

DEEPER IN LOVE

(a lesson series on the greatest commandments)

How to Use This Pamphlet

If a cell group or small group meeting can be divided into four sections—Welcome, Worship, Word, and Work—then this pamphlet only helps leaders on the Word and Work aspects.

Each lesson will have an introduction, points to talk about, and suggested questions for discussions. In each point in the lesson, the leader can choose from among the provided questions what to ask to the group for discussion. Because the Word section is geared toward being finished in 45 minutes, I suggest that only one question per point is dealt with. But of course, if there is enough time, the leader has the prerogative to ask more questions for discussion.

The monthly attendance sheet at the end will help the leaders monitor their small group/s. This will also help the leaders keep track of who are in need of encouragement and prayer.

This series is written by Dick Eugenio © 2016.

Lesson 1

What is Divine Love?

Bible reading:
1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to know and understand what God's love truly is in accordance to the Scriptures.

Introduction

When people say “I am in love,” what do they usually mean? Today, if we watch romantic comedies and teen flings, we will learn that love is something that (1) binds two strangers together even against all odds, (2) brings joy and kiligs, (3) causes problems and heartaches, and (4) makes people become really stupid and blind in decision-makings. But are these socially-prescribed understandings of love biblical? What is the biblical understanding of love?

I. Love Hurts

In the 1970s, the band Nazareth popularized the song “Love Hurts.” Unlike telenovelas today that sentimentalize love into a super awesome feeling that brings great smiles and day dreaming, the song says that love actually causes pain, wounds, and scars. Basically, *to love is to open one self to being hurt*. If

we do not love anyone, then we are not vulnerable to being hurt. In fact, it is because we love our parents and siblings so much that we feel hurt when they die. Again, to love is to open one self to being hurt.

God created us with the capacity to love just like Him (1 John 4:8). The example of God is worth investigating. Even though He knew from the very beginning that humanity will rebel against Him, He still created us—all because of His all-surpassing love. And by creating us, He made Himself vulnerable and open to the experience of pain and rejection. But did this stop God from creating and loving us? No. In fact, God loves us so much even when we were sinners (Rom 5:8). He was even willing to suffer and die for us in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Eph 2:4-5).

- *Do we know people that are hard to love because we know they can bring pain and problems to us? Share your experience with these people and how you were able to love them anyway.*
- *How can we love people who do not love us back? How can we love people who seem to make it their life purpose to annoy, irritate, or bring misery to us?*
- *Can we ever imagine or describe the pain that God feels whenever His sons and daughters rebel against Him?*

II. Victim of Love

Joe Lamont in 1985 produced a song that became an instant hit called “Victims of Love.” The song narrates a once strong love that went sour: “It used to be so easy, it used to be so good / We had an understanding that got misunderstood.” Because of this, the love story became “a broken down affair” reduced to ashes, so the singer is “so sad to see the debris scattered everywhere.”

The love story in the song sounds extremely like the love story between God and humanity. The once awesome relationship between God and humanity got ruined because of sin, and since then humanity has been hiding away from God (Gen 3:23-24). But unlike the song, in the God-human broken relationship, only one is truly the victim. While humanity is enjoying itself in sin, God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to literally suffer for those He loves so much (John 3:16; Acts 3:18). In the words of Isaiah, “he was oppressed and afflicted... [and] was led like a lamb to slaughter” (Isa 53:7). For the sake of redeeming humanity, “he offered up himself” (Heb 7:27) and gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

- *In human relationships, in what way can we become the suffering victim in order for us to show our love for someone?*
- *What are the hindrances to us in loving like God, willing to sacrifice Himself for the sake of those He loves?*

III. Part-time Lover?

The idea of a “part-time lover” is quite ridiculous, but it is the title of one of Stevie Wonder’s songs. We cannot even imagine if this is applied to God. We are very blessed that the God who loves us is so in love with us, regardless of our shortcomings, failures, and sins (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5). God loves us so much that He gave Himself for us (Gal 2:20). Before we started loving God, He already loved us (1 John 4:9-10). Indeed, as the Psalmist says, God is “abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ps 86:15). In His great love, He made us His children (1 John 3:1). God loves us full-time, and He started looking at us even before we were born (Jer 1:5; 29:11).

