

Week 1: The Bankruptcy of the Church

Key Verses:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

John 13:34-35

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Idea:

"To summarise, the contemporary church's perceived love deficit has created both an external image crisis and an internal existential crisis. Externally, many outsiders now perceive the church to be judgmental and unloving, and this is evident in the dramatic demise of the church's standing within society. Internally, many Christians experience hurt and disillusionment as a result of unloving behaviour by other believers, resulting in either guarded emotional detachment or complete disengagement with the institutionalised church." [PAGE 9]

Reflect:

- Do you agree or disagree with the suggestion that the Church (in Australia) has a perceived love deficit?
- What encounters have you had with people outside the church who have an essentially negative concept of Christianity and the institutionalised church? What was/is their primary criticism of the church and what has caused it? How have you responded to them?
- What experience do you have with Christians who have been wounded by their involvement in churches and have either stopped going to church altogether or are now barely hanging in there?
- Read John 13:34-35. What does Jesus say should be the defining characteristic of his true followers? Why do you think Jesus singles out this quality, even above faith?

Pray:

- Pray for people you know who have left the church because they have been wounded. Pray for people you know who are not Christians and who may have a negative attitude toward Christianity. Pray for yourselves and your church, that you might better reflect the love of God to one another and to the world.

Week 2: The Priority of Love

Key Verses:

1 Corinthians 13:13

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

John 15:9-11

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Idea:

The key characteristic that Jesus says exemplifies and defines his true followers is not doctrinal purity or moral obedience or faithful preaching of the Bible (as important as these are), but the deep and obvious expression of God's love among them. Not only is deep, agápē love the defining sign to outsiders that we are God's people, but it is also the essence of the church's experience of God's presence in its midst. [Page 18]

Reflect:

- If you had to pick one word to describe the Christian's that you know, what would you use? Would it be love? Or perhaps something else.
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. The Bible now gives us a full definition of love. Read through these qualities carefully. Which of these qualities do you struggle with the most? Which do you think your church needs to address the most? How does this biblical definition of love differ from the popular understanding of love within society?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. If love is the greatest quality of all, how should this be reflected in the life of your church? For example, what impact should it have on the church's programs and ministries?
- Read John 15:9-11, preferably in several different translations. Firstly, what is the significance of the word that is translated as "remain" or "abide" or "dwell"? Secondly, what is the link between love and joy in this passage? How does one affect the other?
- How have you recently gone at "remaining" or "abiding" in God's love? What are the encouragements and challenges to this in your life?
- David encouraged us to write a love letter from God to ourselves. God is love and he loves each of us deeply – this exercise can help us to see just how God sees us (even with our brokenness). Remember it's not a job reference, but a love letter. The best place to draw inspiration from is Scripture, what does God say about us (and you!). Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:1, Ephesians 2:4-5, Isaiah 54:10.

Pray:

- Spend some time praying about these issues. Pray for yourselves, for your small group and for your church – that God's love might be more powerfully and tangibly manifest among you.
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Notes

Week 3: The God who is Love

Key Verses:

1 John 4:7-9

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Isaiah 55:8-9

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Idea:

In our struggle to understand the suffering in the world at large and its occasional unwanted presence in our own lives, we must come back to the one foundational truth that has been proven irrevocably: that God loves us deeply and extravagantly. Currently we can only see the tapestry of God's plan for the world from our limited rear view. At times it appears to be a tangle of threads that serve no purpose and have no discernible pattern. But we must rest on this one unassailable yet mysterious truth: God is love. [Page 36]

Reflect:

