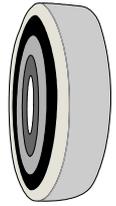


THE LOVE PROJECT

AIMING TO LOVE the Imperfect People in Your Life



LOVE is our “never ending exam” in the school of grace. But there’s a problem: people. People, ah, there’s the rub. Love is a beautiful thing— until we actually have to love *somebody!*



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I. A LOVE QUIZ (open book): Read the passage from 1 John below and **count** the number of times he uses the word *love* in any of its forms.

__ __ times

Dear friends (Greek: *beloved*), let us *love* one another, for *love* comes from God. Everyone who *loves* has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not *love* does not know God, because God is *love*. ⁹ This is how God showed his *love* among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is *love*: not that we *loved* God, but that he *loved* us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends (Greek: *beloved*), since God so *loved* us, we also ought to *love* one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we *love* one another, God lives in us and his *love* is made complete in us.

¹³ **We know** that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ^{16a} And so we know and rely on the *love* God has for us.

^{16b} **God is love.** Whoever lives in *love* lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, *love* is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ There is no fear in *love*. But perfect *love* drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in *love*.

We love because he first *loved* us. ²⁰ If anyone says, “I *love* God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not *love* his brother, whom he has seen, cannot *love* God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever *loves* God must also *love* his brother.

¹ **Everyone** who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who *loves* the father *loves* his child as well. ² This is how we know that we *love* the children of God: by *loving* God and carrying out his commands. This is *love* for God: to obey his commands, and his commands are not burdensome. — 1 John 4:7-5:3 (NIV)

A BRAIN TEASER: Put on your thinking cap. Given the truths we’ve studied in *Grace4Life* up to now, how would you explain the relationship between **faith, the Gospel, the Holy Spirit, love, assurance** and **obedience** in this passage? **You have 3 minutes.** Write out your response in the box on the next page.

The way I see it, the relationship between **faith**, the **Gospel**, the **Holy Spirit**, **love**, **assurance** and **obedience** is...

II. WHO ARE WE CALLED TO LOVE?

Before we go on, because so many of the New Testament passages focus on our love for God's people (such as the one we just read), in an attempt to make the Christian life easier, some have suggested we are only obligated to love other believers.

Problem: Listen to what Jesus said:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴ *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. [Meaning what?] He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

⁴⁶ *If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

⁴⁸ *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. - Matthew 5:43-48*

Love is INTENTIONAL!

(Note that vs. 48 defines perfection as unconditional love for those who are unrighteous. In the parallel passage in Luke 6:27-36, Jesus uses the word "merciful" rather than perfect.)

That's powerful! Christian love is about loving other Christians **and** about *moving redemptively* into the lives of those whose hearts are cold toward the Gospel and us as God's people. But, when we do that, the Holy Spirit can exert divine leverage to begin a new work in their lives. We are called to be the "salt of the earth." And, when we show selfless love to people who don't know Jesus, we become flesh and blood evidence that faith in Christ is not some good-for-nothing "pie in the sky" religion. Rather it is a life-transforming, practical faith that improves the quality of life for people in a world where the name of the game is *use people* rather than love people.

To love others is not only a high privilege, it can have a powerful evangelistic impact. (More on that in Lesson 12.)

III. TESTING OUR "LQ" (Love Quotient)

If we know where to look, it is possible to test the quality of our love for others. For starters, read "The Agape Factor" on page 11-5.

Two simple litmus tests for Christlike love (just two of the many in 1 Corinthians 13):

A. HOW KIND ARE YOU? Look at the ways you show (or don't show) **kindness** (the Spirit's fruit) toward your spouse, roommate, children, parents, in-laws, extended family, congregation, neighbors, work associates, and yes, your postie, cleaner, sales clerk and the waiter at your table.

Do these people feel loved by you, or used by you? (Not sure? Screw up your courage and ask some of them! Tell them it's a silly assignment.)

A CHALLENGE: This week, test yourself. Go out of your way to be kind to someone, perhaps someone who usually plays a servant role in your life (your waiter, postie, cleaner, etc.). *Love is intentional.* It seeks, reaches out, engages and works to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil.2:3). Who knows, you might discover that showing kindness to others is actually *fun!*

RIGHT NOW, EVERYONE think of someone you can show a special kindness this week.

