



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

*Program
Study Guides*

For

February 2016

Does Jesus Care?

Mark 4:35-39

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

Life can suddenly come crashing down, causing us to _____ whether the Lord cares. In times of _____, we ask, does Jesus really care about us? We have no doubts that the Bible will give us the _____, so we keep on looking to it for the answers. Our goal is to _____ God because we love Him and we want to be close to Him.

Longing to be close to God is _____, and especially when you're hurting. The sons of Korah, in Psalm 42, describe the heartache of _____ for God. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul _____ for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while *they* say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' "

When tough times come, many times people feel God is _____. They wonder if the Lord is _____ and if He cares. They _____ for God's help and comfort. Does Jesus care when our hearts are broken with the loss of a loved one, when the bills pile up, when the children are hungry, or when we can't seem to get well? Does God hear our _____?

Nothing, however, _____ the notice of God. Luke 12:6 says that not even a _____ can fall to the ground apart from God's knowledge. God not only sees what happens outwardly, He also sees the troubles inside your _____. He knows all about you because He _____ you. There's never been a single _____ in your life when God hasn't wanted to be close to you and bless you.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to Mark 4:35-39.

Frightening, life-threatening storms happen _____ on the Sea of Galilee. In this storm Jesus is _____, with "his head on a cushion." The disciples cry out "Master, don't you _____ that we're perishing?" We all ask questions like this when we're frightened and we need an _____. We see the world's agonies and we _____ if God is paying attention. We need _____ from someone bigger than we are and we need it now.

Jesus didn't answer their question. Instead, He rebuked the storm and He made the water _____. Then Jesus asked His disciples, "How is it that you have no _____?" The real question is not whether Jesus cares, but whether we _____. Of course, Jesus cares. Mark describes how the Lord Jesus delivered Legion, a demon-possessed man, who lived like a beast (Mark 5:1-20). Later in the chapter, Jesus healed a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and then He raised the daughter of Jairus.

Someone objects, "But why doesn't God _____ every problem? Why does the Lord seem asleep and uncaring?" Are you assuming that if God doesn't _____ all our problems that He doesn't care about us? Some folks want God to keep us _____ from struggles or difficulties. It's tempting to question God's _____ when we face challenges or disappointments. We think if God really loves us, He'll _____ us from any and every problem.

Is a painless world, free from any problem, really the _____ world for us? Oh, it may be convenient and it may even be comfortable, but is it best for our _____, for our growth as individuals? Doesn't the person who has no problems and has everything his way often get _____ and think the world revolves around him? Don't challenges _____ us into people of character?

Read what the Bible says in James 1:2-4. We may see our trials and struggles the _____ way. We may not realize that God permits them because He sees a greater _____ with them than without them. Struggles help us to become the _____ people that God desires. So let's rejoice in our trials because God uses them to _____ us into His people.

James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under _____; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." It doesn't say, "Blessed is the man who has _____ troubles," but "blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." He's the man who won't _____ on God when things get rough. Because he loves God even in tough times, God will _____ him with a crown of life.

The Lord demonstrates that He cares in _____ ways. You might ask, "Well how?" First, He shows He understands suffering in that He himself suffered for our _____. He Himself endured the punishment that was rightfully _____. First Peter 2:24 says, "That He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might _____ to sin and _____ to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

God loved His Son, Jesus, but He didn't _____ the crucifixion. Jesus prayed with _____ in the Garden to let this cup pass, but God sacrificed His Son because He loved you and me, just as He loved His Son. Jesus also prayed, "Your will be done." Atoning for sin was _____ important to Jesus than freedom from suffering. Have you considered how _____ our Father suffered in sacrificing His Son? No one has grieved more over human evil than God has. No one has suffered more than Jesus who bore the cross for our sins. He showed unmistakably how much He loved us. This loving God asks us to _____ Him when we cry out for help.

Read what 1 Peter 2:21-23 says. This is what the disciples in the boat needed to do, and what we need to do: and that is to entrust our _____ to God! First Peter 5:7 urges us to cast "all our anxiety on Him, because He _____ for you."

God inspired Paul to write the book of Romans at a time when the Roman Christians began _____ great persecution. Paul asked, "Who shall _____ us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we're being killed all the daylong; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered'" (Romans 8:35-36). Paul answers this question in verses 37 to 39, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who _____ us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the _____ of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Their problems did not separate them from the love of God and my friend, your _____ won't separate you from His love either. God didn't stop the apostles from being _____, Stephen from being _____, or James from the _____. God didn't keep

Paul from imprisonment or remove his _____ in the flesh. Yet, not one of these men ever _____ God's love. They knew God would never put more on them than they could _____.

