

Spiritual Foundations Bible study

Participant's version: Christian Love. study 4

Introduction

Melbourne has experienced a longer and stricter lockdown in response to the COVID pandemic than any other city in the world! Ajeet Singh, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Deakin Medical School believes many of the Melbourne population and Australians in general are suffering from pandemic stress.

He defines pandemic stress as

“Marked emotional distress triggered or exacerbated by direct or indirect pandemic impacts which overwhelm one’s capacity to cope.”

Although restrictions are lifting and it seems life can get back to normal for most people, Professor Singh considers that it is likely when government subsidies cease in mid-2022 that substance abuse and suicide rates will increase. In these difficult circumstances, how do we minister to one another and the struggling people of our city? Perhaps an important part of that answer is exercising Christian love.

Lecture “Healthy Congregational Responses to Pandemic Mental Health Issues” Professor Ajeet B. Singh.

Christian Love

Often in our English New Testaments when we read the word “love,” it is translated from the Greek verb *agapao* or the noun *agape*. *Agape* was a word the early church adopted to describe Christian Love. It was a love that was to be extended to all people whether family members, those who were a part of the church and complete strangers. It has been described as a selfless love. An unconditional love.

C.S. Lewis referred to it as “gift love”, the highest form of Christian love.

Thomas Aquinas explained this love is “to will the good of another.”

Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary, W.E. Vine

Thomas Nelson Publishers New York, Copywrite 1985, Page 381-382

Openers

Recall a time when a Christian did something for you or said something to you that you thought was particularly loving.

How did it make you feel?

1: Reflect upon John 13:34-35. (The Greek verb agapao, is used in the original text.)

1b: What is Jesus' new commandment?

1c: Whose example of love are we to follow?

1d: What will result when Christian's extend this sort of love?

2: Examine Romans 13:8-10. In the three verses the word "Love" is used four times and on each occasion, it is translated from the Greek verb "agapao" or the noun "agape." What does this passage teach us about Christian love?

The next section of the study will examine five topics to help us explore opportunities and develop our skills to better express Christian love.

Quality Fellowship

The Greek noun "kiononia" is often translated "fellowship" and it means sharing in common.

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, W.E. Vine

Thomas Nelson Publishers New York Copywrite 1985, Page 233

3: Consider Acts 2:42-44. What do you think it means to have quality fellowship today?

4: Examine 1 John 1:6-7. How does our relationship with Jesus affect our fellowship with others?

Small Group Meetings

5: Read Acts 2:46. How would you briefly describe two main types of meeting the early church had?

5b: What are some positive reasons to meet as a small group around God’s Word and prayer that relate to developing Christian love?

6: Reflect on Jesus and his small group of disciples. Do we learn anything about small groups in this account? (Mark 6:30-32).

Hospitality

7: Read 1 Peter 4:8-9 and Romans 12:9-10,13. Often hospitality is mentioned in the N.T. in the context of love. In our modern day, what do you think it means to “offer” or “practice” hospitality?

Pastoral Care

8: Read John 21:16. What do you think Jesus meant when he said to Peter, 'Take care of my sheep.'

9: Examine Acts 6:1-4. As the leader/pastor of the church of Jerusalem what did Peter do to "take care of the sheep" when a challenging pastoral issue arose? How else did he mention he was caring for the sheep?

Personal Development Courses

Jesus taught that if we genuinely love God and others, we will fulfill all the teachings of Scripture! (Matthew 22:37-40). However, most of us would say we need to get better at doing this. We can develop more effective skills in practicing Christian love by completing courses that assist us in understanding ourselves and others.

Personality courses

Spiritual gifts courses

Marriage courses

Parenting courses

Pastoral Care courses

Relational Leadership courses

10: Share with the group any of these types of seminars, conferences or courses that you have found helpful in equipping you to better express Christian love.

Conclusion

Reflect upon the 5 topics related to Christian love we have explored. Consider putting a least some of these into practice this fortnight.

1: Quality Fellowship

Who can you invite out for a coffee or lunch just to catch up and fellowship?

2: Small Group Meetings

Should you consider joining a small group or if you are already a part of one who could you invite to join?

3: Hospitality

Is there anyone or a family you could invite over for a meal?

4: Pastoral Care

Could you call a few people and see how they are doing or offer to visit someone you think would appreciate it.

5: Personal Development Courses

Over the next several months is there a couple of courses you could complete to help you develop skills to better express Christian love? Which courses do you have in mind?

Share with the group which of these you plan to act upon.

Close in Prayer

Do any in the group need specific prayer for an issue in their life at the moment?

Ask the Lord to help you and others put into practice any acts of Christian love you plan to do over the next fortnight.