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Introduction to the Love Course

The Love Course is a discipleship tool developed to encourage people to live and love like Jesus. Ideal for small groups, discipleship groups, or Sunday School, the five-part series includes chapter-by-chapter devotional questions and FREE MP3 files of each lesson. Download the lecture series from seeJesus.net.

Suggested Steps for Each Small Group Session

Before meeting together:

1. Listen to the FREE MP3 file available for download on seeJesus.net, following along in your notebook.
2. Do the six-day devotional, along with any additional reading.

While meeting together:

1. Discuss the Love Course lesson with your small group or disciple.
2. Discuss the answers to the devotional questions.
3. Have group prayer time for one aspect of Christ-likeness.
4. Hand in devotional to the group leader for comments (optional).

Elements of the Course. This manual and the mp3 files that accompany it constitute only the framework of the Love Course. The heart of it is the one-on-one work in counseling, the small group times, large group discussions of the lecture, and the interaction and feedback on the Love Course. We welcome any comments on how we can improve the delivery of the course, its content, or its structure.

Illustrations. Some Figures have been relabeled and reorganized for ease of use. The mp3 files refer to Figures in an older version of this course. Where there is a discrepancy, refer to this book as your guide to locate Figures, rather than the mp3 files. Also, some names and events used in these notes and lectures have been altered for privacy.

Note: The pronoun “he” is used generically throughout the text because it is awkward to do otherwise.

Acknowledgments. I am thankful to Roy Shirley, counselor and co-director of Cornerstone Center for Change. Roy gave gentle feedback on structure, content, and group dynamics. He led the groups in our pilot courses as we sought constantly to make the material of the course practical. I am also very thankful to Dave Powlison of CCEF for his thoughtful interaction and review of the material. Dr. Clair Davis, Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary, was a great encouragement to me in the development of the course.



Summary of the Love Course Units

Part 1. Entering the Compassion of Jesus.

Jesus' compassion is the very center of his being, the principle way that he relates to people. Jesus shows compassion by incarnating, by stepping into other people's shoes. It is an entirely different way of approaching people—one that moves away from judging and begins by looking. This whole movement towards people is inseparable from being in step with the Spirit.

Part 2. Entering the Honesty of Jesus.

Jesus' compassion is balanced by his honesty. His other-centered honesty is stunning. Jesus is completely free from other people's opinions so he is free to speak truth into their lives. Compassion without honesty leads to co-dependency. Honesty without compassion leads to harshness.

This
Unit



Part 3. Entering the Oneness of Jesus.

The goal of love is oneness. Love isn't just a series of actions, but it is a whole movement towards another person where you become one with them. The heart of this movement is a death for that other person. Death is at the center of love. The result, as in Jesus' life, is either resurrection joy or the sadness of death. Knowing the limits of oneness prepares you for sadness. The result of a dying love is deeper intimacy with the Father.

Part 4. Entering the Dependence of Jesus.

Jesus' dependence on his heavenly Father is at the foundation of all his love, shaping his compassion and his honesty. His surrender to his Father frees him not to be bound by other people. He is free to say no to people some times, and then at other times be overwhelmed by other people's needs. This is the subtlest, most difficult aspect of love to master.

Part 5. Entering the Passion of Jesus.

The Passion is one of the most neglected parts of Christianity. Its dark strains and bloody, brutal ending have not been attractive to a culture that wants feel-good stories. It is a trip into the interior of the gospel. In the Passion we discover what God is like under incredible pressure; we discover the very structures of love. As Jesus confronts an onslaught of evil he lowers himself in humility. His heart is like a gigantic sponge absorbing evil. With his life under a microscope we can see Jesus love in the face of evil. He is the champion of love as he confronts, rebukes, encourages, grieves, waits, endures, and cares. Jesus is anything but passive. He is constantly moving towards people. The early church was so shocked by Jesus' love in the Passion that martyrdom became the "prize" of the early church. Everyone wanted to die like Jesus died. He set a new gold standard for love.



Chapter I - Oneness

I. Oneness: The Goal of Love

- A. Illustration of touching: Counselor to me: “Do you touch?” Me: “Of Course.”
- B. Love is more than a series of individual actions. It is a whole movement towards another person where our souls become one. It is a movement that leads to a mystery, a new creation, you and me become something else, one.
- C. Nothing harder in this universe to reach, nothing more fragile, nothing easier to lose than intimacy—but it is the stuff of pure joy.
- D. Usually we think about oneness only in relation to marriage. But when you think of close relationships in the Bible (David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Abraham and God, David and God, Jesus and John, Paul and Timothy), none of these people are married. The models of oneness from Scripture are far broader than simply marriage.
- E. Oneness is something we work towards, it is not something we create. It is the fruit of love expressed in compassion, honesty and communion. Refer to Figure 3.1, The Purity of Love.

