



## SESSION THREE

### God's Dream for Love

Love is much more than a law imposed upon us: 'Since God has first loved us' (cf. 1 John 4-10), love is no longer a mere 'command'; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.  
(*Share the Good News*, 59)

#### 1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome again. During the first session we looked at the reality of family life today. Last time we looked at the ideal for family life as expressed in culture and as we experience it ourselves.

Then we went on to explore what Pope Francis says about the ideal for family life today. We will begin by recalling some of the main points that emerged from last week's discussion.



#### 2. Video Clip 7: Kaleidoscope (5 min)

There is a strong desire in popular culture for love, especially love that endures. This video clip explores the dream of love that is portrayed in modern culture, especially pop culture.



#### 3. Discussion (20 min)

What struck you from the video? How do the sentiments portrayed compare with your own understanding of love?





#### 4. Video Clip 8: Input – St Paul's Vision of Love (20 min)

Pope Francis draws on St Paul's exploration of love in 1 Corinthians 13: 4–7. Saint Paul was passing on to the early Christians Jesus' message about love. These are some of the things Pope Francis says:

- **Love is nurtured in the daily lives of families:** Love between people grows and changes as people grow and change. To be able to love another in a mature way, we need to develop a set of interpersonal skills to help us to consider what is and is not important in how we act as we relate to others. One thing that can help us to develop these skills is a reflection on St Paul's teaching.
- **Love is patient:** Patience takes root when we recognise that other people also have a right to live in this world just as they are. We must not expect everything to turn out as we would ideally like it to, or that everybody would be just as we would like them to be. When we cultivate this attitude, we become compassionate and more ready to accept another with their differences and failures. Being patient means being slow to anger.



“Unless we cultivate patience we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds” (92)





- **Love is kind:** Actions speak louder than words. Kindness is shown in how we act. To be kind means always being ready to be of assistance to others. As St Ignatius of Loyola says: 'Love is shown more by deeds than by words'.
- **Love is not jealous:** If we truly love someone we are delighted when they do well in something or when something really good happens for them. True love values the gifts and achievements of others. It recognises that everyone has their own road to happiness, possesses different gifts and is destined for a unique path in life. Love moves us to find ways of helping those who are cast aside by society.

“Envy is a form of sadness provoked by another’s prosperity; it shows that we are not concerned with the happiness of others but only with our own well-being. Whereas love makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves” (95)

The Joy  
of Love

- **Love is not boastful:** Love challenges a mindset that sees one person as being in any way superior to another. It fosters humility and avoids boasting about our own achievements. People who love are less focused on themselves and more focused on others.

“The inner logic of Christian love is not about importance and power; rather, “whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:27) (98)





- **Love is not rude:** Love never makes others suffer. It is not rude, impolite or harsh. It requires that we learn how to listen, how to speak and how to keep quiet. It urges respect for the freedom of other people. Words are powerful tools. We must learn to use words, as Jesus did, to console and encourage rather than to demean, sadden or show scorn.

“To be open to a genuine encounter with others, a “kind look” is essential. This is incompatible with a negative attitude that readily points out other people’s shortcomings while overlooking one’s own,” (100)

- **Love is generous:** Love is more interested in loving than being loved. Pope Francis quotes St Thomas Aquinas who speaks of mothers as being an example of those who love the most, who seek to love more than to be loved. Love demands nothing in return.
- **Love is not irritable:** Sometimes we may be tempted to react with impatience, lack of understanding, even anger towards others, just because they are as they are. They can be led to think of themselves as being troublesome, even worthless. This is not the way of love.

“If we must fight evil, so be it; but we must always say “no” to violence in the home,” (104)





- **Love reacts with indignation only towards injustice:** It is one thing to feel an urge to act out of hostility towards another but it is another to give into it, as St Paul says, 'Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger'. Pope Francis urges that we do not let the day end without making peace in our family.
- **Love Forgives:** When we have been offended or let down, forgiveness is not easy. It calls for sacrifice, generosity and openness on the part of the person who has been offended. Today we know that we need to learn to accept and forgive ourselves first in order to have an attitude of acceptance and forgiveness towards others. If we keep searching for other's faults, it leads to resentment, which is the opposite of forgiveness.

