

Five Essentials – Aspects of Loving

- A focus for the Church

An introduction

1 Being loved

We all need to be loved and cared for. How can we ensure that all our members and people in the church are loved and cared for?

We are all loved by the Lord and he never fails us. 'You are mine. I will be with you. You are precious in my sight, and I love you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you.' From Isaiah 43.

Do we look to other people to fulfil some need in us rather than looking to the Lord? Perhaps we have looked to the minister for this in the past - but this is no longer possible. In fact such expectations of other people are unrealistic and lead to feeling let down. It is then that we become aware that only the Lord is unfailing love. 'I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.' Isaiah 43.3.

How might we reinforce the Lord's love for us all?

2 Relating to God's love

We need to know the Lord and his ways and their relevance in our lives. How can we work together, ministry and lay, to evolve a new pattern of learning about the Lord and his ways that is relevant to the young and not-so-young in the church today?

The Lord's love for us is always constant. Yet in the Bible this is expressed in so many different forms: Jehovah giving edicts from on high; as a caring Shepherd, loving Father, Healer in sickness, Teacher, and Lamb gently leading. We relate to different aspects of him at different times.

Our ways of learning and relating are varied: some of us are predominantly doers, some thinkers and some feelers. Can we cater for this when planning how we might relate to God's love?

Let us look for what we enjoy and respond to and go from there. This gives us energy and life.

3 Loving others

We need to live from what we have learned and experienced. How can we love our neighbour and live a useful life?

Empowered by God's love we need to give it to others.

'Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.' John 13.34.

'The essence of love is that what is ours should belong to someone else.' Divine Love and Wisdom 47.

'By its very nature, spiritual love wants to share what it has with others. It gets this quality from God's divine love, which is like this in infinite measure. Divine Providence 27.

Kindness is an inner desire that makes us want to do good things even if we do not get anything in return. It is the joy of our life to do them. When we do good things from this inner desire, there is kindness in everything we think, say, want, and do.' The Heavenly City – A Spiritual Guidebook 104.

'Love and wisdom without good, useful action are nothing. They do not become real until they exist in usefulness.' True Christian Religion 387.

4 Loving ourselves

We need to reflect on our own lives and work on our regeneration. We cannot love others if we don't love ourselves. Yet we do not love others when we focus only on ourselves. How can we love ourselves in a truly balanced way?

'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Leviticus 19.2,18

Holy, like the Lord. That sounds challenging. It will require some real work and effort on our part but the Lord will be with us making the real changes, which only he can do.

We are to love other people as much as and in the same way that we love ourselves. It is ok to love ourselves. It must be because the Lord loves us. We are lovable.

5 Loving the Lord

We need to return the Lord's love for us to be whole. When we really receive the Lord's love into our hearts, we are so filled that we can't help but love him and want to offer him worship, thanks and praise. At this stage we live from him rather than from ourselves. What ways do you love the Lord individually and in community?

'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Fear the Lord your God, serve him only. Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you.' Deuteronomy 6.4-6,13,18

How might we develop our love for the Lord personally? and in community?
How might we creatively offer worship, thanks and praise?

A focus

How might we enable each person in our family, group, church, area, throughout the church to know and experience God's love?

Together

We don't have to do this on our own. Ask others what their response is. I did, sharing the idea first with a colleague, then the Ministers' Committee, the Governing Council, the Annual Meeting of Conference and now the whole church. We can work together, sharing our ideas and letting each other know how we are loved and loving.

Team

If you are wondering where to start or want help in developing your ideas, contact Helen Brown, Alan Misson or myself. Over the next year or more Helen is producing material in 4 parts for each essential, offering suggestions for working with it - available via the Lifeline website: www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk and email. She can enlarge on this if you want more material for a group or workshop. Alan is a wizard at the technical side of production and putting things on the internet. We would all be happy to talk with you about any ideas to help 'love' them into being.

Revd Mary Duckworth, Senior Minister, with a little help from Helen and Alan