

Title: Love  
Date: May 8, 2022  
Subject: We gain happiness when we love others.  
Scripture: John 13:1, 22-24, 34, 35; 14:21; 15:12, 13

Up until today, one of the main topics of conversation was “When is it going to warm up?” It was met with the typical response: “July. Maybe, more likely August.” Or the retort was that when it would get warm, we’d all be complaining about the heat.

People are looking for warmth, hoping and praying for it, even though it means we’ll have to be mowing our lawns. People are also looking for another kind of warmth, that of the spiritual dimension. They are looking for love.

#### I. The love of Jesus

##### A. What Jesus said about love.

Read John 13:34, 35.

Let's get a few technical things out of the way. Jesus states he's giving a new command. In numerous spots the command he's giving is spoken of as an old one that's been around from the beginning (1 John 2:7; 3:11, et al). Perhaps it means the beginning of their Christian experience but the command goes back much farther as it's given in Leviticus, the third book of the Bible, where we find “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The oldness of the command goes back even further as it's linked to the early pages of human history and the story of Cain killing his brother Abel (1 John 3:11 - 15).

There's newness as Jesus Christ gives new life and meaning to the command. He fleshed out what it means to love. It can also be considered a new command as we have new opportunities to express love. We can never say that we're finished loving.

##### B. Who Jesus loved/loves.

As I was preparing for the message, I fed my curiosity about the kinds of people Jesus loved during his time on earth. The list begins those who were close to him, those who followed him. The specific people Jesus was addressing at this point were the disciples in the upper room. However, it shouldn't be limited to them as we understand the Lord was talking to all of his disciples. His expression of love covers all of them. We find this later in the upper room discourse in John 14:21. READ.

In the immediate context, that of being in the upper room, we find more about Jesus demonstrating his love. Back up to verse one. Read John 13:1B. There are two ways we can understand Jesus showing the extent of his love. It's in the service he performed to the disciples in washing their feet as told in between the verses we've read. The second way is Jesus going to the cross and dying, demonstrating the totality of his love.

One disciple was closer to Jesus than the rest. That person was John, the author of the Gospel of John and other books. Jesus had a special connection with John. His love for John is mentioned on four occasions.

The first was when Jesus predicted his betrayal. The disciples weren't sure what he meant or who was going to do it. READ John 13:22 – 24. The other occasions were at the cross when Jesus directed John to take care of his mother (John 19:26), at the empty tomb (John 20:2), and when Jesus reinstated Peter who wondered about what Jesus would have in store for John (John 21:7, 20).

Jesus had three special friends, not among the 12 disciples, of whom the Bible says Jesus loved them. These were the siblings of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (John 11:3, 5). People noticed his love for them. Those who had gathered to mourn Lazarus remarked, “See how he loved him!” (John 11:36). This is their response to what’s recorded as the shortest verse of the Bible: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

Jesus didn't only love those who were his. His love reached out to the searching. There was the rich young man who ran up to Jesus and fell on his knees (Mark 10:17 - 23). “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus engaged in a process of explaining truth and challenging the young man. He told the young man he was close but not quite there. He needed to take the next step. The young man went away sad because he had great wealth he wasn't ready to give up. Right before Jesus told the young man he had one thing that he lacked, “Jesus looked at him and loved him” (Mark 10:21).

A third group Jesus loved is the church (Ephesians 5:25 - 32). Jesus loved the church and gave himself up for it. He doesn't hate the church which is his own body but feeds and cares for it.

There are other passages where Jesus expresses love to people even though the word *love* isn't used. Jesus loved all manners of people. He loved and loves those who were/are his disciples, seekers, the entire church which is the entirety of the people group who place their trust in him and he even loved/loves his enemies. He died for all humanity whether they come to him as Savior or not.

## II. How Jesus loved.

Did Jesus' actions back up what he said? It's a safe guess we're among those who'd say he did. We just heard that Jesus gave himself up for the church. It's actually stated twice in that Scripture (Ephesians 5:2).

Let's see it for ourselves to reinforce the truth. READ John 15:13.

