

SESSION 9: JESUS THE WAY OF LOVE

9.0 OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this course called *Walking the Good Path*.

In this course, we are trying to discover who Jesus is, not in a religious or “churchy” way, but as a real person who walked the good path of God the Creator, whom He called Father.

From early times, the people who followed Jesus became known as ***people of the way*** because they lived and acted in the ways that Jesus lived and acted in relation to God and to others. What Jesus taught and how He lived was all about helping people and showing people how to walk the good path of life with God their Creator and Father. He said, *“I am the Great Spirit’s pathway, the truth about who He really is, and the life of beauty and harmony He offers to all. There is no other guide who can take you to the Father. To know Me is to know My Father”* (John 14:6 FNV).

We are looking at Jesus as described in the Gospel of John which is in the Bible and contains stories about the life and teachings of Jesus. It is called the Gospel of John because it was written by John, who was one of the earliest followers of Jesus. The word gospel means good news. For John, the life of Jesus was good news because Jesus showed him how to walk the good path of life. In this course we are looking at what John discovered about Jesus.

During our previous sessions, we discovered Jesus as:

1. The Word – Jesus was sent by God the Creator to us. He is the message of God’s love.
2. The Truth – Jesus spoke the truth and is the Truth. He is trustworthy.
3. The Way – Jesus taught and showed us the way of living in God’s love.
4. The Life – Jesus came from God the Creator to offer fullness of life to all people.
5. The Light – Jesus illuminates the way to fullness of life on the good path of God’s love.
6. The Good Shepherd – Like a shepherd, Jesus cares for, provides, and protects those who follow Him.
7. The Bread and Water of Life – Jesus sustains and satisfies the deepest needs and yearning of our lives.

8. The Vine – Jesus is the source of nourishment and satisfaction in life.

9.1 REVIEW SESSION 8

The last session was about Jesus the Vine and what it means to live the good life. We discussed what kinds of things make for a good life – what nourishment is required. Jesus said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches.”** (John 15:5). Just as a vine provides food or nourishment so that its branches grow and remain healthy, so Jesus provides “food” to nourish those who are connected to Him.

Unlike things or foods that do not contribute to the health and well-being of a person, nourishment is food which helps us live a healthy life – a good life.

At the end of the last session, there was an assignment for you to look at John’s stories about Jesus and His relationships with people. In these relationships what does Jesus give people that feeds their souls? How does He treat them? (Discuss)

Discussion

Here are three further questions to discuss in small groups:

- *When you look at Jesus’ relationships with different people in John’s Good News – is there a particular relationship that stands out for you? What is it about that relationship you find interesting or encouraging?*
- *What does a healthy relationship with Jesus look like? From John’s stories of Jesus’ interactions with people, name 3 or 4 things Jesus did that contributed to their mental, social, emotional well-being.*
- *What can we expect from a relationship with Jesus?*

9.2 WHO IS JESUS?

This session is about Jesus the Way of Love.

Jesus talked about the love of God the Creator more than anything else. His whole life was focused on telling and showing people God’s love for them – love like that of a good, caring father. Jesus shows that this love is more than a feeling. Love is a decision and an action. It is respecting, trusting, helping, being compassionate, caring, supporting, and being truthful in a relationship with someone. Jesus invites us to walk in the way of love with Him and with others.

The soul food that Jesus gives people is love. To be connected to Jesus is to participate in receiving God the Creator's love through Jesus. God's love is life-giving; it is not condemning but forgiving. God's love satisfies the deepest hunger and thirst of life.

Some people call Jesus a great moral teacher, a guru, a prophet, a religious leader. Others call Him the Son of God, the Messiah, Prince of Peace, and Lord. But how does Jesus describe Himself?

The relationship between one person and others is affected by their identity. Identity has to do with how people see themselves and how others see them. A person who is sick will trust a doctor to help them - not a mechanic. But if they need to have their car repaired, they will trust a mechanic - not a doctor. If a person wants good advice about something they will go to someone who is trustworthy, not to someone who is unsure or unreliable.

John's Good News about Jesus shows us that He is who He says He is. He is completely trustworthy. The stories of Jesus' relationships with different people show that people trusted Him with their lives.

Review these stories:

- Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:1-21)
- Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42)
- Jesus and the royal official (John 4:46-54)
- Jesus and the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9)
- Jesus and the woman caught in an immoral act (John 8:1-11)
- Jesus and the man who was born blind (John 9:1-41)
- Jesus and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1-44)
- Jesus and the disciples (John 13:1-20)

Can you see that the people who met and interacted with Jesus experienced Him as the "real deal"? Who and what Jesus said about Himself was what they experienced in relationship with Him. Throughout John's Good News, Jesus relates to people with compassion, care, love, honesty, and goodness.