SHARE: WHO is that person and **HOW** will you show love to them? Be specific. (Stuck? How would you like to be treated?) **Matthew 7:12 - "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."** (Stunning!)

If all this sounds a wee bit hard, or has you feeling a tad squeamish, remember: We may be able to explain the mechanics of sanctification (as we did in that little gray box above), but remain inept at loving other people so that they actually *feel* loved and esteemed by us. At the end of the day, knowing is not being, or doing. *Jesus, help us! Holy Spirit, empower us!*

B. HOW DO YOU USE YOUR TONGUE?

Our tongues are ideal weapons for punishing hard-to-love people. Are there times you use your tongue to express your displeasure with or otherwise show your lack of love toward them?

Reflect: Do you ever:

Talk to them in unkind ways,

Talk about them to others, or,

Not talk to them at all (“freeze them out“)?

Can we change our tongues? James says, “No man can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil full of deadly poison.” (3:8) Actually, there are two ways we can tame it: **1. Keep repenting** and running to Jesus until our heart (the spiritual root of the tongue) begins to change into an instrument of love, healing and edification rather than spite, wounding and destruction. **2. Cut it off.**

John Wesley often wore neckties (bow ties) and some thought the “tails” (loose ends) were too long to be proper for a minister. Once, after worship, he was accosted by a woman who said, “Sir there is something about thee that doth greatly offend me, and if you would kindly stick it out, I will cut it off!” Taken aback, Wesley said, “And what would that be, Madam?” “Your tie!” she huffed, producing a large pair of shears from her handbag. Wesley stretched his necktie out and asked her to trim it to a length that she deemed fitting, whereupon she snipped it off. “And now Madam,” he said, relieving her of the shears, “there is something about thee which doth greatly offend me, and if you would kindly stick it out, I will cut it off.” “And what might that be,” the woman snapped. “Your tongue,” he replied.

IV. A MONSTROUS OBSTACLE TO LOVE

Love requires that we love others sinners.

A. The brutal reality: Every morning when your feet hit the floor, you step into a world inhabited by around 7,000,000,000 sinners. That’s seven *billion*.

And, if you live in a family, you are forced to live in the same small space with a group of sinners you did not choose. Even more frightening, during worship this Sunday, you will be surrounded by scores of them.

The reason life with all these sinful people is so terribly difficult is that most of them know perfectly well how they *should* relate to you and others, but they don’t appear to give a cat’s whisker about doing it. So the question is, given these circumstances, how can we possibly love? For certain, it will be a battle, but if we don’t enter the fray, we will forever be *thermometers* rather than *thermostats*. (Can you discern the difference?)

The people we are called to love are unloveable sinners. Even so, we have a choice about what to do with that information. We can, **1.** condemn them, **2.** ignore them, or **3.** chose to love them.

When I make a decision not to love someone, it will be impossible to move into their life redemptively. **Think about it:** God knows you and I are big sinners, but what did *he* chose to do with that information?

“But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

- Ephesians 2:4,5

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

- Romans 5:8

To love as Jesus loves is to be “rich in mercy”

just as Jesus is rich in mercy (Jn.13:34ff). Our instinctive response to irritating people is to judge, not love. But, we can love them *if* we do what God does with our sin. **REREAD** the definition of forgiveness on page **9-1, B.**

B. Good news! The Gospel gives us power to love other sinners as Jesus loves us.

We don’t have to do this on our own. One of the many wonderful things about God is that when he tells us to do something hard (like love other sinners), he gives us the power to do it. **Think about it:** Where does *God* get the power to love sinners? Yes, it’s in his nature (“*God is love.*” 1Jn.4:16), but his justice was satisfied through the Gospel. So, where might we get the power to love other sinners? From the Gospel!

For you and me, the loved and forgiven, Christlike love is not only possible, it is

inevitable. As we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus in faith, the Holy Spirit produces Christlike love in us so that we love others like the Great Lover himself. Like that “sinful woman” in Luke 7, let’s keep humbling ourselves before Jesus. She showed us the way: “*He who is forgiven much, loves much; he who is forgiven little, loves little.*” (page **7-4**).

Are you a thermometer - or a thermostat?

SUMMING UP

The more we look at, and fellowship with Jesus, the more we will love like Jesus.

(Jn.15:5; Eph.5:1,2; 2Cor.3:18)

The more we become like Jesus, the more we will move out of the role of *perfect judge*, and, relying on the Holy Spirit, move toward others with loving words and actions.