God isn't hiding when our _____ come. He's faithful! You can _____ Him! Nothing that you'll encounter today, tomorrow, or at any time will ever be _____ than what God and you together can handle. He doesn't _____ all our problems; but God does give us the _____ to bear those burdens and challenges. When that problem gets so big that we can't handle it _____, God steps in so we'll never get overcome by it. Remember the promise of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you _____. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your _____. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

God sometimes uses the physical struggles that we face to keep us from doing ourselves spiritual _____. God gave the apostle Paul some tremendous, miraculous revelations to _____ him in his ministry. But God didn't want Paul to _____ himself, and so He gave him that "thorn in the flesh" to torment him and keep him from exalting himself (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul prayed _____ times for the Lord to take away his "thorn in the flesh"; but God refused and said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for _____ is perfected in weakness."

Paul had to understand that this thorn was not going away. Was he bitter? No! He _____ something valuable: God's power is perfected in weakness. **Read what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.** Struggles remind us of our need for God and how God can powerfully work in our lives.

God's grace is indeed sufficient. Suffering may torment your _____, but it can't take away your _____. Suffering may open up for you an opportunity to see the great power of God to _____ you sustain yourself even in times of great weakness. Jesus does indeed _____. Just as Jesus _____ with Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus, so He weeps with us. The Lord knows when we hurt and He provides _____.

Some continue to ask, "Why doesn't the Lord just stop all evil _____?" If the Lord stopped all evil, wouldn't that evil also _____ you? If we ask God to stop all evil, we need to _____ the evil things that we do. Your sin _____; it hurts God; it hurts you; and it hurts other people. The Lord loves you enough to show you a _____ way and asks you to _____ your life by repenting.

Repentance is not some punishment, but it's how we _____. The Lord knows that there's a _____ person inside of you, wanting to come out. He knows that your repentance will not only bless your _____ but bless all the people that you touch. When you come to Christ and you stop that sin, you bless people that you formerly _____. He graciously gives us _____ to repent; He's patient. Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Jesus loved us enough to give us a righteous _____ to follow. He showed us how to _____ and how to be forgiven. He gave us his Word to _____ our lives, and He answers our _____. He says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask Him anything according to His _____ He hears us. And we know that He _____ us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Times of crisis call for the _____ in people. Bravery, heroism, love, self-sacrifice—all of these things flourish in times of crisis. People who exhibit such traits are cherished and are honored as having gone “above and beyond the call of duty.” Was this not the very point Christ made: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his _____”? (John 15:13).

The most important question is not “why did this happen to me?” but rather “what shall I do _____?” Some reject and abandon God when _____ comes their way. Some turn inward in self-pity. Others exercise their faith and find that God has _____ forgotten them. They entrust their souls to Him and find His promise is true: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Not everything that happens to us is _____, but let’s not assume that the only way God can care for us is to _____ our troubles. God also shows His care and His power by taking the hardest things in our lives and using them for _____, to bless us and to bless others. God has the power to _____; and we have no idea all the harm from which He has protected us already. But God also has the power to take things at their _____ and make good out of them.

So, instead of blaming God for our pains, let’s look to Him for _____. Struggles remind us that God never intended this world to be our _____. We’re pilgrims, and our lives here are brief. Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be _____ with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). So, we too must learn to see with the _____ of faith and trust. The last chapter of our lives has not yet been _____. When Jesus comes again, He will bless and comfort His own.

Jesus cares about you. He wants to be your friend. He cares about your physical welfare, your finances, your family, your soul, and your future. More than anything, He cares about your _____. The Lord Jesus knows all about you, the _____ and the _____. He even knows the number of _____ on your head. In spite of it all, He loves you and cares greatly about every detail of your life.

Sometimes we concentrate so much on our longing for God to _____ that we forget God is longing for a relationship with us. The Lord deeply desires that we _____ _____ to Him. When we forget Him or get caught up in _____, He yearns for His people to come back to Him. The Lord Jesus died on the cross for sinful people, yearning to have a relationship with them.

Do you have a close, loving relationship with God? Does the Lord see you as someone who is truly _____ to Him? In your quiet moments as you look into your _____, do you see yourself as a friend to God?

