

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM HANDBOOK**UNIT III Key 5****LOVE****Purpose of this Key:**

- 1) Recognize how our love is tested by difficult situations and difficult people.
- 2) Recognize that our love grows in difficult circumstances.
- 3) Recognize that real love sets and accepts godly limits.
- 4) Recognize that real love does not make demands.
- 5) Recognize that real love actively shows mercy to hostile people.
- 6) Recognize that when we truly love others, we want them to come to faith in Jesus.

John 15:13**Common responses:**

- 1) If we love someone, we will sacrifice ourselves for them.
- 2) Jesus laid down His life for us, so we should be willing to do the same.
- 3) We are to show Jesus' love at all times.
- 4) We will receive joy as a result.
- 5) It was not possible for Jesus to love us any more than He did.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) This verse describes Jesus' love, not ours.
- 2) Jesus went to the cross not only to pay for our sins but also to identify with our worst pain (Isaiah 53:4-5).
- 3) The "gods" of other religions tell people how to live. Jesus entered into the pain of the human race as deeply as possible (Isaiah 53).
- 4) We can never stop learning from Jesus' love.
- 5) No limit is set on how much we can love others.

Romans 5:7-8**Common responses:**

- 1) Most people understand that Jesus died for us when we were still in our sins.

- 2) Many also realize that we must put our love into action, even with difficult people.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Jesus did not just lay down His life for His friends; He lay down His life for His enemies.
- 2) Before we repented, we were His enemies.
- 3) We cannot clean up our lives and then approach God. We can only come as we are. His forgiveness works change in us.
- 4) His life was not taken from Him. He lay it down of His own free will (John 10:18) out of obedience to His Father. (For that reason we must never blame the Jews; the sins of the whole world were responsible for His death on the cross.)
- 5) Jesus died not only to pay for our sins but also to deliver us from all the influences sin has had on our hearts and minds (I John 3:8).
- 6) We need to remember that the servant is not greater than the Master (Matthew 10:24).
- 7) God allows difficult people into our lives in order to stretch our ability to love as He loves us.
- 8) Jesus laid down His life for difficult people, like us, so that we can become willing to sacrifice for difficult people.
- 9) Even if our love does not change them, we can celebrate with Jesus because we did right (Matthew 25:21 & 23).
- 10) This is a good passage to memorize and mediate on.

Matthew 5:44-48

Common responses:

- 1) As forgiven sinners, we should never think that we are better than the people who are have not yet repented.
- 2) If we pray for and show kindness to people who are still dead in their sins, we might see them in heaven some day.
- 3) Jesus commands us to love difficult people. This will make us stronger.

- 4) We will be blessed if we love the unlovable.
- 5) Some find that these verses convict them of their failures to love difficult people.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Jesus' love stretches us beyond what is natural love.
- 2) As our love is stretched, we draw closer to God.
- 3) God promises to reward us if we pray for our enemies (Hebrews 6:10).
- 4) We need to pray for our enemies to be saved, because as forgiven sinners, we do not want them to go to hell.
- 5) We need to remember that our enemies are still dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1-5). We want them to become alive in Christ.
- 6) We need to remember that our enemies are slaves of sin (John 8:34) and do not feel free to behave differently.
- 7) When we pray for our enemies, we gain a sense of power and no longer feel helpless.
- 8) Our enemies are put into our lives for a reason. God has given us an assignment in their lives.
- 9) We need to ask the Holy Spirit's direction for how to love them better.
- 10) Sometimes we have been the difficult ones (Titus 3:3-5). When we ask others' forgiveness, we help them to overcome their hurts more easily.
- 11) Sometimes when God is blessing us, we do not realize He is blessing us.

Luke 10: 29-37**Common responses:**

- 1) Love shows itself in actions.
- 2) We should not ignore a person who has problems.
- 3) The strong should help the weak.
- 4) We should help even if it is inconvenient.
- 5) Love gets tested in certain circumstances.
- 6) Love is never prejudiced.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) The Samaritan took a big risk. Common sense would tell him to run away before the bandits attacked him.
- 2) We are tempted to judge the priest and Levite, but they did nothing worse than run away to safety.
- 3) The Samaritan stayed in a dangerous situation to help.
- 4) Jews despised Samaritans. The Samaritan did not owe the Jewish man anything.
- 5) We do not easily accept help from those whom we have always despised. The Jewish man had a humbling experience.
- 6) The Samaritan had to overcome his resentment. The Jewish man had to overcome his pride. They both had to adjust their attitudes.
- 7) Both were tested in ways in which they needed to be tested.