- Are you able to share specific instances of suffering that you or a loved one have struggled with? Have there been times in your life when you have questioned the goodness and love of God? What have you found helpful during times of suffering? What has helped you to continue to trust in God's love and good purposes?
- Read Romans 5:1-11. Notice the flow of Paul's argument. Verses 1 & 2 speak of our salvation through Christ. Verse 3 to 5 describe the role that suffering plays in our lives. The remaining verses speak again of our salvation. What does this passage imply about the purpose and role of suffering? Notice the two references to God's love in this passage; in verses 5 and 8. Read these two verses aloud again. What evidence is given here to show that God loves us? How does that help us in times of suffering?
- Rod suggested that God can and does redeem suffering (eg. Joseph's Story... Genesis 50:20). As you look back on past trials, can you notice where God was at work in them? When challenges hit, what question(s) do you ask of God? God where are you? God, why? Rod suggested another question to ask: "God, how are you at work in this?" It doesn't take away any of the suffering or pain, but can help us see things from God's perspective and more easily allow transformation/growth/perseverance to occur.

Pray:

- Pray for yourselves and others who are experiencing suffering or who may be struggling to trust the goodness and love of God in the midst of difficult circumstances. Pray also for wisdom for yourselves and for your church, in knowing how to reach out to a suffering world with the love of God.

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Pray

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Week 4: God's Love with Skin On

Key Verses:

John 1:14

¹⁴ *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Ephesians 3:16-19

¹⁶ *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Idea:

[Jesus'] incarnation provides us with the clearest possible picture of what God's love looks like in human form. Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't simply turn up to Earth as an adult human and immediately go to the cross to die for our sins? Why did he bother to be born as a frail baby and live among us for 33 years before carrying out his ultimate mission? The answer is that his substitutional atonement was only part of his mission (albeit the most important component). Another key part of his mission was to show us what a life of love and obedience looks like – and he took 33 years to do it! Jesus is the literal embodiment of God's love in human form, and he calls us to follow in his footsteps. [Page 39-40]

Significantly, as Jesus' earthly ministry neared its end, he gave this exhortation to his followers: "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34) It is a well-known verse, often quoted. But have you ever stopped to consider how profound it is? It infers that love was the predominant characteristic of Jesus' life. He does not say, 'lead as I have led you.' He does not say, 'teach as I have taught you.' He does not say, 'remain pure as I have remained pure'. He says, "love as I have loved you". It is a bold statement to make. In Jesus' mind, love is the thing that has most strongly characterised his life and ministry. [Page 41]

Reflect:

- When you think of everything that Jesus did during His time on earth, what particular things stand out most to you? And Why? Was it things he said, things he did or something about him (character and nature)?
- Have different members of the group read the following passages: Colossians 1:15 then 19-20; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3. What primary description of Jesus is given in each

of these passages and what does it mean? What act of Jesus do each of these passages point to as the supreme example of this? What does this say about the character of the Father and Jesus?

- Read Matthew 14:6-14. What does this teach us about the compassion and love of Jesus? What is particularly remarkable about the compassion of Jesus on this occasion? What implications does this have for us, as we seek to emulate the love of Jesus to a needy world?
- Can you think of a time when you most clearly experienced 'God's love with skin on' – a time when the love of God was most clearly demonstrated to you through the actions of others? How significant was this for you? Take a moment to thank God for that person.
- Bec introduced a Jewish practice called 'Dayenu'. Translated: "It would have been enough". It's a song of gratitude in response to what God has done. At the centre of our faith is Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection which has atoned for sin and provided the opportunity for us to experience a relationship with God. You may like to write your own version of Dayenu or song of gratitude. Jesus, if you had only done X and not done Y for me "it would have been enough".
- As we reflect with gratitude on the love that God has shown us in so many areas, we reminded in John 13:34 that we are called to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Is there someone who you can embody Jesus' love to? Someone that you can be God with Skin On in a moment of need?

Pray:

Share prayer needs. Are you or someone you know in need of God's compassionate love at the moment? Pray for them. Give thanks for the extraordinary sacrificial love of Jesus for us. Ask that we might better reflect God's compassion and love to others.

