

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Basic Doctrines: Love

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Basic Doctrines: Love

Learning Objectives

1. Realize that God is love and that Jesus is the greatest expression of that love
2. Understand the differences between God's love and human love
3. Choose to allow God to manifest His love in our lives

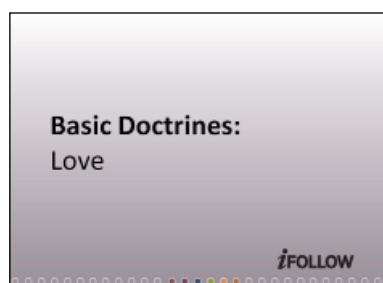
Content Outline

- A. Needing love
- B. Experiencing love
- C. Reflecting love
- D. Human love vs Divine love
- E. Old Testament God vs. New Testament God
- F. A response of love

Background Material for the Presenter

The most basic idea in Christian faith is simply that God is the source of love. *The Message* Bible translates Genesis 1:26 as: "Let us make human beings ... reflecting our nature." If we truly believe that God created us to reflect godly nature, and if we truly believe that God is love, then if God is present in our lives, we can reflect this love through our actions. Easy to say, isn't it? The question is, how? How can we do this in our messed up, broken lives?

Let's look first at the thing that's easiest for us to see; we all need love! Most people have heard of the many studies that prove this, as if we needed scientific studies to tell us we need love! Some were done at the end of the nineteenth century in orphanages. Babies were well cared for, fed, kept dry and clean and healthy, and yet they tended to have a high rate of mortality. When volunteers came to spend time the overwhelmed orphanage workers didn't have, just sitting and holding and rocking the babies, they were much



more likely to live.

More studies have been done throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first. Surprise; they all show we need love. We have to have it. If we don't physically die from lack of love, we can die emotionally or spiritually. We can grow up violent and lawless, or silent and isolated. We can end up living in cardboard boxes under freeway underpasses, or in mental hospitals. A shocking number of us end up in prisons. It would be interesting to go from cell to cell and ask each inmate, "Have you been well-loved in your life?"

According to Genesis, this was decidedly **not** God's plan! God lived in a kind of united community we cannot begin to understand, so we argue about it all the time. God lived within something we call a Trinity, or Godhead, and even then, began to create other beings to love. This Word of Love eventually created this world, hand-sculpted beings to live on it, personally breathed Life or Spirit into them, and put itself into some sort of form that could "walk and talk with them in the cool of the evening."

Astonishing! And, one would think, irresistible. Yet it didn't take long before the perfect unity of that love was broken by the choices of both the angelic beings and the human ones. Ever since that day, we have all been surrounded by all the infinite love we were originally surrounded with, but we can't feel it anymore. It's a dreadful state: I **need** love! But I can't **feel** love! Some may **say** they love me, but how do I **know** it's true?

Experiencing Love

Why did the orphans live if they were held and cuddled? Didn't the workers already love them? Hadn't they given their lives to working for them, taking in foundlings, rounding up strays who were trying to survive in the streets? Didn't they work tirelessly to raise the money needed, perhaps going without things they needed themselves? Didn't they work long hours caring for them and keeping their rooms clean, cooking, doing laundry? These babies were already loved, right?



There's a difference between **being loved** and **feeling loved**.

God's extraordinary love is highlighted throughout Scripture. Creation, the gift of the Sabbath, the plan of salvation, all affirm God's loving nature. Why, then, don't humans all feel loved? Why is it that, even if we have Bible studies with them, showing them all about Creation, the Sabbath, even the plan of salvation, their eyes don't just immediately well up with tears of joy because they feel so loved?

The operative word is **feel**. The babies, had they been able to, would have no doubt been

thankful for the clean clothes and the food. It certainly was a practical and necessary means of showing them love. Had someone sat down on the curb with a starving street child and held her, she might have felt loved, but only while the hug lasted. She would still be cold, dirty, and hungry. However, babies need love in a language they can understand. We **all** need love in a language we can understand! And one language that is eternal, international, passes all language barriers, and is less likely to be misunderstood (though it can be, usually because it has been misused and abused in a person's past) is touch.

