



The Fruit of the Spirit (Week 9/9) The Love of Jesus

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *What regular opportunities do you have to express goodness in your heart & through your actions?*

Warm-Up

1. Do you think our culture understands love to be more of a noun or a verb?
2. Why would Richard Dawkins claim that when you look at the universe you see pitiless indifference?
3. How does looking to Jesus show us radical love rather than pitiless indifference?

Read John 11:17-37

4. What was Jesus' relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? What was the message sent to Jesus?
5. When Jesus nears Bethany, what cry is he greeted with by both Mary and Martha? *Is this accurate?*
6. What would it have been like for Jesus to walk into this situation? How would you have felt?
7. How was Jesus making himself *physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually* vulnerable?
8. How would Jesus make himself ultimately vulnerable for us because of his love?
9. How should this give us confidence that we can make ourselves vulnerable with God? What do you think it looks like in practice to make yourself vulnerable to God?
10. In the face of suffering, do you ever feel like God hasn't shown up? What do you do with that?

Read 1 John 4:9-12

11. What does John say is the ultimate expression of God's love for us?
12. What is the significance of God loving us *before we loved him*? *Why is God's unmerited love good news?*
13. How should this type of love enable us to trust him and also love others in a similar way?
14. What can cause us to hold back our love for God? How about love for other people? What might help?

Read John 11:38-46

15. Why—according to Jesus—was it so important for people to witness the resurrection of Lazarus?
16. What does it mean to *believe* in Jesus? How is Jesus' sacrificial love for us the means by which the ultimate enemies of sin and death are conquered? How is Lazarus' resurrection a glimpse of this?
17. Can you think of an example of being loved sacrificially by someone (other than God)?
18. What do you find most challenging about loving? *How is Jesus both the standard and source of love?*
19. In the knowledge of God's love for us, how do you think you are called to love others?

Apply *How could you be more vulnerable with God so that you might grow in your experience and expression of his (vulnerable, unmerited, and sacrificial) love?*

Pray *Holy Spirit, we pray that this day you will fill us with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

The Fruit of the Spirit (Week 9/9) The Love of Jesus

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

What fruit of the Spirit is least prominent on your frontline? How can you nurture it?


For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “The Love of Jesus” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-love-of-jesus/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Love each other” by Vaughan Roberts:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/love-each-other/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Jesus, the resurrection and the life” by William Taylor:
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/56894/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Emotions” by John Stott:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=51729&show_file=58443
- *Watch (video):* “Love” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/>

Series Resources

- *Read (book):* “Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit” by Christopher Wright. 
- *Listen (sermons):* “Fruit of the Spirit & the Character of Jesus” by Tim Keller: <https://bit.ly/3r5alRY>
- *Watch (video):* “Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit” by Chris Wright: <https://us.langham.org/fruit/>

 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

THE FRUIT OF THE SPRIT
Week 9/9 “The Love of Jesus”
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (20/07/2025)

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Bible Passage: John 11:32-45

*Holy Spirit, we pray that this day you will fill us with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in our lives:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amen. (John Stott)*

Richard Dawkins — *the world renowned atheist* — claims that when you **look** at the universe:

- you see that it has: “*precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.*” //

The Gospel of John — *authored by one of Jesus’ closest* — claims that when you **look** at Jesus:

- you see that behind *the God who weeps at the death of his friend, is the God who LOVES.*
See how he loved him!
Who would go so far as to send his only Son right into the thick of our human existence and pain.

It’s hard to imagine two more contrasting claims?!

- If we could take a peek behind the curtain to see what *really is* the driving force behind our existence and our world, what would we see?
- *Godless indifference* or *divine love*?
- Well, the Bible claims—over and over again—that if you look to Jesus, that you will not only see love in its full richness and beauty, but that you can see *and know* the God *who is love, loves us, and calls us to love like him.*

When it comes to love, there’s no shortage of points-of-view in our culture.

