

Virtue: Love

MASTER KEYS

Key Verse: This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 John 4:10-12

Key Idea: I am committed to loving God and loving others.

Key Question: What does it mean to sacrificially, and unconditionally love others?

Key Observation: The most important expression of becoming like Jesus is love. It is the ultimate fruit and essential virtue. Biblical love is defined in 1 Corinthians 13 and declared the Greatest Commandment in Mark 12. To love God and love our neighbor is the standard of God which on our own we cannot achieve. But God pours his presence and love within us first. Then, as we receive it, we let his love pass through us to others.

PERSONAL STUDY

Self-Evaluation: Using a scale of 1– 6, rate how strongly you believe the statements below that are related to this Essential (1=no belief at all, 6= complete confidence). If you don't understand the statement currently mark yourself low. Don't rate yourself on whether you believe it is the right answer but on whether it is a way of life for you today.

_____ God's grace enables me to forgive people who have hurt me.

_____ I rejoice when good things happen to other people.

_____ I demonstrate love equally toward people of all races.

_____ I frequently give up what I want for the sake of others.

Bible Engagement: Answer the following questions. When you encounter Scripture take your time with it, allow it to take root in your heart and consider what loving God and loving others means to you.

Loved Defined. The Bible is a complex narrative. But what is the big – yet simple – idea behind all the stories and teachings contained in this ancient book? Love. Love dominates God’s story. First Corinthians 13 provides us with an earnest description of the love that resonates throughout Scripture.

1 Corinthians 13. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1. Now that you have read 1 Corinthians 13 make two lists. A) What are the characteristics of love in the positive sense (all that love is). B) What characteristics does love not have?

Is...

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Is Not...

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

2. How could this virtue express itself in your life?

3. What visible attributes can be found in someone who embodies the virtue of love?

The Greatest Commandment. Love as the greatest commandment can be found early in God's story with his people. For example, near the end of his life, Moses gathered the Israelites together to remind them of what truly mattered as they readied themselves to enter the promised land. His words, recorded in the book of

Deuteronomy, include a passage known as the Shema (Hebrew for “hear”), which later became the Jewish confession of faith, recited twice daily at the morning and evening prayer services. As the Shema beautifully articulates, the love between God and his people has always been the driver behind a life of faith.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Leviticus 19:17-18. Flowing from the priority to love God with our whole hearts, souls and strength is the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus confirmed these two commands from the Old Testament – love God and love others – as the greatest of all the commandments during an encounter recorded in the New Testament between Jesus and the religious leaders in Mark 12:28-34.

Religious Leader: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

Jesus: “The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’”

Religious Leader: Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Jesus: (After seeing the leader had answered wisely) “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.)

4. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? How would you describe the amount of love you show for others? Are you satisfied with your answers?

A New Command. Every moral law of the Old Testament fits under one of these two greater commands – love God and love others. The Law was given to express God’s high standards for community in his kingdom and to demonstrate legally that people were incapable of keeping God’s perfect commands and requirements and needed a savior. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and offered us a new commandment.

Interestingly, it was after Judas left the gathering with the disciples at the Last Supper to betray Jesus that Jesus changed the formula for love and issued a new command.

Read John 13:31-35.

From this point on the commandment to love is never referred to again in the same way. Instead of us trying hard to love God and others, we receive Christ’s love for us and then pass it on to others. This is what Jesus did as our example. He received the love of the father and passed it on to us. It is God’s love in us that gives us the capacity to love others.

5. Put into your own words what happened in the shift from the Great Commandment of the Old Testament to the new command of Jesus.

6. What is impeding your ability to embrace this virtue? How can you overcome this obstacle?

Left to our own sinful nature, or flesh, we move away from unconditional and sacrificial love and instead crave to satisfy our own wants over the needs and interests of others. Living a life of love requires the presence of God's love and power within us. When we yield to this presence in our lives, it produces within us love for others. The Law provides some instruction regarding how to live a life of love; the Spirit empowers us to actually do it.

Life by the Spirit. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself. If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:13-25).

7. After Paul lists all the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, why did he then write, "Against such things there is no law"?

8. What action step can you take this week to love more like Jesus?

Video Teaching Watch the video segment for this Essential. As you watch use the following outline to record some of the main points. The answer key is located at the end of this study.

- Key Question: What does it mean to sacrificially and unconditionally _____ others?
- Key Verse: "This is love. not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made _____ in us. 1 John 4:10-12.
- Key Idea: I am _____ to loving God and loving others?
- (Key Application) I am their _____.
- (Key Application) I sacrifice my _____ to see them succeed.
- (Key Application) I help them see God's good _____ for them.

