



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES **2014**

You are loved

Zephaniah 3:17 says, 'The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing' (NIV 1984) *.

How wonderful it is that God will quiet us with his love, and he rejoices over us with singing! We are so precious to God, and as we share in these Bible studies we hope that you will have a clearer picture of just how much God loves each one of us and how we can take on his character in our own lives.

During 2014, the shared theme of Women's Ministries throughout the world is 'You are loved'.

This series of 12 Bible studies helps us to focus on the truth that we are each loved by God. This year the studies explore the verses from our text – Colossians 3:12-14. Each word is explored in detail, phrase by phrase, throughout the studies, which follow a simple pattern that can be used in any setting. They are designed to be flexible, so that you can add material that is relevant to your culture and context.

Each study includes four sections which can be explored with your group, as follows:

1. What the Bible says – where you explore 'What does the text actually say?'

It is important that you read the Bible carefully and allow it to speak to you and guide the content of your study.

2. Our lives today – considers such questions as:

- What does the Bible reading tell you about your lives?
- Does it highlight any problems in society?
- What challenges are there for the way you live your life?

3. Discussion questions – depending upon where you are using the studies, you may choose to select one or two that seem most suitable for you, or ask different groups to discuss other aspects and possibly, if you have time, share what they have been speaking about.

4. Living as loved – this is designed to give you something to take away and do before you next meet. If appropriate, you could share how members of the group worked through their 'living as loved' the next time you meet.

As the studies were compiled this year, various words stood out. Therefore, on the final pages you will find some songs which we hope will aid your reflection on the truth that 'You are loved'. There is also a song with music arrangement written by Major Valerie Mylechreest, which may be useful in your setting.

As you consider through 2014 how you are loved by God, we pray that he will be evident as you study his Word and share together.

*Unless stated otherwise, Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version* 2011 (anglicised) edition.

Bible Study I

We are loved

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and **dearly loved**, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading – Colossians 3:12-14

What the Bible Says

We are assured of some very important truths within Paul's letter to the Colossians, and in chapter 3 he points out that as Christians we are 'God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved'. God cherishes us – he loves us extravagantly. Isn't that amazing?

Throughout the Bible there is a consciousness of God's love for his people. Deuteronomy 33:3 records, 'Surely it is you who love the people; all the holy ones are in your hand.' And within the Book of Psalms there is a particular ribbon of awareness of God's amazing love. Our spirits are lifted as in Psalm 36:7 the psalmist cries out, 'How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!' and then as we open Psalm 103 the Father-love of God dominates the text.

The well-known and often quoted verse in John's Gospel draws our attention to the truth that, 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (3:16). The New Testament constantly confirms that we are precious in God's eyes and that he loves each one of us. As we take the opportunity to read through the Scriptures our understanding of the love of God increases – 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins' (1 John 4:10).

When we look at Jesus – his birth, life, death and resurrection – we see a demonstration of God's abundant love for us. Jesus' teaching, particularly in the parable of the prodigal son, also enlightens us to the incomprehensible measure of God's care and compassion. The prodigal does not deserve the love of the father and yet 'while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him' (Luke 15:20). This is the kind of love that God has for us! Grace – the undeserved favour of God! As Romans 5:5 says, 'God's love has poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.'

To explore this topic further read through Psalms 103 and 100, and 1 John 4.

Our lives today

As we recognise that God's love cannot be deserved or earned, but that it is given freely, we can accept it, and his unconditional love can transform our lives. Accepted in all its fullness, it liberates us! When we realise the breadth and depth of God's love for us and 'abide in his love' it transforms us. When we abide we thrive! What peace accompanies the knowledge that the Lord loves us fully and freely! What joy is ours as we live in the security and certainty of a loving heavenly Father! It gives us a renewed sense of worth. God accepts us – there is no need for pretence in his sight.

The sad reality is that it is possible to be a Christian without fully grasping that God's love for us is not dependent on our actions, our feelings or our obedience. The good news is that nothing will change God's love towards us. As Romans 8:38-39 reminds us 'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Even when we fail, or have fallen, this will not change God's love toward us. His love is not dependent on our behaviour!

However, when we accept his love in all its fullness, it changes not only our perception of God but also our treatment of those around us. Luke explains that if we wish to enter into the Kingdom of God we need to respond to God's love for us, to confess our sin and also to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;" and, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27). What a privilege is ours to be the recipients of such inestimable love — and what is our response to such love?

Discussion questions

1. Describe in your own words God's love for you.
2. What are the consequences in our lives when we accept that we are loved by God?
3. To be a Christian is often seen in terms of obeying commands, about duty, about earning his love. How do we see our service for God?
4. God loves us as we are. Does this mean that our actions and our life choices do not matter?

Living as loved

Ask yourself, 'Have I accepted God's love for me or am I still trying to earn his love?'

Commissioner Silvia Cox

I have known I am loved just as I am certain of God's love for me. As a consequence, it is a joy and privilege to share this message and experience as I serve women around the world in my role as the World President of Women's Ministries.

Bible Study 2

You are loved – as God's Chosen People

Therefore, as **God's chosen people**, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible readings – John 15:9-17; Mark 3:13

Jesus . . . called to him those he wanted, and they came to him (Mark 3:13).

