

Mike Connell

Extravagant Love

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Smashwords Edition

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The Great Commandment (1 of 6) Teacher, what's the great commandment in the law? What's the most important thing in the Bible? And Jesus said to him - here it is - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul. He said this is the first and great commandment. Second's like it: love your neighbour as yourself. So notice there, love God passionately, love people fervently, including yourself

God's Extravagant Love (2 of 6) Christian life is a response to God's love, a continuing response. We love Him because He first loved us. Meetings aren't enough. I must meet with God. I must feel His presence, encounter His presence and I must learn how to respond. If you love Me, you'll trust that what I say will work out good for you, and you'll do it. Many Christians want to come into an experience someone else creates, rather than a lifestyle where they walk and enjoy God. The measure of your maturity, is not your experiences, it's what do you do with people

Keep Yourself in the Love of God (3 of 6) In Jude 20 it says keep yourself in the love of God. Now why do I have to guard or protect or watch over this area of encountering, experiencing, and walking in the love of God? There's an enemy that wants to keep me from it. The devil brings spiritual pressure around us. You've got to guard against isolation and loneliness.

As You Love Yourself (4 of 6) Now God's calling the church, calls every person, to serve. Love always serves others, but if you're not happy about who you are, you'll use the serving as a way of fulfilling an unmet need inside, so God wants us to place value on ourselves. So I want to focus on 'as you love yourself.' So what do you believe about yourself?

When you look in the mirror and you look there, you look at that person there, what do you think?

Loving Yourself (5 of 6) Loving yourself is not the same as being self-centred, it's not about being selfish. It has to do with placing the appropriate value upon your life that God has placed. It's coming into agreement with Him, so our relationships with others are not affected by the way we see ourself. You are valuable, you are a special person, you are important to Him.

Love your Neighbor (6 of 6) Love is incredibly practical. We've looked at spiritual dimensions of it, the need to experience God, to hear his voice, thats the fuel for the fire, but encounters with God are always to lead us to mission. Love always has an outworking, or a practical expression. Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

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1. The Great Commandment (1 of 6)

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I want to just start another series, and I want to look at Extravagant Love. That's a good one, Extravagant Love - trying to think about what I could call this series, Extravagant Love. So we're going to do some messages just related to that, and I want us to start in this particular passage here, in Matthew, Chapter 22. Jesus asked a question, in Verse 36, Teacher, what's the great commandment in the law? What's the most important thing in the Bible? And Jesus said to him - here it is - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul. He said this is the first and great commandment. Second's like it: love your neighbour as yourself. So notice there, love God passionately, love people fervently including yourself and so we're going to look at this series on Extravagant Love but this particular time we want to look at the love that God has for us, because most people when they think about being Christian they think well, there's lots of things you have to do now, and lots of things you're not supposed to do now.

It seems like life's more complicated, but Jesus never came to make life complicated. He came to make it abundant and He came to make it abundant by introducing us to a relationship, a personal relationship with God. So you notice what He says here the whole of the Bible, everything is summed up in passionately loving God. Notice all your soul and all your mind and all your heart. That's not sort of an inexpressive thing, that is a passionate thing. I was watching an interview with that New Zealand group Flight of the Conchords. You know Flight of the Conchords? These Kiwi guys and they're just trying to [speaks in a monotone] talk like this you know. One of the guys says those guys talk funny and this is what they said. They said oh no, that's just a New Zealand accent. I laughed and laughed when I saw that, but what it was, they were just highlight the monotony and lack of expression and passion.

When you have a look a lot of people are like that, no passion, no passion! God is a passionate lover of people, and we're going to look and see that the whole key around us loving God passionately is first of all experiencing Him. You can't make something like that just happen. It can't be done unless God doesn't first ignite something in our life by touching us, so before we look about loving extravagantly, loving God, loving people, love ourselves, before we go down that track we want to focus today on just the passionate love that God has for us because people have all kinds of concepts of God. The way you see God, is how you will approach Him, so if you have wrong concepts of God, it will affect how you can connect to Him, so for example if you believe someone's angry at you, you're going to steer clear of them. If you feel guilty that you've already failed someone, let them down, you probably won't want to meet Him.

If you feel that someone is really heavy and demanding of you, you won't enjoy being around them, but if you know someone loves you and celebrates you and welcomes you, accepts you no matter what's happened in your life, they're not fazed, they're not changed, they're not disturbed, that they can totally be relied on to embrace and celebrate you, you could easily connect with a person like that. The problem is we don't have many relationships like that, and so we project the pain of our own relationships into the relationship with God, and then avoid Him. I

want to just show and open up the Bible and show you just the extremely expressive, passionate manner that God loves people. It's extraordinary and it's pictured all through the Bible, just how passionate God is, and so we're going to look at that. In 1 John 4, Verse 19 it says this. It says we love Him because He first touched us with His love. So this love that Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, love Him passionately, get into God. Really be engaged and love Him passionately, and then let it overflow to love people. He said, that is the response that comes when we experience something with Him, so the thing is not to try harder to love God and love people. The thing is firstly fuel the fire of your experience with Him. We love Him, because He first loved us. We respond to Him, because He first initiated reaching out to us. Now when you begin to see that, when your capacity to live the Christian life diminishes, take time to get near and experience the love God has for you. It will ignite the fire again. Get in His presence.

So let's look at this. First thing I want to look at is 1 John, Chapter 4 and Verse 16. God is an initiator of love. God is the initiator. Many people think about God as being someone who's very demanding. He wants us to do this and doesn't want us to do that, but this is what the Bible says. Now God is love, so it tells us the nature of God, He is a loving person. He can never change. That's His nature is to be loving, to be compassionate, to be gentle, to be merciful, to believe in us, to look for the very best in us, to be very patient in working with us. That's the very nature of love that's described in 1 Corinthians 13. That's what God's like. He's patient, He's very, very compassionate, He's willing to reach into us and encourage us and lift us up. He's willing to help us, and He longs to invest Himself. He's an initiator of love, He starts it off, and we'll show you just with a few things in the Bible, and as you think about your own experience, that God always is an initiator.

How many people just woke up one day and decided they're going to become a Christian? You don't. God has sent people into your life. He's pursued you. He's always the one who initiates. When you look through the Bible, we find from one end to the other, God is the one who initiates relationship. Why did He make people? I mean with all the mess that people have made, why did God create people? Very simply this. Love

must find an expression. Love must have an overflow. Love must outwork in a practical, tangible, verbal, emotional and spiritual way - can't just say I love but its real deep down. Sorry, that kind of love doesn't work, it's buried, it's dead. It's not active, vibrant love. That always overflows and has expression. If you bury your love, your relationships wither, so God has designed us for a relationship. He designed people for relationship with Him. He designed you and I to experience Him, not just to know about Him but to actually experience a touch of God from the realm of the spirit, touching us because we are spirit beings. That's what God is like. Have a think about that. That's how we are; God has designed us to be a relational being, to be a spirit being.

Now here's the thing about God is, He loves you. We find that hard because we find that love for most of us has been an experience where we experience love when we did right, and we experienced something else when we didn't do right, so people's love for us most of our lives, has been conditional on our performance, so we tend to think that when we come to God that His love for us is also based around our performance, so people reduce Christianity - well you've got to do this and you're not allowed to do that. That is not what Jesus came to give us. God loves you exactly as you are. You may think well my nose is too big. Well He loves that, it's the way He made it. Don't give up on it, see? You may think well I don't like my ears, they stick out. Well God loves those ears of yours. He allowed you to be designed that way. You may think well I've got some faults and lacks in my life. Well don't worry, God is not fazed by that at all. He sees the potential in your life and what you can be, because He loves you.

You may think well you know, I've really messed stuff up in my life. Well don't worry, God has made a provision for you to overcome that, to learn from it, and to become a better person at the other side. God loves you in the morning when you wake up, God loves you and is watching over you. I'll show you it in the scripture in a moment. When you sleep at night God is still watching over you. He doesn't sleep. During the day, God is watching what you do. He wants to invade your world, and to invade the world of others around you, so when you look in the Bible how God came to people, He came in unusual ways; He came to Moses in a bush, came

to the disciples in an upper room, came to people in all kinds of different ways and He still does. All kinds of different ways God is willing to reach into your world. If you will look and reach out for Him, you'll experience Him. Trouble is so often we just get so busy that we just forget.

I want you to have a look at a scripture here in Psalm 139, it's an amazing scripture. This is one that David wrote. I won't open it all up but I want to just draw your attention to just a couple of things in it about how God looks upon you. See, God is an initiator of love. We'll pick it up at Verse 13. You formed my inwards parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. Now what he's saying here is he's saying that - see, what happens in a mother's womb is the physical body is formed, a child begins to grow and develop. But what David is saying in here, is he's saying that I was actually a spirit being, and You have covered me with a physical body, so You were watching over me even while I was being formed in the womb. Notice what else it says. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret. Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me. So David is saying this; he's saying that while I was still in the womb being formed, while I was experiencing things in my mother's womb, You were watching over me, and as I came forth, You wrote down in a book a destiny, a plan, something my life was called to accomplish, a purpose for my life. What an amazing thing.

In Jeremiah 29, Verse 11, it says I know the thoughts I have to you, thoughts of good, not evil. So every day God is thinking about you. He's thinking thoughts that'll give you hope. He's thinking how your life can go forward. He's thinking how you can prosper. He's thinking how you can be encouraged. He's thinking how you can succeed. The Bible says the Lord delights and takes pleasure when we succeed and prosper. He loves it. He doesn't sort of rejoice over us failing and falling over, He lifts us up. The steps of the good man are ordered by the Lord, though he fall, he'll not be utterly cast down or abandoned by God. God will lift him up and get him going again. This is the nature of God. He initiates love, He initiates reaching out, He continually thinks so God's absolutely passionate about people.

I want you to go with me in Song of Solomon. There's a whole number of ways in the Bible where God seeks to express what He's like, so if you just read it as a book you kind of miss it really, but if you realise that this book describes the experiences of men who encountered God; they weren't perfect people. The Bible's full of people with lives that were full of holes and mistakes and failures, yet God loved them and worked powerfully through them. Many of them changed their generation, yet they were full of holes and faults in their lives, but God loved them. He's not overwhelmed by your failures and lacks. He'll help you get up. I want you to have a look in Song of Solomon here, and it tells us about the love that God has. Now Song of Solomon, guys don't tend to like this book too much, and it kind of looks like sort of a romancey sort of book - well it is, and what it is, it's actually like an allegory. It's like a picture, a story of a relationship between a groom and the bride, so all through the groom talks, the bride talks, and so that's what it is. It's all full of that and it's full of talk of romance and love using picture language, but actually it is to describe the nature of what God's feelings and desires and yearnings are for people, particularly for those who have responded to Him.

Look what it says here in Song of Solomon, Chapter 8, Verse 7. It says many waters cannot quench love - so waters in the Bible speak of adversity or difficulties or setbacks, and notice what it says. It's God's love for you, you can't quench it. You can't put it out. You can't take the flame out, you can't diminish it in any kind of way. His love remains consistent. It's not dependent on our performance, so what happens is we tend to respond based on our performance, and the Bible says no matter what we're going through, no matter what difficulties, hardships, whatever struggles, failures, God's love for you doesn't change - unquenchable. He loved you at the start, He loves you now, He'll continue to love you - hard for us to understand it, so we're going to look at just a few more expressions of it. The Bible's full of it. Once you start to look for it you'll find throughout the Bible God trying to show how He loves people, and His willingness to engage in our lives in a positive, life-changing way - if we will respond. He's yearning for us to respond.

Let's have a look at another one in Song of Solomon - Chapter 4. Now this one here, this is going to be tough for the guys, but here it is. This is

a man talking you see. Now guys, we kind of keep the love down deep, but it's not good enough you see? God is a passionate lover, He's a passionate person, so when God loves, He loves passionately. He's absolutely extravagant in all He does, so you think about creation for example, and you look in creation, and you look at just get on a clear starry night and just look at the magnificence of everything there. See, God is so creative. Have a look into creation, the whole variety of animals, they're still discovering species. In spite of all the species there is God's - you know, if you and I were told to make a few animals for the earth we'd probably come up with about three or four or five and that's about it - a couple that fly, a couple that go in the water and a few on the land we could eat, and there it is. But God is extravagant! Look at all the animals, all the different kinds of species, the variety. Look at the big ones, look at the little ones, it's absolutely diverse. That's God - extravagant.

Look at the colours. If you had to think about the colours, if you were going to create a world and put colours you'd probably pick one or two of your favourites and that'd be it. Well God's got favourites - blue I think, then green - but there's all kinds of colours. God is diverse. You think about - look at the people around, how diverse we are. See, God is extravagant in His expression, so don't try and copy someone else. God doesn't want you copying someone, He made you like you are, He likes you like you are too. He likes you like you are. He likes you. He loves you. You are special to Him, you are valuable to Him. The world around you takes away your value, but God always values you. He never changes. Now look at this, now this is the groom speaking, and so these words here are a picture of God speaking words to people, to His people that have responded to Him. You have ravished my heart my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes. How fair is your love, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love. Now that's pretty - that's good stuff, we won't go any further, you'll just get all distracted. But see?

Now notice that word ravish. It means to fill with strong passionate feelings and emotions, because something is very attractive. In that verse it's saying, when people look to God with love and desire for Him, His

heart is filled with expressive emotions. He loves that. He designed us for that. He designed us for an intimate expressive relationship, you're wired for it. You'll malfunction if you don't have it. The Bible says you all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory; sin's just we're separated from God and we can't function like we're supposed to. We still function in some ways, but not in the fullness of what God has. Look at that one there. I'll give you another verse here, try in Songs 6 and Verse 4. O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah - that was one of the most beautiful fruitful cities everyone wanted to go and live in, in Ephraim. You are beautiful. Now that's God speaking. Can you imagine God saying that to you? You are beautiful. You see you're struggling with that already, but that's what the Bible says. You see, you're struggling because you've got your own ideas about God.

God is not unwilling to say to you in My eyes, you are beautiful, and I love you. When you respond to Me, My heart is stirred with deep emotion. See, that's what God is like. He's not wanting us to keep laws and keep rules and stuff like that. He's wanting us to have a relationship. His heart yearns for the relationship and you see He gave us a free will so we can choose whether you'll enter into that relationship and become a lover of God, or whether we become a lover of the world, and fill our life with substitutes. But when we turn our heart towards God and begin to respond to His love, then He in turn begins to find fulfilment. He says He's made us for His pleasure, made us to enjoy us, and us to enjoy Him. That's the way we're designed. Wonderful isn't it aye? The guys are starting to choke now so - but you see, you know we carry wrong concepts of God, and most people bring out of their family background and their experiences, all kinds of ways of viewing relationships and love, and particularly God. If you don't actually find what the Bible says, you'll have an image of God that's not correct, that's not right and you can't relate to something that's not really Him. You've got to relate to Him, and He says you're beautiful, I love you. I'll give anything - and He has. He's given His only son, Jesus Christ.

So all the Bible you find God pursuing people, pursuing them, chasing them, trying to bring them into relationship, overcoming all kinds of things. We've got a whole number of things like that, so God pursues us.

Think about in Genesis, Chapter 3 and Verse 9. Now God has made Adam and Eve for relationship with Him. Imagine every day God would come, and they would feel His presence, and He would talk with them, and they'd talk what they had done and would enjoy Him. Now things were beautiful and they made a dumb decision, they're going to go their own way, and so when God came again into the Garden, it says they heard His voice and felt His presence, and they ran away in fear and hid. Now what did God do? Well watch this - lightening bolts are for you! See, but that's the concept people have. It's a wrong concept. It's a religious concept, it's a false concept. Does God deal with issues? Yes, He does, but love always rejoices over judgement. God must uphold justice and judgement, but love is much higher than that, and so what did God do?

He said Adam, where are you? That's a relationship question. Adam, I know what you have done, and you have broken my heart, that you choose something as a substitute for Me. Can we meet and talk about this, and put this matter right? That's what God was doing. That's the response of someone who still loves, and Adam, instead of owning up and facing up, blamed someone else, and then because he made the choice not to own up and not to go back into relationship, he had to face then the consequences of that, and hence sin entered the world, and all the issues we've had since then. Eve did exactly the same thing, but that didn't stop God providing them with clothing and still being good to them. He still loved them. He still talked with them. You see we don't understand the passionate love that God has, and the depths to which He'll reach out over and over and over again to find ways to enter into our life and help us, see? You find it all through the Bible. Luke, Chapter 19 and Verse 10 it says this; the Son of Man came to seek, and to save that which was lost. So all through the Bible you find God reaching out to help people, to touch people's lives, to make Himself known in every kind of way, and then finally He came out of heaven and the person of Jesus Christ, entered the world to show what He is like.

Jesus said this is why I have come. This is why I left heaven. This is why I left the majesty and the glory of heaven and became very humble and came just like everyone else. This is why I did it; because I have come to seek, to pursue, and to get back something that's very precious and

valuable. That's why I came. So all through the Bible God visited the earth, and kept showing His compassion and His power and His willingness to help people, then finally He sent His only Son. If I send My Son they will respond! Instead men crucified Him - even that didn't stop God loving. See? God doesn't stop loving. That's the thing that's amazing. You look at Paul on the road to Damascus and Paul, he's a religious nutter - too much education for his own good, so he's full of education, full of religion. He thinks he's doing God a favour killing the Christians, and so you'd think - now you imagine you're a Christian, and this guy's stirring up all of the problems and causing everyone to go to jail and be beaten up and people killed and families broken up, homes broken into. What would you be praying about that guy? Well probably different to how God turned it.

God just suddenly BOOF! and He interrupted him. He just interrupted him and then changed his life with one encounter, and that guy that caused so much destruction, God raised him up and made him the greatest builder of the church in the New Testament. That's God, passionate pursuer of people. He chases people. He looks for people. You think about how you came to Christ. Someone came to you, and probably not one, probably several people, probably people would - God put it on their heart to pray for you, and all the time they were praying for you you're saying no to God, no, no, no. He's not upset by that. He keeps pursuing. We give up quick - oh well, there you are, that's their choice. That's harshness. God's not like that. He never treated you that way. His love is passionate, expressive and it pursues people. I've observed when people fall away from God, they feel condemned, they don't feel good enough. They do what Adam did, run away and hide. Where do you hide? Well you stay out of church, because if you come here you'll feel exposed. People run away from God.

I remember going to a pub one time. We'd gone out for a meal and we had a lovely meal, it was a wonderful meal and I enjoyed it. Then I heard the sound of all the music next door, and I thought let's go in there. I said there's bound to be some people who've fallen away from God in there. What are you going to do when you fall away from God, no more music? No, we're going to find some other music, go out there to the other music.

No more Holy Ghost love to touch our life. We'll go out and drink something or whatever. So we went in there and sure enough I see a guy there and he was once walking with God. I said you watch this, and I went over and he was up at the bar there, he was ordering these drinks, had his whole hand with drinks. I just waited until he got his drinks, he was doing something busy, so I didn't interrupt him.

Then when he got all his drinks I tapped him on the shoulder and said hi, how are you doing? He sort of - holding all this armful of drinks and stuff [laughs] and he said what are you doing here? I said I've come to talk to you. [Laughter] God sent me to talk with you. He loves you, knows you've been through some hard stuff, but that doesn't stop God loving you. All you're doing is hurting yourself, finding substitutes for the real. You need another round, of course you will, see? Because you've lost what you needed, the touch of God, the presence of God, the love of God living and alive in your heart. Man, it was great we saw him at church that Sunday, it was good. I got so excited I thought I might go around all the other pubs so we did, we did a pub crawl, went in all the other pubs. Would you believe it, in every pub we found someone. Went up to them too, the same way, it was great, I loved it. I haven't done a pub crawl for a while - must get out and do it again. Should take Lynney with me. You'd be safe to take would you Lynney? [Laughter] Would she Leon? [Laughs]

Anyway, but you see the point is here that God pursues people, doesn't quit on them, doesn't give up, never gives up. He keeps believing in them, reaching out and He'll find someone to come and get you, just when you're - I can remember when I was in Dannevirke and started my first year teaching. It was disastrous. I remember coming home, it was so disastrous one day I came home, and I just sat down and cried, this was disastrous. I had the worst day, it was just terrible, and I thought my life was finished about that time, my career was finished. So I said that's it God, I'm getting out of here unless you send someone to help me! Now I had hardly finished saying the prayer, and knock, knock, knock at the door. I thought who the heck could that be interrupting me, feeling sorry for myself? I opened up the door, it was a Pastor was there. I said oh [Laughs] He said I felt God put it on my heart to come and talk with you.

God pursues us, loves us, doesn't ever give up and He wants us to be the same kind of people you see? He's wonderful, a wonderful person.

Notice this in Romans 5, Verse 8, it says now God demonstrates His love for us, that when we were dead, had no interest in God, in fact anti-God, then He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins. Now you can't get better than that. That is passionate, determined, pursuing of people. God was determined to make it possible for us to get a relationship back, no matter how we treated Him. That's amazing love, amazing, extravagant that He would give His own Son to die on the cross, that we could have a relationship. Wow, that's amazing. See, so that's God see? Now a human heart can never be filled without God. In Proverbs 20, Verse 27 it says now the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord. That word lamp is like a candle, lamp that has to have oil in it, and has a little wick and it has a life, and it says you and I are spirit beings, so we're a spirit being. God is a spirit, we're made in His image, we're a spirit being living in a body. We have a soul, mind, will and emotions and whatever, but our spirit, until we receive Jesus Christ our spirit is dead.

The Bible says, like a person taking a light and bringing it down and lighting an oil lamp that was not working, he said that's what God does to our spirit. When we receive Christ we receive the love of God into our heart, it ignites something inside us. Isn't that wonderful? God ignites love inside you, then it's your job to keep it going. In the Old Testament God shows it everywhere in the Bible. Here's one example they had in the Old Testament. God said make an altar for Me. He says I want you to prepare an offering for Me, and give something to Me, then fire came from heaven. He said now you just keep the fire going, keep that fire of love burning, see? So God loves us, and there's a part of us can never be satisfying unless God satisfies us, so it says in another one of the Proverbs, it says in Proverbs 18:28, you will light and ignite, and set me on fire. How do we do that? When we receive Jesus Christ, when we experience God's love, we start to ignite on the inside. Now God has designed you with a number of thirsts or longings inside. It's interesting, everyone's got them, doesn't matter where they are, what colour, what race, we're designed with these needs.

One of them, there's a thirst in our heart for security. Every person longs to feel security. It's built into us, it's a longing see and we're longing to be loved unconditionally, not to have to work and never be sure whether we're acceptable, receive love that's unconditional and acceptance no matter what we've done, we're secure in that relationship. We need that. People enter into relationships hoping they'll find security, but if we don't find it in God, what we'll do is we'll find a substitute, so people enter into all kinds of relationships looking for security and then hurt themselves, because they need to find it in God. The second need we have, is the need for self-worth, to feel we're a person of value, so we try to find it apart from God; well we'll get lots of money, we'll try and become important people or get significant positions and whatever. But at the end of the day, none of those things satisfy. The money goes at the wrong time when you need it the most, the position fails and falls over and you get fired and something changes. There's no security in it. There's nothing lasting in it, but God never changes. He will always tell you how much He values you.

You look back at the cross, you see His value expressed in a very tangible, practical way - but right now we can experience Him. You can have that. There's another need we have, it's the need for significance, the need to have a sense of purpose in our life. There's a need to think that my life is not nothing but it counts for something, and God is the only one that can give you that, so if we don't find it in God we'll find it somewhere else, in thirst for adventure, in thirst for love and intimacy. But you know if you don't find some of those things in God, what you do is you try to find something that'll fill it, so guys get real excited about man stuff, and get excited out there and watching a match and getting all excited. But actually there's an area of adventure that God wants to put in your hearts called the walk of faith, where He takes you into situations, gives you opportunities to take risks and show courage and trust in Him. All the other stuff's a substitute - so this is God, this is what He's like.

