

Session Three

Love and Commitment

Many Kinds of Love

The New Testament, in its original Greek, contains three words that have different meanings in the Greek language. But all three of them are translated as "love" in English. The three words are these:



AGAPE: the perfect love of God

EROS: romantic love

PHILIA: friendship, or what we call "brotherly love"

Many (though not all) human beings will have, in their lives, some experience with each kind of love. Read the list below, and put a letter before each item on the list. If you think the item is an example of *agape* love, put an A. If it exemplifies *eros*, put an E, and put a P if it is an example of *philia*. Discuss your answers with the rest of the class.

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|--|---|
| ___ Valentine's Day | ___ Donations to charity |
| ___ Birthday present for a sibling | ___ Volunteer work at a soup kitchen |
| ___ Sharing a sandwich | ___ Praying for an enemy |
| ___ Accompanying an elderly neighbor who must go to the vet to have her beloved dog put to sleep | ___ Gift to a boyfriend/girlfriend |
| ___ A date | ___ Marriage |
| ___ Forgiving a generally-unliked person | ___ A few minutes of help to a stranger |
| ___ Proofreading a paper for a friend | ___ Infatuation |
| ___ Family reunion | ___ The death of Christ on the cross |
| | ___ Doing the dishes because everyone else seems really tired |

Looking at Myself

You have had an opportunity to use St. Paul's beautiful definition of love in *1 Corinthians* as a measure of your idea of what your romantic partner should be like. But now let's apply St. Paul's definition to you—what kind of partner will you be for someone else? Rate yourself according to the standards St. Paul offers.

	Always True	True Most of the Time	Occasionally True	Never True
1. I am patient				
2. I am kind				
3. I don't envy				
4. I don't boast				
5. I am not proud				
6. I am not rude				
7. I am not self-seeking				
8. I am not easily angered				
9. I keep no record of wrongs				
10. I don't delight in evil				
11. I rejoice in the truth				
12. I protect				
13. I trust				
14. I am hopeful				
15. I persevere				
16. I do not fail people				

(Adapted from *What's Love Got to Do with It? Everything!* Published by Education and Community Life Ministries of the Orthodox Church in America).

We know that if God were filling this out, he would respond "always true" for all sixteen. God is committed to loving us, in all times and places, under all possible circumstances, no matter whether we love him or not.

But what about us? Many things can happen to the relationships to which we commit ourselves. Sickness, a crippling accident, loss (a friend moves away, rejects you, joins another clique, etc.) or outgrowing relationships—all can happen. How will we react when they do happen?

Think about yourself, and about whether you are growing into a person who can sustain a commitment. Remember that we are called to the perfect love that God shows to us. Use this list to check yourself every now and then, and keep working toward that godly level of commitment that makes your love worth offering to another person.

Being Committed

Here are four stories of real people. Read them, and for each one think about these questions:

1. What was the person committed to?
2. What was the cost of their commitment? (All commitments come at some cost—to maintain our commitment to one person or thing, we have to say "no" to possible replacements.)
3. Was this person, in your opinion, showing a love that reflects some of the perfect love that we receive from God, which we call *agape* love?



Story One. Dorothea is a saint of the third-century Church who, like many others, was arrested and imprisoned for her faith under the emperor Diocletian. Because she refused to give up her faith, she was sentenced to be executed. The trial gained much public notice and interest because of Dorothea's youth and her steadfast refusal to be frightened into denouncing Christianity. The crowds were intrigued by so much determination in one so young. So there were many people listening when Dorothea reacted to her death sentence by calling out, "I thank you, O Christ, that you have invited me today to your heavenly paradise!" One of those who heard was a young pagan nobleman named Theophilus, who said mockingly to Dorothea, "Send me some roses and apples from your Christ's paradise." Dorothea turned toward him and replied seriously, "I will."



Later, as Dorothea was being led to her execution, a boy tapped the watching Theophilus on the shoulder and said to him, "Here are the things you asked for." The boy handed him roses and apples. It was midwinter, making it impossible to get either of these things. And from the extraordinary beauty and delicacy of the boy's face, Theophilus knew he could be no earthly messenger anyway.

Theophilus' whole body shook, and everything inside him, everything he thought he knew, seemed to turn upside down. It was not too long before he became a Christian, eventually following Dorothea on her journey to martyrdom and to paradise.

Story Two: Joseph, the man chosen to be the earthly husband and protector of Mary and her son Jesus, was hard pressed to believe that it was God's will that the young woman should become pregnant before they were married. When it happened, Scripture tells us that he resolved to end his relationship with Mary quietly, with no embarrassment to her. In doing so, however, Joseph would be breaking the Jewish law. According to that law, he was required to make her conduct known to the authorities and the people.

Story Three: The French film director Henri Verneuil (born Ashod Malakian) writes about his childhood and family in his autobiography *Mayrig*. As a little boy on his first day of school, Ashod is up very early one morning in the family's tiny apartment in Paris. He writes, "In passing by the couch, I suddenly noticed that my father's bed . . . clearly hadn't been slept in that night. Leaning on the rail of our little balcony, I tried to think of a logical explanation for his curious absence, but it seemed impossible to explain. Below, Paradise Street was slowly coming to life. There were still only a few passersby, but the trams were already running, their long poles jutting out to catch the current in the network of huge cables overhead. . .

. . . A tram came to a stop. A man staggered heavily off. From the fourth floor, I could only make out the meager outline of his bent silhouette, but the man seemed broken in two from pain. He took a few steps toward a plane tree, leaned his back against the tree as if to regain some of his strength and slowly pulled up his back. For a long moment, the man and the tree seemed one, but then, his head sagging to his chest, he crossed the street with heavy steps and disappeared from view.



