

EVERY NATION ROSEBANK

CONNECT OUTLINE

topic

The Art of Love

5 Weeks

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EVERY NATION ROSEBANK

WEEK 1

topic

The Art of Love

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DISCUSS

God's Heart for People

Get to know each other:

- Share a time when you experienced love and where was that?
- How does it make you feel to know that you are loved?
- How would you know when there's no love and how would it make you feel?

Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV)

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. "

If you were quizzed on what you believe is the main essence of the Bible, what would you say? If you had only a moment to share a one-liner on what it means to be a Christian, to follow and become like Jesus, how would you sum up the Kingdom of God?

Many of us are taught the Lord's prayer as young children, in which we pray "your Kingdom come, your will be done . . ." but when you stop to think about it, what is God's Kingdom really about?

In Matthew 22 we see the Pharisees quiz Jesus; they want to know what the greatest commandment of the law is. Jesus replies "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'"

Here, Jesus sums up the Kingdom of God for us, plainly stating that we are to love God and love people. Everything else we do should flow out of these two commandments. It's vital to pray, fast, and practice spiritual disciplines as well as listen to godly teachings and grow in our knowledge of scriptures. However, if we had to put a spotlight on what Jesus, and therefore the Father, holds to be most important, loving God and loving people would and should be at the core of everything.

A. Love the Lord your God with all your HEART and with all your SOUL and with all your MIND.

- **Love God with your HEART**

To love God with your heart means to love God with your emotions, affections, deep desires, and your whole being. Praising him with your happiness, smile, and gratitude is easy when things are going well. Like when you perceive an answer to prayer or one of life's good gifts comes your way, but how about when things aren't going so well? ALL your heart means at ALL times. Even when God seems quiet. Even when he says wait. And even when he says no, and yes, even when bad things happen. Continuing to love God even when bad things happen or when good things don't happen is key to a life of contentment. You don't have to be happy "for" the bad thing. You just have to see through that bad circumstance to the God who wants to comfort you and will never leave you nor forsake you.

- **Love God with all your SOUL.**

Soul is perhaps the hardest thing to qualify. But let's suggest that our soul at least contains our passions, our motivations. Loving God would mean being driven by the things that move Him, pursuing the things He pursues. This is the embodiment of "your kingdom come," and being a part of bringing the kingdom. To love God with your soul means that innate part of you that always knew that you were created by a Creator. When you let yourself be still and quiet, something inside of you just knows that there is a God. When you look at all of the intricacies of the universe, the planet, and your own body, a piece of you knows.

As Blaise Pascal said in 1670, "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

Yes, you have a God-shaped hole within you that can only be satisfied by Him. But then you have to allow yourself to go even further past that simple knowing and let yourself believe that God not only exists but he loves you enough to send his only Son to die and free you from your sins.

- **Love God with all your MIND.**

Loving with your mind means dedicating your intellect to God, seeking His truth through His word, and shaping your thoughts to be in line with His character. It is possible to know and believe in the truth of the Bible and yet still fall for many lies of the world and Satan. You may even know that they are lies, but you still feel like they have a hold on you. Lies like “who am I to do this or that? I’m not good enough. Maybe I can take a shortcut and not have to wait on the Lord for this good thing? This person won’t listen to me. People don’t care about me”. For each lie that your mind entertains, there’s a truth that is found in the Word of God to counteract that lie. If you haven’t read Mercia Scharneck’s book “A mind renewed, a life transformed”, please do yourself a favour and grab a copy, especially if you are struggling with the torment of negative thoughts seeming to take space in your mind. Philippians 4:8 is also a weapon on how to deal with negative thoughts occupying our minds.

- **Philippians 4:8 ESV**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Reflection:

1. Is your heart sold out to God or are there things that have your heart?
2. Our souls are meant to yearn and thirst for God, what practices do you have in place to fill up your soul?
3. It is possible to know and believe in the truth of the Bible and yet still fall for many lies of the world and Satan. The war is often in our minds, how do you refute the negative voices constantly coming at you?

Prayer:

Father God, thank you for loving us even before we knew you. Please help us to love you with all our hearts, souls and minds. May our conduct and speech reflect our love and honour for you. Thank you Lord. Amen

EVERY NATION ROSEBANK

WEEK 2

topic

The Art of Love

5 Weeks

Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV)

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. "

Loving Ourselves

This week we will focus on loving ourselves.