But because of God’s great love for us, we are also asked to love Him back (Ps 136:26). The command given to us is to love Him with our every thing (Matt 22:37). We must walk in Him (Col 2:6-7), remain in Him (John 15:4), offer our lives to Him (Rom 12:1), and worship Him always (Heb 12:28-29). Loving God part-time is not a good and thankful response to His full-time love for us. A part-time lover is not a true lover.

- *Do you think there are Christians who are part-time lovers of God?*
- *What are the evidences that suggest that one loves God only part-time?*

Application

God has shown His amazing love to us already. It is now our chance to respond to Him in gratitude by loving Him with all our

hearts, soul, body and strength. Love that falls short of this standard is simply unacceptable. So let us examine ourselves this February, the so-called “love month.” How much do we love God? And if we truly love God, what are the evidences in our daily lives?

Lesson 2

Sweet and Sour

Bible reading:
Ezekiel 16:1-63

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to realize that love is a commitment, and it requires quite an effort to make things work and last forever.

Introduction

“Walang forever.” This is a phrase we commonly hear these days. The magic that once was there vanished. Things got so sour that lovers started to spit each other out. This is a tragic story that no one in this world is unfamiliar with. And this applies to all sorts of relationships: friendly, romantic, and even married relationships. So why do these things happen? How do things end up getting broken? The saddest of all is this: broken love relationships can also happen between God and humanity.

I. Love Replacement (Hosea 1:2)

The sad reality is that even God can become a discarded Lover. The thought is quite repulsive, because we can ask: How in the world can someone even discard God? Or why in the world will people abandon God, the greatest Lover? Unfortunately, this incomprehensible possibility can happen in reality. Even the

Israelites—the people saved by God from slavery, and with whom God made His dwelling place—were guilty of saying goodbye to God. They were described as “like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD” (Hosea 1:2). Because they have abandoned the true God over idols, they were also likened to prostitutes who gave themselves to many men (Ezekiel 23:7-8).

One of the primary reasons why Christians begin to abandon God is because they find someone or something to replace God in their lives. What are these replacements? It can be a new hobby, a new career, or a new interest. Basically, these replacements can be anything that we think gives a sense of satisfaction and fun. They are anything that steals our attention from God. They are thing that we like to do and are doing when we should be with God instead. For instance, it can be playing Clash of Clans when we should be having our devotions instead or being at church in worship and service.

- *To identify potential replacements, honestly answer: What are commitments or activities we do when we should be at church instead or should be doing our daily prayers?*
- *What are the most common (and subtle) replacements that Christians choose today over God?*

II. Love Gone Cold (Matt 24:12)

To replace God with an idol does not happen in an instant. The transition from our love of God to love of another happens

quite slowly and gradually, which is why we only realize it quite late. We will be surprised how a shallow commitment to a game or to a hobby can gradually take the place of God at the center of our schedule, planning, and routine. Because these new hobbies or activities give us excitement and enjoyment, little-by-little, we look for them and strive to do them even at the expense of neglecting our other commitments and responsibilities.

Jesus predicted that even Christians would have their love turned cold. He said that “because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matt 24:12). As the saying goes, “masarap ang bawal,” and even Christians are not immune to the tempting allure of sin. The passage is important because it makes sense: the more we love sin, the less we love God. Also, Hebrews 12:1 says that sin “easily entangles.” Once our feet are entangled by sin, it is very hard to be set free. It is very hard to be set free, because we do not want to be set free. And why do we not like to be set free? It’s just because we may be enjoying the perks of sin. We may not notice but these sins are actually choking us to death (Matt 13:22). There is a very close relationship between sinning, forsaking our first love (Rev 2:4), and being lukewarm (Rev 3:15).

- *What are the activities we are enjoying these days that are slowly entangling our feet into addiction, to the point that they have become an appealing option instead of going to church?*

- *How do we know that our love for God has started to grow cold?*
- *What acts of wickedness are so appealing to our generation today that can become the primary reasons for deserting Jesus (John 6:66)?*

III. Love Taken for Granted

To illustrate what taking someone for granted looks like, here is a story. There was a famous preacher and author. Because he was well-known to be an awesome speaker with great wisdom, he gets a lot of invitation from all over the world. Because of this, he really does not have much time for almost anything or anyone. In fact, he has a secretary who organizes his schedule and every minute of his every day is operating under a strict time frame. One time, while he was away, his local church did a fund-raising event. Basically, attendees can bid to go on a dinner date with the famous guy: him. When his secretary said that the winner paid US\$1000 in order to be with him on a dinner date, he felt very important. After all, someone was willing to pay US\$1000 just to eat and talk with him. When he arrived at the appointed restaurant, he was surprised and embarrassed that the winner was his own daughter.

