

## **Get an Attitude!**

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus – Phil 2:5*

I have written these Bible Study guides with the intention of looking at how the attitudes of Jesus were so different from that of his generation. Even today, how our world defines certain attitudes and how Jesus expressed them are quite different. Most often, the worldly definition and Jesus' demonstration are almost contrary or at least paradoxical.

So, as you look at each attitude, try to stretch your thinking box away from society and really put yourself into Jesus' shoes. What was he trying to teach and show his followers about living in dependence upon God and not tradition or institution? If we begin working on these attitudes, they will develop in to personal attributes, for these attitudes are certainly the attributes of the character of Jesus. If you have questions, please feel free to email, write or phone me and I'll do my best to answer.

In Christ,

Faye Reynolds

## **Week 1: POWER**

One defining characteristic of God is Omnipotence, which means all powerful. This study will look at how Christ demonstrated power and authority in his earthly life and discover in what ways we should exhibit similar characteristics.

**Key Verse:** *II Tim. 1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

### **Webster's definition of power:**

- a) The ability to act or produce effect
- b) A position of ascendancy over others
- c) One that has control
- d) Physical might or moral vigor.

1. Look at each definition and describe how Jesus fits the dictionary attributes. Is there any aspect of Jesus' power that could contradict the world's understanding of power?
2. Complete the sentence with as many nouns as you can think of: "Jesus exhibited power over \_\_\_\_\_." Consider some of his healings, his encounters with religious authorities, government, hurting and sick, demonic, etc.
3. Can you think of situations where Jesus did not seem powerful at all or certainly not the way the world defines a powerful person?
4. Did Jesus ever force his opinion or limit another's freedom through his power?

## Read John 11: The Raising of Lazarus

1. What impresses you the most about Jesus as he exhibits extraordinary power over death?
2. What is the relationship between power and love in this event, and also power and self-control. How does Jesus express all three in tandem?
3. Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead? What was the purpose behind this display of power?

**Consider:** Jesus never uses power to control or manipulate people, just as God never uses power to force a relationship with him or certain behaviors from us. He gives us freedom to come at his invitation. Jesus doesn't use power to defend himself but he does to protect or heal others. There is a difference between power and control. We have been given power over evil and we need not fear it and that empowers us. However, we do not control the elements around us or the actions of people around us. We have power to choose our response to people, but not to manipulate them. Jesus never lets others rattle him. He doesn't get defensive – he doesn't react to pressure or opposition or respond to other people's time line. **He exhibits SELF – control, not OTHER – control.**

5. In what ways can the church misuse power in relation to its people? As a woman, have you experienced any abuse of power within the church?
6. In what ways can pastors misinterpret the meaning of authority and endeavor to control their congregations and boards?
7. Where are we lacking power in our Christian walk and witness?

LOVE AND SELF-CONTROL – are essential ingredients to accompany power. Our greatest witness is the power we wield over our own lives; how we face hardship and struggle; how we discipline our personal lifestyle; how we stand up against injustice where power is used against the weak; how we love others as much as we love ourselves. *Power without love is evil.*

**Consider this Quote:** Phillip Yancy: *Jesus did not say, "All men will know you are my disciples . . . if you just pass laws, quash immorality, and restore decency to family and government," but rather, ". . . if you love one another" (John 13:53). He made that statement, of course, the night before his death. Never have the contrasting styles of God's power and human power been more openly displayed. Human power, represented by the might of the Roman Empire and the full force of the Jewish religious authorities, collided head-on with God's power. Amazingly, at that moment God chose the path of deliberate powerlessness. He could have called 10,000 angels, but did not. As I look back on that dark night, and also other dark nights in history, I marvel at the restraint God has shown."*

**Get Personal:**

- 1) Is there an area in your life in which you feel powerless? Is it God's desire that you lack power in this area or is He there to empower you? What do you need to let go of and what do you need to believe in order to access the power available to you?
- 2) Can you recognize times when you have tried to manipulate another's behavior or use a position of authority to get your own way? Pray for the discernment to recognize these times and pray for forgiveness and the ability to change.

