

## Outline

Week 1: Who should I be?

Week 2: God Most Holy

Week 3: God Most Loving

Week 4: God Most Good

Week 5: God Most Just

Week 6: God Most Merciful

Week 7: God Most Gracious

Week 8: God Most Faithful

Week 9: God Most Patient

Week 10: God Most Truthful

Week 11: God Most Wise

## How this Study Works

Over the next couple of months, we will be studying God's will for our lives. We'll learn answers to the question "Who should I be?" by looking at who God is and how we can reflect His image in our own lives.

This study follows the outline of the book "In His Image" by Jen Wilkin. While we'll be looking at ideas she presents, the book is not necessary for us to find answers to these questions. Our primary study source will be God's Word, and these daily prompts will reflect that. For those of you who choose to read "In His Image," I recommend reading the related chapter on the weekend. For those of you not reading the book, I'll include the full quote any time I reference it, so you won't feel a need to purchase the book. However, if you'd like a book provided for you, just let me know. You may also want to pick up a journal to write your thoughts as you study. While we work through this study, please pray for the women of our congregation and community - that those who need answers to big questions and those who need to refocus on God will find their way to our class, so that God can show His image through us.

Each day will also include a song of worship to carry with you throughout the day. Several will probably be new to you, so I've added them all to a YouTube playlist here:

<http://bit.ly/in-his-image>

*God, help us as we learn more about you. Help us set aside any incorrect assumptions and understand who you truly are. As we learn more about you, we want to become more and more like you. Give us opportunities to reflect your image into the world, and let the light we reflect lead people to salvation in you. We are already in awe of all the work you have done in the world, and we are excited to see what you do over the coming weeks. In the name of your son Jesus, Amen.*

Week 3 Day 1

**Focus:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study and focus your mind. "What do I need to learn today?"

**Engage:**

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

1 John 3:1

Luke 6:27-26

2 Chronicles 6:14

**Assess:**

Human vs Godly view

"Human love, even in its finest form, can only whisper of the pure and holy love of God." (32)

The word *love* has two types of baggage: linguistic (I love my husband and I love sweet tea) and cultural. "Our culture loves love", but has long mistaken the infinite, unconditional love of God for the fleeting romance seen in every movie. This misunderstanding of what "true love" should be has led to countless broken lives, yet the world never steps back to consider what love really is.

In contrast to "our culture's worship of romance...", the word *philia* (brotherly love), is used fifty-four times in the New Testament. *Storge* (parental love) and *eros* (romantic love) do not occur at all. The word *agape* (Godly love) occurs a whopping 259 times" (33-34).

Based on those numbers alone, we should probably assume that God has a different view of love.

Based on the above scriptures, how is God's love different from our human view? What other passages can you find to demonstrate how God's love is unique?

**Spark Transformation:**

Read 1 Corinthians 12-14. This discussion of what love looks like is surrounded by instructions about spiritual gifts and unity.

Does this context change how you interpret chapter 13?

How does this larger context shed light on what godly love looks like in your daily life?

**Turn to God:**

Begin your worship today in Psalm 36

Ask God for opportunities to show His love to others through your spiritual gifts.

Today's Song: "How Can I Keep From Singing"

Week 3 Day 2

**Focus:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study and focus your mind. "What do I need to learn today?"

**Engage:**

Romans 5:1-8

John 15:12-17

1 John 5:1-5

1 John 3:16-18

Matthew 22:35-40

John 14:18-14

Ephesians 3:14-21

**Assess:**

Agape requires action.

According to 1 John 5, "the love of God [is] that we keep God's commandments." This notion that love requires consistent action is radically different from the world's view. "Whereas our common notion of love is that it is an emotion to be experienced, agape is an act of the will, 'an intelligent, purposeful, outgoing attitude that desires to do good to the one loved.' In other words, agape does not merely feel; it acts. Two hundred fifty-nine times the Bible describes a love that acts." (34)

1 John 5 continues by saying that "His commandments are not burdensome." The actions God requires for showing love aren't meant to be a burden - they are meant to free us from the burdens of sin.

What actions do we see in the first century church that demonstrate the love of God to one another? What about the actions that show love to the world?

**Spark Transformation:**

Consider this quote in light of scripture: "Because it originates in God and is enabled by God, agape is unbound by the limits earthly forms of love face... Because agape is not bound by need, it can be given freely and lavishly, without any fear that it might have been more wisely spent elsewhere." (35)

How have you seen this unbound love of God in your life? What can you do to act in love freely and lavishly?

**Turn to God:**

Turn to God today beginning with Ephesians 3:14-21.

Today's Song: "Greatest Commands"

Week 3 Day 3

**Focus:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study and focus your mind. "What do I need to learn today?"

**Engage:**

1 John 4:7-21

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1 John 3

Romans 5:6-11

**Assess:**

Agape is required for holiness.

The scriptures above show us that love and righteousness are so intertwined that they can't be separated. In fact, it appears that we can't be holy without love.

First, we wouldn't even have the chance to attempt holiness without God's love for us. He tells us directly that we cannot be saved outside Christ - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17) This salvation in Jesus *because of God's love* leads to our sanctification.

