The Four Loves — and the God Who *Is* Love

Leader copy · Women's Jail Ministry · a 15-minute lesson · Pleasant Springs Church

Built on: C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960) · **More lessons:** ps-church.com/discipleship

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **15 minutes** at a slow, conversational pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. If you are short on time, the **designated cut is the Friendship section's second half** (Proverbs 17:17 and the paragraph after it) — it saves about a minute. **Never cut the last three sections** (God is love, the two things to carry out, and the prayer). They are the point of the lesson.

The one sentence the whole lesson proves. *In the Bible, love is not first a feeling. It is something you do, for someone.* Every section comes back to it. If you lose your place, say that sentence and move to the next heading.

Who is in the room. Assume that many of the women have heard "I love you" from someone who then hurt them — a man who hit them, a family that shut the door, a friend who set them up. Assume at least one was abused by someone who used the word. **The Eros section is written for her. Go slowly there.**

What not to say. - **Never say or imply that loving someone means going back to be hurt.** The foot-washing section says Jesus washed Judas's feet. Say the line that follows it in the script — *love never means going back to be hurt again* — every time, word for word. - **Do not guess at the Samaritan woman's sin.** John does not say why she had five husbands. In her world a woman could not divorce her husband; she may have been widowed or put out more than once. The script says so. Do not add "she slept around." - **Do not press on children or motherhood.** Many of the women carry deep shame there. This lesson deliberately uses no mother-and-child example. - **Do not ask anyone to share about a relationship** in the room. Discussion questions stay general.

Reading level. About 7th grade. When you ad-lib, keep sentences short.

Scripture. English, ESV. The language work behind the lesson is real — the counts were measured, not guessed — but it stays off this page and is said in plain English.

About the book. Lewis's four chapters are named *Affection*, *Friendship*, *Eros* and *Charity*. The lesson describes his ideas in our own words and quotes him **once** — one short line. Please keep it that way when you teach it; his book is still under copyright.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — one word doing four jobs

Listen to this. *"I love tacos. I love that song. I love my sister. I love Jesus."*

Same word, four times. And it doesn't mean the same thing even twice.

English makes one little word do four jobs. And some of you have heard that word from somebody who then hurt you. So maybe the word feels cheap to you. Or maybe it feels dangerous.

A man named C. S. Lewis thought about that word more than most people ever do. He's the man who wrote the *Narnia* books. In 1960 he wrote a book called *The Four Loves*. And here is what you need to know about him: **he wrote it while his wife, Joy, was fighting cancer. She died the year it came out.** This was not a man writing about love from a comfortable chair.

He wrote one line I want you to keep: **"To love at all is to be vulnerable."** He knew.

His book begins with three words from the Bible. *God is love*. Here they are:

> **1 John 4:8** — "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

So here is the whole lesson in one sentence. **In the Bible, love is not first a feeling. It is something you do — for someone.** Lewis found four kinds of love. We'll look at all four, and we'll prove that sentence four times.

[2:00] 1 · Affection — the love that grows where you're planted

Lewis's first love is **Affection.** It's the love of the *familiar*. It grows between people who are simply around each other, every day. You didn't pick them. It grows anyway — slow, like moss on a rock.

You know this one in here. The woman in the next bunk — you didn't choose her. But six weeks later you know how she takes her coffee. And when she goes quiet, you notice.

The Bible's best picture of this is two women. **Naomi** lost her husband and both her sons in a foreign country. She was so bitter she told people, *don't call me Naomi anymore — call me Bitter*. She told her daughter-in-law Ruth to go home. And Ruth said this:

> **Ruth 1:16–17** — "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried."

Now look closely. Ruth never says *"I feel close to you."* **Every line is something she is going to do.** Go. Stay. Take your people. Take your God. That's affection with its boots on.

Here is something from the language Paul wrote in. The word for this kind of family affection shows up **only once** in the whole New Testament:

> **Romans 12:10** — "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

And its opposite shows up in a list of what the last days will look like. One word in that list is *"heartless"* (2 Timothy 3:3). **The word underneath "heartless" means *without family affection*.** When ordinary affection dies out, Paul says, you know things are breaking.

Some of you didn't get that at home. Hear this verse:

> **Psalm 27:10** — "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in."

Lewis gave one warning. Affection can turn into grabbing — *holding on so tight* to someone that it chokes them. Affection needs God's love underneath it, or it goes bad.

[5:00] 2 · Friendship — side by side

Lewis's second love is **Friendship.** He said lovers stand *face to face*. Friends stand *side by side*, looking at the same thing. Friendship is born the moment one person says to another, *"You too? I thought I was the only one."*

The Bible's great friendship is **David and Jonathan.**

> **1 Samuel 18:1** — "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

Knit. Like two pieces of yarn. And then watch what Jonathan *does*:

> **1 Samuel 18:3–4** — "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt."

Jonathan was **the king's son.** He was next in line for the throne. And he handed his robe and his sword to the man God had chosen instead of him. **That's friendship that costs something.** Again — not a feeling. An action.

And then Jesus takes this word for himself:

> **John 15:13, 15** — "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends… No longer do I call you servants… but I have called you friends."

Jesus didn't just *say* "friend." He went to the cross for his friends.

[CUT HERE if short on time — skip to Eros.]

> **Proverbs 17:17** — "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

Born for adversity. Hard places are where real friends get made. That's true in here. But some friendships in here pull you back toward the old life. So here's a test: **when you stand side by side with her, what are the two of you looking at?**

[7:00] 3 · Eros — being in love

Lewis's third love is **Eros** — being *in love*. Romance.

The Bible is not embarrassed by this. The very first words a man says in the Bible are a love poem:

> **Genesis 2:23** — "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

Jacob worked **seven years** to marry Rachel, "and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20). And a whole book of the Bible, the Song of Solomon, sings it:

> **Song of Solomon 8:7** — "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."

But here's something strange. **The Greek word *eros* — the word Lewis named this love after — never appears in the New Testament. Not one time.** The apostles had the word. They chose not to build on it.

Why? Lewis said being in love makes promises it can't keep by itself. It says *"forever."* But a feeling can't carry forever. And he passed on a warning: **a love you turn into a god will turn into a devil.**

[Slow down here.] I'm not going to ask anybody anything. But some of you have been told "I love you" by someone who then lied to you, used you, hit you, or left. **Hear me: that was not love the way the Bible means it.** That was a feeling somebody called love — or it was a lie.

Now meet a woman at a well:

> **John 4:16–18** — "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.'"

Five husbands. **The Bible doesn't tell us why.** In her world, a woman could not divorce her husband. She may have been widowed, or thrown out, more than once. Don't assume the worst. **Jesus**

didn't shame her. He knew everything — and he stayed at that well and kept talking to her. And here is what she did next:

> **John 4:28–29** — "So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.'"

Fully known — and not thrown away. Maybe that is what she had hoped for all along.

[10:00] 4 · Charity — the love that is God's own

Lewis's fourth love he calls **Charity.** It's the New Testament's main word for love — the verb and the noun together are used **more than 250 times.** It is the love that gives — not because the other person earned it, but because the one loving is good.

Paul describes it:

> **1 Corinthians 13:4–7** — "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

In English that sounds like a list of words that *describe* love — patient, kind. **But in Paul's language, every one of them is a verb. Fifteen verbs.** Love doesn't just *feel* patient. Love *waits*. Love *does* kindness. Love *bears*. Love *endures*.

Try this. Put the word "feeling" in there. *"A feeling bears all things. A feeling endures all things."* No, it doesn't. Feelings quit. **People who love keep going.**

Then Jesus *commands* it:

> **John 13:34** — "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

You can't command a feeling. Nobody can order you to *feel* happy. But you *can* command an action. And that same night, Jesus showed them the action:

> **John 13:4–5** — "He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet."

Judas was at that table. Jesus knew what Judas was about to do. **He washed his feet too.**

[Say this every time:] **Now hear me — loving someone who hurt you never means going back to be hurt again.** Jesus walked away from people who tried to kill him. Sometimes love prays

for a person from a safe distance.

[12:30] God is love — an action, inside a relationship

So back to where Lewis started. *God is love*. How does John explain that? Not with a feeling. With something God **did**:

> **1 John 4:9–10** — "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Sent. Twice. Love is a verb.

> **Romans 5:8** — "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

While we were still sinners. Not after you cleaned up. Not after your court date. **While.**

And here's the deepest part. **Love needs someone to love.** So before there was a world — before anything — who did God love? Jesus tells us:

> **John 17:24** — "Father… you loved me before the foundation of the world."

God has always been **Father, Son and Holy Spirit** — giving and receiving love, forever. God didn't make you because he was lonely. **He made you to bring you into a love that was already going on.**

Does God *feel*? Yes. At his friend's grave, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Love is not *less* than feeling. It is *more*. And here's why that matters in here: **a feeling can change on a bad day. An action that is already done cannot be undone.** The cross happened. Your worst day in this place does not un-send the Son.

> **1 John 4:19** — "We love because he first loved us."

[14:00] Two things to carry out

1. Pick one verb. Choose one from 1 Corinthians 13 — *waits, is kind, doesn't keep score, bears*. Pick one woman in your pod. Do it this week. **You don't have to feel it first.** Feelings often follow the doing.

2. Put your name in Romans 5:8. *"God shows his love for* ___ ***in that while _ was still a sinner, Christ died for*** ____." Say it with your own name, every night.

[14:30] Closing prayer

Father, thank you that you are love — not a mood you are in, but who you have always been. Thank you that you did not wait for us to be lovable. You sent your Son. He came. He knelt. He washed feet. He died for us while we were still sinners.

For every woman here who has been hurt by someone who said "I love you" — show her what the real thing looks like. Heal what the counterfeit broke.

Teach us to love with our hands and not only with our words. Give us one verb to live this week, and the strength to do it before we feel it.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

If you only remember three things

1. **Love in the Bible is a verb.** 1 Corinthians 13 is fifteen verbs, and Jesus *commanded* love — you can't command a feeling.
2. **Every natural love needs God's love underneath it.** Affection, Friendship and Eros are good gifts — but a love you make into a god turns into a devil.
3. **God is love because God is relationship.** The Father loved the Son before the world began, and he *sent* the Son so we could come in.

The four loves at a glance

	Lewis's name	What it is	Bible picture	The action
1	**Affection**	love of the familiar	Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1)	"Where you go I will go"
2	**Friendship**	side by side	David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18)	gave his robe and sword
3	**Eros**	being in love	Jacob and Rachel; the woman at the well (John 4)	seven years of work; told the whole town
4	**Charity**	God's own love	Jesus with the towel (John 13)	washed their feet — Judas's too

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. Which of the four loves has been easiest for you? Which has been hardest?
2. Ruth's promise is all things she would *do*. What would a promise like that sound like in here?
3. Why do you think the New Testament never uses the word *eros*?
4. Which of the fifteen verbs in 1 Corinthians 13 will you pick this week?
5. What changes if God's love for you is something he already *did*, not a mood he might be in?

More lessons online — ps-church.com/discipleship

The Discipleship School has more lessons written for the jail ministry, including **The Cup: How Jesus Took Your Sentence** (ps-church.com/discipleship/jail-ministry/cup-of-wrath), plus full

studies with the Septuagint and the ESV side by side.

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