NOW, right now, we will begin to put all these great truths into practise. It is time to begin writing “The Never-Ending Final Exam” first in pen and ink, and then in flesh and blood by loving words and loving deeds.

THE LOVE PROJECT

Instructions

1. Choose the two most difficult people in your life as your "Love Targets." We recommend choosing a family member (spouse, etc.) for one of them. The closest people to us are usually the most difficult to love because we can't escape their eccentricities (nor they ours).

2. Complete the "My Love Strategy Worksheets for each of those people.

AN OBJECTION. Difficult as it is to believe, some of our (seminary) students in the past have voiced loud objections to this exercise: "But, this is legalistic!" "You talk about grace but now you are putting us under law!"

What does this sound like to you? Weren't they actually saying, "We like thinking about love and talking about love as the fulfillment of the law, but surely you're not saying we should actually **do** something about it!"

Jesus made it clear that our love for others is the sure proof that we belong to him (Jn.13:35), and John admonishes us, "Dear children, let us not love with words, but with actions and in truth" (1Jn.3:18).

So, we go about this exercise with all the seriousness those words warrant.

A CAUTION & SOME WISE ADVICE:

CAUTION: Remember, this is a "love them" not a "change them" assignment.

WISE ADVICE: Immediately withdraw your application to play Holy Spirit. What is the alternative to a "change them" strategy? Ask God to change you! Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you've had a spirit of demandingness, an unloving or unforgiving attitude, said nagging and complaining words, or used uncaring gestures and facial expressions. (As when I hurt my dear wife recently. How? She had made a mistake and I demeaned her by rolling my eyes at her.)

HEAR THIS: The method God most often uses to profoundly change the difficult people in our lives is **to change us** before their very eyes. When they see us being changed by the power of the Gospel, a new thought may occur to them: "If this Jesus is powerful enough to change this messed up wife, husband, roommate, friend, etc., he just might be able to change me!"

Adopting this perspective can transform your praying into something very exciting. Each morning we can "get in partnership with God" and ask the Spirit to give us his fruit in our relationships for that day. This will help us be sensitive to the Spirit's leading us to love others in Jesus-like ways.

And wonderfully, as we do, Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17:21 will be answered: the church *will* be one; revival will come, and men and women, boys and girls will be drawn to this Mighty Christ who can make big sinners like us into big lovers like Him.

To God be the glory!

SCRIPTURE HEART-PREP for the exercise:

¹⁴ **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...** ¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil...* ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath...* ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [Prov. 25:21, 22] ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- **Romans 12:14,17,19a-21**

Lastly, Paul's reminder that love is the never-ending exam of the Christian life:

⁸ **Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.** ⁹

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be [!], are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

- **Romans 13:8-10**

Ready? Let's begin our "final exam"!



GRACE ASSIGNMENT

1. Complete the "Love Strategy Worksheet" for Love Targets 1 and 2 (pp.11-7,8)

2. Study the "Five Levels of Communication." Compare yourself with Jesus and Paul. Ask the Spirit to move you in their direction. (pp.11-9,10)

3. Give yourself a heart exam using "Loving Hearts - Loveless Hearts." (pp.11-6)

The Agape Factor

I **F I speak in the tongues of men and of angels,** but have not love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,
and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love,
I am nothing.

3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love,
I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient;
love is kind;
it does not envy or boast;
it is not arrogant
5 or rude.

It does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

7 Love bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.

8 Love never ends.

As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge,
it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the
perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I
shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

13 So now faith,
hope, and
love abide,
these three;
but the greatest of these is...
love.

— I Corinthians 13

Loving Hearts vs. Loveless Hearts

Spiritual diagnostics: How great a lover am I?

WE call **1 Corinthians 13** “the love chapter,” and so it is. But the church has sentimentalised it to the point it packs all the punch of mushy peas. This chart can help you calculate your “L.Q.”—Love Quotient. See how you fare, and if you come up looking bad (as you surely will), run to Jesus and ask him to cleanse you from your lovelessness. Claim his promise: “*If you...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*” So by all means, ask him for the power of his Spirit in your life. (The Spirit’s fruit *is* love.)