If you haven’t given yourself to the Lord, today is the right day to come to Him. Come to the Lord in _____, trusting in Him and in His Word. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. In repentance, make Jesus your Lord; and let Him _____ your life. Having done these things, be _____ in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. In baptism, the Lord will cleanse you from sin (Acts 22:16); He’ll cause you to be born again (John 3:5); and He’ll give you newness of life (Romans 6:4). In baptism, the Lord will add you to His church (Acts 2:47).

When you become a Christian, you’ll find the strength and the grace to deal with all of life’s struggles. God cares enough to give us the strength to bear what He does not take away. Trust Him! Trust Him!

God's Love for Us Ephesians 3:14-19

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

If we could but grasp how greatly God loves us, it would _____ our lives. No one loves you like the Lord Jesus. From start to finish, the Bible is God's supreme _____ of love and redemption. The more we read the Bible, the more we can understand the _____ of God who created us and sustains our very existence. Though mankind can be _____ to love, God has never faltered in wanting to _____ those who seek His face and draw near. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

God hasn't hidden His love for us; God has displayed it beyond dispute in the _____ of Jesus Christ upon the cross. **Read what the Bible says in Romans 5:6-8.** We were weak, ungodly, and sinners; but Christ was still _____ to die for our sins, to wash us clean by His blood. Such love is truly abundant and beyond comprehension.

Jesus bore the cross to _____ us of our sins and then to open a door for us to have a loving relationship with our Father in Heaven. The Lord loved us when we were _____ and couldn't save ourselves. He helped us when we were ungodly and had little _____ of Him. He died for us while we were _____ who had offended Him. Christ loved our _____ when we didn't deserve it, when we didn't understand it, or even appreciate it. Such amazing love!

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians 3:14-19.

The Old Testament uses a rich and amazing word to _____ the love that God has for His people. The Bible says that God is _____ in this kind of love. Some versions call it "steadfast love," some "lovingkindness," and some simply just "mercy."

Read Psalm 103:8-14.

"Steadfast" love is the deepest and best love; it's the kind of _____ love that doesn't let go and doesn't fail. It's loyal, faithful, kind, and good. It's compassionate and merciful. This type of love is _____ upon a voluntary covenant, an everlasting commitment to those who are in His favor. Psalm 86:15 says, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Because the God of Heaven is kind and good, He's _____ to pardon and forgive our sins if we remain _____ to Him.

When you consider all that Jesus gave up in bearing the cross to save us from sin, you cannot _____ His love. If anything, the magnificent love of Jesus was stubborn, unflinching, and utterly unselfish. Jesus didn't merely give up something; He sacrificed Himself _____. On the cross the _____ Lord Jesus sacrificed everything. He kept silent and did nothing while men slandered Him, falsely accused Him, condemned Him, scourged Him, mocked Him, and crucified Him. **Read what 1 Peter 2:22-24 says.**

Jesus bore the punishment and death for our _____, and it's the punishment that we should have borne. He bore it personally in his own _____. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). His suffering was _____ and _____. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew _____ sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Everything that Jesus did, He did out of an undeniable and pure _____ for us. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to know that he would _____ scourging and crucifixion? According to Matthew 26:38, Jesus was greatly troubled and sorrowful, even to the point of death. Luke 22:44 says, "And being in agony He _____ more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

They didn't simply bind Jesus; they _____ His hands and feet to a rugged cross and suspended Him in the most agonizing position. As they crucified Him, He prayed that the Father would _____ them. They mocked Him, insulted Him, and did their very _____ to Him. Through all of His suffering, Jesus remained _____; He uttered no threats. He didn't even revile them in return. He didn't call for the twelve legions of angels to wipe them out. No! The Lord's stubborn love lasted for _____ long hours on the cross. No matter how ugly men were to Jesus, Jesus' steadfast love held Him to the cross. He loved us to the end!

First Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good, and it's pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires _____ people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his _____ as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that _____ should perish, but that _____ should reach repentance." God doesn't want anybody to be lost, but our heavenly Father grants us the _____ to choose Him or to choose sin. You can't make someone love you by _____. God wants us to know Him, and to know the truth, and to love Him freely for Who He is. This means we must be free to _____ Him or _____ Him. God loves everyone, but His blessing and grace are _____ for those who choose to love Him. We must freely and lovingly choose to _____ in Him, to _____ of our sins, and to _____ Him.

