

**5 BIBLE STUDIES**

**WHERE LOVE COMES TO LIFE – WEEK 2**

Special thanks to Dean Eaton, Church Planting Mentor and Mission Facilitator, for developing the training material.





## BIBLE STUDY 2: WHERE LOVES COMES…

**Reading:** **1 John 4.7-21**

Open in prayer

**Introduction**

We should know a lot about love. ‘God is love’, John tells us (1 John 4:8, 16) and, after all, we’ve been made in his image (Genesis 1:26–28), so it’s no surprise that love figures prominently in the whole human race. But the Bible also tells us that the image we were created in has been horribly twisted and distorted. We love the wrong things in the wrong way for the wrong reasons.

This may come as a surprise, but the opposite of love is not hate. It’s selfishness. And selfishness marks our natural state. Self-centred thinking, living and acting: these are the expressions of human sinfulness. Martin Luther spoke about us as being ‘curved in upon ourselves’. Like a supermassive black hole, we take all things into ourselves and let nothing out.

Self-centredness even hides itself as religion—just ask the Apostle Paul whose life as a Pharisee was consumed by zealous love for God and his Law (see Philippians 3:5). It conceals itself as true commitment—just ask Peter who really, truly believed that his love for Jesus was so great he would never forsake him even if the rest of disciples did (Matthew 26:34). It hides in the folds of sexual attraction—just ask David whose adultery led to bloodshed and death (2 Samuel 11:7-12).

Human sin hasn’t left any part of life untouched. Not even love.

How might our natural selfishness express itself at home? At work? In the church?

**Group Discussion**

1. Look at the selfish love in **Luke 6:32–36; 14:12**. How does this compare to the love of God described in **1 John 4**?
2. Can you share in your own words what your experience has been of these two different kinds of love?—both love that is selfish and love that is described in 1 John.

And yet...

Read again over that list of characters above: Paul, Peter, David.

Their failure in love, their wrongheaded expressions of love, didn’t stop the love of God coming to them.

Our thinking about love is most naturally conditional: ‘If you … then I …’, or ‘If I … then you ought…’ We expect that our love will be rewarded, or at least returned.

We can even transfer that sort of thinking onto our relationship with God:

‘I’ve given so much … therefore God ought to…’
‘I’ve been a faithful member of the church for years …that should be worth something …’

And, conversely, we judge others according to our own standards:

‘They haven’t loved and cared for me …they shouldn’t be loved or honoured.’

In reality this sort of thinking is simply idolatry. It’s the way all idol worshippers think their gods operate. The more you put in, the more you should get out. The greater devotion you show, the more your god should approve of you. The bigger the offering, the greater the blessing.

It’s simply human self-centred love on a spiritual plane.

1. What particular parts of **1 John 4:7-21** counter this kind of thinking?

What other passages in the Bible can you think of that reinforce this difference?

1. Read the story of the workers in the vineyard in **Matthew 20:1-16**.

Why does this story grate with our sense of fairness?

Do we really want to get what we deserve in life? Why/why not?

Why do you think Jesus told this story to the disciples?

It’s sometime said that the love of God is “unconditional”. In using that term we’ve imported a psychological concept (it came originally from a particular school of humanistic psychotherapy) into the way we talk about God.

In fact, God’s love is “counter conditional”. He doesn’t love us and let us be. His love, against all our selfish hatred of him, transforms us. He finds us, not as helpless victims nor as innocently lost sheep, but as rebels with weapons in our hands (see Colossians 1:22; Romans 5:10; 8:7-8; Ephesians 2:1-2).

But finding us in that state he loves us still, acting in his powerful and love to redeem us from our own rebellion.

In Jesus, God overcomes his own holy wrath, ‘counter conditionally’ loving us at the expense even of his only begotten Son.

1. What does **1 John 4:7-21** tell us about the nature of the love of God?
2. Read **Luke 15:11–32** read the story of the Father’s amazing love.

What does this story tell us about our love?

What does this story tell us about God’s love?

Where and how have you seen the love of God?

Could a person love God without knowing the forgiveness of their sins?
Why/Why not?

1. Try to express 1 John 4:7-21 in your own words. Or think about how you might explain this to someone who doesn’t know the Bible.

**Prayer**

O for a thousand tongues to sing our great redeemer's name; To sing beyond ourselves, extravagantly, with abandonment, beyond all our possibilities, and all our fears, and all our hopes ... to our redeemer dear, the antidote to our death, the salve to our wounds, the resolve of our destructiveness ... A thousand, a million, a trillion tongues, more than our own, more than our tradition, more than our theology, more than our understanding, tongues around us, tongues among us, tongues from our silenced parts. Tongues from us to you in freedom and in courage. Finally ceding our lives and our loves to your good care. Amen.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Brueggemann, W. *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: The Prayers of Walter* (Augsburg Fortress, MN. 2003). P.160 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)