His love is self-sacrificing. Jesus Christ laid down his life for his friends which is what he desires people to become by entering into a relationship with God. He gave all he had to give. There was nothing more for him to give. He gave his life blood for you and me and for those who hated him. That's the position all people were in before they were enlightened by God. Jesus came to make nobodies in the somebodies (Romans 9:25).

It's self-abandoning. He didn't view himself as needing to be treated the way that God should be treated. He abandoned those things and left them to be regained when he got back to heaven. He abandoned the need for him to live. He came to be a servant. Christ's love and serving are interchangeable. Earlier in the evening, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples to give an example of how they were to react to one another.

His love is non-self-benefiting. There are other words we can use to unpack Christ's love. We could also say that Christ's love is unselfish, unreserved, shows genuine concern, was done whether or not people acted in similar manner to him and it is an “in spite of” kind of love.

Two weeks ago I brought up God's vast covenant of love which he extends for a thousand generations. I said, "We're to know that God is a loving God. Count on it. Bank on it. Stake our lives on it." Here's a connecting thought from Max Lucado: "Have you let God love you? Please don't hurry past the question. Have you let God's love seep into the innermost recesses of your life?...We are beneficiaries of an unexpected, undeserved, yet undeniable gift – the love of God" (Max Lucado, *How Happiness Happens*, p. 153).

We are to luxuriate in, bask in, revel in, indulge in, wallow in the love of Christ. Roll around in it. While we are to do that, at the same time remember that Jesus Christ uses himself as the example of how and who we are to love.

READ John 15:12.

Simply put, we are to follow his example.

Who are we to love?

We're to love the same people groups Jesus loved. The Bible commands us to love our neighbors and our enemies and all people. However, the main focus in this passage is loving one another - others in the family of God. "One another" could be extended to include all other human beings because we're all human.

The last verse we read says we're to love each other. The first verses we read use the phrase "love one another" three times. This command is sprinkled throughout the New Testament 12 to 18 times, depending on the translation. Add another nine "loving your neighbor." Sometimes the concept isn't expressed explicitly as a command but is conveyed in terms of living a life of love (Ephesians 5:2).

The command to love one another is the greatest of all the "one another" commands. If you'd like to do more study, read the book of 1 John. It's very similar to what we find in the Gospel of John. You'll find the command to love one another is used repeatedly, but not as often as the word love which is used over forty times with thirty-two coming in the space of 18 verses (1 John 4:7-5:3). It gives a negative illustration of what we aren't to be like through the reminder of the first murder on the planet -- Adam and Eve's oldest son Cain killed his brother Abel. Love for others in the family of God is presented as one of the evidences of being God's child. Love is addressed as being part of the new command. The other part is believing in the name of God's Son Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23).

How are we to love?

Scripture has numerous great 3:16 verses. The one in John's Gospel gets most of the attention. One of the ones that's often overlooked is 1 John 3:16: "This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

We come again to laying down our lives for others. The gospel of John brought it up: READ John 15:13; 13:34. Jesus gave up his life and we are asked to do the same. It's quite the sticking point, isn't it? To be willing to die for somebody else who is part of the family of God? Some have been called upon to give the ultimate sacrifice. And more will as the end draws nearer. That's the greatest love. If giving of our lives isn't required of us, do we simply breathe a sigh of relief figuring we're off the hook when it comes to loving others?

A man was waxing eloquent to his wife of how much he loved her. He told her he'd even die for her. "That won't be necessary," she responded, "just pick up that towel and help me with these dishes."

Earlier we looked at the love of Jesus Christ in laying down his life. It was described as self-abandoning, self-sacrificing, non-self-benefiting, unselfish, unreserved, showing genuine concern, was done whether or not people acted in similar manner to him and it is and "in spite of" kind of love. Jesus didn't look out for his own interests. He sought what was best for others – coming to him as Savior and then helping them grow to spiritual maturity. We're to do the same. We're to give of ourselves to benefit others – bring them to Jesus and help them grow... those imperfect sinners...just like we are imperfect sinners.

