

Overdrawn

A newspaper cartoon I read years ago has stayed with me. It's a single drawing, showing a bank manager speaking to a customer. The dialog below the panel is the customer's somewhat flustered reply, "Overdrawn? Well, just let me write you a check!"

We owe God a debt we can never repay. And yet he says he is satisfied if we will just keep making payments, knowing we'll never reach the final payment. It's the debt of love that God is interested in, and he wants us to make those payments by loving those around us: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."* 1 John 3:16

Monday – The Debt of Love

"The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved – loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves." Victor Hugo, Les Miserables

1. Please read Romans 13:8-10. Why do you think Paul calls this a debt of love?
2. How is God's love described in 1 John 3:1? In what ways has God lavished his love on us as his children?
3. Jump forward one chapter to 1 John 4:7-12. Why are we to love others? According to verse 7, where does love originate? How does this help you understand that love is a debt you owe?

Making it Personal: Consider the ways God has loved you, and ways you can thank him by loving those around you. Pray, asking God for the wisdom and grace today to love someone in your life.

Tuesday – a Commanding Love, part 1

"Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays." Andrew Murray

1. Please read Romans 13:8-10. What does Paul mean when he calls the debt of love a *continuing* debt? How would you state the principal that Paul is trying to make in verse 9?
2. What does Jesus say about love in Luke 10:25-28? How does this passage relate to Romans 13:9?

Text Insight: The word "law" in Luke 10 referred to the Hebrew Scriptures, God's word. So this person questioning Jesus was not a lawyer like we have today, but an expert in God's law.

Digging Deeper (optional): Take a look at Exodus 20:1-17. Which of the Ten Commandments relate to love of neighbor? How?

Wednesday – a Commanding Love, part 2

"To love God is the greatest of virtues; to be loved by God is the greatest of blessings." Portuguese proverb

1. Please read Romans 13:8-10 and Mark 12:25-31. Of the two great commandments, which does Jesus identify as the first? Why do you think Jesus calls this the first? How closely are the two linked?
2. Which of the commandments in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 show love of God? How?
3. Now read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. How seriously does God take his commands? Why do you think Jesus chose to quote this passage in Mark 12?

Prayer Focus: Pray that God's church (you, me and all believers in Jesus) will take God's word seriously.

Thursday – Loving Neighbors, part 1

"Love is the sum of all virtue, and love disposes us to good." Jonathan Edwards, 18th c. American theologian

1. Please read Romans 13:8-10 (focusing on verse 10). What is the fulfillment of God's law (his commands)?
2. In Luke 10:25-37, we expect Jesus to identify the neighbor we are supposed to love. But who ends up getting the label "neighbor" (the one needing the love ("half dead") or the one doing the loving)?

Text Insight: Priests and Levites served in God's temple in Jerusalem. If they touched a body that turned out to be dead, they would be defiled and barred from the temple until they performed certain cleansing rituals. Apparently, remaining ceremonially clean was more important to them than caring for the robbery victim.

3. How does Jesus set a good example for us in Luke 14:1-14? What suggestions for loving others does he provide?

Making it Personal: Do you ever make excuses for not helping others? Pray, asking God to release you from that burden and open you up to serving him by repaying the debt of love to others.

Friday – Loving Neighbors, part 2

"Love is not blind; that is the last thing it is. Love is bound; and the more it is bound the less it is blind."

G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

1. Please read Romans 13:8-10. In light of this week's passages, what do you think it means to fulfill the law by loving others?
2. How do each of the laws listed in Deuteronomy 23:15-25 show love for a neighbor, for God, or both?
3. Read Ruth 2:1-9 and 14-16. How does Boaz fulfill Deuteronomy 23:25? Would you say he followed the letter of the law, or the spirit of the law? What did he do that might be considered more than was required?

For the Weekend: The Book of Ruth is a short story that is big on loving one another. Consider how they honored God: Naomi loved her daughters-in-law, Ruth loved Naomi, and Boaz cared for them both. Now take a look at Ruth 4:22. How did God honor their faithful love for one another?