

EIGHT GREAT TRAITS 8: LOVE

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. (Song of Songs 8:6, NIV)

DO YOU LOVE GOLF MORE THAN YOUR WIFE’S COOKING? I’ll leave it up to your friends to put you on the spot with this question, but you can probably rest assured you won’t have to tackle it in front of a TV audience as Ben Crane once did. While attached to a polygraph machine. His attempts to say *no* didn’t pass.

Crane’s scenario was actually a funny bit for a commercial spot, but it draws us all in. What do we love? And do we love this one thing over that one?

Years ago, when I was working among teenagers, I would sometimes ask them to list the top 10 things in their life in order of importance. It’s something of an impossible task, because it can be hard to measure the relative value of things, especially if we’re mixing tangibles and intangibles. But here is what I found common: God fell somewhere in the sixth to tenth spots. For a long time this bothered me. If you come from a faith tradition that tells you God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, how could he occupy any place other than first? But remember, the question was about importance. And what is most important to us are the things that we love. These kids esteemed God, but they didn’t love him more than their family or friends or aspirations, say.

For eight weeks, we have been studying the traits that Peter wrote should be added the faith we possess. So far we have looked at faith itself, then goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, and kindness. How fitting that we should end on love, for as Paul told the Corinthians, “the greatest of these (faith, hope, and love) is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

But love must be put into practice to hold any meaning beyond words. This starts with the question of *whom shall we love?* Every Links Player should know the answer, as it rests in the L of the Links Player’s Mission: Love God and others. Here is the Jesus creed, the two great commandments for his disciples.

And then, *how do we love?* We love, you might note from our passage today, strongly. We are jealous on behalf our own affections, not wanting them to be torn away in their aim for God himself or from those he has given us to love. As Jacob held fast for his blessing, we hold fast in love to bless others.

Opening questions What evidence would you provide to show that you love golf? How would you rank this love among the other loves of your life? • How do you know which things you love most?

READING Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8; 1 John 3:16-19

A test of love (Matthew 6)

What measure of one’s heart does Jesus use here? What other ways of measuring a person’s heart (affections or love) might we suggest in this same way?

What love does (1 Corinthians 13)

Among the traits of love shown here, which ones are on the more successful end of the spectrum for you and which are low down? How can you become better at expressing this kind of love to God and to others?

Sacrificial love (1 John 3)

Give an example of someone you have seen laying down their life for a friend. What kind of sacrifice was involved in this kind of love? Do you know someone who needs a love that requires sacrifice right now?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study with Jeff Hopper and Tracy Hanson is available at <https://youtu.be/iBdgWAbaIPo>