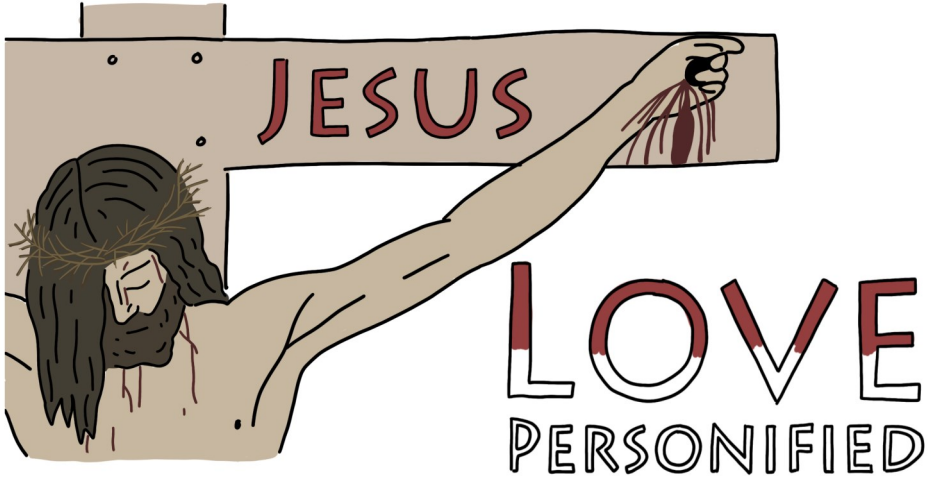


# Kew Baptist Church



*"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

(Jesus in the Gospel of John, chapter 15)



## Jesus: Love Personified – Study Booklet

It may surprise some to hear, but the Bible is a grand love story—the grandest of love stories. It tells the story of the Loving Creator God creating the glorious heavens and earth, and bringing forth humanity to share and enjoy His love and creation. We chose the way of selfishness and rebellion (sin), were cut off from God's love and became violent and hateful toward one another.

But God's love and justice came together in the perfect and beautiful life of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, gave his life in love upon the cross to bear the weight of God's justice against the sins and rebellion of human beings. "For God so loved the world", says the Gospel of John, "that he gave His only Son..."

Over the next couple of months our vision is for everyone at KBC to learn and experience more of God's love, and also become more loving people. For God's love is costly and calls for a response from us. It's a love that gives, that sacrifices—even when it hurts—and a love which will have no rival lovers. It is a love based on truth, and as pastor and author Tim Keller states:

*"Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it."*

And to love like this will require us opening up our hearts, just as Literary Critic and Professor—and former atheist, C. S. Lewis, said:

*"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable."*

But love that is the best way, the true way, the right way and God's love enables us to be fully human and fully alive, and deeply connected in community with others. As the Bishop of London said at the wedding of William and Kate:

*"A spiritual life grows as love finds its centre beyond ourselves. Faithful and committed relationships offer a door into the mystery of spiritual life in which we discover this; the more we give of self, the richer we become in soul; the more we go beyond ourselves in love, the more we become our true selves and our spiritual beauty is more fully revealed."*

And no one, not ever, has shown us more powerfully what love looks like, than Jesus: Love Personified.

## 24 February — Loving the Unlovely (Matthew 8:1-4)

We don't ostracize people because they are sick, and families don't cast out terminally ill people onto the street for them to fend for themselves. But in some countries today this happens—I have seen it with my own eyes. And in Jesus' day it was a common occurrence—especially those suffering the scourge of leprosy. Sick people were considered “unclean”, cursed by God, and to be avoided lest you too were contaminated. Imagine having a terminal illness and also being shunned by family, friends. What was worse, the sickness or the abandonment and isolation?

This story shows the roots and reasons of why our society does not do this: Jesus taught a new way. Sick, vulnerable and helpless people—even contagious people—were to be loved and welcomed. They were to be treated with dignity as image-bearers of God. Look at how Jesus loved, and imagine what the man felt: “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man...” Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

Read Leviticus 13:45-46. Given this Old Testament practice, what attitude do you think people had to those with skin conditions like leprosy?

What does Jesus' touching the man with leprosy (8:3) demonstrate

- In terms of Jesus' compassion?
- In terms of Jesus' spiritual power?

How do you imagine the man who was healed felt after this encounter, especially in front of a large crowd (8:1)?

How can we love like this in our lives in practical ways?

### 3 March— Love Forgives (Matthew 9:1-8)

In this story we are not being told that all sickness is the result of a person's sinfulness; but we are being told that sin is the most severe and life-threatening illness a person can have. As challenging and painful as any physical ailment or sickness we have might be, it is only temporary—limited to our physical existence. However, sinfulness—missing the mark, falling short, rebellion against God—has eternal consequences. So if you had to make a choice between peace with God for eternity or perfect physical health for a lifetime, which would you choose?

