



Discussion Guide

Watering others—John 13.34-35

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o How do you know if someone really loves you?

Setting the Stage: *“He loves me. He loves me not.” Oh, the eternal enigma of love. What is it? How do we show it? How do we know when we possess and are possessed by it? Love is a many splendid thing, and yet sometimes we are left asking, “What has love got to do with it?” Love is slippery and yet essential. Elusive and yet core. According to Jesus it is everything. Love guides who he is and what he came to do. Love exudes out of everything that he did. He makes one simple request of those who would follow him. He asks that we love as he loved and in so doing others would know of our devotion to Jesus. Just how are we to love as he loved? What is love? How do we show it as he did? How might our very fiber exude love as his did? How are we to become a people of whom others do not have to wonder if we love them or if we love them not?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read John 13.34-35. (*Note:* You may wish to read John 13-15 for background.)
- Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another as he had loved them. Considering John 13-15, in what ways did Jesus love his disciples?
- How might Jesus’ examples of love be considered to be new?
- In your understanding, what about loving as Jesus loved demonstrates discipleship?
- In what ways does Jesus’ exhortation to love differ in purpose and scope from love as you see and experience it?
- If we obeyed Jesus and truly loved as he commanded, how might the lives of those around us be impacted?
- What would obeying Jesus’ command to love look like in our families? In our community group?
- Do you find any difficulty in loving as Jesus commanded? Can you elaborate?
- What are some practical steps we can take as a group and in our families to love?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o Housekeeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Watering others: John 13.34-35

Context and Background

John: The Gospel of John is the fourth Gospel and the most unique of the four. It was perhaps the most influential Gospel in the earliest days of the Christian movement. The book of John differs from the other three Gospels in that it has no mention of Jesus' birth and little information about Jesus' ministry in Galilee. In contrast to the other Gospels, John focuses on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, his final dialogue with his disciples, and the use of signs and metaphors to point to the divinity of Jesus. Further, one can see that the timeline of Jesus' ministry is decidedly different. These differences can be due to the nature of the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke seek to record the actions and sayings of Jesus and present them in a loose order while John seems more interested in presenting the actual order of Jesus' ministry. Second, John is concerned with a very narrow aspect of Jesus' ministry, that which took place in Jerusalem while the other Gospel authors attempted to detail the entire ministry of Jesus. Finally, the audience of John is different thus requiring different needs. The audience for Mark and Luke were probably Gentile and therefore less familiar with the customs and happenings of the Jewish people. There is good evidence that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience and yet was influenced by Mark's Gospel. Thus Mark's framework is incorporated into Matthew's Gospel with adjustments to account for his audience. Matthew, Mark and Luke incorporate particulars in their Gospels due to their specific audiences. John, on the other hand, seems to attempt to transcend audiences. He therefore places his emphasis on universal truths that lead his audience to faith (John 20.30-31), universals such as light, life, truth, bread and water. His point in so doing may be to clarify questions his audience had about Jesus. Thus, they are not hearing the story of Jesus for the first time but in this Gospel we are encountering a thoughtful response to those who have heard and are reacting to the story of Jesus.

Love: The word "love" is central to the command of Jesus in John 13. For us, love involves concepts ranging from infatuation to deep emotional attachment. However, in the ancient world, love was less about emotion and more about loyalty and action based on this loyalty. Love for the ancient person was the devotion given to another person in their group (family, extended kin-network or work related society). Further, love was something that was expressed. It could have accompanying feelings but true love was always seen in actions. Jesus' command to love is best understood in this context. With his command to love, Jesus is instructing his disciples to maintain loyalty and devotion to one another. This loyalty would be expressed by actions that others would be able to see (John 13.35). The loving actions encouraged had little to do with what we might label as love as they are not dependant on emotions. Rather, the loving actions encouraged are those modeled by Jesus himself (John 13.34). In the immediate context, these loving actions include serve (John 13.4-5), group loyalty (John 14.18), and sacrifice (John 15.9-13).

The Text

Command to Love (John 13.34): In John 13-17, the Gospel of John records the final discourse between Jesus and his disciples. In these final words between Jesus and his disciples, Jesus seeks to prepare his followers for life on the other side of the crucifixion and resurrection. The first major instruction in Jesus' discourse is the new command to love one another. A degree of discussion exists as to what Jesus means by "a new command." The command to love others and God's character of love are interwoven throughout the OT, so a command to love cannot be new in this sense (see Ex. 15.13; 20.6; 34.6-7; and Lev. 19.18). Loving others as rooted in God's character of love was already an accepted tenet within Judaism. It is likely that Jesus is referring to this command as new because he intends that it will form the basis of a new or renewed covenant (see Jer. 31.33-34). Jesus used this final discourse with his disciples to clearly mark the beginning of a new covenant (Luke 22.20). Some might think that the Jews understood Law to be the foundation of the former covenant. However, God's love actually is the foundation of the former covenant (Exodus 20.1-6). Therefore, the new covenant seems to be a renewal of the intention of the former covenant and an expansion of those included. Whereas the former covenant included the Jews, this new covenant includes all people. The love that forms the basis of the new covenant with God has two dimensions, horizontal and vertical. The vertical dimension involves the love between God and people while the horizontal dimension involves love between people. The love that comes from God affects the redemption of people (John 3.16), and as such is not unlike the love that formed the basis of the former covenant and brought about the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt. However, in the context, Jesus has in mind the horizontal love as exemplified by his followers. This love is to be modeled on Jesus' own example of love. In loving as Jesus loved, the disciples would in fact be modeling God's love as Jesus modeled God's love (John 15.9-13). Such divine love is marked by service and sacrifice for others (John 13.1-5 and 15.9-13). In loving as Jesus loved, the disciples demonstrate through their actions that they are Jesus' disciples. On the surface, this demonstration comes through the obedience to the command of Jesus. However, a deeper reality is probably at play. Jesus has stated that he is about to go away (John 13.33). Therefore, by modeling Jesus' love the disciples become a living example of Jesus for the world in the same way that Jesus was a living example to the world of the Father (John 14.6-10).

Application: Love is and always has been the bedrock foundation of what God is doing in the world. His love motivates Him to redeem His creation and people within it. His love binds Him to people in covenant loyalty. As such, He calls His people to demonstrate this same love, a love modeled by the life of Jesus. In loving as Jesus loved, the followers of Jesus become a living example of God's own redemptive love for humanity. Their loving actions become a living witness of who God is and what He desires to do. Such love begins with those closest to us and extends to all freely.