**Week 2: MEEKNESS/GENTLENESS**

Jesus described himself by saying, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (KJV) but the verse is translated in the NIV as "I am gentle and humble in heart". In the Beatitudes we also read that "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Today we will study meekness in relationship to power and what is the characteristic of Jesus that helps define this trait for us.

**Key Verse:** *Col. 3:12 "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness (meekness) and patience."*

**Webster's Definition of Meekness:**

- b) Characterized by patience and long-suffering
- c) Controlled Strength
- d) Deficient in spirit and courage.

**Gentleness:**

- a) Kind, amiable, tractable, docile
- b) Not harsh, stern or violent

1. Which definitions best describe Jesus and in what situations do you see him displaying the characteristic of meekness or gentleness.
2. Is there a definition that contradicts the nature of Jesus in Webster's list?
3. Complete the sentence: Jesus was gentle with \_\_\_\_\_. (think of the way Jesus interacts with various people)
4. What aspects of meekness does our society disdain or look down upon?
5. What are some situations today that a Christian needs to show gentleness and meekness as our witness?
6. Are there more expectations that a woman be gentle and meek than a man in our society? Would this be by a Biblical understanding or societal understanding?

## Read John 8: 1 – 11 Woman Caught in Adultery

7. Who are the main characters in this play?
8. Who are the sinners and who are the righteous? How does Jesus display controlled strength (meekness) in this story? How is his attitude in contrast to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees?

**Consider:** It is very essential to understand the difference between being a door mat to others' wishes and whims and the ability to discipline and control our strength for the good of all. Once again, we do not see Jesus on the attack or the defense – we do not see him preach at or condemn any behavior, but in gentleness, he simply asks a question.

9. Are there ways the Christian church could approach immorality in our society (issues such as abortion and homosexuality) with more gentleness and understanding? How could our witness be strengthened by a change of heart?
10. Are there areas that we should be focused less on the actions of others and more on the attitudes of our own hearts?
11. What is the power of meekness?

MEEKNESS is not a reactionary trait. **Meekness displays great dependency upon God** for wisdom and discernment to understand. *It is not a judging spirit but a patient, sensitive, loving heart, which desires to seek truth above all.*

### Get Personal:

1) Is there a person in your life to whom you need to show more patience and long-suffering with: A person or a situation in which you need to be less critical and more supportive? Meekness is also a teachable spirit. Are you teachable?

2) Are there areas that you need to be more assertive, because you have misunderstood meekness and allowed a need to go unmet?

## Week 3: HUMILITY

We talk the talk of humility, but do we really walk the walk? **To be humble is to know yourself to be made in the very image (nature) of God thereby being steeped with such self-esteem, that self no longer needs center stage.**

**Key Verse:** *Phil. 2:5 – 7 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

### **Webster's Definition of Humble:**

- a) not proud or haughty
  - b) not pretentious: unassuming
  - c) insignificant, modest, lowly
  - d) to destroy power or prestige
- 1) Jesus described himself as humble – but most of us could not get away with doing that without appearing proud. What are some of the things that Jesus said and did that showed a spirit of humility? (Think about the company he kept!)
  - 2) Because the writers of the Scriptures wanted the readers to know that Jesus was the Messiah, they tend to emphasize the powerful sayings of Jesus and the miraculous events surrounding his life. It isn't always easy to catch the humble nature of our Lord.

