



LOVE

By Alison Lublink & Melissa Sivals



Part 1: Connection

Read: Psalm 116:1-2, 1 John 4:12

Ponder:

Have you ever met someone and immediately felt a bond to them? Some of us might think of a cheesy romantic comedy when we consider that question. However, I know there have been people in my life that I just hit it off with from the get-go. The kind who make you think “Yeah, these are my people.”

The truth of the matter is God created us for community. We were made for one another. That’s why throughout scripture, how we should treat our brothers and sisters in Christ, is such a central theme. One of our texts for today says:

“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 4:12

What a wonderful challenge for us to consider. When we are living in the fullness of God’s love for one another, we are most like him. We carry his spirit within us and his love is

completed through us. A good exercise for many of us before we interact or respond to someone who is more difficult to love might be asking ourselves: “How can I best live out the love of God right now?”

It would’ve been easy for Lucy, who met *BethanyKids* in Kenya, to give up on her son Alvin like so many others had. To decide that caring for him was too much trouble. Instead, she remembered the overwhelming surge of love she felt the first time she saw her little boy on that sonogram. The love she has drives her to do anything and everything she can to get the best medical care possible for him.

When you give to *BethanyKids* your support is providing that care for children like Alvin. For mothers like Lucy who embody sacrificial love. In doing so **you** are exemplifying the perfect love of God for his children. While you may never meet the people who are served by your gift, you are nonetheless an answer to their prayers.

Discuss:

1. Why do you think the concept of “love at first sight” is such a popular one? Have you ever experienced an instant connection (romantic or platonic) with someone?
2. Who is someone in your life that exemplifies God’s love well? What about them stands out to you?
3. Why do you think the way we treat the people in our lives is so important? When do you find it’s the hardest to love the people around you?
4. When was a time that someone was a tangible expression of God’s love to you? What happened? How did they make you feel loved?

Pray: Lord, help me to be a living example of your love. Help me to choose to love those around me that others may not. Remind me that we are all connected through the blood of your son Jesus and made in your image.

Do: Identify someone in your life who may not feel very loved at the moment. Send them a note, buy them a coffee, share your favorite passage of scripture with them. Something tangible to let them know that you see them and they matter to you.



Part 2: Commitment

Read: Lamentations 3:22-23, 1 John 4:19

Ponder:

A part of loving one another in any type of relationship (whether romantic, friendship, collegial or familial) is commitment. At its core, it is the commitment to stay together. Now, obviously we know that different types of relationships involve different types of commitment, but ultimately it's a choice; a desire; a commitment. We have to *want* to be committed and be willing to sacrifice for one another.

In 1 John 4:19, it says "we love because He first loved us." Our love for Jesus is reciprocal. God first loved us, and so in return, we love him. It's a choice on both sides. A part of making any type of relationship work is a willingness to understand things from your partner's point of view. This requires effort because we are always going to see things from our own perspective first. We have to be willing to put our ego aside and understand where someone else is coming from. Compassion will go a long way as we show one another love.

Sometimes we push people out of our lives because we find them too hard to love. We might not say that out loud, but that's the reality. It takes a lot of strength and commitment to love someone, and sometimes we are weak and choose the "easy" way out because it's easier for *us*. Can you imagine if God did this to us? When we get too difficult to deal with, he just shoves us to the side? It's appalling to think about! If we wouldn't expect God to do this to us, then we shouldn't be doing this to others.

Collins was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy but could not seem to get the counselling and help he needed. He was only helped to a certain extent. This led to many stereotypes and stigma at the school he was attending, which made his life even more challenging. At the age of 15 he joined the Joytown school where BethanyKids runs the physiotherapy program. This was a huge turning point for Collins. He was finally able to get advice from therapists, spiritual counselling, mentorship and even a wheelchair. This type of practical love from the BethanyKids staff has gone a long way to show their commitment to the health and wellbeing of Collins and other children like him. We love because God first loved us, and at BethanyKids we aim to always put people first because of this love. That's our commitment.

