



This devotional from LoveWell Ministries looks at the basic elements, Biblical teachings, and practical application of how to love God and love others well, and how to be loved by God and others well. Dallas Willard describes this move as follows:

“We are loved by God who is love, and in turn we love him, and others through him, who in turn love us through him. Thus is love made perfect or complete.”ⁱ

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www.lovetheonline.org

Lesson One: *Love is foundational*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**
- **Scripture Reading:**
 - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, ESV – If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
 - 1 John 4:7-8, ESV – Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.
 - 1 John 4: 15-16, ESV – Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:31, ESV – So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- **Commentary:**

Love needs to be foundational to all we do. We can do great things in the eyes of the world, and even the church, but if what we do is not from a place of love, we gain nothing in the kingdom. Our motivation for doing good needs to be rooted in God, for He is love and love comes from Him.

God is love, and love comes from Him. True love comes from knowing God and having a relationship with Him, through Jesus. This was God’s design from the beginning. We were created by love, with love, and for love.

God first created Adam (man) to be in relationship with Him in the Garden of Eden. God didn’t force Adam into a relationship with Him. Likewise, we can’t force someone to love us. That isn’t love. True love requires the freedom to choose it. God gave Adam a choice, to follow Him or to follow his own way. We have a choice, too. Receiving Jesus, and what He did for us on the cross, allows us to be in a

relationship with God and experience His unconditional love. God's unconditional love, or agape love, is a love that never gives up on us and never fails us. It lasts forever.

It's from the position of being in a loving relationship with God that we're able to love others. It's from the position of being in a loving relationship with God that the good things we do in this world glorify Christ. It's when we're in a loving relationship with God, and loving others and glorifying Christ, that the things we do have meaning. Without love, everything is meaningless.

Genuine love is the mark of a true Christian. Genuine love is the evidence that we've been born of God and know God. If He is in us and we know Him, then we can't hate others because they were also created by Him. We can only love them. Hate and love can't flow out of the same person.

Love is foundational to everything.

- **Action Steps:**

Pray and ask God to give you an outpouring of His love. Ask for eyes to see things in new ways than you have before, from God's loving perspective. Then, start paying attention. Before moving on to lesson two, spend some time journaling all the new ways God shows you love in response to these prayers.

Lesson Two: *Love God above all else*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**

- **Scripture Reading:**

- Mark 12:30, ESV – “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.”
- Exodus 20:2-6, ESV – “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

- **Commentary:**

The greatest commandment Jesus gives us is to love God with our entire being.

As we learned in lesson one, we were created for a relationship with God. When we genuinely love Him, He should be the most important thing in our lives. We're to love God above all else. But what happens when 'all else' includes the significant things in our lives like family, work, sports, or anything else that's seemingly good? How do we know if there are idols in our lives?

In the Biblical sense, idolatry is valuing a person, place, or thing higher than God. An idol is any person,

place, or thing we place our trust in and depend on to supply what only God can give; anything we value higher than God.

In the third chapter of the Book of Daniel, we see King Nebuchadnezzar demand that everyone bow down to a ninety-foot statue of himself. To build a giant statue of oneself, or to bow down to a statue, is obviously idolatry. In this instance, it *seems* easy to apply what God is commanding to our lives, as we don't usually go around bowing down to or serving statues.

However, it gets tricky with the things in our lives that are seemingly good and innocent. For instance, suppose someone is a long-distance runner. Running is a good activity for their health, but it becomes a problem when they start prioritizing it above spending time with God. If someone starts to build life around a training schedule, never missing a workout, and becomes willing to skip time with God, their priorities may be skewed. This is just one example of how idolatry can quite easily creep into our lives, without us even realizing it.

The story of Abraham's faith being tested on the mountain of the LORD with his son Isaac offers another look at idolatry. Abraham's family, specifically his son, Isaac, who represented Abraham's purpose and God's promise and blessing, had become more important to him than God, the Promisor and Blessor who gave him his purpose. We should take note, because all too often, without meaning to, we also elevate purpose above the Giver of purpose, promises above the Promisor, and blessings above the Blessor. So, God tested Abraham's heart to see if he loved Him above all else; to see if he loved Him with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Through his willingness to sacrifice his son, Abraham passed the test. Abraham demonstrated that neither his family nor his purpose were more important than the Giver of those gifts.

Would you be willing, metaphorically, to sacrifice the most important people in your life for God? How about a hobby, or your career, or anything else that seems good to you? To love God above all else, we must go through the continual process of removing idolatry from our lives.