So God wants to reveal His love for you. I want you to have a look in Song of Solomon. Guys are going to find this one a bit hard too but here it is, it's there anyway. So most guys just overlook this book - I'd rather go into the Kings you know, and read about the kings and the battles, and

fighting the battles and won great victories and whatever, but that's only part of life you know. You can't live all your life like that, so Song of Solomon was put in there to show us the nature of the loving relationship God wants with us. Now look at this, now here it is. Song of Solomon's, which is Solomon's and remember it's just a picture and now here's the woman. Now remember she's speaking about the Lord; Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine. Whoa! Now if you've ever been kissed, you remember what a kiss is like, first kiss. You don't usually forget it. My first kiss was a long time ago - I remember it. [Laughs]

The first time I kissed Joy was a long time ago, but I remember where we were, I remember it exactly. Didn't you remember yours? Young people, you don't know anything about this, that's okay. One day it'll happen, it's alright. Don't be in a hurry, because kissing's like drinking wine. Once you start, it's hard to stop. [Laughter] That's what it says. Your kisses are sweeter than wine see, now have you ever had a sweet wine? Well, you want more. Now some of you don't know about that, but I can tell you now from experience [laughs] once you start you want more, and you have just a little bit first of all. Oh, well that's a nice wine, I'll have a bit more of that and then something changes once you've had a few wines, have you noticed? Well you've probably seen people like that, but Lynney knows, isn't that right? Yeah, you have a few wines, you know, it's [Laughter] well life cheers up! Life gets very, very cheery. The first one you have, if you haven't drunk much wine, it's whoo! I feel whoo! Ha! So you say hey get me another one, and then you start to loosen up. [Laughter]

Now you've forgotten about all the problems, yeah, it's good. The jokes are flowing and you're laughing and there's a whole new area of - you know, all that control is all starting to go now, and stuff's starting to come out, so when people drink often they'll talk loud and they're all over the place and they'll laugh a lot, or they cry and get angry a lot - whatever's in their heart will come out one way, but that's what the drink does. It says now love or kisses - his kisses are sweeter than wine, and they're better for you too. Now what is it talking about? Now this is picture language, it's trying to give you something that you do know, so that you can

understand something you don't know see, so it talks about kissing and wine, and when they go together it's a bad mix. [Laughter] Too much wine and it'll be [laughs] lots of kissing, that's for sure see, so he says your kisses are sweeter than wine. See, so there's something about kissing you can never - it's like eating chocolate, you can't stop with one see, once you've had one. So when the Bible's talking in this verse about kisses and about the kiss of God, it's talking about a touch of God's spirit coming into our spirit, and we feel His love and acceptance and it ignites something in us, just like kissing does. Well you know what kissing ignites in you, well this is the same, it ignites something, we get touched by God you know. Here it is, the kiss of God, the touch of God's spirit. What it does is it softens your heart when God touches you, it melts your heart. If you've been hard or disappointed or angry, and then God starts to touch you with His love, most people just cry. They cry or they become soft.

I've seen people when we have encounters with God, and the presence of God fills the place, the love of God was so tangible you could feel it filling the whole atmosphere, and when it was like that no one wanted to go. They wanted to hang out and it changed. We were in a Bible school and had people from all these different cultures and races and nations, and when God set them free of demons, then they felt His love, the whole environment and culture of the college changed. The nations united when they experienced the passionate, consuming, delivering love of God, see, kiss of God. That's what he said, he said this is better than wine see, because wine will just leave you with a hangover. It'll pick you up and then let you down. He said when God touches us and keeps touching us in our spirit, then our lives ignite with fire, we become free, we become overflowing.

Later on in the year I've got a guy called Jason Westerfield coming here. [Yahoo!] Now you're going to enjoy Jason. You're either going to love him or hate him, it'll be one or the other, but the one think you'll have to admit, he's freer than you are, see and so when people get uptight I like to bring someone in who's really free, because when you have someone who's really free you feed off it yourself, it opens your own heart. He's just a passionate lover of God, and God's presence comes. It comes anywhere,

out in the community, in the coffee bars, all over the place - wonderful what God does, the miracles God does. It's going to be great. Look him up on the internet and you'll find some of the stuff he's been doing, it's great. He's coming here to stir us up to love God a bit more.

So when God loves us we feel very, very special. So how does it happen? How does God do that? How does He come upon us? Well normally - see one of the things I've found is God can do it at a most unexpected time. He'll often touch us when we never expect it, like I was just sitting there meditating in the word of God yesterday and suddenly the presence of God just filled the room, I just began to weep, feel His love. It's just like whoa! What? Who did that? It's like someone turned on the lights. I didn't go into my room thinking that's likely to happen. It happened. Sometimes I've been in a car just driving to work and played a CD and one song, I thought I like the words of that, I like that song so I went to play it and suddenly the tears, I begin to feel the car fill with the presence of God, so God can touch us through meditating in His word. He can touch us through a song, He can touch us through an act of kindness that someone does to us. It so touches your heart.

We had a very difficult situation in Cambodia. We've got a team going out in 10 days time or something, and a war has broken out on the boundary between there and Thailand, and the guy who's arranging everything had to go immediately up there. There was all sorts of uncertainty around the trip and everything like that, and then he was feeling we didn't trust him.. so we'd given money to him and we were trying to work out how the money can be released for the mission and what can happen. In the middle of it he began to be kind of feeling like we didn't trust him. I said we just need to give him this money. It's not a big sum, let's give it to him because he's doing a great job over there, just tell him we love you, we trust you, we want to just bless you. You know what? He wept. He just broke down and wept at a tangible act of kindness that expressed God's love to him. People need that, but it's ignited when we encounter the love of God for us. It's ignited by God.

So how does God do it? Sometimes someone shares a testimony and as they share their testimony, oh, you just feel like you want to cry. Suddenly you - how many have found that? Someone shared something with you,

and you just felt the tears welling up? Of course if you're a guy you'll try and hold it in. Have you been in a movie - you know, now I like to go to movies. I went to Transformers. Well Transformers, there's no soft tender stuff in it - well only a little bit, about three minutes and it's over. Get onto the action. There's stuff going on all the time. It was a great movie you see, boy's movie, but you can't live your life on that stuff because actually, although it - it just is a temporary fix. What you really need you've still got to have relationship, so you get into another story, and I remember going and watching The Notebook. Oh oh, oh my goodness me, I had to turn it off. I think oh, I can feel tears coming - why are the tears coming, you know? But there was something in the story that triggered something deep in my heart, and I thought what is it about that movie that's touching something in my heart? What is it in my heart it's touching?

Most people just watch the movies and don't think of anything, but many times you'll be in a movie, and then suddenly you'll just feel your heart open up, because the Bible says deep calls to deep. God uses many ways to engage our heart, to stop us and get us think about real values. Have you ever watched New Zealand at the Olympic Games when we have our man up there? Now you may not even be into sport of any kind but boy, you watch our man up there on the stand and he's got the gold and they're singing our anthem, it's hard not to cry. You think what on earth is that about? I'll tell you what it's about. It's about somehow someone breaking through and defeating everything that was against him, and rising up and becoming a champion in the world. That connects with purpose in our heart, deep calls to deep because secretly we want that to happen to us.

See, so God's got many ways of touching you with His presence and His love, of igniting you to come back into relationship with Him. Maybe it's a prophetic word someone brings, maybe you have a prophetic encounter or visions or dreams. Perhaps it's God just touches your spirit at some time, or maybe just you felt someone pray for you. I was in my office and a guy came to me and he'd been without the touch of God for about 18 months. I just talked with him and showed him what to do and I said in about 10 to 15 minutes you'll experience God again. Sure enough, the

presence of God just came and filled the room, and next thing he said well I'm glad you're leaning on the chair, I can't even stand up. Can I sit down? God reaching out to touch him, and he went away ignited, and so God wants to ignite something in you, wants to ignite fire in you.

When did you last have a touch of God? When did you last experience Him? When did you last open your heart and acknowledge that yes, you've filled your life with substitutes and really you need God? Well God tells us in His word that God so loved the world He sent His Son, gave His Son. One of the most wonderful pictures - I'll just finish with this last picture from the Bible of the passionate, expressive love of God. It's found in the story of the Prodigal Son, and the son virtually said well I wish my father was dead, I want the money now and I want out. I want to go my own way. So his mindset was I've got a better life without God, than with God, and then later on his life was messed up, ruined, it's character so broken down, his friends that he had because he had money have gone, and everything's gone. He's been abused, and now his character's broken down, his heart's been broken. He despises himself, he smells like the pigs.

In the middle of it he remembers that there was goodness in his father. He remembers, comes back to his senses the Bible says, that actually God is good, and he makes a decision he'll come back. So I guess all the time he's coming back he's a mess and smells and his clothes are tatty and whatever, went out a proud young man with a lot of money and all these hopes and aspirations. Now his life's a mess - but what will my father be like. As he gets there the Bible says, in one of the verses it said this. While he was a long way off the father saw him, and the father was moved with compassion - not judgement. He didn't say well look what you've done and you've messed your life up. He felt compassion; it's my son and I love him. It says the father ran. He ran to him. He put his arms around him and hugged him, and he wept over him and kissed him.

That's passionate pursuing love. That's what God is like. That love is what Jesus came to reveal. His final prayer as He prayed in the Garden was something like this; Father, I have enjoyed Your love, and it's enabled Me to accomplish all these things. Now the relationship I have with You, I want them to have also. See, that's what Jesus came to give

us, was that, but we accept a substitute. Why don't we make a decision in our heart just to open our lives again, or maybe for the first time, to experience the love of God?

Summary Notes:
Introduction – The Great Commandment:
· Matthew 22:36 - What is the greatest commandment of the law?
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, you shall love your neighbor as yourself"
· All the requirements of the law hinge on passionate love for God and for people.
· Passionate = expressing or showing strong feelings and expressive action.
· Passionate love for God is a response to experiencing His passionate love for us.
· 1 John 4:19 – "We love Him because He first loved us"
· Christian life is designed to be a passionate life giving relationship – love affair of heart.

God is the Initiator and source of Love:
· 1 John 4:16 - "God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God in him".
· The nature of God is love – it is core to who He is.
· Love always seeks to find an expression – someone to express love to.
· God designed us in His image – to receive love and to express love.
· God loves you - Not just tolerates you
- Not waiting for you to grow up
- Not waiting for you to get life right
· God loves you uniqueness.
- Your appearance, with all your blemishes, He loves you.
- Loves you when awake, loves you when asleep, He made you for His pleasure and enjoyment and loves to accompany you.
- Loves talking to you, touching you, watching you Revelation 4:11
· Psalm 139:13-18 - "How precious are your thoughts to me"
· As soon as you were born God was thinking of a relationship with you.

God is Passionate about People:
· Song of Solomon is a metaphor – picture of the relationship and love of God for us.
· Song 8:7 - "Many waters cannot quench love"
· Gods love for you is unquenchable – nothing can put it out or overcome it.
· Song 4:9 - "You have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes"
- ravish = to fill with strong emotion, captivate, enthrall, make heart beat faster.
· Song 6:4 - "Oh my love you are beautiful as Tirzah" (beautiful city)
· People carry wrong concepts of God or incomplete picture.
People see him as demanding, trying to discipline us, angry, distant.
· He passionately loves us and wants to reveal that love to us.

God Pursues us with Passion:
· Genesis 3:9 - "Adam, where are you?"
· This is the call of God's heart reaching out to people He loves.
· Even when we sin God still pursues us to restore us.
· No matter what has happened God's love is not quenched or changed.
· Luke 19:10 - "Son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost".

· Seek = 2212 = to search for something very vulnerable and precious until finding it.
· Save = 4982 = to rescue from danger or destruction, heal, deliver, make whole.
· Throughout the Bible God is the first to initiate and pursue.
· God has pursued you even when you didn't realize it.
· Romans 5:8 - God demonstrates His own love towards us – while we were sinners Christ died for us.

The Human Heart is never fulfilled without God:
· Proverbs 20:27 - "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord"
· The Human spirit has thirsts:
i) Security – to be loved and accepted unconditionally
ii) Self worth – to be valued
iii) Significance – to have purpose and meaning
· Proverbs 18:28 - "You will light my lamp"
· Only God can meet the deepest needs of the human spirit.
· Without God we find substitutes, ways to fill needs without God.
· They never satisfy us – we always thirst for more and more

God wants to Reveal His Love to You:
· Song 1:2 - "Let Him kiss me with the kisses from his mouth"
· Song of Solomon = revelation of the passionate affection of God for His people.
· "Kiss of God" = not literal, metaphor – picture
= deep touch and impact of God's love on human spirit
= softens out heart and empowers the heart to love
· Very few people talk to us to really know who we are – to connect and affirm that we are loved, valued and special.
· "Kiss of God" = imparts to our spirit tangible feeling of love and value.

How does God Communicate "Devine Kiss":
· Meditate in scriptures
· Testimony of person
· Song we hear
· Book we read
· Scene in a movie
· Prophetic revelation
· Impression on heart
· Ministry of people
· Act of kindness
· "Deep calls to deep" – we feel the presence of God and our heart is touched and moved.
· When did you last feel the Kiss of God and your heart was moved?
· Passionate love for God is ignited and kept alive by constantly experiencing His passionate love for us in a tangible way.
· Luke 15:20 - "He arose and came to his Father, and when he was still a great way off, his Father saw him, and had compassion and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him".
· John 3:16 - "God so loved you … He gave His only Son"

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2. God’s Extravagant Love (2 of 6)

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Okay, why don't we just open our Bible then, Matthew, Chapter 22, Verse 36. We started last week on a series called Extravagant Love, and I began to share with you about the passionate love of God. I happened to share a verse out of Song of Solomon and some of the young people got that wrong. They thought I was talking about kisses and wine; I wasn't talking about that at all and the Bible says His kisses are better than wine. In other words he's saying that the touch of God in our life is more intoxicating and has better effect on our life than wine drinking would have. But the Bible abounds in God's expressions of love and we saw last week this verse, how God calls us to love Him and that's what we're going to focus on today, is on loving God, whole-hearted love of God.

Last week we were looking at how we love Him as a response to being loved first of all. In other words God starts it going. God always sends people into our lives. God sent His Son into the world, God continually initiates bringing us into relationship with Him, and we saw that God's love is extremely passionate. There's feeling and emotion and we saw how He loves people. It's not the concept of God that many people have, but we looked through some verses in Song of Solomon and it explained how deeply passionate God is. I love that. We serve a loving, passionate God who desires to communicate, but also requires and calls us and invites us to make a response. Isn't that fantastic? Last week we looked into the story of the Prodigal Son, one of the most vivid New Testament stories to show what the heart of God is like, and I have a picture I got off the Internet, it's a picture by Rembrandt. How many know who Rembrandt is? Some people there, all the grey headed people know Rembrandt, the others haven't got a clue. Well if you had one of his paintings you'd be pretty wealthy actually, they're worth millions and this

is a great picture if they can just get it up there for me. Can you get it? It's up, it's on the sides, okay then, great.

Okay then, now we saw last week how Jesus wanted to show people or talk to people what the Father was like and so He shared a story of a lost sheep, a lost coin and then a lost son. You remember in the story of the Prodigal Son how he decided he wanted a life independent of his father so virtually what he said is dad, I'd prefer you were dead, give us the dough, I'm out of here. That's what sin is like. We say hey God, we want to carry on our life like you're not around. We just want to enjoy what you've given us, and do our own thing, so sin is like that. So this young man went out into the world and he had a great time, then he used up all his money. There was a famine, an unexpected famine and he ended up in such desperate lack; all his friends that he'd made with the money - because when you've got money you've got friends, you've got no money, not many friends, only authentic friends. He lost all his friends. He ended up so desperate that he got a job working for a pig farmer and even they didn't pay him any money. They just exploited him and said if you want pay, eat the food the pigs have got, so he was fighting with the pigs for the food. Then the Bible says he came to his senses, and the thing was that turned his life, his life turned when he remembered the kindness of his father.

The kindness of his father turned him back when he remembered it. In other words we respond when we experience the goodness of God. See, our love for God is birthed, it's a response to someone expressing God's love to us. Someone came to us, God sent them. Someone prayed for us, God called them to pray, and then He got us to an environment and we began to feel the love of God. Before you know it you're up the front, your hands are up, you're praying and you're crying and you're wondering how you got there. You weren't clever and thought well I'm just going to go to God today. God began to draw you and then you were touched by His love and wanted to make a response to that love, so the Christian life is a response to God's love, a continuing response. Jesus wanted to show what God is like and so He used this story of the Prodigal Son.

In the picture that's up there it's a picture of the encounter of the Prodigal Son with his father and it's when he's come back to the household and you can see the father there, you can see the son his knees before the father. You can see the older brother on the right and you can see the servants in the background. This shows - firstly you see the Prodigal Son and there he is, he's broken. His life is damaged. He smells. There's nothing loveable or attractive. He's got no friends, but there is one person who loved him and loved him passionately and that was the father. So you see if you look at the father, he's bending over his son. His heart is very tender towards his son. The Bible tells us that when he saw his son he was moved with compassion and ran to him and hugged him and kissed him. You see the father there and his hands are over the son's shoulders and he's bending over him and there's compassion and there's joy. He's welcoming his son back. He's opening his heart to him.

That's what Jesus wanted to convey and Rembrandt has tried to convey that. Hundreds of years old the painting, but nevertheless you can catch the feeling on it when you look close in the face of the father. You can see the emotion on his face, and on the side there you can see the older brother. He had no revelation of the heart of God, and so there was pride in his heart and resentment in his heart, and he looked down and he judged his brother. If you don't have a revelation of the heart of God, you tend to despise others who are weaker than you, and he despised the younger brother, looked down on him. He probably despised his father and judged his father. He was angry with his father and despised his brother. Finally he left the scene altogether, and this man represented the religious people of the day, who had no understanding of how much God loves people. They were supposed to represent the love of God to people, instead they just condemned them, judged them and put burdens on them.

So you see the son proud, standing on the right looking down on the brother, and this painting illustrates something of that story. In the background you can see the servants and they are amazed. They're like the angels in heaven who watch the love that God has for us and sending His Son and are amazed, what is there about humans that God would love them so deeply? So there's the story. Well that painting's worth

millions, and that's the painting. How much more must the reality be worth, the reality of God's love, the reality of God's compassion, the reality of His heart to reach out and put His hands around you no matter what you've done? You need to keep that in your mind all the time, otherwise you'll suddenly slip, that if I just am good enough God will like me or love me or I can get a blessing from God, whereas God has a heart that's abounding and generous. He immediately transferred sonship rights and responsibilities back to this young man and restored him. What an amazing God we have.

We love Him because He first loved us. We love Him because He first loved us. If any of you have experienced God loving you and putting His arms around you when you've failed, then you've felt His love and forgiveness and gentleness and grace, then you love Him. The Bible tells us very clearly we love Him because we've experienced His love, so if we're going to walk with God we have to continue to experience Him. Meetings aren't enough. I must meet with God. I must feel His presence, encounter His presence and I must learn how to respond. Have you ever noticed in a relationship and you can look at human relationships, that when in a human relationship a person does not make any response, then very often the other one stops reaching out. Well God will never stop reaching out, but He wants us to respond to Him, and so we want to talk today not so much about the passionate love God has for us, but we want to talk about whole-hearted loving Him back in response.

You can imagine the older son there, how he lived in resentment that the father would so bless this younger son when he didn't deserve it. Now that's the interesting thing about extravagance, it's giving you something you don't deserve, giving you something you're not entitled to but going beyond what you would expect. What a wonderful thing. What a wonderful thing. I just love it. I love that God is like that, I love that God is so open and so caring about us. That's God. That's what He's like. Aren't you glad? [Yes.] Aren't you really glad? [Yes.] Amen.

Why don't we just lift our hands to the Lord and just begin to pray in tongues and let's just express our gratitude to Him, express our thanks giving to Him and just honour Him. What a great God we serve, what a great God that we serve, halleluiah. Lord, we thank You, You're

extravagant. You're extravagant. You go what's beyond reasonable or what's deserved and You love us and we want to thank You for that. Thank You for loving me Lord, thank You for forgiving me, thank You for giving me a purpose and destiny. Thank You for surrounding me with wonderful people, thank You Lord. What a wonderful thing. So we love Him because He first loved us. Now notice what Matthew 22 says. They were asking what's the great command, and He said love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, and then there's a second commandment, love your neighbour as yourself and this sums up the whole of the Bible, Matthew 22. Isn't that amazing?

So God is saying that the whole of all He requires for us can be summed up very simply, in a whole-hearted loving of God, and then an overflowing fervent love for people. They are deeply connected to one another. You can't have one without the other, you know? It's great to have talent, but if you don't create anything with it then it's pretty well useless. It's dead talent. It's very good to have a love for God, but if you don't do something with it, it's not really an active love, it's a dead love. Great to say you have faith, but if you don't do something with your faith it's not an active faith - so we can say I love God, but He calls us to do something with that, to express it in various ways, and so we want to talk about whole-hearted loving God. Now notice He says love the Lord with ALL your heart, that's all your spirit, all your inner man, your desires and affections, all your soul, your emotions, all your mind, your thoughts. So God doesn't want a half-hearted kind of thing. Half-hearted means I'm indifferent, I don't really care. Half-hearted means there's no passion in it. Half-hearted means I'm someone passive and shut down.

Now God is not looking for a people like that. God is wanting you to respond to Him. You know when Jesus came into town and everyone was shouting and praising and the Pharisees, the religious people said tell them to be quiet, it's not respectful. He said if I shut them down, even the stones will yell out. All creation yells out praise to our God, so God is looking for a whole-hearted response to His generous extravagant giving to us. He wants us to respond and we want to look at what that will mean, and what that would look like see, so I want to be whole-hearted. I don't want to be half-hearted, nothing half-hearted pleases me. You ever had

someone do a job for you that's half-hearted? Never a good job and you're never happy with it. Had a tradesman do something for you? It's half-hearted, it doesn't please you at all. It never quite makes it, but it costs you, and you have someone in a relationship and they're boyfriend got a half-hearted response to you? Well I don't think you'd be too interested. See, think about that.

Marriage; the husband's half-hearted towards his wife, I don't think that marriage is going to be going to well. Would you think not? That's true see, so what God is looking for is that we keep a whole-hearted love for Him alive. Now you've got to keep it alive. I've met with couples and prayed with couples who were married many years, and in the course of many years they've gradually drifted apart. You know it was not one thing, it was lots of little things, and then suddenly they found themselves where they shouldn't be. What happened? The extravagant love was lost on the way. The things, the little things that made the relationship work were lost, and so I want to share with you three key aspects of loving God. Now I'm sure there's others, these are three I looked at and thought of, and felt the Lord drop into my heart, so I want to just share these three things with you. These, we can say well I love God, come into church, well I love You Lord! We sang and I love God. Wonderful.

Now I want to just share with you three aspects to loving God, so loving God is not just about words. We engage Him in our heart and spirit and also it overflows to the world we live in, and you'll see very clearly from the Bible that loving God has not just a spiritual eternal dimension to it, it has an overflow right now where we live and how we live. Loving God has to be expressed, to find it's fullness it has to be expressed in both ways, so here's the first one. Number one, if I'm going to love God whole-heartedly I must choose to pursue His presence, to pursue Him. You have to make a decision to pursue Him, to pursue, engaging and connecting with Him. It's a decision to do that. You know in Mark, Chapter 3 and Verse 14, the Bible says this. It says Jesus chose the disciples to be with Him, and then to send them into the world to preach the gospel, heal the sick, cast out demons. Notice the priority. The first priority was, He wanted them with Him, to know Him, connect with Him, understand Him and to catch His heart and spirit.

When the apostles were doing miracles in the New Testament, Acts, Chapter 4, the Bible tells us that the people looked at them and said these guys, they're fishermen and ignorant people. They haven't even been to university, haven't trained, haven't done any stuff. Oh, they've been with Jesus. There was an overflow of His courage, boldness and the dynamic of His life into them, and they could see it manifested in them. They saw they'd been with Jesus. They saw they'd been in His presence, so an important part of loving God but not the full thing is, I must make a decision to pursue connection with Him. What are some simple ways that I can pursue connection with God? It's always very simple. Here's the first one; very expressive praise. Very expressive praise is a way of opening our body, soul and spirit whole-heartedly, so that's one of the reasons we have very expressive praise is because it's biblical and because it's part of whole-heartedly loving God.

Have you ever been in a group of people and you're trying to get them to sing a song and they just were half-hearted? It's actually better if they didn't sing at all, it's so bad. Don't you feel embarrassed, sort of awkward? There's something really flattening about something like that, but oh and everyone - I was sitting there in the game there watching the cricket and the Indians are there and the Irish there. The Irish have all got their green on and singing. It was stirring. It was really stirring and you see, so praise. Now the Bible says in Psalm 47, Verse 1, it says clap your hands all you people! Shout unto God with the voice of triumph! Praise Him, Praise Him. Clap your hands all you people! We should do that shouldn't we? One, two, three [Applause] Halleluiah, Praise the Lord [Applause] Oh yes, yes, yes Lord! You're simply the best. Oh that's good, that's why we do it. It's in the Bible. David did it and David was a great king. David even did more than that, he danced mightily! Whoa! See? Some of us can barely get a foot up you know? [Laughter] Just need to get going you know and praise the Lord mightily, see? Praising shifts the atmosphere around us and one of the ways that we are whole-hearted in loving God, not the only way but one great way of doing that. The Bible says for everyone to do that.

Another is tender worship. In John 4:24, God is a spirit a spirit, they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit. I must let my inner man open out

and engage with God, have to make a decision to pour my heart out to Him. Now for many people whose emotions have been shut down, that takes some challenge. Sometimes we need to be healed or delivered or released so our inner man can flow towards God, not just sing songs and enjoy an atmosphere, but allow our spirit by faith to connect with the one who loves us. There's a woman in the Bible, I think in Luke, Chapter 7 and she had an alabaster box. She came in, and the Bible says she loved much because she was forgiven much, and she probably had a very broken life and Jesus had forgiven her and touched her. She comes in, there she is, she doesn't worry about anyone else. She's extravagantly loving Jesus, and Jesus commended her and said that what she did will be rehearsed for generations. The half-hearted worship was never recorded for generations. In fact God says He doesn't like the half-hearted thing. They come there with their lips but their heart's far from Me, He said I'm not into that at all.

