

“The Greatest is Love”

Believe Chapter 21

We are entering Week 21 of the special journey we have been on called “Believe”. Up to this point we have been looking at answering questions such as:

- ❖ Who is God?
- ❖ How do I know God and his will for my life?
- ❖ What is God’s call on my life?

We have examined affirmations such as:

- ❖ I focus on God and his priorities for my life.
- ❖ I study the Bible to know God and his truth and to find direction for my daily life.
- ❖ I share my faith with others to fulfill God’s purposes.

We’ve been learning how we can both **think** and **act** more like Jesus. But we want to do more than just mimic the thoughts and behaviors of Jesus. We want to **imitate** who he is. We want to *be* more like Jesus in the core of our being.

Jesus was the most loving, joyful, peaceful, kind, compassionate, and humble person who ever lived. How do we become more like that? The things that we believe and things that we do should be driving us to be more like Jesus.

Cremona, Italy is a city which has produced the best violins ever made. There is a museum in Cremona which houses these priceless violins, but it is no ordinary museum where they sit



in glass cases week in and week out, month in and month out, and year in and year out. A violin, it turns out, needs to be played, just as a car needs to be driven and a body needs to be exercised. The job of exercising these violins falls to 84 year old Andrea Mosconi who has followed the same routine for the last 40 years. Donning a suit and

tie, he drives to the city hall and enters the violin museum. Mr. Mosconi, the city’s official musical conservationist, stands before pristine, multi-locked glass cases and faces three violins by the Amatis (one of the first makers of the modern violin, from the mid-16th century), two by the Guarneris and four instruments — three violins and a cello — by Stradivari. Mr. Musconi is tasked with the care and preservation of millions of dollars worth of wood and strings. He does this by playing these instruments. He says that the wood gets tired if left un-tuned and untouched. The violins begin to lose their vibrancy. Every day but Sunday and every month but August, he begins the task of bringing the best out of these instruments. He carefully removes them one by one from their cases and for seven or eight minutes he fills the chapel turned museum with music and treats these precious instruments with tender care.

Every day, you and I get to handle instruments that are far more precious than a four century old Amatis violin and more valuable than a Stradivarius cello worth over \$20 million. We are

human beings and we can bring out the best in people, men and women created in the image of God. Some of the treasures in our world share our homes. Some of them bear our names. We often do not think of them as treasures. They can have bad hair days, bad attitudes and some bad habits. But handled with love and patience, they are indeed treasures. Then think of the people that are just part of our everyday lives - the checkout person at the grocery store, the teller at the bank, the person that cuts and styles your hair, or the technician on the phone who is trying to walk you through a computer problem. These might not think of themselves as precious or valuable. Each and every one of them is a special creation, crafted by the greatest craftsman in history – Almighty God. They are beautiful, unique and perfectly shaped. All they need to bring out the best in them is for someone to care about them – to be a Mosconi. And maybe what we need is to ask God every day, “Lord, what can I do to bring out the best in every person that I meet?”

In our first Scripture Lesson, we read that Jesus was asked this question: **“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”** Here is the answer that he gave: [29](#) **“The most important one,”** answered Jesus, **“is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30](#) Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ [31](#) The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”** (Mark 12, Believe page 341) It is interesting to notice that while Jesus was only asked for one commandment, he responded by giving two. Now, we may wish that he had just stopped at one. The first one is a call to love the Lord our God. We kind of like this one. We figure that we can do it. It’s a command to which there is some wiggle room. We can interpret it in almost any way we want. My understanding and interpretation can be different than yours. But it’s hard to argue which one of our understandings is correct.



Then there is the second commandment which Jesus included. **‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** Actually the second one is an interpretation of the first one. It tells us how to do the first one. If you really love the Lord your God, then show it by loving your neighbour. Well,



you might say: “God, have you ever seen my neighbour? He weighs about 350 pounds and in the summertime, he sits out in his backyard in a pair of shorts with no t-shirt on, drinking beer and listening to loud music. He’s abusive towards his wife and kids. Even his dog doesn’t want to have anything to do with him! How am I supposed to love that?” What Jesus is really saying here is that if you want to see how much a person loves God, then look at how he or she treats

people. We know we love God if we love people and the way we love God is measured in the way we love people. The apostle John put it this way: [20](#) **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. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. (1 John 4) John has just rephrased the words of Jesus. Years ago I heard this little ditty and while I have never forgotten it, I was reminded of it when I heard it again recently. “To live above with the saints we love, well, that will be glory. But to dwell below with the saints we know, well, that’s another story.”

