

What sort of person are you? I'm not asking you what your personality type is, or whether you're male or female. What sort of person are you?

I'm not asking you what your racial background is, or your job, or your interests. What sort of person are you?

On the inside, ever grabbed an apple, a pink lady, nice red apple, and shone it up, and taken a bite, and discovered that on the inside, it's not what you expected? It's either bruised, or worst case, something is in there. Or an avocado.

Who enjoys opening up that avocado, going, ah? Looks so good on the outside. But on the inside, it's a different story.

What sort of person are you on the inside, behind the curtain, on the backstage? Those of us who have been Christians for a while probably know the general correct answer. I am a sinner saved by grace.

And that would be correct if you are a follower of Jesus. But is that all you are? What type of person are you becoming, whilst and having been saved by grace?

What sort of person are you? At the beginning of this 10 week series, today being the last of the 10 messages, and it's been on spiritual formation.

On the first week, I referred to one of the American presidents, who some years ago abused his office, abused his power differential that existed between him and a staff worker. And he was found guilty of sexual misconduct.

The President of the United States. Before he was discovered, he did say he lied and did say he hadn't done anything, but then it came out. And he was caught out.

And he said, and I made this point on that first message, he said that his actions were out of character. He said, I've done something wrong, but it's out of character. He was telling the truth.

He did actually act out of character, because we always act out of character. And character is the sum of our habits. How we act is the fruit of what is on the inside.

How we act, even though it can be a mistake when we do something wrong, it's because we have the propensity and probably the habit formation that would allow us to act in that way. What sort of person are you on the inside?

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, who were known for their external righteousness, and he used a dish washing metaphor. He said, you clean the outside of the dish, but on the inside, it's still dirty.

And he actually took, for the first time, a name for an actor in the first century, a hypocrite who would wear different masks and play different roles. And he actually took that and he applied that to someone who was of duplicitous character.

He said, don't be an actor. Don't be an hypocrite expressing what you want people to see on the outside, but being someone who's very different on the inside. What sort of person are you?

And as I say this many times today, I'm asking myself, what sort of person am I? Wayform refers, that last time I'll say it, to spiritual formation in the way of the master. A tricky, fancy way to talk about discipleship.

And today is on love. It's our last message. Spiritual formation in the way of the master is a way of love.

I would put it to you that the answer to the question, what sort of person are you for a follower of Jesus, is, I am born from above, pursuing love. I am born from above, pursuing love. That's the type of person I am.

This is the aim of the formation which is happening in me, the spiritual formation by the grace of God. I am born from above, pursuing love. That is, if you are a Christian by grace through faith.

Love is the end of spiritual formation. Now, one could argue correctly, isn't the glory of God the end of everything? And you'd be completely right.

And I agree personally. Yes, it's life is about the glory of God. But we can best glorify God when we make loving Him and loving others our pursuit.

Amen. We are being shaped by the grace of God, the word of God, the Holy Spirit, trials and temptations, sufferings and holy habits. We are being shaped to be Christians who love with the love of God.

John 13 verse 34, Jesus says, a new command I give you, love one another, as I have loved you. So you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples.

If you love one another, love like God has loved, this will be the mark of true discipleship. Some of us are reading, as Richard mentioned, 1 John at the moment, in 13 days. And 1 John, chapter 4, gives us a superb explanation of how God has loved.

Jesus says, I want you to love the way the Father has loved. Well, this is an explanation. John writes, dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God. Excuse me, and knows God. Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. God has loved by sending his son to die in our place. The holy one, the perfect son of God, gave his life as an atoning sacrifice, which means a sacrifice which amends for sin.

It fixes the problem. That's what God has done through his son. He has fixed the problem of sin because Jesus has carried our sin on himself on the cross.

2,000 years ago, this is love. Amen. This is love.

Christ has laid his life down for us. What sort of person are you? Are you born from above, pursuing love?

Well, Christians who are on a journey of spiritual formation must first be born from above. John chapter 3 tells us, verse 3, Jesus says, very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

Born again in Greek is *genete anothēn*, which means born from above. It's normally translated born again. So if you have repented of your sin and believed that Jesus Christ died for you and rose again, you are born again, born from above.