1. An honest assessment on you, do you love yourself, yes/no and elaborate on the second question.
2. Share with the group what you love about yourself?

Oftentimes, we focus intently on the call to love our neighbour, and rightfully so. According to Karl Rahner, SJ, love of God and love of neighbour are one and the same thing. “We accomplish what is the love of God in Christ when we allow the love of our neighbour to attain its own nature and perfection.”

Yet, we often neglect those last two words of the commandment – as yourself. In fact, I think that for many of us, if we truly treated our neighbours the way we treated ourselves, we’d be a pretty lousy neighbour. At the same time Jesus knows that people are selfish in their nature, hence the love of neighbour first.

A. As yourself

Love yourself toward God.

Loving ourselves without God is like trying to fill a bottomless hole...it can never be filled. We will find ourselves in a constant cycle, where one day we love ourselves and the next we feel like there is no way that we could ever be loved. Human nature only knows how to love conditionally. When we try to love ourselves without God, our love is conditioned to our perception of ourselves in a specific season or moment of our lives. Our perception of ourselves is always changing, and every time it changes we have to learn to love ourselves all over again.

Self-love without God can be draining and futile. Self-love with God is peaceful, refreshing and full of happiness. Self-love with God goes beyond just tolerating your flaws or who you are as a whole, it means total acceptance and appreciation of who God has made you to be. It starts with the acknowledgement that we are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). That the God who made the whole universe and created all things loved us before we could love Him. Loving ourselves towards God is aligning our thoughts, our habits and lifestyles according to the word of God. Loving ourselves towards God is living in a manner worthy of the Gospel (Phil1:27).

Pause here and reflect on whether you love yourself towards God or away from God as a follower of Jesus?

B. Loving ourselves towards Correction/Counsel

Loving ourselves doesn't mean to accept ourselves living in sin. An unbiblical view of self-love not only leaves you unsatisfied; it can leave you unsanctified. If we dismiss the convictions of conscience as simply lack of self-acceptance, we risk misidentifying gracious warnings from God as attacks from Satan. When we do this, we forget the crucial difference between Christ's invitation to come as you are and the unbiblical invitation to stay as you are. Loving ourselves also means that we will make an effort to stay connected with our church community. It also means that we will allow our brothers and sisters to speak life over us, correct us and point out sin in our lives when they see a misalignment. Loving ourselves is an invitation to be sharpened by others as we sharpen them. May the Lord give all of us a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone when it comes to receiving correction and a call to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord.

How easily are you receiving correction, and what is your attitude when your brother or sister in the Lord points out a pattern of sin in your life?

C. Loving ourselves towards Self-care

We have often heard it said that you cannot pour from an empty cup and if you have been in an aeroplane one of the safety instructions from the flight attendant is “put an oxygen mask on yourself before assisting fellow passengers”. Self-care can be both highly overvalued and undervalued in a church environment. The pendulum can swing too far left or too far right depending on our backgrounds. Some over-prioritise caring for themselves and end up ignoring the needs of others. Some prioritise caring for others so much that it ends up harming themselves, their family, and their relationships.

1 Cor 6:19-20 NLT

19 Don't you realise that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body.

In its original context, this passage talks about sexual immorality, but I believe it applies on an even greater level to our worth in God. We are precious and hold great value, and we should take care of the temples we reside in — our bodies. This means we should eat well, work out, rest and watch what we do by avoiding things that may be physically or spiritually harmful.

Reflect:

Share two ways in which your Connect group can hold you accountable in practicing self-care.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you have loved us unconditionally and have created us in your image. Help us to have a positive view of ourselves, and help us to love ourselves in a Godly way so that we can love others well. In Jesus's name. Amen!

EVERY NATION ROSEBANK

WEEK 3

topic

The Art of Love

5 Weeks

Loving Your Neighbour

Matt 22:34-40 ESV

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. **35** And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. **36** “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” **37** And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. **40** On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

I know that last week we discussed loving yourself, which is contrary to how this scripture is phrased, right? I however, believe that we can better love others when we know how to love ourselves in a Godly way, not the selfish way that is not God honouring.