In the same chapter that I quoted from above, John wrote the words that form our key verses for this week. (Page 339 in Believe) 1 John 4:10-12 says: **10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11**

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. Remember that 350

pound drunken abusive neighbour that I mentioned a few minutes ago. We don’t

actually have a neighbour like that. We don’t really have neighbours. We don’t love people because they are loveable. In fact, I don’t think that I could love this imaginary person. No, we love people because God first loved us. If keeping this commandment depends on the lovability of people, then most of us are in trouble because there are times when we are all not lovable – when we are cranky, out-of-sorts, irritable and self-centered. Fortunately, God still loves us when we are hard to love, so we can love others who are hard to love.

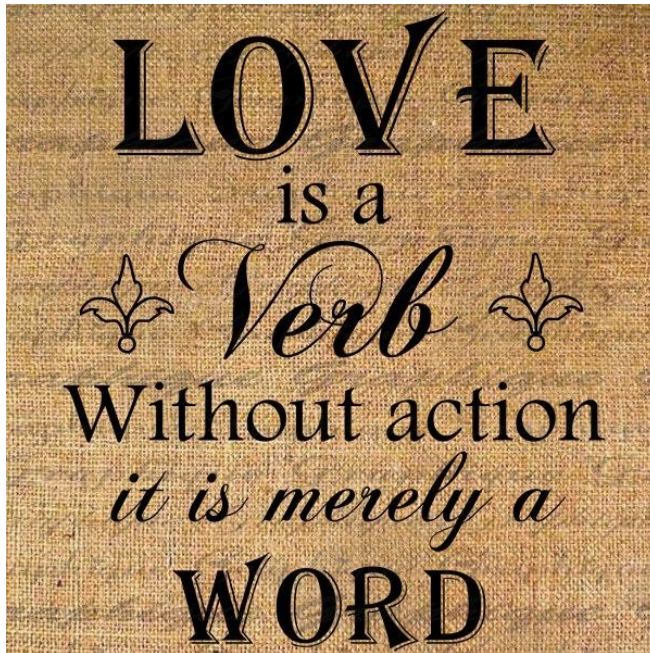
Key Verse



We love, not because we are wonderful people, but because God loves us. It is one thing to know that God made the world. It is another thing completely to know how much God loves the world. God loves us. God’s love is like a huge reservoir out of which every spiritual blessing flows. Think of John 3:16, undoubtedly the best known verse in the Bible. **16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.** Love prompted God to act. God gave sacrificially because he loved us so much. Everything flows out of the reservoir of God’s love for us.

Look at the questions we can ask and see how the Bible responds. Why did Christ die for us? It is because God loves us. **8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5) Why did God save us? It is because he loves us. **4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** (Titus 3) Why is it that you and I will one day be raised with Christ? It is because God loves us. **4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.** (Ephesians 2:4-5) What is it that binds us to the Kingdom of God? It is his love. **38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.** (Romans 8:38-39) Every good thing flows out of this massive reservoir of the love of God.

You see, God loves us with a sacrificial love. What that means is that the kind of love God has for us drives him to an action not an emotion. Think about that. What does my wife like best? Does Susan like it best when I have a crazy day but I still end up doing a little job for her that she has really wanted done? Or does she like it best when she asks me to pick up something at the grocery store and I come home without it, but say to her: "No, I didn't pick up what you asked me to, but I thought about you as I pulled into the driveway and it gave me goose bumps!" Let's be honest. We usually equate love with an emotion. And while emotions or feelings may come as a consequence of love, they are not what love primarily consists of.



Love is a verb and verbs are action words. Love leads us to do things. As Max Lucado defines it – and many others have as well – “Love is a decision to do what is in the best interest of another person.” There may be no feeling at all, but love is a decision to do what is in the best interest of another person. Sometimes true love is tough love. Sometimes real love is having to say something that a person does not want to hear. For a teacher, wanting what is in the best interest of young student may require you to give that person a failing grade or having them repeat a year. As a parent, wanting what is best for your son or daughter may require saying no to letting them do something or go someplace that they really had their heart set on.

What does love mean for a Christian? **Being a Christian means that we learn to love like Jesus.** I came across this story about a man who fell into a pit. I have heard numerous stories about men that fell into a pit, but I found this one the most instructive. So, a man fell into a deep pit and couldn't get out. Several persons came along and saw him struggling in the pit.

A **sensitive** person said, "I feel for you down there."

A **reflective** person said, "It's logical that someone would eventually fall into this pit."

An **aesthetic** person said, "I can give you ideas on how to decorate your pit."