Discuss:

1. Think about 3 close relationships in your life (any kind). How would you define your commitment in those relationships? Is it different in each one? Why or why not?
2. When you think about the most important relationships in your life, do you feel that they are committed to you as much as you are committed to them? Why do you think this is? Is there something you could do to show your commitment and love for them (*remember that your love is inspired by God's love; not personal gain*)?
3. How would you describe your commitments to:

- a. God:
 - b. Your family:
 - c. Your church:
 - d. Your employer:
 - e. Your hobbies:
 - f. Your finances:
4. What commitments have you made to God? Think of some ways that you can recommit to your relationship with God.

Pray: O Lord, I pray that you would give me a heart of commitment in all relationships. Allow me to see things from the other perspective and be willing to love first because you have loved me.

Do: Find a time each day to commit to your relationship with God. This might mean praying; reading the Bible; worshipping through music; etc. Try to foster your relationship with God through a steady commitment of communication and worship.



Part 3: Giving

Read: Psalm 119:36, 1 Corinthians 16:14

Ponder:

At its basic level, love means giving. It's right there in an oft-quoted verse: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only son." (John 3:16) He loved us, so he gave us Jesus. That's a pretty big gift to be giving!

Although it's doubtful that any of us have given up our one and only son's for all of humanity, sharing love through giving is a common act. When we think about loving others, we often can reflect back on a time when someone gave us a loving gift, or gave up their time to help us. If we can think of many of these instances, we're very lucky!

If we call ourselves Christians, then we are called to do everything in love and keep our hearts away from selfish gain. This is easier said than done. We all know how hard it can be to love someone when they're not nice. But God didn't look down from heaven and think "Hmm... if everyone is nice today, then I'll give them my son, Jesus." No. He sent Jesus anyway, to be the actual physical representation of God's love,

walking among us in the flesh. How can we take on this posture of giving love?

Philomena was born with a condition where she was unable to pass stool properly. Her twin sister was born with heart problems. Both sisters have been in and out of hospitals since birth, requiring multiple surgeries to care for their varied conditions. Of course this isn't easy on their parents. Their mother owned a small cereal shop which she had to close down in order to care for the twins. Their father is a carpenter, whom the family of seven now relies on fully. Due to the pandemic work has been hard to come by even for basic needs, let alone surgeries.

Organizations like *BethanyKids* makes these types of surgeries possible for families that cannot afford them. When our supporters give selflessly of their finances, it goes towards providing compassionate care for even the tiniest of babies. Philomena's family is grateful for *BethanyKids* and their ability to perform the surgery that she requires, without them having to spend all of their money.

Never underestimate what your giving can do. Giving of your time, resources and money are all acts of love that should be done selflessly. If we are genuinely giving to others out of love, then we will hopefully show them that same giving love that God had for us when he sent Jesus to earth.

Discuss:

1. Where you give your time and resources also reveals what you love. When you think of that, what tops your list of what you "love"? Do you think that's a fair representation? Is there something you need to adjust?
2. If we think we love someone, yet never give to them of our time or resources, then we aren't being very loving. Are there people in your life that deserve more of your time, and therefore love? Consider who those people

might be and how you can give more of yourself to them.

3. While there are many people in our lives that are deserving of our love, our relationship with Jesus should be number one. How can you give more of your love to your relationship with Jesus?
4. What opportunities are there for you to make visible the love of God this week?

Pray: Loving God, I pray that you would fill me with a love that is overflowing in abundance so that I might be able to give of that love to all those that I meet.

Do: Donate to *BethanyKids* this week by visiting www.bethanykids.org/donate If you're unable to contribute to *BethanyKids* financially at this time, then give this devotional guide, our website and/or our social media channels to some friends. Let them know about *BethanyKids*! That would be a great gift to us and those we serve throughout Africa.



Part 4: Respect

Read: Proverbs 21:21, Romans 12:10

Ponder: What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word "Respect?" Personally, I think of the well-known hit by Aretha Franklin. In case you aren't familiar with it the whole point of the song is a woman asking her partner to show her respect with his time, attention, and attitude when they are together. She lays out pretty clearly that she gives him so much of herself that it's the very least he could give to her.