- Everything from lofty ideals: like all you need is love...
to the most sickly of sentiments. //

- We can often have very broken experiences of *longing for love, being loved, and loving*.
 - But when we open up the Gospels, *to look at the very character of Jesus*, we not only see that: the standard of love that the Spirit longs to ripen in us is profound; but that as we respond to God's call to love him and love our neighbour, that it's anything but *fluffy, feel-good, or fleeting*.
 - If you want to see what real and lasting love is, you've got to look to Jesus. /
 - So that's what we're going to do today. //
- There's so many accounts in the Gospels that give us insight into the love of Jesus, but I think there's no better place than in John chapter 11 and the raising of Lazarus.
- Spoiler alert: that's where the story lands, with Lazarus emerging from the tomb after four days, complete with his tomb wrap still dangling from his body. However, the lead up to that moment is a bit more involved.
 - Lazarus is gravely ill. His sisters, *Mary and Martha*, send word to Jesus. *Jesus does not come immediately*. And by the time he gets there, not only has Lazarus died, BUT Jesus is: plunged in a community wracked with grief, *and* confronted by two sisters who are struggling to make sense of his absence.

- This is gritty and raw.
- And there's nothing indifferent or pitiless about Jesus' response.

We see that the *love of Jesus—the type of love that the Spirit longs to ripen in us—is:*

- **Vulnerable;**
Unmerited; *and*
Sacrificial.

VULNERABLE | VERSES 32-35

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First, the love of Jesus is **vulnerable**. John chapter 11, verse 32...

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept. / Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

When Jesus received word from Mary and Martha that Lazarus was gravely ill, instead of immediately setting out with haste from where they, to Lazarus’ hometown of Bethany, Jesus stays on for two more days.

- In fact, having *seemingly* delayed their departure for two days, and because the the journey probably took close to another two days, by the time that Jesus’ arrives, *Lazarus has been in the tomb*—dead and buried—for four days.
- Just imagine what he is walking into. /
- **Martha**, having heard that Jesus is coming, is the first to speak to him. She goes out to him and says: “*if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*”
- **Mary**, when she hears that Jesus has arrived, rushes out to him, falls at his feet weeping, saying: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

- Jesus has been travelling — no doubt anticipating with grief what he is walking into. He’s not even stepped into the village. There is now a crowd of people watching on. And there’s truth to what Mary and Martha claim.
- Jesus had healed many. / Martha knew that anything was possible with Jesus. If only he had arrived in time. // *Why? Jesus!*
- Do you ever feel like that? That God hasn’t showed up? /
- Jesus had reason—profound and loving reasons—why he did not come immediately.
- But as Jesus saw the sisters and the crowd weep, *and heard Mary and Martha say those words*, it must have been like a knife twist to the heart. With a little part of him saying, *that’s true!*
- *That’s partly what we see in v.33*, as he’s described as: *being deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*
- He could have explained away his absence. He could have raised Lazarus at that moment. He could have unburdened himself from their blame.
- But instead, he plunges deeper into their—and his grief, asking: *Where have you laid him?* // Come and see, Lord THEY replied. And he **wept**.

If you're not yet a Christian and you're uncertain of the character of God, *just look at this*.
If you are a Christian and you at times feel God is unmoved by your pain, *just look at this*.

- Jesus openly enters into grief *and* weeps:
even though he is the Son of God;
even though he knows that Lazarus will be raised moments later;
even though he knows that death is temporary, because he will soon defeat it, once and for all. //
- God is not *distant, disinterested, nor indifferent*.
- That's how the greco-romans understood their gods.
Their gods were distant: unmoved, untouched, and unloving.
Their gods were power hungry: never to show weakness *nor mix with those who are mortal*.
Their gods were not to be known: but only to be appeased.
- *But when we look at Jesus we have every assurance that not only has God entered into our world, but because he made himself human, he's made himself vulnerable for us.*
- **Physically:** *it was dangerous to come back so close to Jeruslaem. The disciples thought they'd die.*
Emotionally: *Jesus allows himself to feel the pain of others, exposes himself to the weight of their disappointment, sharing in their grief and sharing his grief outwardly.*
Psychologically: *he's got so much going on—still so much that lays ahead—yet he enters into this.*
Spiritually: *he's in no need of us—he's God—but he steps into our darkness and takes it on himself.*

God making himself vulnerable *to love us* didn't mean a chance of getting hurt.
God making himself vulnerable *to love us* meant a certainty that he would.

