude journal, make notes of how this season is different from the seasons that have gone before. What were your hopes? What brought joy? Was there peace? Be thorough and honest.
3. Take the "love inventory" for yourself. How are you doing? Model it for others.
4. Pick someone you're quarreling with, and describe them prophetically using Paul's description from verses 4-8 above. Replace the word "love" with their name, and say it out loud, as if you foresee this happening. Note what changes.

Take the time to pray.

Scribe's Notes:

1. **On love**—This might be one of the most studied words in the history of word studies from the Greek. If you pursue a Christianity that is real long enough, you will hear that there is more than one Greek word translated as "love," and that each has a different nuance. That is true. Bible hub offers this insight: (<https://biblehub.com/greek/25.htm>) **Cultural and Historical**

Background: *In the Greco-Roman world, various words were used to describe love, including "eros" (romantic love), "phileo" (brotherly love), and "storge" (familial love). However, "agapaó" and its noun form "agapē" were relatively rare in classical Greek literature. The New Testament writers adopted and expanded the meaning of "agapaó" to express the unique, divine love revealed in Jesus Christ. This love transcends human emotions and is rooted in the will and character of God. Some who have heard the lecture know that eros also denotes the pleasures of fleshly lust, from which our word "erotic" is derived.*

The Hebrew note on the parallel word for agape is also worth examining: <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/157.htm> Hebrew H157 **Cultural and Historical Background:** *In ancient Hebrew culture, love was not merely an emotion but **an action-oriented** commitment ("Love is action"—Pastor Mark). The concept of love in the Old Testament is deeply intertwined with covenantal relationships, where love is expressed through faithfulness, obedience, and sacrifice. The Hebrew understanding of love often involved a holistic approach, integrating heart, mind, and actions. This is evident in the Shema ("Hear, Oh Israel..."—Deuteronomy 6:4-5), where loving God involves the whole being.*

There are places where *agape* is best illustrated by contrast. Review Peter's litany of growth in 2 Peter 1: [3](#)His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to [4](#)his own glory and excellence, [4](#)by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. [5](#)For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6](#)and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7](#)and godliness with **brotherly affection** [phileo], and brotherly affection with **love** [agape]. [8](#)For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9](#)For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. When the importance of *agape* is seen in the progression of Christian spiritual growth, we can more easily see the contrast. If, as it is written, "The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and we understand that love is perfectly expressed in God's wisdom, and we understand, as John tells us in his first epistle, "Perfect [agape] love drives out all fear," then we can write the equation in mathematical terms: The Limit of the Fear of the Lord as the believer approaches infinity is perfect love. As John said, "There is no fear in love." This is what we are growing toward...and the imitation of God. And we will be tested. One of the least perfectly translated moments in the Bible misses this test completely. In John 21, Jesus restores Peter completely to fellowship. Look at the passage as it is translated almost universally. (I've read this passage in English, French and Swedish, and the same mistake is made in all but one Swedish translation): [15](#)When they had

finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me more than these?**" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I **love you.**" He said to him, "Feed my lambs." **16**He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I **love you.**" He said to him, "Tend my sheep." **17**He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "**Do you love me?**" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I **love you.**" Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Notice that the same word, "love" highlighted above, is the translation rendered in verses 15 twice, sixteen twice and 17 four times. But John did not use the same word each time. In fact, John illustrated the lesson Peter was trying to teach in his second epistle. Look closely at the Scribe's rendition of the same passage: **15**When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love **[agape, love]** me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I like **[phileo, like as a brother]** you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." **16**He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love **[agape, love]** me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I like **[phileo, like as a brother]** you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." **17**He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you **like [phileo, like as a brother]** me?" Peter was **grieved (!!!—emphasis added—the scribe)** because he said to him the third time, "**Do you like [phileo, like as a brother]** me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I like **[phileo, like as a brother]** you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." Do you see how this changes the entire passage? The third time, Jesus used Peter's own language, attenuating "love" to Peter's "like," to question the degree of growth in friendship and fellowship Peter had reached. Peter couldn't say, "I love you." He could only say, "I like you...as a friend or a brother." Agape Love, the love of God for His own, born of divine intention, is not something that springs up from within, fully developed out of the ground. Like Faith and Hope, Love also ripens and matures with intention and stewardship over time. Do we love our spouse? Our children? ...as we should? Ask first, do we really like them? Where are we on God's scale. And that is how we test our love. (For the linguist, notice how well the English language lends itself to the nuances Jesus was expressing, and that Peter later teaches. Help me understand why the experts who have translated this passage into English, have missed this nuance universally. Even the Amplified version, although expressing a difference, misses the reason for Peter's dismay in verse 17.)

For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP...** (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: 1 Corinthians 13: all
Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13
Wednesday: Philippians 1:9-11
Thursday: 2 Peter 1:3-8
Friday: 2 Corinthians 5:13-19
Saturday: Galatians 5:13-15
Sunday: Romans 5:6-8