

Senior High Bible Teacher

March, April, May 2017

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SPRING QUARTER

For Teachers of Teens Ages 15 Through 17

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Edited and published quarterly by
THE INCORPORATED TRUSTEES OF THE
GOSPEL WORKER SOCIETY
UNION GOSPEL PRESS DIVISION

Rev. W. B. Musselman, Founder

Price: \$2.15 per quarter*
\$8.60 per year*

**shipping and handling extra*

ISBN 978-1-59843-532-0



Lessons based on International Sunday School Lessons; the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching, copyright © 2013 by the Committee on the Uniform Series and used with permission. Edited and published quarterly by The Incorporated Trustees of the Gospel Worker Society, Union Gospel Press Division, 2000 Brookpark Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44109-5812. Mailing address: P.O. Box 6059, Cleveland, Ohio 44101-1059. www.uniongospelpress.com

The Weeks Ahead

This quarter is all about God's amazing love, and it begins with lessons about the nature of His love for us. In lesson 1, we learn that God is the source of all real love and that we are able to love Him and our fellow man only because He has loved us first. Lesson 2 explains God's overflowing love that takes us from death to life. This love is a free gift of grace, received only through faith in Jesus and His sacrifice.

Lesson 3 is all about how we manifest God's love to the world as we stay connected to Jesus. He is the True Vine, and we are His branches, who can do nothing without Him. In lesson 4, we see a picture of God's merciful love as He called the sinful people of Israel back to Himself through His prophet Joel and promised to restore them. He gives His children His Spirit as an undeserved gift of grace.

The second unit focuses on the work of God's love, beginning in lesson 5 with the way God lovingly shepherds His people. From King David's famous extended metaphor, we learn how God guides, protects, and provides for His people like a shepherd tending sheep. Lesson 6 explains how God's love saves us through the gift of His Son, Jesus. We accept that gift through faith as the Holy Spirit awakens our spirits and we are born again into eternal life.

The joy of Easter Sunday fits well in this unit, as lesson 7 shows how God's love is triumphant through Christ. In His death and resurrection, we are reborn into a living hope and salvation now and forever. Lesson 8 shows how God's love also does the work of reconciling us to Him through Christ's sacrifice. Because of His great love, God restores us to a right relationship with Him; no force can separate us. In lesson 9, we revisit God's shepherding love as we see how Jesus embodied that love as the Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for His sheep so that they might enter through His door into protection and provision.

The last unit of lessons is about the full extent of God's love. His love extends to include discipline of His children, as in the story of Jonah in lesson 10. God lovingly disciplined Jonah to bring him back from his state of rebellion. In lesson 11, we see how God's love always reaches out to protect us, even in the midst of discipline. As we lay down our pride and let God protect us, we experience more of His blessings.

God also loves those who do not love Him, as we see in lesson 12. God used Jonah to reach out to the wicked sinners of Nineveh. His love extends to the lost, and He wants them to experience His blessing rather than His wrath. Finally, lesson 13 concludes the

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quarter with a look at how God's love is big enough to embrace the whole world, from His pursuit of whole people groups who do not know Him to His

teaching and guidance of each of us as individuals. The true extent of His love is limitless, and we rest in that love as it fills the earth.

EDITORIAL

Love and Identity

Knowing the love of God is foundational to our lives as followers of Jesus. We will never have the impact God desires us to have in His world if we are not deeply rooted in His powerful, unending, limitless love for us. Without knowing and experiencing God's love, we can never fully understand who we are and what our role is intended to be. Our individual identities are completely intertwined with God's love for us in such a way that without it, we cannot become who we were meant to be.

One of the best scriptural examples of an identity grounded in God's love is the Apostle John. In his own Gospel, John referred to himself only as the disciple Jesus loved. Of course, Jesus loved all the disciples, but apparently He and John shared a special bond that was unique. John rested in this identity, just as he did when he leaned back against Jesus at the Last Supper and heard His heart beating. Long after Jesus had gone back to the Father, John's confidence in His love allowed him to become a stalwart pillar of the church. He encouraged many others to ground their identities in Christ's un-failing love.

In his epistles, John often returned to one specific term to address the body of believers. That term was "beloved." He defined God's church not by what its members were able to accomplish or by their spiritual gifts but by their status as the beloved of

God. This term conveys a special closeness that is constant and reliable. We are not God's beloved sometimes or to some limited extent. We are fully loved at all times, from before we do a single thing for the Lord through times when we turn our backs on Him all the way until we meet Him and rest in His love in eternity.

Of course, Jesus is the perfect example of resting in the Father's love, and the Father taught Him early about the constancy of His identity as the beloved. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Him and the Father called Him His beloved Son in whom He found great pleasure. This was prior to *all* of Jesus' earthly ministry—He had not done anything yet to earn the love, yet it was fully His always as God's Son.