What the Bible Says

The Bible tells us that God has chosen people from different backgrounds to walk with him: from a family of idol-makers he chose Abraham; from a family of slaves he chose Esther; from a huge family of strong men he chose the youngest, David; from prostitutes he chose Rahab; from fearful prophets he chose Elijah; from teenagers he chose Mary; from fishermen he chose Peter, from the shy he chose Bartholomew; from the middle class, Matthew; from dishonest tax-collectors he chose Zacchaeus; and from the educated and well prepared, Paul. I could go on and on mentioning ordinary, incapable or unprepared people that God has chosen.

But you must have a question mark in your mind: what were they chosen for? 'For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession' (Deuteronomy 7:6).

He chose each one to belong to him as his treasured possession, to be loved by him and be part of his master plan to touch humanity in different ways. As the Creator, God knows everything about everyone and yet he chooses people to be his treasured possessions.

Our lives today

Only God can look at a sinner and see a saint. He embraces us with open arms, knowing how to handle our human frailties, issues and roller-coaster emotions. God sees us at our worst and brings out our best. God can relate to every situation we, as humans, will ever experience. God is able to do that by his awesome and unending love for us.

I remember the time my husband asked me to marry him. I was 16 and was already in love with him but we really did not know much about each other. With some unbelief I asked him: 'Why do you want to marry me?' He answered 'To love you and make you happy.' I accepted his proposal and I am loved and have been happy for almost 30 years.

In the same way, God invites us to be in relationship with him. Why? Because he loves us and wants to make us happy. He expressed and proved his love for us when his precious Son died to save us. Jesus living among us was the voice and presence of God calling us to himself.

Why are the names of the people mentioned previously known to us today? Because they were chosen and they came to God - they accepted God's love.

Discussion questions

1. What are the symbols of being chosen in your society/culture today? How does it affect you personally?
2. How does being chosen by God make a difference in the lives of people?
3. What has changed in your life since you became aware you are chosen by God?
4. How does it tell you that you are loved by God?

Living as loved

Take time to reflect on what the signs are in your daily life that show you and others that you are chosen by God. Enjoy the love of God every minute of your day and be happy.

Today God continues to choose people to love and to make them happy — ordinary as well as prepared ones. It is up to each person to listen, go to him and be in relationship with him.

Commissioner Deise Eliassen

I have known I am loved since, as a little child around the dinner table at home with my parents in Brazil, I became aware that God had chosen me. His love has embraced me in every area of ministry during more than 22 years serving as an officer in my home country. His presence, comfort, wisdom and strength were some expressions of his love for me and my family when we were sent to work in Mozambique. Now I have the privilege to serve as Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries in the Americas and Caribbean Zone, at International Headquarters (IHQ) in London, where I can confirm God's love every moment of my days.

Bible Study 3

Loved and Holy

Therefore, as God's chosen people, **holy and dearly loved**, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading I Peter 2:1-5, 9

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'

What the Bible says

Peter reminds us that we are called to be holy individuals in order that we might be 'a holy people'. This is not only a personal choice, but also a command given by God when he says: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy' (Leviticus 19:2).

We who claim to be believers need to replicate, to mirror God as we know him, through the things we say and do. 'Holiness in all things.'

Peter says (in the verses we have shared) that on our part it is a deliberate decision to reject anything unholy and to strive, daily, to 'grow up in our salvation' as holy people.

Zechariah - an Old Testament prophet - gives us a lovely picture of holiness when he sees that we need to live out holiness in every part of our lives. There is no divide, no 'sacred' or 'secular'. Every part of our life matters to God.

'On that day 'HOLY TO THE LORD' will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD'S house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar' (Zechariah 14:20). Isn't that a wonderful picture?

The tiny bells decorating the reigns on the horses will matter as much as the immaculate golden plates in the temple. Every area of our life holy, as if unto the Lord.

Our lives today

When I first met my husband, I wanted to make sure I made the 'best impression'. I always tried to dress smartly, to look my best, to speak well, to give a 'good impression'. It's often the case when we want to present our 'better self' for those we love, and who love us. (More than 20 years later, I am still doing my best!)

Being loved by God means that I want to do all I can to be my better self: 'To lead a life that is clean in thought, word and deed' (Junior Soldier's Promise). I don't want to disappoint him, and I want to live my life in such a way that my everyday holiness will impact the lives of others. This takes time, but it matters enough to make time. It is not just a matter of the heart — 'Set your hearts on things above' (Colossians 3:1) but also of the mind — 'Set your minds on things above,' (Colossians 3:2). We are chosen and loved by God, to be holy women, focusing and mirroring our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in him always, and feed on his word.*

William Dunn Longstaff
The Song Book of The Salvation Army, 458 verse 1

Discussion questions

1. What does 'holy living' look like where you are today?
2. In what ways might you make/take time to be holy this week ?
3. In the light of 1 Peter 2:1, what things might you 'take off' in order to live a holy life and, in the light of Colossians 3:12, what might you 'put on'?

