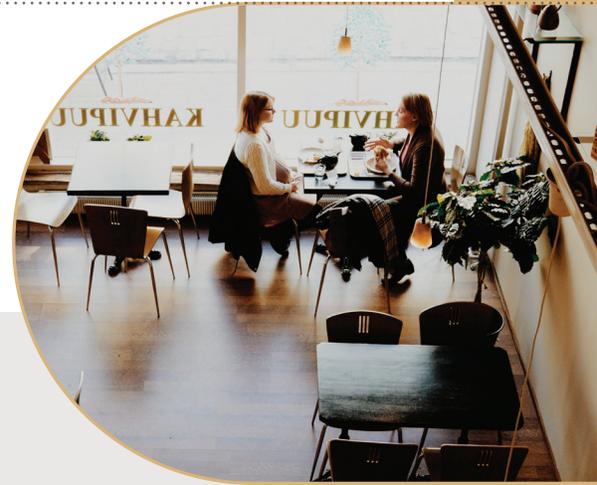




## Love

*noun*

*strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties; from Latin lubēre or libēre to please, from Greek phileo brotherly affection toward someone, and Greek agape deep love, benevolence, good will for another*



Welcome back ladies. Let's take a bit of time talking about how we were able to rise up to the challenge from last week...

### QUESTION:

- How did you share your authentic self in conversations this past week?

We hope that, while it might have felt like a risk, the reward of letting people get to know the real you was worth it! This week we'll spend time getting to know the love of Christ.

The word "know" in our culture often carries with it the meaning that we know or understand something in our minds. However in the Old Testament, the word "know" is translated from the Hebrew "yada" (yaw-dah), which refers to more than an intellectual awareness of understanding. Knowing in the Jewish context implied an intimate connection between people.

So sisters, let's allow our hearts to be open today to knowing, in an intimate way, the love of Christ. Then we'll recognize how we are called to love others too. Here's where we'll begin, at Jesus' final dinner gathering with His disciples.



### READ: John 13:1

### QUESTIONS:

- How long does Jesus say He'll love those with whom He has shared His earthly life?
- What does that make you think of Christ's love for you?

Jesus is in it for the long-haul. Among His earthly companions there were men who at one time rejected Jesus. There was another who betrayed Him. In reality, we are those people at one time or another. And so are the women beside you. We mess up. We hurt God and we hurt each other. Yet God sticks it out. He is not about to unlove those He was committed to love.

The word "love" carries a whole lot of different meanings. For some of us it might bring to mind those warm fuzzy feelings of love at first sight. Or it might make us think about our favourite activity, and how we feel when we are participating. Perhaps it's the love of a cherished place or memory.

But Jesus has a different love in mind when He shared His life with humanity.

Let's continue to read about Jesus' final dinner with His disciples.



## READ John 15:12-13.

### QUESTIONS:

- How does Jesus describe love in this passage?
- How is this kind of love different from the forms of love our culture promote?

Jesus tells us that the greatest love is one that surrenders self. The New Testament is written in Greek. In this passage, the word translated into the English love is the Greek word “agape” (ah-gah-pay). This is a “deliberate and unconditional love that is the result of choices and behaviors rather than feelings and emotions.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is telling us how we are to love each other. But He’s also stating the way He loves all of us...me and you. Jesus loves you to the point of surrendering Himself to death in order to save you and bring you into intimate closeness with God.

### QUESTIONS:

The passage John 3:16 tells us that “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.” (NRSV)

- Do you find it easier to accept that Jesus loves the whole world or that He loves you personally? Why?
- What does God’s sacrificial love tell you about your value?



## READ: John 15:9-10

### QUESTIONS:

- Where does Jesus say His ability to love comes from?
- How does this affirm Christ's love for you?
- How does this change your ability to love others?

The only way to love ourselves and others is to love like Jesus did: Receiving it from the Father. Then being able to love unconditionally, and to the end. This is a committed love. This is the love that anchors you. This is the love from which your identity exists. This is a love that cherishes you on the good days and on the bad ones. This is the love that calls forward our best to love each other. As Jesus did.

If we know that we are loved, and believe that it is everlasting love, that ought to make it possible to love others. There’s no fear that being rejected will change how much I’m loved by the Father.

There’s no fear that if we succeed or if we fail it will change the affection the Father has for us.





## QUESTIONS:

- What is one way you can love someone deemed unlovable in your daily interactions? A crusty co-worker? A smart-mouthed student? An angry person in the store line with you?
- Are you willing to give it a try, by asking God to give you His love for that person?
- How would being pushed away by this person make you feel?

Sometimes loving ourselves, and loving others is based on our poorly formed perception that we may not be lovable or that others must prove themselves worthy of our love. We may not trust that God is capable of loving us beyond our misguided self-perceptions.

Henri Nouwen takes this matter of identity and puts it squarely on our shoulders to explore where our identity is rooted:

*“Your true identity is as a child of God. This is the identity you have to accept. Once you have claimed it and settled it, you can then live in a world that gives you much joy as well as pain. You can receive praise as well as the blame that comes to you as an opportunity for strengthening your basic identity, because the identity that makes you free is anchored beyond all human praise and blame.”<sup>3</sup>*

Next week we’ll spend time exploring the TRUTH of what Jesus says about us and our identity.

Let’s close with our prayer today, that we will know the love of Christ, allow it to shape our identity and how we go and love others.

## PRAYER: by Elle Pyke

God, what manner of praise could we offer, for the identity you have given us?

In moments of mystery or mountain tops, your love sustains.

Let us hear your heaven-song, remind us of our rightful home.

Give us the courage to be still Lord.

Still enough to hear the quiet of our souls.

So that we might hear you speaking softly, telling us again that we are loved.

May we walk in our identities, as daughters of the King, with boldness.

In your name, we pray,

Amen.



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1 [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love)

2 [www.christianitytoday.com/moi/2013/001/january/meaning-of-agape](http://www.christianitytoday.com/moi/2013/001/january/meaning-of-agape)

3 Nouwen, Henri. *Life of the Beloved*. The Crossroad Publishing Company; 10 Anv edition (2002).