▼ **LOVING HEARTS**

- Loving hearts are patient.
- Loving hearts are kind.
- Loving hearts do not envy.
- Loving hearts do not boast.
- Loving hearts are not proud.
- Loving hearts are not rude.
- Loving hearts are not self-seeking.
- Loving hearts are not easily angered.
- Loving hearts keep no record of wrongs.
- Loving hearts do not delight in evil.
- Loving hearts rejoice with the truth.
- Loving hearts always protect.
- Loving hearts always trust.
- Loving hearts always hope.
- Loving hearts always persevere.

▼ **LOVELESS HEARTS**

- 1** Loveless hearts are impatient. (What drives our impatience with others?)
- 2** Loveless hearts are unkind. (Why are we unkind to others? What motivates our unkindness?)
- 3** Loveless hearts envy. (Why do we crave other people’s possessions, gifts or positions?)
- 4** Loveless hearts boast. (Why this “compensatory egoism”? What do we need?)
- 5** Loveless hearts are full of pride. (Why do we gain by being better or higher than others?)
- 6** Loveless hearts are rude. (Why do we need to wound others with our looks or our words?)
- 7** Loveless hearts are self-seeking. (Why do we rush to the most comfy chair? Why this “me first!”)
- 8** Loveless hearts are easily angered. (Why do we have such a short fuse with others?)
- 9** Loveless hearts keep a record of wrongs. (Why do we store up the wrongs of others?)
- 10** Loveless hearts delight in evil. (Why are we delighted at the failures or misfortunes of others?)
- 11** Loveless hearts don’t rejoice with the truth. (Why are we comforted by lies and half-truths?)
- 12** Loveless hearts love to accuse. (Why are we so quick to accuse rather than protect/defend others?)
- 13** Loveless hearts are always suspicious. (Why are we reluctant to hope the best from others?)
- 14** Loveless hearts look on the dark side. (What is behind our negativity?)
- 15** Loveless hearts easily give up. (What causes them to pack it in? What is it they don’t love?)

MY LOVE STRATEGY WORKSHEET 1

My Love Target's name (in code or use their initials) _____

WAIT! BEFORE you begin writing, think: Does this person need to be converted? Is he/she really regenerate? Are they trusting in Jesus' righteousness or their own? Or, is he/she a believer that has a tendency to forget the Gospel the same way I tend to forget the Gospel?

• **If the person is not a believer,** what is your *plan* for sharing Jesus with them? A plan? Yes indeed. As the old adage goes: "If you aim at nothing, and you'll hit it every time!"

• **But, if the person is a Christian,** what is your *plan* for showing them how walking in the Spirit really looks?

Remember: only a personal relationship with Jesus can change people. Show them what that looks like in a real flesh-and-blood person - you.

NOW you're ready to work out your love strategy.

1. What do I need to **start doing** to love this person the way Christ loves me? ("put on")

2. What do I need to **stop doing** in my relationship to this person? ("put off")

3. What is it that irritates me about this person? What makes him/her difficult to love?

4. How am **I like** this person? How do I share the same root sins, if not the same fruit sins?

5. What are some **good** qualities in this person? (the things I tend to *overlook* because of their sin)

6. Pray: "Father, what should I do to begin a '**LOVE OFFENSIVE**' toward this person?"
Be specific:

a. What will I do? (I'll ring them, invite them for tea, e-mail, say this or that, etc.)

I will...

b. When will I do this? (Write down a specific day and time you will do it.)

7. Lastly, resolve in prayer to begin serving this person in love. **Ask the Father** to give you the Holy Spirit to empower you to do what you have purposed (Lk.11:13). Ask Jesus to help you reach out to them in love as he would.



MY LOVE STRATEGY WORKSHEET 2

My Love Target's name (in code or use their initials) _____

WAIT! BEFORE you begin writing, think: Does this person need to be converted? Is he/she really regenerate? Are they trusting in Jesus' righteousness or their own? Or, is he/she a believer that has a tendency to forget the Gospel the same way I tend to forget the Gospel?

• **If the person is not a believer,** what is your *plan* for sharing Jesus with them? A plan? Yes indeed. As the old adage goes: "*If you aim at nothing, and you'll hit it every time!*"

• **But, if the person is a Christian,** what is your *plan* for showing them how walking in the Spirit really looks?

