



TO  
Love &  
Be Loved

# Welcome

We've created this discussion guide to aid our small groups and individuals as we progress through this series. On the following pages you will find the readings for each Sunday as well as discussion questions. The intent is that small groups would use this material in the week preceding the Sunday topic. So week one, Sept. 15th, would be used for Bible Study Sept. 9th-14th. However, make use this guide only as it is helpful. Don't feel you have to stick to it exactly.

If there are questions that arise during discussion that you would like to be answered on Sunday in the sermon please write them in the space provided and email them to Pastor Mike. He will try to address as many questions as possible.

*The world is indeed full of peril and in it there are many dark places. But still there is much that is fair. And though in all lands, love is now mingled with grief, it still grows, perhaps, the greater.*

*— J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings*

# To Love & Be Loved

a sermon series on men, women, relationships and identity

## Week One

**You are a Royal Priesthood**

**1 Peter 2:6-10**

We are born into sin and that sinful nature strips us of our God-given identity as His child. The Bible is a story of God rebuilding His relationship with his people – with us. As we hear again this story, of a creator God who deeply passionately loves his people we rediscover our place as one of His, a Royal Priesthood, a people loved and known by Him.

## Week Two

**Men**

**Genesis 3:1-12; 17-19**

Men feel pressures of all kinds. We see in scripture that this stems from the fact that we are in our very nature broken, longing for things to be as they once were. Because of this we sometimes fall under the pressure of this world, struggling against shame when we don't live up to our own expectations. The good news is that God lifts us out of shame by drawing us to himself, giving us a holy purpose for this life.

## Week Three

**Women**

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

Women today have many voices from our culture telling them who they ought to be, how they ought to dress, where they ought to work and what they ought to look like. These pressures can cause us to desire escape or to seek approval in the wrong places. God's word for women is that He loves them unconditionally; He has claimed them and made them His own.

## Week Four

**On Being Single**

**1 Timothy 4:6-16**

Every person is single for some part of their lives, sometimes more than once. Singleness is not a curse, but rather it is a gift from God. In all of whether single, married, divorced, or widowed we are claimed by a God who cares for us and gives us everything we need.

## Week Five

**A Family after God's Own Heart**

**Ephesians 5:22-33**

Families are under attack today. Forces such as poverty, societal norms, and the shortcoming of our lives all make family life stressful and complicated. Families are the greatest gift of God to His creation and are meant to be the starting place for love and identity.

*To Love and be loved is to feel the sun from both sides.*

*-David Viscott*

# Week One

Sunday Sept. 15th

You are a Royal Priesthood

## Primary Reading:

1 Peter 2:6-10

## Other Readings:

Psalm 16, Deut. 7:6-11

## Overview

We are born into sin and that sinful nature strips us of our God-given identity as His child. The Bible is a story of God rebuilding His relationship with his people – with us. As we hear again this story, of a creator God who deeply passionately loves his people we rediscover our place as one of His, a Royal Priesthood, a people loved and known by Him.

## Discussion Questions

- \*What has been your personal experience with love? (not just romantic love)
- \*In what ways have you experienced that love and relationships become broken?
- \*Do you think the idea of love or “being in love” is romanticized and idealized in our culture?
- \*What does it mean to be loved by God?
- \*How does understanding God’s love for us, and our position as his people, change our other relationships?

*“A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you.”*

– Elbert Hubbard

# Week Two

Sunday Sept. 22nd  
Men

**Primary Reading:**  
Genesis 3:1-12, 17-19

**Other Readings:**  
Psalm 145:1-8; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:5

## Overview

Men feel pressures of all kinds. We see in scripture that this stems from the fact that we are in our very nature broken, longing for things to be as they once were. Because of this we sometimes fall under the pressure of this world, struggling against shame when we don't live up to our own expectations. The good news is that God lifts us out of shame by drawing us to himself, giving us a holy purpose for this life.

## Discussion Questions

\*What are the challenges of being a Christian man in the world today?

\*What temptations do men face in their families, their work, or socially?

What are some assumptions our culture places on men and men's roles? Are these helpful or harmful?

\*It is often the case that churches have a higher number of women than men, and that men don't step into leadership positions. Why is this?

\*How is God's word helpful for men, such as in the readings this week?

\*How can women encourage the men in their lives?

*"Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within."*

*-James Baldwin*

**Love** is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

# Week Three

Sunday Sept. 29th  
Women

**Primary Reading:**  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

**Other Readings:**  
Psalm 123; Judges 4:1-7

## Overview

Women today have many voices from our culture telling them who they ought to be, how they ought to dress, where they ought to work and what they ought to look like. These pressures can cause us to desire escape or to seek approval in the wrong places. God's word for women is that He loves them unconditionally; He has claimed them and made them His own.

## Discussion Questions

- \*What are the challenges of being a Christian woman in the world today?
- \*What temptations do women face in their families, their work, or socially?
- What are some assumptions our culture places on women and women's roles? Are these helpful or harmful?
- \*What are the greatest felt needs expressed by women?
- \*How is God's word helpful for women, such as in the readings this week?
- \*How can men encourage the women in their lives?

*"I am not sure exactly what heaven will be like, but I know that when we die and it comes time for God to judge us, he will not ask, 'How many good things have you done in your life?' rather he will ask, 'How much love did you put into what you did?'"*

— Mother Teresa

# Week Four

Sunday Oct. 6th  
On Being Single

**Primary Reading:**  
1 Timothy 6:6-16

**Other Readings:**  
Psalm 91; 1 kings 8:55-61

## Overview

Every person is single for some part of their lives, sometimes more than once. Singleness is not a curse, but rather it is a gift from God. In all of life, whether single, married, divorced, or widowed we are claimed by a God who cares for us and gives us everything we need.

## Discussion Questions

- \*At what stages in life are we single? How are they different in the way they feel to us?
- \*Is being single a gift or a curse?
- \*What are some of the temptations or emotional challenges of singleness?
- \*How is God's word helpful for us regardless of our relationship status?
- \*Sometimes at churches, those who are single feel left out. In what ways can a church serve and meet the needs of those who are single?

*"Love is the voice under all silences, the hope which has no opposite in fear; the strength so strong mere force is feebleness: the truth more first than sun, more last than star..."*

*-E.E. Cummings*

# Week Five

Sunday Oct. 13th

## A Family after God's own Heart

**Primary Reading:**  
Ephesians 5:22-33

**Other Readings:**  
Psalm 16; Isaiah 62:1-7, 11-12

### Overview

Families are under attack today. Forces such as poverty, societal norms, and the shortcoming of our lives all make family life stressful and complicated. Families are the greatest gift of God to His creation and are meant to be the starting place for love and identity.

### Discussion Questions

- \*What are the challenges and stresses of family life?
- \*How does faith fit into all of the other pulls and constraints families feel?
- \*Is the family unit an important and respected entity in our society?
- \*How does God's word speak to families?
- \*What is the importance of forgiveness for families? How can families incorporate forgiveness into the way they relate to each other?

*"The only thing we never get enough of is love; and the only thing we never give enough of is love. "*

*-Henry Miller*