Ice breaker:

Get into pairs and share one or two things about yourself with your partner that they don't know. Back in the group, share these things about your partner with the group.

A. Loving People is Equal to Loving God:

1 John 4:8 states that “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love,” a simple although weighty verse, as we are challenged that the evidence of us loving God is based on our love and treatment of people.

The way we act and feel towards people directly relates to how we love and know God. Let that sink.

As believers we cannot claim to love God but hate people. If God is love and love is a mark of God’s Kingdom, we need to be a people who love others. If we do not love people, we do not truly know God. Too often Christians feel that their relationship with Jesus is a private matter. It’s all about “me and Jesus.” As a result my relationship with Jesus does not need others and does not affect my relationship with them. However, nothing could be further from the truth. A true relationship with Jesus should impact our hearts to the extent that those around us are affected as a result. Jesus is the epitome of this. Jesus knew God (who is love). Therefore, Jesus loves.

Time and time again, throughout the Bible we see that Jesus did not simply feel love for us and leave it there. He felt love for humankind, got up and did something about the state we were in. He came down to earth and gave His life for us on the Cross. He got up and dined with sinners. He got enraged by injustices in the world and endeavoured to bring about lasting change in people's lives . He set the example, showing that loving God equates to loving people.

Reflect on whether your actions, words, feelings, and thoughts towards other people testify to your belief in God and relationship with Him, or do you feel there is a disconnect between your relationship with God and how you view and interact with the world around you?

b. Loving our Neighbour is costly

Luke 10:27-29 & Luke 10:30-37

In this discussion with Jesus about the greatest of God's commandments, an expert in the law was more interested in justifying himself and his actions than seeking the heart of God. God created the ten commandments to guide His people in how to live radically differently to the people around – loving Him with all our hearts and showing others around us His world-changing, selfless love.

I wonder if we, like the man in this story, are also tempted to put limits on what God is calling us to do? Who is my neighbour? It's much easier to show love to our friends, to those who are easy to get along with, at a time that is convenient to us. But the love Jesus displayed for us is a costly love, giving everything at great expense for people who were His enemies.

What if we, fuelled by this love, took time to show love to people who are hard to love, at a time when it's not convenient to us? What if we purposefully looked to include new people, those being left out, or people who think differently to us? What if we were gracious and gave people a second chance, or started to pray for those who have hurt us instead of seeking revenge? Costly love for our neighbours.

Perhaps then we would better reflect and point the way to a God who is love.

Because the good man was a Samaritan, Jesus is drawing a strong contrast between those who knew the law and those who actually followed the law in their lifestyle and conduct. Jesus now asks the lawyer if he can apply the lesson to his own life with the question “So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves. Luke 10:36 Once again, the lawyer’s answer is telling of his personal hardness of heart. He cannot bring himself to say the word “Samaritan”; he refers to the “good man” as “he who showed mercy.” His hate for the Samaritans (his neighbours) was so strong that he couldn’t even refer to them in a proper way. Jesus then tells the lawyer to “go and do likewise,” meaning that he should start living what the law tells him to do.

By ending the encounter in this manner, Jesus is telling us to follow the Samaritan’s example in our own conduct; i.e., we are to show compassion and love for those we encounter in our everyday activities. We are to love others (vs. 27) regardless of their ethnicity or religion; the criterion is need. If they need and we have the supply, then we are to give generously and freely, without expectation of return. This is an impossible obligation for the lawyer, and for us. We cannot always keep the law because of our human condition; our heart and desires are mostly of self and selfishness. When left to our own, we do the wrong thing, failing to meet the law. We can hope that the lawyer saw this and came to the realization that there was nothing he could do to justify himself, that he needed a personal saviour to atone for his lack of ability to save himself from his sins.

Thus, the lessons of the Parable of the Good Samaritan are three-fold:

1. We are to set aside our prejudice and show love and compassion for others.
2. Our neighbour is anyone we encounter; we are all created by the same creator(God) and we are to love all of mankind as Jesus has taught.
3. Keeping the law in its entirety with the intent to save ourselves is an impossible task. We need a saviour, and this is Jesus.