II. The Father and Son’s Relationship: What Is It Like?

- A. Total knowing: “...just as the Father knows me and I know the Father...” (John 10:15)
= Total knowing of the other person. I understand you completely. You hide nothing from me.
- B. Complete oneness: “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does” (John 5:20)
= Complete and total openness between the Father and the Son. You understand me completely. I hide nothing from you.
- C. A total giving of one to the other: “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine” (John 17:10) = Complete and total giving from the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father.
- D. The finished oneness relationship looks like: “. . . you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21) = The incarnation.
- E. The Father talks of his love for Jesus. Two of the three times the Father speaks audibly about Jesus, the Father describes his love for him. Imagine having a father who couldn’t speak of his son or daughter without in the same breath speaking of his love for them.
 - 1. His baptism: “You are my Son, whom I love” (Luke 3:22).
 - 2. His transfiguration: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 17:5)
- F. Jesus sums up his relationship with the Father: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30, NASB). These references together give us a definition for oneness.

Oneness: A state of pure and constant compassion between two or more people where there is a complete absence of demand. Incarnation is so total, your needs are so totally mine that I can say, "I am in you." My needs are so totally yours that you can say, "I am in you." There are absolutely no secrets. Each heart touches the other completely. There is no ownership. Each gives to the other all it owns. Anything that mars this harmony is brought out into the open and lovingly dealt with.

III. Oneness: The Key to Unlocking the Mystery of the Universe

A. Jesus discloses his heart at the end of his ministry. The end of his last week in ministry, the end of his last day, in the last hours, Jesus opens his heart to his disciples and shares with them the very secrets of the universe: John 13-17. It is also the end of the first half of his story. Final words in John 17. Jesus' thoughts turn back to pre-time/space.

B. Father's love for Jesus in pre-time/space (see Figure 1.1).

1. "...glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5).
2. "because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24).
3. "...have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23).
4. What was in existence before the world was created? The Father, the Son, the Spirit and the love and glory between them.

John 17: 20-26

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. ²⁵ "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

C. This love explodes into creation and redemption.

1. Jesus carries the Father's love to us. "...have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23).
2. "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).
3. This love is always linked to others: it always flows outward. "...in order that the love you have for me may be in them" (John 17:26).