- **Action Steps:**

Pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you any areas of your life that you're prioritizing over Him. Be still and listen for the answer. His word tells us He will generously give us wisdom when we ask for it. Jot down in your journal everything He reveals to you. Don't allow yourself to sit in shame over the idolatry in your life. Rather, turn your ways to God. Simply ask Him for forgiveness, and then immediately start making changes in those areas. Consider sharing with another believer the change you believe you are being invited to take and the way you are going to practice that step.

Lesson Three: *Love involves sacrifice*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**
- **Scripture Reading:**
 - 1 John 4:9-10, ESV – “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”
 - 1 John 3:16, ESV – “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”
 - Hebrews 13:16, ESV – “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

- **Commentary:**

Love involves sacrifice. God went first, and showed us what this means, through Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. This was and is the greatest expression of love we’ll ever know, and from it we’re transformed and get an abundant life with Him for eternity.

We must also die, with Christ, to our old way of life. This involves giving up doing things our own way. It also involves not placing value in the things of the world. Loving the way Jesus commands us to love involves making sacrifices. These sacrifices can be anything from time to money to certain activities that differ from what God would have us be doing. Either way, loving the way Jesus did will cost us just as it did Jesus.

As we receive Christ, what He did for us on His cross, and God’s love, we reflect that love back to Him by laying down our lives and taking up our own crosses. Our lives become living sacrifices, and we become His true disciples.

When we sacrifice for the sake of love, we’re transformed. When love transforms us, we do things differently. We pray for the coworker who makes our life difficult instead of talking about them behind their back. We steward purity and the sanctity of marriage by not sleeping around or doing anything that might compromise honoring God, our partners, or ourselves. We’re generous with our money, and our time and talents, knowing that our Father has unlimited resources. This list goes on and on as we continue to sacrifice of ourselves for the sake of love. We sacrifice the things we want to do for the things God wants us to do. And, in the end, there will be rewards in heaven for doing so.

- **Action Steps:**

Spend some time meditating on (re-reading and thinking about) these verses and what Jesus did for you. How has Jesus loved you? Invite the Holy Spirit in to show you any old ways that need to die and anything that needs to be sacrificed for you to walk in the fullness God has for you. Share with another believer the step you believe you are being invited to take and the way you are going to practice that step.

Lesson Four: *Loving God well calls for obedience*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**
- **Scripture Reading:**
 - 1 John 5:2-3, ESV – “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”
 - 1 John 3:24, ESV – “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”
 - Ephesians 5:1-2, ESV – “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

- **Commentary:**

When we love someone, we naturally want to do things that make them happy. This desire comes not out of obligation, but simply from the love we have for them. For example, a wife picks up tacos for dinner on her way home because she knows they’re her husband’s favorite. She didn’t have to. She wasn’t obligated to. She did it because she wanted to. It’s the same for us with God. We ought to do what He wants because we love Him and want to please Him.

When we’re in a loving relationship with God, it’s an investment that goes both ways. He loves us, and, in return, we show our love for Him by doing the things that make Him happy. He tells us what these things are through His word; they’re called commandments. God is happy when we’re protected and provided for, and so He lovingly gives us commandments that, if obeyed, keep us under His protection and provision. The term commandment can throw us off a little because we think we must, out of obligation, do what we are *commanded* to do. That’s the Old Law, or the Law of Moses. Under the New Law, or the Law of Christ, we die to our old selves and live a new life of love for God and others with Jesus.

Through a loving relationship with God, following the commandments becomes the desire of our hearts as we draw nearer to Him. Following commandments is no longer out of obligation to a rule or law. Rather, our heart is changed into one that now *wants* to follow God’s way. It’s our obedience to God’s Word that demonstrates our love for Him. We show our faith in Him, our love for Him, and our appreciation for what Christ has done for us in how we love others. God rewards our obedience with life, peace, healing, protection, and spiritual treasures (Proverbs 1-8).

- **Action Steps:**

Spend some time journaling where in your life you think you do well at obeying God and where in your life you can improve in obeying God. Pray and let the Holy Spirit lead you. Then, pick one of your strong areas and one weaker area and commit to focusing on them this week. Share with another believer for accountability and encouragement.

Lesson Five: *Love others well*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**
- **Scripture Reading:**
 - Mark 12:31, ESV – “The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”
 - 1 John 4:11, ESV - “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”
 - 1 John 4:19, ESV – “We love because he first loved us.”

- **Commentary:**

When we’re loved by God and love God, as we were designed for, it becomes the position in which we’re best able to love others well *and* be loved by others. It’s out of His overflow that we’re able to pour love out to others.