Occasionally people speak of God's "unconditional love." Yes, I know Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 that God "makes his _____ rise on the evil and on the good, and sends _____ on the just and on the unjust." God is certainly _____ to all! Jesus didn't bear the cross for us because we were so good and deserved it. No, Jesus died for us because we were sinful and _____ saving. In that sense, He unconditionally took the initiative' but we cannot for that reason assume that to remain in God's love we can do whatever we _____. We can't assume God's love for us will _____ to bless us if we turn from Him.

The Lord's steadfast love, His covenant love of promise, has _____. **Read what the Lord Jesus said in John 14:23-24.** God promises His love and He promises His abiding presence to those who love Him and _____ His words. A person who doesn't love God won't _____ about keeping God's words.

It's a fantasy to think that we can sin all we wish and still count on the _____ of God. It's fantasy to think that we can _____ against God and still be right with Him. It's fantasy to think that we can remake God in our own image and still _____ Him. It's fantasy to think that we can rewrite His commandments, ignore His holiness, corrupt His character, and forget His justice but still _____ on His love.

Read what Hebrews 10:26-31 says. Oh friend, we must never take the love and grace of God for _____. It's too _____ to squander.

You might be thinking at this point, "Phil don't you remember that the Bible says, 'God is _____.'" Yes, I know 1 John 4:8. But picking a passage out of the Bible and ignoring other verses that are just as inspired isn't accurately _____ the Word of God. We shouldn't understand 1 John 4:8, "God is love," without also consulting 1 John 1:5-7. **Read 1 John 1:5-7.**

As J. I. Packer said in his book, *Knowing God*, "the God who is love is first and foremost _____, and sentimental ideas of his love as an indulgent, benevolent _____, divorced from moral standards and concerns, must therefore be ruled out from the start. God's love is _____ love. The God whom Jesus made known is not a God who is indifferent to _____ distinctions, but a God who loves righteously and righteousness and He _____ iniquity, a God whose ideal for his children is that they should 'be perfect. . . as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). He will not take into his _____ any person, however orthodox in mind, who will not follow after holiness of life."

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the _____ without which no one will see the Lord." Some might wonder if God loves us, why would He _____ on our living holy lives? Some think that if God loved us, He wouldn't _____ that we live by all those rules. But let's stop here and think. Is God trivial? Are His laws petty? No! God insists His people live holy lives so as to _____ us and give us peace. We should consider the righteous way of life that Jesus commands as a precious _____, not as a burden or something petty or trivial. God isn't being _____ when He asks us to treat others kindly or to refrain from evil. Everyone _____ when we live good lives. God's goodness is one of the ways that He shows His love.

When we sin against God by breaking His commandments, He _____ us with love. Godly discipline is not abuse; it's _____ given for our good. Proverbs 3:11-12 says, "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he _____, as a father the son in whom he delights." The book of Hebrews explains in Hebrews 12 verses 10 and 11 that God "disciplines us for our _____, that we may _____ his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems _____ rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been _____ by it." God disciplines our sins that we may _____ in His holiness and _____ with Him. He acts for the long-term good, not simply for the _____.

Our society _____ discipline, thinking love leaves people alone to do anything they want. They believe that _____ against any behavior is mean-spirited and judgmental. But God speaks against sin out of love, not meanness. Remaining _____ about sinful behaviors that ruin lives is far more cruel than simply _____ someone. God speaks out against sin because He _____, and He wants to _____ us.

Why is this important? Because the Lord created you for _____ than what takes place in this life. God loves you and is interested in your life here on _____ and in the hereafter. He wants you to live with Him forever in _____. Along with Paul, we pray “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through _____; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses _____, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

The Lord Jesus touched _____ throughout His ministry. He healed the sick, the lepers, the blind, and the deaf. He raised the dead, walked on water, stilled the storm, and fed the multitudes. When men did their worst to Him, He _____, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” Peter described Jesus in Acts 10:38 as One who “went about doing _____ and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” The Lord Jesus is _____ doing good in the lives of men and women. He leads them out of _____ to sin to become _____ of God. He leads them out of _____ into hope, out of _____ into faith, and out of _____ into love.

We need the love of God in our _____ every day! The more we grasp how much He loves us, the more we’ll determine to _____ that same kind of lasting, committed love. Knowing the love of God will _____ better fathers and husbands, better mothers and wives, better citizens, better children, and better friends. God’s love _____ us patience and kindness, compassion and forgiveness, and forbearance and loyalty. Love _____ us to be holy and faithful. It teaches us how to love the _____ and to live with integrity and virtue. We need God’s love to become _____ people.