This is what it means to take someone for granted. We know they exist. We think we love them. We think we have not forgotten them. But we take them for granted. The prime example of someone who took God for granted is King Solomon. He started being very zealous (1 Kings 3:5, 9). But as

his fame and wealth grew, he started putting God on the side. His desire became more focused on wine, women, and the world. Solomon never forgot God; he just took Him for granted.

So when Solomon wrote, “Remember your Creator while young” (Ecc 12:1), he was saying: Do not forget God. Do not take Him for granted. If He really matters in our lives, then He must be a part of our lives in the real sense of the world. Like the daddy whose daughter had to win a bid just to have time with him, all of his accomplishments mean nothing: fame, money, career, and everything else. Everything under the sun is meaningless (Ecc 2:1-11, 17-23; 4:13-16; 5:8-17; 9:13-18).

- *How can we avoid Solomon’s experience of slowly taking God for granted?*
- *How can we maintain the fire of our love for God in a world that has deceptively great things to offer?*

Application

The song “Light the Fire” offers words that should become our prayer everyday: “Don't let my love grow cold / I'm calling out / light the fire again.” If we know that our love for God has gone cold, or if other human-made idols have replaced God from the center of our hearts, we must pray hard and turn back to Him right away. He does not want that any of us shall perish. As His beloved children, He wants us to love Him back in the same way He loves us. We must learn to let go and surrender whatever things are hindering us from loving God with our everything.

Lesson 3

The Violence of Love

Bible reading:
Hebrews 12:7-13

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to realize that true love has a somewhat unappealing side, because lovers always require a lot from their beloved.

Introduction

When Valentines' Day comes, there is a very strong pressure for lovers to buy and give presents to their beloved. After all, the common idea is that lovers should always seek to please their beloved. Malls and merchants capitalize on this mentality, which is why items with hearts and lovey-dooie stuff decorate their stalls. In particular, flowers, huggy bears, and chocolates are sold like crazy, even though their prices soar ridiculously higher than normal days. This is the face of love that people often see only. It is very superficial and shallow. The fact is that true love, when investigated more deeply, reveals a somewhat offensive side. Love can be the most violent thing in the world. So how is love both offensive and violent?

I. Love Demands

Love is actually quite demanding. There is no one who loves—be it a parent, or a bestfriend, or a spouse, or a sweetheart—who does not demand anything from the people they love. One of the natures of love is the desire to be loved back. For instance, people who love demand time from their loved ones. It is unnatural for people who truly love to not care at all whether their lovers also give them time. In fact, how many relationships—family, husband-wife, or boy-girl relationship—do you know that have been broken because someone feels they are not given enough time, and therefore feel unloved and unprioritized?

This is all the more true in our love relationship with God. He demands time from the people He loves. He demands that we spend time meditating on His Word (John 1:8; Ps 1:2). He demands that we spend time in communicating with Him in prayer (Phil 4:6-7). He demands that we worship Him (Deut 12:1-32). He demands that we serve Him (Deut 6:13; Luke 4:8).

This is where Christians begin to have problems. Our understanding of God's love is that we should be receivers, since we are the children. We think of our identity as children who God must spoil. But the fact is that because God loves us, He wants us to spend time with Him in reading the Word, in prayer, and in service. When we do not do this, God is hurt, because as a lover, He feels unloved and forsaken. When we do not do this, He becomes angry because He certainly does not deserve to be left alone.

- *In our relationships in this world (family, boy-girl, friendship, etc.), what are the common demands of lovers from their beloved?*
- *What are the demands of the God who loves us so much that we often fail to accomplish?*
- *Why do you think do lovers demand things from their beloved? Is it possible for lovers not to demand anything?*

II. Love Transforms

When I was single, I loved playing computer games. I would spend hours playing RTS games. When I got married, my wife did not want seeing me playing such games. Her will naturally collided head-on with my will. When she sees me playing, she would naturally become angry. I realized that if I were to maintain a joyful marriage, I will need to give up even things that I cherish in life. Otherwise, our relationship will be filled with real-life violence and fights. To be a recipient of love is to be transformed in accordance with the likes and dislikes of the one who loves us.