*City On the Hill* by Casting Crowns has hauntingly disturbing lyrics: "Did you hear of the city on the hill?" Said one old man to the other. "It once shined bright, and it would be shining still, But they all started turning on each other. You see the poets thought the dancers were shallow. And the soldiers thought the poets were weak. And the elders saw the young ones as foolish. And the rich man never heard the poor man speak... Each one thought that they knew better, But they were different by design. Instead of standing strong together. They let their differences divide. And one by one, they ran away, With their made up minds to leave it all behind. And the light began to fade, In the City on the Hill...But it was the rhythm of the dancers That gave the poets life. It was the spirit of the poets That gave the soldiers strength to fight. It was fire of the young ones. It was the wisdom of the old. It was the story of the poor man That needed to be told...But one by one will we run away, With our made up minds to leave it all behind, As the light begins to fade in the City on the Hill?"

Jim Van Yperen writes extensively about the "one another" commands: "The Church is God's agent for reconciliation and spiritual transformation. God created us for one another. Jesus prayed for us to be one even as the Father, Spirit and Son are one...Church is not a place we go but a life we live together—a life worthy of our calling. Faith requires others...A church that is serious about discovering, describing and embodying the one another commands will form a people and a church that are growing up in Christ as they grow together by his Word and Spirit...The one another commands are the pathway to holiness. As people begin to learn, to practice and to embody the one another commands the character of the people in the church is transformed...Christians often are too individualistic -- doing what they want. Americans by nature are rebellious...The church has bought into the culture. The problem is that we have become so accustomed to thinking and acting like individuals we cannot even see or accept that we are forming selfishness not godliness -- until a conflict or crisis... What does it say about people who have been in a church for 20 - 25 years, and when something comes up (disagreement over the color of the carpet, etc.) they can leave it and not miss it? What does it say about the church that can't work together through the problem? They probably don't understand nor are interested in building and maintaining true fellowship and community."

What keeps the average believer from loving one another? There are attitudes like jealousy, fear of rejection, indifference, not wanting to expose ourselves to potential hurt. There are obstacles like busyness, tiredness and inconvenience.

There's a little four-letter word where at the end of verse 34 - must (also 1 John 4:21). Loving others isn't an option. It's something we must do. Loving, including loving others in the family of God, doesn't mean it's all easy street. It can be tough but God promises it will be rewarding. Jesus will consider us his friends. His love will be in us and he and the Father will make their home in us.

We are to keep on loving. A little bit of love goes a long, long way. We are to love each other deeply (1 Peter 4:8). Another morsel of truth from 1 John speaks to having sincere love, love that's not for show: "Dear children let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). It's not enough to bless somebody who has a need and tell them we'll pray for them. We are to do what we can to help."

Andrea Mosconi worked six mornings a week at the City Hall in Cremona, Italy. Each day he entered the violin museum that contained some of the most valuable musical instruments on the planet, including instruments made by Amati family, Guarneris, and Antonio Stradivari. Most were over 300 years old. His job wasn't to make sure the instruments were safe under lock and key. His job was to play music. Mosconi would remove the instruments one by one from their elaborate, multi-locked cases. Then he played each one for six or seven minutes before gingerly returning it. Mosconi and the instruments created beautiful music that could be heard throughout museum and City Hall.

Considering the age of the instruments, many would assume they were too delicate to be played, let alone touched. The truth is that if they weren't touched, tuned and played they would lose their ability to create music. They would gradually turn to dust. Mosconi kept them vibrant by exercising tender care.

Likewise, we are to regard others as finely tuned instruments that need to be handled with gentle care – whether it's the gruff neighbor, friendly waitress, family member, church family. We are able to love because we have been first loved by Christ.

More from Lucado: "Agape love writes the check when the balance is low, forgives the mistake when the offense is high, offers patience when stress is abundant, and extends kindness when kindness is rare... *Agape* love finds beauty in the collage of humanity. Logical thinkers. Emotional worshippers. Dynamic leaders. Docile followers. The gregarious who greet, the studious who ponder, the generous who pay the bills. Apart from each other we have an incomplete message, but together "we are his workmanship" (Eph. 2:10)... *We* are his poetry. You aren't God's poetry. I'm not God's poetry. Together we are God's poetry. Independently we are nothing but small pieces on God's page. You may be a verb, she may be a noun, and I'm probably a question mark. We're just letters, marks from God's hand" (Lucado, *How Happiness Happens*, pp. 153, 155, 156).

People are looking for warmth and needing it. Let's show it to one another.