



Vision studies – week 7

Growing in Love

w/c 23 February 2020

"You are the only Bible some unbelievers will ever read." (John MacArthur)

When we read of love in the New Testament, it is usually a translation of the Greek *agape*. The Greeks had further words for love in other contexts – parental, marital, friendship – that need not concern us here.

While unusual in classical Greek, *agape* was used very widely in the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was in common use around Jesus' time. According to the Bible Dictionary, it originally expressed "...the highest and noblest form of love which sees something infinitely precious in its object". In New Testament usage it was used to encapsulate God's love as shown through the whole of our redemption as for example in verse 10 of our second reading.

The nineteenth-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote that, *"To love someone means to see them as God intended them."* Reflect on how taking this seriously might affect the way we live our lives.

Read 1 Peter 4:7–11

Peter writes of the need to *"love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins"*. What kind of community does that speak of?

Why is it so important that we (only) use our gifts *"to serve others"* (verse 10)? Can you think of times when people within churches you have known have used gifts to other purposes?

Read 1 John 4:7-19

In writing on verse 12, John Stott noted that: *"God who is love still loves, and today his love is seen in our love"*. How might such a thought affect the way you act towards others in your everyday encounters?

This verse also talks about God living in us. How could you express that concept to people you know outside the church community?

In *Surprised by Hope*, Tom Wright, in considering 1 Corinthians 13, observes that *"...love is not our duty; it is our destiny"*. In this letter, John clearly feels he has to remind his audience of the need to love each other. How far does love come naturally to Christians or is it still a learned activity?

Both passages talk of love within the church – *"each other"*, *"brother and sister"* etc. How do we extend this to the love we are to have for non-believers around us? Think perhaps of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

This week sees the start of Lent; how might you use this time to think through your response to the love shown by Jesus in the events of Good Friday and Easter?

"What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like." (Augustine of Hippo)