Devotional Reading: Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in thinking like Jesus through this reading.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:10-12

Parental love is likely the purest expression of love within the human race. Parents spend their lives depositing their love into their children. The children will never

remember the caressing of their cheeks as babies, but the parents know it contributes to the overall physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational health of the children.

The greatest joy of parents is seeing their children all grown up and living a life of love – blessing their own children, their spouses, their neighbors. When the children decide to live a life of love, the parents know their love has been received and made complete.

This is how it is for God, your Father. He has been pouring his love into you all your life, even when you were too young to remember it. When you grow up and choose to live a life of love, you give evidence that God's love has been born in you and has been made complete in you.

Do you really want to give evidence that God's love is in you? If you do, go love someone else.

I am committed to loving God and loving others.

Closer Look: Answer the following questions to help you apply this Essential to your own life.

Our capacity to love begins with receiving God's love for us. From this reservoir we pour out love toward one another. The presence of God's Spirit in us, working through us to overcome our passion for self in favor of loving others, is confirmation that we are in fact, children of God.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:10-11)

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, who they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. (1 John 4:19-21)

With this increased capacity for God's love to flow in and through us comes increased expectation.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (Matthew 5:46-47)

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. (Roman 13:8-10)

Although we may love our brother or sister, all relationships have their issues. Unfortunately, dissonance can replace the love when we leave hurts and offenses unresolved. In scripture, when Peter approached Jesus with a question about forgiveness, Jesus answered the question and followed it up with a poignant parable to illustrate his point. It is forgiveness that keeps relationships connected and prevents bitterness from dividing people.

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

Read again John 13:31-35.

1. Who are the toughest people for you to love? Family members? Coworkers? Strangers? Explain why.

2. It's easy to love someone who meets our needs. Is it possible to genuinely love someone who does nothing for you or even hurts you? If so, how?

3. Outside of Jesus' example, when have you witnessed expressions of Christlike love?

4. Throughout Scripture, love is described as an identifying quality that proves we belong to God. If this is true, why are Christians so frequently described by others as hypocritical and judgmental?

5. Based on what you read, what is the best strategy for developing authentic and genuine love for God and others?

6. How can withholding forgiveness be an adversary of genuine love?

LIFE APPLICATION

Take Away: What difference does this Essential make in the way you live your life? Consider how you can incorporate the core truths of this Essential into your daily life.

- Jesus' love in our hearts enables us to love those we could never love before.

In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew's gospel Jesus says:

"You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45).

Jesus is telling us that hatred is no longer an option for his followers. Regardless of how we are treated by anyone, the only choice is to love.

- Jesus' love in our hearts enables us to love the unloved.

Matthew includes in his gospel Jesus' teaching about the gathering of the nations and the separating of the "sheep" from the "goats" that takes place when Jesus comes again:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' " (Matthew 25:34-36).

Our world today has little time to spare for the homeless, poor, hungry, orphaned, diseased, elderly, and imprisoned. But Jesus clearly states that his followers will be about his business in those very places — to show love to the unloved.

- Jesus' love in our hearts enables us to show the world what true love looks like.

Jesus lays out the ground rules for anyone who wants to be his follower:

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37-38).

To interpret this passage as Jesus urging us to not love our family or to shun them for his sake is to not take into account the context of the entire New Testament. Jesus is saying here that our love for him should be so strong and committed that all other loves can't possibly compare. The amazing thing about God is that when we do love him to this degree, our devotion and care for all people, including our families, will grow in ever-increasing measure.

Each day as we live out our lives, Jesus loves us unconditionally and sacrificially, and he offers ongoing forgiveness. He asks us, his followers, to offer the same in our relationships. Why? This new breed of love allows us to be involved in healthy relationships and also to be free to express God's love to the world.

The apostle John sums it up: "We love because he first loved us."

Case Study: Use the following case study as a model for a real-life situation where you might put what you've learned into practice. If needed, refer to your *Video Teaching* notes. Considering the *Take Away*, what gentle advice or help would you give?

Bo's boss is not an easy man to work for. He shovels out criticism by the truckload, talks disrespectfully to his employees, and often takes credit for ideas that are not his own.

Rumors have been circulating around the office that the boss's wife served him divorce papers over the weekend. He has basically locked himself in his office all week. When he does come out, he hardly says a word and looks awful. Most of the employees are reveling in their boss's pain, secretly making jokes and snarky comments.

Bo has never liked his boss, but something in his spirit won't allow him to join in with the other employees. Should he ask his boss if he's okay? Should he give him space? Does he deserve sympathy or is he simply reaping what he sowed?