This is the same in our love relationship with God. Like people, God has specific things He likes and dislikes (1 Thess 4:3-7). If we are to continue in our relationship with Him, we must be able to give up our selfish desires, otherwise we'll just end up grieving Him all the time (Eph 4:30). To be loved by God is to be transformed into the people God wants us to be. This is what it means to be god-like or Christ-like. We are commanded to be

transformed into God's likeness. It is hard to imagine two lovers who are unwilling to give up their self-preferences and still hope to continue in their relationship.

Again, this is where problems come in for Christians. There are things that we cherish in life, and we do not want to easily give them up. We probably know that they are offending God already, but we just hope that God will understand and continue to love us anyway. We are testing His patience. We are not yielding to His preferences. But here is the thing: we should not even imagine or hope to have a good love relationship with God if we are unwilling to be transformed into the person He wants us to be.

- *What are the things that you like the most? Look at your good relationships. Do you think you are in relationship with your friends right now because they do what you like as well?*
- *If you are to maintain a good relationship with God, what are the things that you really need to start doing or stop doing right away?*

III. Love Disciplines

These days, when we discipline our daughter, it is clear that she is still unable to see the relationship between love and discipline. She would say things like, "You don't love me anymore" or "You are so bad. You are not my mommy." Well, I was the same when I was young. I could not understand how

my parents can claim to love me when they actually cause genuine physical pain. I would cry not only because of aching body parts, but also because of the emotional turmoil within me. Have you ever asked yourself the same question: “Do my parents truly love me?”

The fact is that as human beings, we only want a love that gives us a mushy cloud-floating feeling, but it is hard to accept a tough love that can hurt our emotions and cause pain in our bodies. But to be loved is to be disciplined. Because God wants a great future for us, He sometimes sends us crises and struggles meant to jolt our minds and shake our being, so that we may return to the right path. The Bible actually has a lot of things to say about God’s discipline:

- “Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you” (Deut 8:5)
- “The Lord disciplines those he loves” (Prov 3:12)
- “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Heb 12:6)
- “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline” (Rev 3:19)

In all these passages, it is clear that God disciplines those He loves. In fact, the Psalmist writes that the ones disciplined by God are called “blessed” (Ps 94:12). It is tough to receive discipline, but should we not desire it, if it is actually a sign of God’s affection for us?

- *What is the purpose of discipline in our Christian lives?*

- *Have you ever experienced God's discipline? Share your experience. How did the discipline help you or make you into a better person?*
- *What do you think does this verse mean: "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them" (Prov 13:24)? Is it a requirement to receive discipline?*

Application

Now we know that there are aspects of being loved by God that do not seem very appealing. As people loved by God, we need to follow His demands, we need to be transformed into the sort of people He wants to hang out with, and we need to accept His discipline. So the questions are: Do you still want to be loved by God? If yes, then what are you going to do about His demands and His requirement for transformation?

Lesson 4

Corrupted Love

Bible reading:
2 Timothy 3:1-5

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to realize that even Christians need to be intentional in loving God and the good. The Bible warns us about idolatry, or loving what we should not love.

Introduction

As an emotion, love is a feeling that makes us obsess about someone or something. When we love something, devoting our all to it seems natural. When we truly love something, our minds cannot stop thinking about it. We try to arrange our schedule so that everything we do revolve around the thing we love. We make time for it, even in the midst of busy-ness. We are even willing to sacrifice many things just for it. Love compels us to do things that we have not done before. Because this is what love does, imagine how dangerous it would be if our love is directed to something nasty and ungodly.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul says that in the last days, people's love will be corrupted. People will be without love (3:3) for God (3:4) and goodness (3:3). They will love, but the objects of their love

are idols. They will be lovers of themselves (3:2), lovers of money (3:2), and lovers of pleasure (3:4).

I. Lovers of Themselves (3:2)

Paul says that in the last days, people will be extremely self-centered, selfish, and egotistic. They will love themselves, prioritize themselves, and consider themselves of greater value than others (cf Rom 12:3). They will try to preserve themselves and their pride no matter the cost. They will defend themselves, even when they are wrong because they do not like rebuke or criticism (Prov 13:1). Especially when doing good, they like attention and praise (Matt 6:1). We see these features in many characters of TV shows we watch, like *Johnny Bravo* and *The Simpsons*.