Second, doing righteous things is not enough to make us holy. As 1 Corinthians tells us, if we "have not love, I am nothing... [and] I gain nothing."

Third, love is commanded all throughout scripture. Jesus even says that the Law and the prophets all hang on 2 commandments: love God and love others (Matt 22). We can't be holy if we aren't following all the commandments, so obeying the command to love is, therefore, a requirement.

So, if agape is a requirement for holiness, how do I make sure I'm loving the way I should? We should begin by keeping our eyes on the source of agape - God himself. "Rightly perceiving ourselves as unworthy recipients of the agape of God, we become willing to love our neighbor in spite of himself because God first loved us in spite of ourselves. We do not wait to feel love; rather, we will ourselves act out in love whether or not we feel it. Agape transcends our feelings." (38) If we keep our focus on God and His infinite love, we will be better qualified to reflect the image of agape to those around us.

### **Spark Transformation:**

Consider the following questions:

How can love be a command?

Have my actions in the last week flowed from agape or from some other motive?

If I haven't been acting in love, what can I do today to get my focus back on God?

If I have been acting in love, what can I do today to continue acting in love?

### **Turn to God:**

Praise God today through Psalm 86.

Today's Song: "The Love of God"

Week 3 Day 4

**Focus:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study and focus your mind. "What do I need to learn today?"

**Engage:**

John 3:10-21

Romans 8:31-39

Acts 2:14-41

**Misunderstanding Agape**

As mentioned before, we live in a culture that emphasizes love. This emphasis has crept into the teaching of many Christians as well. "It is possible for us to love the love of God too much. We do this when we emphasize the love of God at the expense of his other attributes." (39) It's true that God is love (1 John 4) - it's also true that God is just, God is holy, God is gracious, and so many more things.

In fact, none of the sermons in Acts mention the love of God, nor does the word "love" appear in Acts at all! Looking at Peter's first sermon and the other teaching throughout Acts, we see an emphasis on God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises given to the Jews. Peter's explanation of his vision in Acts 10 points out God's goodness, peace, judgement, forgiveness, and lack of partiality. Paul points to the forgiveness of sin in Acts 13 and God's judgement in Acts 17. God's love is clearly displayed in Acts, but that is not the attribute that the first disciples seem to have been focused on.

Any time we study an attribute of God, we need to be sure that we are viewing it in light of His other traits as well. "When God acts in Scripture in ways we perceive to be unloving, the problem is not with his actions but with our limited perspective." (40) We serve an almighty God who is much more than love. As we dig deeper into his character, our view of Him should grow more and more accurate.

**Assess:**

What do we learn about the apostles' perspective of God by reading Peter's sermons?  
What did agape mean to the first century Christians?

**Spark Transformation:**

Have you been focusing almost primarily on God's love over his other attributes?

How do you describe the love of God?

"Why do you think the idea that "God is love" is so popular with the world? How do our human notions of what love is pollute the way we think about this phrase, even as believers?" (42)

**Turn to God:**

Praise God today through Psalm 107.

Today's Song: "Elohim"

Week 3 Day 5

**Focus:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study and focus your mind. "What do I need to learn today?"

**Engage:**

1 John 4:18

Zeph 3:17

Luke 10:29-37

Jeremiah 31:2-3

Psalms 103:8-13

Isaiah 49:15-16

**Assess:**

Agape is unlimited.

What can you learn about God's love in the above Scriptures?

What verse or phrase really sticks out to you? Write those words down and place it somewhere you will look each day. Recite it to yourself every time you see it to remind yourself of God's love for you.

God has shown his people time and again that he loves them with infinite love. In Isaiah 49:16, God tells us that "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Because of the compassion he has for his people, he wants to keep their memory in plain view. While he is speaking to Israel in this case, we know that Jesus had scars engraved on his hands, feet, and side when he sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins (John 20:24-29).

"The costliness of agape is evident in the cross... When we begin to follow Christ, we resolve to love **God** even if it costs us. And it does cost us - it costs us our pride, our comfort, our self-will, our self-sufficiency... When we begin to follow Christ, we resolve to love our **neighbor**, even if it costs us. And it does cost us - it costs us our preferences, our time, of financial resources, our entitlement, our stereotypes." (41)

In light of God's love, we can no longer consider people loveable or unloveable. We know that he has infinite love for each of us, so we must show infinite love to others.

## **Spark Transformation:**

Let's return now to the big question we are trying to find answers for: "Who should I be?"  
"When faced with a decision, ask yourself: *Which choice enables me to grow in agape for God and others. And then choose according to His will.*" (42)

Do you find that you're cautious in showing love? How can you practice agape - uncautious, unhindered love?

Think of a time when showing love was easy.

Think of a time when showing love was hard.

What was your relationship with God like at each time? (be specific and honest with yourself)

Make a list of habits you had - are you doing them now? When you find it difficult to love, look back at this list to see if it lines up.

## **Turn to God:**

Use Psalm 103 as a starting point for your worship today.

Ask God to show you where your love has been conditional.

Who (specifically) do you feel is unloveable in your life? Pray for them right now for 3 minutes. It's ok if you don't know what to say - the Holy Spirit will help you.

Today's Song: "Unfailing Love"