



Love Is Protecting Oneself

Bible passage: Matthew 22:34–40

Key verse “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:39)

Objectives:

- Recognize the common misconceptions Christians often have about love.
- Make a commitment to practice true, healthy love.

1. Sharing Thoughts

1. Why do you think love must be put into action?

—Purpose of the Question:

- Many people feel burdened by the idea that love equals action. This question aims to help participants let go of the belief that love must always be expressed through action and to recognize the hidden pressure and risks embedded in that assumption.
- It invites reflection on how the pressure to “have to love” can lead to failures in protecting themselves or how well-intended actions may unintentionally cross or violate the boundaries of others.

—Tips for the Leader:

- If participants hesitate to share, it can be helpful to begin with a simple opening question: “How do you define *love*?”
- This allows participants’ understanding of love—whether primarily emotional or action-oriented—to emerge naturally. If responses such as “Love is practice,” or “Love has to be shown through actions” come up, try expanding the conversation with the follow-up question:
“Have you ever had an experience where something you did with loving intention made someone feel uncomfortable or hurt?” This question is not meant to assign blame but to gently remind participants that actions done in the name of love do not always result in outcomes that are purely or unquestionably “good.”

2. What does “love your neighbor as yourself” mean?

—Purpose of the Question:

- This question is not meant to merely reaffirm the ethical command to love one another. Rather, it focuses on listening to how love of neighbors is experienced and practiced in our everyday lives.
- For example, it invites reflection on an attitude that respects another person’s heart, time, and personal space as much as one hopes their own would be respected.
- The intention is to help participants recognize the importance of boundaries and respect that are inherently embedded within genuine love.

—Tips for the Leader:

- If participants’ responses are weak or remain abstract, you may guide the sharing with some questions: “What are some things you dislike hearing from others?” “Have you ever felt uncomfortable because someone forced help on you when you didn’t want it?”

- After listening to their responses, it can be effective to naturally connect to deeper questions: “Just as we do not want to be treated in ways we don’t desire, isn’t it the same for others?” Respecting another person’s boundaries as much as we want our own to be respected—couldn’t that be what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself”?

II. Expanding Thoughts

1. Misunderstandings about Love
2. Re-examining Love
3. Practicing Protecting Love

III. Living Thoughts

1. What habits or circumstances hinder you from loving yourself and others in a healthy way? What kinds of training or practices might be necessary to cultivate “a protecting love” while reducing these obstacles?

—Purpose of the Question:

- The purpose of this question is to help participants identify the distortions of love and the obstacles to love that exist within themselves.
- Because protecting love is the practice of guarding one’s inner life—heart, emotions, and attitudes—it is important first to help participants clearly recognize their own internal barriers.

—Tips for the Leader:

- If participants seem hesitant, try asking questions that invite honest self-reflection: “Have you ever felt pressure to be good in order to be loved?” “When do you feel as if you’re not protecting yourself while trying to accommodate others?”
 - Encourage participants to speak in concrete examples and about specific obstacles rather than with abstract language. For example, “I can’t say no” or “I try too hard to meet others’ expectations.”
 - It can be especially effective to help participants uncover the internal roots behind their responses, for example, people-pleasing tendencies, anxious attachment experiences, or difficulties with personal boundaries.
 - Move the conversation beyond self-analysis alone by pointing to the restoration of intimacy with God as the true source of love.
 - Encourage participants to move not only toward confession but also toward tangible practices. For example, participants can start reading God’s word of love aloud to themselves once a day.
2. Is there someone around you who especially needs love and care? What are some ways that we can practice love while we protect ourselves?

—Purpose of the Question:

- The purpose of this question is to help participants recognize that protecting love goes beyond a personal virtue and is, in fact, a communal responsibility.
- By inviting them to think of specific people as the objects of their love, the question helps participants discern what kind of loving adjustments—such as boundaries, respect, or commitment—are needed in each relationship.

—**Tips for the Leader:**

- Encourage participants to think not in vague or abstract terms but of a specific person or situation. Guide them to reflect on what kind of love that person needs.
- Help participants set practical and achievable goals, which makes the concept easier to grasp. For example, make sure to listen without interrupting, maintain a noncritical posture even when disagreeing, or pray for that person “as for oneself” throughout the week.
- Encourage ongoing practice by suggesting the use of a simple reflection journal.
- Participants can record the date, the practice they attempted, and their reflections or feelings. If this feels burdensome, reassure them that brief notes are perfectly acceptable.
- The warm-up in the first session is especially important. Creating an atmosphere where participants can speak safely and without fear of criticism is essential. This, too, will be the first step in practicing protecting love.

