

DISCUSSION NOTES

Love Your Neighbour

1 John 4.10 | Care: Person to Person | August 2, 2020

OVERVIEW PARAGRAPH

MAIN POINTS

- Jesus didn't stifle love, but was generous with anyone open to him. Sometimes we try to segregate Jesus and God, as if they're made of different stuff or have competing interests, but Jesus is just God's heart walking around outside of God's chest. So, if Jesus didn't stifle love, that's because God doesn't stifle love. 1 John: *"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."* (1 John 4.10) One of the things John is getting at here is that God said *"I love you"* first, through Jesus who was more than willing to risk his life for the sake of the world that *"God so loves."* (John 3.16) Three places to begin with caring for our neighbour personally.
- **First, caring for our neighbour personally as Jesus cares means being *convinced by love*.** One of the things we could say about caring for our neighbour is that we don't care for or love people out of our own resources or capacity alone. We don't care out of duty, obligation or gifting alone. We love because God loves us first. Loving our neighbour becomes very challenging without a robust understanding of God's love for us. We love most truly when we grow each day with the increasing confidence to say, *"I am the one who Jesus loves"*.
- **Second, caring for our neighbour personally means we will be *vulnerable in love*.** Caring for another person, risking a loving action, then, puts us in a vulnerable spot. It's opening up before you know you'll be opened up to. It's giving when you aren't sure you'll be given back to, let alone be received. It's jumping out of the plane without the assurance the parachute will open. Vulnerability, as the popular psychologists tell us, is bravery. That's what's so brave about Jesus' life and death. He becomes increasingly vulnerable to the point of death. He becomes so vulnerable and open that he makes room to

bring everyone in. The movies often tell us that love comes easy, that we should expect to get as much as we give, but that's not how God loves us. God loves without assurance of reciprocation and without strings attached. So, we should expect a measure of risk, of feeling uncomfortable when caring for the persons around us we call neighbours. Love is risky. Our confidence in God's love leads us to take vulnerable steps toward others, but that's also going to take some risk and bravery. As T.S. Elliot said, "*Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.*"

- **Thirdly, caring for our neighbour personally means we will be consistent in love.** One of the words the Bible often uses to describe God is *faithful*. One angle on God's faithfulness is to say that God is *consistent*. God's love is not a flash in the pan kind of love, not a one-night stand kind of love, but a long term, long suffering (in the old translations) kind of love. "*To be trusted is a greater complement than to be loved*" said George MacDonald, and trust is born of consistency. In John 13 we hear that Jesus loved his disciples and loved them to the very end. That's sacrificial consistency - a love that doesn't leave us high and dry when the going gets tough. That's love we can trust and pray to emulate, even though we may fail.
- Those are three places to start in loving our neighbour person to person: **be convinced, be vulnerable, be consistent.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you feel challenged to be more liberal with love rather than stifling it? Where do you feel you stifle love with others and why?
2. How do we grow in confidence to say, "*I am the one who Jesus loves*"? Why is sometimes hard to own that statement?
3. We don't often imagine God as vulnerable. How does Jesus challenge that picture? What do vulnerability and hospitality have to do with one another?
4. Are we becoming a more consistent society or less consistent in our value of others? What does consistency in the lives of our neighbours look like?