

Spiritual Maturity Part 4: Horizontal as Vertical Love

Discussion Guide – October 5 2025

“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 and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” 1 John 3:16-18

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.” 1 John 4:20

Quotes

Empathy without response in the form of actionable love is sentimentality – Pastor Steve

Our horizontal love expresses how sincere our vertical love is. – Pastor Steve

“Mother Teresa spoke often about recognizing Jesus in the faces of those she served. In her mind, serving a homeless child wasn’t just ministry in Jesus’ name, it was literally ministry *to* Jesus...Mother Teresa understood that you don’t change the world by trying to change the world. Instead, you set your heart upon Jesus because of his surpassing value and, in the process, you begin to see his presence in every person you encounter.” Skye Jethani

“Unpopular Church evangelism idea: become notorious for being the most generous tippers in your city. What if we became known not for our hot takes, mic drops or clever quips, but for extravagant, unreasonable generosity? ...When we’re generous we’re mirroring God’s generosity: We reflect: ‘For God so love the world he *GAVE*... Our generosity is a reflex, a response to His generosity to us first. We are made in the image and likeness of a generous God. We love... because he first loved us.’”

“Let us show our love in deeds more than in words, for deeds are the soul of love.” St. John Chrysostom

Discussion Questions

1. John insists that loving God (“vertical love”) must be expressed in loving others (“horizontal love”). In what ways have you seen the church—or yourself—focus more on vertical love than horizontal love? What might it look like to bring those two loves back together?
2. *“Empathy without response in the form of actionable love is mere sentimentality.”* What keeps us from moving beyond empathy into action? What practical steps could help us turn compassion into costly love?
3. Empathy is “the protein powder that builds the muscles of love.” What has helped you grow stronger in empathy toward people you disagree with?
4. John writes, *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”* What does it mean for us to “lay down our lives” for others in our everyday context—at home, at work, or in the community?
5. John says, “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” What does “love in truth” look like in our world today?
6. The world is often repulsed by distorted images of Jesus—when love is performative or self-protective rather than sacrificial. How do you think the church’s credibility could change if we became known more for our “love in action” than for our statements or stances?