Living as loved

Make a list of friends or family members, or areas of your community that you can influence by your 'holy living'. The challenge is that this is not only about 'doing' but also about 'being'. In what way(s) will your presence witness to your life of holiness this week?

Major Val Mylechreest

I have known I am loved as I have been blessed to be brought up in a Christian family and have responded to God's call on my life. My journey as an officer has been an exciting privilege. Appointments have included Faith House (Midnight Patrol) and The Haven Children's Home as well as corps in the UK and Australia. I now lead the Adult and Family Ministries Unit for the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland. I thank God for his unconditional love, plan and provision for me.

Bible Study 4

Loved — Show Compassion

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with **compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading Luke 7:11-17

When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. 'Don't cry!' he said
(v 13 New Living Translation).

What the Bible says

This story in Luke, where Jesus raises the widow's son from the dead, began with an extreme personal tragedy. It paints a picture of what must be considered the worst possible nightmare for anyone. The death of the widow's only son meant her tragic world was now complete and that all hope was gone. However, Jesus was there for her and became her means of support and hope for the future. She may have felt that no one understood what she was feeling or going through.

In a place of absolute devastation and hopelessness from her tragedy, Jesus shows up and completely turns the situation upside down. 'When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Don't cry!" he said' (v 13). But it doesn't stop there, it gets even better. With a simple but powerful touch of the coffin and a few spoken words from Jesus 'the dead man sat up and began to talk' (v 15). His miraculous works are more than anyone would have ever imagined or even asked for. The outcome was a complete reversal of the initial situation and the feelings that the mother was experiencing prior to this.

Our lives today

Jesus was full of compassion and omnipotence in this story, and he is unchanging. Thousands of years later he is still all of these things in our lives today - in the situations we face whether big or small. Although you may not have been through something as serious as the widow who lost her only son, you can probably think of times when you have shared some of her feelings. You may have thought there was no likelihood of anything good coming out of your situation or that no one would understand. Some days we may feel so hopeless in our situations, but you are not alone - we have all felt like this at some time.

Most of my years as a nurse have been working in palliative care, where I had the privilege to help people through their last days and be by their side when they took their final breath. Part of my job was to pronounce them dead and notify family members. My biggest fear with this was that one day I might get it wrong, but there comes a point where I am certain that someone has died. For family members in sudden, tragic situations, especially involving younger people, there could be a window of hope that perhaps they haven't died.

When I read this story in the Bible I thought about the fact that they were attending the son's funeral. For us this is the stage where we say goodbye, as there's no hope that the person is still alive. It's simply a time for celebrating a life, facing reality and bringing closure.

It might not be a situation of physical death, but maybe there is a situation where all your hope is lost. Our all-powerful God, full of compassion and love, can do more than we would ever dream or imagine. In what we see as a hopeless situation, he brings hope. He shows compassion and understands exactly what we are feeling.

*When I cry, you cry.
When I hurt, you hurt.
When I've lost someone,
It takes a piece of you too.
And when I fall on my face
You fill me with grace,
'Cause nothing breaks your heart,
Or tears you apart,
Like when I cry.*

Marshall Hall and Benjy Gaither

Discussion questions

1. Can you think of a time when you were going through a difficult situation? What were some of your feelings?
2. In what way does this story encourage you? Can you relate to the mother in any way?
3. In what way have you experienced God's compassion or found hope in a hopeless situation?

Living as loved

What is our response to our God who shows us unending compassion? How can we thank him for this today? We are to be compassionate to everyone just as our heavenly Father is full of compassion. 'Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble' (1 Peter 3:2).

1. How can you live differently today because of the compassion Jesus has shown you?
2. Who do you need to show a little more compassion to today?

Take some time and pray that God will give you compassion in situations where it is lacking. He will transform you in such a way that you will love people and treat people as he does if you allow him to.

Ashlee Sheppard (Australia Eastern Territory)

I have known I am loved as I have served in Australia, mainly in youth ministry and as a nurse. God has recently taken me to London, England to work as a volunteer at the Centre for Spiritual Life Development (CSLD).

Bible Study 5

Loved — Acts of Kindness

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading Luke 8:42b-48; Leviticus 15:25-33

Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace"
(Luke 8:48).

What the Bible says

This incident in Luke speaks about a woman who had been subjected to bleeding for 12 years without any cure. She was shunned by the community and suffered a great deal because she was seen as ceremonially unclean. Anyone or anything she touched became unclean. Read Leviticus 15:25-33.

Can you imagine how she must have felt after spending all she had on doctors and still not experiencing the healing she so desperately needed? When she heard about Jesus she made sure that she was in the crowd following him. Her thoughts were focused on Jesus believing he could heal her. She probably thought this is my only chance for healing, and was determined to touch him. In her desperation she pressed through the crowd unnoticed and touched the hem of his garment.

Jesus immediately felt that power had left him and asked 'Who touched me?' (v 45). In her quest to escape unnoticed, Jesus became aware of her. When she realised she could not disappear unnoticed, she came trembling with fear and fell at his feet and told him how she was instantly delivered from her bleeding.

Jesus acted in kindness towards her without rejection and said 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering' (v 48). She not only experienced healing but also love and acceptance into God's family — he called her 'daughter'.