That's why God gave us hands and arms. Adam and Eve's job was to love each other—to become "one flesh." Throughout the next several millennia, God kept begging people to learn to love each other, and when that wasn't working out so well, He came Himself.

Jesus put on skin—put on hands and feet and a face that could smile or cry, and came to **touch us**. The words of God about how much He loves us, how He created this world as a home for us, even how He planned our salvation from before the beginning, these words all suddenly made more sense when the Word became flesh.

Reflecting Love

You can't reflect what you can't see. When Jesus came, when he walked among humans and they could (as John points out in 1 John 1) see and hear and touch the love of God, suddenly the love they had always longed for but never quite trusted became visible. Finally they could see that even if He really saw them for what they were and knew all about them, including the secret things they did their best to hide, **He still loved them!** Only then did it become possible to "reflect" the love of God.



This is not to say that God's love had never been reflected in human life before. The Old Testament is replete with stories of those who did see, even if "in a glass darkly," the love of God, who did experience it, and were able to reflect it. And so much time has passed since the time of Christ that He is now just as old a story to us, and almost as hard to imagine as the God who came to save His people from Egypt or visited in Abraham's tent. The point is that when we can see and touch love, then we can reflect it. Once we truly realize—literally, **real-ize**—in our own hearts that God loves us, experience that love for ourselves, see it in the face of Jesus, only then can we turn and pass that love on to others.

Generally, we see and touch and taste that love in the faces and arms of other humans around us. Whenever we feel true, abiding love, we can know God is there. All love comes only from Him. Conversely, all unlove comes from the enemy of souls. Whenever we or others act in hurtful, unloving ways, we can know that the devil is present.

So if we want to experience and reflect His love ever more fully, we will spend time, effort, and energy surrounding ourselves with that assurance of His love in all its splendor.

God is love. It's His defining attribute. If you want to put all that God is, was, and will be into one word, that's the only one it's possible to use. When we allow Christ to abide within us, this love will be revealed in our lives. But how? What does it mean to allow Christ and His love to "abide within us"?

Human Love versus Divine Love

Celsus, one of the many critics of Christians and Christianity in late antiquity, wrote sardonically, "These Christians love each other even before they are acquainted." (Ketcherside, chap. 11, italics supplied) Celsus found Christian love absurd. Yet, how much more absurd would someone like Celsus find the idea that although God is acquainted with us already and knows for a fact that we are not lovable, He loves us anyway?



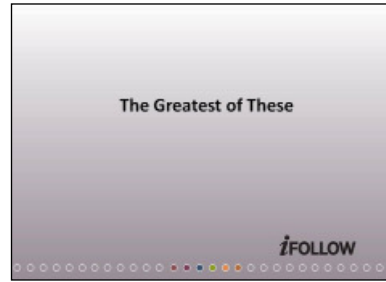
People don't tend to love like that. In fact, it would be safe to say that people never love like that unless God is active in their lives, and even then, we don't do it as well as God does! What are some of the human definitions of love? There probably are as many distinct concepts of love as there are people. What are some of yours? How do these definitions measure up against God's love for us? How do they help us understand God's love better?

Probably the most important difference is that humans attach conditions. "I love you if. . ." "I love you because. . ." Even when we're really trying to love unconditionally, "I love you no matter what!" we still tend to want something in return—we want to be loved back! We even tend to see God this way—that He wants something from us in return. Mind you, He does want us to love Him back, and He especially wants us to let Him show love to some people who can't feel or see it direct from Him, but whether we do or whether we don't, **He loves us just the same!** This is not easy for us to catch on to. We tend to think, at best, that we "owe" God allegiance or love or our best efforts. We even think we "owe" Him our best efforts to reflect His love to others. What would happen if we once and for all let go and basked in His love, believed in His love, trusted His love, and just let that splash all over the place, onto everyone in our paths?

What would happen?

The Greatest of These

Everybody knows what “The Love Chapter” is. Even people who are unfamiliar with the Bible, though they may not be able to say where it’s found, may know something about it, and can often cite some parts of it. Let’s take a look at that chapter: 1 Corinthians 13. Here it is from *The Message Bible*:



If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don’t love, I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God’s Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps, but I don’t love, I’m nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don’t love, I’ve gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have.

