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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.

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.

This
Unit



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 - The Purity of Love

I. Jesus' Surrendered Will

A. Jesus' reflections on how he relates to people in John

1. John 5:19, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."
2. John 5:30, "By myself I can do nothing..."
3. John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."
4. John 7:28, "I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know because I am from him and he sent me."
5. John 8:28, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

B. My self-will: Very subtle. Illustration of conversation with a fellow worker who had been told to do something a little humbling by a superior. My co-worker asked me, "What do you think about _____?"

1. "I don't care about that" =
2. "I'm not like that other person. See what I'm like" =
3. Demand for love. "He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing *false* about him" (John 7:18, emphasis added).
 - a. I was false in what I said to my co-worker because I didn't say what I was thinking. What I was saying was, "I'm better than that person. I wouldn't speak that way."
 - b. Larry Crabb's word for that is Demandingness (willfulness—seeking something for *me*). It twists our personalities so we begin to manipulate. I was manipulating, speaking indirectly.
 - c. I didn't say to my co-worker, "Look, I'm better than that person. I wouldn't speak that way."

C. Jesus' surrendered will: The first temptation.

1. Satan to Jesus, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matthew 4:3).
2. Always wondered about this. Why not just make a loaf of bread?
3. No man ever said no to that before. We've always done the logical thing. We've always made bread.
4. Making bread = Self-will.
5. What kind of bread was I making? I was building a relationship. I was moving close to him. We were bonding by gossiping.
6. "It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, NASB).
7. Jesus' life: Closely connected to his Father. "For I do not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his

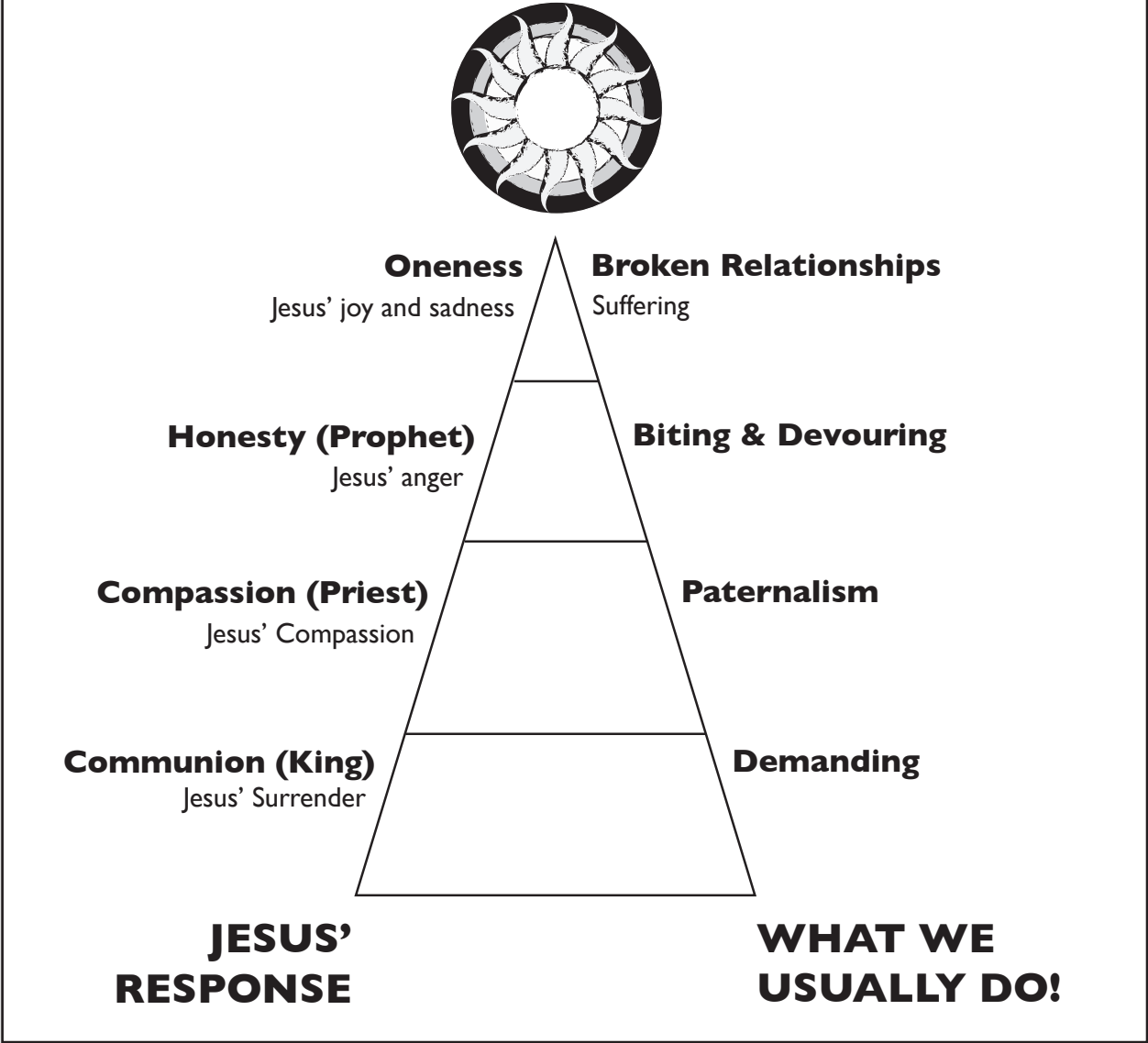
command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (John 12:49-50).

8. Jesus to Satan, “The words that my Father says are my life.”

II. The Foundation for Love

- A. Communion supports compassion and honesty. (See Figure 1.1, The Purity of Love)
 1. Subtlest, most powerful part of love.
 2. Self-will is the hardest part to see.
 3. The foundation of love because it constantly comes up and either empowers or pollutes our compassion and honesty.
- B. The foundation for honesty
 1. Illustration of someone needing an honest rebuke: What I want to say is true but...
 - a. ...am I saying this to the person just to get it off my chest?
 - b. ...will this really help the person for me to say this hard thing now? Am I really thinking about them or am I just kind of irritated with life and they happen to be the target?
 - c. ...or, by not saying it, am I trying to protect myself from the anger of their response?
 2. Communion: As I examine my motives and seek to eliminate the *me*, I’m driven into God! I must begin laying my life before him. I must commune—talk—with him! A movement towards the Father is constant.
 3. Describes two sides
 - a. Negative—what Jesus puts off: Complete absence of self-will. Absolutely no demand in any of his relationships.
 - b. Positive—what Jesus puts on: Constant and complete surrender to his Father’s will.
 4. Prayer. Everything in this unit drives toward prayer as a logical physical outcome. I don’t approach prayer from the subject of how to pray. Prayer is far too hard and elusive. Jesus only commanded prayer a couple of times. I believe there is only one problem with prayerlessness: Self-will. Each of us instinctively believes, without the Spirit, that life works on its own. That is self-will. Prayer flows when the will is broken.
- C. Absence of demand: The door to tenderness. Very subtle.
 1. Illustration of my daughter on the basement steps (see Figure 1.2).
 - a. Looks like: I am doing something for Kimberly
 - b. Really: By helping Kimberly I am doing something for myself. Efficiency makes me feel good.
 - c. When I don’t demand and instead I wait, I feel empty and restless.
 2. There can be no *me* as I move to care for you.
 3. What was the *me*?
 - a. Desire for efficiency—not wasting time.
 - b. I feel uncomfortable, unfulfilled when I waste time.
 4. When I cut off that idol in my life, I have to find life somewhere else: my Father.
 5. Net effect of communion underlying, supporting, and surrounding honesty: Slows it down, makes it more cautious, becomes more selective. Connection with your Father controls and shapes compassion.

Figure 3.1, The Purity of Love

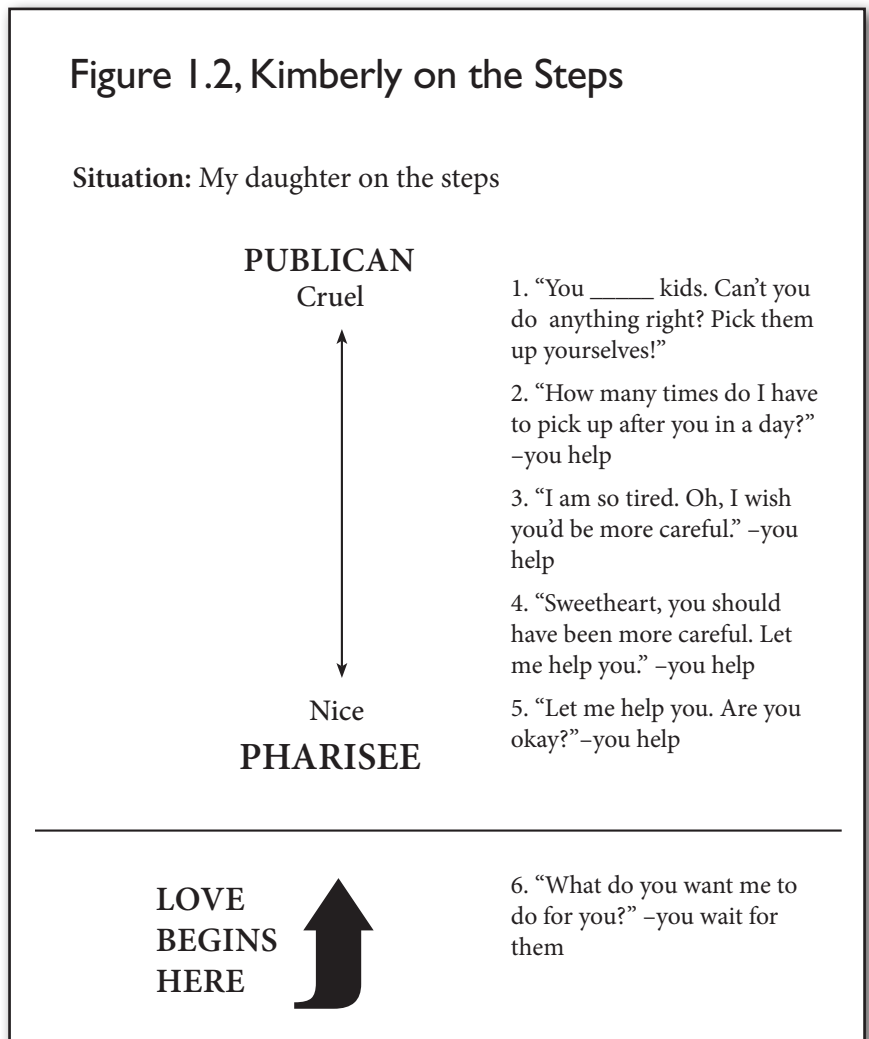


- D. What drives demand?
1. Understanding my “demand” or self-will always uncovers what I am worshipping, an idol.
 - a. Something outside of me.
 - b. Or, just me seeking worship.
 2. Dave Powlison: An idol is always driving demand.
 - a. An idol → A law → A demand
 - b. Efficiency → Don’t waste time → Helping Kimberly
 3. Pastor friend, “What would it be like to live without an agenda?”
- E. Isaiah describes the gentleness of Jesus that comes from the absence of demand. “He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isaiah 42:2-3).

III. A Display of God!

- A. Glory!
1. God’s personality is displayed. He is revealed in and through me.
 2. Unbroken chain of love from the Father to the Son to me to you.
 3. Jesus’ prayer in John 17:26 is being answered!
 4. Illustration of a difficult meeting with staff. Invited someone else in. I kept playing through scenarios of how this might come out. I looked pretty good in each scenario. “Paul, what you are seeking is a display or revelation of yourself”
 5. Illustration of fellow worker: I was displayed. As I sought to display what kind of person I was (“I would never treat you that way”)

I *really* displayed what kind of person I was (demanding, manipulative). When you seek for *me*, you always display *me*. A week later, “Did you catch my tone when I said that?” “Yes.” I apologized. I had modeled disrespect for authority, manipulation, and etc. simply by a tone of voice.



6. Kimberly on steps: God was displayed through me as I sought his will.
 7. Jesus: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:5-6).
- B. Jesus’ life: “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27).
1. Jesus feels the anguish of the cross.
 2. He does his Father’s will and not his own desire. “I do nothing on my own. I only do what my Father tells me to do.”
 3. He worships God audibly! His worship is a reflection of what he just did by not seeking his own display or revelation, but seeking that his Father would be displayed.

IV. The Two Faces of Demand: Attack or Retreat

- A. “I do nothing on My own...” (John 8:28).
1. “I do on my own” = I will.
 2. “I do nothing” = I will not.
- B. Not wrong to want something.
1. Legitimate: Desire for a hug, warmth, companionship.
 2. Demand: Came out in low-level anger or touchiness. Didn’t face the aloneness briefly and then move back to loving.
- C. Absence of demand affects the body. Compassion is fed by the eyes, honesty by speaking, and now communion affects the whole body: Physically, I don’t push into your space; communion is quieter, slower, less interrupting. The physical expression of communion is prayer.

Barbara Bancroft’s Reflections

The creation of the universe is an explosion of uncontainable power of the Father’s love for the Son and the Son for the Father. Just as in the natural world all things naturally go towards entropy—chaos—so it seems in the world of the Father all things naturally go towards unity. (One day we will be like him because we will see him as he is—we will be one!—completely unified.) The explosion of love and power that created the universe, the intensity and depth of love that sent the Son to the cross, is at work in the life of the believer to bring unity with the body and in that unity he will dwell and through that unity the world will have a clear picture of the gospel—the Father’s great love for us.

What hits me most about this love? First of all, it is completely beyond me. But it is tremendously attractive and powerful. It sucks me in. It is a tidal wave. Who can resist it? To live like that, in a world of love, is worth everything.

All of life pales in comparison to knowing this love, experiencing such unity with the Father and the Son and with people. A deep chord is plucked that is the life I want to live, the way I want to be. All of the sacrifices of the saints throughout the ages are understandable. They are not a burdensome sacrifice but a heart response to a vast ocean of love. God is love.

Barbara Bancroft's Reflections continued

Duty, self-sacrifice, doing the right thing, etc, this is the language of the world. These concepts the world understands. If I live the Christian life out of these, how is the world impressed? It doesn't even notice because it doesn't understand. But the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Father for us to kill his Son and the unity that love brings to believers—these things are astounding and completely beyond human conception. The power let loose in the believer's life, where the Father's love for the Son and the Son for the Father is explosive, and out of it flows true ministry. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. . ."¹

Illustration of Not Demanding

We had just finished breakfast. My daughter was heading down to the basement playroom with a box of crayons. I was coming behind her carrying a large pile of Richard Scarry books down the basement steps. I noticed that she was sitting on the bottom step. I peered around the corner of my books to see that she had dropped all the crayons. Normally, I'd put my pile of stuff down and help her. But I had been increasingly aware of how I invaded people. Jesus' reflection about himself, "I do nothing on my own" was showing me how much I did or said on my own.

This new communion with Jesus led me to say to my daughter, "Do you want me to help you?" The answer was "No," so I just waited on the steps while she picked up the crayons. It took her a while. I felt restless as I waited. I think I was feeling the emptiness of my soul as I cut off the demand. Again and again I find that leads me directly into communion with Jesus.

By moving too quickly into "loving" or "helping" my daughter and not moving out of communion, I would have actually invaded her

and never known it. It would have been paternalism.

Communion as the foundation for cherishing or compassion purifies the cherishing. The opposite tendency is for us to have a demanding personality that leads to paternalism and then abuse versus communion leading to cherishing and then honesty.

With the communion operating, let me just say, "Can I help you?" The resulting activity is much more restful than the invasion. Jesus' yoke really is easy; his burden really is light.

Seeing my self-will in these little ways and not acting it out always leaves me feeling empty. In that emptiness I find the Father very close. I've not drunk from the broken cisterns of my personality, and I find God very satisfying. So I find myself in increasingly constant communion with the Father through Jesus. The more I understand about my personality, the more I see that I need Jesus. Sometimes within a half-hour period, I can see five or six times my drinking of Jesus or my need to.

1. Barbara Bancroft, seminar participant. Used by permission.

Homework



Day One

1. Read the notes and write a summary below of what hit you the most.

2. Watch yourself this week. Come to class with an example of how you were demanding or you caught yourself starting to be demanding and did something else instead. You will write out the example in Day 6.



Day Two

Read John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:28; 12:49-50. How does Jesus' answer to the first temptation tie in with these passages?



Day Three

How does demandingness pollute love? Or, why does communion (the absence of demand) make a pure love possible?



Day Four

Reread the verses from John. What does demandingness look like in your life? What kinds of demands do you ask from your spouse or friends?



Day Five

Read verses surrounding John 7:18. What prevented the Pharisees from hearing the voice of God? How does this tie in with my saying to a fellow worker, “I don’t care about that”? How does that tie in with idols being the source of demand?



Day Six

Reread the verses from John. Write out your illustration of either the presence of demand or your beginning to recognize it and have victory over it. Be prepared to share this in class.