“We love because he first loved us.”ⁱⁱ God goes before us to model the way. Jesus confirms our responsibility to imitate Him with the second part of the Great Commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The key here is that we can’t do it in our own power. To be brutally honest with ourselves is to admit that we’re not capable of always being loving out of our own ability. Sometimes we have bad days and don’t *feel* loving. We can’t just tell ourselves to ‘do better’, and ‘love them well’, because in our flesh we aren’t able. Rather, the power of the Holy Spirit provides in our weakness to love as He wants us to. Being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit allows us to love the coworker who annoys everyone at the office. It even allows us to love the family member who has deeply hurt us or continues to say mean things to us. Regardless of the scenario, we’re all God’s creation, and we’re called to love everyone. We’re called to love one another.

We give away the love God gives us so He can give us more. His “love well” never runs dry.

- **Action Steps:**

Pray and ask God to reveal how you can be the hands and feet of Jesus this week. Do one thing each day that makes someone feel seen and loved by God. It can be someone you know or someone you don’t. It can be big or little. Be sure to seek God’s help in the action and timing so you see just how incredible love can be. Write down your experiences in your journal.

Lesson 6: *Listening and doing is loving*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**
- **Scripture Reading:**
 - Matthew 12:34, ESV – “‘You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.’”
 - 1 John 3:16, ESV – “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”
 - 1 John 3:18, ESV – “Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.”

- **Commentary:**

Loving well isn't about us; it's about them. It's about seeing people, understanding how they receive love, and then loving them that way. Loving people the way *I* want to be loved is easy, *or easier*. It takes work to understand what makes someone else feel loved.

When we shift to being outwardly focused rather than inwardly focused, and see people as God sees them, we can start loving well.

If you aren't sure how someone receives love, listen to what they say for clues. The Bible tells us the words we speak are from our hearts. So then, listening gives us glimpses into the hearts of others. For example, if a person is talking about an argument they had with their partner, it's because that's what is on their heart. They may feel so wounded and consumed with the argument that it's all they can talk about. When we listen, we learn what's important to others, and therefore, can love them even better.

After listening, we do. It takes action to love others well. Is it loving to look at a person in need and say 'I love you' but then do nothing to meet that need? Scripture tells us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Laying down our lives is an action, and it takes effort. And, at times, we make sacrifices. These sacrifices can be of our time, treasures, or talents. As Jesus showed us love through sacrifice, we're to show others love through sacrifice.

- **Action Steps:**

Pray for the Lord to give you ears that hear. Be intentional this week to meet up with a friend and practice your listening skills. Make it your goal to make them feel heard. Listen to hear their hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond in a loving way. Write down your experiences in your journal.

Lesson 7: *Be loved well*

- **Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you, teach you, and direct your journey through the Scripture reading, commentary, and action steps.**
- **Scripture Reading:**
 - Mark 12:31, ESV – “‘The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.’”

- **Commentary:**

Jesus’s command to love others implies something else that we often overlook. If we’re loving well, as we’re called to do, then there must be someone on the receiving end of that love! Sometimes, the receiver is us. While loving others can be difficult at times, in some respects, receiving love from others is harder.

Receiving love means letting others in, opening ourselves up, and breaking down walls and past hurts. It entails trust, vulnerability, and taking risks to let someone love you. Perhaps that’s why God gives us His perfect love first. It never fails us.^{iv} We can trust it. As we receive that love from God, so also are we able to receive love from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We need to allow others to use their gifts and their walks with God to love us well, too. Letting others love well, as they also are called by God to do, completes the love cycle. He abides in us when we love others, and He abides in them when they love us. This is how God’s love is made perfect and complete. His love is perfected in us.^v

When we experience love through others, we’re experiencing God. It’s essential that we allow ourselves to be loved by others so we can fully experience the love of Christ.

- **Action Steps:**

Pray for the Lord to give you eyes that see the love of others, and to fully receive that love. Pay attention to things people do today that make you feel loved. Reflect on why these things are meaningful to you. Receive the love. Then, think of ways you can do the same for the people in your inner circle. Keep record of this in your journal. When the opportunities to love your people well present themselves, act!

Now that you’ve made it through the LoveWell Ministries Devotional: Love Well and Be Loved Well, go back and review the notes you made in your journal. As you look over your notes, make some commitments to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in keeping those commitments. Oh, and don’t forget to love yourself!

ⁱ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, First Ed printing May 1, 2002, revised 2012), 132.

ⁱⁱ 1 John 4:19, NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ See Mark 12:31, NLT

^{iv} See 1 Corinthians 13:8, NIV

^v See 1 John 4:12, ESV