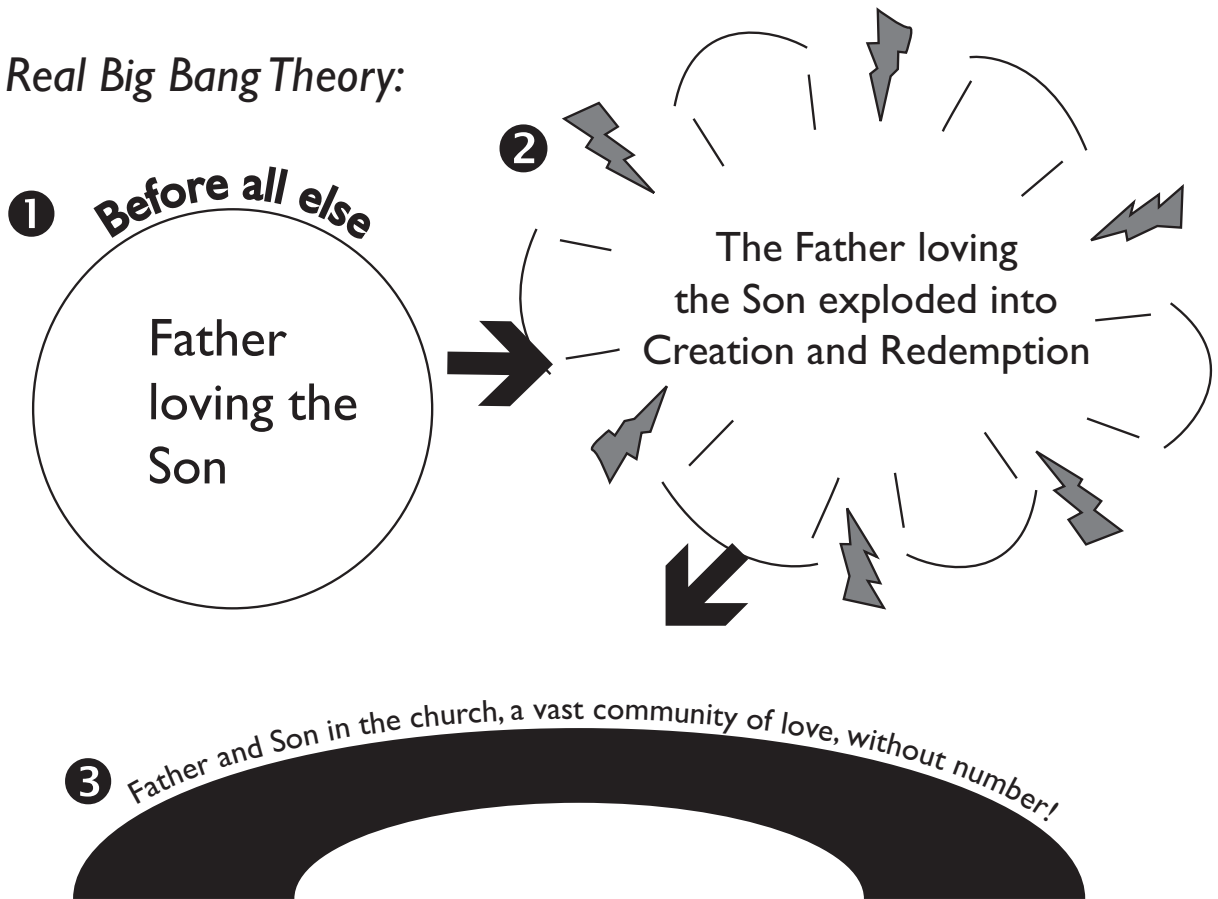
Figure 1.1, John 17

John 17:23 "...have loved them even as you have loved me."

John 17:24 "...the glory you have given me in your love for me before the creation of the world."

John 17:26 "...in order that the love you have for me may be in them..."

Real Big Bang Theory:



John 17:21 "...that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us..."

John 17:22-23 "...that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity..." (links love + oneness)

John 17:26 "...and I in them" = core of universe

D. This love moves towards heaven.

1. To be with Jesus where he is; to see his glory. “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24).
2. To live in his love: “...in order that the love you have for me may be in them” (John 17:26).

E. What is the structure of this new thing God is creating? Oneness. It is exactly like the oneness between the Father and the Son!

1. “that all of them may be one [large circle], Father, just as you are in me and I am in you [small circle of Father and Son]. May they also be in us...” (John 17:21).
2. “...that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity [into a unit] to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22-23).
 - a. Same movement is mentioned twice, once using the language of oneness and second time using the language of love.
 - b. Jesus in the church, the Father in Jesus.
3. “...in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:26).

F. How is this same love going to be in us?

1. “...have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23). The same way in which the Father loved Jesus, Jesus loves us. The same intensity.
2. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love” (John 15:9).
3. “I am the good shepherd and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15, NASB).

“It is hard to believe that God would have the same love for us as he does for Jesus. Jesus holds none of God’s love back from us. He wants us to experience it all.”

—Cindy Tate¹

G. Love: The structure at the heart of the universe

1. Pure state of love between the Father and the Son. “God is love” (1 John 4:16).
2. What must happen if God is love? If love defines God, then what will God, who is all love, do on the basis of his very character? Can that love remain only between the Father and the Son in the Spirit? No, it cannot remain alone. Love always goes beyond itself.
3. The trick: If love is going to work, other people need to be able to choose love.
4. To create the possibility of lovers, we have to be made a very special way. We can’t be machines. If people are going to love, they must have the ability to give love (the difference between a prostitute and a wife). We need to be beings who can worship, who can love. He must make us godlike so we can freely give love and freely receive love. (At the same time I affirm that God is in absolute control. No one understands this mystery.)

5. The risk: As soon as God creates the possibility of love, he opens himself up to an incredible risk: that we will reject him.
 - a. As soon as you do that, you create the possibility of evil. It's not creating evil.
 - b. When we don't choose God, that's evil. We take our ability to love and use it to become independent, and not lovers.
6. Suffering came because God allowed himself to be rejected by us.

No Safe Investment

“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. . . The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.” —C.S. Lewis²

H. Will this happen? Will the church become one?

1. Who is praying this prayer? What is Jesus' faith like? What happens to those with complete faith?
2. The Father must do what his Son wants because the Son is praying according to the will of the Father.

I. A Quick Peak into Heaven: It Images John 17 Perfectly

1. Heaven is people: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).
2. John is shown a person, the bride: “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:9-10).
3. Awesome: Heaven = the bride of the Lamb! Do you see the connection between the nature of heaven and the prayer of the Son?
4. Who gives the bride to Jesus? In answer to the prayer of his Son, the Father formed and prepared the bride for his Son and now presents her to him!
5. It's the wedding ceremony.