The love of God should make you want to become a better Christian. When you become a Christian by placing your trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, when you are turning away from sin, when you’re confessing Christ before others, and when you’re baptized into Christ, you become a Christian. When you’re baptized, the Lord washes away your sins; He adds you to His family, the church. And nothing you will do today is more important than becoming a Christian, and professing Your love for God. Won’t you become one today?

Get involved with a church of Christ in your area. They’re the reason that we don’t ask for money. If you’re looking for a church home, a Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ love and they want guests to come and worship with them and if you go and worship there, you’ll be glad that you did.

Our Love for God

God loves us greatly, but have you considered that God wants _____ to love Him greatly? When you love God, you'll also love His _____ found exclusively in the Bible. The Bible tells the _____ of the amazing love and grace of God, how God has watched over us all through the years. It's more than a simple love letter; it reveals His _____ love towards us and what He expects from us. The Bible teaches us _____ to love God.

Love begins with a decision, but _____ love for God cannot remain with simply a decision. It must grow until it becomes the _____ priority. Love starts in the _____ but shows in the _____. True love will not stay _____; it'll prove itself by the way that it behaves. Love must _____. Romans 5:8 says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were _____ sinners, Christ died for us." God demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to the _____. The Lord Jesus sacrificed His life on His own initiative when we didn't ask for it, didn't deserve it, and didn't quite understand it. That's true love.

The word "love" is often _____. For instance, people say that they love something when what they really _____ is that they like or enjoy it. They may enjoy it greatly, but it certainly isn't the _____ of their lives. Loving God can never be on the same _____ as loving ice cream. Many say they love God when truthfully they only _____ Him. They've never taken God seriously enough to make a lifelong, _____ commitment to Him. They never let God make a difference in their moral or spiritual _____. They love the _____ of the grace and forgiveness of God as long as God doesn't mess with their lives. They love Him but want to do as they themselves _____.

Our reading today comes from Mark 12:28-31. That's from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I asked you if you loved God, how would you _____? Many people would quickly answer yes, but how does your love for God _____ itself in your life? It's easy to _____ that you love God. The Lord, however, defines love in ways that may _____ from the common understanding of love. We use and misuse the word "love" so frequently that it's hard to define _____ love. Today let's explore how love for God demonstrates itself.

First, I would ask you, do you _____ God? Love begins with _____. Genuine love for God pays attention to the love that _____ has shown. Have you considered all of your blessings that come from God's hand and are you _____ thankful? Love and thanksgiving intertwine; you can't have one without the other. The person who counts his blessings grows to appreciate and to love, and the person who loves won't fail to _____ the kindness and goodness of the Lord.

I've always loved the words of Jeremiah that are found in the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah wrote this book at the time when his _____ was falling apart. He saw the love of God in _____ times and in the _____ of times. The Babylonians had once again invaded Jerusalem

in 587 BC; and they tore down the _____ and destroyed the city. Yet Jeremiah could say in Lamentations 3:22-24, “‘The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will _____ in him.’”

Jeremiah never gave up on God. True love never _____. We live in a society ready to _____ on anyone they don’t like for any reason. Many keep a remote in their hands, ready to change channels the moment they hear something that doesn’t _____ them. Some feel God is only _____ of our love as long as He does what we want or what we agree with. Instead of _____ God, many feel God ought to obey us. They judge the God who created them, forgetting that He’s the _____ of every blessing they have. The air they breathe, the water they drink, the food that they eat come from His hand. They selfishly _____ appreciating and acknowledging the God who made them and sustains their lives.

Many _____ God if anything in their lives turns sour. They even blame God for the heartaches that they _____ for themselves. We should never suppose God has forgotten us or has stopped loving us because times are _____. **Read what Paul said in Romans 8:31-32 when the Roman Christians were going through some rough times.** When times are tough, instead of forsaking God, let’s _____ to Him.

Second, do you _____ God? Are you interested in Him? Do you _____ to draw close to Him? When people love each other, they want to spend _____ together. The Lord wants to spend time with you, and He wants you to spend time with Him. Can you imagine loving someone but _____ communicating with that person? When you consider the time that you spend with God, how loved do you think God _____? We hear God’s heart and message by a close _____ of the Word, and we share our hearts with God when we _____. Our relationship with God deepens as we _____ Him. Love involves _____ and communication. Do you read your Bible, pray, and worship God _____?