The terms related to excessive self-love in the passage are being boastful, proud, disobedient, unforgiving, slanderous, and conceited (3:1-4). The term “slanderous” is particularly important, because in Greek, it is *diabolos*. Literally, to slander or destroy other people (maybe for the sake of putting others down to put ourselves up) is to be the devil! In the same way that Satan only loves himself, people who love themselves are prone to do whatever it takes to turn themselves into mini-gods who want to rule over others, and ruin those who are in their way.

- *What are the evidences of selfishness, self-centeredness, and egocentricism that are noticeable even among Christians today?*
- *What are the things that people who love themselves so much usually do?*
- *Why is self-love dangerous in our relationship with God and with others?*

II. Lovers of Money (3:2)

Crown Financial Ministries, in its study, indicated that there are 2,500 verses on money and possessions in the Bible. This means that there are more verses on these topics than all the thirteen letters of Paul put together. Because the Bible has 25,145 verses, it means that 1/10 of the whole Bible is also on finances. The excessive number of verses dealing with issues of money and possessions in the Bible tells us that God really cares about how we view and use our possessions. Jesus even made a sharp contrast between God and money (Matt 6:24).

Paul also says that “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus said that we cannot serve both God and money, because those who love their money will hate God (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13). The problem with money-lovers is that they will have the tendency to sacrifice everything, including God and the church, only to satisfy their desire to have more money.

The lie that is always before us is that we need more. In fact, even Christians often times fail to distinguish between needs and wants. People tire themselves to death and sacrifice everything in order to gain money, when they do not really need it. All they want is to have more so they can buy extra gadgets and enjoy extra pleasure. These people have the tendency to be abusive, ungrateful, brutal, and treacherous (3:1-4).

- *How do we know that we have become lovers of money?*
- *When does love for money become excessive and sinful?
How do we know that we have become greedy?*
- *Discuss what this means: “Every financial decision is a spiritual decision.”*

III. Lovers of Pleasure (3:4)

We are created by God to experience pleasure. The problem is that people tend to seek pleasure not from worshipping and serving God, but from other things (3:4). People have different sources of pleasure: sex, playing computer and mobile games, sports, shopping, travel, and so on. It is easy to discern what gives pleasure to people. One just has to note the activities they tend to repeat, because these are the ones that obviously bring them momentary happiness and satisfaction. In short, our addictions indicate what give us pleasure.

What’s interesting about the passage is that lovers of pleasure are the only ones contrasted to lovers of God (3:4). When we

look at our world today, we see a mad and endless pursuit of fun and pleasure. Worse, the pleasures the world provides are the same things we are commanded not to seek after (1 Pet 4:3-4; Isa 5:11-12). Worst still, the pleasures of the world only promises more without giving ultimate satisfaction (Prov 14:13). Pursuers of worldly pleasures will just end up dry and empty. Paul even says that people who live for pleasure are “dead even while [they] live” (1 Tim 5:6).

The problem with those who love pleasure is that they will tend to sacrifice everything, including God and their family, just to pursue what gives them enjoyment. Moses was mentioned in the Bible as one who preferred suffering than “to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25), so he was named as one of the heroes of faith. We must find wisdom in the words of Solomon that seeking worldly gains and pleasures is meaningless (Ecc 2:1-11).

- *What does it mean to be choked with the pleasures of this life (Luke 8:14)?*
- *Is Solomon right when we said that “whoever loves pleasure will become poor” (Prov 21:17)?*
- *What are the worldly pleasures that are very appealing even to Christians?*

Application

We are Christians. We must be careful that our love for God is not challenged and overcome by our concern for ourselves, for

money, and for pleasure. We must continuously examine ourselves about the things that occupy our schedule and recreation options. Here are some questions we can use to see if we are still in the narrow way: (1) Do the things that give me a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment contradict my faith in God? (2) Are there activities that I repeatedly do that actually take the time I should be devoting to God, His church, and His ministry? (3) Are there other things or activities that I prioritize on Sundays or during times of worship? (4) What is it that I hope to do as soon as I have free time?

Monthly Attendance

Leader: _____

Month: _____

Members	Dates				
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