Have you ever found yourself in a relationship like that? It seems like you give the best of what you have to someone only for them to turn around and disrespect you? It can be extremely painful. Especially when it comes from someone that we thought we knew and could trust.

Respect and the lack of it are a big part of Allan's story. His father abandoned his family when he was just 15 years old, leaving his mother absolutely devastated. On top of dealing

with his own hurt from the abandonment, Allan had to watch his mother's physical and emotional health drift away.

As a result Allan made it his life goal to serve his mother and do whatever he could to support her. Unfortunately, this meant neglecting his own physical needs for a long time because he was afraid to cause any more pain. Eventually he was diagnosed with an inguinal hernia. By the grace of God, Allan discovered *BethanyKids* after receiving his diagnosis and was overjoyed to know that he could receive the help he needed without any financial burden to his family.

Romans 12:10 says "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." This seems like a pretty straight forward command that should be easy for us to follow, right? Unfortunately as a society we can be a pretty selfish people. Instead of being concerned about the person next to us we are taught and almost conditioned to constantly be looking out for ourselves.

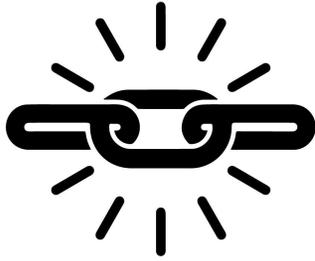
As Christians we are part of an upside down kingdom. We are called to think of others first and ourselves last. Helping families like Allan's by supporting *BethanyKids* is just one of the many ways we can put that into action.

Discuss:

1. How would you define Respect? How would you define Disrespect?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where someone close to you has broken your trust? How did you feel at that moment?
3. In this story Allan put his mother's needs above his to a fault. While his intentions were good he suffered instead of being honest about his pain. Where do you think the balance is between being selfless and practicing healthy self-care?
4. What are ways that we can bring honor to God?

Pray: God, we live in a society that teaches to put our needs before anyone else. Help us to have a mindset of generosity towards those around us. Help us to take good care of those you have entrusted to us.

Do: Identify someone in your life that you can honor today.



Part 5: Trust

Read: 1 John 4:16, Psalm 143:8

Ponder:

As early as childhood we learn to understand the concept of trust. If someone says they'll do something, and they don't, we recognize this, which helps protect ourselves from being let down in the future. These types of boundaries are an important element to relationship building.

Part of building trust is to become vulnerable in our relationships as they develop. We feel trust when we rely on one another. This is true for our relationship with God and also with others.

Christians are often referred to as "believers," which when we think about it, implies our belief - our trust - in God. Ironically we often come across more so as people that trust our friends, family or even the government more than we trust God. God wants us to put Him first in our lives. He wants us to trust him completely in all things all the time.

Mitchell was born with spina bifida, and then later diagnosed with hydrocephalus. Despite these diagnoses there was seemingly no help that could be offered by the many doctors and hospitals her parents visited. It was discouraging, to say the least. Then when COVID-19 hit, Mitchell's family became stuck in Nairobi, miles away from their home. They were told

that her condition was not urgent and could wait until the pandemic had settled.

Due to COVID-19, *BethanyKids* was not able to help the family at the hospital in Kijabe, but rather wanted to arrange for them to receive care at another location. However, it was hard for the *BethanyKids* staff to convince the family to go to another hospital since they had already spent all they had and had been turned away so many times. Their trust that *BethanyKids* could actually help, was limited.

It was through connections that *BethanyKids* had with another local hospital that arrangements were made for Mitchell to receive treatment, as long as the family tested negative for the virus. Mitchell was able to have surgery and is well on the way to recovery now. Her father says, "Please accept my heartfelt thanks for supporting our family in this time of crisis. Your support gave us a new meaning and new hope. There are very few people who are so caring and supportive in life, and you are definitely one of them."