Week 5: Grace Not Condemnation

Key Verses:

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Idea:

Grace flows out of love; it is love with legs on. In fact, grace is not possible without love. As humans, if we do not love someone, we will have great trouble merely dispensing justice, let alone treating people better than they deserve. Only when we love others deeply do we find the motivation and capacity to extend grace. Jesus is the living embodiment of grace. He extended grace rather than condemnation toward the lost, and this was why so many people loved him. This is a vital point for us to grasp because, as we have already noted, today's church is overwhelmingly perceived as judgmental and condemning. [Page 49]

Grace does not diminish the reality of sin or its seriousness. In fact, by affirming sin's reality and seriousness, the full depth of God's grace is revealed. Grace is God's extravagant forgiveness that is lavished upon undeserving sinners. [Page 51]

From Liz's Message:

What is Grace?

- Justice: You get what you deserve.
- Mercy: You don't get the punishment you deserve.
- Grace: You get blessings you don't deserve.

Reflect:

- Read John 3:1-21. The famous John 3:16 is found at the end of a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, in verses 1-15. How would you describe Jesus' explanation of the gospel in these first 15 verses? What strikes you about his explanation? Is he focused on calling Nicodemus to turn from specific sins, or does he have a more positive message? Now read verses 16 and 17 again. While verse 16 remains a favourite

verse of many Christians, notice the message of verse 17. What application does this have for our own proclamation of the gospel today?

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10. This passage starts, in verses 1-3, with a very candid description of the state of those who are outside of Christ. How are they described? Then verses 4-5 describe the means by which people are saved from this condition. Notice that they are not saved by cleaning their lives up! How are they saved? Then in verses 6-7, what is the ultimate result of our salvation? In verses 8-10, we are given one of the great summaries of the means of salvation in the Bible. Explain in your own words. What implications does this have for the message that the church must present to the world?
- Get different members of the group to read the following verses (some people may need to read two verses): 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:24; Philippians 4:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18; Philemon 1:25. Have you ever noticed how Paul concludes almost every letter with a reference to the grace of Jesus? Why do you think he does this? What does this say about the primary message of the Christian faith?
- Given all that has been discussed this week, what impact you think this should have on our engagement with the world – particularly regarding the difficult issues of other people *sinful* behaviour and society's moral issues. How should the character and message of Jesus guide our own response?

Pray:

Pray for people whom you may know who have felt judged and condemned by the church and who have not heard the message of grace and reconciliation that Jesus came to give. Pray for Christians and churches who may be preaching a message of condemnation rather than grace and forgiveness. Pray for wisdom for yourselves and for the church as a whole, as we seek to stand firm on God's unchanging standards but also hold out his message of love and grace.

Week 6: Love, Not Control

Key Verses:

Matthew 5

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 10

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Idea:

"The sin underneath all our sins is to trust the lie of the serpent that we cannot trust the love and grace of Christ and must take matters into our own hands."

Martin Luther

From Brian's Message:

- Jesus' approach to discipleship was invitational.
- He could have taken control either politically or through force, yet He has chosen to bring His kingdom in through disciples making more disciples.
- Not everyone will take up the invitation to follow Jesus, but our response must be to continue to show love and trust God; not to control, guilt or manipulate.

Reflect:

- As you reflect on the issue of love versus control, have you had any experience of being in a church or a Christian environment where control was the predominant mode of operation? What was the result?
- Conversely, have you had any experience of being in a church or a Christian environment where love was the predominant mode of operation? What was the result? Do you know of any stories of people who have come to faith as a result of their experience of the love of God through the actions of his people?
- Read Genesis 2:16-17. Why did God give humans free will when he knew that they would inevitably disobey him? Why didn't he remove the possibility of choice from us?

- Read Matthew 11:28-30. How does this passage illustrate Jesus operating from love rather than control? What aspects of Jesus' character do you see in this invitation?
- Read Romans 2:1-10. How does this passage describe the choices and consequences that mankind is faced with? What are the two paths we can choose, and what are the consequences of both? Most importantly, notice verse 4. How does this verse describe God's interaction with our world throughout history and the approach that Jesus also took? What practical implications does this have for us today?
- How are we as the Church engaging with the secular society around us? What effect do you think it is having- positive or negative? Is there a better approach?