Our lives today

Place yourself in the shoes of this woman who felt rejection, was discouraged and had feelings of despair for 12 years as no doctor was able to cure her. In her desperate search for healing she followed Jesus and trusted him for her healing. Her faith was rewarded and she left free from condemnation and experienced the healing she was so desperately seeking.

Maybe you are also suffering. Your situation might be different to that of this woman, but here are words of encouragement to you - he is still the same today as yesterday, a God who is aware of you and knows you by name.

I am reminded of the words from the songwriter Paul Baloche that say:

*He knows my name
He knows my every thought
He sees each tear that falls
And hears me when I call.*

One of the names of God is El Roi - meaning the God who sees. Hagar experienced the God who saw her pain.

'She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her. "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me" (Genesis 16:13).

He sees our suffering and pain; all we need to do is stretch out in faith towards him and trust him to bring change into our situation. Faith is what allows him to do the impossible, even when your faith is as small as a mustard seed (see Matthew 17:20).

Discussion questions

1. Is there anything about this woman you can relate to? If so, why?
2. How can her faith help you in your particular situation today?
3. In her suffering Jesus acted in kindness towards her, irrespective of her condition. How does that make you feel?
4. How does this study help you when dealing with others who are shunned in your community?

Living as loved

It is good to know we serve a God who acts in kindness and loves us for who we are. How can you show kindness to someone who may need such an act shown towards them this week?

Lieut-Colonel Yvonne Conrad (Southern Africa Territory)

I have known I am loved as, in obedience to God's call, I have experienced the presence of a loving God who faithfully guided me from South Africa to New Zealand - where I served as Divisional Secretary for Personnel then in the Africa Zone at IHQ as Assistant Under Secretary, and shortly back in my home territory, South Africa.

Bible Study 6

Loved — Act Humbly

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, **humility**, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:1-11

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 2:3-5).

What the Bible says

Few incidents in the Gospel story reveal the character of Jesus and perfectly show his love for his followers so much as his actions in washing the feet of his disciples just before the last Supper.

When no servant stepped forward to fulfil the custom of washing the feet of guests at the table, none of the disciples were prepared to volunteer for the task. Luke tells us that they had recently been arguing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). Whether it was competitive pride or misguided arrogance that blinded the disciples to the need of the moment, the lowly task of washing dusty feet was left undone. Then Jesus did what none of his own men were prepared to do. He took a bowl of water, wrapped a towel round his waist and knelt in front of his disciples to wash the dirt off their feet.

John explains why. He says that Jesus 'knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God' (v 3) and 'so ...he began to wash his disciples' feet' (vv 3-5). Jesus knew who he was, where he came from and where he was going to. Because he was secure, he was secure enough to serve. The foot washing is a visual parable demonstrating the truth that 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:28).

Paul captures that underlying principle of Christ's servant heart in an early hymn quoted in his letter to the church at Philippi. He speaks of Jesus who 'being in very nature God . . . made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and . . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!' (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus' life was marked by the total abandonment of any rights. His was a life marked by humility and obedience, a life marked by service.

Our lives today

In my part of the world, to succeed in the commercial or business world, we are told to be strong, assertive, powerful and confident in achieving our aims. Humility and servanthood do not appear on any list! Yet these are essential qualities for all who would follow the example of Jesus. Frederick B. Meyer was a renowned Bible teacher and preacher working in England at the turn of the 20th century. He became a lifelong friend of American evangelist Dwight L. Moody and established one of the first 'megachurches' in London. Although a prolific writer (he wrote more than 40 devotional books). Meyer is best remembered for his drive for social reform, tirelessly campaigning against the social and economic ills of his day. This great teacher once said: 'I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves one above the other; and that the taller we grew in Christian character the easier we could reach them. I now find that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other; and that it is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower; and that we have to go down, always down, to get His best gifts'.

We are called to consider others better than ourselves. We are called to follow the example of Jesus. We are called to have the same humble, selfless desire to serve people as Jesus did - but we will not serve people well unless we are confident and secure in our own relationship with Jesus. If we find our security and identity in him, we can take the place of the lowest and least of servants, knowing that anything we do for others, we ultimately do for him (Matthew 25:31-46).

Discussion questions

1. Jesus' servanthood originated in his loving relationship with God. How does our love relationship with God shape the kind of ministry we are involved in today?
2. Jesus did not tell us to do what he had done, but to do as he had done. We are not full-time foot washers, rather full-time servants. What is the difference?
3. We are called to serve others, but there are times when others will serve us. Can you think of a time when someone came alongside and served you in some way? Do you find it hard to let others serve you?
4. What does it mean for us to have the same mindset as Jesus?

Living as loved

Reflect on the ways your faith has grown and strengthened in the last year. How have other people served you by encouraging your confidence in Christ and helping you grow as a Christian? Consider how this has impacted on your service for others.

Major Pat Brown

I have known I am loved as God has been alongside me in each and every chapter of my life, nudging, guiding and challenging me in new aspects of service and ministry. He has been with me on a journey that began in Scotland and has taken me as far away as New Zealand working in corps, new planting and divisional roles. I am privileged now to serve as Chaplain at IHQ in London.