**Look at the following Scriptures:** What are some of the clues that portray humility?

- a) Mt. 3: 13- 17
- b) Mt. 8: 1-4
- c) Mt. 9: 9 – 13
- d) Mt. 11: 25 – 30
- e) Mt. 21: 1 – 11
- f) John 13: 1 –17

**Consider:** *Humility is the path to freedom.* When we are freed from our own worries and concerns, we have eyes to see others and energies available to offer healing. We have no need to boast of our accomplishments or beat ourselves for our failures. We accept who we are which also enables us to also accept others as they are. *There is peace, contentment and security within a humble spirit.*

- 1) Who are some spiritual leaders within the Christian community that you identify with the spirit of humility?
- 2) What are some of the signs of pride that hinder a leader's ministry?
- 3) What does it mean to have a servant's heart, particularly in a church leader?
- 4) How does the Christian church as a whole convey a spirit of humility to the world through its writings, ministries, and proclamations? In what ways do we serve our society? Is it the church's calling to judge society or serve society? Who did Jesus stand in judgment of and whom did he choose to serve?

**Consider these Quotes:** "Humility is really aimed at the person who has arrived at full self-possession and found it wanting. Only such a one can embark on a risky journey of ego-reduction" - Kathleen Norris

“To give up one’s self in love or dedication, one must have a self” – Kathleen Norris, *“Amazing Grace”*.

**Read Philippians 2: 1 – 18** and discuss the ways we can “shine like stars” by the attitudes and examples that Paul gives in that passage.

**Get Personal:** Can you identify areas of pride in your life that are really masking insecurities you feel? OR Do you see areas where you lack confidence and therefore do not get involved or withdraw from people or situations? **A humble spirit is not self-conscious but other – conscious, and that is freedom indeed!**

## Week 4: GRATITUDE / CONTENTMENT

The attitude of gratitude is essential to live a joyful life. It is the source of all contentment – to see life as a precious gift to be savored and enjoyed. Yes, there are difficult times, pain, suffering and struggle – but even in these, life has something to teach us and offer.

**Key Verse:** *1 Thessalonians 5: 16 – 18 – Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

**Webster’s Definition of thankful:** Conscious of a benefit received.

Appreciate: to value justly, to be aware of.

1. Is there any evidence in Scripture that Jesus lived with an attitude of thankfulness? What are some of the stories where Jesus expressed thanks to God in prayer?
2. In which stories does Jesus expect others to give thanks for a benefit received?

**Read Psalm 100, Philippians 4: 10 - 13**

1. What are the ways that you express your gratitude to God? To friends? Family?
2. How would you describe the feeling in your heart when you are truly thankful for an experience or gift?
3. What are the things that keep you from feeling thankful?
4. Are you by nature an optimistic joyful person, or a pessimistic, negative person? If you tend to be negative, what can you do to counter that tendency and become more ‘conscious of benefits’ within your life?

**Consider these quotes:**

“Gratitude is a profound condition of life lived in a generous, sane, and creative region of the spirit. Gratitude is the shining great river of human life . . . Gratitude is a region of spirit wherein one may dwell. It is here. It is now, and not backwards or forwards in time. And it is communion, not solitude. . . no one is alone in the region of gratitude; for sanity, compassion and love are what gratitude gives our life together.” *In Praise of Gratitude* by Robert Raynolds.

**We have two choices in life. We can live in the region of gratitude, or we can live in the region of resentment.** There is no other choice. If we are not thankful for that which we have, we are resentful and resentment hardens the heart. It is interesting that those who visit the mission fields in third world countries most often find that the people who live in poverty show more gratitude and joy in their lives than we in North America.

**Get Personal:**

Can you say with all honesty that you are content? Do you believe that you have all that you need to live joyfully in right relationship with your God and your neighbor? What are some personal choices you can make to emphasize a heart of gratitude and minimize any areas of resentment or jealousy? Is your personal worship and corporate worship characterized by thankfulness?

**Week 5: GRACE / MERCY**

I considered bypassing a study on grace, because of the wonderful work Phillip Yancy has done on the subject in his book, “What is so Amazing about Grace”. However, because I consider it such an essential attitude that provides the framework for every other action and attitude we take in our Christian walk, I had to touch on it here.