1. Have you ever had a loving, non-sexual friendship with someone of the same sex? Do you believe a non-sexual friendship is possible?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) Some have, and it was a huge blessing.
- 3) Some have not, but believe it is possible.
- 4) Some had sexual thoughts about their friend.
- 5) Relating with their friends at a deep emotional and spiritual level made it harder to view them as sexual objects.
- 6) Ssa/ma/tx men often find that as they get to know other men better, they feel less sexually attracted to them.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) If they have had such friendships, encourage thanks and praise to God. Such relationships are often very healing, especially if the friend is an ever-straight Christian who loves them in spite of their darkest secrets.
- 2) If they have sexual thoughts about their friends, encourage them to block the thoughts with memorized Scripture and to get to know their friends better.

- 3) Ssa/ma/tx people often used sex to get love, friendship, approval, understanding, loyalty, acceptance, and belonging. They can get those benefits without sex being a requirement.
- 4) Often the more the ssa/ma/tx overcomer learns to relate to others of the same sex at the spiritual and emotional level, the less they feel sexually attracted to them.
- 5) As they grow in Christ, they value others less for their appearance and more for their character traits.
- 6) Church should be a place to get the right kinds of friendships with others of the same sex.
- 7) If they have no such friends, refer to Proverbs 18:24. They may need to spend more alone time with God before He points them to the right person.

2 Have you ever had a genuinely loving relationship with a same-sex partner? If so, would the love have been available if the sex had not been available?

Common responses:

- 1) Most say 'no' to both.
- 2) A few say the relationship was loving, but only because sex was available.
- 3) A rare few say they were in long-term loving relationships, but now realize they could have loved each other better without the sexual thrills.
- 4) Some state that their friendships with straight Christians of the same sex are far more meaningful.
- 5) Some say that only after they made friends with straight people of the same sex did they find out what real friendship was.
- 6) Some say that they only found out what love was when they accepted Christ.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Male ssa relationships are often short-term and primarily for sexual purposes. Long-term monogamous relationships are more common among lesbians.
- 2) Loyalty and belonging may have been present in the relationship, but usually only because sex was available.

- 3) The good parts of the relationship should have been available without sex needing to be available.
- 4) For many, especially ssa men, sex was their only way to bond with other males.
- 5) Maa's will often state that they love children. The love unfortunately was mixed with lust. They would have acted in the children's best interests if they had avoided becoming sexual with them.
- 6) Encourage them to continue making non-sexual friendships with others of the same sex. They may need advice, coaching, and lots of encouragement.
- 7) For many, this is a huge challenge that will require a lot of concentration. Many painful memories, insecurities, and fears will get stirred up as they do this.
- 8) Be aware that the relationship you have with your overcomer is part of his/her learning process. Feeling safe with you might be helping him/her feel safe in reaching out more to others. You are showing him/her that you consider him/her lovable, worthy of having a relationship with, and having something to offer.

3. What are some situations in which your love has been tested? How did you handle those situations?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) Many have been disappointed by loved ones.
- 3) Some realize that love and trust are two different things.
- 4) Some used to hold grudges but no longer do so.
- 5) Some try to be kind to people they do not like.
- 6) Some were invited into sexual encounters but refused the temptation.
- 7) Some are learning not to let the sun go down on their anger (Ephesians 4:26).
- 8) Some realize they handled the tests badly.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Affirm any Biblical response.
- 2) We show our love for God by resisting temptation.

- 3) We love better when we surrender our self-will (I Corinthians 15:31 & Galatians 2:20). As we receive God's forgiveness in Christ, He works His changes in us.
- 4) We might have to frequently ask God for specific guidance on how to handle difficult people.
- 5) Difficult people drive us to greater reliance on God.
- 6) Encourage confession of sin when necessary (I John 1:9).
- 7) Counsel based on your knowledge, experience, and what you have learned from working with this person.