“If we accept that God's love is unconditional, that the Father's love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us” (108)

The Joy  
of Love

- **Love Rejoices with others:** In a family when something good happens to one person they should know that others will be there to celebrate it with them. In order to be able to rejoice with others we must learn to focus on their dignity and value their abilities and good works, rather than on their weaknesses. It is always important to remember that none of us is perfect, we all have our good points and our bad points. If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence.

“If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others, and focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence, for, as Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)” (110)



- **Love bears all things:** love calls us to speak well of others. This does not mean being blind to the faults of others but that we see their faults and weaknesses in a wider context, recognising that we are all a complex mixture of light and shadows. When we believe that love does not have to be perfect to be real we can then appreciate that the other person loves us as best they can.

“If I expect too much the other person will let me know, for he or she can neither play God nor serve all my needs. Love co-exists with imperfection” (113)

- **Love believes all things:** In this context ‘belief’ means trust. Love trusts, which means it sets free and does not try to dominate, possess or control. This freedom fosters independence and openness to the world around us. It enables people to share openly with one another, rather than being secretive in the fear of judgement or suspicion. It avoids deceit, falsehood and lies. It allows each member of a family, each partner in a marriage to develop their own separate interests and involvements as well as their relationships with each other.

“Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything” (115)

- **Love hopes all things:** Love hopes for a better future. Everything, including people, can change. Even if transformation does not take place in this world, the Christian lives in the hope of eternal life and hopes that God’s dream for humanity will be realised in the next life.



- **Love endures all things:** Love is prepared to endure difficulties and stand firm and if necessary to confront challenges. It never gives up even in the darkest hour. There are extraordinary examples of this in situations where, in spite of their difficulties, couples continue to show care for one another. Families endure the most horrendous situations of pain, illness, financial difficulties in a spirit of mutual support and love.

“The Christian ideal, especially in families,  
is a love that never gives up,” (119)



### 5. Discussion (20 min)

Which of these characteristics of love do you think you need to cultivate in your own life? In your family?

Which do you think might be most difficult? Why?

Where have you seen love in action?



### 6. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

### 7. Video Clip 9: Closing Reflection (5 min)



### 8. Tea/Coffee



## IN SUMMARY



Pope Francis wants to help us to understand the Christian message about love. He draws on St Paul's teaching on love in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Love grows and changes in families as people grow and change. Love does not have to be perfect to be real. But we can learn to relate in ways that help love to grow.

Love is patient: We must not expect that everything will turn out just as we want it to. To be patient is to be slow to anger.

Love is kind: Love is more than a feeling. It's about how we act, especially how we treat others. When someone does something for another out of love they do not expect to be repaid.

Love is not jealous: Love values the achievements of others. 'It frees us from the sour taste of envy'. (95)

Love is not boastful: Love prevents us from seeing ourselves as superior to another.

Love is not rude: Love compels us to use words as Jesus did, to console and encourage rather than to demean, sadden or show scorn.

Love is generous: Love demands nothing in return.



Love is not irritable: Love does not react harshly to the faults and failings of others. To do so causes hurt and alienation. Pope Francis urges that we never let the day end without making peace in our families.

Love forgives: When we have been hurt, forgiveness is not easy. It calls on us to try to understand other people's weaknesses, knowing that we also have our own weaknesses.

Love bears all things: Pope Francis urges that people learn to speak well of one another, rather than point out another's faults and weaknesses.

Love believes all things: If we love someone we need to trust them. When someone knows they are trusted and appreciated, they are able to be open and hide nothing. This leads to mutual growth and open sharing in a relationship.

Love endures all things: The Christian ideal is a love that never gives up.