How long has it been since you _____ the Bible at length? The Lord Jesus said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by _____ that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We need every word that God says. It nourishes our _____; it keeps us going in the right direction; it builds us up; and it gives us hope. Oh, I tell you if there was ever a time, we need the Bible.

Let me ask you, when was the last time you spent just a half-hour in _____? When was the last time that you worshiped at _____? Many of you attend church, I know; but do you _____ worship there? Is your worship focused; is it sincere and true. **Read what the Lord Jesus said in John 4:23-24.** I fear many folks go to church, have a good time as a spectator, visit friends, but may _____ to worship God. Loving God means focusing on what He has done for us and on what He _____ us.

God hears our worship and looks into our _____. God complained through Malachi, the prophet, that the Jews were making _____ that were polluted. They substituted animals that were blind, and sick, and lame, and blemished for the _____ ones. Worship was no longer

_____. **Read what they were saying in Malachi 1:8.** Today, in place of worship, many _____ entertainment or meaningless rituals.

Some think that God ought to be _____ with whatever we offer Him, but is He? Loving God means paying enough attention to Him so as to do what _____ Him. Don't you want God to pay _____ to your requests? Why should you think that God is willing to _____ whatever we offer?

We need hearts that _____ for God. The sons of Korah wrote, "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). They longed to worship God, to be _____ to Him. David too had that kind of _____ for God. David said, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1). We love God by _____ Him and drawing close to Him. We should love Him so much that we can't spend not even one day without Him.

Drawing close to God means that we _____ righteously. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be _____" (Matthew 5:6). Hungering and thirsting is common for food, but do you hunger—I mean, really hunger—for righteousness? If you truly love God, you will long to be _____ with Him. No one wants to be in _____ with the person that they love. Loving God also means loving what He loves. He loves what's good and right, but God despises what is hurtful and wrong. God despises sin because He loves you and knows how sin will _____ you. Loving God means loving righteousness.

In Matthew 6:33, the Lord said, "But seek _____ the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Many want God but don't understand that having God necessitates being "right" with God. You can't have the grace and favor of God and then just _____ in sin. Romans 6:1-2 asks, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that _____ may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

Third, are you _____ to God? True love involves commitment. Many want the joy of love but without any strings attached. That isn't love—it's selfishness. Love without commitment is fickle and can't be _____. We live in a society that's _____ of committed love. Millions of couples live together without the commitment of _____. They want the better but not the worse, the richer but not the poorer, the health but not the sickness. Love without commitment is a _____. Without a commitment, lasting love isn't possible.

People talk much about placing _____ in God, and so we should. God is utterly trustworthy. But trusting God means you're _____ to put yourself into His hands. May I ask you, "Can God trust you? Are you trustworthy? Can God trust you to love Him for a lifetime? If you want God to be committed to you, are you _____ to be committed to Him?" Someone says, "Well I don't like to be tied down." The Lord Jesus wasn't tied down; He was _____ down. He didn't merely _____ about love and commitment; He demonstrated it.

Loving God fully and wholeheartedly means putting Him _____, before anything or anyone. **Read what He said in Luke 14:26-27.** The word “hate” here does not mean to despise but means to _____. If you compare your love for Jesus to your family or even yourself, you will love Jesus more.

Commitment to the Lord means staying away from _____. **Read Romans 12:2.**

Love also means _____ myself to what is good. James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” Pure religion means helping those who are in _____. We show our love for God by loving and helping people.

Committed love means _____ to the Lord and _____ His commandments. The Lord Jesus simply said, “If you love me, you will _____ my commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus wasn’t putting a _____ on us that He didn’t bear Himself. The Lord said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. And if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15: 9-10). Love listens; love pays attention; and love submits to the _____ of the One that we love.

Read 1 John 2:3-6. My friend, you can’t _____ obedience from the love for God. Love means living the way Jesus lived, caring for others as He cared, forgiving as He forgave, and doing what is right just as He did.

Why are we asking and talking about all this? Because God wants us to love Him the _____ that He loves us. God has loved us with a great love and He _____ us to love Him with a great love. When we consider His grace and forgiveness, His daily blessings, His guidance in the Word, and the eternal home that He has prepared for us in heaven, how could we _____ but love God with all of our hearts, and all of our souls, and all of our minds, and all of our strength?