Discussion:

In small groups, discuss who Jesus is as the Word, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Bread and Water of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Light, the Vine - and the impact Jesus had on the people who met Him. Specifically:

1. *Choose three of these descriptions.*

2. *Write down what they mean in your own words.*
3. *Reference the stories listed above to give examples.*
4. *What is one thing about Jesus that stands out for you – in a word or few words how would you describe that?*

9.3 WHO ARE YOU?

We have looked at who Jesus is – what John said about Him and also what Jesus said about Himself. If someone were to ask you, “Who are you?” how would you respond? This can be an uncomfortable question for many of us, but it is a fair question. We often ask others this question to get to know them. So, who are you? How would you describe yourself? How would others describe you?

“Who are you?” Exercise and Discussion (Individual or Group)

On a 3x5 card or sticky note write down two things that other people notice about you, and two things you think other people should know about you (but probably don't know). Share with others in the group as you feel comfortable doing so.

- *How did the exercise make you feel?*
- *What did you learn about yourself in this exercise?*
- *What did you learn about the other person?*
- *What have you discovered about our identities?*

9.4 RELATIONSHIPS

Depending on who we are with, most of us tend to describe ourselves in positive terms, especially if we like the other person and want that person to like us. We all have a desire to be respected and to be treated with dignity and consideration. We also have a need to belong and to be affirmed by people we consider to be significant. Under all of this is our need to love and to be loved. Our sense of personal worth and security grows out of and is rooted in loving relationships.

By nature, we are “social beings.” That means we are connected with other people through relationships with them. We are individuals who are born into families, communities, and cultures. As individuals we are solitary, but we are also linked to the individuals around us. Our relationships with those people vary depending on age, personality, circumstances, and a lot of other factors. Inevitably, some

relationships are more satisfying and uplifting than others because of how the other person treats us and how we treat that other person.

Let's think about our relationships and what those relationships are like.

Discussion:

- *What kinds of things make a relationship with another person difficult, or cause a relationship to break?*
- *What do you expect from another person to have a really good relationship with that person?*
- *What is the one thing you think is absolutely essential for a good and fulfilling relationship with another person?*
- *Describe what that looks like when something bad happens to you?*
- *Describe what that looks like when you do something that hurts the other person?*

9.5 GOD LOVES YOU

John's Good News is that God the Creator loves all of humanity. Jesus completely shared God's love for all people (every single one of us) by entering human existence to show and tell us how much God loves us. Everything Jesus said and did while on earth was focused on sharing God's love and showing people the way to walk in God's love.

From the very beginning (John 3:16), Jesus has been all about showing that God's arms of love are open for all people no matter who they are, where they are, what they are like, or what they have done.

To the very end, Jesus will let nothing stand between God's love and people. He puts them first, not Himself. Just before Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and then executed, He was having dinner with His twelve disciples. They had had a long day walking. Their feet were dusty and dirty from the journey. Jesus was their Master, Teacher, and Leader, but instead of having His disciples or followers wash His feet, He knelt down and washed their feet (John 13:1-11). Jesus loved them so much that He chose to serve them instead of demanding that they serve Him first. Notice that Jesus even washed the feet of Judas, who would ultimately betray Him; Peter, who would publicly turn His back on Him; and the others, who eventually abandoned Him when He is arrested and taken to trial. That is how deep His love goes.

The stories in John's Good News show that the people who met Jesus (See 9.2) did not have to make themselves look good or hide the reality of what they had done in order to be loved by God or to be accepted by Him. Consider the following examples:

- The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4)
- The woman caught in an immoral act (John 8:2-11)
- The disciples who betrayed and abandoned Jesus; the people who falsely accused Him; the authorities who forcibly arrested Him; the judge who unjustly tried and sentenced Him; and the soldiers who mistreated, tortured, and executed Him (John 18, 19)

In Jesus, God the Creator also makes a way for people to live in love with Him. God's love for people is not a one-way street. In Jesus, He reaches out to each person, welcoming them into His embrace and inviting them to love Him. Love is completed in the response of the person being loved. Consider our relationships with the people we love and those who love us. Love is always fulfilled when the person we love also loves us. Love expects and invites a response that is more than just an emotional response. It is a response that reflects things like respect, honesty, compassion, patience, forgiveness, trust, etc.

Discussion:

- *What response do you expect from a person whom you love (a brother, sister, parent, son, daughter, friend)?*
- *How do you respond to a person who loves you (a brother, sister, parent, son or daughter, friend)?*

9.6 LOVING GOD

Jesus completely responds to the love of God the Creator. In fact, Jesus' relationship with God is so close that their love for one another is inseparable. Everything Jesus says and does reflects His love and respect for God the Father.

Jesus invites people to have the kind of relationship with Him that He has with God the Father.