The door to our apartment opened. And the bent man I saw from the balcony came in. It was my father. He held himself as straight as a pole, a tender light in his eyes, and he smiled to hide the ravages of fatigue. He kissed me, and that kiss, smelling of sweat, suddenly disclosed the 'solution' that the screen I eavesdropped behind one night prevented me from hearing. My father had changed his day job for a night shift to increase his salary."

Story Four. Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate, sent her husband an urgent message while he was conducting the interrogation of Jesus. She told Pilate that he should not condemn the prisoner before him. She knew Jesus to be a righteous man and had been disturbed by a dream about him.



Pilate's wife was the granddaughter of an emperor of Rome, and she was one of the upper-class women who had been much affected by the Jewish faith, but even more particularly by Jesus' teachings. She was trying to save him, but also to save her husband, who also knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against him and that he would be committing a dangerous, terrible sin by condemning him. But Pilate did not have the courage to stand up for his beliefs as his wife did. He handed Jesus over to the enemy, washed his hands of the affair, and later ended his career without honor. He was removed from his post of Roman Procurator by the Emperor Tiberius and banished to Vienna, where tradition says he committed suicide.

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Love and Commitment

1. A relationship with God at its center values each person in the relationship.
2. As Christians, we are called to base all our love relationships on God's example, and to commit ourselves to those relationships.
3. Christian teaching recognizes three basic kinds of love (the names are Greek): *Philia*, brotherly love or friendship; *eros*, romantic love; *agape* (*ah-gá-pay*), God's perfect love.

Students will:

1. Define and explore the three kinds of love.
2. Enumerate characteristics of a God-centered love relationship as described in the New Testament.
3. Read and discuss stories of people who lovingly "committed" themselves to others or another.

Key Concepts

Objectives

Background for Teacher

Helping our students understand what commitment means in relationships will give them confidence that they can commit themselves to God and to other people. This confidence is one of the most important elements of a fruitful, happy life. A person who feels able to make and sustain a commitment to a lasting relationship will find stability and purpose in life.

The lesson will show how God has made a lasting commitment to us, and how we are able to follow his example in our relationships with him and with each other. By exploring the three kinds of love as enumerated in the teachings of Christianity, we can understand better the elements of our own personal relationships.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- pencils or pens

Procedure

1. Open with a prayer. Ask the class to think of some words that come to mind when you say the word "love," and write their answers on the board. Then ask, "How many of you would say that love is closely related to our emotions?" (Most students will probably say that it is.) Now have the class do the exercise called **Many Kinds of Love** in the student text.

In discussing the answers students have written down, there may be some varied opinions. For example, some may say that Valentine's Day is an example of *eros*, but perhaps also of *philia* because we give valentines to friends or family members as well as sweethearts. This variety of opinion is fine. But see if you can get the class to agree that all the items on the list are indeed examples of love.

Go through the list together and discuss which items involve the emotions; make sure they see that some acts of love do not really engage us emotionally. For instance, to make a charitable donation, share a sandwich or proofread a friend's paper does not require that we be swept away by loving feelings.

Read together *Matthew 5:43-44*. Ask the class to decide which of the three kinds of love is described here. Is it emotional? (No; the love that God calls for here is not emotional but an act of will. We offer

Procedure

agape not because we are "in love" with another person, nor because we decide another person "deserves" our love, nor even because we want to feel good about ourselves and be glad that we are so loving. We offer it because God has called us to treat each person lovingly. That is the kind of love God has shown for us—*agape* love.)

Be sure students understand that God has blessed all three kinds of love mentioned here. But the special feature of Christianity is that we are given an example of a person who embodied *agape* love—Jesus Christ. He calls us and enables us to show that kind of love in our lives, too. (25 mins)

2. Divide the class into small groups of three or four. Ask them to discuss, as a group, the qualities they would like to have in a romantic partner. They should come up with four or five qualities that the whole group has agreed on. Have each group report, and then put the qualities on the board. Now, back in the full group, read *1 Corinthians 13:4-8a* ("Love never ends"). Note with the class how many of the attributes of love listed there are reflected in the qualities they came up with. (10 mins)

3. Have the class do the exercise **Looking at Myself** in the student text. They should do it individually and not show their answers to anyone else, but you can give them time to discuss the exercise. You might want to take a few minutes and poll their "Always True" and "Never True" answers. (10 mins)

4. Let various class members read aloud the stories in the **Being Committed** exercise in the student text. Then discuss the questions for each story. (Students can give their opinions for question 3 concerning *agape* love—though probably all four people demonstrated it, or at least its beginnings in their lives.) Points for discussion:

1. Dorothea's commitment to Christ is obvious. She was holy enough not to resent the heartlessness of Theophilus, who mocked her on her way to execution. And she was spiritually perceptive enough to see his potential as a believer in Christ.

2. Joseph's love for his wife, and his commitment to protect her

Procedure

even when he doubted, is wonderful. He took the risk—a very great risk for a pious Jew—of being thrown out of the accepted group of Jewish believers because he broke the Jewish law.

3. Henri Verneuil's father has a commitment to his family's welfare that leads him to sacrifice his own comfort and physical strength. He hides the pain of this effort from them, and we might say that he is like a person who keeps the fast without letting everyone know he is fasting—which is what Christ told us to do.

4. Pilate's wife (Claudia Procula) was, according to early historical sources, the granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus. She knew and had been very much affected by Jesus' teachings. In sending her urgent message to Pilate, she showed a commitment to truth, for she knew that Jesus was innocent and knew that her dream meant she must do something about it. She also showed a loving commitment to her husband, not wanting him to be burdened with the responsibility for an unjust execution. Sadly, her husband could not show the same strength of character and commitment to truth, even though he also knew Jesus was innocent.

After your discussion, close with prayer.

(15 mins)