Love doesn’t strut,

Doesn’t have a swelled head,

Doesn’t force itself on others,

Isn’t always “me first,”

Doesn’t fly off the handle,

Doesn’t keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn’t revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say

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about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

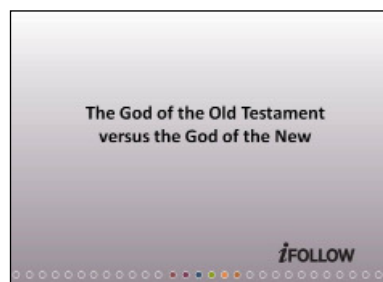
In discussing the importance of love, Paul compares it to the gift of tongues, prophecy, and martyrdom. These gifts and experiences were tangible evidences to the early Christians that they were on the right path in spite of the world's opposition and ridicule. But the gifts aren't the point. So, what is?

Love: love of God for human beings, love of human beings for God, and love of human beings for one another. The miracles, the mysteries, and what seem to be superhuman acts of devotion arise from love and serve the purposes of love. Otherwise they are just magic tricks and empty pretense.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes the kind of person who gives the appearance of doing everything right. Do you ever find yourself just going through the motions? How can we guard against this pretense?

The God of the Old Testament Vs the God of the New

Some people find it hard to reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New. They say the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, the sender of plagues and of destroying angels, who would rather blot the name of His people out of His book of life than forgive. By the same token, it is said that the New Testament presents us with a radically different portrait of God: one of love, self-sacrifice, and inclusiveness.



How do we know that the Old Testament God is the same God of love we see in Jesus Christ in the New Testament? Perhaps, it is not the different halves of God that need reconciling but our view of Him. We would do well to remember that the same God who sent destroying angels also sent manna. The God of the Old Testament not only created us and preserved us. He laid the foundation for our redemption. How could we even

begin to know that Jesus was who He claimed to be unless the Old Testament first told us when, where, and how to expect Him?

Let's take a look at some Old Testament passages about what God was like: Genesis 1:26-31, 2:21-25, 3:15, and Isaiah 53. Can you think of more? Jesus says that the Old Testament scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39). What does this suggest to us about the unity of the two Testaments in conveying God's message of love?

A Response of Love

The Bible—Old and New Testaments—tells us to love God and to love one another. (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 5:44, 22:37-40, 1 Peter 1:22.) But as if being told so were not enough, God as Jesus Christ provides the example (Phil. 2:5-7), the motivation (2 Cor. 5:14, 15), and the means (John 16:12-15). All that remains is to allow Him to change us.



It is easy to love people with whom we have something in common or people who make us feel good about ourselves. After all, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:46, even tax collectors—the yardstick of amorality at the time—could do the same. What about those who seem strange or alien to us or who frustrate or antagonize us? What examples can we draw from Jesus, the One who is “altogether lovely,” and from His life and ministry about how to love the unlovely and unlovable?

As we have seen, love is crucial to life itself. Only in God can we see love in its perfect form. But God can and will pour His perfect love into our lives and cause it to overflow onto those around us. It's our choice.

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant Notes
2. The Love Chapter



Additional Resources

- Brummer, Vincent (1993). *The model of love: a study in philosophical theology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carson, D. A. (1999). *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Fitzgerald, Troy (2008). *20 Questions God Wants to Ask You*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.
- Greeley, A. M. and Durkin, M. O.; editors (2002). *The Book of Love*. New York City: Tom Doherty Associates.
- Johnson, K. A. (2000). *The Gift: God Gave You More than You'll Ever Know*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.
- Jones, S. J. (2003). *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Ketcherside, W. Carl (1996). *In the Beginning*. DeFuniak Springs, FL: Diversity Press. (Especially see chapter 11, "Fear of Love.") Available on line at: www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wketcherside/itb/index.html
- Maxwell, Graham (1992). *Servants or Friends? Another Look at God*. Redlands, CA: Pineknoll Publications.
- Oord, T. J. (2010). *The Nature of Love: A Theology*. St. Louis: Chalice Press.
- Reid, G. W.; editor (2000). *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association.
- Wade, Loron (2009). *Simply Put: What God's Been Saying All Along*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association.
- Wynkoop, M. B. (1972). *A Theology of Love*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press.