**Key Verse:** *Col.4: 5,6 “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

**Webster’s Definition of Grace**

- 1) Unmerited help given to people by God
- 2) Freedom from sin through divine grace
- 3) A virtue coming from God.

**Mercy**

- 1) Compassion shown to an offender
- 2) A blessing resulting from divine favor or compassion
- 3) Compassion shown to victims of misfortune.

**Author's Thoughts:** I have always understood grace as receiving what you **do not** deserve, and mercy as **not** receiving what you **do** deserve!

We, as believers in Christ, are very willing to accept the grace extended to us in our sin and struggle, but in turn, we are not very gracious to others. We say that we are saved by grace, *but in honesty, we really believe we are saved by our theology or doctrine* – by what we believe about God and how He works. And we then decide who is not saved because of their beliefs. But Jesus tells story after story about how big and expansive and inclusive the Kingdom of God is – how gracious and loving is the Ruler of the Kingdom. The rules that we think are fair, God blows out of the water by his overwhelming generosity (Matt 20). We don't have a clue what grace really is. We still think of God as Santa Claus making a list and checking it twice to find out who's naughty or nice. But who really needs the physician, the sick or the healthy?

- 1) Many of the parables of Jesus deal with the theme of grace. Look up the following Scriptures, and **discuss the theme of grace** in the stories of Jesus: Matt. 18:10 – 14, 18: 23 – 35, Matt. 20: 1 – 16, Luke 11: 5 – 13
- 2) Think of the kinds of people that Jesus extends grace and mercy to in his earthly ministry. Upon whom was he most likely to pass judgment?
- 3) How do you understand the paradox of being saved by grace, but faith without works is dead? Think of this in light of the Parable of the unmerciful servant. Where does a heart for mercy come from? Look also at Matt. 6:14.
- 4) Are there times when the church has been more legalistic than gracious to people/society?

**Consider this Quote:** Mt. 16:25 *“For if anyone wants to save his life, he will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”*. *The sad fact is that the church, both now and at far too many times in its history, has found it easier to act as if it were selling the sugar of moral and spiritual achievement rather than the salt of Jesus' passion and death. It will preach salvation for the successfully well-behaved, redemption for the triumphantly correct in doctrine, and pie in the sky for all the winners who think they can walk into the final judgment and flash their passing report cards at Jesus. But every last bit of that is now and ever shall be pure baloney because: (a) nobody will ever have that kind of sugar to sweeten the last deal with and (b) Jesus is going to present us all to the Father in the power of HIS Resurrection, and not at all in the power of our own totally inadequate records, either good or bad . . .* **Jesus saves losers and only losers. He raises the dead and only the dead. And he rejoices more over the last, the least and the little than all the winners in the world.** – Robert Capon “Parables of Grace”

**Get Personal:** What are you honestly counting on for your salvation? Are there any elements of guilt in your relationship with God that you are not **doing** enough to please Him? Have you ever felt angry with God because you have been obedient, but things have not turned out as you thought they should? Are there ways that you have denied God's grace to others, through your speech or attitude, subconsciously assigning them to hell because it doesn't fit your theology that they might be saved? How can we as Christian community be more gracious to our world, rather than judgmental?



## Week 6: COMPASSION/ PASSION

I was challenged by the message of Tim Colborne at our Alberta Baptist Assembly when he spoke on Luke 12 and asked the question, “Do we care about what God cares about?” “Are we compassionate to those whom Jesus was compassionate?” It is an important question we must all ask ourselves as we look at what we are truly passionate about in our lives.

