

INTRODUCTION



by Beth Guckenberger, Back2Back Ministries Co-Executive Director

Ahavah is a word I can't stop thinking about. It means "to love" in Hebrew. I use the word love all the time: I love my family, I love God, I love Mexico, I love children... but what does that mean? And how do they know I love them? What fascinates me about ahavah, is the root word ahav, which means "to give." Embedded in this idea of loving, is giving. The way we show our love, is by giving ourselves to the object of our affection.

We had a death in our family last year, and immediately following the news, people began to demonstrate their love for us by delivering meals, asking questions about how we were doing, helping us with simple tasks, and praying for us. They were showing how they felt about us through their actions. The result: we felt loved.

The Bible is full of examples of this. We see a heavenly Father who loved us so much, He gave us His only Son. We hear Paul teaching the early church how to practically show love to each other, and thus put God on display. We read Old Testament accounts of sacrificial parents and generous leaders. This is clearly a God idea - to love is to give.

Who are we to love? We are to love our family, friends, and the foreigner. We are to love the lost, the least of these, our enemies, and our neighbors. This week you are here loving vulnerable children, and the team you are serving alongside. You'll do that by giving them your time, attention, and gifts. You'll share your granola bars and be willingly uncomfortable. That is biblical. The command to love is called the greatest of commands.

Matthew 22:37-39 *"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

What we have to give, we first get from Him. It might seem like someone has a bigger capacity to give or love, but what it tells us, is they've learned how to tap into

the Father's unlimited supply. If someone listens to you well, they have been heard by God. If they are encouraging, or generous, you know they have received what they needed from Him. We are conduits of love, connected through the Spirit to an unending measure.

So, if we are to love the Lord our God, and the idea behind loving is giving, what does it mean to give Him my heart, my soul, and my mind? How do I ask God for what I need to give back to others? What does it mean to love through giving to my neighbor? (And who is my neighbor, exactly?)

These are the questions we will be exploring this week. We will talk about giving time, advocacy, forgiveness, grace, encouragement, tangible needs, prayer and the list goes on. Turns out we have a lot we've been given (as He's shown love to us) and it's His idea we turn around and love others. We'll talk about where this is easy and where it can be hard. We'll discuss in small groups, and debriefing circles, what we have to give and who we can show love towards. It's our prayer the result will be a community that looks more like a kingdom of heaven on earth - that when someone interacts with any of us, they will feel more loved, more seen, more known. We hope after thinking on ahavah, we'll be more mindful of opportunities to sacrifice, and put action to our feelings. We are praying for a revolution, because loving creates change - both in the giver and the recipient.