Your spirit is now alive in you and will live forever.

Hallelujah.

Born from above. Your heart is not stony anymore. It is made of flesh.

The gift of the Father born from above. Your will is now capable of following God's ways. Born from above.

It's who you are. If you have placed your faith in Christ, what sort of person are you? I trust that you are born from above by the grace of God through faith.

But are you pursuing love? Are you pursuing love? Have you found sometimes Christianity is strange?

Anybody? It's funny, we are given the presence of the living God by the Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ. So Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make their home through the Spirit in us by faith.

So we have God, yet we are told all the way through the Old and New Testament to seek God. We have God, yet we seek God. We are given in Christ righteousness.

We are clothed in his righteousness. Yet the Old Testament says, what is required of you to act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with our God, to do justice is to act righteously.

So there's this strong sense that we are given as a gift, righteousness, yet we are told to live out, pursue righteousness. We are certainly holy. Without holiness, no one can see the Lord.

Yet we are called to be holy, to seek out holiness. We have love, yet we are called to pursue love. Spiritual formation is ultimately a pursuit of love.

God's love expressed through our whole lives, our will, mind, emotions, bodies, social context. 1 Corinthians 14 wraps it up very succinctly, chapter 14, verse 1. Paul writes, Let love be your highest goal.

Did you know that was what your Christian faith is all about? Let love be your highest goal. The Greek word means pursue, chase, even persecute.

Chase love. Pursue love. You're already saved, born again, if you are a follower of Jesus.

You are right with God, living forever. Paul says, make love your aim. Is that your aim?

What sort of person are you? Born from above, pursuing love. We heard this morning, yuki read for us, 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient.

Love is kind. It doesn't boast. It's not proud.

It does not dishonour others. It's not self-seeking. It's not easily angered.

It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

And now these three remain, Paul writes, to wrap up that section. Faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Did you notice the text doesn't say, we are patient and kind. It says love is patient and kind. And herein lies the most profound truth of spiritual formation.

When Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount to turn the other cheek, anybody find the Sermon on the Mount a little bit out there? A little bit like, wow, are we really meant to be this?

And he says in the Sermon on the Mount, if you're gonna follow me in the way of the master in this kingdom of God, that he's being manifest amongst you by the Spirit of God, I want you to turn the other cheek.

If you get hit on one side, turn the other cheek, let him hit on the other. If they ask you to walk one mile, say I'll walk another, they ask for a coat, do your shirt give them your coat also? He says all these challenging things.

If you are persecuted, I want you to bless them back. I want you rather than to seek worldly treasure, to seek godly treasure, if you are in the kingdom, you are going to speak truthfully, let you yes be yes.

You are not going to look lustfully at people. But when he gave all these commands, all these teachings, he was not saying try to do those things. But that's how we often read it.

He wasn't saying try to do those things, he was saying become the type of person for which this is normal behaviour. You see, the goal of spiritual formation is to catch love, to be the sort of person in which love resides and bears fruit.

This is a profound question. When Jesus was dying on the cross, about to give up his spirit, remember what he said about those who killed him? Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing.

The question I want to ask is, was that hard for Jesus to do? I would suggest it wasn't hard at all. In fact, it would have been so much harder for the son of God who was love incarnate, it would be so hard for him to say, Father, smite them all.

That would have been impossible for him to do. So hard because his life was one of love, amen. Think about it.

Don't lose. This is what it's all about. Ten weeks is about this moment.

He has called us to become like him. Make love your pursuit. Not that I would shine up the outside, but I would become like Christ on the inside.

That's why spiritual disciplines are called indirect training. They have to help me become a loving person. And a loving person acts in certain ways wherever they go.

That's a wonderful truth, isn't it? And also a challenge. What sort of person are you?

At the core of spiritual formation, we are to pursue love. And it's not just a nebulous idea of love. Love is not God, but God is love.