**Key Verse:** Matt. 9: 36, 37: “*When (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.”*”

### **Webster’s Definition of Compassion:**

- a) sympathetic feeling
- b) with passion – strong feeling/ love
- c) the emotions as distinguished from reason

**Consider:** What Jesus was most passionate about was LIFE! He wanted everyone to have life and have it abundantly. He saw the religious authorities as so tied up with all these rules of dos and don’ts that they practically sucked the life out of anyone they encountered. There was no joy there but Jesus was a joyful person. *He felt compassion for those who were harassed in life, rather than knowing the freedom to celebrate it.* **Jesus had a passion to set people free** – free from infirmities, from guilt, from legalism, from loneliness and isolation.

### **Read John 2: 1 – 11**

The jars full of water at the wedding were used for ceremonial cleansings. Wine is considered a symbol for joy.

- 1) When Jesus changed the water into wine, he was replacing the religious ceremonies and traditions with a new joy – the celebration that the bridegroom had come and was among them. The Kingdom of God is here and that is a source of joy that shall never run dry. How did the rest of Jesus’ ministry reflect this symbolic act here in John, which takes place at the beginning of his ministry?
- 2) What are ways that we can encourage those around us to live joyfully?

- 3) Do you think Christians as a whole portray a joyful attitude? What are things that hinder us from finding joy? How can we be a more positive presence – a bright light of hope in our communities?

**Consider this Quote:**

*Every human being has a great yet often unknown gift; to care, to be compassionate, to become present to the other, to listen, to hear, and to receive. If the gift would be set free – and made available - miracles could take place. Henri Nouwen.*

Our passion ought not be for rules or morality but for people – for their wholeness. That is when passion becomes compassion – a heart with and for people.

**Get Personal:**

Do you know what your passion is? Perhaps you have many things that move you, or excite you. How do you serve those passions? Do they mirror Christ's passions and his compassion for his children? What are the tangible ways that you care for others – that you are present for another?

## **Week 7: COURAGE**

Followers of Christ and those filled with his Spirit ought to be fearless. There is nothing stronger than our God; there is no battle that has not been won yet at times the Christian church seems to act threatened and quite defensive about their beliefs. I feel that we have been guilty of fear mongering to motivate believers to take stands or win the lost into the kingdom. It is not God's way!

**Key Verse:** *1 John 4: 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

**Webster's Definition of Courage:** The ability to conquer fear or despair; bravery.

1. What are some instances that Jesus might have felt fear and how did he overcome that fear? i.e. Luke 4: 28 – 30, Luke 13: 31 – 33, Luke 22: 30 – 46.
2. Where did Jesus get his courage? Is that source available to us as well, or unique to Jesus as the Son of God?
3. How did Jesus react to criticism? Do we have any record of Jesus appearing defensive or threatened? Did anything threaten his mission or final goal?
4. Should the church feel threatened today in terms of its ministry or mission? Can you think of times throughout history that the church has reacted in fear and attacked causing great harm? Do you recognize any similar attitudes today?

**Consider:** Whenever the church has tried to defend its beliefs, it has gotten into serious trouble. Think of the Crusades, the Inquisition, the burning of witches and heretics, the Klu Klux Klan, Galileo and his belief that the world was round, not flat. Defensiveness and aggression have always damaged the Church, not saved it. Jesus never tries to prove the existence of God – he simply lives as if God is so. There is no record of any apologetic debate, or the weeding out and crucifying of heretics. Jesus loved his enemies and prayed for those who persecuted him – he never attacked.

I believe that the church needs to be very careful in trying to prove the existence of God – of trying to prove a literal six-day Creation, or that the world is only 6000 and some years old. **It is the wrong battle to fight.** Evolution is not the enemy. Hatred and intolerance is. *We must live as if God is Love, God is Truth, God is among us and within us, and then we share the Good News that it is so!*

**Read: Luke 12: 4 - 12**

1. What are we not to be afraid of and why?
2. Who are we to really fear and why?
3. How do you reconcile verse 5, which tells us to fear the one who can throw you into hell, with verse 7, which says, “Do not be afraid”?
4. What does the passage say about defending ourselves? Compare this verse with I Peter 3: 13 – 16. Should there be any place for fear in our witness?

