



Personal & Group Study Guide: February 6, 2022

Message Series: The Questions Jesus Asked (Part 3)

Message Title: *If You Only Love People Who Love You, What Reward Will You Get?*

Series Introduction: Christians often think of Jesus as the guy with all the answers, but when you read the biographies of his life in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) you will find that Jesus preferred to ask people questions. In fact, the four gospels quote Jesus asking questions over three hundred times during his three-year ministry!

Why did Jesus ask so many questions? Because his questions inspired deeper conversations among his disciples as they pursued the truth of God together. That's what The Story is all about, so with this series, we're taking a closer look at some of the questions Jesus asked.

Today's question: *If You Only Love People Who Love You, What Reward Will You Get?*

Time to name names! Who are some of the people (or types of people) you find most difficult to love? Why?

What did God do for Adam and Eve in the aftermath of their sin, and what does that tell us about the love of God? (Check out Genesis 3:8-9, 3:21)

Read Matthew 5:43-48.

"You have heard that it was said..." Jesus repeated this phrase often when speaking to his Jewish audience. What did he mean by this? Where had they "heard that it was said"?

If the Old Testament said "Love your neighbor," but Jesus said, "Love your neighbor...and your enemy," did Jesus contradict the Bible? (See Matthew 5:17)

When Jesus said "Love your enemies..." and "If you love those who love you..." he used the word *agape* for love. What is *agape* love, and how does it compare to other, lesser forms of love?

Followers of Jesus love everyone because:

1. God _____.

Read Romans 5:6-10. What is the difference between the way God loves and the way most people love?

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2. We're _____.

When you become a follower of Jesus and you receive the Spirit of God, a new “you” is born. Although you may continue to struggle with the same sins as before, the victory is yours by faith in Christ. The primary vital sign in your new life with Jesus is LOVE, because the more you choose to love Christ, the more love you will have for everyone else.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. How has your new life in Christ increased your capacity for love?

3. Everyone _____.

If you're following Jesus, you are on a mission to make sure as many people as possible know about his gospel and his love for all people. Although Christians have tried many evangelism “tactics” over the years - including argumentation, fear-mongering, and coercion - *agape* love is the only way to win people over.

Let's be honest. How have you failed to love others (even your “enemies”) with *agape* love? (Note: *This question isn't meant to shame you, but to produce the “godly sorrow” which “brings repentance that leads to salvation” [2 Corinthians 7:10]*)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor who was executed in a Nazi concentration camp at age 39 for his anti-Nazi activism. If anyone had the right to be filled with hate, it was him. But this is what he said about how Christians overcome the world:

“Love bears all things. That means it is no longer frightened by evil. It is totally able to accept the terribleness of human sin. It does not look away because it cannot take the sight of blood.

Love believes all things and becomes a fool because of its faith, yet it is right in the end. It is victimized and duped and lied to as a result, but nevertheless it stands its ground. *Isn't it nonsense to believe all things? Doesn't it actually provoke others to consider me stupid?* Yes, it is nonsense if I have something in mind I want to get for my love. But if I really want nothing less than to love without conditions, without limit, without prejudice, then it is no nonsense at all; on the contrary, it is then *the* way to overcome people, the very people begin to wonder and then change their ways. Love believes all things because it cannot help but believe that ultimately, when all is said and done, all people are created to be overcome by love.”
(from *The Unbelieving Way of Love*, a sermon delivered on October 21, 1934 in London)

Name two or three specific ways you will *choose* to love hard-to-love people with the *agape* love of God this week.