- Love makes you vulnerable.
- That's why we can be so apprehensive of loving others.
Or why we can kind of hedge our love by holding something back.
- There will be disappointment. There will be loss.
- Some people know the pain of that more than others.
Some people are in the thick of that *right now*. *// But I wonder:*
- *Would you make yourself vulnerable to the God who has made himself vulnerable to you & for you?*
- God is **the one** who can make yourself truly vulnerable with
and not be afraid of him betraying, rejecting, or abandoning you.
- He won't be indifferent. He won't break his promises. He will never misunderstand you.
That's why you can be vulnerable with him. *//*
- We make ourselves vulnerable to him in an ultimate way: by recognising him as Lord.
But also day-after-day, season-after-season, trusting him even amidst our suffering.

Peter Adam put it like this: [] **the most important person with whom to share the deepest realities about ourselves, good and bad, is God.**"

UNMERITED | 1 JOHN 4:9-12

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Second, the love of Jesus is **unmerited**. In his first letter, John said in chapter 4:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Obviously, John helps pinpoint that the ultimate expression of God's love for us, is in the sending of his Son to die for us, for our sins, so that we would be saved.

- But backing it up a bit, note that as John seeks to establish the type of love that would enable God to do this for us, is true love: a love that is **unearned**.
- This IS LOVE: not that we loved God, but that he loved us.
God not only made the ultimate move, but he made the *first move*.
- And he did so with *no guarantee* that we would love him back. //
- It can kind of sound offensive that we don't deserve God's love.
But it is the best news. It means we don't need to earn *his love*. In fact, we can't. /
- There can be all sorts of reasons, *good reasons that we might love someone*:
Perhaps because we have a shared connection or have had a shared experience.
Perhaps *because we share in what we like and dislike, in what we do or where we're headed*.
- Sometimes we love in response to their love for us. Or because there's something we gain.

- But real love—God's love for us—loves regardless.

Ultimately, Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus,
not because of their shared experiences, not because they were perfect human beings,
but because he chose to love them.

- They can't quite fathom *why* Jesus did not show up sooner.
But note that it was even in his **not coming in time**,
that he was loving them, *so that they would believe in him*.
- Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead, as painful as it was even for Jesus,
was an act of love to help them to see. To open their eyes to his ultimate saving work. /
- The most loving thing he can possibly do, is not only to die for us,
but help us to see *who he is so that* we would put our trust in him and have life. //
- There's nothing we can do to earn God's love.
Jesus loved them *before* they believed.
Jesus loved them *even though* they doubted.
Jesus loved them *even though* we can't contribute at all to our salvation.
- Lazarus was powerless—he was dead. (*That is what we're like spiritually in our sin.*)
But Jesus made him alive. And one day, Lazarus, along with all who believe, will be raised forever.

[baptism] My sins have been washed clean by Jesus' death, and now as I believe in him, my future — life forever — is caught up in his resurrection.

So often we can hold back our love from people,
not only because we're scared of making ourselves vulnerable and getting hurt, but
maybe heart-of-hearts, because we don't think they *deserve it, are worth it, or will value it.*

- I'm sure we can all be guilty of that.
But it would be a mistake to think that's how God approaches his love with us.
- When we look at the cross and see God's unmerited love for us poured out,
it affords us the most amazing freedom.
- If you think you're worthy of God's love or you come to him on those terms,
then you're not recognising the richness of love that God has for you.
- You're approaching your relationship with God as a consumer.
Kind of saying to God, wow your love is amazing, I like it, I want it, and I deserve it. /
But what can you possibly do to earn that sort of love? Nothing!
If you approach God like that, at some level you'll never have security of God's love,
because you've made it dependent on your own goodness and worth,
instead of it being an expression of God's perfect goodness and worth.
- But when you begin to recognise just how unworthy you are,
it gives you the most extraordinary freedom to come to him.
- *Nothing in my hands I bring.* / And if that's the sort of love that we've been shown in Jesus,
Then that's the sort of love that we should share in the power of his Spirit.

