

## DEFINITION **LOVE**

**/LəV/**

an intense feeling of deep affection

## SCRIPTURE

### **1 John 4:10**

"This is real love--not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."

## BIG IDEA

Love is a complex concept. Even the word itself can be used to describe a multitude of different things. Love can define an emotion, a state of being, a choice, an ability, a gift, a force, or all of the above. Other languages use individual words to describe these various meanings of "love." In the Greek, we see four separate and distinctive words for love.

Storge: affection

Philia or Phileo: friendship

Eros: sexual, erotic

Agape: unconditional, divine, selfless

In order to live a life marked by love, and in order to truly love others, we have to understand it first. We need a personal and comprehensive experience of the true, unconditional, unfailing love of God. One of the best demonstrations of this love can be found in John 8:1-11. Here we see the story of a woman who is brought before Jesus after being caught "in the act" of adultery. The religious leaders brought her to Jesus with the intent of trapping Him into making an impossible judgment call. According to their understanding of the Law, the punishment for the woman's sin was death by stoning. But Jesus, who is the very embodiment of love, had a different response. He bent down and began to draw marks in the dirt with his finger. Then he looked up and said, "let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Although we don't know what was written, it certainly shocked the religious leaders, and the quiet challenge that Jesus issued left them speechless. One by one, they dropped their stones and retreated.

Now this woman, who moments ago was on the verge of death, was left alone with the only man who was without sin, the only person worthy of condemning her. But rather than casting judgment or stones, Jesus looked at this broken, bruised and battered woman, and offered only love. "Woman," Jesus says to her. "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," She said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Before she could even acknowledge or accept Jesus, He responded to her sin with love, compassion, and forgiveness. It was an extraordinary, incomprehensible love that overthrew reason. It was radical! It was eternal! It transformed her from the inside out. She was no longer marked by sin, shame and regret. She was marked by real love: a love that is large and incredibly patient, gentle and consistently kind to all. A love that does not traffic in shame and disrespect, and takes no delight in what is wrong. A love which is a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others, never takes failure as defeat, and never gives up.

## CONVERSATION

1. Think about a time where you felt the overwhelming love of God. Share with your group or journal below.

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2. Just as Christ has loved us in our mess and sin, so he calls us to love others regardless of their circumstance. Who in your life needs you to demonstrate and example of true love for them?

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3. Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 13, "The Love Chapter." Which attributes of love come easily to you? Which are more challenging than the rest? Ask God to help you be patient, kind, not boastful, etc.

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## TAKE AWAY

Think about the way Jesus looked at that woman in today's story. Imagine Him looking at you that way, and that deep sea of love, compassion, and forgiveness is reflecting in His eyes at you. Let that love penetrate your heart, and bring healing and restoration to your soul. Choose to let go of the temporary love that fades, set aside your sinful nature and old ways, and turn to Jesus. No one and nothing can fill the God-sized place in your heart. His love is unconditional. No matter where you have been or what you've done, nothing can separate you from the love of God. He isn't expecting you to be perfect or all put together before He chooses to love you. As he demonstrated in today's story, with the woman who should have been condemned to die, Jesus chooses us while we are yet sinners. All we have to do is receive His free gift of love. As we grasp and accept the enormity of His love for us, that is what marks us, and is the secret for sharing the gospel with the world. For they will know we are Christians by our love.

Ephesians 3:18 " May you, together with all the Lord's holy people, grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