A **judgmental** person said, "Only bad people fall into the pits."

A **curious** person said, "How in the world did you get down into that pit."

A **perfectionist** said, "I believe you deserve to be in that pit."

A **self-pitying** person said, "That's nothing - you should have seen my pit."

An **optimist** said, "Cheer up! Things could be worse."

A **pessimist** said, "Be prepared! Things will get worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the miserable pit. As Christians we are called to do the same thing.

There are Biblical examples of love in action in Believe. Let me give you a different kind of example. Chris Carrier of Coral Gables, Florida, was ten years old when he was abducted by a man who had a grudge against Chris's father. It was December 20, 1974. He didn't even realize that he was being abducted. The kidnapper took him to an isolated area north of Miami and stopped the truck. He grabbed an ice pick out of the truck and stabbed Chris numerous times in the back and in the chest. Chris said, "I was a regular churchgoer, so I remembered Jesus' words on the cross. I cried, "Father, forgive him because he doesn't know what he is doing." The man put Chris back in his truck and drove him to another spot where he walked him back into the bush of the Florida Everglades. As he turned, he pulled out a gun and shot Chris in the head, leaving him to die.



For six days, Chris lay there unconscious. When he came to, he didn't even realize he'd been shot. He walked out to the road and was picked up by a man who took him to the sheriff's department. Chris was taken to the hospital in Naples, Florida where an x-ray which showed a bullet had passed behind his eyes and exited his temple. The only lasting physical effect from the ordeal was that Chris lost sight in one eye. His attacker was never captured but Chris suffered from tremendous anxiety.

Chris wrote: "When I was thirteen, during a Bible study with my youth group from Granada Presbyterian Church, I realized that God's providence and love had kept me alive. In his hands, I could live without fear and anger." Chris went on to attend seminary and later, along with his wife and growing family, he returned to Coral Gables and accepted a position as director of youth ministries at his boyhood church.

In 1996, Chris received word that a man named David McAllister, a seventy-seven-year-old frail and blind ex-con living in a Miami Beach nursing home, had confessed to committing the crime all those years ago. Chris headed to Miami with a trusted pastor friend. He said: "The visit was awkward. What do you say to someone who tried to kill you? At first McAllister denied trying to kill me, but eventually admitted it. He held my hand and apologized for what he had done. I told him that I had forgiven him." After that Chris visited frequently. "I visited often, introducing him to my wife and two girls, offering him hope and some semblance of family. I shared the gospel with him, and he trusted in Christ. He was always glad when I came by. I believe that our friendship eased his loneliness and was a great relief to him after 22 years of regrets. He told reporters from CNN that I was the best friend he'd ever had. While many people can't understand how I could forgive David McAllister, from my point of view, I couldn't not forgive him. If I'd chosen to hate him all these years, or spent my life looking for revenge, then I wouldn't be the man I am today, the man my wife and children love, the man God has helped me to be."

Did Chris Carrier have feelings of love for David McAllister? I doubt it. But his love was an action – something he chose to do. And that action produced in him the ability to love this man who had so terribly wronged him. The end result was that David McAllister came to experience what it meant to be forgiven by someone that he had hurt and from that he came

to discover the love of God in Christ Jesus. He experienced what it was to pass into the Kingdom of God and from a living death into that life which is eternal.

Truly the greatest force in the world is the love of Almighty God displayed through one of his children. (You can read the full story of Chris Carrier at www.christianity.com/11622274/ .)

Closing Hymn: “O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go”

George Matheson was only fifteen when he was told that he was losing what little eyesight he had. Instead of giving up, Matheson immediately continued with his plans to enroll in the University of Glasgow, and his determination led to his graduation at age nineteen. But as he pursued graduate studies in theology for Christian ministry he finally lost his sight. His sisters joined ranks beside him, learning Greek and Hebrew to assist him in his studies. He pressed faithfully on.

But his spirit collapsed when his fiancée, unwilling to be married to a blind man, broke their engagement and returned his ring. He never married, and the pain of that rejection never totally left him. Years later, as a well-loved preacher in Scotland, his sister came to him announcing her engagement. He rejoiced with her, but his mind went back to his own heartache. He consoled himself in thinking of God’s love which is never limited, never conditional, never withdrawn, and never uncertain. Out of this experience he wrote the hymn, **O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go.**



O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths it flow
May richer, fuller be.

Human love is very uncertain and I am sure all of us here today have experienced rejection at some point in our lives. Like George Matheson we need to learn how to trust God’s perfect love. His love is our hope and our goal.