

TOUGH LOVE



Winter 2025

Let the Love of God Fuel Your Relationships

Sustaining loving relationships takes hard work, commitment, and an abundance of grace. Join us as we consider the tough, sacrificial love that is needed to bless our families, friends, and communities.

This personal journal is meant to be a space for you to discern what you want for your life, your family, and your neighborhood. Each week we have recommended scripture readings for prayerful reflection. Our hope is that these scriptures may help you grow in wisdom and deepen your love of God, which will fuel your relationships with a tough love that endures through better and worse.

We also encourage you to check out our weekly sermons by Pastor Stina which will explore each of these topics in greater detail and our new shorter YouTube videos, hosted by Amber Lahtinen, geared for especially for parents on the go. Find video links on our website - crosswindslife.org

May this time of prayer, study, and reflection bless your life and your relationships. We are praying for you.

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Week One - What Do You Want?

Getting Started - What Do You Want?

Let's begin thinking about the kind of love you give and the kind of love you get. Now ask yourself - What do you want? Are you giving the love you want to others? Are you getting the love you want from others? What needs to change? What needs to be nurtured and strengthened? Spend time over these next few weeks praying over these questions. Notice your feelings and your thoughts. What have you been telling yourself? What have you been ignoring? What lies have you been feeding? What truths have been left unclaimed?

God is waiting to give you what you really want and really need - a love that endures forever. This kind of love will steady your life and nourish all the relationships you have. So we invite you to open your heart to God. Be honest with Him about how things are going. Invite Him to lead and care for you. Let Him order your steps and be the source of your deepest love.

Sunday, January 12 - Read 1 John 4:7-10

The Bible reminds us that at the core, God is love. Every time we experience love and share love, we encounter God. Pray about the ways you have experienced the love of God today.

Monday, January 13 - Read 1 John 4:11-16

God really loves you. He loves you enough to give everything He has just for you. He loves you so much that His love remains in you. As you pray, listen to God speaking words of love directly to you.

Tuesday, January 14 - Ready 1 John 4:17-21

When God's love dwells deeply in our hearts, it has the power to cast out fear. It has the power to help us love everyone else. Today, lift up your fears to God. Ask for His assistance.

Week One - What Do You Want?

Wednesday, January 15 - Exodus 34:1-7

What is another way to describe the nature of love of God? The Old Testament reminds us that at the core of God's being is grace, mercy, forgiveness, loyalty, and steadfast love. Meditate on these attributes. What do you want from God today?

Thursday, January 16 - Psalm 136:1-9

Many of the Psalms declare God's steadfast love which endures forever. Today's Psalm lists ways God was faithful in the history of the Israelite nation. Make a list of the ways God has been steadfast to you this day.

Friday, January 17 - Matthew 22:34-40

Jesus tells us that the most important thing to do is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. How is God inviting you to deepen your love of Him and your neighbors today?

Saturday, January 18 - Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus also reminds us that we can fully trust and rely on His love to protect us, guide us, and carry us. Share with Jesus your burdens this day. He loves you.

Week Two - What Do You Want For Your Kids?

Getting Started - Loving, Doing, and Giving What is Best For Our Kids

This week spend time reflecting about what you want for your kids. Although these devotions may focus on the questions parents have for their own children, the questions are still applicable for extended family, church, and our neighborhoods.

There is a special love and calling that emerges when we become parents and are responsible for raising a child. C.S. Lewis wrote in his book, *The Four Loves*, "Affection opens our eyes to goodness we could not have seen, or should not have appreciated without it. So does humble sanctity." Truly, raising children is a means of sanctifying grace, expanding our understanding of the love of God.

Sunday, January 19 - Read Proverbs 1:1-9

King Solomon, known as one of the wisest kings in history, is said to have written most of Proverbs. These short sayings were meant to help teach children wisdom. What sayings do you have in your family that impart wisdom?

Monday, January 20 - Read Proverbs 22:1-6

At the heart of Proverbs is a desire to build strong character and moral virtue. What virtues do you wish to impart on your children for their future wellbeing?

Tuesday, January 21 - Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9

This is the central message of Deuteronomy, known as the "Shema" which means "Listen!" Who are we supposed to listen to here? God! It goes even further than listening. It includes loving God with every part of our being. Doing that requires daily attention, recitation, and even posting it in our homes. How are you making your home a place that remembers to listen and love God?