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- 2. What** do I need to **stop doing** in my relationship to this person? ("put off")
- 3. What** is it that irritates me about this person? What makes him/her difficult to love?
- 4. How** am **I like** this person? How do I share the same root sins, if not the same fruit sins?
- 5. What** are some **good** qualities in this person? (the things I tend to *overlook* because of their sin)
- 6. Pray:** "Father, what should I do to begin a '**LOVE OFFENSIVE**' toward this person?"
Be specific:
 - a. What** will I do? (I'll ring them, invite them for tea, e-mail, say this or that, etc.)

I will...
 - b. When** will I do this? (Write down a specific day and time you will do it.)
- 7. Lastly,** resolve in prayer to begin serving this person in love. **Ask the Father** to give you the Holy Spirit to empower you to do what you have purposed (Lk.11:13). Ask Jesus to help you reach out to them in love as he would.



Five Levels of Communication

A personal or small-group workshop

LEVEL ONE: The surface, casual chatter, the weather, current events, humour

Examples:

"This rain is intolerable." "Yes, typical!"

"What? Another signal failure?" "Wrong kind of snow."

"What are we having for supper?" "Please turn up the volume? I can't hear."

Note: This is "no risk" communication with no possibility for disagreement. No opinions are offered and no emotions are expressed.

LEVEL TWO: The surface - reporting facts about other people

Examples: *"Did you hear? Colin broke his arm at the weekend!" "Suzanne landed that new job she applied for." "That Amy Winehouse; she's back in rehab again."*

Note: This is "low risk" communication. Nothing from one's heart is shared.

LEVEL THREE: Sharing my own ideas and judgments about current events

Examples: *"Do you think Boris will unseat Ken?" "Not a chance!" (!)*

"I disliked the sermon today; bad theology." "Rain was forecast for today, but I don't think we'll see a drop."

Note: There is some risk at this level since your listener can always offer an opposing point of view.

Example: *"Well, I thought the sermon was splendid! Anyway, who are you to question the pastor's theology?" "Well, I think it will rain; just wait, you'll see."*

LEVEL FOUR: Sharing my feelings and emotions

Examples: *"I really like Colin and Kaye. They're so nice to be with."*

"I love these earrings my husband gave me. They're lovely, don't you think?"

"I really do hate my job. Do you think I ought to make a change?"

Note: There is increased risk at this level. You have exposed your heart to the other person. Not only have you shared an idea (as in Level Three), but how you *feel* about something. You are vulnerable and could be wounded.

LEVEL FIVE: Sharing my deepest heart, full communication—the hidden is revealed

Examples: *"I have really been struggling with my son's behaviour lately. Can we have lunch this week and talk about it? I need some advice and prayer."*

"I know it's hard to cope with Steven's death (husband). When my Derek died, it took me over a year to get back to normal. Why don't we get together this week?"

"My dearest; I love you; will you marry me?"

Note: This is *high-risk* communication. You are totally vulnerable. You are sharing your deepest heart—your struggles, hopes and fears. You are allowing people to know *the real you* and are so enable them to open up to you as well.

The Communication Levels in Your Life

The Gospel frees us up to share our hearts with others

1. Is it difficult for you to communicate with others at level five? Why?

a.

b.

2. At which level does *your pastor* communicate in his sermons? Level ____

Your *Grace4Life* leader? Level ____

3. At what level do these persons communicate with us?

God the Father? Hosea 11:1-11 – Level ____

The Lord Jesus? Jn.12:27; 15:1-17 - esp. vs. 15 – Level ____

The Apostle Paul? Phil.1:7; 2Cor.12:15 – Level ____

4. At which level do *you* usually communicate with God? Level ____

Think: Does *the level of your intimacy with God* need improving?

Let Hosea 14:1-8 and Psalm 51 help you evaluate the depth of your relationship.

What will you need to *believe* for that to happen?

5. At which level do *your family members* usually communicate with you?

a. your spouse (if married, roommates or same-sex friends if single)? Level ____

b. your children? Level ____

6. At which level would you *like* for your family to communicate with you?

Level ____ Why?

7. At which level do *you* usually communicate...

a. ...with your spouse (if married) with your roommate if single? Level ____

b. ...with your children? Level ____

c. ...with friends of the same sex? Level ____

Think: Do you think your family *feels* they really know your heart? Yes / No

Explain your answer:

Think: Does your level of communication affect *how they feel* about your love for them?

Yes / No Explain:

8. What could your family and friends do to make it easier for you to communicate with them at levels four and five?

Your answer:

a.

b.