Reflect:

Reflect on the above key points at the centre of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and think about some of your own barriers preventing you from reaching out to your neighbours and what you are committing to do to bring down those barriers.

Prayer:

Lord, teach us to love like you do, we acknowledge that we cannot say we love you if we don't love people. Forgive us where we have allowed prejudice to hinder us from sharing the love of Jesus with others. Help us and give us opportunities to neighbour well. Amen.

EVERY NATION ROSEBANK

WEEK 4

topic

The Art of Love

5 Weeks

Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV)

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. "

DISCUSS

Loving our neighbours while disagreeing with them

In our culture today, it's normal to disagree with people and "cancel" them by refusing to talk to them or even trying to understand their viewpoints on various issues. But did you know that "cancel culture" contradicts what the Bible says? Cancel culture simply means we decide that somebody is not worthy of listening to or valuing at all because of one small part of who they are or what they believe.

READ JOHN 20:24–28

Jesus' resurrection is a defining moment in our faith. As I've re-read scriptures about His death and resurrection this year, it was not this life-changing miracle that stood out to me... rather these words in v26 – 'Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them.'

Prior to this verse, all the disciples (except for Thomas) had just seen Jesus and were now celebrating the news with their missing friend. Thomas' response to this life-changing news... 'Yeah, na.' Today it would be easy to cancel, unfriend or block Thomas for his lacklustre response... his rejection of this incredible, life-altering fact. This is why 'Eight days later the disciples were together again...' leaped out at me... this verse tells us that the disciples kept Thomas with them; he was part of the family, part of the crew – his scepticism included.

They didn't kick him out, or make him move Bible studies or Connect Groups. They allowed Thomas the space, grace and time needed for God to reveal His truth to him.

As Jesus was gracious in revealing His truth to us (or the disciples in this case), we need to respect the unique journey Jesus has people on – and then trust He will reveal Himself and His truth to them at the perfect time. Our responsibility to the people we're in community with is to love them, be patient as we point them to the truth and to give them space and time and make sure when they exclaim, 'My Lord and my God'!, as Thomas did, that we can celebrate together.

Like Thomas, we will have people in our circles who will catch up on the truth later, we will have people who perceive things differently from us and even living in the nuances of some Biblical Truths either because of other sources they've allowed themselves to drink from or whom they've surrounded themselves with. We're in a unique time, which allows us to have creativity in how we live out our faith but also in how we encourage each other.

Jesus didn't say 'Love your neighbour that agree with you, that make you feel comfortable, a neighbour who give you strokes for what you're doing with your life or that are happy that you go to church' He just said, 'Love your neighbour like you would like to be loved'

When we are disagreeing or in conflict with those we love (Neighbour), let's take the Philippians 4:8 posture.

Philippians 4:8 ESV

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Here are some practical and helpful ways when you are in a disagreement.

1. Listen to them. This may seem simple, but listening is a skill. Don't talk over them, and when waiting for them to finish speaking, don't be thinking about how to make a cutting comeback. Really pay attention and try to see the issue from their perspective. A good strategy to prevent misunderstanding is to repeat to them what they said (and don't misrepresent it in a negative way): for example, "It sounds like you're saying_____. Did I understand that correctly?" Careful listening shows that you respect and value the other person.

2. Start with something positive. When it's your turn to respond, focus on the positive as well as the negative. Start by demonstrating that you understand and acknowledge the other person's view and/or point out places where you agree: "I agree with your premise that _____. Can I tell you how I see it?" "You make a good point. Try looking at it this way..." Not only does this soften your rebuttal, but it keeps the disagreement from turning into a contest between enemies.

3. Know that you may not convince them to change their mind. No matter how flawless your argument, it will rarely have the immediate effect of winning over your opponent on the spot. If you approach a disagreement as your one opportunity to ‘win,’ then you’re treating the other person not as a neighbour to be loved but as a castle to be sieged and conquered, by battering ram if necessary. However, even if you don’t convince them in the moment, if you are kind and respectful, you may leave them thinking more favourably toward your point of view. At the very least, you’ve demonstrated a loving character to them.