Bible Study 7

Loved — Show Gentleness

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, **gentleness** and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading – Luke 18:15-17

But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these'

(v 16).

What the Bible says

The Book of Luke emphasises Jesus' love and care for those whom the Jewish leaders never even became aware of - women, the poor, the socially, racially and religiously excluded. People such as immoral women, Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors, criminals' rebellious family members and Gentiles. Luke 18 therefore shows the truth of how a person is worthy.

Verses 15-17 tell us that parents brought their children to Jesus, but the disciples scolded them for coming to him. In ancient culture, it was thought that children should be seen but not heard. In the Greco-Roman world, children were at society's margins. Infants were among the most vulnerable, as shown in the practise of killing infants by exposing newborns to the elements.

But it was the practice for Jewish mothers to bring their babies to famous rabbis and to ask these teachers to bless the little ones. In the reading, the crowd, including the disciples, did not see this as being appropriate. They thought there was a better way of protecting their honoured teacher from spending time with the lowliest members of society, like women and children, but Jesus proved to them that children were welcomed in God's Kingdom.

Our lives today

In what ways do we show the same kind of gentleness to others? Consider the gentleness of Jesus to the children who were brought to him to be blessed. This is an illustration to us of how we are loved and accepted when we come to him in a childlike faith, not depending on our own strength or understanding, our wisdom or our own good works.

We can only come to Christ in a childlike state. Imagine the children chased away by the disciples but still loved by their heavenly Father.

In our everyday life we quarrel with our children, but they still come back to us.

My youngest son plays cricket. He likes it so much that whatever he takes hold of he wants to use it as a cricket bat. One day he was practising his batting styles near to where my husband's car was parked. Inevitably the ball hit and broke the rear window. Our son knew how much he had hurt his dad's feelings, so he quickly came to ask forgiveness for what he had done. Dad shouted at him and my son kept quiet but after a while they hugged and dad suggested our boy should practise his skills away from the car.

Just as we show our children how much we love them, God does the same to those who run to his arms knowing that he is going to care for them. God does not discriminate, but he loves all and cares for all.

Discussion questions

1. In what sense must we become childlike?
2. Why do you think Jesus silenced the disciples and allowed the children to come to him?
3. What do you think the disciples' response was?
4. In what way does Jesus' teaching offer hope to us who read it today?

Living as loved

Jesus left us an example to follow. How can we show gentleness and love to others?

Major Tracey Kasuso

I experienced God's love when I left my home country of Zimbabwe for South Africa, where I served as Divisional Director of Women's Ministries in the Eastern Cape Division. I have served as Personnel Secretary at the International College for Officers (ICO), and have recently been appointed Assistant Under Secretary for Africa at International Headquarters.

Bible Study 8

Loved — Patience

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and **patience**. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

What the Bible says

Background to the Letter to the Colossians

Paul wrote this beautiful letter while he was imprisoned (4:3, 10, 18), most probably in Rome. This epistle is regarded as a companion of Paul's letter to Philemon and shares similarities of style and content with the letter to the Ephesians. Based on the internal and historical evidences of the letter, Colossians was probably written around AD 50-60.

Like other Pauline epistles, the letter divides into doctrinal and practical sections. The doctrinal discussions, (Chs 1-2) highlight majestic hymns about Christ as the image of the invisible God (1:15).

He stands before all time and above every power, and at the end of all history (1:16).

He is head of the Church (1:18).

In him all fullness dwells (1:19).

He reconciled all things to himself (1:20).

In Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (2:3).

He wiped out every accusation against us (2:14).

He has disarmed every power opposed to him (2:15).

The practical section of the letter is in chapters 3 and 4. Before we focus on our main verses (3:12-14), let us examine certain words that are common in Pauline presentation of argument.

Chapter 3 starts with the word 'if' in the *King James* and in the *American Standard Version*; 'Therefore' is used in the *New American Standard Bible* and 'Since' in the *NIV*. These words translate the Greek word *ei* which refers to the foundational beliefs stated in chapters 1 and 2 and leads to the practical application. As a summary Paul says, 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God' (3:1). Then he explains the practical application of what it means to set your heart on things above. He rises to a higher level of discussion in verses 12-14. What word was used again? **Therefore**.

In chapter 3 v.1 the practical application was based on the fact that the Colossians had been raised with Christ. In verse 12, the following applications were based on the fact that the Colossians were:

- God's chosen people.
- Holy.
- Dearly loved.

Now let us focus on one of the characteristics of a chosen, holy and dearly loved man or woman of God – patience. Verses 13-14 give us a beautiful description of patience with regard to our relationship with one another.

- Step 1. ‘Bear with each other.’ The Greek word for ‘bear’ is *anechomai* (an-ekh’-om-ahee), meaning to put up with, endure, forbear, suffer.
- Step 2. ‘Forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.’ If the offence has hurt you so much and it is getting harder to put up with, forgive.
- Step 3. ‘Forgive as the lord forgave you.’ Don’t just forgive. Forgive as the lord forgave you. We should never forget that we, too, need forgiveness and we might have done something that is also hard to forgive.
- Step 4. ‘And over all these virtues put on love.’ This is the most beautiful and compelling appearance of patience.