DVD and Video

God's Love directed by Stewart H. Redwine and a number of other short video clips, including beautiful nature shots with traditional hymns, are available from the Christian digital media publisher, SermonSpice.com at: http://www.sermonspice.com/sermonspicegodslove?utm_source=yahoo&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=god%20love%20sermon&OVRAW=%22movies%20about%20the%20love%20of%20God%22&OVKEY=god%20love%20sermon&OVMTc=advanced&OVADID=76184141011&OVKWID=485061419011&OVCAMPID=19390151011&OVADGRPID=30418454899&OVNDID=ND1

Discussion Questions

1. As humans, we all have the need to love and be loved. How is God's love different from the love of others? Can you replace one with the other? Why, or why not?
2. Caring for someone or something because doing so somehow benefits us is a rather cynical definition—or practice—of human love. How would you define human love? What relationship does human love bear to divine love? Are the two related, even though human love is imperfect?
3. Share specific ways you have experienced God's unfathomable love.
4. The gift of eternal life is the ultimate demonstration of love. What are other examples of God's love?
5. Reflecting God's love to each other can be hard to do in a world full of sin. How can we better reflect and emulate His love in our relationships with others?
6. Paul states that of the spiritual gifts—faith, hope, and love—love is the greatest (1 Cor. 13:13). Why is it the greatest? What is its relationship to the other two gifts?
7. In John 13:34, 35, Jesus states: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (NIV). He leaves little doubt that fulfillment of this directive was to be the defining characteristic of the church He was leaving behind. Does love characterize the church as we see it today? What is our role in making the church more loving and less prone to judgmentalism and petty politics?
8. As Christians, we want to win people to the gospel. Cultivating a loving attitude toward others is the only way of doing so. Yet, in many instances, Jesus Himself—the ultimate embodiment of love—failed to win His hearers over. How can we apply His example?

Group Activity

Purpose: To practice what loving responses would be in various contexts.

Preparation: Copy the scenarios below on sheets of paper. You will need space for teams, and tables with writing materials would be helpful.

Assignment: Divide the group into teams of four or six and give them each one scenario. Have them discuss loving responses and then come up with a one-minute role play to share with the larger group.

Debrief: Allow a few minutes discussion and sharing following each role play. A question to consider: When is silence the wisest response, and when is a loving but firm response an opportunity to open a door for someone to walk through to meet Jesus?

Time: Allow about 10 minutes for groups to discuss their scenario and come up with their role play. Allow one or two minutes per role play and five minutes of discussion following each role play. You may wish to allow another 10 minutes at the end for general sharing.

Scenarios

1. You are having a conversation with someone on a random topic, and it becomes clear that he or she is interested in spiritual things. You share your beliefs. He or she politely but firmly asks you probing questions for which you don't have ready answers. How do you respond?
2. Someone is spreading wild and destructive rumors about you at church or work. As a result, you lose an opportunity for a promotion or a ministry you really wanted. You discover the source of the rumors. How do you handle this situation?
3. You are a leader of a ministry at your church. You suspect that one of your volunteers is engaged in clearly improper or inappropriate—possibly illegal or immoral—behavior that bears directly on their role in the ministry. Your suspicions are correct. How do you confront this person?
4. There he is at the same intersection every day on your route to work. His sign says, "Homeless, hungry, God bless." You avoid making eye contact as he walks past and hope he doesn't notice the fish symbol on your car that marks you as a caring Christian person. He asks you for money. What do you say and do?

Handout 1

Key Concepts: Love

Scripture Focus: Isaiah 53; Matthew 22:37-39; I Corinthians 13; 1 John 3; 1 John 4

Concept: From the Genesis creation story to Revelation's prophecies, God's love for us is evident. Having received such great love ourselves, we can't help but show love to others!