4. Be kind and calm. The Christian is not to be combative and quarrelsome (2 Timothy 2:24). Romans says, “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18). So, for your part, keep the conversation civil. Even if the other person is being uncivil, treat them the way you would want them to treat you. If you remain kind and calm, they may actually start to model their behaviour on yours, deescalating the conflict and keeping it from becoming heated.

The person you’re disagreeing with is someone that God loves and that He wants you to love. By remembering that our neighbours are our neighbours and by focusing on loving ways to disagree, we can be more effective witnesses for Christ.

Reflect:

1. Have you ever been cancelled, sidelined or shown unkindness because of differences in opinions; disagreement ect?
2. If so, how may you act in helping someone not to experience the unkindness you might have experienced even if you don't agree with them?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, please forgive us in times where we have cared so much about being right at the expense of loving our brother or sister whose opinions are different from ours. Help us to keep love at the center even in times of conflict, remind us that love covers a multitude of sins. In your name. Amen.

EVERY NATION ROSEBANK

WEEK 5

topic

The Art of Love

5 Weeks

John 17:20–23 NLT

20 “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. 21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one — as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

22 “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me

Love That Reconciles

In John 17, Jesus prays that those who believe in Him may be one, being brought to complete unity. This speaks of relationships that are reconciled, that are not divided, but unified, and marked by the love of God.

To reconcile means to “restore friendly relations,” or to “make or show to be compatible.” Prior to the fall there was reconciliation — reconciliation between man and woman and God. There was no division; however, after the fall, and sin came into the world, divisions appeared, and they have only increased over the ages — divisions between families, between groups of people, between different ethnicities, between different cultures, between different ages. Our world is marred by division, and oftentimes, by the media, by politicians and by individuals who add fuel to the fire.

But as a people of God living to bring His Kingdom on earth, we are called to love beyond ourselves. We are called to be a people who actively pursue reconciliation not only in our personal lives but also in our communities and our nation.

Fellowship

We cannot become complacent, and therefore, complicit in acts that bring further disunity. We are to be a people, who although we look, sound, think, feel, and act differently are unified and reconciled to one another (2 Cor 5:18-19)

In swimming upstream let's endeavour to build friendships with those who are different to us. Let's cross barriers which have held previous generations divided. Let's set an example of the unifying, reconciling love shown to us through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — those who are unique and different in function, but equal in value.

The word of God is filled with examples of conflicts arising and yet the end marked with reconciliation. In Acts 15:36-41 Paul is mentioned having a sharp disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark. In 2 Tim 4:11 & Col 4:10 we are given a sense that reconciliation happened. This is obviously one example, but the ultimate reconciliation to happen in human history is that of God reconciling with us by sending Jesus to die for us on the cross.

We had sinned and offended Him greatly, and yet He chose to forgive and reconcile. Forgiving people who have wronged us is challenging, however, it's not an option to us as followers of Christ. Forgiveness is not optional, even though reconciliation is a process and may take a while depending on the weight of the disagreement or offense, however, it is possible. It is possible to forgive someone and not reconcile with them, e.g. you may be able to forgive someone who has caused harm to you in a form of abuse and not reconcile to that person for safety reasons.

I think we are all challenged to consider love whenever there's conflict or disagreement with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, our family members, and our neighbours at large. The love of Christ that resides in us calls one to lay down his life for his friend (John 15:13).

Here is a challenging scripture to ponder on.

Matt 5: 43-48 NLT

43 “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’^[a] and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies!^[b] Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends,^[c] how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Reflect:

Take some time to think about your relationships and friendships. Do you feel you have managed to build authentic relationships that mirror the reconciliation that God so desires for His people? Would the way you think of, act towards, and relate to those who are different to yourself highlight God's love in your life, or is there room for improvement?

Prayer:

Lord, we acknowledge that it is difficult to love, forgive and reconcile to people who've harmed and hurt us. We are challenged by the instructions in your word to love and pray for our enemies, help us and give us the grace to obey your word. Show us people that we are still holding back forgiveness towards, and help us to forgive and release them. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Bonus point: I have learned a new concept that has helped me immensely with regards to forgiving quickly and not allowing my heart to harbour offense from John Eldridge, and is called Benevolent Detachment. You simply release hurt, worry, and sometimes the difficult conversations and interactions you've had with people during the day. I do this daily before sleeping.