Our lives today

Nothing has changed in history when it comes to humankind’s struggle against impatience. Saul lost God’s favour when he offered the sacrifice instead of patiently waiting for Samuel. In Psalm 13:1, 2, the Psalmist cried out, ‘How long, LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?’ This cry reverberates through the ages and everyone has to surrender to God’s purifying act of love.

Discussion questions

1. Bring strands of different lengths of yarn. Ask each lady to describe their level of patience by choosing a yarn of a particular length. During the discussion, you may discover that some people have higher tolerance levels for other people than for their own family members. Explore the experiences and motives behind people’s levels of patience.
2. Discuss the different steps of exercising patience as outlined in Colossians 3:13, 14. Allow them to identify incidents and people that they should put up with or forgive; or people from whom they should ask for forgiveness.

Living as loved

On a piece of paper, ask the women to make a particular commitment to live as somebody who is secure in God’s love and shows the same love for others, by exercising the virtue or fruit of the Spirit which is patience.

Major Elsa Oalang

I am secured in God’s love because God has shown his patience with me in so many situations. I have served as Director, Education and Curriculum, in the Papua New Guinea Territory, and am now Literary Secretary and Editor of *The War Cry* back in my home territory, The Philippines.

Bible Study 9

You are loved — Accepted

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **Bear with each other** and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading – John 4:1-42; Romans 15:7

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(Romans 15:7)

What the Bible says

Looking at the life and ministry of Jesus we can quickly see how often he connected with people considered to be on the fringe of society - he ate with tax collectors; he befriended sinners; he touched lepers; he healed the sick. In the passage from John's Gospel we learn a great deal about Jesus' attitude to people.

Jesus was resting alone at Sychar's well when a Samaritan woman arrived to draw water. With nothing with which to draw water and no cup to drink from, Jesus shocked her by asking her for a drink. For centuries, Jews and Samaritans had been quarrelling and, as John explains, 'Jews do not associate with Samaritans' (v 9).

More shockingly, this Samaritan was a woman, and a woman with a questionable past. Perhaps she deliberately chose to come to the well at the hottest part of the day to avoid meeting the other villagers who would come when it was cooler. She was a moral outcast. No respectable Jewish Rabbi would want to be seen speaking to such a woman in a public place – yet Jesus spoke to her.

Beginning with the request for a drink of water, Jesus then turned the conversation to spiritual things. The Samaritan woman may have simply come to draw water from the well, but Jesus invited her to drink of the everlasting water of life (vv 13, 14). Her secret life was not hidden to him for, in her own words, she testified that 'he [Jesus] told me everything I've ever done' (v 39). Jesus did not judge her. He did not condemn her. He simply accepted her and helped her see who he really was – the Messiah (v 26).

Our lives today

The Church today must be a place where people of diverse backgrounds can meet together and expect to feel welcome: different people at different stages of life and at different stages of spiritual understanding. We're all so different! Yet the Bible assures us that God wants all of us to be saved and come to know him.

Through the shed blood of Jesus, people who once were far away - people like us - are brought near to God. Every wall of enmity, discrimination or prejudice must be broken down, for we are now at one with God.

Acceptance is defined as the ability to communicate value, regard, worth and respect to other people. Acceptance of others implies that we can learn from them. An attitude of acceptance must be at the heart of who we are as individuals and who we are when we meet together. Yes we are different, but accepting each other as brothers and sisters in Christ is to love, respect and honour each other as God loves, respects and honours us.

If God, by his grace, has accepted us unconditionally, we must do the same. We must be people of grace. We must accept other people and show them that we love them.

Discussion questions

1. When was the last time someone made you feel welcome and accepted?
2. The opposite of acceptance is rejection. Can you think of a time when you have felt excluded or rejected by a group? How did that make you feel?
3. How do we keep an attitude of acceptance without compromising our faith?
4. Acts 11:9 shows that the early Christians had a difficult time accepting that Gentiles could also be believers (read the full story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts chapter 10). What does this story teach us about our attitudes to others? Can it ever be right for a church to reject someone?

Living as loved

None of us is the finished product. We are all in the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. Along the way we need to learn to accept people as Jesus did. Sometimes, as Paul says, that will mean we have to bear with each other, or 'make allowance for each other's faults' Colossians 3:13a (*New Living Translation*). As Jesus has accepted us, we must be accepting of others.

Reflect on how you can show this attitude of acceptance to people you meet in your community.

Major Pat Brown

I have known I am loved as God has been alongside me in each and every chapter of my life, nudging, guiding and challenging me in new aspects of service and ministry. He has been with me on a journey that began in Scotland and has taken me as far away as New Zealand working in corps, new planting and divisional roles. I am privileged now to serve as Chaplain at IHQ in London

Bible Study 10

You are loved — Forgive

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and **forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading – John 8:1-11

Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, 'Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?' 'No lord,' she said. And Jesus said, 'Neither do I. Go and sin no more.'

(vv 10, 11 New Living Translation).

What the Bible says

In John chapter 7, Jesus had come from Galilee to Jerusalem in Judea for the Festival of Tabernacles and teaches in the temple courts, even though the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill him. After this Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives, but he comes back early in the morning and this is where the story begins.