4. On a scale of 1-10, how well are you loving people in general? Please explain your answer.

Common responses:

- 1) Many realize they have improved.
- 2) Many realize they are more understanding of others than they used to be.
- 3) Some are learning they can pray for people who do bad things.
- 4) Some are struggling with others' negativity.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for His work on their hearts. Many had love and sex confused for a long time.
- 2) Some are learning to genuinely love for the first time. Non-sexual friendships with others of the same sex may bring new experiences, and they need to be patient with themselves.
- 3) Sometimes no matter how kind, gentle, and patient we are with others, they remain committed to their negative attitudes, which are not our fault.
- 4) We can celebrate with Jesus when we are loving, even if they reject our overtures.
- 5) Our love will be flawed until we die (I John 3:2).
- 6) Never criticize someone who has been discouraged by the persistent negativity of another. Everyone has their limitations (2 Corinthians 4:7). Some people are in environments where their ability to love is stretched every day.

- 7) While we cannot blame our environments for our sins, we need to be realistic about the enormity of the challenges put before us.
- 8) We need to recognize that negative people are a test of our love.
- 9) Prayer is the best defense. Encourage transparency. We can go to God in prayer and tell Him that the negative people are discouraging us.
- 10) The more we obey God's will, the more free we are in our prayers. If our will is lined up with God's will, we have more of a claim on His promises.

5. On a scale of 1-10, how well are you loving those who wronged you? Please explain your answer.

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) Many realize they have improved.
- 3) Many realize that they have become more forgiving.
- 4) Many realize that they are more understanding of others than they used to be.
- 5) Some are struggling with others' negativity.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Same as #4.
- 2) Praying for their salvation is the most loving thing we can do for them.

6. Have you had any opportunities to do good to those who hate you (Romans 12:20-21)? Are you praying for their salvation? Please share any examples, whether or not they appeared effective.

Common responses:

- 1) Some have made overtures to those who have hurt them. Some found it effective.
- 2) Some are planning to make overtures to people they have hurt.
- 3) Many have learned to pray for those who have hurt them.
- 4) Some see indications that God is working on those for whom they are praying.
- 5) Some made overtures and were rejected.
- 6) Some are under conviction for not having attempted overtures.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Commend any overtures they attempted. God will bless their obedience (Hebrews 6:10).
- 2) Encourage thanks and praise to God for any positive response they got in return.
- 3) Encourage continued prayer for those who hurt them (James 5:16).
- 4) The more we intercede in prayer, the more opportunities we have to rejoice when the prayers are answered.
- 5) Even if they were rejected, they did the right thing. The ones who hurt them might feel too guilty to respond (Romans 2:15 & 12:20).
- 6) If they plan to speak to someone or write a letter, they should pray about it first. If they want to contact a former victim, first be sure the laws allow such contact.
- 7) We can confess our sins of failing to do what God wants (I John 1:9). His forgiveness empowers us to obey His will.
- 8) Give lots of encouragement. Ssa/ma/tx people have often experienced much hostility and rejection. They risk more rejection when they make overtures to hostile people.

7. What is the point of Jesus' conversation with Peter in John 21:15-19? You might want to read over John 18:15-18 and 25-27 before answering.

Common responses:

- 1) Many note how much Jesus loves Peter, even after he denied knowing Him.
- 2) Peter needed to know he was forgiven.
- 3) Peter needed to know he was still useful to Jesus.
- 4) Peter needed to have a chance to reaffirm his love for Jesus.
- 5) Peter needed to be told to put his love into action.
- 6) Peter needed to face his own weakness.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Peter had to be reconciled to Jesus after a fall into sin.
- 2) Peter denied Jesus three times, so he had to make three confessions of faith.