And God is inside us by his spirit, so then love is inside of us, but we are still told to pursue love, to catch love.

When we catch love, and I know this sounds a bit weird, catch love and love will bear fruit in your life because that's what Jesus said. Good trees bear good fruit. They don't bear bad fruit.

Bad trees, from the inside out, they bear bad fruit. What sort of person are you? Born from above, pursuing love.

Well, let's think about the aspects of spiritual formation that we've studied. Week number one was the easy yoke. And just think about how love is the goal in this.

The way of the master is a learned way. It starts with faith in Jesus, born from above, and he says, come and I'll put my yoke on you, and I'll help you walk the way of the master. The metaphor is work, yet rest.

It's an easy way. It's unhurried grace, but it is a way of love. Week number two was known and loved, Romans 8.

Who gets to be born from above? Those who put their faith in Christ. In the Holy Spirit comes Romans 8 and says, you belong.

He testifies to our spirit. We believe we become a child of God. We're not already a child of God.

We have to become by faith. Then we belong in the family of Jesus and we behave differently. It starts from the inside out.

Known and loved, love is our goal. When we know we're loved by God, we can love others. Amen.

Week number three, we began four weeks looking at the renewal of the mind. Why would you renew your mind? So that we can love.

We talked about replacing lies with the truth. Isn't that about love? Are we loved by God?



Yes. Sometimes our mind says a lie. I don't think he does love us, but John has said multiple times, no, it can never be taken away.

Every question you would ever ask God, do you really love me? And the Spirit says, check out what he did in history. God has shown you what love is.

This is love that God sent his son to die for your sins on the cross. This is love. That is the truth that I have to replace a lie with.

I am loved by God, demonstrated once and for all in the cross of Jesus. And I need to replace the lie regularly, that I am filled with shame and I am worthless. It's not true.

I am loved and I have worth. We love God and others because we are first love. Week number four was the rewire principle.

Repetition rewires the brain. Christ has changed us by grace through faith. Fundamentally, we are born from above.

And these truths need to be rewired into our mind and our emotions and our body so that we can love. We looked at the reframe principle, week five. God is good all the time.

Romans 8.28 says all things are working together for good. He is love. He is good.

I need to reframe what he was doing in my past when I thought he wasn't loving me, but he was. He never stops being loving.

And I can reframe my future and look for his fingerprints of goodness and love so that I can be safe in his love and then love others. We looked at the rejoice principle.

Contentment comes from knowing we are loved and cared for and forgiven and given new life out of joy we love. Amen. These are all driving us to the end of spiritual formation, which is the glory of God through love.

Week number seven was rest. We don't strive to become who we're meant to be because we are born from above, declared children of God. New creations.

We're called to live in these rhythms of grace. We enjoy rest. And when we rest, we snore the song of the redeemed.

I am not sovereign. You are God. Don't you love that?

Every human being will dribble like a baby, whether you're the president of the United States or not. Everyone runs out of puff and falls asleep. And God neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Amen. He is the one who is sovereign. And in His love and in His care, we rest.

And out of that place, that unanxious presence, we bloom where we are planted and we love. Week number 8 was about limits and boundaries. We live within God's limits because His limits are loving.

His limits are loving. And we impose limits on others. We say yes and we say no because we love them.

Because love includes boundaries and differentiation. And week number 9, we looked at temptation last week. The evil one wants to tempt us to live anything but the life of love.

Desire is antithetical to love. Pride is antithetical to love. Unbelief is antithetical to love.

These are the three great temptations of the evil one. But love responds with grace, humility and belief. And in the last week today, make your goal love because God is love.

What sort of person are you? What sort of person are you becoming by the grace of God? We are born from above pursuing love.

As we finish, consider the seemingly beyond reach expectations of the Sermon on the Mount that we just mentioned before. Do you think the world would be a different place if anger was replaced by love?

Jesus teaches to his disciples, right at the start of the Sermon on the Mount, you need to deal with anger and contempt because it's gonna mess you up. Do you think there would be so much anger, as we see in the world, if love reigns supreme?

