weekend

resource guide

for the week of 21 January

*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. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God: but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1John 4:9-12)*

Divine revelation and human revolutions share one thing in common. Both require new vocabularies to describe their worldview, their understanding of the future, and their ethic. New words are created and old words are redefined. Such is the case concerning the Christian understanding of love. While other religions and ideologies may share certain Christian beliefs (i.e., there is only one God) and behavior (i.e., God abhors injustice), one factor that is distinctive and unique about Christianity is love—the love of God made real in our hearts and relationships by the Holy Spirit. This love is so different from other understandings or expressions found elsewhere in the world that the New Testament writers had to redefine a new Greek word to articulate it. This word is found nowhere in any other writings of that period.

The Greeks knew all about sexual love, about natural family affection, about the special bond between husband and wife, the strong cord of friendship, and a sense of wonderment before the gods or nature. Their philosophers, poets, artists, and playwrights eloquently brought these reflections to life. Nevertheless the Christian word for love that comes 250 times in the New Testament isn't found in any of their literature or art. In nearly every reference in the New Testament this word is used to describe God's relationship with man. This word describes the love of God

that is supremely concerned for the highest good of humanity

that gives and gives and gives without thought of reciprocity

that is willing to lay down its life for the benefit of others;

that stands ready to forgive anyone for anything

a love that initiates, calls, provides strengthens. heals, and sets people free.

This love is exemplified in the person and work of Jesus Christ—“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5.8)

This love can also be witnessed among Christians when the Holy Spirit is working in our midst. I have had the opportunity to talk with many people from other worldviews who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Among these people have been atheists, people from other faiths, communists, ex-Nazis, the rich, the poor, children, teens, adults, senior citizens, and people from every continent (save Antartica!). The one thing that convinced them of the truth about Jesus and the reality of God was the quality of love they found among Christians. I also recognize, with sadness, that the opposite is also true. Many today remain unconvinced about the spiritual realities Christians bear witness to simply because they do not see this love which should always be the outstanding mark of a Christian and of the Church. Gandhi once said to a Christian leader in India, “In that day when we see Jesus Christ living out His love in you, on that day we Hindus will flock to your Christ.”

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another better…

What is your earliest memory about a “next door” neighbor?

Mark 12.28-34: The greatest commandment…

*One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ 31 “The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 The scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE’S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*

What? (does the Bible say)

Though Jesus is only asked for one commandment (Deut. 6:4-5), in good rabbinic fashion he responds by adding a second to his reply (Leviticus 19:18). What relationship does this second commandment bear to the first?

What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

What do you think it means to "love your neighbor as yourself"?

What did Jesus mean when He said to the teacher, "You are not far from the kingdom of God”?

Now what? (should/will I think based on what this passage says)

Many Jewish teachers posed the question as to which was the greatest out of all the 613 commandments in the law of Moses. Jesus says that love was the foundation of the Old Testament law. Why do you think we have so much trouble equating God's laws with love?

What modern-day religious practices would be like the burnt offerings and sacrifices to which the teacher of the law referred?

How does a person’s love for God manifest itself in everyday life?

So what? (difference will this passage make in how I live)

Who are your “neighbors” and what responsibility do you feel toward them?

In what ways do you think Christians should treat their neighbors differently from the way non-Christians do?

In what ways can you be more deliberate in expressing your love to God and your love for others?

Who is one neighbor to whom you can show your love in a practical way this week? How?

How can your LifeGroup encourage you to love the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for…)

Praying for my group…