For reflection, from the book:

"In our current dialogue with the world regarding society's shifting moral values, are we arguing, badgering and bullying? Are we, at times, attempting to coerce and control our sinful society, rather than love the sinners? Are we attempting to legislate and enforce compliance to God's moral standards, instead of demonstrating the love of God to lost and confused people?"
[page 67]

Pray:

Pray for wisdom as we seek to love a lost and confused world. Pray that God will help us to follow the loving path of Jesus rather than the controlling path of the Pharisees. Pray for our Christian leaders as they seek to lead in love rather than from a position of control. Pray for people in your community, that they might come to experience the love of Jesus and be transformed by it.

Week 7: Lost Coins and Wayward Sheep

Key Verses:

Luke 19

¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 4

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Idea:

"This incident [Jesus and the Samaritan women in John 4] provides us with a profound insight into the missional approach of Jesus and its profound impact on sinners. He did not castigate and condemn. He did not need to. Most of the sinners he encountered already knew how unworthy they were. Instead, he visited them in their own world and loved them and spoke to them of the offer of God's grace. And it was this profound love of Jesus that often brought about such sincere and deep repentance, rather than stern words of condemnation." [pages 79-80]

From Rod's Message:

Rod asked us to consider: Our Mission, Our Heart and Our Prayer...

- Our Mission; and how we go about it.

"We are called to move beyond the confines of our often-cloistered religious world and actively seek those who do not yet know God's love. We are called to be like Jesus. Like the shepherd who left the comfort of the fold to go out into the wilderness to find the lost sheep. Like the Saviour who went into the homes of tax collectors and prostitutes and had dinner with them. Like the friend of sinners who mixed with outcasts and undesirables in order to bring to them the message of God's love and forgiveness. If the lost aren't coming to church, we need to take church to them." [page 75]

- Our Heart

Is our heart for the lost the same as Jesus' heart for the lost?

- Our Prayer

HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST -We beg you to save!

Song/Prayer Lyrics: Heal my heart and make it clean. Open up my eyes to the things unseen. Show me how to love, like You have loved me. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Everything I am. For Your Kingdom's cause. As I walk from earth into eternity.

Reflect:

- What do you think are some of the challenges that we face as Christians today in seeking to reach out to people who have strayed far from God? What barriers or prejudices within our own hearts might we have to overcome in order to show them the love of Jesus?
- Read John 4:1-26. Notice the complete absence of condemnation in Jesus' interaction with this woman. How would you describe Jesus' approach to her? What impresses you most about the way Jesus related to her? Why do you think she responded so positively to Jesus and was so excited as she went back to her village? What has she sensed?
- Read Luke 15:1-10. Why did Jesus tell these two parables? (See verses 1-2). Read verse 1 again. Why were so many tax collectors and sinners gathering around to hear Jesus? What was so appealing about him? What implications does this have for the church today as we re-evaluate our own message and missional methodology?
- As you reflect on these passages, what is the role of today's church in continuing Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost, and how can we ensure that our approach aligns with his message of grace and inclusion?
- Discuss specific examples from your own life or your community where you've seen the mission of Jesus to seek and save the lost being carried out. How can you and your fellow believers further embody this mission in your daily lives? How can you make better connections with those who don't yet know God's love?

Pray:

Pray for yourselves individually and for your whole church as you seek to embody the loving, missional heart of Jesus and put his principles into practice.