Love _____ makes a commitment. You can say “I love God” when you’re _____ to make a lifelong, serious commitment to Him. Loving God requires _____ than words. God doesn’t want fair-weather friends or nominal followers. He wants people who _____ love Him fully, freely, and faithfully. He wants people who will _____ for His cause, who won’t give up when things get tough. He wants people who will follow His _____, love His _____, and not compromise the faith.

Will you decide today to be His _____, to deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow Him? If you want His love and grace to _____ you, commit yourself to Him. We become Christians by putting our _____ in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Our faith isn’t private; we must _____ it before others. With our faith, we must _____ from sin to righteousness, from error to truth, and from evil to good. Repentance means _____ from sin to the Lord and His will.

Our faith, and love, and repentance will lead us to _____ the Lord in baptism. Baptism is biblical; it’s how God _____ us with Christ and saves us. **Read Romans 6:4-7.** Oh, let God free you from sin, be baptized!

Loving Others Colossians 3:12-15

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

The highest _____ of life is to love God and to love others. How well are you fulfilling that calling? God's way brings _____ and _____. It leads people to _____ each other fairly and kindly. God's way is humble and compassionate. It's never selfish, never callous, and never hateful. God's way _____ up rather than puffs up; it _____ with hope and comfort rather than manipulate with doubt and fear. The more you know about God, the more you'll love Him and His _____. The more you follow His ways, the more _____ you will see. Don't push God out of your life or let others _____ you away from Him. Love Him, serve Him, and lead others to love Him, too.

The Christian _____ can be summed up in two commandments of Jesus found in Mark 12:30-31, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your _____, with all your _____, with all your _____ and with all your _____. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment _____ than these." In fact, every commandment in Scripture is really an explanation of how to love God and how to love people. You simply can't follow the Lord _____ loving Him and loving others.

The Lord Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, gave us what some call the _____ rule. The Lord said, "In everything, therefore, treat people the _____ you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Righteous people, who love the Lord, ask the question, "How do _____ want to be treated?" They treat others the way that they would like to be treated. If everyone followed this _____, wouldn't our society be a better place?

Our reading today comes from Paul's Epistle to the Colossians 3:12-15.

Love is our highest calling. Nothing is more _____ than loving God and loving other people. **Read what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.** Without love we can't fulfill our _____ in life; we become empty; and we gain nothing. If love is that important, then we ought to _____ what love is and how it behaves. Let me make these suggestions:

First, love warms a cold _____. The opposite of love is not _____ but apathy or indifference. A cold heart can _____ on by and never get involved. Negative and hurtful experiences can _____ the heart, can depress the spirit, and can drive away compassion. Love warms your heart, makes you _____, and causes you to feel and to act.

Selfishness and apathy lead people to sit by and do nothing, while others _____. **Read 1 John 3:16-18.** Love starts in the heart, but it doesn't end there. Love doesn't merely _____ about doing something. Love _____!

Many people today live _____, isolated lives. One-fourth of all the households in America have only _____ person in them. Researchers say that 40 percent of people relate _____ with others over a cell phone or a computer than they do in _____ life. Many family gatherings have little conversation and lots of _____. I visited a home recently and the first thing the host did was ban all use of smart phones. He wanted us to talk. I recently read that the number of people who have no one to _____ important matters with has tripled in the last twenty years. Loneliness can _____ to depression and illness. We need each other; we need to love and to be loved. It's essential to life.

Second, love _____ its will and itself for another's best interest. Love is never self-seeking or self-serving. First Corinthians 13:5 says love "does not _____ its own." Another version says "it doesn't insist on its own way." Love puts itself _____ and others _____. Love seeks to _____ more than it seeks to win. Love tries to understand by seeing things through another's _____. **Read what God urges us in Philippians 2:3-4.**

Many years ago, Francis of Assisi prayed a prayer worth remembering; he said, "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life."

Third, when _____ and _____ arise, love seeks reconciliation. The Bible says, "If possible, so far as it _____ on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). God has always wanted His people to have a compassionate and understanding _____. Philippians 4:5 says, "Let your _____ spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." We need a gentle spirit, one that is sweet and reasonable rather than one that stays _____ and grows _____.

Sometimes that means humbly and sincerely apologizing to those whom you have _____. **Read what the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 5:23-24.** If you know you've offended someone, don't _____ until that person confronts you; go to him or her and get it straightened out.