God wants passionate worship, passionate worship, passionate fervent worship and we have to learn to do that, have to learn to speak words of love and words of affection for Him, speak in tongues, speak in the language God's given and let your heart flow to connect with God, not just sing songs and have a service. Connect and love Him. It's a person we're loving. We need to express that love. He wants to enjoy the relationship with us. Another way we can develop that expressive love for God is by meditating. Meditating's one of the most powerful ways that you can open your inner man to connect fully with God. You take the word of God and you begin to picture it and use your imagination to see scripture, to see the stories of men encountering Jesus, to look into it and allow your heart and emotions to feel the truth. When you do it, you begin to connect with God and you become touched and changed.

Over this last week I've seen people encounter God and He's stepped in as they did exactly that, just opened their life to meditate and allow their imagination to go into the word of God, and they began to encounter God. The most wonderful thing to see people weep and hear God speak to them, and God touched them and set them free. See, that's something we do. Now of course everything is competing for your time, so if you're going to love God with all your heart and soul and mind, you have to take

time to let your mind be trained to focus on God. It's a discipline. Most people can't sit still for just a few minutes. It's a discipline for my mind to remain connected to and focussed on the Lord, until I begin to engage Him and there's a life flow comes. So the strong praise breaks the heaviness and control of your body and your soul's heaviness. The tender worship and affection expressed, you begin to connect with Him but as you begin to meditate you become conscious of Him and you start to experience loving Him. It's the most wonderful, wonderful thing to just experience loving God and most people don't do it. They're too busy. They close their eyes and see bad pictures, so we've got to paint those pictures out with the blood of Jesus and allow our heart to focus and connect with God.

You need the experience of God, not just knowing about Him, and as you begin to discipline and allow your life, train your life to picture truth, you can take scriptures - you could take this one with the Prodigal Son, and begin to just meditate on it and begin to put yourself in the picture, see it and imagine what that must have been like. Begin to look for the details in it, ask the Holy Spirit who reveals Jesus to reveal the heart of God in that story, and then see yourself like that son going to the father. It's extraordinary how scripture, as we meditate in it, can just come alive and begin to engage God. It's wonderful. I've been in some of these scriptures then just began to weep. I could feel what that man felt and see, so if we're going to love God whole-heartedly I must train my mind to focus for periods of time and meditate so I can engage with God. What you focus on, you open yourself to. We live in a culture which is full of technical wizards really, all sorts of wizardly, but here's the problem. It dilutes your capacity to imagine and to see and to connect in a very real way with God.

One of the things perhaps some might fast off is all TV, all kinds of visual stuff and then just take time to be with God, reading the word of God, then allowing yourself to meditate and engage God. It would be a good thing to do. It really would be a good thing to do. I find every now and then I just have to cut everything out, so that I can just sharpen my attention again, and begin to increase the presence and awareness of the presence of God, a wonderful thing to do. Another thing you need to

do in pursuing God is to deal with issues very promptly. You know in any kind of relationship that loves dies if you don't nurture it, and it dies by little things, little disappointments, little offences, little worries and anxieties, little distractions, little diversions. It just goes quickly, so you have to deal with them very quickly. Martha was very, very busy and doing things for Jesus and she got so busy doing things for Jesus she ended up stressed out, and Jesus had to quietly put her right and say, there's something more important than just being busy with your life. You need to learn to prioritise time with Me, personally hearing from Me. How many of you are living off someone else's messages? How many of you are hearing God speak and then when someone preaches, oh the joy that what they said confirmed what God had already been saying to you? Oh, that's another area isn't it?

So loving God involves firstly our pursuit of Him and engagement with Him from the heart and spirit. Okay then. Now the second aspect of it which is also very important is my response to the word of God, and you cannot disconnect or you can't separate loving God, from how you respond to His words, so heartfelt obedience to the word of God is the significant way we demonstrate that we really do love Him. If you say you love someone but you don't listen to a word they have to say and ignore them completely, you can't really say that love is very deep. You can imagine in a marriage you know, if they say they love one another, but neither actually listens to each other and they certainly don't co-operate together, that can't be a very deep love relationship. Why would you think that you can build a deep relationship with God, without actually learning His word and being in His word and hearing what He has to say, about how to make your life run?

Jesus made that extremely clear. Let me just give you a scripture which would be very helpful - in John 14, Verse 21, He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one that loves Me. And My Father will love him, and we will manifest Ourselves to him. So loving the word of God - you say well I'm not a good reader. Well get one of them on CD and just play it over or download it onto your iPod and start to play the word of God. Let the word of God come into your life and into your mind and into your heart, and begin to find out what - let God speak to you

about how to adjust your life. You know the Bible tells us very clearly, in all the New Testament, how to live our life successfully. I've found when I look at why people don't succeed inevitably they violate God's ways, so if you were to begin to say take just a simple scripture, honour your father and your mother that it may go well for you, so you begin to meditate in that scripture, begin to think well what ways could I be dishonouring to them? What ways would I honour them? What will this enable me to do in the relationship? What can I expect God to do? See, it's very, very good.

Look, you know there's a lot of decisions people pray about. You don't have to pray about it all. The Bible says what to do, and Jesus said if you love Me, then your heart will trust Me, that when I describe things in the Bible and describe things in My word, that's actually how life works and how you can succeed. If you love Me, you'll trust that what I say will work out good for you, and you'll do it. Now that's a key thing. Got a lot of Christians don't read their Bible very often or very frequently. A lot of Christians don't take much notice, but God wants the Bible to be worked into our lives, so for example you take a scripture, you know, be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication make your request known to God, and the peace of God will keep your mind and heart. Whatever things are good, lovely, just, true and beautiful, of good report, think on these things - in Philippians 4. So the Bible says don't get uptight or anxious. I find a lot of people uptight and anxious. God says don't do that, do something else, so what does it say to do then?

It says cast your cares on Him, talk to Him, make your needs known, and start to thank Him and think positively. If you did that you wouldn't need much counselling, because you're doing what God says to engage Him. It says if you will do what He says, you're showing and demonstrating and manifesting your love, and you'll increase the dimensions of His presence working in your life. You can't separate - see the trouble is many Christians want to come into an experience someone else creates, rather than a lifestyle where they walk and enjoy God. We must be diligent with the word of God. Here's the third thing then is the area - and this is a really good one - and that is tangible kindness to people, tangible kindness to people. Look at this in 1 John 4 and Verse 20. Now love that isn't tangible in its expression is really not a living love, see? So look at

this in 1 John, Chapter 4, Verse 20, here it is. It says if someone says I love God and hates his brother he's a liar, for the one who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he's not seen? Isn't that interesting?

God connects loving Him with loving people. Why is that? Well you're okay, but people are pretty, you know, just - they're a problem. Now you see what God is saying is something like this; you can't see Me, but you can see people, and they're in your face, especially the ones you live with. How you treat them, reveals the dimensions of love you have inside you, so if you react to them and you're unforgiving and you're resentful and angry and in conflict with them, you show you haven't got much of My love inside you. You say well I love God, you see? Well I love the experiences of God so I'll get in praying and I'll get in doing this and I'll spend hours in prayer. This is wonderful to do that, but the measure of your maturity, not your experiences, your maturity is what do you do with people? If you withdraw from people you show immaturity, not spirituality. If we react and upset and we're always abrasive with people, then we show our immaturity. We show that yes, we say we're in love with God but we actually are broken and damaged and not manifesting much of it. We need to change see, need to see people like He sees them. Great scriptures in here aren't they? I love these scriptures in here - 1 John 3, Verse 14; We know we've passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. You don't love your brother, you abide in death. Well how about that?

So how can you know that you're in a place of life? How you treat people, so people who are in a place of life with God, there is something overflows that positive, encouraging, nurturing, lifting, believing in and activating people - not judgemental things and all that kind of stuff. See, we have to understand that the dimensions of maturity we have are always reflected in how we treat people. If I want to know how deep your connection is with God, I don't need to listen to all your revelations. What I really need to see is how you connect with people, how you treat people. Is there a continued flow of kindness, generosity, abundance to people? That is the measure of the outworking of what you've got with God.

I've known many people over years and particularly people who had a great revelation from the word of God, great insights to the word of God, but there was a bit of a problem. I found that when I was with them, it always felt like I never knew anything. It always felt like I was sort of inferior, and they were sort of so spiritual gurus. I used to feel a bit put down by that and then one day we said why don't we have a group and we'll just meet together and we'll talk about how to make marriage work, so we got the group and we brought out some material that would help make marriage work. They all said it was carnal, and not spiritual and they refused to come. Then I got a revelation, that for all that they knew in the word of God, their knowledge of God and maturity was not deep, because they actually could not outwork this in real life. This is one of the troubles that we have, is that we can have great experiences with God, great insights from the word, but where the love of God is outworked is with that person next to you. That is the only way you can really measure in a tangible way, what dimension of maturity you have in God in your life. Think about it.

I've met other people who've had wonderful experiences, but you know what? Problem was, they didn't know how to love people and they hid in the experience from engaging and loving people, just as the other ones we were connected with some years ago, hid in the doctrine from engaging and loving people. The bottom line is do we manifest the love of God, or do we manifest religiosity? Now when Jesus told a story and He said there was two men went into the house of God to pray; one was a tax collector and the other one was a Pharisee, one of the religious people. The religious man said oh, I thank You God I'm not like that other fellow over there, drunken boozer. I don't know why you've let him here, he smells of booze. The other one said Lord, I'm broken and damaged, Lord, please forgive me.

Jesus asked the question - who do you reckon went home that day right with God? The man who had a struggle with alcohol, or the man who had a struggle with pride? The man who had a struggle with pride couldn't see his need. He was blind, and didn't demonstrate the love of God, he demonstrated a superiority that looked down on others and found them lacking. The other man captured the heart of God when he said God, I

know I'm broken, I know I'm damaged, but I'm reaching out to You to forgive me. That man who was forgiven went away loving God very much, and that's what Jesus wants. He wants us to be able to bring our experiences of Him, our knowledge of Him into the reality of how we engage one another, and the culture around us. So often people come, they have a wonderful thing and hold their hands up on Sunday, and Monday they're a monster. That's not Christianity. It isn't. It's just not coming to grips with the core of what Jesus said to us; love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, not just on Sunday - ALL your soul, that's your emotions and your mind, ALL your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself. It should flow to where people are and engage them.

I wonder what overflow is out of your life. I wonder if we connected with the people around you, whether they would say that what you show on Sunday, you show on Monday through to Friday. Why don't we close our eyes right now. Thank You Lord, the greatest thing we could do, any of us could do, would be to receive Jesus Christ, to open our life to the love of God. Jesus made it very clear that we're born into this world separate from God because of sin. Sin is just going our own way, doing what we want, but our life is always empty and something's missing. Jesus came to reveal that love of God, to show us what God is like, then He died on the cross, to show us God is willing to remove every obstacle if we will just turn to Him in love, and in trust. You might be saying well I have to get my life alright. No, you don't have to. You just come to Jesus. He's paid the price to make your life right. You may say well I've been coming to church for a while. Coming to church doesn't make you a Christian. What counts is your personal connection by faith with Jesus Christ.

You may say well I've been trying to live a good life and trying to do the best I can. Well listen, you probably recognise if you think about it that, the best you can has still got lots of things lacking in it, and God called us not to just do the best we can. He wants us to be changed through a personal connection with Jesus Christ. Jesus said you must be born again. You must be born again. You must be born by the spirit of God in your inner man, or you can't enter the kingdom of heaven, or even see it. I wonder if there's anyone here today and you're right at that place of recognising I've been running my life without God, just trying on my own

efforts and strengths. That kind of life often is quite self-centred. We succeed, we feel real good and a bit proud. We fail, we feel quite guilty and condemned. Jesus said I want you just to be able to enjoy Me. I wonder is there any person here ready to receive Jesus Christ, to experience the life-changing power of God in your life.

Would you raise your hand and let me know if you are? Just let me know I'm ready to receive Jesus, become a Christian. Please just raise your hand and let me know I'd like to give my life to Jesus Christ, just raise your hand and let me know if there's anyone here today, I want to receive Jesus Christ, want to become a Christian, give my life to the Lord and be changed on the inside. Is there anyone here today just at that place of decision? Thank You Lord. I wonder if there are others here today and, as you're thinking about it and have listened to me today, or even just prior to this, God has been just disturbing you. You realise that you have drifted and become not extravagant and abundant in your walk with God, but quite indifferent, and quite passive, and just you need to renew your commitment, you need to come back into relationship with Him. Perhaps you're struggling with people, and you blame them and are angry at them, and God's saying you're just exposing how much you need My love and grace operating in your life.

Isn't it amazing, we want to grow and become all God wants, but in doing so we have to deal with people, and they show us up. Often they show up just how self-centred we are, and maybe you're discovering that today. Why don't you just say Lord, I need Your grace to help me. I want to come near to You, I want to express my love more openly and I want to learn to love people. I want to learn to show loving kindness consistently. If that's you, you felt God speaking to you today, I want you to just raise your hand and say I know God's talking to me today. God bless, hands going up, God bless them. Father, I just thank You.

Well the most simple way you can really tell how mature you are, is how you react when someone disagrees with you, or points out something you did wrong. That's a very simple way of showing your maturity. Many of us have a good struggle and react with that. We say God, help me, help me to overflow with a passionate love for You, and a fervent love for the people that You have sent me to, and have brought into my life. May I

continually be a blessing to them. May I show them and demonstrate to them, Your love and Your kindness and Your goodness. May my life abound with goodness and kindness. Lord, I ask that You will increase my influence upon the people around me, by increasing Your presence in my life, in Jesus' Mighty name - and everyone said [Amen.] Amen. Why don't we just stand and finish with that song we were singing before, that wonderful song, Jesus I Love You.

Summary Notes:
Introduction – God's Extravagant Love:
· Matthew 22:36 - What is the greatest commandment of the law?
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, you shall love your neighbor as yourself"
· All the requirements of the law are summed up and fulfilled in extravagant and wholehearted love for God and for people.
· Jesus came to reveal the passionate love that God has for us and to impart it to us.
· Luke 15:20 - The Prodigal Son returns to his Father.
"… the Father saw him, had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him".
· Extravagant = Going beyond what is reasonable or deserved, abundant.
· Passionate = expressing or showing strong emotion or feeling.
· We love and respond to God according to the revelation we have for Him.
· 1 John 4:19 - "We love Him because He first loved us"

Wholehearted love for God – 3 Key Aspects:
· Wholehearted = fully or completely sincere, enthusiastic, unreserved.
· Matthew 22:36 - "Love the Lord with all your heart"
- God is seeking a response from us – a heartfelt response.
- Religion is about laws, duties – God seeks a relationship.
· Halfhearted = having or showing little enthusiasm, indifferent, passive.
· No one enjoys or is blessed by the halfhearted involvement of others.
· Wholehearted love for God is the overflow of personal experience of Him.
· Wholehearted love for God is revealed in 3 key ways:

(i) Pursuing His Presence – Pursuing Him:
· Mark 3:14 - He appointed 12 that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.
· Jesus' primary concern was to develop love, intimacy, relationship.
· The disciples' success was connected to being in the presence of Jesus.
· Acts 4:13 - "…they realized they had been with Jesus"
· Personal pursuit of God is fuel for relationship.

(ii) Heartfelt Obedience to the Word of God:
· Ephesians 6:6 - "Not with eye service as men-pleasers but as bondservants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart".
· Revelation of God's love for us awakens the desire to please Him.
· Obedience birthed out of revelation of love for us produces the strongest commitment.
· Obedience based out of fear or duty is lifeless and dead.
· John 14:21 - "He who has my commandments and keep them, it is he who loves me.

· John 14:15 - “If you love me…keep my commandments”.
· The reality of our love for God is revealed in how we respond to His words.
· You cannot separate loving God from loving and keeping His Word.
· Love God = align life with the word of God – Do what God says!
· Many people like to experience the presence of God but love for God requires a response to His Word e.g. finance, relationship, priorities 1 John 5:3

(iii) Tangible Kindness to People:
· 1 John 4:20 - “If someone says he loves God but hates his brother he is a liar for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”
· Wholehearted love for God is revealed on how we treat His family.
· Our interactions with people give opportunity to reveal self-centeredness and to grow in love.
· Some Christians become so focused on personal spiritual experiences that they become unaware just how self-centered and immature they really are.
· Our spiritual maturity is displayed in how we relate to and treat people.
- Our attitude (e.g. Priest Luke 10:31, our actions, e.g. Samaritan Luke 10:33)
· 1 John 3:14-18 - “Let us not love in word or in tongue but in dead and in truth”.
· Wholehearted love for God = overflow of tangible kindness to people.

Pursuing God:
· Matthew 22:36 - “Love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul, and all your mind”
· “All” = no reserve or holding back, no half-heartedness.
· What does this look like? How does this express itself?

i) Expressive Praise:
· Psalm 47:1 - “Clap your hands all you people, shout unto God with a voice of triumph”
· Samuel 6:14 - King David danced with all his might.

ii) Tender Worship:
· John 4:24 - “God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”
· Luke 7:37-48 - Woman with the alabaster box.
· Forgives much = loved much = express affection and love.

iii) Meditate in the Word of God:
· Use your spiritual imagination to picture and ponder the Word of God.
· Picture scenes from scripture = see the details, consider the feelings.
· Prodigal Son being reunited with his Father
· Leper being touched by Jesus.
· Allow your imagination to picture truth and embrace it within.
· Repeat over and over until the Holy Spirit writes it into your inner man.
· Return to that truth during the day to become conscious of God.

iv) Deal with Issues Promptly:
· The heart is easily distracted and divided Proverbs 4:23
· E.g. offence, disappointment, love for other things
· Luke 10:41 - Martha – issue of priorities in life.

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3. Keep Yourself in the Love of God (3 of 6)

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Well we're just in a series now on the Extravagant Love of God, and I want to just do the third in this series. We're sort of breaking it up into three parts, so this is the first part, and Jesus was asked remember in Matthew 22, what's the great commandment? He said well the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, all your strength. Then the second one is love your neighbour as yourself, and on this is everything of God's requirements, the law of love, and so He laid it out. So we're looking at three aspects and three different sections we're going to cover. The first is loving God passionately, and the first we saw was that God is a passionate lover of people. He expresses His love in a whole variety of ways. You may not have experienced it, doesn't mean He hasn't expressed it, and we looked at that and we saw not only that we respond to being loved by loving Him.

The Bible says we love Him, because He first loved us. Our loving God, our passion for God, is an overflow of responding to what He's given us with hunger and appreciation and longing for more. So this part of what we're doing is the first part, loving the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength. We've covered two, the passionate love of God, and loving God with a whole heart. Today I want to speak about keeping yourself in the love of God, keeping yourself in the love of God, then following that we're going to look at a couple of messages around loving yourself. Jesus said love your neighbour as yourself, so one of the challenges in loving people, people can be difficult, people can drain us, people can be disappointing, all kinds of things can happen when you work with people. It's only to be expected you have all these challenges, but if we're going to move to touching the lives of people and impacting them, we need good foundations.

One of the foundations is a passionate love of God, that we ourselves are continually being fuelled with an experience of God's love, His abundance, His care, His support, His strength, His wisdom. We need to have that, so that's what we're focussing on at this stage but if we don't have a source then we'll look for that elsewhere, so people tend to look to meet the needs that only God can meet, they look for it in other things.

So the source of addictions, whether it be pornography, alcohol, gambling, workaholism or whatever it is, the source of that is a deep rooted sense of feeling unloved, so unless that's addressed, the addiction can never be solved. Some people pour out their need to be loved into helping people, so helping people can be more a means to get my own needs filled than actually overflowing the love of God. So it's very, very important, one, that we develop a vital spiritual life, so we have inner resourcing to be able to accomplish things for God, and two, that we have a proper value on ourself, neither at the one end, so self-centred everything's about us and what we can get, nor at the other end, where we have such little value on ourself that people walk over us, we're exploited, taken advantage of, and we burn out.

Burning out is the consequence of being unable to set good boundaries that define who you are, and recognise what you can give, so we'll look at that in another session. So I want to finish the first of the three on loving God whole-heartedly. We started the whole passionate love of God, now I want to look at keeping yourself in the love of God, so we need just a few things as we talk about the love of God. The first thing is it's the nature of God to love. It's His nature. That's who He is and heaven, heaven is filled with love. It's an atmosphere, it's a spiritual reality. It's the life of God, when it manifests itself people feel embraced and celebrated and loved, for example if you're going into a place where there's people you can feel the atmosphere. If you are not welcome, you feel you're not welcome in lots of little ways, or when you go to a place where you're celebrated and welcomed and affirmed and gathered up, you feel something come around you. You feel welcomed. There's an environment that nurtures your connecting, and so in heaven there's a spiritual environment full of the love of God. The trouble is that's in heaven, we need it here.

So to get it here requires that we learn how to receive and bring that life into the world around us. Firstly you've got to receive it for yourself. You can't give someone what you don't have. I've been in meetings where people have been touched by the power of God, set free, particularly our freedom seminar where I've done in Bible schools, we've been there for a while and we've done seminars here, or even in Lyn's restoration

seminar. Then there's always a part where suddenly the place becomes filled with the atmosphere of God's love, and it's a spiritual reality, and people just cry. They just feel so touched on the inside. They feel loved, they feel alive. I've been in some meetings where people, the atmosphere of God's love was so thick no one said a word nor moved. They just sat weeping, feeling the love of God. It's a spiritual reality. You may not have had much, you may not know how to access it, but it is available for you as we'll see today. It's our responsibility to learn how to access it.

Now we're just going to have a look into Ephesians, Chapter 3, and I want to just read two or three verses here. It says now - Verse 16 - that God would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with His might, through His spirit in the inner man. This is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians believers - that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now notice what he's praying. He's praying the end result that believers would be filled with God. Isn't that interesting? Filled with God, and he says a key to it is being strengthened in your inner man, in your spirit man, by the Holy Spirit and being rooted and grounded in the love of God. So the love of God is like a soil within which a healthy spiritual life grows.

The love of God is a foundation upon which you can build a strong life that can touch the lives of others, so love of God is very, very tangible. When God's love manifests, it's tangible, it can be felt and experienced. Love of God is also incredibly practical. God so loved He gave His Son, and we read the life of Jesus, that's the practical love of God, meeting needs, touching people, entering people's lives, developing and calling forth the potential of people and finally, sacrificing His life for every person. That is tangible, absolutely tangible. So there is a spiritual dimension to it, the manifest reality of God's presence and then there's also an incredibly practical dimension to it. You can't have one without the other. They both go together. Now notice here it says being rooted and grounded in love. The word rooted means to become stable, or to

have deep roots like a big, big tree going right down into the ground, and so have you ever seen a little tree in the wind? It gets blown over. See a big tree, and it stands strong in the storm. It's usually got an extensive root system, lots of little wee things that have gone down, and so it's saying that our life needs to be like that, internally rooted or drawing from the love of God.

It uses another word to create a different picture, a picture of a building going up, and the thing that makes a building stable is a foundation. So you don't see the foundation, but it supports the building. It said founded or built upon a strong foundation, the love of God. So what He's speaking of in here is that, for us to manifest the life of God, we have to deepen, strengthen the foundations and root systems of our inner life, your connection with the Lord. How that outworks of course is quite simple. We'll share with you about that, but it does open us up to start to think; well how can I get deeper rooted in God? How can I strengthen that? See, this is a core thing in the Christian life, is your personal access to being loved, valued and spoken to and affirmed by God Himself. That was what motivated Jesus' ministry in life. Paul said that's what motivated him, in 2 Corinthians 5. He says this, he says the love of Christ motivates me or compels me to go out and do things. He had such a passion burning love of God in his life, it moved him to do incredible things. I'll share with you a little bit about that tonight.

So let's have a look at another verse. I want you to have a look with me in Jude, Verse 20, just before Revelation. It's a little wee book right at the back there. You can just about miss it if you don't know where it is - Jude, Verse 20, it's only got one chapter, and I want us to read Verses 20 and 21. Now you beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. Notice what it tells us now. It says keep yourself in the love of God, implying no one can do this for you. This is your responsibility, is to discover, nurture and hold onto the reality that you are loved and valued by God. If we don't do that, we will look for substitutes, or be overwhelmed by lacks and problems and issues. It's something we're responsible - notice it says you do it, you keep yourself in the love of God. Keep means to guard from being taken

away or losing something, to guard yourself or literally it means, focus your attention on this so it doesn't get taken away from you.

Now that's an extraordinary statement, because the Bible says the love of God is unchangeable. God is unchangeable, God doesn't change. Today He loves you as much as He loved you yesterday, and He'll love you the same tomorrow. He is unchangeable in His love, but our positioning to receive and to walk in the reality of it can change. We can feel very close or very far. We can be enjoying that love, or we can be missing that love. We can be longing for it, or we can be overflowing with it, and if you're longing for it, that's a thirst inside you that you're going to have to fill somewhere, and as Jesus spoke to the woman in the well, she filled that thirst for being loved, with ungodly relationships and with trying to desperately find some man that would meet the need in her life. All of us are designed to have this thirst met through relationship with God, so that raises a number of questions. Here's the first one. How can I experience the love of God? What can take my awareness of that away? What have I got to watch out for that would steal that from me? Then how can I keep myself in the love of God?

When you're reading scripture it always helps you to ask questions, so the first thing I want to look at is just the area of how can I experience the love of God, or can I experience the love of God? What is involved in that? I want to share with you just a passage that will just help and it's found in John, Chapter 17. There are two things I want to draw your attention to that are quite vital in helping us come to grips with being loved as a person by God, then we'll look at some of the things that we struggle against sometimes. Let's read in John 17 and this is Jesus' last prayer as He finished His ministry.