The man in this story receives both, and such is the ultimate destiny of all who know the forgiveness of Christ, but who still suffer in this life. It's a frustrating mystery that not everyone we pray for is healed—though we keep praying as this is a beautiful ministry of love to those suffering. But Jesus goes to the deeper sickness in the man's life first. Jesus wants to walk in love and friendship for eternity with him, so he says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Jesus: Love Personified.

#### *Personal Study*

What is surprising about Jesus' first words to the paralysed man? (9:2)

What does Jesus' declaration of forgiveness show about his love for this man?

Why are some people so concerned by what Jesus has said? (9:3)

What is the answer to Jesus' question (9:5 – i.e., which thing is easier to say?)

How does Jesus' healing the man prove his authority?

How can we seek to care for all parts of a person's life like Jesus does?

## 10 March— Love Welcomes Strangers (Matthew 9:9-13)

Shamima Begum was born in the UK and was a UK citizen until the UK Government revoked it recently. She left the UK to join Islamic State, married an ISIS soldier and now has a child to him. She believes the slaughter of 22 innocent concert attendees who were killed at Manchester Arena in 2017 by an IS sympathizer was justified. To her UK compatriots she is a traitor, a sympathizer with murderers and no longer welcome to be a UK citizen. She wants to go home to the UK.

Now you get a feel for how Jewish people felt about their fellow Jews, like Matthew, who sold out their own people and became wealthy by joining the murderous and oppressive Roman Empire. But Jesus sees a life able to be redeemed and offers Matthew a second chance when he says to him "Follow me".

Justifiably and understandably many people were outraged at Jesus going to Matthew's house for a party and sharing a meal with him. But Jesus' response silences them: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

Why do we feel the way we do about people like Shamima Begum and Matthew?

What's a modern equivalent of Jesus' dinner with "tax collectors and sinners"?

What is Jesus' attitude to people like Matthew from his final words (9:12-13)?

What is our attitude to people like Matthew today?

How could our attitude be more like Jesus'?

## 17 March— Love #MeToo (Matthew 9:18-26)

Two females have died in this story. A little girl has physically died and a woman had died socially and relationally through being cut off from her people due to a shameful sickness. In the ancient world, throughout history, and in places still today women have been treated harshly and often suffered through oppression and violence. But the way Jesus responded to women changed forever the way women are viewed. He treated them with dignity, equality and tender love.

The little girl who has died matters to Jesus and he goes without hesitation to the house to raise her to life. It's a promise to anyone who has lost a child that they are now with Jesus. And then there is the woman carrying her secret shame and pain. Mark tells us she "had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mk 5:26). But Jesus turned and saw her and tenderly says, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you." Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

How does Jesus react to the request of the (wealthy, well-regarded) synagogue leader, and of the (poor, outcast) bleeding woman on the street? (9:18-22)

How do you think the synagogue ruler and family reacted to Jesus' act of love?

How do you think the bleeding woman reacted to Jesus' act of love? (see 9:21)

How might we be tempted to distinguish between those worthy and those unworthy of our love?

How can we love more like Jesus does in this story?

## 24 March— *Love is Hard Work (Matthew 10)*

Everyone loves love. After all, “Love is love!” But that is like saying “Yellow is yellow” or “Trees are trees”. It doesn't tell us where love comes from and what love looks like. So where does love come from? The Apostle John who walked with Jesus for 3 years said that Love comes from God. But more than this, “God is love.” And “We love because God first loved us.” (1 Jn 4)

What is love? John answers Love is what God has done in sending Jesus to this earth. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Love Comes from God and Love looks like Jesus! So in this chapter where Jesus sends out his disciples with his message, he is beginning the hard work of love to bring the message of God's mercy and grace to all the nations. Love is the best and most wonderful of things; it is also hard work and calls us to give our lives in response to God's love in Jesus and in order to share that love with the world. It's a love that gives us something worth living for, and dying for—just what Jesus would ultimately do for us on the cross. Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

How does the disciple's mission flow from the love of Jesus? (10:6-8)

How does Jesus expect people will respond to the disciples' mission?

How can the disciples' mission be considered an act of love to the people they reach?

Do we consider telling others about Jesus in our lives to be an act of love?

How does the disciples' mission sound similar to Jesus' own experience?

## 31 March – Love Gets Angry (John 2:13-25)

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple Courts is a fascinating and challenging story from his life. Imagine the chaotic and frenzied scene: Hundreds of people yelling, tables crashing to the ground, money scattering everywhere, sheep bleating, cattle lowing and doves cooing and running and flying in all directions. Jesus was angry and acting in love. How do we reconcile this? One author has suggested:

"Our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don't have to compromise convictions to be compassionate." Rick Warren

Religion and societies can become toxic, money-making and devoid of truth and spiritual life and love. In Luke's telling of the story, Jesus says: " 'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Lk 19:46). It's right to be angry and to act in the face of injustice, exploitation, greed and oppression. Jesus did not preach violence or incite hatred; but how can love stand idly by in the face of injustice, misery and suffering? Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

What makes Jesus so angry? (2:13-17)

Given Jesus takes a moment to construct a whip before entering the temple (2:15), how would you describe Jesus' response?