Sometimes others _____ us. Love moves us to want to remain _____ and to forgive; so it's willing to go privately and humbly to the other to work things out. The Lord Jesus said, "If your brother sins (some versions say, sins against you), you go and show him his fault in _____; and if he listens to you, you have won your brother" (Matthew 18:15). Our world would be a much _____ place if two people at odds with each other would follow this teaching. Instead of trying to _____ an issue, many grumble and gossip. Proverbs 16:28 says, "A perverse man _____ strife, And a slanderer _____ intimate

friends.” Others seek _____ to get even. Instead of making the problem worse, love _____ to get along for reconciliation. Love values talking _____ someone rather than talking _____ someone. Gossip is still gossip no matter who’s doing it or who’s hearing it.

We can solve many problems by simply _____ some questions. People often assume the worst about others and accuse them of wrongdoing before they know the _____. Proverbs 18:17 says, “The first to plead his case seems _____, until another comes and examines him.” We may get hurt or angry when we hear _____ of the story but don’t know all the facts. Sometimes hearing the rest of the story can _____ us to understand what really happened and why. A few more facts can _____ our thinking entirely.

Read the story about the husband pushing his wife as a car was approaching.

Fourth, love knows how to _____. **Read what the Bible says in Ephesians 4:31-32.** Knowing that God had enough love to forgive us of our many, many sins, we should be _____ to forgive others of their few sins. God’s Word simply says, “love _____ a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Love _____ to put offenses behind us and to go on. First Corinthians 13:7-8 says, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” Love never quits.

Whether you can forgive another is not some small matter; it actually affects your _____. God _____ you to forgive, if you wish to be forgiven. **Read what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:14-15.** People who want to experience the _____ of God have obligations to show _____ to others. James 2:13 says, “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” If we wish to be forgiven, we must _____ to forgive.

When God forgives us, He no _____ holds our sins and trespasses against us. Sometimes we _____ forgiving with forgetting. You can forgive a sin, even if you can’t _____ it. Forgiveness is not forgetting; it’s forgetting against. Second Corinthians 5:19 says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses _____ them.” Our sins are a matter of _____. God’s grace touches our hearts because He _____ with our sins rather than because He ignored or denied them. Because Jesus suffered for our sins, God doesn’t _____ them against us. The fact is that our sins have not disappeared; the _____ for our sins has. God has forgiven us.

Fifth, love will tell you what you _____ to hear, not what you _____ to hear. God’s Word says, “Faithful are the wounds of a _____, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6). Honesty, even when it _____, from a true friend is far more loving than half-truths and flattery from someone who means to do you harm. The devil will tell you what you want to hear, whether it’s true or not; but the Lord will tell you what you need to hear to _____ your life, even if it hurts your feelings for a short time.

The very best thing you can do for a friend is to _____ him or her to Jesus Christ and the gospel. The gospel is good news of salvation and _____. People _____ the gospel story of Jesus Christ. They need to know that He died on the cross for their sins; He was buried; and He rose again on the third day. They need to know about His loving grace and His call for them to _____ and _____.

Sixth, loving others means _____ others. First Peter 4:10 says, “As each has received a gift, use it to _____ one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” Whatever talent we possess we should use it to bless the _____ of others. Galatians 6:10 says, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do _____ to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Read the story about the two brothers.

Why have we spent this time talking about love? Without love in the heart, we are just _____ beings. Without love, our lives are _____ with loneliness and sadness. Without love, we’ve failed our _____ in life; we have no value, and we make no gains. Oh, we need the love of Jesus in our hearts and in our lives so that we may love others.

God’s Holy Word teaches us how to _____ one another. The Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another. And by this all men will know that you are My _____, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). The Lord wants us to love each other the _____ that He loves us. How has He loved us? Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his _____ for his friends” (John 15:13). The Lord Jesus loved us with a great love; He died for us.

When we love one another the way Jesus loved us, people _____ Christ living in us. Loving others like Jesus did _____ us as Christians. It’s not the only mark of a Christian, but it’s a necessary one. Let me ask you, are you _____ to others? Do you _____ others or hold grudges? Are you compassionate or do you have a closed heart? Do you _____ peace or do you get even? Do you have a sweet spirit of reasonableness or are you constantly grumbling? Do you try to _____ conflicts or do you gossip and slander others? Do you love like Jesus?

When the love of Jesus is in your heart, you’ll make a _____ in your life. I hope that you love the Lord enough to _____ Him. To become a Christian you must _____ that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and be willing to _____ Him in the presence of others. You must cease doing evil and follow Christ in _____. You must be _____ into Christ, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Oh, I pray that you’ll become a Christian today.