Verse 20, He's praying for the believers. I don't pray for these ones, my disciples alone, but for everyone who will believe in Me through their word. He's praying for us, you're a follower of Christ. Now here's what He's praying, that they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me and I in You; that they may be one in Us, so that - there's the outcome - the world may believe You sent Me, and the glory You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them and You in Me, they may be perfect in one, that the world may know that You have sent Me,

and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that those whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me from before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

Now when you look at it initially, it's just not easy to get to grips with it. There's a lot of things that Jesus says there that's recorded, but I want to pull it apart and just bring out some very simple things in it. Jesus is praying, and He's concerned not just about His disciples. He's concerned about every person who would believe in Him, because of the disciple's mission, in other words us. He's really praying two things; number one, that the disciples, the believers, would experience intimacy and the love of God. That's His prayer, you would experience the love of God for yourself. That's the first thing. The second thing is that His followers would express the love of God in such a way to one another, that there would be unity in the church, and that people would see how they love one another, and would recognise only God could do something like this. So in other words notice what He's doing. He's saying His prayer is that believers would experience love, not just know about it but to feel, experience it in such a way, it would change how we relate to one another, that the outcome would be unity and connectedness to one another and a love for one another that is visible, that people can see and say man, God has got to be here, look at what's happening in these people's lives. That's His prayer.

Experiencing it, and expressing it see, and it's virtually the core of the law isn't it aye, that you love the Lord your God and experience His love, and also you love the people that you can see, so that's the core of what He's doing. So how do believers experience such a love that impacts them, and unites them, then they begin to overflow? How do you do that? So He says there are two aspects to that, and I want to just look at the two aspects of it, then we'll break it down very, very practically. So I want to go in and first of all look at the second aspect, and the second aspect which is mentioned here is this. You notice what He says, Verse 26, I

have declared to them Your name. I have revealed what You are like, and will continue to reveal what You are like, and here's what the outcome of Me revealing what the Father is like, that the love that You have for Me will also be in them.

So the very same relationship Jesus had with His Father, the very same love that sustained Him in every adversity, He wants you to have it, and He said the way it comes, is by it being revealed to you. You can't have something you don't know about, so He says I have made Your name known, or literally, I have revealed what You are like, so how does Jesus reveal what God is like, and continue to reveal what God is like? Simply through three main ways. One way that Jesus has revealed what God is like is just through creation. The Bible tells us Jesus created all things. When you go out into creation, you get alone and away from all the busyness and you take a few moments of solitude and look at maybe the universe, the sky, the stars, you look at the sea. You become aware of how vast and great God is, and yet He's interested in you, so creation itself tells us what an awesome, amazing, incredible God and I'm connected to Him.

The second thing is about the life of Jesus. Jesus' own words reveal what God is like, so if you want to know what God is like, you've got to look at the life of Jesus Christ and become connected to Him, so the first way that we experience the love of God is by developing an on-going personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That means that we see what He's made and appreciate it, that we listen and read His words and we begin to dwell on them and let them change the way we view life, and that we draw from His life and what He did to others reveals to us something about what God's like, so for example how did Jesus handle an adulteress? Well look at what He did to the leper. How did Jesus handle the woman at the well? How did Jesus handle people? That's what God is like, so if I read the word of God, and begin to study the life of Jesus and open myself to Him, then I begin to start to access the life that God has through personal relationship. There's another way too, and notice what He says here in Verse 22. I'm going to make this very practical. He says - now notice this - He said, the glory You gave me I

have given them, that they may be one - then Verse 23 - the world may know You've sent Me, and have loved them, as You have loved Me.

Now notice here He says that I have not only made You known through life and teaching and whatever, I've also given to them the same glory You gave Me. Well I wonder what that means and I wonder when He got it? You've got to ask questions of scripture, otherwise you sort of read it and it doesn't impact your life - so He said the glory You - that's the Father - gave Me. Remember He left everything behind when He came to earth - the glory You gave Me, I have given it to them, and the purpose of it is to unite them, so that they may experience Your love, and people will obviously see it. So here are the two things; one is the personal life of Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him. The second one is this one here, it is prayer, and openness to the Holy Spirit revealing God to us, openness to the glory of God, whatever all that means. So if I encounter or experience the glory of God, it changes me. I begin to feel touched by the very character of God, the very life of God. I begin to experience the very life of God, the same way Jesus did, and that changes me, just as building relationship with Jesus, getting into His word and seeing His patterns of life and teaching and applying them to my life, also do that.

So both things are to accomplish the same end: having an experience of the glory of God, whatever that all means; and secondly studying the life and ministry and accessing Jesus by faith, and allowing His life to begin to become the pattern we build our life on. Those things make it possible for us to experience the love of God. Now here's a question then. The glory You gave Me; when did He receive that glory? What did it look like? I'd like to know, because He said it's for you, and for me.

So the answers are found in scripture. You've got to compare one scripture with another, so if you look in 2 Peter 1 and Verse 5, it tells us when that happened, then in Matthew it tells us what actually happened. Verse 16 - 2 Peter 1 and Verse 16 sorry. We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of the majesty of what He will be like when He comes again, for He received from God the Father, honour and glory. When did He get it? When there came a voice to Him, from the Excellent Glory: This is My beloved Son, in

whom I am well pleased. And we heard this voice which came from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain. I won't go into this too much, but just pick up the obvious here, that He received glory from the Father, when He was in the mountain, when He heard the voice. So if I can come into such an experience and hear the same thing, then I can have an impartation of the glory, goodness, character, life of God. It tells us when He got it. When we go and look at it, we see what He got, and we have right and privilege to access that ourselves.

Okay, let's have a look in Matthew, Chapter 17. In 2 Peter, Peter was describing what he experienced. We're going to read what he experienced. He said we experienced what it will be like, we saw what it'll be like, when Jesus comes again. We saw what He will look like. Now what is he describing? He's describing what happened in Matthew 17; after six days He took Peter, James and John his brother, and led them up the high mountain by themselves. Verse 2, He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, His clothes became as white as the light. Now just stop there. As He was praying, it tells us in Luke, He began to change. Something in Him began to like a light bulb brightening up, began to rise and began to glow until it was like there light shining out of Him. He totally was changed, everything about Him radiated life and light and power. Now this is Jesus in a human body like yours, so what was the hidden life inside? It was the spirit of glory, it was the Holy Ghost. It's the same spirit given to you. It's the same spirit that will quicken your body, and raise you from the dead. That same spirit was in Him, but at that particular situation, the spirit of God began to radiate forth. It's like the light breaking through the cloud of covering and showing what was really inside Him.

It says it doesn't yet appear what we shall be. In other words you can't tell looking at us now what we're going to be like, but when He comes we shall be like Him, that same life, that same Holy Ghost, that same glory inside you - so there's a glory God has imparted in you, when you receive the Holy Spirit, and all the virtues of God are in that inner joining with God.

You have to build your inner life if you want to be filled with the life, the energy, the vitality, the revelation of God. You build your inner life through

prayer and other things I'll share with you shortly. Okay, now if we go down there was something else happened, so not only did He shine like someone flicked the lights on inside but something else happened. It says - Verse 5 - While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying, this is My beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. Hear Him! Let's stop. Now this is a different manifestation of glory. This is God's glory coming down upon. Now when we look at it you see bright cloud. Well most people then think of a nice sunny day and there's a cloud up there and it was shiny bright. That's it. That's about all we get, would that be right? How many thought that when you read that, it was a bright cloud? Okay, I guess it was a bit sort of a cloud. Of course the thing is, well you know we've all gone over to Taupo and climbed up the mountain there, and as you go up there then you come into the clouds, and go down the other side, so we kind of think it's a bit of that with some sun on it. It's nothing like that.

This was not a natural cloud. This was a cloud, a manifestation visibly tangible. It's a visible manifestation of God. That word there where it says 'bright' cloud, the word means literally to emanate out rays of light, brilliant, shimmering rays of light filled with gold. It was a manifestation of God Himself, but notice this; it says out of that cloud came some words - this is My beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased, hear Him! Now notice this. The glory that God has given Jesus Christ, the Father gave Jesus Christ, He wants us to have, so how do we have it, and what does it do? Well first He puts His spirit, the spirit of glory inside us, to begin to renovate us, and illuminate us on the inside, and one day it will come to its fullness. Also, we can experience God, and when we experience God, now he experienced a tangible glory of God, same as they had in the Old Testament, which came down inside the tabernacle. I've heard reports in meetings around the world at times of like a mist, a shimmering mist coming into the house of God, the glory, but here's the bit I wanted to draw your attention to.

He said he received glory when he heard the voice see, so what did he get when he heard the voice? Now this is the bit he got, otherwise you get caught up in all the manifestations of shimmering lights and lightening

and stuff like that. This is what he got; he got words. He got words that were powerful, spirit filled, energising words, that formed a part of the foundation of his life. Notice what he heard; this is My beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. He got words of identity, who I am. Now most people who I am is measured by what I own and who likes me and what positions I have, but our identity is to come out of what God says about us. I am a child of God, born again by the spirit of God! God is my Father. Who am I? I'm a child of God. You've got to be able to answer that.

Notice the second thing is, My beloved Son, I belong to Him, My, My, My beloved. You and I need to hear God say, you're My beloved, you belong to Me, I belong to you. You're loved and valued. That imparts to us the things we can't get enough of in the world see? And then the final thing, it says I'm well pleased, words of affirmation, how valuable I am. Now people starve for these things, people starve because we don't know - we starve spiritually and emotionally. Because we are not sure of who we are, we become insecure because we're not sure who's we are or who we belong to. We feel uncertainty about who we are, and what we have, and we don't know how valuable we are in God, if we don't receive from God, then we're going to look for it somewhere else, look for it in your job, you look for it in a position, look for it in possessions, we look for something to meet these core needs - but the glory God gives us, is the glory of being a son of God, of having access to a Father who is an eternal Father. He's got great plans for His family. What a privilege. What a privilege to have these things, see?

How do I get into that? I have to pray and pursue God. Jesus went up on a mountain and pursued His Father and out of pursuit He experienced what the Father had for Him. I guess we'll have it the same way. It's the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal God's glory, God's goodness, God's love, so the Holy Spirit comes in, you have an anointing within, you have to learn to grow internally in your capacity to carry, and be sensitive to the anointing of the spirit of God. You have to learn how to pray in such a way, that you begin to encounter His experience, but ultimately it comes down, that you have revelation to your heart that reassures you, strengthens you, gives you vitality as a loved, vital, important person with something to contribute to this world. You're unique. I've got about three

or four clips of a Christian guy, I'm going to show one of them tonight, who was born with no limbs. He wrestled continually with feeling he's of no value, and he couldn't do this and he couldn't do that, he couldn't do whatever, until he got perspective in Christ, and saw there's no limits for me - unless I decide there's limits.

So now he supports 60 orphans himself, travels the world. He's got no arms and no legs, and I'll show a little clip on him tonight, and you'll hear a little bit about just the spirit of the man. I'm so impressed with that man. See, he can swim, he can do all kinds of stuff, and I saw him there, a video clip of him walking down one of the streets with distressed people, and he's got a mission out there to preach all around the world. He said I've got a dream in my heart to do these great things. There's no limits! He's writing a book at the moment called No Arms, No Legs and No Limits. Don't you like that! But he got revelation of his value to God and arose inside. He's able to do great things. Just like Jesus, he had a revelation of who he was, was able to rise up and do great things.

Okay, so if the knowledge of the love of God comes by revelation and by connecting to and studying and focussing my life around the kind of person Jesus was, then what will take away the love of God, the awareness or consciousness of His presence? There are several things. In Jude 20 it says keep yourself in the love of God. Now why do I have to guard or protect or watch over this area of encountering, experiencing and walking in the love of God? Very simply there's an enemy wants to keep me from it. The foundation for our life, the foundation for our walk with God and to be able to make an impact is to know we're loved. Now what can take it away? Well very simple; the devil brings spiritual pressure around us. He puts pressure you either intermittently in seasons, or constantly. Some of you today may be under tremendous pressure. Now how do evil spirits bring pressure around us? What happens inside us? What goes on? How could I know that I'm under attack and that there's every chance if I lose my focus that I'm loved by God and don't come into that experience of Him, I'll go off track?

Several things - number one is constant feelings that go like this: I'm not good enough. I don't feel good enough. How many people have had some of those feelings? See, right, well that's a spiritual pressure to

cause you to feel not good enough so you let go of being loved by God and don't go there for Him to meet that need. He says your good enough for Me, based on the work My Son did. Feelings of loneliness and isolation are very common, but that's the result of a spiritual pressure that comes around us, to disconnect us and cause us to feel God isn't near me, people aren't near me, no one loves me. It's a terrible place to get. It steals away revelation of the love of God. You've got to guard against isolation and loneliness. There's a place for quietness and being alone with God and having time of solitude, but we're talking about the feelings of being alone and not wanted.

Awareness of personal lacks - how many of you have struggled with awareness, an overwhelming sense that I lack? This is a pressure comes around to get your mind so it shifts away, actually all that God called me to do I can do it. Everything I need I have. All I've got to do is to trust Him and engage with life, but when you're obsessed with your lacks you withdraw, and you go below your limits. Another way enemy presses us is nagging accusations, continued accusations, pointing out your faults, what's wrong with this and that and what you did. When that stuff comes around you, it pressures you so you don't feel as though you're loved by God. You draw back from fellowship and everything else. These things have to be overcome. Temptations to find a substitute, so most temptation is around finding a substitute for the reality of a connection with God. That's all it is. This will fix you quick - but after it's fixed you up, then you feel bad again, and you need more, and you feel guilty as well. See, so none of the things that are at the other end of sin can satisfy us. The pleasures of sin only last a season. It feels good, then you feel bad see?

So stirring up wrong beliefs inside us - so all of these are things that happen. They come around you. Now the reality is, I experience all of those like you do, all of those things, feelings of inadequacy, feelings of lack, feelings of loneliness. I mean I go through the whole deal of all these things, but I've learnt that there are some things you can do that will get you so you can subdue those attacks of the enemy, and keep repositioning yourself to be filled again by the Lord. Now the thing is, no one's going to do it for me, just like no one's going to do it for you. You

have to decide to do this for yourself. You do have a real devil and he is committed to sabotage your whole life and your destiny. It's your responsibility to learn how to access God regularly, so that the inner tank of His love is filled, and you have a security in your life. I know people that are just workaholics. You know what a workaholic is? It's the same as an alcoholic, absolutely destructive to their marriage, their family, their loved ones. It's the same deal. It's just an 'aholic. There's sexaholics as well, there's all kinds of - sportsaholics.

Basically it's an addiction to a substitute, because I can't stand the pain of what's really going on inside me, of feeling so terribly unloved. That's at the core of it all. It is at the core of it all, so you can tell someone to have balance in their life but if they've got a driving need to be loved and they think it's going to be in their work, they'll never stop working like crazy. Long after they've just ruined everything around them, and they're still driven by work, they still can't see what they're doing - like a person drinking can't see what they're doing. A person gambling can't see what they're doing, until their world falls apart, that it's a substitute for the reality of God's love in a personal relationship leading to a balance in life because you're not driven anymore. Getting the idea? You've gone all quiet - I know I'm talking to someone next to you.

Okay, so how can I keep myself in the love of God? Let me just give you a few practical things because we need to just get some simple keys, how can I keep myself in the love of God. Well you notice that in Jude 20, the whole environment for keeping yourself in the love of God, is an environment of prayer. Prayer is the key factor in it. Notice praying in the Holy Ghost, building up yourself in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Prayer in the Holy Ghost is to energise our spirit man, but there's some things we also need to do. Here's number one. Number one is we need to constantly expect and anticipate and welcome God's mercy and forgiveness, looking for the mercy of God, looking for it, expecting it. Now a lot of people when they've failed don't expect God, they think they don't deserve it see? I don't deserve that mercy. Well God gives it to you, whether you deserve it or not see, so God is wanting you to believe, and if you blow it and fall over quickly get up, quickly come back, expect mercy, get it over and done with, move on, see?

So if I want to keep myself in the love of God, I've got to deal with failures and mistakes and errors, and just humbly admit they're there, confess them to the Lord, put it right and then move on. Don't beat yourself up for the lacks and failures. Stop doing that. That's not how you keep yourself in the love of God, beating yourself up all the time because there's this and that wrong with you. Just get over it, because God has, at the cross in Calvary, see. So the second thing is we need to meditate in the love of God, need to take time to allow your thoughts and your mind to centre around and focus on the person of God and how much He loves you, so you need to picture it in a very real way. Use your spiritual imagination and allow your life to meditate on scriptures until your mind - see what your mind meditates on, you'll begin to become aware of and you'll begin to feel. Thoughts and feelings are very closely connected. If we talk about food right now, and I described some food to you, very soon you'll start to feel incredibly hungry. That's all you'll be able to think about, because as your mind fills with thoughts and they become like pictures in you, then emotions start to come and even your body starts to respond.

So meditation, consciously using my imagination to dwell on, embrace and see the love of God, very tangibly the person of Jesus Christ welcoming me, loving me and to meditate on that, to see it over and over, to imagine how it feels. If you just ponder the truth of it, and do it regularly - now you only have to do it just in moments through the day. Take a minute break and stop, just quieten down, and just take a moment to become still inside, become conscious God is with me. Now initially that may take some discipline, because many minds are so busy, but it's a discipline to train your inner life, to just refocus and centre back on the love of God, the person of Jesus Christ. See, so you meditate, you repeat that over and over so it constantly goes back, Jesus is my source. Go back to become conscious, I'm loved, He values me, thank You Lord. Begin to dwell in that, I start to become aware of His presence again.

Now you see it's a discipline inside. Now most people want to fill their outside world with stuff to satisfy the inner needs, but if we will build our inner life, our outside world will change. Consciously, as you change on the inside, things around you change as well. Here's another thing we need to do is manage your emotions and your thoughts. Now your

thoughts and emotions go together, so thoughts that aren't right, quickly address them because they'll lead to emotions and feelings and old ways. You know, you think about someone, the injustice someone did you, you'll start to feel angry. You begin to think about how much you lack, and how much trouble you have, and you start to feel sorry for yourself. You have a choice what you'll set your thoughts on, and we have to choose to think the things that are good. If you start to allow your mind to go to all the things you have to do, you start to feel anxious and divided, and you lose consciousness that God is with you.

Here's another thing. I'll give you a couple of other things. They're also quite simple, so those are all internal things, consciously and quickly expecting God to forgive me, rushing back into His presence when I've blown it, meditating on His love and dwelling on that, beginning to build an awareness that God is with me, disciplining thoughts and emotions. Those are all very, very simple things you can do, and there's a couple of other ways we can actually experience the love of God. One of the ways is learn to receive from other people. Jesus also lives in a body of people, and so He calls us to love one another, and sometimes people feel so far from God, that what they need is someone who can represent God to them, someone who can actually - it's like God in a skin, coming to them. We need to be able to open ourselves to receive being loved, valued and supported by other believers. Oh, well I'd rather go it alone with God. No, no, no, we're not called to go alone with God.

One of the evidences that the glory of God is growing in our life, and that we're becoming stable in love, is we begin to engage people and connect with people. Why is that? We'll see that just in a moment. So God reveals His love through people sometimes. I remember in my first year teaching, how I was just absolutely desperate. It was really not going good for me, and I got to the end of myself one day. I said that's it Lord! I've had enough of this. This just sucks, I'm out of here, so I'm going to put in my resignation, we'll leave and go somewhere by a beach where I can fish like I always wanted to anyway. I got the place in mind, I got the magazine out, had to have a look at it and see the job away up there Warkworth way, I could just see myself. I pictured there at the beach, out

there loving - oh man, don't go there. [Laughter] Maybe for a holiday, you know?

Anyway I said but Lord, You know You brought us here, and so if I'm going to shift well, You've got to help me out here to keep me here, so I'm out of here unless You help me. What I want You to do is send someone to help me, strengthen me and support me, encourage me. You know I hadn't even finished - I don't even know whether I prayed it out loud, or just thought it out loud, but anyway whatever it was there was a knock at the door as soon as I finished. I couldn't believe it. Who the heck could be coming here, it's the middle of the day, I'm home and no one expects me home - and it was my Pastor. He said I felt God put it on my heart to come around and see you like you needed encouragement. I've come to pray for you. I thought oh, I just swallowed it! I just cried like a baby. [Laughter] Now I received the love of God through a person, and it strengthened me, so don't just think you go it alone and get it all from God. None of us goes it that way. Even Jesus said to His disciples, come and join Me, this is a very difficult hour for Me, come and join Me in prayer. I really would like your support.

Now people don't give us everything and they do fail us and they don't come up when we expect, but nevertheless, they are a way God brings His love to us. Don't underestimate how God can love you through people.

One man - I've probably shared this story, it's still a good one to tell - first year pastoring, and one of the young men in the church, we had a boy who was a bit older, he used to play with our kids, and play with Peter. Then he had a baby, and we were so excited about the baby, and three months later I got a call in the night, he said our baby just died. I couldn't even believe what I was hearing. How could a baby die? I mean how could a baby die! I didn't know anything in those days, and I went out there in the car to see him and God, what do I say? I don't know what to say. How do I pray? I didn't know what to do, and the Lord said don't say anything. I want you just to go to him and hug him. As I went to him, I began to think I wonder what he's going through, and began to think of my own children as I was going there, and I began to start to feel what it would be like to lose a child.

I went there and I got to the house and he saw the car pull up because the lights were on and so on, so he came out to see me. I went over to him - we walked together and I still remember as clear as it was yesterday - put my arms around him, and I just hugged him and we both cried. I didn't know what else to say. We just got our way through it the best we could, and got through the service and everything. Years later he told me, all my life I'd been so shut down I never was ever able to experience being loved, but that day when you said nothing and just hugged me, I felt the love of God for the first time, and he cried. It changed his life. He became trained later and become a Pastor. Isn't that amazing? Amazing, just the love of God, so it's got a very spiritual dimension to it, and it's got an incredibly practical part to it as well.

I can remember one time, we were very low in our life in ministry and I'd been through tremendous stress and pressure, and we went away for a break and a holiday. I didn't actually have enough money to get back, and I said well I'm going Lord, if you want me back You've got to provide the dough. That's it, so I'm out of here. So we went there, and we were looked after up in a camp up in Whangarei. Anyway, one night someone said hey, won't you come around for a meal? I said that sounds pretty good, and so we'll come round. We got around their place, they said well actually it's a surprise and you're not coming with us. There's something else we've got in mind, it's a surprise. Oh, fantastic, so they said well follow these directions to this house. Oh wow, that's mysterious. Followed these directions to this house, and got to this house, and there were lights on and we came in, the door was open and there was a sign up, welcome Mike and Joy. I thought that's unusual, and I guess that means we should go in - knocked on the door, no one answers, we came in, and there's music and there's soft lights, and this table set for two people, and there's a meal laid out.

We had a note with a scripture of encouragement, saying we'll come and we'll give you coffee later on at 9.30, but we want you just to enjoy the meal the Lord's provided for you both. So the practical - they said later on, they said God has put it into our heart to help couples under stress by just putting on a special meal. He said the only condition is, you can't tell anyone who we are. We sat at the table, and just wept that someone we

didn't know, cared for us, and we knew that past that and beyond that, it was God showing His love through someone, so that's over spiritualised. We are all people, and we need the love of God through one another, as well as through personal encounter and sometimes when you can't get it through personal encounter, it comes the other way. God loves us, and we can become a community that love people.

That brings us to the last one, if we want to keep in the love of God, we have to practice loving people. John 14 tells us that Jesus said if you love Me You'll keep My commandments and here's the one, God commanding you to love one another. He said oh Lord, He said well if you'll do this My love will abide with you, we'll manifest ourself. He said well how - we'll love one another, well that's not so easy Lord you know? Some people are pretty nasty, not very nice. He said well you know, when you love, you'll learn to forgive them. How are you going to learn to forgive? Because love forgives. I'm going to send some people and they're going to offend you and upset you, and you've got a chance to learn what real love is, and to grow in forgiveness. There'll be some people upset you, and you'll get irritated, and it'll be a chance for you to grow in patience. There'll be some people and they don't deserve anything and you'll give them kindness, and you'll learn what it is to grow in kindness, so it's impossible to grow mature in love, without some people to practice on.

So Jesus revelation that we could experience the love of the Father, is deeply connected to our relating with people, and overflowing and interacting with them. You just can't have one without the other, so right now just as we finish, let's just close our eyes, want to just bring your attention around one of the greatest, the most practical gifts of all, and I'm going to just get you to - it'll take about one and a half minutes and then we'll finish. I want you just to meditate for a moment, on how great you are loved by God, how valuable you are. The Bible says see what manner of love the Father has, and while we were sinners Christ died for us. I want you just for a moment, just to allow your mind if you can focus for a few minutes more, allow your imagination just to picture what I describe. As you picture it, allow your heart to arise in response.

