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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.

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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.

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.

This Unit ► 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 - Humiliation

- I. Three Scenes with the Disciples
 - A. Patterns
 1. Last six months of Jesus' life.
 2. As Jesus is going lower towards his own death, the disciples want to go higher.
 - B. Right after the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew 18:1-6, Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48
 1. Argument on the road was likely because of the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter, James and John were singled out by Jesus.
 2. Discussion fueled by jealousy
 - a. Two factions within the disciples: one led by Peter, one led by Judas
 - b. Judas paired with three other disciples, who are never mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. We know nothing about them.
 3. "What were you talking about on the way?"
 4. Jesus is very gentle, taking a child to teach them (see Mark 9:35).
 - C. Sabbath lunch, Luke 14:7-11: Take the lower place!
 - D. James and John's request, Mark 10:35-45, Matthew 20:20-28: Jesus is very gentle. Just a question, "*Are you able to drink the cup that I will drink?*"
 - E. The Last Supper, argument over seating arrangement (see Luke 22:24-30, John 13:1-17). Refer to Figure 1.1, Seating at the Last Supper.
 1. Jesus washes their feet—modeling taking the lower place.
 2. Jesus tells them about leadership in the kingdom.
 3. Edersheim's observations:
 - a. Jesus is at the head of the table. Left-hand side favored place, right-hand side second favored place.
 - b. John is on Jesus' right.
 - c. Judas and Jesus have several private conversations. We infer that Judas is on Jesus' left in the seat of honor.
 - d. Peter does not have direct access, seems to be right next to John. (Peter asks John to ask Jesus who will betray him.)
 - e. Judas and Peter were fighting for the best seat next to Jesus. Jesus rebukes them for acting like the Gentiles.
 - f. Just like impetuous Peter to be rebuked by Jesus and go to the extreme!
 - F. Relate this to your own experience: A husband and wife story
 1. Situation: Husband leaves his underwear in a pile on the bedroom floor each morning. Mom always picked it up at home. Never made the connection between clean underwear and the activity of picking it up.
 2. Husband says: "Honey, I'm all out of underwear."
 3. Wife says: "Well sweetheart, if you put it in the laundry basket, I might wash it."
 4. Husband: "What good would that do? You don't do the laundry anyway."
 - a. Shifted the subject from his problem to her problem.

b. Why? He's trying to win. Underwear as a problem has disappeared and new goals make their appearance (winning).

5. Wife:

a. Option 1: "I can't believe you said that! You are the one with the dirty laundry."

b. Option 2: Taking the lower place. "What do you mean I don't do the laundry?"

G. Reflections on the story

1. To incarnate when you know you are right is to take the low place.

2. We usually feel the lower place—hate the feeling—and react so quickly to get away from the pain. That is why we so seldom take the lower place.

3. It feels awful to be attacked for something that is not your fault. It isn't fair. It's humbling.

4. Jesus commands us to take the lower place. The lower place is what life can be like when you stop demanding.

5. What does all this have to do with Communion? Remember, the tension is between Communion and Demand. If I do not use my will to protect myself or make myself look good then I am cast on the care of my heavenly Father. I find Christ in that place of weakness.

6. Illustration of working on a project. "No one will know I've done this. Why am I doing it? Who am I doing it for?" Jesus!

H. Modern culture

1. Openness is the key to love → "I was just being honest."

2. Though he prizes openness in his disciples, Jesus points to Philippians 2:1-11, the key to oneness is humility. It is not openness.

3. Result of culture's openness is that it leads to the biting and devouring in Galatians 5:15.

4. With all our talk of oneness and unity and the time spent working on relationships, the result is simply the biting and devouring of Galatians 5.

5. Once you get into it, openness isn't that hard. Humility is always hard. When I'm open about my problems and needs, I'm in control. When I humble myself for someone—even if only for a few moments—I lose that control.