This passage is so beautiful – telling us to fear God alone, but then not to fear at all, because God loves us so-o-o much – he knows the number of hairs on our head. He has no desire to destine us to hell – he loves us. We do not have to be afraid of what we might say – the Spirit will guide us. That is a certainty. *Do not blaspheme the Holy Spirit by saying He is not with you – he cannot help you.* **That is a lie!** You really and truly have nothing to fear, but fear itself. That is the enemy!

**Get Personal:** List your fears honestly. Look at the ways you have not allowed the Spirit to work in these areas and remove your fears. Invite the Holy Spirit into your fears and ask for the courage to face them head on. God is faithful – He will never leave you or forsake you. Also look at areas of your Christian walk where you have been defensive, rather than loving – where you have lashed out because you felt threatened and seek forgiveness. If you know the truth, the truth will indeed set you free!

## Week 8: INCLUSIVE

This lesson will take us on a study of the Jewish system of purity and cleanliness and how this belief system caused them to become a people of exclusion and separateness, rather than those God called to embrace the hurts of the world.

**Key Verse:** *Eph 1: 9, 10 “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and earth together under on head, even Christ.”*

**Webster’s Definition of Inclusive:**

1. To take in or comprise as a part of the whole: embrace, cherish, love, encircle, welcome
2. Comprehend, involve, encompass, embody

1. How did the Jewish belief in being pure before God, and the Old Testament laws of cleanliness end up hindering their calling to be a light to the world?
2. Contrast the Pharisee’s attitude to the unclean and Jesus’ attitude. How did Jesus relate to those that his society had shunned?
3. Who did the Pharisees effectively exclude from the kingdom of God because of their belief that they were exclusively the children of God – the chosen ones?
4. Who did Jesus include by his actions?

**Consider:** The Jewish people in essence made themselves “untouchables” by withdrawing from their society for fear of being made unclean. They thought they were declaring others unclean – like those with the dreaded leprosy, or women – once every four weeks, or anyone dealing with death or tragedy or injury or illness. They removed themselves from their society by declaring everyone else untouchable, and so they themselves became exactly that.

**Read Mark 7: 1 – 30**

1. How did the traditions and external rules blind the religious leaders to compassion? Are there areas that we lack compassion for people because of our moral stances?
2. Vs. 8 “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” Can you think of any ways that the church may be doing the same thing?
3. Vs. 14 What are the things that can truly make us unclean before God’s eyes? What are the attitudes of the heart we need to challenge and confess?
4. In what ways has our theology excluded people from the grace of God? Whom does God desire to save? Do we pull ourselves away from those we identify as “sinners” or do we move toward them and open our lives to them?”

**Consider:** The story of the Syrophonician woman at first is hard to read, because Jesus seems callous, or at worse, sarcastic as he compares the woman and her people to dogs. After all that was the way the Jewish people really did feel about those outside of their faith. But Jesus does use the word “tongue in cheek” and the Greek word translated

‘dog’ is actually “puppy”. Imagine the smile on Jesus’ face as he says, “Shouldn’t the children be fed before the puppy?” and the woman quickly picking up on his meaning and answers with wit and style, “Even the puppies get the children’s crumbs”. I think of my own children – who sometimes pick at their food, who don’t know what is good for them or delicious to eat. But a puppy knows – it will lap it up like nobody’s business.

Judaism lost the joy of the feast and became picky eaters – they became so fussy, they missed out on the meal altogether. But a so-called ‘untouchable’ recognized the amazing banquet available even in the leftovers. We must never assume that God is not working in people’s lives, even if they belong to a different religion or sect. Labels or definitions do not bind God – he sees the heart and honors the hungry and invites them to the feast. If we are to have the heart of God, our heart needs to be with the untouchables, the lost, the lonely, the hurting. We are to reach out to all in love. After all, we do not save anyone – that is God’s department. We make no judgments; we only serve as the hands and face of Christ.