I want us just for a moment to just travel back in time 2000 years to a small place, a hill outside Jerusalem, where there was a man crucified,

because He loved you. As you kneel in the rocky hard place, and look down you can see how they've dug a hole out in the ground, and the post, the wooden post that He's hanging on has been inserted in the ground, and some rocks pushed into it to keep it stable. You see the dark stain in the dust, the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for you, because He loves you. As you look up, you look at the cross, you can see the blood running down it, freshly running down it, still running down it. This blood was for you, to cleanse you of every failure, every mistake, and make you perfectly acceptable to the Father in heaven. If you lift your eyes a little more, you can see His feet, huge spikes, spiking them to the cross, so He can't move them, and if He tries to move them, nerves just shriek with pain. This blood was for you.

Begin to look up His body, His legs, His torso, you realise that a cruel whip of a Roman soldier has literally lacerated and torn deep welts, deep gashes in His legs, His back, His sides, stripped the flesh off and cut it right open, some places to the bone. He did this because He loved you and me. His blood was for you. If you look towards His arms, you can see huge spikes holding His wrists to the cross, right through the nervous area. Of course in that position He has cramps in His body, and so He has to pull Himself up on those spikes to try and breathe, and then drop back down again, so it goes on for hours, terrible, agonising pain, struggling to breathe, and gradually the lungs filling with water and blood. This was for you, because He loves you. You can't get more tangible than that. As you look at His head, you see a crown of thorns, huge, deep, long spikes beaten in, and you can remember when you had a little prickle and how that hurt - what must this be like? The mockery, the abuse, the hurt, the pain, and as you look in His eyes, there's no accusation, no condemnation; Father, forgive them, they didn't know when they sinned what it would cost to redeem them.

That's how much He loves you. God so loved you He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ. He practically and willingly gave up His life on the cross so you could be joined back in relationship with God, discover that relationship with all it's depths, discover the purpose it has for your life and live a life rooted in the love of God for you. If God was willing to do that for us when we didn't even know Christ, and walked in hardness of

heart and sin, how much more now will He give you everything you need? Father, release Your love, a revelation of Your presence and love into the heart of this church, that it will overflow in love and unity for one another, will overflow to connect with our community in a greater dimension.

Summary Notes:
Introduction:
· 1 John 4:16 - Love is the Nature of God. Love fills the atmosphere of heaven
· The Love of God is constant and unchanging- it is His nature, who He is
· The Love of God is tangible – it can be experienced, it can be felt as spiritual reality
· The Love of God is practical – it can be experienced through acts of loving kindness John 3:16
· Our love for God is a response to first being loved by Him 1 John 4:19
· Ephesians 3:16-19 - God desires us to be rooted and grounded in the love He has for us.
Ø Rooted = 4492 = to become stable, strengthened with an extensive unseen root system
Ø Grounded = 2311 = to lay a foundation or lay a basis for a lifestyle
Ø The Love of God for us stabilises and strengthens us to serve God, act as ambassadors 2 Corinthians 5:14
· Jude 20 - "Keep yourself in the Love of God", look for the mercy of the Lord Jesus
Ø keep = 5083 = to guard from loss or theft by keeping the eye upon e.g. focus
It's something you and I have to do, our responsibility
Ø 3 Questions:
i) How can I experience the love of God?
ii) What must I guard against? What can take it away?
iii) How do I keep myself in the love of God?

How can I Experience the Love of God? Can I Experience the Love of God?
· John 17:20-26 - Jesus prayer for believers – experience the love of God.
· vs 23 - "…world may know that you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me …"
· vs 26 - "… that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them …"
· Jesus prayer:
i) Followers/Believers imitate the love of the Father and to experience it.
ii) Followers/Believers express that love in ways that are evident to the world.

· How do Believers experience the love of God that invites and reveals Christ?
i) Personal Relationship by Faith in Jesus Christ:
· John 17:26 - "I have declared your name…" = to make known who Christ is like. Jesus revealed what God is like.
· How?
I) The Works of God – creation, miracles
II) The Life of Jesus – words, relationships, sacrifice
III) The Body of Christ – receiving the kindness and encouraging words
· Develop an ongoing relationship with Christ and the Father. Open yourself to Him, get access to what He has to offer

ii) Prayer and Openness to the Holy Spirit:

· John 17:22-23 - “the glory which you (Father) gave me, I have given them” = unity and love for people to see.
· Jesus has given to believers the glory which the Father gave Him.
· When did the Father give Him glory? What did He experience?
· 2 Peter 1:16-18 - “… he received honor and glory when such a voice came to him…’
· Matthew 17:1-5 - “… a voice came out of the cloud saying: This is my beloved son in whom I’m well pleased. Hear Him!”
· Luke 9:28 - As Jesus prayed the glory within Him was manifested
· Also the glory upon Him was manifested, radiant life and power
· Bright = to be composed of light, to shine forth rays of light
· There was a visible and audible manifestation of the glory of God
· Note the words:
I) Identity – Who I am
II) Love – Whose I am
III) Affirmation – How valuable I am
· Prayer opened the way to experience the glory of God.
· The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the glory of God to us so that we are filled with God
· Learn to grow and pray to encounter God, have revelation who you are, unique, one and only. There are no limits unless you decide there are limits

What must I guard against? What will take the Love of God away?:
· Jude v20 - “Keep yourself in the love of God” - make it a focus of your life.
· We have a personal enemy who seeks to steal God’s abundant love for us.
· How?
Ø Spiritual pressure on the mind, emotion, spirit
Ø Constant feelings - “Not good enough”
- “Loneliness and isolation”
- Awareness of personal lacks, short comings
Ø Constant nagging accusations in the mind
Ø Constant distractions – cares of life e.g. Martha Luke 10:40
Ø Temptations to find substitutes for God
Ø Stirring up wrong beliefs – acceptance based on performance
· Evil spirits keep up relentless pressure to distract and sabotage our life.
· Must choose to keep self in the Love of God.
· No one can do this for you, it’s a daily personal choice!

4. How do I keep myself in the Love of God?
Jude v20 - “Keep yourself in the love of God”
What are the keys that enable me to be conscious of the Love of God?

i) Constantly expect mercy from God:
· ‘Looking for’ = 4327 = to receive for one self, receive into companionship
· ’Mercy’ = 1656 = kindness, goodwill, deserve to come alongside and help
· Keep short accounts with God – expect to receive forgiveness and mercy Hebrews 4:15

ii) Meditate on the Love of God:
· Use your spiritual imagination to picture the truth of His love
· Use your imagination “to feel” your thoughts

· Constant repetition with expecting establishes a path in mind

iii) Manage your thoughts and Emotions:
· Guard your thought life – what are you focusing on, you open yourself to
· Identify emotions and challenge the thoughts that stir
· Choose to believe and embrace and speak what the Word of God says

iv) Open self to Receive Love from People:
· God reveals His love through acts of kindness and words and presence of people
· Don't be limited at how God can touch you
· Allow God to love you through His people – connect – receive!
· Receive but don't depend

v) Practice Loving People:
· John 14:21; John 15:10-12; 1 John 4:12,16
· It is easier to love God whom we don't see than love people who we do see
· People have a way of uncovering our immaturity and lack of love
· Loving people defines that we are the children of God and challenges us to depend on Him

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4. As You Love Yourself (4 of 6)

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I want you to have a look in your Bible in Matthew, Chapter 22. We were sharing a series on the Extravagant Love, and we started off with the love of God. We looked into it, and we'll just start up where I was at, then I want to pick up and just do something to get you to think about your own inner life, and how to actually change on the inside.

In Matthew 22, Verses 36 to 40, we read this. Jesus was asked, Teacher, what's the great commandment in the law? He said you will love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And so for three Sundays, we shared first of all on God's extravagant love for us, and how we can connect by faith to that; the second one, we began to share on how to

express love to God, various ways we can do that, a number of ways we can express our love to God. Love needs to be expressed. You can't just have it, and not give it away. Doug was talking about that today, about having lived in a family where there was love in the heart, but no expression, and this is always a problem if there's no expression. You don't know how to interpret no expression - then we shared also about how the Bible tells us to keep ourself in the love of God. We talked about what kinds of things can separate you or take you away from experiencing and walking in that love, and then what to do about that.

I want to pick up now the next verse, and it says now, the second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. That's an amazing statement isn't it? Notice He says that we're to love two people; we're to love our neighbour, and we're to love ourself. The word 'as' in there means in the same manner as what is following, so let's read it again. Love your neighbour in exactly the same way as what follows, the way you love yourself. Now you can understand then, if you have difficulty loving and valuing who you are, you will have difficulty loving people. In fact one of the foundations for properly building relationships, is that we have a true sense of value, a clear sense of identity, then we can actually love and value who we are. If you don't like who you are, what are you going to bring into a relationship?

If you are hiding on the inside, because you don't like what you see, what are you going to bring in and give into that relationship, because people will connect with you, they'll connect with what you communicate, so Jesus makes it very clear. Love, that word love means to hold in extremely high regard, to treat as something precious. How about that? Hold yourself in very high regard, consider yourself to be something very special, or very precious, treat as a special prize. It also means to take pleasure in. Isn't that an interesting thing, that we are to treat ourselves as a special treasure, consider ourself that way, to particularly place value upon ourselves? In other words we have to properly treat ourselves, the way God wants us to be treated, the way He sees us and treats us. This forms a foundation then, for stepping out into the world of relating to other people, so if you have a very low esteem, a very low

value on yourself, if you have a lot of unresolved issues about yourself, they will all defile relationships you have when you step out to help other people.

Now God's calling the church, calls every person, to serve. Love always serves others, but if you're not happy about who you are, you'll use the serving as a way of fulfilling an unmet need inside, so God wants us to place value on ourselves. So I want to focus today on 'as you love yourself.' So what do you believe about yourself? When you look in the mirror and you look there, you look at that person there, what do you think? Quite an interesting question to ask isn't it? A lot of people don't like what they see - in fact they don't look at the mirror too long, they're trying to change everything straight away. See, when you look at yourself, do you like what you see? Are you happy with what you see, or is there much unresolved conflict about who you are?

If you have a lot of conflict about who you are, and what's going on inside your life, you will have major issues in relating to people, and also in loving your neighbour, because everything you do will be affected by the way you see yourself. This is why we had a Freedom Retreat. It's why we have Restoration Retreats, it's why we have courses like Search for Significance. There's a reason for it, because you need to get to grips with the truth as God sees it, about who you are, to be freed from defining yourself by the experiences you've had, or by the way people have treated you. If people have treated you badly, you'd come to the conclusion I must be a bad person. If people abuse you, you come to the conclusion there's something wrong with me. Now if you walk through life and there's something wrong with me, and you've got all this going, you're going to actually have a very big challenging time building successful relationships, because you don't know where you start and where you finish, you don't know what's yours and what's someone else's.

All your relationships will be affected by that, and we'll show you how just as we go through, so we want to talk then about properly loving yourself. I can't do it all in one session, but we'll have a go at laying some foundations. So the first thing to look at is, where do you find your value as a person? Where do you find your value as a person, your sense of

esteem, and your worth? Well you're either going to find it inside you, on the basis of what God says about you, or you find it outside you. So your value as a person, you're either going to find it and establish it internally, based by faith in what God says, or you'll try and establish it outside yourself. Let me explain what I mean by that.

If you try to establish it outside yourself, you think something like this; well I've got a lot of money, therefore I'm a very important person, or I'm very valuable. But of course if you've got a lot of money, and your value's based on your money, and your money falls over tomorrow, then you are in a problem, because your value's attached to your money. If you value position, and so a lot of your struggle in life is to get recognition and position, and having a position and a title is a wonderful thing, then that position, you lose it tomorrow, where are you going to be left? You'll be very hurt, very angry and you'll have a lot of issues internally. People do this. They use possessions, they use property, they use their positioning. They use all kinds of things - performance, we work hard. If I work hard and do it perfectly, I'll be valuable. Now when people think this way, they're wired for failure in their relationships, because they're trying to establish their value from what's outside them, rather than having it firmly established inside them.

If it's outside you, where your value is found, in success, in family, in marriage, in every other kind of thing - when that goes wrong, you've got major issues inside you. But if your value is established inside you, you are able to enter into relationships and be much more whole, and much more able to enter into great relationships, so we need to base our value on what God has to say about us. We need to base our value, our esteem, the way you see yourself, you need to base it around what God says. This is what God says. There are two aspects of God's value on us, and here's why you're so valuable. I'll point out to you, now I don't care whether you've got a problem with alcohol, a problem with pornography, a problem with drugs, a problem with your marriage, a problem with relationships, it doesn't matter what kind of issue you've got going on right now, I can tell you, you are still valuable. Here's why you're valuable. It's got nothing to do with the problems you have in your life. That's all about your performing. It has to do with what God says about you.

Now here's two things that God says, and the word of God says; number one, in Genesis 1:26, God made man in His image and likeness. You are a spirit being, an eternal spirit being. Everything you see around you is going to pass away, is going to disappear or change, but you have an aspect of you which goes on for eternity. Therefore you are more valuable than anything around you. You are valuable, because you're made in the image and likeness of God. You are a spirit being. Of all of God's creation human beings are spirit beings. We're uniquely made to represent God in the earth. You are valuable, because you're a spirit being, because you're made in the image of God. You think well yeah, yeah, but what about sin, you know? Sin came in and messed it all up. Yeah, but think about this: a car that's had a bit of an accident is still a car, and if God created you in His image and likeness, and sin has come in and marred it, all it's done is damaged you, but you're still made in the image and likeness of God. It's just you're damaged, and you have to come back through relationship with Christ to be restored into what He intended.

So you find your value - to find your value that way, you have to begin to meditate in that, and begin to start to draw from the word of God the reality that I am loved by God, because I've been made in His image and likeness. He loves people. He made us to enjoy, so I'm a person that is loveable by God - not because I've got everything right inside me, but because God is loving, and He loves me. I'm a loveable person, see? So it may be I don't get on so well with people, I've got some glitches in my character, but it doesn't stop the truth, the reality spiritually is, I am absolutely, totally loved by God, and so are you, all the time. It doesn't change. Sin didn't change it. God just provided a redeemer. Here's the second reason that you are so valuable and so important and such a precious, unique person, found in 1 Peter 1, Verses 18 and 19. It says we are not redeemed by things which are corruptible such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Now here's the second reason that you are so valuable. It is because of the price that God was willing to put on you. Now it says silver and gold, well if we had a bit of silver and gold we'd be really happy. We kind of like the silver - give me the gold! We kind of love to have a bit of gold, I like

gold you know, but the Bible calls it corruptible stuff. Heaven's paved with it, it's just they use it for the roading up there. [Laughter] You walk on it, see. That's how important it is in heaven, see? But He said you were purchased or redeemed. That means someone paid a price to get you out of captivity, and it was more precious than all the gold. There's not enough gold in the world to pay the price for you to be redeemed. It took God Himself to come down from heaven in a human form, and to give His life, and shed His blood, and that blood is precious, more than all the gold, more than all the silver! That's the price He put on you!

Did you ever see that road show auction thing they have, and people bring out their junk, and then the guy goes and has a look at it, and what looks like a piece of old junk to you and me and the guy says oh, well that one there's worth about £4,000. You go what! How can it be worth so much? You think how can it be worth so much? Because someone's willing to pay that much for it, it must be valuable. Oh, I didn't think much of it, I would have thrown it out, thought it was old junk and it's true, people do that. They don't understand the value of things. Now the value placed on your head, if you were wanted alive, is the blood of Jesus Christ. You are valuable because of that, so if you meditate in those truths, and start to separate your value from being around you, and what you own, what people say about you, and what you're doing, and start to be begin to internalise through meditation as we've shown you, that you are valuable to God, a unique spiritual being, absolutely unique. There's no one like you. You're a unique production from heaven, an eternal being, with an eternal purpose in God. How more valuable can you get!

So while the people down there don't think I'm very good, at work they don't think much of me, okay, they're entitled to their opinions. That doesn't change spiritual reality, so you have to build a foundation in your life of a spiritual reality, who I am, what I am, I am what God says. I don't feel like it - doesn't matter what I feel. What God says is the truth and about me and you! So we need to get into that - so on what do you base your value? We have to base our value on what God says. We need to learn to get inside us the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead, the almighty power of God is in my spirit, I am joined to the eternal God - need to become conscious of that, so my value continually is referenced

to what God says. Now that provides a tremendous foundation for you to live out your life, and to engage relationships.

We're going to get a little more specific soon, because there's some things you'll need to get on to, so we need to base ourself on the word of God. Now humility, Bible humility means to agree with God, so to be humble biblically speaking, doesn't mean you're not bold and strong and all that, doesn't mean you walk around oh, oh, you know, sort of down - that's what we kind of think it means, but humility, biblical humility, means I agree with God. If God says I'm an over comer, I'm an over comer. If God says I've got it in me to win, I've got it in me to win. I will agree with God. If God says that's sin, it's sin. Now that's humility agreeing with the word of God. That's why you cannot just live your life from experiences, you must have a foundation of the word of God that develops your experiences into some substance in your life. So many people just live out of the latest thoughts that come into their head, and they don't ever stop to think whether that thought was God or not.

You have to have the word of God to be able to do that see, so now I want you to have a look at this in Romans, Chapter 12 and Verse 3. The Bible tells us the way we're to think about ourselves. This is good. You'll probably think of someone this applies to. Here it is - it won't be you of course, but you'll know someone here I'm sure. The moment I read this verse you'll think I know someone like that. Verse 3, I say through the grace given to me, to every who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to everyone a measure of faith. Okay, let's go there. Notice the words there are 'to everyone.' Now is everyone here included, or are you excluded on that one, see? Because it says here I'm saying, through the grace given to me, to everyone among you. This is for everyone, and here's what He's saying. One is a don't do, and the other is a do do, okay, so the don't is don't think of himself more highly than he ought. How about that. In other words, to overly be opinionated about who you are, to have a picture of yourself that's way out of touch with reality, all puffed up, a lot of wind and not much substance. Don't be puffed up in your mind thinking about yourself, so in other words, having wrong value. Now you see you've got to think well, what do you really think about yourself?

What do you think about yourself? See, usually the thoughts go into one or two extremes, neither of which agree with the word of God, so you can call them both humility although they - both of them equal pride, even though they look different. So you know one form of pride, and that's the superiority, arrogance, better than thou, and when you're with someone who's got that arrogant pride sort of thing, actually what you know is they don't feel loved, they're trying to huff and puff up a bit, trying to impress everyone. When you're around someone like, that they look like they're very big, and you feel like you're very small. They may puff up over their money, or puff up over business, puff over all kinds of things, or ministry, it doesn't really matter what it is. It's all a smokescreen for a very small person, but they puff up, because they're projecting out, I'm very important. Well see, if you're accepted in the eyes of the Lord, you don't have to prove to anyone you're important.

Why are you going to all that effort to let everyone know how important you are? It must mean you don't believe you're important, and you need them to say oh, you're important. Thank you, it's what I needed. Why? Because it wasn't internal. That's the problem you see, so that's one form of pride. Of course people like, that are preoccupied with themselves, it's all about me. Not only that, they're insensitive to others, and they tend to invade and go in over everyone's boundaries and injure them, so you can't think like that and have good relationships, because you've got a trail of destroyed people behind you, or dependent people, who think you're wonderful. That's what happens. Okay and the other side of course is - which is a very common one in New Zealand - is the issue of inferiority, which is exactly the reverse. But inferiority is, I believe I'm inferior to everyone, and if I believe I'm inferior to others, so as I stand beside you, and I look at what's very good in you, and you're so good at this, and I feel so bad at that; now what is my reference point for my value? Is it inside me, or outside me? It's outside me.

I've compared myself unfavourably with you, so people either compare themselves and puff themselves up, or compare themselves, and don't need other people, or they compare themselves, and judge themselves. Usually if we compare we take the strongest thing in them, and match it with the weakest thing in us, and we come out bad. Oh, I'm not much

good. Now you see, now you understand, this is not humility. This is actually pride, because it's still got you preoccupied with yourself, and you can't form good relationships like that if you have low esteem. You actually have to agree with what God says, so what people like that are like is, they neglect themselves. Some of them even despise themselves. Some people even hate themselves.

I was talking to one person, and when he got into huge stress, he'd start to hit himself. I said you've got major issues from your family background of self hate, so when conflict comes, you're beating yourself up, because you believe you need to be punished. Where did you get that from? You didn't get that from God. Someone told you that. Someone treated you that way. A lot of people who are in church, who are Christians, who are believers, carry all this kind of baggage, and so they're able to experience God when there's a strong anointing present, but not easily walk with Him. They're able to enter into relationships, but not hold them, because these issues keep coming up. They're not resolved, because their value is wrongly measured. It's measured by what experience told them, their family background told them, or other people told them, and in the end no one told them the truth. You've got to get what God says, and so that's why you get into these courses. I've had to face many things in my life - still facing things, things that I've believed, which turned out they were not true, you know? Things about myself I believed, I thought actually that's not true at all, but I believed all my life and it's affected my relationships.

You have to repent of those kinds of things, and their strongholds in the mind, attached to a hurt, an emotion. You've got to pull it all down. Why? Because you've got to love yourself, as God loved you. Why? Because you've got a mission, to have to go out into the world and minister to people, so you need to allow God to get in and work in your life, because God is not just wanting us to win the world and influence the world. He also wants us to become Christ-like, to become whole on the inside, so Jesus is the model. So we'll look at that in just a moment too, so getting the idea? So of course on the one hand, if you've got superiority, which is one form of pride, and you walk all over people, invade their boundaries and hurt them; if you've got inferiority and rejection, then what happens is

people walk into your life, and walk over you and hurt you, or you become dependent on people. Either way, you don't have a healthy relationship, and when you come to serve people you get burned out.

You get burned out, because you're in it for the wrong reasons. You need to get something back, instead of just seeing serving as something you do as an overflow of your life. See Jesus came to give His life, not to be served, so when He approached people, He approached: there's needs, and I can help. He didn't come thinking listen, I need you to worship me, so I'm going to do a big thing and die on the cross, then you'll have to! There was nothing like that. He just loved people, and ministered to people, and served people. Why could He do that? Because He was very, very strong in His personal identity. He could withstand the crowds. He could withstand even His closest people leaving Him, and He said you'll all leave Me, but I am not alone, My Father is with Me. See, He's defined in His identity around a relationship with the Father, and you have to build your life that way. That's why you have to build a God-centred life, otherwise everything else falls over when the pressure comes on.

Now notice what it says; don't think more highly of himself than he ought, but think soberly. That's not a bad word, sober, because any of you who've had a drinking problem will know what that means. You know when you're sober, and you know when you're drunk. When you're drunk, you're under the influence of another thing, and you stagger round, and you have poor judgement. You fall, you make a lot of goofy - you wish you'd never done these things. The next day you think oh my God, did I do that? Oooh. See, your judgement is impaired, you make poor decisions, and you have no balance when you're under the influence of drink, or under the influence of alcohol. Notice it says, think soberly, or think with a sound mind. Now how do you get a sound mind? According to what God says about you, so when you believe what God says about you, you're thinking soberly. When you believe all that other stuff, you're under the influence of another spirit, you're drunk under the influence of something, so you speak and act crazy. That's why relationships get in so much trouble, people speak and act crazy, and they think weird things. They perceive things, you know, having a few drinks, and you start to even see things that aren't even there.

You know when you're under the influence of spirits, you see things that aren't there, and they look like they're real, but they're not there, they're all in your head. That's why you've got to - it says, think soberly, and how do we think soberly? Soberly means I agree with God about my value. I'm very special, I will treat myself like God treats, as something special, of value, a highly prized possession. See, I'll treat myself right, and this is based on faith, what God says. So I need to read what the word of God says, and meditate on that. I need to listen what the Holy Ghost says, and sometimes God speaks to you through people. He gives you feedback through people, and He says some good things through prophesy that encourage you, and He says some other things that help you realise where you need to shape up, because you're not coming through too good. So God's got a lot of ways of talking to us. We need to get faith in our heart to believe God about our life. Isn't that true?

Now notice this. Here's another scripture now, because sometimes you find scriptures seem to be quite contrary to one another, but they're not, it's just a matter of getting the perspective. Look at this one, Philippians, Chapter 2, and it says - Verse 3 - Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others, better than himself. Let each of you look out not for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Now notice He starts of by saying, He's talking about pride, thinking of yourself the wrong way. He says don't do things out of ambition. Ambition means I'm driven by my personal desire for fulfilment, and I'll use you to get it. You can't build well that way. He's saying don't do anything out of that motive, and He says but rather do something different. He says in lowliness of mind, let each esteem the other, better than himself. Now you think well what's that about? This is what it means. It means first of all, get a good grip on your own personal value. When you've got a good grip that you are valuable, then when you see other people, they're really valuable too. Lift them up, and put them higher than you, so you can serve them.

In other words, have a good value on them. Place value on other people - but of course, if you don't have personal value yourself, you'll have trouble valuing people. You tend to end up, and you're using people to

build what isn't being built into your life, so we need to place a right value. Jesus had that kind of right value, so let me give you some key aspects then, of actually a way, looking at loving yourself, loving yourself. Remember love your neighbour as yourself. It means to regard the welfare of, to hold in high regard, to treat as a prize possession. Let me give you some very practical things, and they're quite simple. Actually Jesus operated in all of these, every one of them, so we can too. Here's the first one. The first one is, you need to discover who you are. How can you turn up in life and really enter into good relationships, if you haven't got a clue who you are?

