



Loving Others- March 29

Discussion Guide

Face the Issue:

This week, Brian shared with us the increased importance of loving others during times of stress and difficulty. He reminded us that God is love and that we are charged by Him to be representatives of His love in this world in all circumstances. He loves us and loves others.

Even though we know that God loves us, when we hear blanket statements about how God is love or how love wins out, we feel suspicious. Shouldn't those statements be balanced with His wrath and judgment? Shouldn't we say those things only when they're followed by "but . . ." After all, if God is love, doesn't that mean He loves everything and everyone? And can that really be true?

When have you experienced God's love?

How do you react when you hear blanket statements about God's love? Do they bring joy or make you suspicious? Or are statements about God's love so familiar that you fail to even notice them?

What does "God is love" mean? How does that play out practically?

Are there times that we do need to qualify God's love and say something like, "God is love, but . . ."? When?

Into the Word:

Jesus made it very clear that He and the Father are one. If you have seen Him, you have seen God.

That makes it very confusing sometimes when we see instances in scripture of Jesus being, what can appear to be, rude.

Read Matthew 15:21–28.

Did Jesus appear to be a little rude here?

Always remember that Jesus was a master teacher. A good teacher always gives their students the chance to grow and demonstrate what they have learned. That is exactly what Jesus was doing here.

Some background. We are told that Jesus had withdrawn to Tyre and Sidon to get some rest. This is very meaningful because the people in these Phoenician towns were despised by the Jews. He knew that His disciples would have a distrust and disdain for the people that they would encounter here. This would be a test of what they had learned.

Look specifically at verse 23. Jesus' first response was silence. He appeared to ignore the pleas of this woman. Something that the Pharisees would have approved of. His disciples took this silence as approval of shunning this woman and asked Him to send her away because she was bothering them.

What was the Canaanite woman's attitude as she came to Jesus?

What might we learn from this?

Jesus then seems to agree with His disciples and says "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

Why do you think Jesus said this? In my mind, I think Jesus was not looking at the woman when He said this, but instead, was looking at His disciples. The same disciples that had heard Him say time after time that He had come for the sake of the whole world, that God did not want anyone to perish but for ALL to come to a knowledge of Him and His Son. Had they really listened? Had they really learned? So, He appears to agree with them. "OK, I will send this Phoenician, this woman, away. We are Israelites, we are the chosen people. We have no time for this riff raff." And now He waited to see if any of His disciples would stand up for this woman. Would they challenge this action out of love for her?

When none of them meet the challenge, Jesus turns to the woman and tests her faith and belief. She passes and Jesus meets her need.

How is love a test of what we truly believe?

What do you learn from this account?

Apply The Word

We are facing a time of challenge. This will challenge not only our faith in trusting God but also our belief in what He has taught us. He has taught us time after time that we are to love others more than ourselves.

What will you say and do when a human being comes into your life? Will you say, "God, will you help me love this person? Will you help me speak and act with compassion and truth and courage? God, here's somebody who's difficult for me. Here's somebody who doesn't know you. Maybe they're far away from you, but they're poor and needy, and I have stuff."

Read 1 John 4:7–21.

According to this passage, where does love come from?

How are love of God and love for others intertwined?

What are we to make of those who say they love God but don't love others?

How can we show God's love to the following groups?

- *Those with sinful lifestyles*
- *Members of a political party other than ours*
- *Christians who hold different doctrinal positions than we do*
- *Followers of other religions*
- *Those from countries which are our enemies*

How can God help us to love others?