Week Two - What Do You Want For Your Kids?

Wednesday, January 22 - Read Luke 18:15-17

Jesus welcomes everyone, especially our children. How are you bringing your children to Jesus? What blessings do you believe Jesus has waiting for your kids?

Thursday, January 23 - Read Romans 8:12-17

The Bible reminds us that we can call God many names, including, “Abba” or “Father.” It actually is more like calling God, “Daddy.” We belong to God and everything he has is meant to be shared with us. What do you want your kids to know about the great inheritance they have through God’s love?

Friday, January 24 - Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Our baptism connects us to God, our Father, and to one another. This means we receive a great inheritance and have a calling to live great lives worthy of Jesus. What do you think God’s calling is for your child(ren)?

Saturday, January 25 - Read Ephesians 6:1-4

In the Old Testament, “Honor your mother and father” is mentioned in the Ten Commandments (both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 6 and adds that we are called to raise them with discipline and instruction of the Lord. How are you being faithful to God in your work as a parent?

Week Three - What Do You Want For Your Friends?

Greater Love Has No One.....

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves*, "To the Ancients, Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it." He then went on to say, "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets."

This week, spend time reflecting on your friendships. How have they enriched your life? How are you a good friend to others?

Sunday, January 26 - Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Later in King Solomon's reign, he wrote the words of Ecclesiastes, where he considers what matters most in life. Although he recognizes a lot of life is vanity, he reaffirms this central point - having friends matters. Who has been a good friend in your life that has provided strength and solid companionships?

Monday, January 27 - Read Proverbs 27:17

Today's scripture reading is brief, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens a friend." (Proverbs 27:17) How have your friendships strengthened and sharpened you? How are you strengthening your friends?

Tuesday, January 28 - Read John 15:9-12

To be a good friend, we need to remain in the love of God. How is God's love guiding your friendships?

Week Three - What Do You Want For Your Friends?

Wednesday, January 29 - Read John 15:13-17

Jesus models the ultimate friendship with us, in giving up his life for us. He calls us friends. He asks us to live like he did. Spend time talking to Jesus about your friendship. What would you like from him today?

Thursday, January 30 - Read Proverbs 29:5

C.S. Lewis also wrote in *The Four Loves*, "Friendship (as the ancients saw) can be a school of virtue; but also (as they did not see) a school of vice. It is ambivalent. It makes good men better and bad men worse." Proverbs 29:5 warns us that, "People who flatter their friends spread out a net for their feet." Spend time praying for friendships that you struggle with and are destructive.

Friday, January 31 - Read Job 2:11-12

The story of Job includes tragedy and despair. His friends come to comfort him. Pray for your friends who need encouragement and hope today.

Saturday, February 1 - Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-18

The Apostle Paul reminds us that when we become a follower of Christ, we become part of His Church, part of His Body. We belong to one another and we need one another. Pray for God to deepen your friendships and connections through the church. Pray that the gifts we each have may be used for the glory of God.

Week Four - What Do You Want For Your Marriage?

Happily Ever After....

Marriage is a special love where we can uniquely experience becoming “one flesh” with another person. Through this sacred intimacy, we understand what it means to help and be helped by another person that is “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh” (Genesis 2).

This week, we will focus on the love that deepens in a marriage over the years. What do you want for your marriage today? How can we look to God to guide our marriage so that we can be faithful, “for better and for worse”?

Sunday, February 2 - Read Genesis 2:18-24

This story in Genesis recognizes that when we marry another person we become one flesh. We are to be for one another a helpmate. How does your spouse provide help to you in a way that makes you more fully alive? Give thanks for their love today.

Monday, February 3 - 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

This is one of the most popular scriptures read at weddings. It reminds us what our aim is as we love our spouse. Meditate on these attributes today. As you pray through this scripture, every time you see the word “love” add your spouse’s name in there. Then repeat using your own name. Ask for God’s blessing to deepen the love you have for one another.

Tuesday, February 4 - Read Matthew 5:27-30

In the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5), we are given the commandment to be faithful in our marriage. Jesus goes one step further, warning against what we look at and what is in our thoughts. Faithfulness to God and our spouse matters. What things in your life need to be cut out so that you can deepen your faithfulness to your spouse and to God?

Week Four - What Do You Want For Your Marriage?