II. The Low Place

A. What is it?

1. Someone criticizes you regularly.

2. Someone publicly humbles you.

3. Someone excludes you from a group or a meeting.

4. Someone dismisses your feelings: "Oh, you are just being touchy."

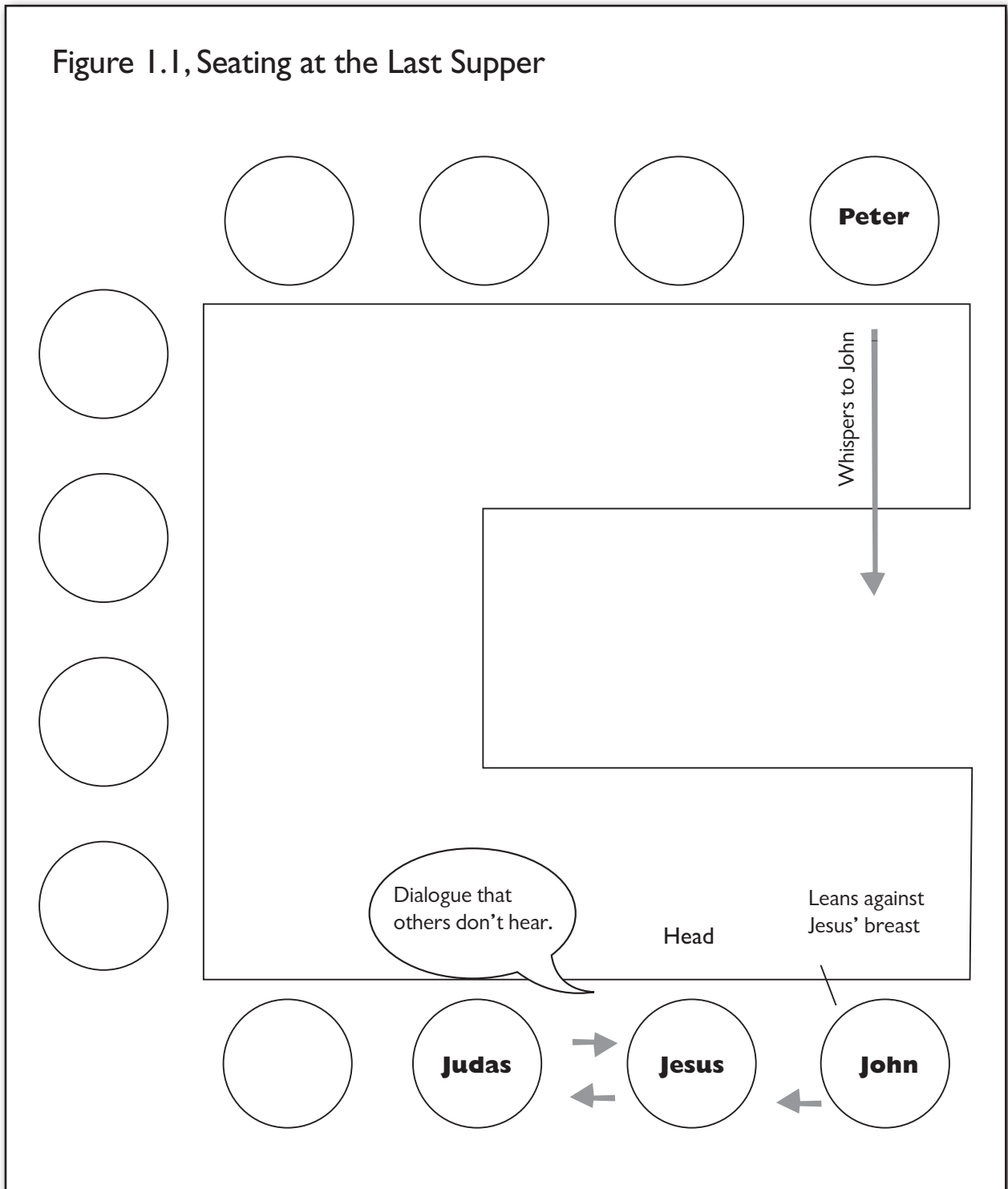
5. Someone takes credit for your idea or work, although not maliciously, they just truly believe it is theirs.

6. When you can't explain yourself because to do so would hurt someone else.

7. When you hear gossip about yourself.

8. Someone listens to a bad report about you, judges you on the basis of that, and then relates to you and makes decisions based on that judgment.

