

1 John 4:8 says, 'Anyone who does not love does not know God, **because God is love...**'

'God is love', means that God continually gives of himself to others and seeks their benefit. This is His eternal attitude towards us and is a key aspect of his glory.

If love is at the centre of God's glory, then because **we** were once full of this glory it would have also represented the main component of **our** original character.

Look at the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. We would have been like this:

'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.'

If God's love was in us, this behaviour would have been ours quite naturally...(although in a perfect world we would not have had to forgive I suppose)

This part of the discipleship course considers how Jesus calls us to return to the original character that God created in us: being filled with his love first, and then showing it.

1. Without God people have a profound hunger for love. Where does the world go in order to fill this hunger?

God has returned to us in Jesus, in order to fill us again with the glory of His love.

There is only one way in which God will do this. Read 1 John 3:16:

'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.'

2. What does the cross teach us about the only place in the universe where we can receive the glory of God's love for us, and also, what does the way he has done it tell us about the intensity of His love for us?

God clearly wants us to receive this love in order to know the love for which we were created, but Jesus teaches in Matthew 16 that we will still have plenty of things in our lives that we hold onto as substitutes for that love.

3. As Christians what kind of things do we tend to hold onto and look to as alternative sources of God's love?

4. Why it is important that we are first satisfied with the love of God, relying on this to fill us; and that we allow nothing to get in the way of our view of it shown to us in the cross?

5. How does receiving an understanding of God's love from the cross of Jesus alone benefit those at a human level whom we love?

6. Look at the kind of behaviour God's love compels Him to show us in the cross – Look what kind of behaviour this will prompt us to exhibit when this love is received by us:

Read Romans 12:9-18

'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position—Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'

7. Does this make you feel this kind of behaviour is too much? Think about 1 John 3:16. How will this verse fuel us to behave like this – thus fulfilling our original created purpose?