Wednesday, February 5 - Read Ephesians 5:15-21

A strong marriage encourages each person to “live your lives wisely, not foolishly.” (Ephesians 5:15-21) How does your marriage provide wisdom for your life?

Thursday, February 6 - Read Ephesians 5:22-25

A marriage that lasts for better and for worse is one that is grounded in the love of God and capable of a Christ-like mutually loving submission that seeks the highest good for the other. It is imperative we look to Jesus as our guide and ground ourselves in the love only God can provide. How does your marriage rely on God’s wisdom and guidance? What needs to deepen and soften through the grace of Christ?

Friday, February 7 - Read Ephesians 5:26-33

To love our spouse is to cherish and honor them, like our very own sacred bodies. How does your marriage embody this love? What needs assistance, forgiveness, grace, or reconciliation? Ask Jesus for guidance.

Saturday, February 8 - Read Colossians 3:12-17

There is an old saying that, “Clothes make the man.” In our scripture today, we hear words of encouragement of what to wear spiritually. Spend time praying for God to clothe your marriage with what you need today.

What Do You Want From Your Marriage In 20 Years?

Renewing Your Vows

In a recent sermon titled, "Eros and Agape: Making Love Last," (January 28, 2024) Pastor Adam Hamilton (Resurrection Church, Kansas City) reported on a congregational survey asking over 4,000 congregants about their marriages. When asking to rate, "Our Marriage is Very Happy," the results took a surprising turn. Newlyweds (0-5 years) indicated 55% as very happy. Couples married 10-14 years indicated only 40% were very happy. Whereas couples married 35 years indicated over 50% as very happy and those married over 40 years indicated more than 60% were very happy.

What marked the changes? The truth is that having children and launching careers creates great stress in a marriage. Couples who could rely on their spouse and God to get through hardship, found greater happiness in the long term. What does it take to weather the stress of life and deepen our love for one another amidst life struggles? What do you hope for your marriage in 20 years from now?

Sunday, February 9 - Read Hebrews 13:1-8

Keeping a strong marriage involves daily choices to keep loving one another like family, providing hospitality to others, being faithful to our spouse, and being wise about our use of money. What words from today's reading are most important to you today? What is God helping you with in this moment?

Monday, February 10 - Read Philippians 2:1-5

Being humble, sharing in the spirit, and finding comfort in marital love happens when we share a common mind that is grounded in the attitude of Jesus. How does your marital love bring comfort in your life? How are you and your spouse in agreement? When do you look to Jesus for guidance in your marriage?

Tuesday, February 11 - Read Luke 6:37-38

Adam Hamilton wrote in *Love to Stay*, "There are six words that may be as important as any spoken in a marriage, perhaps even more important that, 'I love you.' The six words are, 'I am sorry' and 'I forgive you.'" Spend time reflecting on what needs reconciliation in your marriage. Where is forgiveness needed?

What Do You Want From Your Marriage In 20 Years?

Wednesday, February 12 - Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

The Apostle Paul reminds us that our bodies are sacred. How are you honoring your body through your marriage? What does your spouse need support with today?

Thursday, February 13 - Read Song of Solomon 8:5-7

The Song of Solomon is love poetry that would make most people blush on a Sunday morning. It speaks of a sensual love that is as strong as death. As you reflect on your marriage, would you say that “many waters cannot quench the love you have for your spouse?” Ask for God’s blessing on your marriage to have strength and passion that endures even in the face of death.

Friday, February 14 - Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Does this one sound familiar? You’re right, it was highlighted last week. Read it again on Valentines Day. Celebrate the love God has blessed your marriage with and ask for continued blessing in the year to come.

Saturday, February 15 - Read Revelation 21:1-7

The love God has for us is like a bride groom awaiting his bride on their wedding day. This is the same image that awaits us in the new heaven and earth. Pray today for those who have lost their spouses, that they may find comfort in their love and the life of the world to come.

Week Six - What Do You Want For Your Neighbors?

And Who Is My Neighbor?

In a digitally mobile world where we can connect across the globe, we think that we face new questions such as “Who is my neighbor?” Yet, when we read the Bible, we come to understand that “nothing is new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) These questions of how we construct community, who belongs, and what is our responsibility to one another, are questions that have been asked for thousands of years. This week, we spend time looking to the words of Jesus and the prophets as we consider what it means to be a neighbor.