Love will temper and refine anger. If love was pursued by humanity, how many murders would occur? He talks about murder in the Sermon on the Mount.

How many divorces would occur if both parties were committed to agape love, God's love? How much lustful sin if love reigned? How much of the pornographic industry would exist if love reigned?

How much of the drug industry would exist if love reigned supreme? How much of the slave trade would exist? How much of poverty would exist?

How much violence would exist if love reigned? And I'm not just talking about any general love, I'm talking about the sacrificial love that is defined and described in the Son of God dying for us on the cross.

That is what we are called to emulate by the grace of God. How much greed and selfishness if love is our goal? Are you getting it?

It's profound. Life is messed up on planet Earth because we do not pursue love. Love is the solution.

Again, not a generalised love without Christ, but love through the love of God in Christ is the solution to the problems of the world. How much envy if we are controlled by love because we pursue love?

How much eye for eye revenge if love was pursued as the highest goal? Think about the spiritual disciplines, the spiritual habits that we tend to talk about. Why do we pray?

I would put it to you, to love, to love God and others. Why do we give? To love.

Why do we serve? It's to love. Why do we study?

It's to grow in our capacity to let God's love flow through us. What is the goal of the spiritual discipline of silence? It's to understand love and to love.

The goal of solitude is to become that loving person. The goal of submission is love. The goal of worship is love.

The goal of fellowship is love. The Apostle Paul says, make love your supreme goal. And in finding love, you will give the glory back to God, because God is love.

And love is described once and for all, for the 10th time, by Jesus dying on the cross for our sin and rising again. It's a self-sacrificial, God-shaped love.

The greatest spiritual formation scripture in the Bible we have is this, 2 Peter 1, verse 3 and following. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life. Through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Through these, he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them, you may participate in the divine nature. Sermon on the Mount is not a pipe dream. It's the way we are meant to be living by the grace of God.

Having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires, for this very reason, Peter writes, make every effort. Remember the yoke, the easy yoke had effort involved by grace.

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge and to knowledge self-control and to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness and to godliness mutual affection and to mutual affection. Love is the aim.

Hallelujah.

What sort of person are you? May the Lord give us even more children that make more noise out there. That's been our prayer this week.

We pray for a pram jam and a noisy crèche. So, praise God. What sort of person are you?

Born from above. If you have put your faith in Christ, can I encourage you with this truth? You are a radical new creation, by grace.

The old has gone, the new has come. You are freshly shameless this morning, because He has taken our sin. We are guilt free, because the Son has set us free by grace.

Born from above, pursuing love. If you're not born from above online or here, I implore you to get your life right with God. Cast yourself on His mercy and say, I know I'm a sinner, I need your grace.

I believe you died for me on that cross. I don't understand everything, but I just cast myself and say, please forgive me. I believe you are Lord and Saviour of my life.

And the Bible says you will be saved. Repent and believe. And you will be saved, and you will begin a journey that we are on as the fellowship of the redeemed, as followers of Jesus.

We are pursuing love. Born from above, pursuing love. Would you stand together as we finish this 10-week journey?

I'd love to pray. Let's pray it again. Lord Jesus, we've had 2,000 years to get it right, and we still mess up.

I confess, Lord, so often, I feel like love is not my pursuit, even as I know I'm pursuing You, Lord God. Sometimes I can get it mixed up with all sorts of other aspects of my faith. Lord, I pray You would help us as individuals and as a church too.

Make love our highest aim. As we celebrate in that pursuit, Your pursuit of us, as we celebrate and proclaim the unchanging truth that love has been defined in Your life and Your death, You are the one who rescues and redeems.

You seek and save the lost. Lord Jesus, we give You all the glory that we are born from above by faith. I pray, Lord, for those who do not know You today, that You might seek and save.

And for those of us who are part of the family, who are called children of God, behold what love the Father has lavished on us, that we might be known as the children of God. Lord, would You have Your way at NorthernLife.

May loving You with all of our heart and loving our neighbour as ourselves be our goal. And may this be what discipleship is all about until You return. In the name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen.