



**CALVARY**  
TUSCALOOSA

TEACHING PLAN  
DECEMBER 23, 2018



# GOD PROVIDES LOVE

MATTHEW 1:18-25

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 1:18-25. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

**TAKEAWAY:** God provides love both now and forever through Jesus Christ.

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**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:** Followers of Christ must define love according to the standard of God.

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**GOSPEL CONNECTION:** God has displayed His love most clearly in the coming of Jesus Christ.

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## INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.*

- 1 What is the greatest expression of love that you've ever seen?
- 2 What made it different? What made this act of love stand out above all others?
- 3 Why should Christians, more than all other people, be given to selfless, sacrificial love?

One of the most convincing apologetics of Christianity is selfless, sacrificial love. Not only is it a direct reflection of the gospel, but it is also so counter-cultural that those who witness it must take notice. From the point of view of the non-believer, Christians who love in such a way must either be crazy or operate based on a completely different set of rules. Consider the following example: during the second century, smallpox devastated the Roman Empire. The epidemic took the lives of more than a quarter of the total population within just 15 years. Even the famous emperor, Marcus Aurelius, succumbed to it. The typical Roman response to the plague was to flee from it. But Dionysius reported that the Christians behaved differently:

“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and

### ALTERNATE INTRODUCTION

**How would you define “love”?**

**How might the world’s definition of love differ from the biblical concept of love?**

The term “love” has been co-opted and corrupted by the world. We must be careful to maintain a truly Christian perspective on what love is. Not all love is the same.

Given that the word “love” is applied to so many things in such a flippant manner in our culture, it would be easy to completely lose sight of this fundamental biblical concept. Let’s try to recapture some of that today.

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cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead...The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.”<sup>1</sup>

Notes:

Given that the word “love” is applied to so many things in such a flippant manner in our culture, it would be easy to completely lose sight of this fundamental biblical concept. Let’s try to recapture some of that today.

## UNDERSTANDING

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

Matthew 1:18-25 describes the Lord’s work to bring Joseph into the knowledge and agreement with His plan. We might say Joseph himself is a small reflection of the selfless, agape love of the Father. First, it was a selfless thing for Joseph to determine to divorce Mary quietly. Joseph and Mary were in a sort of engaged stage of the relationship, though the commitment level was much higher than the typical Western engagement, hence the use of the word “divorce.” When Joseph discovered that his (soon-to-be) wife was pregnant, there was only one conclusion he could draw. It would be the same conclusion that every one of us would draw. Of course, that wasn’t true, but Joseph had no way of knowing that yet. Yet, he determined to divorce her quietly. This would have protected Mary from even more shame and public ostracism. He certainly didn’t have to do it. He had every right to signal her adultery in the public square and demand restitution. But, that wasn’t his plan. Even in her alleged unfaithfulness, he determined to be kind and loving.

1. Dionysius, quoted by Eusebius in *Eusebius: The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1965.

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Once Joseph was made aware of the Lord's plan in a dream, he took Mary as his wife. This may seem like an easy thing from this side of history, but we should remember that this was a man who was going to move forward in marriage to a woman carrying a child that was not his own. Can you imagine the jeers, questions, and doubts Joseph must've faced for many, many years? It's impossible to know what was happening in Joseph's heart in all of this, but it's hard to find a more acute and striking example of love than Joseph.

Notes:

If we are moved by what Joseph did, then we're beginning to get a glimpse into the astounding love of our heavenly Father. His love is awe-inspiring, humbling, and even disturbing. The selflessness, sacrifice, and kindness that Joseph showed is a very dim reflection of God's agape love.

> Have a volunteer read Matthew 1:18-25 and 1 John 4:19.

*18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

*22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."*

*24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his*

wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

19 We love because he first loved us.

Notes:

It's important to note in Matthew 1:18-25 that God went after Joseph. He didn't allow Joseph to go through with his plan to divorce Mary quietly, though it was a kind and compassionate (and completely reasonable) course of action. Joseph, we may say, was constrained by the love of God. God took action to patiently and mercifully bring Joseph in on what God was doing in the world.

- What does 1 John 4:19 teach us about God's love? How is this different than how people typically view love?

Within the context of the loving relationship that we have with God, God is the initiator. God first loved us. As we mature and grow, we will understand that any acts of love we offer up to God always come by way of response to God's love. The Bible speaks of the love the Christians ought to display, but we should never let that eclipse the important reality that God's love is the prime mover in all of these demonstrations of love. John said a few verses earlier, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God (1 John 4:7).

- What does this mean about how we should view and understand our acts of love?

We have no right to boast or take pride in our acts of love. All of the initiative is God's. If we are able to display divine, selfless love, it is in response to His divine, selfless love. We understand love in the same way we understand the Christian life in general.

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Namely, that we bring nothing to the table. Now that we are seated at the table and are given the right to take part of the many blessings of our Redeemer and King, we do so with humble and contrite hearts. We have been rescued, clothed, and adopted. Now that we are made alive by our God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can love Him and others as we have been loved. Yet, it would be a great error to believe for a second that any of this ability to love springs from within us independently from the work of God in our lives.

Notes:

- How has God's love been displayed most fully?

In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul supplied us with an excellent definition of love: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." In this supreme act of sacrifice, the loving Father showed His love toward us by sending the Son into the world to shoulder God's wrath. This was the occasion for Christ's saving work, and love was the motive of His saving work. Christ's loving and atoning sacrifice satisfied God's wrath on our sin and reconciled sinful man to the Father, which makes it possible for us to love God.

We have already noted that divine love is sacrificial and selfless. But this is an incomplete description, because it is one thing to show sacrificial and selfless love to the lovely. It is quite another thing to demonstrate this love to the unlovely. As Ephesians 5:2 says, Jesus "gave Himself up for us." This is the pinnacle of God's love. Biblical love isn't simply good feelings toward someone, but unconditionally giving oneself for the good of another. 1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." Jesus' sacrifice on the cross wasn't in

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response to our worthiness. This great demonstration of love was unconditional. Had it been conditional, it never would have been realized. The depth of God's love is seen in His loyalty in the face of our disloyalty.

Notes:

- Why is it difficult to show this kind of love to others?

Conditional human love is often characterized by manipulation. People withhold their love from those who do not fulfill their expectations or meet their desires. This can occur between a husband and wife, parent and child, or between friends. This sort of love ebbs and flows and can simply disappear. This, however, isn't agape love. Agape love can't ebb and flow. It's static. God commands husbands to love their wife unconditionally, just as He loves His people (Ephesians 5:25).

> Have a volunteer read Ephesians 5:1-2 and 1 John 4:20.

*1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children  
2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*

God's love is an answering love. His acts of divine selflessness and sacrifice cannot be ignored; they demand a response.

- What does Paul urge us to do in Ephesians 5:1-2? How can we pursue this?

Not only did Paul give us a helpful definition of God's love toward us, but he also made clear what our response to that love should be. He exhorted the Ephesian Christians to walk in love. That command to the Ephesians can be directly applied to us today. It's interesting that from Paul's point of view, the motivating factor to love God and others is the experience of being loved by God. Love begets love.

Notes:

So, the proper response of a Christian who has experienced the love of God in Christ isn't just thanksgiving, holy living, or a shift in allegiance. No, it's much more than that. We are to respond in kind. We are to imitate God by demonstrating the love He has shown us.

- To whom are we called to demonstrate the love of God?

Jesus outlined what this life of love should look like in Matthew 22:37-39. Followers of Jesus make loving God their top priority. Their second priority is loving their neighbor. John said that the natural reaction to God's loving us is our loving others. A Christian cannot possibly claim to love God while hating others, especially those in the household of God (1 John 4:20).

- What is the nature of this love? What should our love toward our neighbor look like?

We are to be imitators of God in demonstrating love. We get the particulars of this command by availing ourselves to the nature of God's love. God's love manifested itself in action: "For God so loved the world that he gave..." (John 3:16); "God demonstrates his own love for us..." (Romans 5:8); and "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world..." (1 John 4:9). We know that

the love that God calls us to show is more than just a feeling; it's an action for the good of the other.

Also, God's love isn't conditioned upon the merits of the one He loves. We don't demonstrate love only to the lovely, or those who will be able to reciprocate in kind. Christian love isn't predicated on what can be gained in return. Rather, Christian love is predicated on the experience of God's love. In other words, we demonstrate love to our neighbor because God has demonstrated His love toward us in Christ.

Notes:

## APPLICATION

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

- 1 Do you think that the way you love others (spouse, children, friends, church members) is more akin to the world's love or divine love? Why?
- 2 How does imitating God's love change our relationships with others?
- 3 How does loving as God loves bear witness to the truth of the gospel?

## PRAY

Pray and thank God for His amazing love. Pray that we would be people so overwhelmed by His amazing love that we can't help but pour out this love on others for His glory.

## FOLLOW UP

Notes:

*Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:*

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - How have you needed to be reminded of God's love most this week?
  - How have you sought to display this love to others?
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- > The challenge to memorize Matthew 1:21.

## MATTHEW 1:18-25

1:18 The words of Jesus Christ are in an emphatic position in the Greek text, implying that the circumstances of Jesus' birth differed from those of everyone else in the genealogy. Although several of those people were conceived by miracles, they all had a human father. Only Jesus was born of a virgin. Before they came together means that Joseph and Mary had not yet had intercourse. Joseph thus assumed that Mary had been unfaithful. Pregnant by the Holy Spirit means that Mary's pregnancy was a miracle performed by the Spirit, not that God assumed material form and physically impregnated her. This makes Jesus' conception dramatically different from Greek myths that speak of children born to gods who lay with women.

Notes:

1:19 Joseph did not want to humiliate Mary publicly because he was a righteous man. His peers most likely expected him to expose her apparent sin, but true righteousness is characterized by compassion and mercy, an important theme for Matthew (Matthew 5:6-7,21-26,38-48).

1:20 God spoke to Joseph through dreams, just as He did to his OT namesake (Gen 37:1-11). The title son of David reminded Joseph of his royal lineage and prepared him for the announcement of Messiah's birth.

1:21 Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Yahweh saves." The angel explained that Jesus' name revealed His purpose: He would rescue sinners from the punishment they deserve. This salvation would be experienced by His people, identified as those who follow Jesus.

1:22 Spoken by the Lord through the prophet implies that God was the ultimate author of the messages spoken and written by the prophets.

The grammar that Matthew uses to introduce the quote from Isa 7:14 (see Mt 1:23) suggests that the angel quoted this verse to Joseph during his announcement. Some interpreters argue that Matthew mishandled Isaiah 7:14, but he seems to have handled it just as the angel did, which means his usage is backed by angelic authority.

Notes:

1:23 The name Immanuel (God with us) implies Jesus' deity. Mary's virgin-born Son would be God Himself living among His people. The Immanuel of Isa 7:14 is to be identified with the person described in Isa 9:2-7 and 11:1-9.

1:24-25 These verses emphasize Joseph's absolute obedience to the angel's instructions, a prevalent theme in these early chapters (2:13-15,19-21). Joseph is a model of the obedience that should characterize Jesus' disciples (5:19-20). Did not know her intimately confirms again that Jesus was the product of a virginal conception.

## 1 JOHN 4:19-20

4:19-21. God first loved us and made a relationship with him possible. The text drives home its refutation of the antichrists and false prophets. We cannot claim we love God and then show that we hate our brothers. This only proves one thing: we are liars.

It is difficult to prove whether or not we love God based on our actions toward him because we cannot see him. Love for God is reflected in love for his children, our brothers and sisters, whom we can see. Therefore, God gave us this verifiable command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Jesus stated the principle in other words: whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me (Matt. 25:40).

## EPHESIANS 5:1-2

5:1. Just as it is natural for an earthly child to imitate his earthly father, so should the spiritual child imitate his Heavenly Father. The word imitate comes from the word mimeomai, from which we get our word mimic. It means “to act like.”

Notes:

5:2. To imitate God in this context means to walk in love. Love denies self. It is willing to give up self-interest for God’s sake. Since Jesus gave himself up for us, we ought to give ourselves up for him. To give oneself up means “to follow, to obey, to live in relationship with.” When we live with this attitude toward God, we please him just as a pleasant aroma pleases the one who smells it (see Lev. 1:17; 3:16; Isa. 53:10). Jesus became the sacrifice for our sins. We must become a living sacrifice, obeying him (see Rom. 12:1).