

A Focus on "Love for Neighbor" (Matt. 22:39)

Who is my "Neighbor"?

[One type of "neighbor" that people tend to forget about is mentioned in Matthew 5:43-47. Be sure to include this in your list!]

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1 Corinthians 13:4-8a describes this type of love. Read this passage and think about what it says. How can you put into practice the things mentioned in this passage? Below is a listing of the various characteristics mentioned in these verses. Write down some ways you can do these things, when you interact with other people. If there are some *specific changes you need to make* in how you interact (even with just one person), include those changes in your list. Remember that love - if it is genuine - will show itself even to "enemies."

Keep in mind that v. 8 says, "Love never fails." This means that it is an on-going action. We are to love others not only today, but also tomorrow and the day after... forever.

What Love Is / Does:

PATIENT - during trials, or when people do things against you	
KIND - expressing itself (to others) in good ways (it results in <i>actions</i> , not just in <i>claims</i> to have love)	
REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH - and its expression/influence in society	
ALWAYS PROTECTS - endures their weaknesses, does not reveal their weaknesses to others	
ALWAYS TRUSTS - not constantly suspicious of others	
ALWAYS HOPES - has positive expectations (in some ways, the opposite of "giving-up" on others)	
ALWAYS PERSEVERES - keeps on going when others would give-up because of the circumstances	

What Love Isn't / Doesn't Do:

ENVY - wanting what others have	
BOAST - wanting to be the center of attention	
PROUD - arrogant, thinking you are better than others	
RUDE - crude, improper or inappropriate conduct	
SELF-SEEKING - selfish or wanting your own way (a "me first" attitude)	
EASILY ANGERED - quick-tempered, irritable	
KEEPING A RECORD OF WRONGS - grudges, resentment	
DELIGHT IN EVIL - happy when sin and injustice are present	

Things to Think About...

- When the passage says that love "*is*" or "*does*" certain things, and "*isn't*" or "*does not do*" certain other things, what does this mean? Are such statements merely "optional suggestions" that we can choose to follow (or not follow)? Or are they an accurate description of what love *really* is? If a person does not have these characteristics in his life, what does that mean?
- To what extent are these characteristics present in your life? (This is an indication of the extent that genuine love is present.)
- Think about situations in your life, in which you did *not* show this type of love. How did you react? In what ways should you have reacted differently - ways that would have been an expression of love? [Since you will probably experience similar situations in the future, it would be beneficial for you to develop a habit of thinking about what love is and what it isn't. Then you might be able to react in a better way, in the future.]
- How did God show his love to you? How can God's love be a pattern, or example, for you to follow?

"TEACHER'S NOTES" for the Worksheet: A Focus on "Love for Neighbor"

This worksheet was written to encourage people (such as in a Bible study or youth group) to make personal evaluations of their lives. Since different groups have different needs, you may need to modify some of the questions on the worksheet to fit your own situation.

WHO IS MY "NEIGHBOR"? (Defining who we should love.)

For some people, the primary focus of "love" involves marriage and romance. Though this may be important (in the proper context), it is but a tiny fragment of the whole concept - and *not* the primary focus of the Bible. The "love" emphasized in the Bible is a type of love we must have for *all* people - not just for our spouse. It involves *all* of life, and even applies to the way we relate to our enemies!

This application of "love" to enemies should be stressed, because it is the most difficult application. If you succeed in having love for your enemies, you will most likely succeed in having love in every other relationship you have with people - even in marriage! If you succeed in having this love, it will mean that you *truly* are a "son (or daughter) of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-47).]

WHAT LOVE IS / DOES (etc.)

This section is written for use as a "personal" worksheet, so that people can apply each characteristic to specific situations in their own lives. It may be good to first look through this section *as a group*, and allow people to suggest typical ways of how the various characteristics could be applied. Then the people could *as individuals* apply the principles to situations in their own lives.

APPLICATION QUESTION: "To what extent are these characteristics present in your life? (etc.)"

Everyone should say that there is room for improvement. None of us are perfect in everything!