

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

All You Need is Love

Lesson 1: Who are we supposed to love?

Matthew 22:34-40

Lesson Objective: Get to know your students if you haven't already. Understand whom we are supposed to love and have people think about this throughout all of our lessons.

Supplies: Poster board, white board, large sheet of butcher paper, etc. (optional)

Opener: Has anyone ever heard of the Beatles? What are some songs you know? Have you ever heard, "All You Need is Love"? What do you think about it? What do you think they meant when they wrote that song? Have students list out five things they love. Ask them what they listed.

Introduction: Love is a word we have no problem using nowadays. "I love my dog." "I love my car." "I love my boyfriend/girlfriend." "I love my parents (hopefully)." "I love my iPhone." "All you need is love." But just because we use it does not mean we truly understand it, because while love is a word, and a powerful one at that, it is so much more.

Illustration: How many of you drive or hope to some day? In order to drive you have to take classes from an experienced driver and learn how to operate that powerful machine, because driving a car can be dangerous to you and to others if not done properly.

While driving a car can be dangerous, it may not be the best illustration since compared to learning to love, learning to drive a car is more like learning to ride a tricycle.

Love is a big deal. I worry we have forgotten that because of how much we use and hear the word. And while we can debate whether love is all we need, we must at least understand it. We must live it out. The future of our world depends on it. The future of Christianity, the church, depends on it. The eternity of everyone you come in contact with hangs in the balance. There's some good news though - love is a big deal, but it is really not that complicated. In fact, it is quite simple if we listen to God, trust what He says, and read the manual.

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Illustration: Remember the car. I drive my car everyday, but I know nothing about the real operation of it. If I have troubles, I am going to have to check the owner's manual or take it to an expert, a mechanic.

Love is the same way, except God is the Expert, and the Bible is the manual. So through these lessons we are going to read the manual and learn from the Expert.

Discussion: How many of you have done some type of research project? What steps did you have to take to gather information? What questions did you have to answer?

I know some things have changed over the years, but one thing has remained constant for me. In researching a new topic, you have to answer some basic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? This is how we will break down love. For our first lesson we are going to answer the simplest question of all: "Who are we supposed to love?"

You are all in luck. In our first lesson you are going to get to see just how simple this question is to answer. And as a free gift, we may just unlock the meaning of life too. Has anyone ever asked yourself, "Why am I here? What is life really all about?" What are some answers you have come up with?

Have everyone turn to Matthew 22:34-40.

Biblical background: As Jesus began His ministry, people were amazed by His teaching. The religious leaders of the day did not like the following that He was gaining, nor did they appreciate how foolish He often made them look. They began to look for ways to stump Him and discredit Him. This day is no different.

Read Matthew 22:34-40.

Wow - what an awesome job Jesus does in this situation. He remains calm, is fully aware of what the Pharisees are trying to do, and handles the situation beautifully while giving us some of the most profound words ever spoken.

Verses 37-39 are where we are going to camp out today, but let me quickly explain what verse 40 is saying. Everything boils down to those first two commandments. Everything that has been taught in the Bible, everything we are supposed to be doing, boils down to love. So what does this tell us? What is the meaning of life? Why are we here? What is life about? We are to love. More on this later...

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So back to our first question, "Who are we to love?"

1. We are to love God. (v. 37)

Almost seems like a Sunday school answer, and it kind of is. We are to love God with everything we have - our heart, our soul and our mind. We'll handle specifics later, but every moment, thought, and action of every day is to be about loving God.

2. We are to love our neighbors. (v. 39)

This one seems pretty simple and straightforward, but most things are if you just rush through them without a thorough investigation. But stop and think:

Who is your neighbor?

Author's note: This is where you knowing your kids and the community they live in becomes extremely important. If they are mature enough to go as deep and global as this discussion could go, take them there. If they are not ready, then keep this on their level. You may think it is good to open their minds to every situation in the world, and over time it may be, but if they are not ready or the situation does not fit for them you will be wasting your time. Example: I might talk about the struggles of inner cities and urban areas with my students. If you live in a rural community with no major city in sight it might not be the best idea.

Illustration: I did not have the Internet when I was growing up. It was not until I was in 9th grade that one of my friends got dial up. Anyone even know what that is? We did not have cell phones either. If someone was not home you left a message or just missed them. If we dialed long distance we had charges per minute. Needless to say, we were not as connected as we are now. Now with cell phones, the Internet, and the explosion of social networking, we are more connected than ever. You can message a friend in China and get an instant response. A friend could move to New York (or wherever is far away for you), and talk to them as much as you would if they were living across the street. Also, did you know that many of the foods you eat and the products you buy come from other countries? Our world is shrinking. Basically, all the choices you make affect someone else.

So let me ask again: "Who is your neighbor?" Open up for discussion. Maybe make a list large enough for everyone to read.

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The list could go on forever, and you can list as much or as little as you like. Here is how I answer the question, though. **Everyone** is my neighbor. From my parents, to my best friend, to the kid no one talks to, to the child working in the sweat shop overseas. They are all my neighbor. (Please list some things that will be personal for your students. Maybe a place you went on a mission trip). Even people I do not like or who do bad things to me, they are my neighbor. Don't believe me? That's fine. Even if you do not think they are your neighbor, listen to this.