Who or what is Jesus showing love for in this passage?

Can you think of a similar modern example where our love might rightly lead us to a response of anger?

How have others, and how might we risk getting this wrong?



## 7 April – Love Heals Shame (John 4:1-26)

Shame and guilt are crippling and painful realities for human beings. Many psychologists, anthropologists and social scientists in the 20th century believed that guilt and shame were the byproducts of ancient, and now redundant, religious views. They taught that with the removal of religion and archaic beliefs from our culture, guilt and shame would go with them. But this hasn't happened.

In an article in 2017 called, “The Strange Persistence of Guilt”, Prof Wilfred M. McClay noted that “those of us living in the developed countries of the West find ourselves in the tightening grip of a paradox...It is the strange persistence of guilt as a psychological force in modern life. Guilt has not merely lingered. It has grown, even metastasized...” We are learning again that actions have consequences, and sinful lives produce the rotting fruit of guilt and shame.

The Samaritan woman is thirsty for cleansing and healing of her guilt and shame. Her village condemns and shuns her. She needs to meet the only One who can see past the guilt and shame and offer her the gift of living water to satisfy her thirst. Jesus said to her: “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

What do we learn about the woman in this story? (4:7-9, 16-20)

How do you suspect the others in her town would have treated her?

How does Jesus show love to this woman? (esp. consider 4:7-9, 25-26)

What impact did this encounter have on the woman? (read ahead: 4:28-30, 39-42)

Do we know and trust Jesus to heal and forgive our shame and guilt?

## 14 April – Love Serves (John 13:1-17)

Slaves in Jesus' day were the lowest of the low, had no rights, and were regularly beaten, and sometimes killed, by their owners and masters. Moreover, one of the lowliest jobs of the lowly slave was washing the filthy feet of those who walked in towns of dirt roads, open sewers and animals everywhere. You get the picture!

So imagine the shock for the disciples when Jesus takes the form, and the role of a slave. He has already revealed he is God's Son, and this is perhaps why Peter so emphatically says "No, you shall never wash my feet." It would be beneath Jesus.

But as always, Jesus has a deeper purpose in his actions: "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." Jesus shows the way of humble love and sacrificial service. It's why the Apostle Paul said of him, "he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant." Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

Given the context of this story, how do you think Jesus might have been feeling?

What does washing other's feet powerfully symbolise? (13:12-16)

Why do you think Peter is initially so reluctant to have Jesus wash his feet?

Why do we find it hard to serve others or allow others to serve us?

What would the church community, and world be like if we aimed to live like this?

## 21 April – Love Leads to Life (John 20:1-18)

There's nothing loving about death. Death is a type of "anti-love". Death brings pain, weeping, loss, and confusion. Life is so much better than death! But one of the Psalms in the Old Testament even states that God's "love is better than life". (Ps 63) To know God's love is better than life! But it is a mystery to us that God shows the greatness of His love for us through death: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (Jn 15:13)

But it would be devastating and ultimately sad if Jesus' beautiful life of love just ended in a loving act of sacrifice. We could still be inspired by it, but there would be a fatalism and emptiness about it too. This is what the Apostle Paul said: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." (1 Co 15:17)

But an ancient prophecy in the Old Testament had foretold that the coming Messiah— the Christ—would overcome death: "you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Ps 16). If death had the last word then love would be defeated. And as the Apostle John put it, "Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 Jn 3:14). Hallelujah, Death is defeated! Jesus: Love Personified.

### *Personal Study*

How does Jesus show love for Mary in this encounter? (20:11-18)

How would Mary have felt once she realised this was Jesus? (20:16)

How is the resurrection a great act of God's love to us?

How can we share the good news of God's love with others?

What have we learnt about love through this series and how will we live it out?

## Meditate on God's Love...

# "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." (Dt 6:4)

# "But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, **abounding in love** and faithfulness." (Ps 86:15)

# "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: '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 mind and with all your strength. 'The second is this: '**Love your neighbor as yourself.**' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mk 12:28–32)

# "But to you who are listening I say: **Love your enemies**, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you...**"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?** Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **But love your enemies**, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Lk 6:27–36)

# "**God is love.** Whoever lives in **love** lives in God, and God in them. This is how **love** is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. **There is no fear in love.** But perfect **love** drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in **love.**

# **We love because he first loved us.** Whoever claims to **love** God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not **love** their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot **love** God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: **Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.**" (1 Jn 4:16–21)