Amazingly, we too are called the children of God throughout Scripture. This conveys to us the picture of the joyful, unconditional love of a good father for his children. We make Him smile, and He loves to spend time just being with us. Jesus rested in this love. He often left the crowds behind just to be with His Father, enjoying His love.

Building on the family image, our status as God's children also makes Jesus our true Brother. He is the first-born out of many, and He loves all of His siblings as a brother. He wants to

do the Father's work together with us, and He allows us to share in His glorious inheritance. We are coheirs with Him in the entire storehouse of God's blessing and power, and He wants us to use that authority to bless the world with His love.

Of course, there is so much more to say about God's love than could possibly be said in this space (or even in a quarter or a year's worth of lessons), but it is vital for us to understand what the effects of this love are on a life that is rooted in it. When our identities are grounded in all the aspects of God's love described below, we experience unparalleled freedom and power in our lives.

First, an identity based in God's love is free from the fear of man. If we base our lives on the changing trends of the times, we will always be swayed by the court of human opinion. But the love of Jesus is solid and unchanging. Knowing that we are His beloved prior to anything we do as believers frees us to do whatever God asks of us without concern for others' opinion. The only opinion of us that matters has already been definitively expressed in God's love, and it can never be rescinded. Therefore, we may follow Christ with abandon. We must love others as well, without regard for what they can do for us, but we must never look to them for a confirmation of our identity. Only God can provide that, and He has spoken: we are beloved.

Second, basing one's identity on the Father's love frees the believer from living a life of constant pressure and striving. If we had to earn God's love, our lives would be a constant, frantic striving to search out and accomplish as many good works as possible. But the Father's love is unconditional. A human father loves his child just as much when he or she draws him a picture of a stick figure in

a flat house as he would if the drawing were the Mona Lisa.

Yes, God created us for good works, but there is no pressure in unconditional love. As we walk with Jesus and become more like Him, we will constantly find ourselves becoming a part of the good works of God already in motion around us. And they will be our joy, not our stress.

Finally (though not exhaustively), living with an identity firmly rooted in God's love frees us from the fear of death. For one thing, we can trust that God's love will protect us until we fully accomplish all His plans for us. When we die, we will at last be fully found in His love, complete in Him. No risk is too great to take for the kingdom when death brings us into the greatest joy that could befall us! For us to live is Christ, for we are His beloved; to die is gain, because we will be fully united with the One we love.

When we realize that to die is gain and therefore stop fearing death, we will also be set free from trying to make this world our home. The worries of this world will lose their hold on us, and we will be free to invest in God's kingdom rather than trying to build our own. In His love we have all the provision we need.

As we live in these freedoms that come from love, there is no limit to what we could see happen. We may see cities restored through the love of God. We might pray for the sick and see God heal them. We may speak the good news with boldness and see the love of Jesus touch more and more lives through us. As we rest in Jesus' love, we will naturally relax and simply release His presence that dwells in us through the Holy Spirit. In that freedom is life abundant, the eternal life of the beloved that begins right here and now through the saving, freeing, limitless love of God in Christ.

Scripture Lesson Text

1 JOHN 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spir'it.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Je'sus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

NOTES

The Source of All Love

Lesson: I John 4:7-19

Read: I John 4:7-19

TIME: about A.D. 90-95

PLACE: probably from Ephesus

GOLDEN TEXT—"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11).

Studying the Text

Around the world, in every culture and country, people innately understand that love is extremely important. In fact, our secular culture here in America exalts love as a substitute god or idol. They usually focus strictly on romantic love and portray it as the chief end of life, but those who spend their lives pursuing this short-sighted view of love will find that it leaves them unfulfilled.

In this quarter's lessons, we will learn about the amazing love of God and see how much greater it is than any secular concept of love. Only by resting in and emulating God's great love can we experience the freedom and fulfillment we all desire.

Perhaps you have seen some of the self-focused ways the world views love. But the reality is that true love is always about us being last and others being first. It is not so much a feeling for us to chase as an action to live and a state to rest in.

This unit's lessons will teach us about the nature of true love, the love that comes from God. The world may set up love as a god, but we will see in this first lesson that God is love! He is the true source of all love, and without Him there is only selfishness and he-

donism. Love is about God, its Author and embodiment, first and foremost.

The unit focuses on the good of others. We are to manifest God's love to all those we come into contact with. This is not something we can produce on our own; rather, it comes solely from God.

DEFINING LOVE—I John 4:7-12

Love's source (I John 4:7-10). The very first word of this week's passage is a clue that love does not originate with us. Rather, our identity comes from the fact that God loves us; we are His "beloved" ones. John used this moniker frequently to underscore his readers' importance as God's people. God's love is bestowed on us before any works that we might do or are even called to do, just as God called Jesus His beloved Son prior to the beginning of His ministry (cf. Luke 3:22). This affirmation of God's love toward us anchors our identity and provides the foundation for a believer's individual calling, just as it did for Jesus.

Building on our identity as God's beloved, John instructs us to love one another. As we will shortly see in this week's lesson text, we are able