3. **Love your enemies.** (Matthew 5:43-48, Romans 12:16-21) (These verses may spark enough discussion to keep you going all day - so go with it if need be).

Has anyone ever read or even heard those verses before? I know I do not hear them that often. Maybe it is because this could be the toughest part to swallow in the study of love. Loving our enemies is not something we are used to talking about. It goes against our culture and our nature. There is usually a line drawn between our friends and our enemies, and a line drawn right on top of that one between who we love and who we hate, or at least keep at a distance. This was the hardest thing for me to swallow, so let's take some time to chew on it. Think about people you consider enemies. Who are they? Maybe a rival, a bully, someone who does not look exactly like you, or maybe even someone who does not believe in the same things you do. Do you usually put them in a separate compartment in your mind or heart, away from everyone else? That is what many of us would like to do or sometimes are even taught to do. But this is not what the bible teaches us to do.

Illustration: Does anyone own a computer? Has anyone ever had to clean up their hard drive? Many times you have to do this when your hard drive seems full, but really there is just a lot of excess junk that needs to be cleaned off, and the good stuff needs to be reorganized to show how much room there really is.

Illustration: Or has anyone's mom or dad ever come in and said it is time for spring-cleaning? It is the same thing. Many times when people do this it is because the house seems full or has become messy and disorganized, when really all that needs to be done is a little cleaning up and throwing away. You just need to take a little time to decide what is really important or needs to be kept.

I look at these two passages like a good hard drive cleanup or a good spring cleaning. God knows our nature. He knows what our hearts can be like. He knows there are times when we can

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become confused by wrestling with what the Bible tells us to do and not to do. And in the middle of all this confusion we can slow down almost to the point of not even functioning in the Christian life. Especially when it comes to who we are to love. Think about all the big issues we struggle with and how much time we spend debating how we should feel about it. It does not leave much time for doing anything else. Think about all the anger and bitterness that bogs us down because we sit around putting people into an enemy category to justify not having to love them. So thankfully, God put these verses of scripture in for us to clear it all up, to remind us that when we are unsure of who to love the answer is simple...everyone.

Closing: Who are we supposed to love? Simply put, everyone. We are to love God with every moment, every thought, and every action. And we are to love our neighbors. Neighbors nearby and neighbors “far away.” People who are easy to get along with and those who are not. Even those whom many people in the world would consider our enemies. Praise God for making life simple. Loving God and loving people; that’s what we are to be about. Well, it sounds like that is going to keep us pretty busy. So we’d better move on and begin breaking down the what, where, when, why, and how of this whole love thing. But before we go on, I want you to have some thing to carry without you throughout the study.

Closing Activity: I want you to make a list of three neighbors. They can be nearby or far away. I challenge you to think of at least one person who is not easy to love, and maybe one group in the world that is struggling (people who are hungry, homeless, in the trafficking industry, facing war, etc.). I want you to keep this list handy and think about these three as we study together.

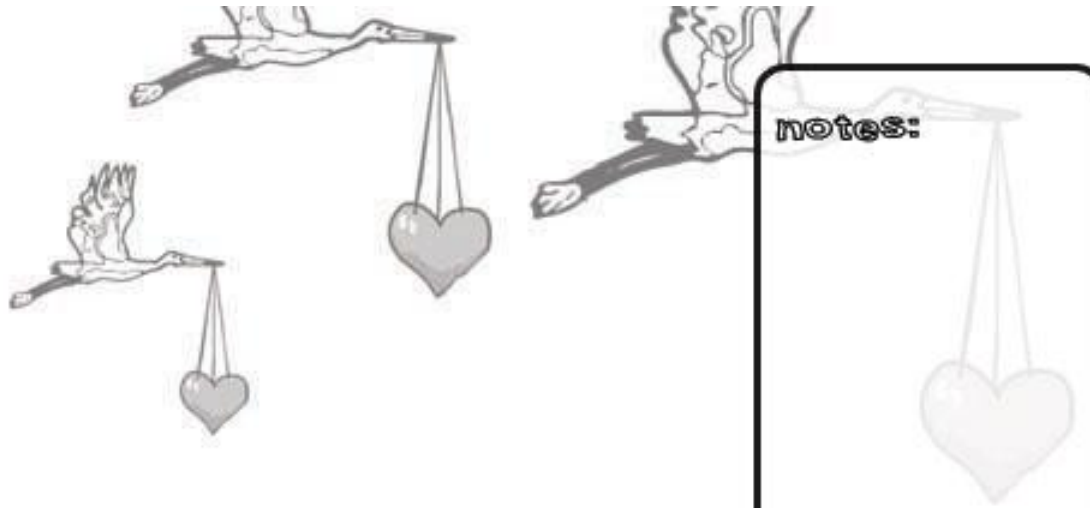
Discussion Questions:

1. How do you feel about the statement, “all you need is love?”
2. When it comes to love, what is the manual and who is the Expert?
3. Who are we supposed to love?
4. How do you feel about having to love your enemies?
5. Would anyone like to share about a time where you could have loved your enemies and the situation would have been better?
6. Now let’s not make this a gossip session, but would anyone like to share some of the people they listed as neighbors? Why? Let’s take some time to pray for them.

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