Week 8: Washing Dirty Feet

Key Verses:

John 13:1

¹ *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

John 13:14-15

¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Colossians 3:12-14

¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

From the Book:

"Jesus knew, even as he washed their feet, that one of his disciples was about to betray him and all the others – all eleven – were about to abandon him completely. So, the most extraordinary thing here is not that a rabbi was doing the work of a servant, but that Jesus was knowingly washing the feet of people who were about to betray and abandon him. But so great was his love for them and his willingness to forgive in advance that "He loved them to the end". [Pages 88-89]

"Brothers and sisters, let us love one another by forgiving one another just as Christ forgave us. Then the world will start to see something different in us. They will see the fragrant, powerful aroma of God's love and grace in our midst and be drawn to it, instead of being repulsed by perceived hypocrisy. The early church in Jerusalem grew because people in the community liked what they saw. May people like what they see in us today as well and be drawn to the Saviour who has transformed us and lives among us as we love one another in his name." [Page 92]

From David's Message:

- Jesus was a radically different Rabbi. He demonstrated His love for His disciples and gave them an example to follow by washing their feet.

Reflect:

- Is anyone in the group comfortable sharing a situation where they have been let down by someone, perhaps even a fellow believer; and have had to exercise forgiveness? How difficult was that? How were you able to do that?
- Read Colossians 3:12-17. In verse 12, what is the significance of "clothing" yourself with these qualities? Why does Paul use the imagery of getting dressed in making this point? How do each of these qualities help us to exercise forgiveness? Why is the exhortation to forgive in verse 13 'bookended' (before and after) by references to "love" in verses 12 and 14? How do verses 15-17 contribute to Paul's exhortation to forgive one another?
- Read Galatians 5:13-15. This is an exhortation written to a church. What is the specific warning given in verse 15 and what does it mean? What attitudes are we exhorted to have in verses 13 and 14? How might this help us to avoid "biting and devouring one another"?
- Read John 13:1-16. What strikes you most about the actions of Jesus on this occasion? In verses 12-17, Jesus tells his disciples the practical applications that they should learn from his actions toward them. What is his message? In what sense will we be "blessed" if we follow his example?
- As followers of Jesus who are called to emulate Him, what does this [washing dirty feet] look like for you today?

Pray:

Pray for yourselves, that you will be enabled to forgive others. If you feel comfortable sharing, you might ask for the group to pray for a specific circumstance where you need to exercise forgiveness. Pray for your church as a whole; that the love of God will permeate your whole fellowship and that forgiveness will prevail.

Week 9: The Power to Love

Key Verses:

John 15:9-13

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Ephesians 4:32

³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you..

Luke 6:32-33

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

From the Book:

"You don't have it naturally within you to love as Jesus loved. You have it supernaturally within you! But you need to act on it, despite not always 'feeling it'. And that commitment to act on it – to intentionally and sacrificially reach out in love toward others – must, in turn, come from a deep understanding of God's love for you. Only when you appreciate how fully you have been forgiven and how deeply you are now loved by God, will your feeble heart be moved with the compassion of Jesus to share that same love with others." [Page 102]

From Liz's Message:

The power to love others does not come from within us, but from Jesus in us. Liz described a number of people and contexts that she found difficult to show Jesus' love towards:

- Loving your neighbour.
- Loving the Church.
- Loving difficult people.
- Loving people who are different to us.
- Loving your enemies.

Reflect:

- Have there been times in your life when your experience of God's love has run a little dry and you have consequently found it difficult to love others? And in contrast, have there been times when you have been 'bursting' with God's love that you just couldn't help but share it with others?
- Read Ephesians 3:14-21. How does this passage describe God's love for us? Why is Paul so keen for the Ephesian Christians to understand the depth of God's love for them? Notice the references in verses 16, 18 and 19 to being empowered or filled. What does this imply about our ability to love as Jesus loves? What is the promise of verse 20 and how should this encourage us as we seek to love as Jesus loved?
- Read Galatians 5:22-23. What are the "fruit of the Spirit" mentioned in these verses, and how do they relate to love? Why are they called the fruit of the Spirit? Why is love mentioned first? Can you share a personal experience when the Holy Spirit's presence in your life resulted in the manifestation of one of these fruits?
- Read John 14:15-17. What does Jesus promise regarding the Holy Spirit in these verses? How does the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit impact our ability to love others as God loves us?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-18. What is the compulsion that is referred to in verse 14? Where does it come from? How does verse 17 help us understand the Christian's ability to love as Jesus loved?
- Liz challenged us to consider if there was someone (or lots of people) that we are struggling to love in our lives right now. After reading these verses above, what might you do to show love towards them? Pray for that person, and for your ability to love to them.

