

how's your LOVE life?

by Florence MacKenzie

Pop and rock stars sing about it. Romantic novelists write about it. Pastors and ministers preach about it. It would seem we just can't live without it. But what is "it"? It's love.

We sometimes think of love as a spontaneous, warm feeling or display of affection towards someone. This is certainly the case in some situations but, if it were always like this, why would there be any need for the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of love in us? Why would Jesus specifically focus our attention on loving our neighbour, loving each other, and loving our enemies? It looks like there are occasions when loving someone has little or nothing to do with our feelings towards them, but everything to do with our dependence on God's Spirit and obedience to His Word. This implies love is not just an emotion, but will often involve taking some kind of positive action.

How about this as a possible definition of love? Love is any thought, feeling, decision or action that is concerned with the ultimate good of another. With this in mind, how might we love our neighbour, each other, and our enemies?

Loving our neighbour

When Jesus was asked "Who is my neighbour?" He responded by telling the story of a man who came to the aid of someone in need (Lk. 10:30-37). The man's compassion motivated him to loving action. Do you know of anyone who is in need? Maybe their need is for friendship. Perhaps it's a financial need. It could be a physical need of some kind. Maybe you know someone who needs to hear there is forgiveness and acceptance when she penitently asks the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue her from her messed-up life. Whatever the need might be, loving our neighbour involves doing for them what we would like someone to do for us if we were in the same situation.

Loving each other

On one occasion, Jesus said to his followers, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). How do we love our fellow Christians as Jesus has loved us? By laying down our lives – which means we die to ourselves. We stop feeding our selfish desires and our need to be



number one. We start serving our brothers and sisters in Christ by promoting their interests rather than paying attention only to our own. Often this will mean going out of our way to help them and accepting the inconvenience that goes along with this without complaining or grumbling. Other times it will involve moving out of our comfort zone, either in relationships or places of service. Laying down our lives does not mean we become a doormat for people to walk all over us, but it probably will mean rethinking how we relate to each other.

Loving our enemies

I'm always amused at the Peanuts sketch where Linus says to Lucy, "I love mankind... it's people I can't stand!" Can you relate? We might be very happy with the concept of loving humankind when this refers to an anonymous, hypothetical mass of people but, when it comes to loving specific people – especially those we might not even like or who don't like us – this can be a different matter altogether. Yet Jesus leaves us no wiggle room when He tells us to love our enemies and points out what this looks like in practice (Lk. 6:27-28). He says:

- Do good to those who hate you
- Bless those who curse you
- Pray for those who mistreat you

These are responses that don't come naturally to us and I'm so glad we don't have to do it on our own. As followers of Jesus, we can tap in to the power of His Spirit, Who is ready to produce the fruit of love in our lives. By obeying His Word and depending on His power, we will be in a position to love our neighbour, that person who is in need; to love each other, by putting the good of fellow believers before our own; and to love our enemies, those who are against us but to whom we will do good, bless, and pray for.

Who knows what God might do in the lives of those we decide to love? Whatever else, I reckon our own love life will take a turn for the better!