



LESSON 2

Love's Initiative

1 Discuss how last week's challenge went.

Introduction

Last week, we focused on God's personal love for us. He knows our names and every detail of who we are. In today's lesson, we will begin to look at how God's love is proven, merciful and offered. God's love is good news for our lives. Before we can truly appreciate this news, however, we must understand why it is so good and why we need it.

Love is Offered

The Book of Genesis tells us that God created everything in the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and that everything he created was good. The world reflects his beauty, creativity and glory. The crown of his creation was man and woman. In the creation narrative, we are told that in the middle of the garden of Eden there was a tree—the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This was the only tree in the garden from which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat. We know the rest of the story: Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent and ate the fruit from the tree. This was the original sin.

2 Read Genesis 3:1-7. We learned last week that God's love is unconditional, personal and secure, so there must be a loving reason why he would put one tree in the garden from which Adam and Eve were not to eat. How is this consistent with who God is?

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

An Offer You Can Refuse

God's love is freely offered. We *can* refuse it. The story of Adam and Eve shows us, however, that refusing God's love is a rejection of what will bring us joy and fulfillment.

3 What attitudes, beliefs or misconceptions were at the root of Adam and Eve's choice to disobey?

Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's directives, not trusting that his way would lead them to fulfillment. Regrettably, what they found outside of God's plan was separation, shame and death (Genesis 3). In order to genuinely understand the good God offers, we should take a moment to look at the unfortunate effects that turning away from him (sin) has on our lives.

4 Read Isaiah 59:2. How does sin affect our relationship with God?

*² Rather, your iniquities have been barriers
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.*

5 Read Romans 5:12. What is another consequence of sin?

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—

Love is Proven

When we turn away from God's commandments and his love, we hurt him, ourselves and others. Despite our turning away, however, God never stops loving us. As in any great love story, God, the protagonist, pursues us to win us back.

6 Think of someone who loves you. What assures you of this person's love?

7 Read Romans 5:6-8. How does God prove his love for us?

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Love is Merciful

The parable of the Prodigal Son paints a moving picture of the Father's love for us. The young man who squanders his inheritance is called "prodigal" because the word means rash, wasteful or recklessly extravagant. Prodigal can also be used in a positive sense, however, to describe extravagant generosity. In this case, the father too is prodigal. This parable shows us how God the Father proves his extravagant love for us, despite our turning away from him.

8 Read Luke 15:11-24. The father agrees to give the son his inheritance. What does this say about the father's character?

¹¹ Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²² But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

9 Why do you suppose the son wanted to leave?

10 What did the son do with his freedom?

11 What were the results of his actions?

12 Why did the son decide to return home?
How has his view of home changed?

13 What is significant about the father's response to his son's return?

14 Consider how intense and immediate the father's forgiveness was. What does this say to you about our Heavenly Father's love, mercy and forgiveness?

Summary

God never imposes his love on us, nor forces us to love him in return—we are free to choose him and the life he offers us. Sin is choosing that which can hurt God, others and ourselves. Even when we sin, however, our Heavenly Father shows his love for us; he patiently waits for us to turn back to him. He proved his love by sending his Son to make a way for us to be reconciled; “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Living It Out

CHALLENGE

Go to Mass this week with an attentive mindset, with humble sorrow for your failures and joyful anticipation of the Father’s welcome and all that his house has to offer. Listen carefully to all the readings and prayers to catch their depth of meaning. Be prepared to share with your group next week something that stood out for you in a fresh way at Mass.

MEMORIZE ROMANS 5:8

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.