J. History and the Role of the Cross

1. It is not just “God created us for his own glory” and things went bad in Eden. There is a complete plan that makes sense out of suffering. Oneness provides the key to understanding how everything connects!
2. Nature of God as pure love → dictates the nature of creation. If God as a lover will have people who can choose to love him, he must create people in his image: who can give and receive love.

3. Nature of creation (men and women, created to be god-like, alone in creation in giving and receiving love) → leads to the cross.
 - a. Creation is only the framework for god-like people to choose love. When we fail, it becomes the backdrop for the cross.
 - b. Genesis 1:1 to 3:15. It only takes 71 verses to get to the display of God's love in redemption with the promise of the seed of the woman. And redemption is announced before the curse on man! God in his eagerness to love, hugs us before he disciplines us!
4. The cross: God is unbeatable, he was willing to become us. He was willing to die to prepare a vast community of love, a bride for his Son. There was no way we could cut under God's plan. Cross—we chose not to love, but because God is all love, he gave himself for us completely in sending his Son to the terrors of the cross—he risked all. The cross makes us one! (See Ephesians 2:11-12.) “He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (John 11:51-52).
5. Heaven is a vast community of pure love, without number of limitless, unending love. We go back to the original circle now in intensity and love, but it is just so much larger!

IV. Intimacy Now

- A. The heart of oneness begins with incarnation: it involves going into someone's life. For example: Jesus looking at Zacchaeus, “Zacchaeus, I'm coming to your house today” (Luke 19:5). First steps of this new creation of intimacy. Incarnation is the beginning of this movement towards intimacy.
- B. Intimacy is the goal of love.
 1. Example of a couple taking the Love Course. They would often go biking together. Husband described how this changed how they biked together. The wife was a slower biker and afraid of another bike getting too close so she would tell the husband, “You bike ahead of me.” If the husband biked next to his wife, he would keep having to keep an eye on traffic behind him. It made more sense solely from a “task” perspective to bike behind or in front of her. But the husband kept the goal of oneness in mind. “No, if it's okay with you, I'll bike next to you.” Three or four times the wife suggested he ride ahead of her over the course of the ride, but each time the husband said “no.”
 2. The goal of oneness shapes the very activities we do in love. Every need of my children is a way I can get closer to them. They don't just have homework they need help with, but that problem is a way we can be closer together.
- C. The pain of intimacy:
 1. Because we chose to be on our own, and didn't choose the dependency of love, fear and shame grip our hearts. We often feel alone. We run. We fill our life with busy things to do so we don't feel the emptiness of that aloneness. Fear raises our walls, and defines us.
 2. “I'm not sure I'm trustworthy. I'm not sure that you are.” (See Genesis 3:7)
 3. Illustration of opening one of my teenager's doors, walking in, sitting on their bed, and talking to them. Feels like I'm walking through a heavy fog with water up to my

neck. Every movement is painful.

D. You in me—opening myself up to you.
Our fears:

1. Loved ones reacting out of their own fear/shame will attack or dismiss or ignore what is precious to us.
2. You are aware of giving power to them in being vulnerable.
3. People can trash what's important to you, what is precious to you. (It's easier to maintain a parallel life, than to work towards oneness.)
4. People don't know how to love you—so you might feel unloved by almost everything they do. Be patient with someone's halting steps towards you.
5. Often harder than incarnation, because I have to share parts of my life that I have hidden. Often discovering parts of my interior world that I've kept hidden.
6. Hard to receive love: Illustration of changing the subject when someone starts sharing their love for me. It's too much. "Father, lay a foundation in my life to even receive love."
7. Risk that we will be seen as weak: Illustration of writing a thank-you note: it feels weak. I'd rather be the giver than the receiver. It's wrong.

E. I in you—incarnation that gets close to the soul

1. What's hard about love expressed through honesty:
 - a. If someone has been isolated in their soul from your honesty, they tend to create an interior world, disconnected from reality. When you mess with this interior world, it can feel like an attack on their whole personality.
 - b. I'd rather stay as "parallel partners," letting sleeping dogs lie. It feels very safe not to be intimate.
 - c. Hard to draw out from another person how you hurt him. Because of these hurts he is very reluctant to share. So you, without a hint of demand or defensiveness, need to draw out from him how he feels about you.