Figure 1.1, Seating at the Last Supper



- B. Why is it hard?
1. Lose power in the low place. It is hard to get things done.
 2. People don't listen to you.
 3. Don't take time with you; there is nothing that you can give them.
 4. Not thanked. You feel used.
 5. Your opinions don't count for very much.
 6. You feel like you are disappearing. What's the point of my life?
 7. You feel like you are losing your personality. People walking over you. Not respecting you.
- C. How does Jesus approach the lower place?
1. Jesus took the lower place of the cross. Jesus reflects on this several months prior to his death: "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17-18, NASB).
 - a. Odd, since the Jews and the Romans caused it. Not entirely true. Jesus gave himself up.
 - b. Jesus eluded death at least six times before Judas' betrayal.
 - c. When "his time had come," he stopped blocking the attempts to kill him and told Judas, "What you do, do quickly." Striking.
 - d. Jesus is physically taking the lower place. Not being pulled by the forces of history.
 2. Why is this helpful? I can do essentially the same thing Jesus has done. I can take the humbling as if it's from God. I can make a decision to go lower. "Father, this is something I want to do."
 3. Back to husband and wife story: If the wife goes with what her husband is saying by an act of her will, she is not a victim. She is deciding to be humbled. She is consciously taking the path of the cross to change the subject to her husband's perceptions.
 4. "Take the lower place" is the exact opposite of "make bread." Opposite of demand.
 5. Taking the lower place is the releasing of power for the sake of love for another person.
 - a. Cuts the heart out of bitterness.
 - b. No longer a victim. Jesus wasn't a victim of history.
 - c. Not under someone else, even though it feels that way and they think it.
 - d. Made a decision in obedience to Jesus' command to love, to take the lower place.
 6. David Powlison, "I've never wanted to accomplish anything. My dream job is sitting on the beach sipping a soda and reading good books. I don't want the hassles of the higher place. My ambition is comfort, ease, and no hassles. For me it is humbling to take the higher place."

Paul's Journal:

"Humility is so quiet.
Incredibly efficient. Takes a
very low level of energy.
No push to be something.
No demands...just quiet."
"Be goal-oriented about
your own death."

- D. Jesus says, “Take the lower place.” If he said, “Take a million dollars,” wouldn’t you take it? You’d say, “In obedience to the command of Jesus, I take this million dollars.” So now, I take the lower place. I want it. I make it my goal to be in the lower place. Active movement.
1. Jesus is ordering us into the very place that we often spend our life trying to stay away from!
 2. Take the lower place not only in position, but in ideas, plans, in conversation, in sharing of insights, in meetings.
- E. Humility
1. For years I repented of pride, but like Brer Rabbit fighting Tar Baby.
 2. But, to borrow Jay Adam’s insight of putting on and putting off: “I needed to put on the lower place. It wasn’t enough to actively try to get rid of pride. I had to actively seek humility.”
 3. Goal-oriented humility: Our pride is so great the only cure is an “active humility.”
- F. What do you do there?
1. Serve as an unworthy servant.
 2. Place where you learn to love: “He learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).
 3. Place of wisdom: Few idols or feeding points.

- G. Dangers of the low place:
1. Retaking the high place when you are in a low place by analyzing everyone above you.
 2. Making it into a show and talking about it.
 3. The greatest danger: self-pity.
 - a. Beginning to draw life from the bad feelings of being in a low place.
 - b. See “Self-pity” poem.
 - c. When overcome with self-pity, still left with the security that you are right.
 - d. Cure: “No one put me in the low place. I take the low place. It is my Father’s will that I go to the low place.”
 - e. Isaiah 53: “It pleased the Father to bruise him”

Self-pity

My wounds are for me, not you.
 They comfort me.
 I lie down with them.
 My wounds are precious to me,
 Better than job, family, and friends.
 My wounds taste better
 than Jesus’ wounds.
 They nourish me, strengthen me, feed me.
 Deliver me from the love of my wounds!
 Show me Jesus’ wounds.

III. Why Does Jesus Ask Us to Take the Low Place? What Is the Character of the Lower Place?

- A. Jesus loves low-place people.
1. “Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2).
 2. But why is God so drawn to people like this?

B. Heart of God is a low place

1. Remember what Jesus told Philip at their last meal together, “To see me is to see the Father” (see John 14:9, my paraphrase). When the Father moves towards us what does he do? What does he look like when we see his glory? He goes lower. He loses power. Bethlehem, manger, hatred, death, death on a cross. Philippians 2.
2. “I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit...” (Isaiah 57:15).
3. Why this juxtaposition? The contrite and lowly heart = The high and holy place of God. God is humble.
4. Holiness = Purity. But purity from what? Pride, self. That is why Jesus was so attracted to dirt.
5. Remember Jesus’ self-reflection, “I am humble and lowly of heart.”
6. Remember, God is love. Love is without ego for self.
7. Interior of the Gospel.
 - a. Gospel, “God loves a broken and contrite heart. He finds it irresistible.”
 - b. He invites us to want that in other people and to want it in our own hearts.
8. If the heart of love is no ego for self, then is that what was so crushing to John, Isaiah and Daniel in their visions of Christ? To be exposed to how humble God is feels like death. Was the shock of God’s lowness too much for them? This is entirely not “us,” that when Isaiah, Daniel and John saw God in all his purity, they were shocked to see someone who is so completely love.
9. Did Satan underestimate God because of his humility? When someone is meek or humble, we tend to dismiss and underestimate them. Did Satan misunderstand God’s lowness? Did he see it as weakness?

C. Powerful door to communion

1. True: “I will be with you in the low place.”
2. But better: “This is where I dwell.” (Because that is where God always is!)
3. Jesus’ invitation to “take the lower place” is an invitation to come live with God.

D. Place of exposure

1. Sin
2. Brokenness
3. See journal reflection.

IV. Spiritual Warfare: The Struggle to Take the Lower Place

- A. Your willingness to take the low place completely disarms Satan. He has no hooks left to get you with. If you take what he threatens you with, he is rendered absolutely powerless. Illustration of six days prior to Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus strips Satan of his weapons, “Get behind me Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interest, but man’s...I’m going to the cross.”

Paul’s Journal:

“It takes a lot of faith to go lower. It is a whole surrender of the life because you are giving up power/control. I believe that I don’t need human power to do God’s kingdom work. I pray. I believe that I don’t need to drink of people’s approval; I can drink of Christ! I believe that when I am powerless you really are the one with the power. I drink only of Christ.”

Journal: “I wanted to strike a mighty blow against Satan. I wanted my life to count. By dying I’ve struck a mighty blow for the kingdom...The quieter we are, the louder God will be.”

Satan: “If you take the lowest place, you will be abused and forgotten.”

Journal: “No, this is the place of purest faith. I have no human resources outside of Christ. No reputation. This is a great gift of humility...To trust in God appears to surrender yourself to human will. To surrender myself to your will is to keep my mouth shut! Because my mouth always promotes me! How do you become one with someone eager for power? You submit to them, you take the lowest place!”

B. A glimpse of a battle

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” [I feel no glory, only pain and rejection. Why does the place of glory begin with deep shame? Father, I accept this as from you! I want your glory!]

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” [What I am dying to is a desire for friendship, respect, honesty, listening, empathy.]

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.” [To follow you in this path of shame is so hard Oh God, give me joy! Father, give me this life in the midst of death. Unite me with Christ.]

“My Father will honor the one who serves me.” [My Father will honor me.] (John 12:23-26)

V. The Character of God Is to Be Completely “Other,” Not for Himself. Humility Is the Beating Heart of Love.

Homework



Day One

Read the notes. Summarize what hit you most from this lecture.



Day Two

Read the account from Luke 22 and John 13 on the argument at the Last Supper. Give an example in your life, no matter how trivial, where you have sought the higher place. How did it impact other people?



Day Three

Read the account of the post-Mt. of Transfiguration fight (Matthew 18 and Mark 9). What is particularly gentle about Jesus' response to the disciples here? How is he also gentle in the two other fights?



Day Four

Read the account of the dinner in Luke 14:7-11. When has someone put you in a lower place? Explain what happened. Describe your feelings in that lower place.



Day Five

Describe your struggles with self-pity when you've been put in a lower place.



Day Six

Describe the kind of communion we have with the Father in the low place vs. what Satan offers us.