So what I mean by knowing who you are, well you've got to know what God says about you, first of all, otherwise you'll live out of your life before Christ, full of condemnation, guilt, grief, disappointments, sadness and accusations, all that kind of stuff. You've got to know what God says. I'm a child of God, I'm forgiven, I'm an ambassador of heaven, I'm a representative of God, I'm filled with the Holy Ghost. I've got to get that into me. I've got to discover what the word of God says about this new creation man that I am, otherwise I'll live out of the old creation, the way I used to be. So because we've lived that old way so long, it's like a default setting, and you just go back into it, but God wants you to shift, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so as I renew my mind with what God says about me, then I'm beginning to discover the new man. But there's other things I need to discover as well, and they're quite a practical sort of thing.

You need to discover not just what God said. You need to just find what are your feelings? Do you have feelings? Are you able to identify your feelings, and own your feelings? What about your thoughts? Are you able to identify what your thoughts are? Are you able to, you know, this is what I think? What about your attitudes; do you know what your attitudes are, because these are the things that'll govern how your life goes. Do you know what you like? What you don't like? Do you know what desires you have in your heart? Do you know what dreams you have in your heart? Oh well I just want to serve God. God's put some dreams in your heart. What are the dreams He put in your heart? Serving God will outwork what He's put in you, and the way He's wired you. You've got to discover

those dreams. What do you really like? What do you really hate? What gets you fired up with passion and energises you? What drains you of energy?

You start to ask these questions, you begin to discover who you really are. A lot of people don't ask that, and then they're always living in vagueness about what they're really supposed to be doing with their life. Usually these things show up very young, and parents can help you. What are your values that you live by? Do you have any things you value? Now we need to ask these kinds of questions. You ask these kinds of questions, you discover what you are, and what you'll find is, some of your thoughts are good, some of them not so good. Some of your feelings, you need to work out how you got into that state, but in all of it, you need to actually bring these things by the word of God, and allow the word of God to be the measure as to whether these things come from God, or come from just out of your old life. It's not hard. A lot of people, every thought that comes into their head, they think it's God. It isn't always. It comes from the devil sometimes, comes from your old life sometimes. You've got to actually run it by the word of God.

So Jesus made it very clear in speaking - now here's an interesting thing - with Peter. One minute Peter's getting revelation; oh, You're Christ, the Son of the Living God. Next minute he's saying, pity Yourself, and Jesus rebukes him and said, that's a devil. The devil's manifesting through you. How could he shift from one to the other like that? Because he never filtered his thoughts with the word of God, never actually thought through what his thoughts were, and maybe where they were coming from, and whether they needed to be changed, so he just reacted naturally. So one of the ways we discover about ourself, and discover who we are, we begin to discover what we're good at, what we're not so good at, what we're gifted at, what we're not gifted at. This is an important part of your life discovering these things, discovering how you're wired, how God has set you up. When you discover these things about yourself, then the things that need to change you can begin to work them; things you need to develop, you can develop, but if you don't ask these questions, you don't know who you are.

A lot of people live their life completely covered over, so you never know who they are, and sometimes they don't even know what's going on in their own life. They're frightened to ask the questions, because some of the feelings that might come up are so bad, I can't do that anymore. Why do you work so long? Why do you work so hard? Why are you doing this? What is motivating that? What is driving you, that your whole life's out of balance, you work like that? What is driving you to that addiction? What is going on? Who are you? What is going on inside you? See, these are questions you ask, and you discover about your inner life, and some of these things need healing and restoring, but the interesting thing is good and bad, God loves you all, and He's able to live with the good and bad, and help you journey through. He'll just accept you, and give you grace, and then help you grow and change, but if you don't actually look into these things, you'll never know who you are, and what kind of person you are. See? You all got so quiet. Well, there you go.

The second way, I need to learn to communicate that to other people, need to communicate who you are to others. First of all, sorry, I didn't give a scripture. John 13, Verse 3, it says that Jesus, knowing He was come from the Father, knowing He went to the Father, and what the Father had given Him, then He served. He washed the feet of everyone. Isn't that amazing scripture? He knew His identity. He knew exactly who He was. He knew His value, and knowing His value, this is what His value was. He came out of heaven, came down on the earth, He gave away all His glory, He was the creator of it all, and yet He come along and washed people's feet! How can you wash people's feet when you're so important? Very simply, He had a good esteem. He found it in the will of God, and in His relationship with the Father, and He could then serve people. That's why you've got to get whole on the inside in your thinking, so you need to also communicate.

In John 6, Verses 63 to 66, Jesus said a few things and the crowd left Him. They walked away. They just rejected Him. But you know something? He communicated truth, He communicated His values, He communicated what He believed. He communicated, and then people could choose, take it or leave it. Many of them left it. Some of them said well, you've got the words of life, we'll follow you. So many times Jesus

spoke things, and people didn't like them. Some loved it, some hated it, but He did speak it out. He had the uncanny knack of speaking up, and speaking, and He actually catalysed people, wherever He went. Now of course most Christians, well we like to be too nice, we don't want a lot of upheavals or anything around, but you read and look in the Concordance, and find how often again there was division because of Him.

He said I come to bring a sword, so He brought a word that would cause people - you know sometimes whole crowds argued over Him. Some say He's the Son of God, some said He's the devil. There was always arguments going on around. Why? Because He lived His life out there, and expressed and shared, and was quite open. He even was open about His feelings. He openly shared His feelings anywhere. He was really sad at the death of Lazarus. He shared His grief; I need you to come and be with Me. I want you to be with Me, in this moment of darkness. When I go to the Garden to pray, come and pray with Me, so He was very, very able to speak out what was going on in His life, and what He believed. So if you're going to do that, you have to learn to speak differently see. You need to say things like I think, well this is what I think, rather than well, lots of people think. Is that right, lots of people think that? I can't work with lots of people. What do you think? Lots of people, is a way of not saying what I think, see?

So you've got to start to learn in your communicating to actually start to be more forthright, who we are; I think this, I feel this, I'm disappointed in this, I'm struggling with this, I need this, I desire this, this is my goal, this is my dream. No, I can't do that. Yes, I can do that. Yes, I will. No, I won't. Now that kind of language articulates very clearly, who you are, and where you live. When you do this, this is what I feel, this is how it affects me. This is all communicating in a way that brings you right out front, and out in the open - hard to do, isn't it aye? But that's part of loving yourself. See if you love yourself, and have proper value on yourself, you'll learn that you just can't conceal who you are, what you believe, what you have, and what's going on. You can't conceal it, or you then find yourself struggling. You're dishonest, there's one world out there, and another world inside here. That's not loving yourself.

What happens is, you start to melt down with the struggle of living an outside life, and a different life on the inside, so loving yourself means, I actually have to value what's inside me, and I have to learn how to express it and communicate it to the world around me. Here's another thing then, and that is, you need to invest in your personal growth. In Luke 2, Verses 42 to 47, the Bible tells us Jesus was down there in the Temple at 12, debating with the teachers. Now how could He debate at the age of 12? Simply, He'd spent time memorising scripture. Over all the years up to 12, He'd memorised possibly the whole first five books of the Bible, which many of them did, then He was entering into discussions and debates and whatever with the religious leaders. But here's the point - He was growing and developing. He invested in it. He spent time there doing that.

Then Luke 2:52 it says, He grew in wisdom and stature, and the knowledge and the favour, with God and with man, so He did something. Now if you love yourself, invest in yourself. That doesn't mean buy a big screen TV. [Laughter] To invest in yourself, means to develop what you've got going on inside you, so if you've got a musical gift, go get some teaching, training, learn how to develop the gift. If you've got a calling to do something, then invest in the training needed. If you're going to get married, invest in learning how to communicate. Why? Because you'll need to. You'll have a miserable future if you can't. A lot of people, they just all get thinking about their wedding day. Listen, the wedding day's one thing, but having a marriage is a completely different deal. We really want to have good marriages, not great weddings. Great weddings are wonderful, but you know, tomorrow you wake up and oh my goodness, what's happened! [Laughter] Very true. The fog clears, and suddenly it's a different - oh, what was I thinking! I didn't know that about you! No, all is revealed now. [Laughter] More than you'd imagine [laughs] see?

So your skills, what about developing your character? What about getting into a group where you work on character growth, and you become accountable? That's an investment in growing your character, because you grow that, you become capable of carrying things more in life. What about your skills, various skills you have? What about education? A lot of

families don't value education. Education is very valuable, because if you invest in yourself, what you do is, you take the potential, and you enlarge what you're capable of, and therefore you improve your value to your employer. Think about that one - so if you want to really be on a track to success you make growth, personal growth is a lifelong journey. You never stop learning, and not only that, you put that value in your children. You value education, not as an end in itself, but as a way of developing, and calling forth the potential that's inside. That's loving yourself isn't it?

Well, you're thinking, now we're all thinking. You know, we're all thinking aren't we, thinking God I wish I'd heard this 20 years ago. [Laughs] Well I wish I had too. This is the first time I've ever taught on this, and it took me a lot of time to get this thing clear in my own head, love yourself. Oh no, loving people, that's what - love yourself, what's that about? It's quite hard to get a handle on that. It raises some issues then doesn't it aye? Oh, move on, next point. Got to take personal responsibility for your choices. If you're going to love yourself, you must take responsibility for the choices you make, and you find in John 17, Verse 4, at the end of His life Jesus said Father, I've finished the work You gave Me to do. He set His priorities, and His choices, around fulfilling God's call in His life, so there were lots of pressures, there were lots of things He said no to. He took responsibility for His life. He made choices. Now one of the things, we live in a victim culture, where people would rather blame someone else for why they are where they are, like they are, and having the experiences and feelings they have.

So you may be feeling terribly frustrated. Well this is to blame and that's to blame, all kinds of things. Hey listen, that's all outside you. You've got to change what's inside you. You've got to make choices about what you'll do with your negative feelings; Well you made me angry! Well yeah, that may be right. Maybe I pulled a trigger, but you're the one who's got the bullet. You're the one who's fired up. You're the one who has the anger. What about actually coming to grips with that side of it? You do it all the time you know, or regularly you nut off, you know? So face what's going on in your life. Take responsibility, rather than blaming someone. Now it's easier to blame, than it is to take responsibility, because as soon as you take responsibility, then now you must do something about your

life. It's much easier to blame someone for why I am like I am, than it is to take responsibility, and yet if you love yourself, don't play the victim, because if you play the victim, you're powerless. Then you get resentful and your life is messed up. That is definitely not treating yourself well.

If you're going to treat yourself well, as very valuable, then take ownership of all that's yours. In other words whatever's yours, take ownership of it and then you're empowered. You can do something about it. That's loving yourself, taking responsibility. Now of course the thing is that, you'll find if you give yourself to discovering who you are, and you begin to find lots of things, then when you connect with people, you're really interested to find out about them, and all the things in their life. Most times we just ask, what do you do? We define people by what they do, rather than actually finding out who they are, so if you're able to communicate who you are to others, you'll also probably be able to listen and find out from others what they have to say about themselves. If you invest in your personal growth, you'll be interested in investing in the growth of others. If make decisions and you take responsibility for your choices, then it's likely you'll hold others to account for their decisions. You'll relate differently.

If you are a victim person, who doesn't take responsibility for your own choices, you're not likely to hold anyone else accountable for theirs, so you'll be out of control. You'll be in a powerless situation. The last one is, you need to learn to set limits or boundaries. If you love yourself, you have to set limits. There are limits on what you can do, set limits and set boundaries. Boundaries are what you let come in, so if you have a house, you have a property - most of you have got a property - you know that if some strange group of people step across that property line, you're going to be concerned, why. They were fine walking down the street, but when they crossed over that property line, they're in you're property. Now there's a possibility it'll affect you. Now you have ownership, you can do something. If something goes wrong, you know, you can cut your grass, don't have to worry about the guy next doors. Boundaries are very good for defining what we're responsible for, and what we're not responsible for.

Jesus put limits on things. He said no. Mark 1:35, they came to Him and they said listen, we have a great revival, let's get out there and do some more, have more miracles, lots of people here. He said no, I've got to go to another city. I've been up praying, and My Father's given Me different directions. In John, Chapter 11, they said hey Lazarus, your mate's dying, you better go over and heal Him before He gets to die - and he said no. How many times did Jesus walk in and out of the temple, and pass that man who was crippled, and never healed him? See, He didn't do everything. He actually defined His life around what God had called Him to do, then set boundaries, and He lived within them. Interesting, there's one place in the Bible, where the disciples would go I'm too busy, and they had nothing to eat, and He said let's stop and go aside and let's begin to have time to eat and refresh ourselves, put boundaries around the ministry, and helped them put the boundaries as well.

So what an amazing thing, He just set limits. Now if you can't set limits on yourself, and boundaries on yourself, you won't set them on anyone else either. It's part of loving yourself. When you love yourself in these kinds of ways, it affects how you relate, and what kind of relationships you build with other people. You can make some changes I'm sure, see? If someone's irresponsible, you have to set limits. You have to say no, and there's consequences for your behaviour. When you do that, you're loving and valuing yourself. When you don't do it, their irresponsibility comes in and invades your life. Now think about this. If you were to get involved in serving and helping and suppose particularly get involved with some drug addicts or some alcoholics or some gang members. The first thing you'll discover with them, if you haven't already discovered it, the first thing you'll discover is, they have no boundaries in their life, and their life is out of control, there's a chaos. See, they don't like themselves, and they're medicating the condition rather than solving the problem, and so their life is in chaos; no boundaries, because they have no value on themselves, so they can't form good relationships.

Now here's the thing. When you start to serve them and help them, and they come into your world, and you go into their world, what happens is their world threatens to engulf yours and absolutely bring chaos - unless you can hold boundaries, see? Then one of the problems people face in

wanting to reach out to the world is, you've got to be able to define who you are, clearly and strongly, and then hold boundaries that you hold other people to, otherwise their problems will engulf you, and your life falls apart, and you can't hold together your marriage, your finances, anything. Everything falls apart, because you're trying to do some things in the name of Jesus. It looks good, but it's chaotic, because the chaos has come out of an internal wiring that's not right, I need to do this, so I'll feel good about myself. You can't be motivated that - we're moved by the love of Christ. He loves us, and we're valuable, and as we become whole, we give more and more, and we learn how to build better and greater relationships. We can serve much better. Our capacity grows much more.

How many felt God speaking to you this morning? Man, He spoke to me. I was pretty wiped out by my own message. I've been up since two this morning, over it and over and over and over, thinking oh Jesus help me. Then I repented. It's good for me, good to repent, good for us to repent. Why don't we just close our eyes right now. Perhaps there's someone here today, and you haven't even opened your life yet to Jesus. The Bible tells us that God loves you very deeply. Doug was talking about you being so very loved by God. You know it is true, He loves you, and it's something you can experience, very tangible, but the first way we experience it is when we come into a meeting, we sort of feel that something's here, and it touches us. Maybe we feel a bit tearful. It's just the spirit of God, but the reality is this, that you are separated from God, that God is on the outside of you, not on the inside. That's because you're living your life without God, but Jesus made a way for you and I to come near to Him, and a very simple way. He said everyone who believed in Him, believed that He died on the cross and rose again, believed that He died for our sins, every person who put their trust in Christ, and gave their life to Him, He gave them the right to become a child of God.

Summary Notes:
Introduction:
· Matthew 22:36-40 - “Love the Lord your God with all your heart … love your neighbour as yourself”
· The benchmark for loving others is … ‘as you love yourself’
· ‘As = 5613 = in the same manner as the one following
· ‘Love’ = 25 = to regard the welfare of, to take pleasure in, to treat as a special prize

· How you relate to and treat yourself greatly impacts how you relate and treat others
· What do you believe about yourself? Are you lovable? Are you acceptable?
· What you believe about yourself will be revealed in how you live your life in relationships

The Foundation of your Value as a Person:
a) Base your personal value on the Word of God:
i) Genesis 1:26 - "You are made in the image of God", good
· You may be damaged by sin but you are still of great value – made in the image of God
ii) 1 Peter 1:18-19 - "You are redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus"
· Redeem = 3084 = to ransom, to pay a price to release someone from captivity
· The value of something is revealed by the price to purchase it – someone willing to pay
· What do you base your value as a person on? What God says about me (internal) or hat people, circumstances say about me (external), how I performed?

b) Humility means to 'Agree with God':
· Romans 12:3 - "I say through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly as God has dealt with each one a measure of faith"
· This is addressed to everyone
i) "Don't think of himself more highly than ought to"
· 'Think' = 5252 = to esteem oneself over much, be vain or arrogant, more high than is
· How do you think about yourself?
· Pride has two phases:
1. Superiority, arrogance = preoccupied with 'self' – 'all about me'
= insensitive and unaware of others
= override the boundaries of others
2. Inferiority, false humility = neglect or despise or reject self
= overly sensitive to everyone else
= let others override your boundaries
· In both situations the view of self is distorted – not agreeing with God

ii) "Think soberly", clearly
· Soberly = 4993 = to be of sound mind, moderate, not under the influence of drugs
· Think soberly = agree with God about your identity and value
= regard the welfare of, treat as a special prize
· Based on faith – what God says about you in the Word, by the Spirit and the Feedback of Others
· Philippians 2:13 – "… esteem others better than yourself"
· 'Better' = 5242 = to excel, hold in a position above eg Jesus
· Place a right value on yourself – then value others more highly, when you are secure in your own value, then you can place value on and serve others. Otherwise – serving + loving is motivated by intent to gain personal value
· Think and know what God says about you. You are valuable and of much value

Key aspects of 'Loving Yourself', not to be full of yourself:
· Love = to regard the welfare of, take pleasure in, treat as a special prize
i) Discover who you are:
· John 13:3 - Jesus knew who He was – he was clear in his identity, and able to serve
· Who are you? Most people define themselves by their role eg teacher, businessman

· You need to discover who you really are!
- what God says - your choice - your loves
- your feelings - your hurts - your hates
- your attitudes - your giftings/talents - your values
- your behaviours - your desires - your dreams
Evaluate in the light of God's Word and the promptings of the Holy Spirit
eg Peter
· When you know these things about yourself you have a good sense of who you are
· If you bury or hide these things about yourself no one really knows you
· What do you want?

ii) Communicate who you are to others:
· John 6:63-66 - Jesus communicated who he was and what he believed
· You must learn to speak openly and directly to people
- I think - I want - I won't - I don't know - I will
- when you... - I need - Yes/No - I feel - I'm sorry
· When you communicate directly you value and prize yourself
· When you do not communicate you do not value yourself and remain isolated

iii) Invest in your personal growth:
· Luke 2:42-47 - Jesus cultivated his inner life and knowledge and skills to fulfill His purpose He invested in His own personal growth and development. He took 30 years of preparation before 3 years of ministry
· Love yourself = value yourself enough to invest in personal growth
· Luke 2:52 - Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men
· Invest in skills, develop, character, communication skills, relationships
· Develop your knowledge, thought life, health and fitness, spirit life
· Invest in resolving inner conflicts – Romans 12:2

iv) Take personal responsibility for your choices:
· John 17:4 - Jesus took responsibility for his life – fulfilling his call
· You are who you are because of choices you made – reaping
· Love yourself = stop blaming, thinking and acting as a victim
= take ownership of choices, good and bad
= take ownership of what is in your soul – it is yours
· Once you take ownership you can take control of your choices – what you do
· External circumstances are not under your control – your response to them is
· Romans 14:12

v) Learn to set limits or boundaries:
· Mark 1:35 - Jesus resisted the pressure of the crowd
· Mark 6:31 - Jesus set limits and boundaries
· A boundary is a property line – defining where you end - what is yours
· It is up to you to set boundaries and limits or what you accept so you protect yourself
· When others act irresponsibly you can set limits

Boundaries define who you are:
· No one can devalue you unless you agree with defining value by how people treat you
· People can treat you badly = 'I have no value'
= 'They are behaving badly'

· If you allow yourself to feel devalued = you have defined your value outside rather than inside
· If you define yourself externally – possessions, people, performance, then when these things change your value and identity changes
· What to do:
1) Guard your thoughts
2) Feedback to the person how you feel, change
3) Refuse the behaviour as it happened
4) Withdraw
· 'Love yourself' then love others as you love yourself!

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5. Loving Yourself (5 of 6)

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I want you to open your Bible with me in Matthew, Chapter 22. I want you to look in Verse 36, and we're sharing about the Extravagant Love, and I shared about loving God passionately, then last week I shared just on loving yourself, which is a bit of a difficult thing for many people to do. We just want to carry that on, and just go a little further with that today. Loving yourself is not the same as being self-centred, wrapped up in yourself, it's all about me! It's not that. Loving yourself is not about being selfish, me first. It's nothing to do with any of that. Loving yourself has to do with placing the appropriate value upon your life that God has placed. It's coming into agreement with Him, and what I've observed with people is that if people don't value themselves, and don't actually love and respect and treat themselves as Jesus treats us, then what happens is relationships are affected by that, and the way we see ourself, it defiles or comes into other relationships, so people with a lot of rejection either are dysfunctional in their relating, or they use relationships to get a need met.

God wants us to grow whole on the inside. One of the ways you grow whole, you have a great self-esteem, you begin to agree with what God says about you. I was talking to one of the teachers we had in our church

a while ago, and she was working out at Flaxmere. She was working with low achieving students, and she said she consistently got higher achievements out of them. She was called to Wellington to have a look. She's actually down there now working with Wellington in head office, shaping policy. I said what was the key to raising the achievement, and she said it was a very simple one. We had to raise their self-esteem, the way they saw themselves. With a low esteem it was impossible to achieve, because every time anything happened in the work, it would immediately resonate inside, well I'm a failure, I'm no good anyway. Then they would give up and not progress, so she said the key to shifting them was to get the esteem or the value, or just to change their way of looking at themselves, so they actually valued themselves. Isn't that an interesting one aye? Very interesting.

So it works out practically. If you don't agree with what God says about you and you listen to someone else's voice about you, you will have a wrong perspective of yourself and it'll be a wrong perspective of life. So I want to share with you just some things and ask the question well what do you believe about yourself? Where are you getting this information? Are you getting it from outside you, or are you getting it from an internal source? So how do you see yourself? I've noticed very quickly that when people are rooted in rejection it flushes up very easy. You pay them a compliment, they can't receive it. You give them a gift, they find it troublesome to receive. You acknowledge and honour them, they actually find a lot of emotions come up, very, very difficult to handle it because inside they believe I'm not really valuable.

So we want to just show you some keys again how to shift that, so here's some practical keys of what you can do that will actually work at addressing this area of your life. The Bible says love your neighbour as yourself. Well love yourself like God loves you. Amen - so here's the first one; number one, agree with God about your identity and value. Agree with God. Agree with God and what He says, you are valuable, you are a special person, you are important to Him. He is a Father and you are His child. In 1 John 3:1 it says, see what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, or just given us, that we should be called the children of God! Another verse says, we know and have believed the love which

God has for us. So in this verse, here it's very clear, God values us, and He calls you a child of God, so when you describe yourself, who am I? Well I'm a plumber. No, no, no, I am a child of God!

When you define yourself all the time by what you do, you're not defining your identity in who you are, and your value around what God says. He loves you. You are more valuable than all of creation. God provides for the birds; how much more will He provide for you, who are of more value, Matthew writes. You are of great value. Of course the world and life around us tends to strip away our value, but I need to actually get into my heart an agreement with what God says about me. I'm a child of God. I am accepted. I am acceptable. I am loveable. I am loved by God. The spirit of God stays in my life, and God is my friend continually. I need to get that inside me, it needs to be the voice that talks, strong agreement with the word of God. In Romans 8:15, you have received the spirit of God, not the spirit of bondage to fear, and be in bondage, but you've received the spirit of adoption, and it's come into your life, and placed you into the family of God, and that spirit bears witness with your spirit on who you are, a child of God. Fathers love their children. You are loved.

Now you and I need to get clearly in our mind we are loved. We have not received a spirit of bondage, or a spirit of fear, to end up in bondage. People who are finding their identity and their resourcing outside themselves, if someone else has got to say words to you to make you feel good about yourself, you will live in fear of being rejected. If relationships are where you get your identity and affirmation from, then if they fail you, you will end up with issues in your life. So people end up in fear, because they're attached to the wrong things. Jesus wants us to be attached to Him, so our identity, we define ourselves by who we're attached to. I am attached to the living God, who created heaven and earth, see? Now when you're attached to God, and of course that has to be something you experience by receiving Jesus Christ as your saviour, and then by building a life with God, whereby you know firmly in your heart I'm attached to God, and God is with me.

How does it get to be like that? There are two primary ways. One is by meditating in the word of God, the other is by confessing the word of God. You need to speak, to speak what God says about you. He says I

have a wonderful plan for your life. I know the plans for you, they're plans for good, not evil, that you might live with hope in your life. So if we get God's word into our heart you have to meditate on it. Why do you need to meditate? Because meditating, or rolling the word of God around in your mind repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly, reprograms your inner man to agree with God's word. If I was to ask for you to tell me, how much is two times three, well almost before I've finished it you know the answer. How many found it bobbed up in there, you got 12? Oh okay. [Laughter] Sorry. How many got six - two three's, that's right? Two three's, okay. You got six, is that correct? How many got it straight away? It was programmed in. How did you get to learn that? Well learned it by heart. What does learning by heart mean? Oh, you repeat it. You have to repeat things to learn them by heart. After you've repeated them enough, then it's inside you.