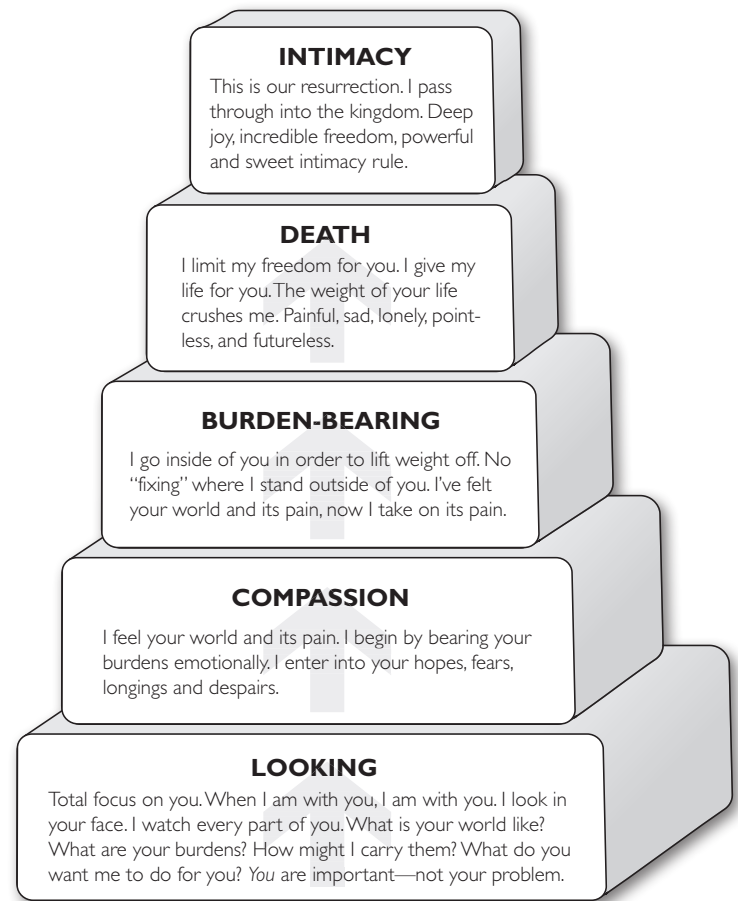


Figure 1.2, The Movement of Love

Intimacy: Nothing Less Than Incarnation

Intimacy... begins with a total movement outside of yourself through your walls and fears and beyond the walls and fears of the person you are loving. Nothing less than an incarnation. Once in their heart, you listen to them and feel all their pain and take it upon yourself. There, lost in their world, it is clear what you should do and say or not do or say. And the love goes through a death where you give up your future and life for them.

F. Closing comments on oneness:

1. Like nuclear fusion¹: The more you know him, the more you will want to demand change in him. The more I cherish, the more I will see ugliness. The more I will want to get rid of that ugliness.
2. An illustration: A wife has an idol, her children. The more her husband moves towards her, the more clearly he sees this idol. His awareness will open his eyes to how she does not love him. He will want to demand that she love him. The movement of intimacy *must drive* you to be in Christ. You need him all the more.
3. When we speak of oneness, we mean wanting someone who can understand and serve us. But oneness is simply what happens when you die for another person.
4. You cannot control oneness. You can't control how people relate to you. But you can be like your Father: you can die for the other person.

G. Simplicity of intimacy. Emily, age 6, "Daddy, will you read to me?" → "Daddy, am I important? Daddy, do you love me? Daddy, be close to me." Since I started noticing people, I caught her looking at me. Quick glances.

H. How can you be safe?

1. Jesus protects us: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:11; see also 12, 15).
2. Primary protection through his work: His gift of perfect righteousness shines a million times brighter as you begin to approach another soul.

1. Cindy Tate, seminar participant. Used by permission.

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 121.

3. Nuclear fusion: the weight of an atomic particle approaches infinity as it approaches the speed of light.

Homework



Day One

Read the lecture notes and the Bible passages mentioned. Summarize the lecture in the space below. As usual, focus on those elements that impacted you the most.



Day Two

Read John 17:20-26. Review the outline “IV. Intimacy Now/ C. The pain of intimacy.” Are there areas in your life where you feel those walls between you and other people? Remember, you might not feel them. Be specific.



Day Three

Read John 5:19-23; 10:25, 29-30; 17:10, 20-26. Describe the relationship of the Father and the Son. (This is awesome stuff!)



Day Four

Read John 17:20-26. Focus on verses 23-24, 26, and on Jesus' desire to make the love of the Father known, Figure 1.2. What are your reflections on "Oneness as the goal of the universe"? What hits you about this love for you?



Day Five

Think of a child that you know or love. What are they like on the inside? What are their hopes, fears, and dreams? What are some of the small ways they open the door of their heart to you? Are there any specific ways that you can help them "open that door" or love them better?



Day Six

Read John 17. Focusing on verses 11-15, in what relationship, in what way, do you need Jesus to protect you from evil?