John continues: Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

He's both the *cause* and the *power* for us to love even those who are undeserving.

A couple of weeks ago it was a joy to give thanks to God as Bettrys and I celebrated 22 years of being married. I know we're running decades short of many people here, but I think the longer I am married the more I'm astounded by just how undeserving I am of such love. It's simple maths, we grow in love, but also, the longer we're married, the number of ways I fall short also accumulates! It kind of highlights how over time, the evidence of her unconditional love for me, mounts up. Because marriage is based on a mutual covenant it affords us a freedom to love one another unconditionally, with a security that we'll keep loving each other even when (not if) we fall short. A consumer type of love says, I'll love you so long as you fulfil my needs but a covenant type of love is not based on merit, but on promise.

How much greater it is with God. In fact, marriage — in all of its imperfection — is meant to be a glimpse of the perfect unmerited love that God has for us. Whether you're married or not, the image in the New Testament is that God's church is Christ's bride. There's a union. And the reason that we can have security in that, is because it is completely dependent on what Jesus has done for us.

SACRIFICIAL | JOHN 11:25

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His **sacrificial** love. It costs us nothing but cost Jesus everything.
It's freely given to us, but is far from free for Jesus. //

As painful as all of this it was for Jesus,
Jesus knew that it was *but a glimpse, a pointer*, to something even greater.

- Jesus said...
- Verse 4: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."
Verse 11: Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, [which he clarifies to mean, Lazarus is dead!] but I am going to wake him up."
- Do you see what Jesus is trying to show them?
Do you see why Jesus needed them to know? //
- He didn't say any of this lightly. / None of this came without a cost to him.
- *the cost of letting down his friends;*
the cost of experiencing grief;
but ultimately there would be: *the cost of going to the cross.*
- It would cost Jesus everything to deal with the root cause of the problem.

- Raising Lazarus would mean he's burying himself.
- Some believed when they witnessed, others set off to seal his death. //

As Jesus is confronted by Martha and Mary and then the tomb itself,
there's such an incredible mix of emotions that he's feeling. He has all the feels.

- Sadness and sorrow. Grief and disappointment. // But he's also angry.
- Note that Jesus is described as *deeply moved in spirit, not once but twice.*
- *First in verse 33 when he sees Mary's and others weeping;*
Second in verse 38 as Jesus comes to the tomb and asks for the stone to be taken away.
- It carries a sense of indignant anger, even snorting like a warhorse.
- You know what he's angry at and indigent about?
- It's not himself.
It's not anyone there.
It's not Mary or Martha.
It's not even the crowd some of whom hated him.
He's angry at sin and death.
- *And he's not only willing to face it,*
but he's willing to embrace it for us.
- The ultimate reason why Lazarus was in the tomb *was not because Jesus was supposedly late.*

- The ultimate reason is because of sin.
- *Death is the result of sin and Jesus will conquer it once-and-for-all.*
- This whole encounter is like a mini preview of what Jesus will achieve on the cross.
- His sacrificial death *that results in life for all who believe.* //

Jesus said, verse 25: I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Do you believe this? // That's the question!

- We can be so hesitant to love in a Jesus-shaped way. // It's not just that it will be costly.
Making ourselves vulnerable, loving those who don't deserve it, will always cost us something.
Sometimes we will even bear the wounds of when we have.
- But the only way that you can begin to love like that,
is when you've been radically *affected* and *empowered* by someone who perfectly loves you.
- *And there's only one who does.* // The world's advice is that you need to learn to love yourself,
But actually, what you really need to learn is the love that God has for you.
- When we look at the cross,
we can have every assurance that is precisely how God loves us, *and*
we can have every certainty that he will fulfil his promises.
- He's the only one worthy to be the ultimate object of your love.