Jesus is teaching once again and a crowd is gathering. It is the perfect opportunity for the teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees to 'put Jesus on the spot' and get him to make a mistake, so they can get rid of him. They bring out a woman who has committed adultery and ask Jesus what he would do — would he follow the law of Moses (Torah)? Jesus says nothing, but begins to write on the ground with his finger. It is only when they keep asking him that Jesus gets up and challenges them: 'All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!' (v 7 NLT). That is all Jesus says and then he goes back to writing on the ground again. He stays there until everyone from the crowd has stepped away and he is left alone with the woman.

This is when forgiveness takes place. This is when Jesus speaks directly to the woman. And what he says must have been a surprise to her and the crowd: 'Didn't even one of them condemn you? ... Neither do I. Go and sin no more' (vv 10, 11). Jesus forgives the woman and she is free to begin a new life of healing and transformation.

Our lives today

Forgiveness is not easy. I find that it is one of the hardest things to do in life. But I have also learned that forgiveness is necessary for healing and transformation to take place. If you do not forgive, it can be extremely difficult to get on with your life. However, forgiveness does not bring instant healing and transformation — it is part of a process and I have found it to be a very good beginning.

When you are in a relationship, whether it be with a friend, parent/child or spouse, at some point you are likely to hurt each other and forgiveness will have to take place. I had a friend with whom I had an instant connection. We got to know each other very well over a short period of time. Sometimes it felt like we had known each other for years. But after a while, it became a one-way friendship, where I was the one initiating contact 99 per cent of the time. So when I stopped initiating contact, we simply did not talk.

On my initiative we tried to reconnect a few times, but it just did not work. After giving it one last chance, I stopped contacting my friend completely. It sometimes felt like a defeat or failure and at times I blamed myself for not being able to make it work when, in fact, I had been trying my very best, but my friend did not try at all.

It was hard giving up on that friendship and I still find myself wanting to try to make it work again. But the process of healing, transformation and 'letting go' could only start when I stopped blaming myself and forgave my friend for not wanting to re-establish contact.

Discussion questions

1. 'Condemn' means to express complete disapproval of something and/or someone, typically in public. Are you aware of condemnation taking place where forgiveness should be happening instead? Share some examples.
2. Take some time to think about the different reactions in the Bible reading. Share your thoughts on how Jesus, the Pharisees and the woman react. How would you have reacted if you were the woman, a Pharisee or Jesus?
3. What do you think Jesus was writing in the sand? If he was writing a message to you, what would it be?

Living as loved

'Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a constant attitude'

Martin Luther King Jr.

Looking back on your life, are you holding onto something that you need to forgive yourself for? Do you need to forgive someone else? Ask God to guide you, as you forgive and begin a process of healing and transformation.

Louise Wahl (Denmark Territory)

I have known I am loved as God has led me to children's and youth ministry in Denmark and Canada, and to the International College for Officers and Centre for Spiritual Life Development (as a volunteer for 12 months) in London. In 2014 I hope to enter Salvation Army Officer training as a cadet.

Bible Study 11

Love that Unites

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in **perfect unity** (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible reading — John 15:1-5

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

What the Bible says

God created a perfect world. Out of chaos, God breathed and created unity. This impacted roles and relationships, work and worship, love and living until men fell out with God and eventually fell out with each other (look again at the Genesis account). The unity became fractious and fell back into a state of chaos. That is one of the reasons why Jesus is referred to as the second Adam. The difference is that this time, through our relationship with him, we can stay strongly united with God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks about us being 'united' with God in order that our united lives may impact others. We are not born to be solitary beings. Jesus says that being united with him (described here as the living vine) will bring about spiritual growth in the following ways:

- We would bear fruit — John 15:4.
- We would bear much fruit — John 15:5.
- We would bear fruit that will last — John 15:16.

Our lives today

Loneliness is one of the biggest concerns of the 21st century. In so many cities, communities, towns, villages and even families, people are living lonely, disconnected lives. It's a small change in grammar, but the difference between being connected and disconnected can be huge for the person experiencing it.

We are not meant to live in isolation. We read about it in John chapter 15, and again, at the beginning of the Genesis account and Creation, we read that we are intended for each other, for community. 'It is not good for man [people] to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). This is not about being single, or living alone, this is about living disconnected lives. Just as electrical appliances need to be connected and 'switched on' to allow the power to run through them, so we need to live connected and 'switched on' lives, open to the Holy Spirit flowing through us, empowering and unifying us, one with another.

It is vital that we live in 'perfect unity' with our heavenly Father in order that we might form unifying relationships with others. God needs to be part of every relationship, whether between partners, family members or between friends.

Paul's message to the Ephesians reiterates a similar message to our key verses in Colossians where he writes: 'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:2. 3).

Discussion questions

1. In which ways might it be an 'effort' to keep the unity?
2. How does love help us to bear fruit that will last?
3. In what ways can we better express our Christian unity?

Living as loved

In what ways might we become better connected to our communities?

One suggestion might be to 'prayer walk' your local street, community, area, village...

Pray for unity – look for opportunity.