So we know it works with times tables, but we somehow miss that some of the truths of the word of God will only come into our heart if we actually meditate repeatedly upon them, and embrace them, welcome them, celebrate them until they're written inside us. Then two times three is? [Six.] Six, of course it is six, that's right. It's always been six, but you know what happens is that we are wired in our identity, most of us, that two times three isn't six. We've got a different thing comes up when you ask the question, well what are you like? Who are you? We find there's problems in answering some of those things. We need to agree with what God says; I am who God says I am. I can do what God says I can do, and I have what God says I can have. We say well, you don't have much. Yes, but I have what God says I can have, and as I have a belief in my heart, eventually I'll see it. You understand that we have to believe to experience things, see, we have belief in our heart, so you've got to change and reprogram how you think. Most people don't take time to do that, because you do have to take - how many love learning your tables? Yeah, three ones are three, two threes are - what was that, two threes again? Oh, two threes are six, that's right. Two threes are six - you know, it takes time doesn't it. You have to invest.

Now if you love yourself, practice agreeing with God, and take the time to reprogram your thinking, so you agree with God. You do something

wrong, normal thing if someone does something wrong is, they feel bad about themselves. What a believer does, they don't feel bad about themselves; I did something wrong. I am not a bad person, I'm still a good person, I'm still a child of god, and so I apologise, I ask forgiveness, I get over it, I move on. That's how we walk. We don't accumulate baggage. Fortunately many have come in, we've got a lot of baggage, so we've got to work on that - number one. So number one, practice agreeing with God, embracing His word into your mind and heart, and speaking it over your life, day by day, through the day.

The second thing, boundary or limit destructive influences. Put a boundary around anything that's destructive to you. If you love yourself, don't let yourself be destroyed. If you love yourself, don't let negative influences into your life. If you love yourself, put up a boundary. That means put up a fence, put up a barrier. That means actually, when it gets on the ground, just saying no. That's what it involves. Now a lot of people don't think they can say no. They've got to love, and so on and so forth. It's true we love, but it's also true we say no. If this is destructive to me, I will say no. Now that's loving yourself. A lot of people, because they can't communicate what they really want to say, allow things to happen and flow in around their life, and therefore they feel low esteem and low value, because they haven't stood up, a child of God speaks the truth in love. Therefore in love, I will say what I need to say to put the boundary up. You have to do that, see how it goes.

A boundary's a wall or a barrier that defines what you're responsible for, so if you permit destructive influences into your life you are not loving yourself. Loving yourself means you actually identify things that are negative coming into your life, and confront them. That's how you love yourself, see? Interesting that one. I need to agree about what God says, and learn to say no, no thank you, no. I met one guy, he had real trouble saying no. I said every day when you get up, and stand in front of the mirror, and in about 20 different ways smile and say no. No. No. No. Thank you very much, but no. Some people, they can't say no. Is that true? [Yes.] [Laughter] I'm sorry, that was a bit mischievous wasn't it aye? [Laughs] You have to put up a boundary, stop those influences okay, so basically they fall into two categories really. One falls into the category of

destructive influences by people, destructive influences by people. In Psalm 1, Verse 1, it says blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, sits not in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law does he meditate day and night. He shall be like - now you understand it actually is making a stand about ungodliness.

I'm not going to walk with sinners, not going to sit in the seat of the scornful, and point the finger at other people, and mock what they're doing. It's actually about making a stand, of setting boundaries around your life. Now many people that come into our life, we can love them, embrace them, we can welcome them, we can talk with them. We can help them, but we cannot let their negativity, and their negative influences, come in and invade our life, so you'll find people that you come across who are very negative. When you talk with them they complain, continue to complain. They're critical. They're running someone, or something down. They're running the boss down, the government down, they're running the church down, they're running all kinds of things down. You find people who are demanding. They're putting pressure on you, you've got to do this, got to do that. You meet people who are bitter. Sometimes you can see it on their face, but you definitely hear it in their words.

Sometimes you engage people who are angry. Sometimes you engage people who are seductive, or defiling. Now when you meet people like that, there's a spiritual influence flows that will impact you. I talk with people who are doing phone counselling. I said when you get off the phone, just stop and pray in tongues, and reflect what you're feeling inside, what you're left with after that conversation, and if it's bad, then start to pray and push it away from yourself. The Bible's very clear you know, that bad communications corrupt your lifestyle, so you've really got to watch communications, and make a stand about things that are destructive - so there are some people - now how do you do that? Well it's not such a hard thing. You just if someone's complaining you say well, have you spoken to the person about that? Well don't download the complaint on me; go where someone can help you. If someone's critical you say well, have you checked your facts out, do you know if that was

really the case? Is this hearsay? Have you talked with the person? What options have you got apart from just criticising and complaining?

There's always some ways you can stop things - or if they're talking about someone behind their back, say just stop, no, listen I'm not comfortable at all with you talking about someone behind their back. They're not here, I'd rather you didn't do that in my presence right now. You just push back, now that's loving yourself. It's just saying, I am not a trash can, I come up to you, and you push the thing, and drop your junk into me. There's no way that's going to happen, but you've got to put that boundary up, that no one flips your lid unless you say yes. Getting the idea? You've got to say no to some of these things. That's loving yourself. If you love yourself, you'll set boundaries about what you'll receive and accept into your life, in terms of the way people treat you. Now that doesn't mean you just walk away. It means you have to communicate, speak the truth in love, and connect over the issue. That's always a challenge, but we are to do it. It's one of the most difficult challenges we face, but we've got to make a decision we're not going to live in fear. We will do this. We'll start to push against those things.

If you speak up and say something, then what you do is you put the boundary up, and you get an understanding between you; You may like to complain, I don't like to receive complaints. We've got a problem here, so how about when you're with me, you don't complain. It'd be quite simple wouldn't it? I'm sure there are wonderful, good things. Now when you complain of course, you'll have negative feelings and emotions. Why don't you start to actually look at all the things that you could be positive about, and grateful for, and start to develop an attitude of gratitude? You'll find your life changes. So anyway, there it is.

The second area you've got to put a boundary against destructive forces, is the area of visual influence, visual influence, the media, entertainment, books, TV, computers, internet, all that kind of stuff, because it can so easily defile. You get a spirit comes behind it. Much of this stuff is empowered by demonic spirits. I think these are all wonderful inventions, but you've still got to guard what you allow your eyes to see, because Job said, I made a covenant with my eyes, not to look upon a woman. Why? Because where my eyes go, my heart will go - so if you've got to

love yourself, just make a commitment to yourself that you will begin to guard what you allow to come into you, around visual media, otherwise what'll happen is your standards will lower, and be eroded. You won't even know what you've got - you're not loving yourself when you do that. Actually you're abusing yourself when you do that, because your value isn't going up, your value's coming down. Why is it coming down? Because what God gave into you, is now being eroded out.

What God gave us is very, very important. He gave us holiness, see? So we need to do those kinds of things. Well you know I'm talking about the person - tell them to listen up, it's probably all about them. [Laughs] Okay, just two more now, two more. Here's the next thing is, you need to resolve negative influences inside you, or that operate in your own life, resolve negative things that operate in your own life. If you love yourself, then be committed to personal growth. Let's show you just in 2 Chronicles, Chapter 29, been reading about Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a great reformer, and it says this. It says in Verse 3, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. Verse 5 he said, now hear me you Levites! Sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, carry the rubbish out of the holy place, for our fathers have trespassed, and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God. See, they shut up the doors, put out the lamps, haven't burned incense or burnt offerings.

I can't do all of that, but just go down to Verse 16; so the priests went to the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris they found in the temple of the Lord, to the court of the house of God. Now this is reaffirmation, now here's a young man, and when he became king, in other words when he stood up in the authority God had given him, his first priority was to deal with the house of the Lord. Now you and I are the house of the Lord, so what did he do? The first thing he did was repair the gates. He looked at the areas where access comes in and out, and he repaired them, covered them all with gold, restored them,, and covered them with gold. He restored the glory of God's presence into that place see, so he restored the gates. The gates are always a picture of the entrance ways into things. Then he went into the inner place and cleansed out what was in there, in the very same way in

our own lives we need to resolve things which are going on in our life, some of which have been there for years.

If you love yourself, care for yourself enough to look at the areas you need healing. Now most people, if you drop a hammer on your foot or you accidentally bang your thumb, normally every part of your body yells, it yells protest and probably you'll say a word or too as well. Something will come out I'm sure, but you know there's pain there, there's something not right, so we can see that with a physical thing. Often with the wounds in our soul, we're not so aware of the damage that's been caused, and so we don't usually take the effort to do anything. The Freedom Retreat, the Restoration Retreats and some of the Care Force courses are designed to help you get the baggage out of your life. God loves you enough, He's made provision for that to happen. Love yourself enough, that you roll up and let the thing happen to you, you begin to open your life and say I'm on a journey of change. I'm on a lifelong journey of change. Okay? So what kinds of things would you need to look at?

Well are there inherited curses, family patterns, that are operating in your family, that need to be sorted out and brought to the cross? Are there offences you've been holding for years, you need to actually remember what happened, and bring it out into the light, and deal with it? Are there fears that cause you to feel intimidated? Bring them out, and get them sorted out. Someone spoke cursing over your life? Get that out, and bring it to the cross, and let it get sorted out. What about trauma and things that have affected you emotionally? Get them out, and get them to the cross, get the stuff out. Why? Because you value yourself. God valued you, and He made provision for that to be dealt with. He made provision for your griefs to go, made provision for every area of our lives to be healed and restored. It's His plan to restore us, so if I'm going to agree with God that I'm valuable, also agree with God He's provided for my wholeness, and I will therefore pursue it. Isn't that a good thought to do something like that?

Need to deal with sexual sin, if sexual sin's taken place. Let me just show you something here in Genesis 49. This is Reuben, one of the sons of Jacob. Genesis, Chapter 49 describes the last words he prophetically spoke over the various sons, so he gathered the sons together - Verse 3

- and said Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. But unstable as water, you shall not prosper or excel, because you went up to your father's bed and defiled it, and went up into my couch. Now what you've got to see here is, he is making a prophetic declaration, he's speaking words that will impact the destiny of this man, and this man had a tremendous call on his life. He was the firstborn, and so God's intention for him was this, for multiple blessings. Firstborn blessing meant double portion of inheritance, and the leadership in the family. Second blessing, my might, and the beginning of my strength. In other words, his calling in God to carry on the work of Jacob, to be strong, and walk in the ways of God. The excellency of dignity, he would carry honour and be recognised by people, and the excellency of power, he would have supernatural help, to actually advance and to prosper. What tremendous blessing this man - this was his destiny.

Yet - this is what it says - you will not excel, and there's a reason you won't excel. It's because of something you did 20 years ago. You got involved in sexual immorality, thinking it wouldn't be noticed, it wouldn't count, and now today it's beginning to count. This is the problem with sexual sin. It feels good, but the Bible warns us about it, because sexual sin brings something into your body, into your inner man, that causes you to change, and it always has a legacy. You may think you get away with it, it's done in secret, doesn't affect anyone, no one hurt. But listen, what it'll do is destroy your destiny. It'll take away the legacy. It'll leave you bitter and sorrowful, so why not deal with the thing. If you love yourself, deal with it. In James 1:22, now beloved receive with meekness the engrafted word of God, which is able to save your souls. To shift in these areas, we need the word of God, the anointing of the Holy Spirit to help us. People around can help you.

We don't need to go into all of that today, but here's the principle. If there are negative issues eroding your life, love yourself enough to get out some help, ask someone to help you and bring resolution to it. Why live in defeat and bondage when you don't need to? An interesting thing in the Old Testament, Numbers 33, in 52, God said drive these enemies out of the land, because if you don't, they'll be a prick in your eye, and a

thorn in your flesh, so what you leave unaddressed in your life after you become a Christian becomes a prick in your eye, it affects your vision; becomes a thorn in your flesh, you're preoccupied always with things that you should not be preoccupied with. Amazing isn't it? Love yourself enough to deal with issues, see? Then the last one here, this is a crucial one. Make God your friend. Make a decision to build friendship with God. Why would we make that such an important thing of loving yourself? Because your friends influence what happens in your life.

The Bible says if you go with someone who's angry, you'll become angry, so the people you're hanging out with, or people you associate with, and make your friends, they influence you. So if you were to make God your friend, to take the time to build relationship with God, to become intimate with Him, to listen to Him, to build a life that pleases Him, to discover from the word of God, what He hates, and what He loves, and begin to love the things He loves, and hate the things He hates, begin to align your life along that path, and make God your friend. What happens is, you begin to receive the love of God, and then we love and feel loved. We feel loved, why? Because we have a source that no one can see. It's an invisible source. Now God can also love us through people, so we need to be connected to people who are positive, people who are encouraging, people in the body of Christ who are loving, and who can help us and encourage us. We need those kinds of relationships. Why? Because that's one way God loves you, helps you to feel of value.

Let me just give you a couple of scriptures. In Luke 10, Verse 41, Jesus speaks to Martha, and says Martha, Martha, you're troubled and uptight and anxious about many things. And she got so uptight, her esteem went down, and when her esteem went down, she starts complaining; Lord, you don't care. My sister's left me. Now that's a bit of a whine isn't it aye? Put a bit of cheese with that one, see? It's really quite a grizzle, and a whine, and a negativity, and a complaint; left me to serve alone. Oh poor you! Why don't you tell her to come and help me? Why don't you go and talk with her, and ask her for help yourself? So notice what happened, that because she didn't prioritise her life right, and receive personal revelation from her own connection with Jesus, that's what she didn't do. That's the choice that Mary made. Now it's wonderful to come to

meetings and receive inspired teaching, and prophetic teaching or whatever, but you need to get near God, and find from the word of God, words for yourself, personal words, God speaking directly into your heart.

Have a devotional diary, and write down the things that need to be written down. Write down the things God is saying, write down things God is talking to you. Why is that? Because the rhemas that God speaks to you, will give you faith, and change your whole life, so make God your friend. If you make God your friend, then you'll become more and more like Him, as you talk with Him and interact with Him, a most wonderful thing. What happens when you encounter God and have experiences with God is, the DNA of God gets downloaded into your spirit, and you change. Some areas that we struggle to change - now I'm all into process. I believe processes are important to grow, but encounters with God can download spiritual DNA and empowerment into you, that just shift you immediately. It just changes you immediately, and you become a different person.

Remember Jacob? Jacob wrestled and he fought. There was a whole struggling over issues in his life, and then out of that encounter, he was changed completely. They even changed his name. Encounters with God change you. Love yourself enough to make God your friend, and seek encounters with Him, and particularly that you hear His word for yourself. Got that? Then part of this whole dimension is that we learn to walk with the people of God as well. In Hebrews, Chapter 11, Verse 24 the Bible tells us - I think its 24 or something like that, near enough. Anyway Hebrews, Chapter 11, Moses, it says see he saw the Lord, he had an encounter with the Lord, and it changed a frightened man into a brave leader that touched and changed a nation. Then it says he identified with the people of God. He identified with the church, to walk with them and bring them out of bondage and into liberty. Why did he do that? It wasn't easy. They moaned and groaned and complained and rebelled and all kinds of things.

But listen, he did it, it said, because he saw Him who was invisible. His encounters with God kept an energy in his life that enabled him to influence a whole generation. What a tremendous thing, that you would love yourself enough to agree with what God says about you, who you are, and what you can do, and what the possibilities are for your life, that

you would love yourself enough to put a boundary up and say no to people treating you badly, or to other things happening which are negative, that you'd love yourself enough that you'd say no more, to some of the things which are affecting your life, and you're beginning to deal with them; that you'd love yourself enough to say, I want to be friends with the most wonderful person, because I want to become like Him. As you do that, you begin to find your life changes, everything in you changes. You see yourself different, you see people differently. It all starts with a choice doesn't it, to love yourself.

Just close your eyes right now as we just finish. Father, I just thank You for Your wonderful presence here today. We just so love Your presence. It's just a great joy to sit in Your presence. As we just wait upon You and worship You, we can feel that You are here, angels are here.

Summary Notes:
Introduction:
· Matthew 22:36-40 - "Love the Lord your God with all your heart … love your neighbour as yourself"
· The benchmark for loving others is … 'as you love yourself'
· 'As = 5613 = in the same manner as the one following
· 'Love' = 25 = to regard the welfare of, to take pleasure in, to treat as a special prize
· How you relate to and treat yourself greatly impacts how you relate and treat others
· What do you believe about yourself? Are you lovable? Are you acceptable?
· What you believe about yourself will be revealed in how you live your life in relationships

Practical Keys:
a) Agree with God about your identity and your value:
· Agree = to say the same thing that God says
· What do you say about yourself?
· 1 John 3:1 - 'See what manner of Love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God
· I am a child of God and I am loved and accepted
· Almighty God is my Father and I belong to God
· God places immense value on me – do I agree with the Word of God
· Romans 8:15 - You have received the Spirit of Adoption whereby you cry Abba Father. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, we are the children of God
· Define yourself by who you are joined to, connected to and not by what you do eg family name – who you are
· What does God say about who I am in Christ
· How can you do this?
a) Meditate in the Word of God and what He says about you
b) Confess and agree to the Word of God and what He says about you

Boundary of Limiting Destructive Influences:
· Boundary = a wall or defense or barrier that is erected, brings limits

= defines who is responsible for what
· If you permit destructive influences into your life not loving yourself
· Agree with God about your value and learn to say ‘no’
· Most destructive influences enter the eye gate or ear gate
· Loving yourself is to identify things that is trying to come into your life that is destructive

i) Destructive influences of people
· Psalm 1:1 - stand against ungodliness 1 Corinthians 15:33
· Negativity complaining bitter controlling seductive
Critical demanding angry unclean defiling
· Value yourself – love yourself set a boundary to this behaviour
· Think through your response – how will it communicate in body and consequences
· ‘Am not a trashcan, someone flips the lid and drops trash in it’

ii) Destructive Visual Influences:
· Media and Internet Psalm 101:3
· You are abusing yourself when you allow negative influences to come into your life
· Surround yourself with people who are loving and supportive

iii) Resolve Negative influences that operate in your life:
· 2 Chronicles 29:3-16 - Hezekiah’s first action as king was to cleanse the House of God
· When you resolve negative influences from your past and present you love and value yourself
· Numbers 33:52 - ‘Drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy their engraved, those whom you let remain shall be the inhabitants in your eyes …’
· What kind of things you need to resolve: Inherited curses; fears; trauma; offences; word curses; sexual sin Genesis 49:3
· You love and value yourself when you commit to the process of growth and change
· James 1:22 - ‘Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls

iv) Make Relationship with God your First Priority:
· Luke 10:42 - One thing is needed and Mary has chosen that good part. Martha complained about the word and didn’t focus on relationship building with Jesus
- You love yourself and value yourself when you make connecting with God a priority
- What you focus your life upon you become like
- When you worship and focus on God He becomes the predominant influence in life
- An encounter with God downloads DNA into your spirit that changes you and shifts you immediately
- Draw near to God and get personal/rhema word from Him as your friend
· Hebrews 11:24-47 - Moses
· Moses chose to identify with God and to commit to His purpose
· Moses chose to commit to the people of God – their welfare and deliverance
· Encounters with God increase your personal ability to influence others
· The world cannot be won without the presence and power of God in our life
· Relationship changed a frightened man into a leader, out of bondage into liberty. He changed a whole nation

· You are valuable and lovable – chose to agree with God!

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6. Love your Neighbor (6 of 6)

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Okay, let's have a look in Matthew, Chapter 22 and we've been sharing on Extravagant Love, talked about loving the Lord, loving your neighbour as yourself. We want to look at loving your neighbour now, loving your neighbour, and remember the verse that we shared, Matthew, Chapter 22 - should just about know it by heart now - what is the great commandment? Thou shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. This is the first and great commandment, and then the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. So Jesus said then, all the law and the prophets are summarised in those two commands, in other words, the Bible is about love. It's about revealing the nature of God, and we did two or three sessions on loving God, God's love for us, and our love for Him in response. Then we talked over the last couple of weeks about loving yourself, about treating yourself as God treats you, placing value on yourself, agreeing with what God says about you, listening to what God says about you, opening your life to receive God's love, and then standing with boundaries around your life, so your life actually becomes whole.

I want to just move from there into sharing about love your neighbour as yourself. We're just moving to that. I want to share a number of things on that, but today we'll just do one message, and I want to just do an overview of where we can go. If you look with me in 1 John, Chapter 3. Love is incredibly practical, so we've looked at spiritual dimensions of it, the need to experience God. It's important we experience God, not just know about Him but encounter Him, experience Him, have encounters with Him where we hear His voice, He shows us things. We need that. That's the fuel for the fire. That's the fuel to keep us alive, but encounters

with God are always to lead us to mission. Love always has an outworking, or a practical expression, so we read in 1 John, Chapter 3, Verse 16, by this we know love. How do we know love? Because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay our lives down for the brethren. That's the person next to you.

And whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know we're of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. So you notice he talks then about the example of Jesus Christ. This is what love is about. Love is seen in what Jesus did. Jesus, the Bible tells us, filled with the love, filled with the compassion of God, but you can't have a heart full of love, and nothing overflow. If you've got the love of God in you, there must be an expression of it some way. Jesus overflowed. How did He express the love of God? He expressed it tangibly. He ministered the anointing of the power of God to minister to needs of people. He connected with people where they were. He demonstrated acceptance of people, He discovered needs people had by listening and interacting with them, and wherever He met with people, He allowed His life routines to be interrupted, so that the needs of people could be met.

In other words, He demonstrated what love looks like. Love is incredibly practical, and it gets involved with people. Finally, He loved us so much He lay down His life for us, sacrificed His life in giving for people. So notice what it says now; if He laid His life down, that's the model, that's the example, we ought to lay our lives down for our brethren. So we're called to follow Jesus' example, not to just listen to words, but to do what He did. In Ephesians 5:1 it says be followers of God, even as Christ loved us and gave an example to us follow His example. Now what we tend to do is, we look at what others are doing; well, he's doing this, or he's not doing this, or this is what's happening. This is reality. We need to define our Christian walk using Jesus as the model; as He walked, that's how we'll walk. As He handled people, that's how we handle people. God is wanting to reveal what Jesus is like through you and me, and He can't do it unless we engage with people.

You'll find that our experiences of God are vitally connected also to our experiences with people, and how we interact and work with people. Notice what it says here; whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? Notice the key issue here, is seeing someone in need. Now there are more needs than you can minister to, so take a break. You don't have to minister to every need there is. You're not responsible to meet every need. Even Jesus didn't meet every need. He walked in and out of the temple week by week, and nevertheless there was a cripple there. He never healed that cripple. He was motivated and directed by an inspiration from His Father. Nevertheless, He met needs, so if anyone sees his brother in need. Most time when we see someone in need we say well, someone ought to do something about that, that's wrong. Someone ought to do something about that. Actually, you're right. The someone who ought to do something about it is you, because you have seen the need. Well I don't know what to do, I don't know quite what to do. Well there's always something we can do.

We're not required to meet everyone's needs. We're not required to meet all of their needs. What we are required is, to not shut up our heart when we see a person in need. To shut up your heart means to wall yourself off. One of the problems with TV and exposure to TV, if you watch a lot of TV, if you see a lot of world news and the violence and the destruction and all the difficulties and things that happen to people, or if you watch too much violence on TV, you watch too many games where people are being killed and things like that, what happens is you become a spectator and your heart becomes hardened. You can look at need and not be touched. So the Bible tells us that love, the love God is looking for, is not just about lifting our hands in worship. It goes beyond that. It actually overflows where you see someone with a need, you begin to start to take initiative to connect with the person and help them.

Notice what it says; if you see the brother in need, and you have something that can supply that need, and you shut your heart up, then how can you say that the love of God is manifesting in your life? Isn't that interesting? I've been to meetings, and I've experienced deeply the love of God, and felt full of the love of God, but at the end it comes down to

this. When you see someone in need, will you connect with them, and then begin to manifest practically some answers to the problems they have? Very clear - don't shut up our heart against a brother in need. The key issue is shutting up the heart. It's important for us to maintain good works. In Titus, it tells us in the last chapter of Titus, it says be careful to maintain good works, in order that you be fruitful. In other words, God wants us to ensure that we're not just talk, we actually on the ground level are doing things that change the lives of those around us. Be careful to maintain good works. Be careful to be involved doing things. Isn't that interesting?

You say oh well, you know, it's not all about good works, it's about intimacy. Intimacy results in good works. Jesus was intimate with the Father, and He abounded in good works to people. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Notice what it says, Acts 10:38, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and He went around doing good, healing all who were oppressed of the devil. So our love, our relationship, our intimacy with the Father is to lead us to overflow and connect with people. The interesting thing about that of course is, our connections with people are where the reality substance, and the maturity of our Christian life is revealed, so spiritual experiences need to be connected to practical action. You see Isaiah had an encounter with heaven, saw the throne of God, the glory of God, heard the angels saw and felt and experienced heaven. Then coming out of that encounter he captured the heart of God, whom shall we send? He said Lord, send me, I want to be part of the answer in meeting the needs of people.

