**Love is the most excellent way to follow.**

**Gather Spring Bible Study Week One**

**1/16/24**

Love is the essential principle of our faith—the greatest command that encapsulates all the others. It is our mark of distinction as followers of Christ, the distillation of our religion. After reading the entire Bible together, we now get to practice what is most important to God—how we love.  Let's dive deep to see how we can become better lovers through God’s love.

**Love is our Purpose**

Things are invented for a purpose—refrigerators keep things cold, a toaster toasts and the oven keeps things warm. God tells us He is Love, and our purpose is to love like Him. God's love is why the world exists. Love makes our actions and gifts worthwhile. *We love because He first loved us*. It is a choice to put Him above ourselves and follow His way of love.

We are ambassadors of Christ in this world. *Everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another.* (John 13:35).

Chat GPT: Christian love, often called "agape" love, is a central Christian teaching emphasizing selfless, unconditional, and sacrificial love for others. It is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, who exemplified this type of love through his actions and teachings.

**Love is a Priority**

**The Greatest Commandment - It starts with God—Prioritize and Receive.**

*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* (Matthew 22:36-40)

The first commandment is first for a reason – we must receive God’s love for us to give it. God needs to remove the blockages that stop us from loving well. It is a decision to prioritize Him above all else.

1. **Heart**: Loving God with all your heart implies deep, heartfelt affection, passion, and dedication. It involves an emotional connection and devotion to God.
2. **Soul**: Loving God with all your soul refers to a commitment at the core of your being, involving your essence, life, and spiritual nature. It encompasses your will, emotions, and identity in relation to God.
3. **Mind**: Loving God with all your mind involves intellectual engagement and dedication. It signifies using your intellect, thoughts, reasoning, and understanding to seek and comprehend God's will and principles.
4. **Strength**: Loving God with all your strength relates to dedicating your physical energy, actions, and abilities to God's service. It means using your physical capacities and resources to honor and glorify God.

This commandment, articulated by Jesus, emphasizes the comprehensive nature of devotion to God. It encourages believers to love God not just superficially or in one aspect of their lives but to integrate this love into every facet of their existence — emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical. It's about wholeheartedly giving oneself to God and seeking to align every aspect of life with His will and love.

# C.S. Lewis Quote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

# We cannot love like this without first receiving it from Him. *We love because He first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

*Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love.* (1 John 4:8)

1. **How do you build your relationship with God?**

Spiritual Practices are simple habits that help us develop, grow, and strengthen our faith in Christ.

1. **How do you feel loved by God?** We know God loves us, but how do you experience His love? Knowing and understanding God’s love for us is quite possibly the most essential quality of His to know. It removes those blockages that stop us from loving others and ourselves.

**2nd Commandment—** *Love your neighbor as yourself*, is a fundamental commandment given by Jesus, closely linked to the greatest commandment to love God. It instructs individuals to treat others with the same care, respect, and kindness they would want for themselves.

God is calling us to a higher standard that is only possible when we get our love needs met by Him first. Our natural human love is limited by selfishness and reciprocity.

“No love of the natural heart is safe unless the human heart has been satisfied by God first.” -Oswald Chambers.

**Read 1Corinthians 13**—These words describe God’s Love and His character, and list the characteristics of love we will study this semester: Patience, Kindness, Does not Envy, Does not Boast, Is Not Proud, Does Not Dishonor, Does Not Insist on Its Own Way, Is Not Easily Angered, Keeps No Record of Wrongs, Does Not Delight in Evil But Rejoices I the Truth, Protects, Trusts, Hopes, and Perseveres.

God's love is utterly unselfish. Godly Love seeks the best for one another without putting our needs first. This kind of love goes against our natural inclinations. It is impossible without God’s help—it sets aside our own natural desires and enables us to love without strings attached. We gain it only through the Holy Spirit (*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.-* Romans 5:5).

Chat GPT: Christian love is not limited to affection or emotional attachment; instead, it is a **conscious choice and action** to care for and serve others, regardless of their background, beliefs, or actions. It involves forgiveness, compassion, empathy, and a willingness to act in the best interest of others, even when it requires personal sacrifice.

This love is considered foundational to the Christian faith. It is seen as a way to reflect the love of God, who, according to Christian belief, demonstrated the ultimate act of love by sending Jesus Christ to die for humanity's sins.

Practicing Christian love involves treating others with kindness, compassion, and respect, even in challenging situations, and striving to embody the virtues and principles taught by Jesus Christ in daily life.

1. **What blocks your Love for others?**

This is a serious question that needs to be dealt with because it is of utmost importance to God. These blockages hurt our relationship not only with others but also with God. When wronged, it is natural to be bitter, seek revenge, or detach from a person. This is human nature, but God gives us His divine nature. WWJD is always an excellent question to ask.

1. **What area do you most need to choose love?**

*If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar, for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God\* whom he has not seen.* (1 John 4:20)

*Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there, remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift*. (Matthew 5: 23-24).

Unmerited Love and forgiveness speak louder than anything. It is the biggest witnessing tool of God's love– it builds bridges and covers a multitude of wrongs. Like MLK Jr said, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." We need to understand this expansive, life-changing action and follow God's commandment to love, and that's what we will explore this semester.

**Key Passages:**

*-Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:**Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 'This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matthew 22: 36-40)

-1 Corinthians 13

**-***By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.* (John 13:35)

**-**Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. (1 John 4:8)

*-Everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another.* (John 13:35).

-Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

(1 Peter 4:8)

**Questions**

1. How do you build your relationship with God?
2. In what ways do you personally feel God's love?
3. What gets in the way of loving God?
4. What blocks your love for others?
5. What area do you most need to choose to Love?
6. How are the greatest commandments related?
7. What description of love in 1 Corinthians seems the most difficult to do?