Mitchell's parents were willing to trust in the staff of *BethanyKids* to help them find a solution for their daughter, even when it seemed impossible. And the staff of *BethanyKids* were able to trust in the relationships they have built with other hospitals in order to continue to provide care for people even when they are not at one of our locations. These relationships all made it possible for Mitchell to be made well.

Perhaps some of us have a habit of trusting ourselves because we're afraid to trust others. There have potentially been difficult circumstances, like the ones Mitchell experienced, that have shown us that we can't trust anyone. But that's not entirely true. We can always trust in God. Trusting God is believing that he loves us and wants to help us. In 1 John 4:16 it says, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God,

and God in them." This love is the type of love we can trust. This love supersedes everything.

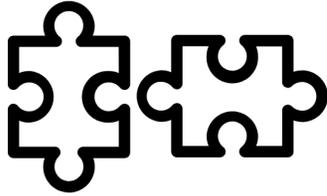
We must regularly study the Bible to really trust in God. By doing this, we can hear God speaking to us and helping us to make decisions and navigate life. It will also help us to discern and trust others in our lives as they speak into our situations and help us along the way.

Discuss:

1. What would you say competes with your ability to trust in God?
2. Think of some examples of when you have trusted God and how you made the decision to trust him rather than relying on your own strength.
3. Have there been times when you felt that you trusted in God, but he disregarded your pain and your struggles? How did you feel? How did you respond?
4. What practical things could you do to exercise your trust in God?

Pray: You are a good and holy God, and in You I trust. Help me to consult you first and foremost; and to trust that what you have planned for me is perfect.

Do: Check out your Bible this week and try to look up all of the verses about "trust." You can also google it if that's easier! See what it says and try to meditate on what it means to trust fully in God.



Part 6: Intimacy

Read: Proverbs 10:12, 1 Peter 4:8

Ponder:

Today's verses are incredibly intriguing to consider, aren't they? Hatred stirs up conflict - sure we get that part. But what an encouraging concept to think that deeply loving one another can make up for the ways we wound each other also.

The fact of the matter is, whether we like it or not, as humans we have the capacity to hurt one another. Even the people we love. We make judgements against them. We say things to them or about them without considering how they sound. Sometimes, we intentionally choose to use hurtful words simply because we are hurt ourselves. We need something or someone to blame and it's easy to target the people who are closest to us.

We can also be very quick to make judgements about people who are different from us. Maybe they have a different skin color, political leaning, religious belief, physical ability, or accent.

This is something that Nelius has dealt with for her entire ten years of life so far. Starting with the cruel speculation that happened when her mother brought her home from the hospital as a baby. Despite the rumors that swirled around

them her parents chose to stay together. Their bond only strengthened as they did everything they could to protect and care for Nelius to the best of their ability.

It wasn't until they found *BethanyKids* that they truly felt loved or cared for by the people around them. Not only when she was a baby and able to get proper medical care but then again when she enrolled in school at Joytown. Despite years of people misunderstanding, judging her, making assumptions, and even hating her; Nelius has grown into a little girl who inspires others and carries hope with her anywhere she goes.

The love she was able to find inside the *BethanyKids* community made up for years of pain outside of it. Nelius could've chosen to be bitter and resentful towards the people who treated her and her family so poorly up to that point. Instead, she chose to be motivated by her experience and speak up for others who are being mistreated or overlooked. She has become an example of grace, hope, and love to everyone who comes in contact with her.

Discuss:

1. What is your favorite "underdog" story that you've read/watched/or heard about second-hand? What makes the story inspiring to you?
2. What do you think it looks like practically for Christians to "love each other deeply?"
3. Do you find it harder to forgive yourself after you hurt others or forgive others for hurting you?
4. Has there been a time you've made assumptions about someone that turned out to be wrong? Have people made false assumptions about you? How did that make you feel?

Pray: God, help me to love the people in my life the way that you love them. May my words, actions, and behavior cause healing to come in your name.

Do: Educate yourself about a culture or group of people you don't know much about. When we have better understanding we are less likely to hold onto unfair assumptions and biases.

BethanyKids

Resource produced by BethanyKids to be used for individual study or small group Bible Studies. New free resources produced throughout the year.

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