- 3) Jesus confronts Peter in a loving and gracious way. First, He repeats the miracle He had done 3 years ago when He first called Peter (John 21:3-8 & Luke 5:4-10). Second, He makes sure Peter has a good meal.
- 4) Then they sit down for a chat. Jesus handles Peter gently, and Peter gets the point.
- 5) Three years before, Peter had been confronted with his own sinful nature (Luke 5:8). Three years later, Peter has proven how sinful he could be. Jesus repeats His promise to Peter (Luke 5:10).
- 6) Often after we sin, God in His mercy puts the same temptation in our path again.
- 7) He gives us another chance to get the victory, not to earn His favor, but to show our love.
- 8) Pentecost is a few weeks away (Acts 2), and from that point on, Peter will have a job to do. He will lay a foundation of faith for millions of people.
- 9) Peter's love for Jesus will cause him to endure prison, chains, beatings, and a martyr's death.
- 10) Peter never denies Jesus again.

8. On a scale of 1-10, how victorious have you been lately? Please explain your answer.

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for any victory gained.
- 2) If the number is high because they have had very little temptation lately, encourage thanks and praise to God.
- 3) If the number is high because they have had to fight a lot of temptation and were successful, encourage thanks and praise to God.
- 4) More tests will likely be put in their way, but future tests should not spoil their enjoyment of the victories they have had so far.
- 5) Avoid criticizing a low number. Try to find out the reason for it. Ask about their thoughts, attitudes, stressful situations, how they are using their time, or if anything unexpected has happened.

- 6) If they sin less frequently than before, assure them that God has been working in their lives. Encourage progress, not perfection.
- 7) If they have slipped, encourage them to confess it, accept God's forgiveness, and get back on track.
- 8) Remind them that I John 1:9 and Romans 8:1 always apply.
- 9) Encourage them to retrace their steps and ask the Holy Spirit to give them insight into what weakness led to the fall.
- 10) Encourage them to confess sins of thoughts (Romans 12:2) in order to more easily avoid sins of words and deeds.
- 11) Continue to encourage them to use memorized Scripture to block tempting and negative thoughts. Encourage use of the Emergency Prayer.
- 12) If they view themselves as making very little progress, keep their focus on God's mercy rather than their own failures.
- 13) New Christians do not always understand the difference between temptation and actual sin. Some give themselves a low number, but while the temptation was great, they may not have fallen into sin. Explain the difference to them.
- 14) If they have not had temptation in a long while, they might need to be aware that the devil does not give up easily and may be preparing a major attack. This possibility should not prevent them from enjoying their progress now.
Overcomers commonly experience a major attack of temptation before getting the final victory over a besetting sin. If they withstand a big temptation, which can go on for days or weeks, they will usually find themselves that much stronger once it is over. Encourage them to pray for rescue immediately when tempted.

9. Did you use any memorized Scripture to battle temptation lately? What was the result?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) By this time, most have learned to use the Word effectively against temptation.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Affirm any Biblical response.

10. How is your spiritual life in general, how are your private devotions, and how are things at your church/fellowship group?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) Most report that things are going well.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for whatever is going well.
- 2) If things are not going well, try to find out the reason.
- 3) Counsel based on your knowledge, experience, and what you have learned from working with this person.

Plan of Action:

- 1) Affirm any Biblical response.
- 2) Give lots of encouragement. Much of this Key is focused on loving difficult people. Much of this Key may be new material for them, and they are being asked to take risks with others.

Additional points:

- 1) Some are reporting heterosexual feelings and expressing hope that they will someday get married.
- 2) Although such feelings are evidence of progress, they should not rush into a dating relationship.
- 3) Sometimes they are so delighted to have heterosexual feelings, often for the first time ever, that they want to hurry to make up for lost time.
- 4) However, in times of stress, they might still regress to ssa/ma/tx feelings.
- 5) At this point they might be wiser to solidify what they are learning, continue to let the Holy Spirit re-wire their minds, and develop stronger non-sexual bonds with others of the same sex.

- 6) If they have made messes in life, they might be wiser to clean those messes up before bringing a spouse into their lives.
- 7) Part of getting married is surrendering to God's timetable and accepting His plan for their future marriage.
- 8) However, they might find it helpful to make more friends with people of the opposite sex as long as they are aware of their boundaries.
- 9) They can begin to pray for their future spouse.
- 10) They can read the Song of Solomon to get a Biblical picture of heterosexual love.