The most powerful overflow of our spiritual experience is that we begin to engage people in a different way. Spiritual experiences, revelation from the word, revelations of spiritual things must lead to encountering and working with people. Paul said I had more revelation than anyone. Nevertheless I had pressure and afflictions come against me, lest I be lifted up in pride. So one of the problems that comes with the greater the spiritual experiences and revelation we have, the greater responsibility we have to engage with people. The dilemma I have seen over the years is when we have experiences, and in the end they don't lead to practical action. It leads to pride and elitism. I've seen that years ago, always

concerned me that the revelation was not matched with a humility that met the needs of people. So love that's practical, real, the real experience with God, the tangible experience of God, is to direct us to people, and one of the things that happen is when you meet with people, you find that they're difficult.

They have problems, and they're messy. Have you noticed that? Well it's one thing to say, I'm full of the love of God, that's wonderful. Now let's see what happens when we put a messy person in front of you, a person and they irritate you, a person and they've got holes and all kinds of things going on in their life. What are you going to do? Well what you'll do is, you will manifest the level of maturity of God's love that you carry. If you're impatient, you don't have much love, because love is patient. If you're unkind, you don't have much love, because love is kind. If you're harsh, then you don't have much love, because love is gentle, see? So the check mark for our spiritual experience and walk with God is the people that God brings into our life. Don't you just hate that teaching!

What it does, it brings responsibility. It brings responsibility, that we don't just talk and engage alone with God, but we actually overflow to start to engage with people, and share what God is really like. Over the years I've been in church, I've found people - and I included - I love spiritual experience. I love time with God, away from all those people. [Laughter] Isn't it lovely? But you know it's to lead us to engaging people at a different, and a deeper, and a more impacting level. Look at this. He says - let's just pick it up there in Verse 20 of 1 John 4; If someone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. Whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? So see what the trouble here is, that we feel full of the love of God - oh I love the Lord! I love the Lord! Then God brings someone in front of our life, that really shows us up. It really shows the level of love we have.

God wants to increase the tangible manifestation of loving people. The bottom line, whatever spirituality we have, must show itself in love for people, gentleness and kindness and forgiveness and mercy and grace. You know, this is a key part of what Jesus said was required of us. You notice it's a command. [Laughs] It's a command. This commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God, must love his brother also. So

have a look around then near you. Even right now if you were to have a look around, you'd probably see some people, well you'll probably avoid them on the way out of the church see, and you think, I wonder why that is? Well it's because your heart is walled off for some reason, could be all kinds of reasons. You may be hurt or whatever, but that's not love flowing. See there's a thing called cold love. We look at this and we say well, if anyone hates his brother, well you know, we're not conscious of hating someone. What we do is just build a wall, and shut them out, and any of you who have been with someone who shut you out, you didn't feel embraced. You felt barely tolerated, but actually the coldness of it actually is wounding. It actually impacts us quite negatively.

Well that's their problem and their issue, but nevertheless cold love is not real love at all. Cold love ministers a different spirit to people. God wants us to learn how to open our heart and celebrate, and make people welcome in our life. I remember when we first started the church here, at one point there there was a whole lot of things happening. It was all exciting and wonderful and was a bit wild. Then in the midst of all the wildness, we had about eight Mongrel Mob from Auckland came into the meeting. That was a bit of a surprise. You don't see that every Sunday do you? It was quite fun really. I thought oh yeah, this is good, you know, all the gear and the tattoos, every kind of thing on and whatever. It was quite exciting you see, and we preached the gospel, and they got saved. We had people come up and they got saved, and then at that time there I had some people in the church, and I had one person there; the thing he said, well I'd love to be used in ministry, but I don't want to get involved with these guys.

I looked at him in the eye and I said, if you won't get involved with these guys, I don't think this church is the place for you, because we're involved with them. If you want to be involved in ministry, you can't pick and choose who you minister to. You need to learn to embrace who God brings into your life, see? So you need to love them, reach out and love them. So we reached out, and we had a really wonderful time - they flogged the offering but - you know that offering box that's down the back there? Well that walked out the door with them one night. [Laughter] But I went and talked to them, and they brought it back. We got it back as you

can see, we got it back, but the point is this, is that the religious spirit over some people, will not permit them to love people that God wants to impact. It divides the world into those who are acceptable, and not acceptable, those who I like and reach out to, those who I won't get involved with. The heart of God is to reach out to people wherever they are, whatever's going on.

See, you start to think about that. Think of what are the chief criticisms that Jesus' opponents had, that He ate with all the wrong kinds of people, sinners and messed up lives, all the kinds of people that the good people wouldn't mix with. But Jesus mixed with them, because He came to demonstrate the love and the heart of God. Isn't that fantastic? Don't you love that? Love initiates action to do something! Let's have a look in Luke, Chapter 10. I want to have a look at where the same issue is raised again by someone else. It's a lawyer this time, trying to trap Jesus and ask Him the question, well you know, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And He throws it back at him in Verse 26, said what do you read in the Bible? He said you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength, and all your might, and love your neighbour as yourself. He said well done. You've answered rightly. We'll do this and live - but he wanted to justify himself, so he said to Jesus who is my neighbour? Jesus answered and said, well a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves. They stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, departed, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. He saw him, and he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, he came and he looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and saw him, and had compassion. So he went to him, bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, took care of him. On the next day when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave it to the innkeeper and said, whatever more you spend, when I come back I'll repay you. Who of these three, do you think then was neighbour to him, who fell among the thieves? He said the one who showed mercy, and Jesus said go and do likewise. Notice the question, who is my neighbour? Jesus reversed it and said, who is a neighbour?

So the lawyer's trying to trap Jesus and catch Him out over the law, and Jesus makes it very clear, it's not a matter of trying to identify who around you is your neighbour. What counts is, are you a neighbour to those around you in need? Are YOU a neighbour?

A neighbour gets involved. A neighbour engages with needs. A neighbour does something. So let's just go through this parable. I want to just highlight a few things which I'll develop at a later time, and notice here it says, a certain man went from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, they stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, departed leaving him half dead. So here is a story of a man in need, and this man had set out on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. That area is notoriously dangerous, full of thieves and robbers, and he was set upon. He did not expect that before he got to the end of his journey, he would encounter so a violent attack. Thieves set upon him, they hit him and beat him up, stripped him of his clothes, left him wounded, left him half dead. They abandoned him.

Notice the things that happened here. This man fully expected he would walk through the journey of life, and he would not have such a thing happen to him. He is like many people around us. We meet them every day. They're in school. Some of you teachers are like this, some of the students in your class are like this. You meet them in business, you meet them in the community. I have never gone anywhere I didn't meet people who were just like this person here. They have had experiences in their life where they were set upon by demonic powers, set upon by thieves. The Bible says the devil is the thief and a robber, been wounded in some kind of way. That which was good in their life that God destined them to have was taken from them. They were abandoned in some kind of way, and left there barely struggling to make it through life. This is the condition of many people. You meet them all the time. They're around you all the time. Some will be sitting here. Some turn up in our Freedom Retreats, some come to our Restoration Retreats, and always that person that looks so nice worshipping God, there they were, broken, wounded, half dead on the inside, beaten up in the stories of life.

The Bible tells us they were wounded. That word for wound is trauma, traumas, emotionally painful experiences, divorces, abuse, addictions, all kinds of things. This is the world we live in. Everywhere we go, we meet

people who are like this, everywhere we go there are people around exactly like this. Now I want you to see what the priest and the Levite did. The priest there came and saw him, and then he just crossed and passed by on the other side. He did not want to get involved. Notice he saw him, and then shut up his heart against him. It's not he didn't see the need. It's not he wasn't aware there was something wrong. He just closed up his heart. The Levite went, and he not only saw him, he went over and looked closely. Oh man, what a mess - and he shut up his heart, and he left him as well.

Jesus brought this out to show us this is what religion is like. Religion does not have a heart for people. Religion shuts up the heart, and will not get involved with people. These people were dedicated. They went to church, they went to meetings, tried to obey the law, tried to do everything that was right, but they did not have the heart, the spirit, that which captivates what God is like. God calls us to an intimate relationship, and out of that, the flow of life, and presence, and anointing, and the love of God to touch people. These people shut up their heart. They closed their heart. They held their heart in. I've found that religion will cause people to divide their world up, those who are acceptable, those non-acceptable. There's a judging attitude, a superior attitude. There's something that you feel when you meet it. We're not to be like that. We're called to be something different.

Jesus was demonstrating the impotence of religion, and showing how the church of His day had lost the heart of God, and lost the purpose of God to connect His people, with the community, to be a channel of life, and healing, and power. Then He begins to talk about the Samaritan, He talks about the Samaritan. The Samaritan of course, was someone that they all hated, so this really was a poke in the nose to the religious people of the day. You know something? God can raise up anyone to meet the needs of the community, and He will do. He'll raise up anyone who is willing, and for us to stay with what God is doing, we have to be willing to engage with the needs of people. You can't just have experiences and worship, without actually catching and moving with the heart of God, which is to meet people.

I want to show you several things out of this next passage on the Good Samaritan. I want to just highlight for you several things that we'll open up and look at a little bit further, but I want you to see this guy. There's a certain Samaritan journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, had compassion. He went to him, bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said take care of him. Whatever more you spend, when I come again, I'll repay you. Notice first thing: he came where he was. So one of the first things that God is - God's heart is that His people be like the Samaritan. God's heart is WE be like the Samaritan. God's heart is for YOU to be like the Samaritan, so the first thing we need to understand, the church that Jesus is building is apostolic. Every believer is sent by God on a mission.

Every believer, wherever you are in the community, you are sent by God, so the first thing is, that we embrace our calling as a sent person. Where you are, you are empowered to minister. Wherever you go, you're called by God to be a minister. You're called by God to be His ambassador and representative. We are sent people. See, it says here he came where he went. Well every one of us meets people. I guarantee that within this week, if you were to position yourself with an open heart, and begin to look for the opportunities, God will bring someone to you who's battered, wounded, half dead, got issues inside their heart, waiting for someone who will not just cross to the other side, but will actually engage them, and reach out to them. I had a group of guys, at one point and I said, why don't you this week - I taught them just about asking questions and listening. I said don't talk so much, ask more questions, and listen. If you'll do that, people will open up their heart and tell you what they really are concerned about, and what is really happening.

But if you shut your heart up, and just want to talk about yourself, and be interested in yourself, you'll miss the opportunities. You've got to look for them. This man came where he was. Now in your life God is going to bring you to where people are wounded. You will come where they are. Why? That's God's plan. His plan for an apostolic church is that wherever people go, they will go where people are wounded, hurt, damaged,

whether it's the businessman, who looks so good and seems successful, but his heart is broken, his marriage is failing, got all kinds of issues in his heart; whether it's some young person at school, whether it's some teacher. It doesn't really matter where we go. God sends us to people who are in need. Notice he saw him and had compassion. The second thing God calls us to do is to manifest the heart and the compassion of God. When we see people we feel moved. How do you feel moved? Because God's had compassion on you, because you're vitally connected to Him. You're actually open in your heart, and you feel needs, you feel the compassion.

One of the things I've learnt about flowing in the gifts of the spirit, is whenever I feel compassion for someone, I know God will give a gift of the spirit to operate. As soon as I feel the compassion, I know God's going to do something. As soon as I sense a heart for the person, I know God is about to do something. When you see someone, meet someone, begin to discover a problem or an issue, and you start to feel compassion in your heart, God is stirring you to do something so compassion, we need to manifest the compassion, not close our heart but be sensitive in our heart to the needs of people. Now you don't have to meet every need, as you'll see this guy didn't either. Jesus definitely didn't - said he went to him, he went to him. So here's the third characteristic. We need to be able to engage and enter, enter and engage, the world of unsaved people.

Now to enter and engage unsaved people, you must be able to get rid of religious clutter, and jargon, and funny ways of doing things, and talk in language, and realities, that unsaved people can understand. We've got to be able to enter their world without any judgement, enter their world and understand, people who are sinning do crazy stuff. We need to understand where they're coming from, what's going on. Today the next generation that's emerging has got immense needs. I was looking at a study related to the Gen Ys, and concerning the baby boomers, those who are married or - were married, permanently married at around the age of 24. There was something like about 70 per cent of the Gen Ys, which are the younger generation now, only five per cent at about the same time - a huge drop, over two or three generations, disillusioned with

relationships, disillusioned with all kinds of things, unable to enter into commitments.

The world around us has changed rapidly, so the church has to change, and the way it does it's business, to engage with a culture that has shifted, now that's a challenge because of course, if you're from my generation you tend to think in certain sorts of ways, but the young generation and the people today think and operate radically differently. In order to engage them, you've got to be willing to enter their culture without judgement, and begin to understand how their culture operates, and connect with ordinary people who are quite wounded and need someone. The needs are the same. The answers are the same. It's just the wrapping is different, that's all. But the church over the decades has been notoriously slow to engage culture at where it is, with the needs it has right now. We need to do that. We need to do that.

Notice the next thing he went to him, so he entered his world. Can you enter the world of unsaved people and begin to even understand them, and find out what's going on? It requires a measure of conversational skill and ability. It requires a heart to listen, it requires a willingness to be non-judgemental. Next thing you notice it says, he bandaged his wound; he connected to and identified the wounds in the man. He bandaged his wounds. Now you can't minister to someone's needs, unless you connect into and identify what they are, and usually that requires listening with a heart to hear, ability to ask a few questions. I've found people will open up, they will share their heart. You say, well I don't know what to do. Well do what you can. If God put a touch, and brought that person around you, why don't you do what you can, see?

The next thing you notice, he poured in the oil and the wine. Well God calls us to be ministers of the Holy Ghost, the oil and the wine. Notice that the religious people lacked oil and wine, they lacked the anointing, the flow, the presence, the activity of the Holy Spirit. But this man here had that anointing, had that flow. He had what was needed, to bring soothing and healing to the wound, and he did what he could at the time. Gifts of the spirit are for every believer. God calls you to operate in giftings so He can bring a word of encouragement, word of prophesy, word of healing, bring ministry at the level you're able to, and whatever

level you're able to, grow in it. Get more oil and more wine. We'll talk about that another time.

See next thing it says, he set him on his animal. What he did then was, he adjusted his priorities around his mission. Jesus continually adjusted His time, and His scale of doing things, around mission. When people came to Him in need, He made adjustments, and met the needs. When people came to Him with faith, He stopped to listen to them, and meet their needs. People with needs come at the most inconvenient times, so one of the things about the Samaritan was, he was willing to reprioritise his life. It's incredibly inconvenient if you're riding a horse to get off and put someone on, and start to walk. To be engaged with the needs of people is inconvenient. It requires we adjust what we do. I found every time anyone's come with a need or I've spotted a need, it never was at a good time. You notice people don't even die at a good time, they just die at a most inconvenient time. [Laughs] Yet you've got to step off on whatever you're doing, and get involved with that. It's part of what ministry is like.

Let's have a look at the next thing. It said he brought him to an inn. One of the things we need to learn how to do is how to bring people into the house of God, into the body of Christ, to begin to connect with them. None of us has all the answers, not one of us, but together, we can actually provide healing, and hope, and help for people. So he didn't just fix him up on his own, he just did what he could. So another thing he did was, he knew his limits. When you're working with people you need to know your limits. You can help to a certain extent, then it needs others to help. Sometimes we recognise the needs are beyond what we can do, then we have to refer to someone else who can do the job, but we can at least reprioritise our life, connect with the person, help them actually make the next step.

The next thing he did was he took care of him. When you bring someone to church, there's a way of actually drawing people in. Many times we try to invite someone to church who's hurting and needing, and they desperately need the touch of God, but we haven't sown into their life. We haven't invested kindness in their life long enough, for them to be willing to make a response. Notice this man invested healing and

invested energy and time into him, and that then laid the way for him to respond. He was able to bring him into the inn, bring him to the house of God - but there's a way of bringing people into the church, there's a way of linking people into the church. He brought him to where others were, brought him to a place where there was vitality and life. Notice there he took care of him, he followed him up. If you bring someone here on a Sunday, then look after them, follow them up, check out how they're being looked after. You look after them, make them a priority, and if you didn't bring anyone, and someone else did, well then you as a part of the general people that are in the inn, go to them, and make them welcome, make them feel like they're very special, feel like they're very important. Make them very welcome.

Finally the last thing is, he released finances to do what he couldn't do, the on-going care. One of the things we're all called to do, is to release what resources we have. For some it may be just a little - well a little is just very big, if it's in God's eyes see? Or it may be a lot more, it doesn't really matter. The key principle here is, that resources are released so that God's work of ministering to people, and bringing them to wholeness and activating them again, can take place. This is what Jesus did. This is what love looks like. That's what love looks like. That's what it looks like. Let's have a look at it again. Love, love embraces the calling, as a sent person to the community. Have you embraced your calling as a sent person? Love is sensitive to the heart of God, and manifests the compassion of God. Do you feel that sometimes, and let that rise up when you see people with needs?

Love enters the world of unsaved people, engages them, begins to build a bridge and a connection across to them. Love identifies, and begins to recognise the needs people have, because once you've found a need, and you begin to meet that need, their heart opens up to you. Love ministers the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Love reaches out with the gifts of God, the flow of what you got in worship, what you've got from God begins to flow out, and touch that person's life. Love reprioritises the life, so you can fulfil what God called you to do. If you are in a business or in a workplace that place you're called to be the missionary, the pastor of

that place, so you're the one responsible then, and God will open the opportunities.

See, what else did he do? He brought him to an inn. We're called to connect people to the church, the local church, the body of Christ. We're called to connect people. Do you connect people? We're called to follow them up with some personal care, one on one care. No one thrives without personal care. You're here because someone cared for you. I'm here because someone cared for me. I'm here because someone showed interest in me. And finally love, true love, releases resources, that the work of God can be much bigger than we are. That's what love looks like. No wonder Jesus taught this parable, it's one of the most brilliant parables I've recognised and seen and gone through in the New Testament. In it contains wonderful gems about what love really looks like. That's the kinds of people God wants us to be.

Let's just close our eyes right now. Father, we just thank You that You loved us. You do love us, You continue to love us, but Lord, with our receiving that love comes a great responsibility, a responsibility for the house of God, that it be built and made strong, a responsibility for the community, that Christ is made known through our personal lives. Father, we thank You for such a great call. We thank You Lord, that increasingly your church will arise and engage the community in different ways and different levels, and broken people will be restored, and that we want to be such a people that will do that.

Just while our eyes are closed and heads are bowed, is there anyone sitting here today that's never actually made that first personal connection with Jesus Christ? This would be a great day to make that decision. Trying to be a good person isn't enough. Just coming to church isn't enough. It needs a personal connection to Jesus Christ. Is there anyone here today, right at that stage, where you want to give your life to Christ, receive forgiveness of your sins, a connection with God, a beginning of a new life? Why don't you just raise your hand if that's you today. Is there anyone here this morning right at that place to receive Jesus Christ, right at that place of decision? Don't put it off. Make that decision today, I will open my heart to the Lord, I'll open my heart to

Jesus Christ. Is there anyone here today at that place, that position, just raise your hand and let me know.

While our eyes are closed and heads are bowed, I wonder how many people you felt God challenging you today, challenging you not to be like the priest and the Levite, who saw the need and closed your heart, but to be like the Samaritan, and wherever you go there's a channel of life flows through you. If you felt God speaking to your heart about that this day, just raise your hand just right now, say God's speaking to me. God bless, God bless, God bless. Father, we just thank You, pray for a flow of Your spirit around our lives, around ministry. Father, we pray that from this body of people many will rise up with great boldness to make Christ known, great boldness to reach the lives of people around them, great boldness to interact in a creative way with the community, great boldness to interact with people who are desperately empty and need you.

Father, we just pray that ministry of the Good Samaritan, that flow of love and compassion, to begin to flow like a river through this church to touch people who are in need. Jesus, we give You all the honour and all the glory. Some of you have got great gifts in this area. I feel the Lord saying there's some, your gift has been shut down for whatever reason. Some you are disappointed, someone you've invested in, a lot of energy, a lot of time and then they didn't come through, they didn't respond as you thought they would. This is the same thing that Jesus experienced of course. We invest in people because it's an expression of love, and representing God, and they don't always respond well, but you have to let it go. You're responsible just to sow the love, the goodness, the kindness of God. You're responsible to speak to them and speak the truth. You're not responsible for how they respond.

Maybe some today here and your heart is shut down and you've stopped giving out, stopped reaching out because you've suffered some rejection or knock backs or setbacks or some kind of injustice. You need to let it go today, just let it go, let it go and say God, I will give myself to reaching out to people around me. I will give myself to engaging people where they are. I will give myself to making you known. Amen.

Summary Notes:

Introduction:

· Matthew 22:36-40 - “Love the Lord your God with all your heart … love your neighbour as yourself”
· Love the Lord Passionately is the first command
· Love yourself as God loves you – value yourself as God values you
· Love your Neighbor! This is the 2nd command

Love is Practical:

1 John 3:16-19

a) Example of Jesus:

· Jesus laid down His life for us

b) Follow Jesus’ example

· Lay down your life for the brethren> this means practical action
· Ephesians 5:1 - ‘Be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also loved us and given himself for us.’
· The love of God for is is a spiritual substance that can be experienced
· The love of God for us is also very practical. He meets our needs
· Passion for Jesus needs to overflow in an a extremely practical way, practical involvement with people
· Engage with real people, real needs
· Jesus was constantly criticized by His religious enemies for His practical involvement with sinners (Lk.15 1-2)

c) Love is Practical

· Love connects with people and meets needs of people
· Key issue: Shutting up heart = refusing to connect and help
· Abiding love is manifested in practical ways
· It is important to maintain acts of love and kindness
· What manifestation of the love of God flows through you to others?
· If you see a brother in need how do you respond?
- “Someone ought to do something!”
- “Its his problem not mine!”
-“I don’t know what to do”
· All these responses are “shutting up the heart from him” they are NOT a manifestation of the heart of God but of self preservation
· Jesus did not meet every need of people on earth. He was Holy Spirit led
· Love manifests as compassion and willingness to engage and do what we can
· Titus 3:14 - ‘Let out people learn to maintain good works, meet urgent needs that they not be unfruitful.’
· Spiritual experiences must be connected to practical action
· Eg Is.6:8 Also I heard the voice of The Lord saying “Who shall go for us?”
· Spiritual experiences without practical expression = pride and elitism

d) Reality of Relationship

· 1 John 4:20 - “love brother whom he has seen’
· Command = to Love God is that you must love your brother also
· Someone with needs standing in front of us in need exposes the reality of our love and spiritual maturity it reveals what’s in our heart. How will you react? How will you respond? What response will you make?
· The person who you see in need reveals the quality and substance of what is unseen within you
· Spiritual encounter and experiences with God lead to mission or pride and elitism and judging begin to operate
· Closing the heart =Cold love = wounds and isolates people

Love is Proactive – it initiates action:
· Luke 10:25-37
· Question posed by Lawyer = Who is my neighbor?
Reply presented by Jesus = Who is a neighbor?
· Experiences with God are to prepare you to represent God
· To represent God you carry His Heart, His compassion and do what He does!

Parable Of the Good Samaritan
a) Man in Need:
· Thieves – demonic powers
· Stripped – took what belong to him, left him vulnerable and exposed
· Wounded – imposed blows upon verse 34 – 'trauma'
· Abandoned – left isolated and alone
· Half dead – struggling to stay alive
· This is the condition of people we all meet every day in every area of life
· Often they do not realize their condition but their behaviors reveal it

b) The Priest and the Levite:
· Saw – passed by on other side
· Saw and looked – passed by on other side
· Religion is cold and powerless and has no heart to help people

Religion
· Busy for God in spiritual matters
· Close heart and compassion to people in pain and in need
· 'Cold Love' – tolerates, little overflow
· Pride – self reveferential, Judgment, Faultfinding
· Irrelevant to the community and its needs
· Obstructive to the Kingdom of God
· 1 Corinthians 13:1
· The religious spirit doesn't manifest the love and heart of God, It builds systems and places burdens upon people that hinder spiritual and relational growth

c) The Good Samaritan: Key Lessons
· 'Came where he was' – Embrace your calling as a 'Sent One', wherever you go you are an ambassador of the Kingdom of God, engage people and needs
· 'Saw and had compassion' – Manifest compassion of God. When you see people you are moved by their condition
· 'Went to him' – Enter the world of the unsaved. We are to be proactive-to go to people and personally engage people in their world
· 'Bandaged the wounds' – Connect and identify the needs of people. This requires skills of listening and asking questions with a heart to discover where people are and how you can help them
· 'Poured in oil and wine' – Minister the Anointing of the Holy Spirit. Moving in the Gifts of the Spirit when interacting with someone, This requires a personal prayer life and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit
· 'Set him on his animal' – Prioritize your life around Gods priorities. He changes his plans to accommodate the new opportunity that he had to reveal the love of God
· 'Brought him to an Inn' – Connect people to the Local Church family. We do not have all the answers to people's needs. We must connect people to the community of faith where there are other gifted people
· 'Took care of him' – Follow up people with personal care. Every perso we bring into the church we must

follow up personally to ensure they are connecting and forming relationships. We recognize our personal limits in meeting the needs of people
· ‘Give money to the Inn keeper – Release finances for the Kingdom of God. For lives to be changed and touched there is a need for finances

· This is what Love looks like!
· The Good Samaritan is Jesus Christ Himself who calls us to be imitators of Him
· Experiences with people act as a mirror to the level at which our lives are full of the love of God
· Spiritual experiences lead to a changed life, manifesting the heart of God to people and influence community and people we meet.
· Where do you fit in? The Priest, Levite or Samaritan? Or the wounded man?

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