Sunday, February 16 - Read Luke 10:25-28

We hear once more the words of the Shema, to Love God with everything we’ve got. The gospel story adds in “love your neighbor as yourself” (which is originally from Leviticus 19:18). The perennial question is, who is included in this second commandment? How would you answer the question of “Who is my neighbor?” Pray today for your neighbors.

Monday, February 17 - Read Luke 10:29-37

We meet the Good Samaritan today and learn that to be a neighbor is to show mercy. Who needs your mercy today?

Tuesday, February 18 - Read Micah 6:6-8

The prophets remind us that if we forget to love our neighbors, our offerings to God are incomplete and insincere. What does the Lord require of you today?

Week Six - What Do I Want For My Neighbors?

Wednesday, February 19 - Read Isaiah 51:1-8

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that in our zeal to be righteous and just, we need to look to the rock from which we were cut. We need to find wisdom from our ancestors. Spend time reflecting on the wisdom of your ancestors and those Biblical ancestors as you seek to understand what it means to be a good neighbor.

Thursday, February 20 - Read Matthew 25:31-36

Jesus very clearly tells us that he regularly appears to us through those who are in need. Who is God calling you to care for today?

Friday, February 21 - Read Matthew 25:37-46

Sometimes we simply aren't paying attention to those who God has sent to us for care. Spend time examining your week. What have you left undone? Ask God for forgiveness and mercy.

Saturday, February 22 - Read Romans 13:1-10

The Apostle Paul presents a challenging interpretation of being faithful to Jesus and living as a citizen under foreign occupation. What do you think Paul is trying to teach us today about being a faithful disciple in a sinful world?

Week Seven - What Do I Want For My Enemies?

“But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies.” (Luke 6:27)

We conclude our series with one of the toughest loves - loving our enemies. Our instinctual desires towards those who have wronged us are those of anger, retaliation, and vengeance. How can we possibly move past those deep instincts into a higher love that seeks the wellbeing of all persons? What kind of tough love reaches out transformatively in the face of sin to create redemption and resurrection?

Sunday, February 23 - Read Luke 6:27-31

Who do you consider an enemy? Who has wronged you? Share these names with Jesus. Ask for his mercy and grace in their lives and in your own.

Monday, February 24 - Read Luke 6:32-36

Jesus calls us to a way of living immersed in compassionate love. What do you think compassionate love looks like today, especially towards those who have wronged you?

Tuesday, February 25 - Read Luke 6:37-38

Why does Jesus warn against judgment and condemnation? What is the difference between permissively allowing everyone to do what is right in their own eyes - and calling one another to a life of holiness? What judgments do you need to relinquish?

Week Seven - What Do I Want For My Enemies?

Wednesday, February 26 - Read Matthew 5:21-26

Anger is a natural emotion, but left unchecked can become a dangerous wildfire. What anger brews in your heart? How can you remedy it today with God's help?

Thursday, February 27 - Read Matthew 18:15-20

The reading today is often referred to as "The Rule of Christ," providing guidance when someone has wronged us. What do you learn about confronting sin and injustice from these teachings? How is Jesus convicting you to confront sin in your life today?

Friday, February 28 - Read Luke 23:32-43

Jesus had enemies. He was unfairly crucified because of a jealous and angry institution. Yet even in the midst of suffering and pain, Jesus declares forgiveness. He welcomes those who are penitent. Spend time at the foot of the cross. What does Jesus teach you about the power of loving your enemies?

Saturday, March 1 - Read John 21:15-19

As we conclude our series, we leave with this resurrection story. Jesus, our Savior, the one who has the power over even hell and death, shows the strength of resurrection. He leaves us with this challenge - if we are to love him, we must feed his sheep.

The 5 Love Languages Workshop

Saturday, January 25
10am-12pm

Register online

Five Love Languages Workshop (Saturday, Jan 25, 10am-12pm)
Brunch included. Registration preferred.
All Ages Welcome. Nursery care provided.

Based on the work of Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages®* book is a best-selling resource that has helped people for decades understand how to show and communicate love to others. The premise is quite simple: different people with different personalities give and receive love in different ways. Join Pastor Stina and Amber Lahtinen (Director of Children and Family Ministry) on Saturday, January 25th (10am-12pm) for a special workshop open to all ages to learn about your own love language and how to care for the love languages of others so that you can navigate conflict with grace and deepen your connection in valued relationships. Registration in advance is preferred so that we can have materials and a light meal ready for you.

Cross Winds

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