**Get Personal:** Are there any people that you shy away from because of fear that they might wrongly influence you? Are you concerned that in some way, being with them might make you ‘unclean’ in the sense that others might think poorly about you? For example, would you feel shame being seen with anyone – or seen in a certain setting? Does this keep you from going to where God desires you to minister?

## **Week 9: INTIMACY (LOVE)**

Love perhaps should have been the first attitude of Christ we studied – for it is certainly the crowning attribute of our Lord. Each study has included an aspect of love –for it is the greatest commandment that includes all others –to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. I chose to end our study with intimacy, because love is also the greatest mystery. We desire intimacy more than anything in this life – but we also fear it more than anything. It is very hard to let others know us so well, because intimacy also means vulnerability.

**Key Verse:** I Peter 1:22 *“Now that you have been purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, **love one another deeply, from the heart.**”*

### **Webster’s Definition of Intimacy:**

1. Innermost, intrinsic (belonging to the essential nature or constitution of a thing)
2. Marked by a very close association, contact or familiarity
3. Marked by a warm friendship
4. Of a very close or private nature.

1. Do you think that Jesus loved everyone equally in his earthly life? What is the difference between caring about people as God's children, and loving specific individuals?
2. Name the people that you believe Jesus was the closest to and tell why you think there was intimacy in those relationships.
3. How do you think Jesus balanced the calling to 'be all things to all people' with spending time with those closest to him?
4. What evidence do we have that Jesus loved himself and cared for himself?

**Read John 14: 23, 24; I John 3: 11 – 24**

It is interesting that the Apostle John has written the most on the commandment to love, and he himself was referred to as "the disciple Jesus loved". Perhaps through his experienced of being loved by Jesus, he understood more completely the commandment to love others.

The Bible does not tell us to look for love, to find love, to get others to love us, to be lovable. **Its message is not about others loving us, it is about us loving others.** This is a significant difference from the worldly aspiration of needing to be loved. People often go into relationships for what they will get out of it, and this most often spells disaster.

1. Can you see different levels of love mentioned in these verses? What do we learn from the comparison of hate and murder to love? They seem very extreme, yet in what ways do we "kill" people by not loving them?
2. How do we lay down our lives for others when our lives are so interconnected to others – our children, our husband, our parents? Could you take away your children's mother or father for the sake of a stranger?
3. How could we be set free from our material desires in order to be more effective lovers in the name of Christ?
4. In verse 19, does your heart at times condemn you for not loving as we have been commanded? Does loving as Christ loved seem too tall an order? What do you believe God is asking of you in relation to humanity in general, to acquaintances and friends, to family and loved ones?

**Consider:** There are many levels to love, and though Jesus loved all of humanity, he dedicated his life to 12 particular individuals and 3 of those were particularly close to him. He allowed friends like Martha, Mary and Lazarus to minister to him and his heart was particularly connected to their hearts as he weeps with them. **The more we learn to love, the more we will know the presence and image of God within us.** The rule of thumb for love is that our actions should be for the growth and development of another. If we deter or hurt their progress, we have not loved. If our actions limit them rather than set them free, we have not loved. If we desire to be loved in return, we have not loved.

God loves us each individually – therefore we do know perfect love – we need not look to others to love us. *We must love ourselves*, because it is blasphemy to reject or harm what God loves and delights in. As we learn to love others with no self-interest in our motivation, we will be better at loving ourselves and also recognizing the love of God

within us. In loving ourselves, we will be more honest and open in relationships – certainly more vulnerable, but also more fulfilled for we will be doing exactly what we were made to do. And we will know Love – for God is Love!

**Get Personal:** Read again I Corinthians 13 and challenge yourself to see how well you love according to the principles given in that Scripture. If you learn to live this chapter of the Bible, then you truly will have the attitudes of Christ dwelling within!