Discussion

Read John 10:25-38 together (The Message Translation)

25-30 Jesus answered, "I told you, but you don't believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than

words. You don't believe because you're not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them real and eternal life. They are protected from the Destroyer for good. No one can steal them from out of my hand. The Father who put them under my care is so much greater than the Destroyer and Thief. No one could ever get them away from him. I and the Father are one heart and mind.”³¹⁻³² Again the Jews picked up rocks to throw at him. Jesus said, “I have made a present to you from the Father of a great many good actions. For which of these acts do you stone me?”³³ The Jews said, “We're not stoning you for anything good you did, but for what you said—this blasphemy of calling yourself God.”³⁴⁻³⁸ Jesus said, “I'm only quoting your inspired Scriptures, where God said, 'I tell you—you are gods.' If God called your ancestors 'gods'—and Scripture doesn't lie—why do you yell, 'Blasphemer! Blasphemer!' at the unique One the Father consecrated and sent into the world, just because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I don't do the things my Father does, well and good; don't believe me. But if I am doing them, put aside for a moment what you hear me say about myself and just take the evidence of the actions that are right before your eyes. Then perhaps things will come together for you, and you'll see that not only are we doing the same thing, we are the same—Father and Son. He is in me; I am in him.”

Discussion:

- *How would you describe this relationship between God the Father (Creator) and Jesus?*
- *What one word might best sum up the relationship between God (Creator) the Father and Jesus?*
- *How does Jesus prove/show His love for God the Father?*

9.7 THE WAY OF LOVE

The good news of John is that God loves us. God's love for you and me is not based on who we are, where we live, where we come from, or even our performance. John's Good News uses the word “love” more than fifty times. It is the word used more than any other to describe the relationship between God the Father (Creator) and Jesus, and to describe the relationship between Jesus and other people. Jesus' whole purpose is summed up in the word “love.” There is a connection between the love of

God the Creator and Jesus, between Jesus and people, and between us loving God and each other. This is the “circle of love” into which Jesus welcomes us.

Discussion:

Read the following things that John says about Jesus’ way of love and answer the questions that follow:

John 3:16 NIV

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son (Jesus), that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:19 NIV

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

John 17:26 NIV

I have made you [God] known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them.

John 15:9-10 NIV

As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you keep My commands, you will remain [live] in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love.

John 16:27 NIV

The Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God.

John 14:23 NIV

Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching. My Father will love them, and We will come to them and make Our home with them.

John 15:12 NIV

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

John 17:21-23 NIV

...that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are

one— I in them and You in Me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

Referencing the Scripture above, how would you answer these questions?

- *How do you know or see that God the Creator (Father) loves Jesus and Jesus loves God the Father?*
- *How do you know that Jesus loves you?*
- *How can you show your love for God?*
- *How would you describe the “circle of love” between God the Father (Creator) - Jesus - you?*

9.8 WALKING THE GOOD PATH

Through Jesus, every human being is welcomed into the circle of God’s love and invited to walk the Good Path of loving God and loving others. By loving others, we welcome them as Jesus welcomes us, not just into relationship with us but into God’s love for them. There is room for everyone on the good path of love.

John’s Good News sums it all up in John 15:9-12. It is helpful to read this in different translations of the Bible to better grasp the meaning of what Jesus says:

“I have loved you just as the Father has loved Me. You must go on living in My love. If you keep My commandments you will live in My love just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and live in His love. I have told you this so that you can share My joy, and that your happiness may be complete. This is My commandment: that you love each other as I have loved you. “

(John 15:9-12 Phillips Version)

“In the same way the Father loves Me, I have loved you; so never stop walking this road of love. By doing what the Father has told Me, I have remained in His love. As you walk in My ways, My love will remain in you. I am saying this so your hearts will be filled with the same joy I have. To walk the road with Me, you must love each other in the same way I have loved you.”

(John 15:9-12 FNV)

“I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you’ll remain intimately at home in my love. That’s what I’ve done—kept my Father’s commands and made myself at

home in his love. I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love.

(John 15:9-12 MSG)

Group Exercise:

- *In your own words, briefly summarize what Jesus says in John 15:9-12.*

9.9 WRAP UP AND ASSIGNMENT?

Where do You go From Here?

Jesus came to show us the love of God and to guide us into walking on the Good Path of God's love. You and I are not alone. People walking on the good path learn how to help each other, encourage each other, care for each other, and love each other as Jesus loves us. We are together in God's circle of love. We learn how to forgive each other when we make mistakes or do things that are hurtful – and to seek forgiveness when we cause others hurt.

Discussion and Reflection

- *How can you walk the Good Path, in the way of Jesus – today – this week – next month?*
- *What can you do to keep walking on the Good Path when you come face to face with:*
 - Disappointments?*
 - Disagreements or disputes with others?*
 - Difficulties?*
 - Distractions?*

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