Major Val Mylechreest

I have known I am loved as I have been blessed to be brought up in a Christian family and have responded to God's call on my life. My journey as an officer has been an exciting privilege. Appointments have included Faith House (Midnight Patrol) and The Haven Children's Home as well as corps in the UK and Australia. I now lead the Adult and Family Ministries Unit for the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland. I thank God for his unconditional love, plan and provision for me.

Bible Study 12

Loved then Love

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on **love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Bible readings

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11)

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

What the Bible says

God's love for human beings is reaffirmed numerous times in Scripture. 'But it was because the LORD loved you ...' (Deuteronomy 7:8); "'I have loved you,'" says the LORD' (Malachi 1:2). God's desire in response to his love toward us is for us to love one another. 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD' (Leviticus: 19:18) is the injunction given to his people.

Jesus' last command clearly reflects the Old Testament teaching: 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34). He commanded his disciples. He reiterated this strong statement as a sign for his disciples: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (v 35). There could hardly be a stronger statement than 'Love one another' as the basis for qualifying one as a follower of Jesus.

Our lives today

Love anticipates and demands love in return. In my part of the world, there is a general feeling among religious and even secular groups that the true sense of love is diminishing in our generation, in relationships and in the community at large. Love within the family — between couples, siblings, in-laws and so on — is seen to be on the decline.

There are numerous factors contributing to this. One common observation is that materialism is gaining the upper ground on religious, social and cultural sentiments. Scientific advancement and globalization are other factors worth considering, as is the rapid advance in technology. Human relationships are at stake as the present generation becomes more reliant on devices than person-to-person contact. As humanity seemingly becomes more self-reliant, so greater becomes the likelihood of people straying further from God.

The timing of these studies on the subject of love is truly perfect and I pray that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has been evident throughout these pages. If we understand what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, 'For Christ's love compels us...' (2 Corinthians 5:14), there can be no reason to delay in sharing love so wonderful.

In one of my appointments I worked among people living with HIV/Aids, and drug abused and commercial sex workers. Since there was no proper place for them and their stigma and exclusion was common, they would often knock on our doors at odd hours. I would prepare food, hot water for them to bath, and a bed for the night, and this would often continue for weeks and even months. The challenges here lay in providing preventative measures to combat the symptomatic diseases that they carried. Knowing and experiencing God's love enabled me to love them without discrimination.

Discussion questions

1. What does the phrase 'love one another' mean for you?
2. Take time to share personal experiences of loving others with Christlike love.
3. In your society/culture what challenges contribute to expressing Christian sisterly love for one another? Suggest how believers can overcome them.

Living as loved

Looking back at the studies, which one has spoken to you most in your journey of love? We prove our love for God by loving others.

Meditate on these verses:

'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'

(John 13:34,35).

Commissioner Nemkhanching Nu-i

I have known I am loved as I have had the privilege of serving the Lord in the India Eastern Territory (my home territory) and in Women's Ministries roles in the India Northern, Sri Lanka and The Philippines territories, and currently as Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries in the South Asia Zone at IHQ.

You are loved!

by Yvonne Field

Do you ever wonder what it's all about?
Do you want to question why you came to be?
It may seem hard to fathom,
Much more than you could ever know,
Trust it all to God, you'll discover:

*You are loved, you are loved,
Child of God, don't you know you are loved?
God sent his Son, his precious one,
To show you, child, you are loved,
O, you are loved, you are loved,
Child of God, don't you know you are loved?
God sent his Son, his precious one,
To show you, child, you are loved!*

Never give up hoping, live beyond a dream,
All you ever longed for is here for you;
For in God's eyes you're honoured,
Much more than you could ever know,
Trust it all to God, you'll discover:

Chorus

Will you believe in him,
And take him at his word?
Walk through the open door,
Everlasting life is yours, life is yours, for,

*You are loved, you are loved,
Child of God, don't you know you are loved?
God sent his Son, his precious one,
To show you, child, you are loved! You are loved!
To show you, child, you are loved!
Child, you are loved!*

Rest in my love

by Marilyn Baker

Rest in my love, relax in my care.
And know that my presence will always be there.
You are my child and I care for you.
There's nothing my love and my pow'r cannot do.
Jesus is here. He is alive,
And all pow'r is given unto him.
His peace and joy he gives to you
Brings strength and comfort to your heart.

And he said: Rest in my love, relax in my care
And know that my presence will always be there.
You are my child and I care for you.
There's nothing my love and my pow'r cannot do.

You can't stop God from loving you

John Gowans
SASB 854 v3

You can't stop God from loving you
Though you may disobey him,
You can't stop God from loving you,
However you betray him;
From love like this no power on earth
The human heart can sever,
You can't stop God from loving you,
Not God — not now, nor ever.

You are loved

Based on Colossians 3:16

Moderato ♩ = 80

C G/B Am

May the word of Christ, The rich word of Christ Live in your hearts and make you

Em G Am Dm

wise. Speak his words, sing his songs, It's to him all praise be -

G(sus4) G C G/B Am

-longs. May the word of Christ, The rich word of Christ Live in your hearts and make you

Em F G C F/C C

wise. May you know, may you show, you are loved.



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES **2014**



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