Pray:

Pray for a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit's empowering and filling in your own life. Pray that you might have a deeper appreciation of God's love and a deeper personal experience of his love so that you will have an overwhelming desire to pass it on to others.

Week 10: Love, Hate and Tolerance

Key Verses:

Luke 10:27

²⁷ ... "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Leviticus 19:16

"Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the LORD."

Matthew 5:10-11

*¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

From the Book:

"In this book, we began by identifying the disconnect between the average person's perception of Jesus and their opinion of the church. Most people regard Jesus as kind and loving but they view the church as hypocritical and judgmental. They like Jesus but they don't like his followers. We also briefly explored the deep hurt felt by many Christians because of their unloving treatment at the hands of other believers. The contemporary church is desperately in need of a love reformation. This can only happen as we return to the source of our faith and recapture the radical love of Jesus. His was a love that took him into the homes and lives and hearts of sinners. It was a love that embraced those who were living in disobedience to God and offered them grace rather than condemnation. And it was a love that enabled him to forgive even those within his own fold who betrayed and abandoned him. The radical love of Jesus must be our guide as we relate to our fellow believers and as we seek to reach those outside our church doors. Love must be the predominant characteristic of the followers of Jesus. It must be the overwhelmingly obvious trait that is equally evident from both inside and outside the church. And the well spring of that love must be our own deep personal encounter with God's love which results in a deep transformation of our hearts." [Page 115]

From Brian's Message:

Francis Schaeffer

*"Most people catch their presuppositions from their family and surrounding society, the way that a child catches the measles. But people with understanding realize that their presuppositions should be *chosen* after a careful consideration of which worldview is true."*

We can easily slip into applying labels / stereotypes to people and having an "us and them" mindset – in fact that is how society pushes us. Jesus' ministry was characterised by love and he invites us to view people not in categories, but as beloved humans created in the image of God in need of a saviour.

In the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' the lawyer asked the question: "who is my neighbour?" ie. Who do I need to love in order to be righteous (implying that there are some who we don't need to extend love to). Jesus' response was jarring, commending a despised Samaritan as the model to emulate and reframing the question to: "Are you being a neighbour? Are you loving as a neighbour ought to?"

Reflect:

- How do you see "love, hate, and tolerance" expressed in our society today? If you think of it as a spectrum from love to hate with tolerance somewhere in the middle, where do you think most people in our society sit on that continuum? Where do you sit?
- The sermon described how the media we consume (driven by other's agendas and algorithms) amplifies division. Have you noticed that happening in your own news feed or conversations? How does that shape your attitude toward others? Do you [naturally] feel pulled more towards love or hate on the continuum?
- What categories or labels (e.g political, generational, social, religious) most influence how you view others? How do those labels help or hinder love?
- Read Luke 10:25-37. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbour?" but Jesus shifted the focus to, "Are you being a neighbour?" by asking the man to do what the Samaritan did. Why is that shift important for followers of Jesus?
- The priest and Levite "passed by on the other side." What might that look like in modern life—how might we also "pass by"?
- The word "do" (poieō) is repeated throughout the passage by both Jesus and the Lawyer. What does this teach us about love as more than just emotion or belief?
- When has loving someone been costly, inconvenient, or uncomfortable for you? How did God work in you through that experience?
- In what ways can our church community "go and do likewise" — showing mercy and love beyond boundaries or categories?
- As you reflect on the sermon and Luke 10, what might the Holy Spirit be prompting you to *do* this week?

Pray:

Holy Spirit, fill us with Your power and compassion. Send us out as neighbours who love without limits, seeing others through the eyes of Jesus, and to acting with mercy, compassion, kindness wherever You lead us. Amen.