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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Jesus' own example in verse 31.

2. Refer to Matthew 22:35-40. Jesus is teaching that all the commands of the law - i.e. everything that God requires of us - hang on the twin cord of love for God and love for your neighbour. How does this reflect what Jesus says in John 14?
3. Does this link between love and obedience help you to answer for yourself the question Jesus put to Peter in John 21?

Worship Exercise: If you have time, go back over 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and read your own name in the place of 'love'. Ask God for grace to make that ring true.

Weekend

1. The word 'love' covers a number of quite distinct concepts. C. S. Lewis' book *"The Four Loves"* (Fount) would make interesting weekend reading if you want to follow this up.
2. The idea of **eros** - the love that aims to possess, or sexual love - does not appear explicitly in the New Testament. However, the Old Testament provides many examples of love used in this and other senses. You can check this out under 'love' in an analytical concordance. Try to work out for yourself what the Hebrew words 'aheb, dod and ra'ya mean.
3. Song of Solomon is a beautiful poem about human love. You may like to read it and note in your notebook some of the lessons you learn.
4. Alternatively, you may like to read Hosea's love story (Hosea 1-3), which is not only a tragic tale of human love, but a picture of God's love and the response to it.

Notes

Week 17: Love (A word study)

It would be very difficult to talk about the Christian gospel without mentioning love. But what is it? The word 'love' conjures up all sorts of ideas. We shall look at how the concept comes across in the Bible itself.

Day 1. Love is ...

1 Corinthians 13

The church at Corinth had a lot going for it. But it had problems! Not the least of these involved divisions into various party groups and irregularities in worship.

The church had written to the apostle Paul about these and other issues, and time and again he hints at love as being the solution to their problems.

Chapter 13 focuses the reader's attention directly on love — its meaning and importance.

1. How would you define what love is? Before reading the passage, write down your definition and then test it against verses 4-7. Can you think of any other ways of briefly summarizing the meaning of love, or of other words you could use in its place?
2. In verses 1-3 you will read some startling statements. Why do you think, should lack of love make these apparently highly spiritual activities worthless?
3. Verses 8-13 contrast temporary things with the permanence of faith, hope and love. How do Paul's pictures about growing up and mirrors (vv. 11-12) help you to see the importance of faith, hope and love over 'temporary' things?

Notice the supremacy of love over even faith and hope (verse 13).

Pray about what you plan to do today and ask God to help you to 'make love your aim' (14:1) in everything you do and say.

Day 2. Loving and being loved

1 John 4:7-12

The characteristic word for love in the New Testament is *agape*. It was not used widely in Greek-speaking society, but was picked up by Christians to bring out the special quality of love that God has for us - and that we should have for him and for

other people.

John addresses his readers as *agapetoi* - those who are especially loved. (The translation 'Dear friends' is a weak substitute for the old-fashioned word 'beloved'. In its singular form - *agapetos* - it is the word used by God the Father to describe his special love for his 'beloved' Son, e.g. in Matthew 3:17.)

As people whom God especially loves we have special responsibilities.

1. 'Without love — nothing!' How does this principle from 1 Corinthians 13 work out in 1 John 4:7-8? Why can you not be a Christian without having love?
2. Where did your love relationship with God begin (verse 10)? How can you be sure that God still loves you? (Before you write down your answer, compare verse 9 with John 3:16; Romans 5:8; then read Romans 5:6-11.)
3. If God's love is seen through his actions in your favour, how should you love other people (verses 11-12)? What unseen resources can you draw on to enable you to love like God?
4. How can you be confident that God will not stop loving you? (Think again about what you read in Romans 5.)

Worship: As 1 John 4:8 says that 'God is love', you may like to substitute 'God' for 'love' in 1 Corinthians 13, and then use these verses to help you praise God.

Day 3. Love that lasts

Deuteronomy 7:6-11

One of the great Old Testament words for love is *hesed* (often translated as 'steadfast/constant love', 'loving-kindness' or even mercy'). It focuses on the permanence of the relationship that God has with his people to whom he has committed himself.

God promised Abraham that he would be his God and the God of his descendants, and he sealed this covenant commitment with an oath (Genesis 15:18-20; 17:1-8).

God's love involves commitment: steadfast love.

In Deuteronomy 7, set just before Israel takes possession of the Promised Land, God restates this covenant relationship.

1. Why did God choose Israel (verses 6-7)? Write your answer in terms of (a) motive and (b) purpose. Make a special note of any reasons that clearly are not grounds for God's choice.
2. How was God's love seen in action on Israel's behalf (verse 8)? Note any parallels between this and how God's love for you was displayed. (See your notes on Study 2.)
3. In the last study you saw that your love relationship with God began with God rather than with you. But love is not all one way. How is this brought out in verses 9-10?

Study 5 will pick up the relationship of 'love' to 'law'. Begin to think about how God's love is seen in his action towards us and note any ways in which you can show

your love for him in the light of verse 11.

Day 4. God loves you!

John 3:16; Ephesians 5:25-27; Romans 8:28-39

1. What does John 3:16 tell you about the extent of God's love - and the conditions of benefiting from it?
2. Ephesians 5:25-27 pictures Christ's love for the church in terms of a bridegroom's love for his bride. (This parallels the Old Testament picture of God's covenant love for Israel as his bride.) In your own words, write down what Jesus wants to do to express his love to you as a Christian, based on this passage.
Read Romans 8-28-39. List what this passage teaches you about the results of (a) your love for God, and (b) God's love for you. Why can the apostle write with such certainty (verse 32)?
3. Many people encounter difficulties over the Bible's teaching concerning election: how does God's special love for some square with his love for all the world?
The idea of choosing a bride can be a helpful one in appreciating what God has done: that God has chosen a special people for himself - as you saw he did with Israel in the last study.

The fact of God's undeserved and electing love must not be allowed to detract from God's loving offer of life to all who will believe in Jesus.

4. Think over Romans 8:29-30. Try to grasp the idea of a love which stretches from eternity to eternity - beginning in God's foreknowledge (which means much the same as his 'forelove') and ending in glorification for Christians.

Rededicate yourself to Christ in readiness for the church's presentation as his bride (Ephesians 5:27-29).

Day 5. 'Do you love me?'

John 21:15-17

This is an encounter between Peter and Jesus after his resurrection. Three times Jesus asks his friend, 'Do you love me?', and he then gives Peter a threefold commission to look after his sheep. This must have brought great reassurance to the disciple who had denied his Lord three times.

Two Greek words for love are used in this dialogue: *agape* and *phileo*. Much ink has been spilt over why these different words are used. It could be that a contrast is intended between different qualities of love. (Phileo may be understood as 'tender affection' or 'friendship'.) But the distinction cannot be clearly determined - and it is reasonable to assume that John is just using different words for variety.

1. Read John 14:15-24 (part of what Jesus said to his disciples on the night he was betrayed). How do Jesus' words help you to know if your love for him is genuine? (NB verses 15, 21, 23 and 24.) Write your response after looking at