



1: A different kind of Christian | Pastor Joe Wittwer | September 20, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Introduction: Christianity has an image problem. People like Jesus but ask them what they think of Jesus' followers and you'll get a very different response. Christians have become known for what they are against, rather than what they are for; for what they protest more than what they promote; and for their politics, not for their compassion. Christianity has an image problem; we need to be a different kind of Christian. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 3:2-3**, "*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody...you are a letter from Christ.*" People form their opinion of the Christian faith based on the way we live it, and we may be the only Bible people will ever read. To help us grow into being a different kind of Christian, our church's vision centers around four guiding purposes: **love** God and people, **win** our friends to Christ, **grow** into all God wants us to be, and **send** all of us to do God's work in a broken world. If we live them out honestly and Biblically, we will be "a different kind of Christian".

1. Our first purpose is love: to love God with all we've got and to love people. (Read **Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28.**) Our first and highest purpose is to love God with all we've got and to love people. We'll continue to talk about it because it's first, it's the most important, it's greatest...and we haven't mastered it yet. We're still learning to love. Sometimes people mistakenly think that we overlook the deep things that are the mysteries we find when reading Ezekiel and Revelation. However, the deep things are the simplest, most obvious and important. There is nothing deeper than loving God. Some people mistakenly think that they can separate love for God and love for people. But, you can't separate love for God from love for people. Jesus connected them, as it is recorded in **Matthew 22:37-40**: *Jesus replied, "you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.* (See also **1 John 4:19-21**) First and greatest commandment: love God. A second is equally important: love people. If you love God with all you've got and love people, you'll fulfill all God's commands! But, the two go together; if you don't love people, you can't say that you love God.

2. What is love? Love is doing what is best for another no matter what it costs you.

Webster's first three definitions of love are about strong affection, sexual attraction, and warm attachment. In other words, love is a feeling or an emotion. The fourth definition in Webster reads, "unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another." And the first example says, "The fatherly concern of God for humankind." Like Webster, as Christians, we get our definition of love by looking at Jesus. **1 John 3:16** says: *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* And in **1 John 4:9-10**: *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* God loved us and did what was best for us no matter what it cost Him—and it cost the life of His Son (**John 3:16**). Love involves feelings and in English we have one word that covers everything. The Greeks used several words for love: *Eros* is the Greek word for passionate love that desires the other for itself: sexual attraction. *Phileo* is the warm affection of friends and family. *Agapao* is the word used of God's love for us, one who seeks the good of another. This type of love starts not in the emotions, but in the will. It begins in the goodwill of the lover, not the goodness of the loved one. *Agapao* is the love that God commands us to show to Him and to people.

3. How do we love God? First, we love God with our whole life. This is the meaning of “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” And love is doing what’s best for another no matter what it costs you. In the Lord’s Prayer, **Matthew 6:9-10** says “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” Before we ask for our daily bread or forgiveness for our sins, we start with God: His interests, honor, kingdom, and will, first, before mine. The more we live for Him, the more we love Him. Worship is loving God. It isn’t just something we do by singing in church. We live it all week long. We ask ourselves: How do I love God with my work? How do I love God with my family, my friendships, and my relationships? What is best for God? We also love God by obeying Him. We do what He wants. Jesus said in **John 14:15**, “*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*” And John adds in **1 John 5:3** “*This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.*” God’s commands are about what is best for us—and for Him. God has a purpose, a plan He is accomplishing. When we obey, we are working with Him, instead of against Him. Somehow, we are doing not only what is best for us, but what is best for Him. We also love God by loving people. As **1 John 5:1** states: “*Everyone who loves the Father loves His child as well.*”

4. How do we love people? Love is doing what is best for another no matter what it costs us. Love meets needs. We help. We do what we can. As proclaimed in **1 John 3:17-18** “*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*” This is a very challenging verse! If we see someone in need and we can help, but have no pity, no compassion, and do nothing, how can the love of God be in us? We can’t just say we love someone, we have to show it. If they are in need, we show it by meeting their need as much as we can. Jesus’ most common emotion toward people was compassion. The Bible says when He saw the blind, the leper, the outcast, the hungry— Jesus was moved with compassion and met their needs. That’s what love looks like. We need to be a different kind of Christian, one who loves God and loves people. One who is moved with compassion and meets needs in Jesus’ name.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. If a person’s only impression of Jesus and His followers were based on what they’ve seen in the media, what kind of impression might they have? Read 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 aloud and discuss the statement Pastor Joe made that “we are the only Bible that some people will ever read”. What does this passage and Joe’s statement mean?
2. According to Jesus, what is the most important thing we can do? Can our love for God be separated from our love for people? Why do you think it so important to God that we love others?
3. What is love? Pastor Joe described several different types of love, which one does God command us to show Him and others? Is that type of love dependent upon our feelings or upon our will? Where does this type of love begin?
4. What does “loving God, loving people” look like in your life? How have you experienced God’s love, and the love of your brothers and sisters in Christ? How are you loving God and people these days?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- This week, look for ways to love God at home, at work, wherever you are. We live in a broken world that greatly needs God’s love through us.
- Once this week, simply respond to someone in need...with some action.
- Start reading The Hole in Our Gospel...so you can stay on track with our upcoming 5-week series.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Pray that God will lead you to people who need Christ’s love through you.
- Pray that you’ll take loving actions this week in obedience to God.
- Pray for other concerns or items that came up during the discussion.