Connecting with the Scripture Topic

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCdZwitrNoY&feature=related>

A. View or listen to this story. Was there a defining moment in your life when an experience clearly showed you God's love?

B. Think of a time when the awareness God's love for you caused you to love someone else in return. Perhaps you forgave someone, encouraged someone, etc.

Sharing and Receiving Scripture

Can God's love be seen clearly throughout the Bible—in spite of the stories that may cause us to question? Is God's love steady and dependable? How does the realization of God's love cause us to act toward others?

Thought Questions

Read Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 3:11-13. Was it loving on God's part to create man and woman, knowing that they would sin and cause us all to live with the consequences?

1. It doesn't appear loving because God knew the pain that creating this world would cause
2. God created the world sinless and Adam and Eve were given the power of choice
3. Humans should have been given the choice to be a part of a world that would turn imperfect
4. A loving God doesn't create obedient "robots" but people of free choice
5. Although God knew the end result, a way out was planned through the death of

Jesus!

6. Other....

Read John 3:16, John 14:15-18, and 2 Peter 3:13. What loving solution did God provide for humanity's sinful choice?

1. God gave the gift of Jesus, God's Son, to die in our place
2. Out of love, the Son volunteered to take the death penalty
3. After returning to Heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so that we would not be left alone
4. God has promised a new Heaven and earth where sin can never enter
5. Some may question why we must live with the consequences of a sin that we didn't commit
6. Other....

Read 1 John 3:1-3. How is God's love expressed toward the end of the Bible?

1. God's love for us is lavish, extravagant and openhanded
2. The Father loves us so much that we are called God's children
3. God's love will send Jesus back to get us one day for the great rescue
4. Someday, we will be pure like God
5. It's hard to understand why things couldn't have remained perfect from the beginning
6. Other....

Read Philippians 2:5-8. Since we have been given an abundance of love, how should we treat our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, strangers, etc?

1. Our attitude should be like Jesus'—no room for pride or selfishness
2. We need to be aggressive; too many Christians come across as weak
3. We need to be humble, not thinking of ourselves as better than others
4. Our attitudes and actions toward others should be that of a servant
5. We need to be obedient to God's will--just as Jesus was—even to the point of death
6. Other....

Applying the Message of Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If you have opportunity, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: Come up with a favorite Old and New Testament story or text that beauti-

fully depicts God love for us. Write about the reason behind your choice.

Option 2: Think about how Jesus' love has been shown to you this week---an answered prayer, a Bible verse that was just what you needed, undeserved love from another person, etc. Write a thank-you prayer to Him.

Option 3: In today's world, it's hard to take on the role of a servant. Yet that's what Jesus asks of us. List ways to serve others and how you plan to go about doing just that over the next 10 days.

Valuing Scripture in Your Life

A. Close your eyes and recite John 3:16, putting the word "me" in the place of "the world." Think about all the ways God has tried to show love to you through answered prayers, the Bible, nature, and other people.

B. The Bible says that the world will know that we're Jesus' disciples if we love one another. Ask God to show you how you're doing in this area of your life. Are you accepting of others? Do you need to be more forgiving? Have you gone the extra mile for someone in need?

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HANDOUT

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Handout 2

The Love Chapter: 1 Corinthians 13 “The Way of Love”

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Would you agree or disagree with Paul that all these actions are pointless without love? Don't answer too quickly. Look carefully at the actions he mentions. Are they really worthless without love? Why or why not?

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Write about a time when you didn't give up, cared more for another than for yourself, and didn't want what you didn't have.

Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first."

What are the things that tempt you most, when it comes to being humble vs being loving? Be as specific as you can.

Love doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth.

Think of your one closest relationship, and sometimes you have "flown off the handle" or "kept score" with each other. What are some actions or attitudes you can change to help yourself to "take pleasure in the flowering of the truth" more than you take pleasure in being right?

Love puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end.

Write a thank you letter to someone who acted out this wonderful, godly love toward you.

Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled. When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good. We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us! But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

How can you trust steadily?

How can you hope unswervingly?

How can you love extravagantly?

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