

## Love One Another

John 15:12-17

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<sup>12</sup> *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, so that you will love one another”* (John 15:12–17, ESV).

There are some truths in the Bible that are very basic and well-known. Even if you are not a Christian, I would guess that you know a few of the Bible’s most important statements:

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish...”* (John 3:16).

*“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mark 12:31)

*“Judge not that you not be judged”* (Matt. 7:1)

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience...”* (Gal. 5:22)

The power of these verses and ideas for us is not their novelty. Most of us are familiar with them. However, knowing something is true doesn’t necessarily mean we know how it works or that we have mastered the concept. The most important truths are ones that you never stop pursuing and learning.

For example, what would you think if you were having a conversation with someone and the person said, “Yeah, I’m not working on humility this year; I think I’ve got that one down”? People who understand biblical humility never stop trying to practice it.

The same is true in any area of life. This week, the country mourned the tragic death of Kobe Bryant, his daughter and seven others. Kobe was relentless in his pursuit of improvement and practicing. I read that the janitor of his Pennsylvania high school made a gym key for him because he would show up before school to shoot five hundred baskets.

The relentless pursuit of what should be obvious and not new, is essential in many areas of human life.

But it's especially true when it comes to Christianity or following Jesus. The challenge is that we tend to not practice what we already know is important. We "muddy the waters" with other topics, issues, and concerns. Sometimes it's important to be reminded about the basics.

John 15 is that kind of text. It rehearses for us some basics about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Last week we learned the following:

- Jesus is the true vine; we are the branches
- Abiding in Jesus is the key to fruitfulness and prayer
- Abiding = "nothing without Jesus"

Our text today, expands on this theme of abiding in Jesus by applying it to the most important command given to the disciples: "love one another."

But if you look closely at John 15:12, Jesus doesn't just say "love one another;" he says, "love one another *as* I have loved you." So, it's not just the command that's important. It's the connection to loving like Jesus.

Last week I suggested that you could define abiding as "nothing without Jesus." This week, I would suggest that John helps us see the other side: "everything like Jesus."

Let's see how Jesus applies the concept of abiding to loving one another.

### **Love Like Jesus**

Abiding in Jesus must translate into tangible action. Union with Christ is a spiritual reality with fruit, behaviors, and a way of living. In verses 12-17, Jesus talks about how the disciples should treat one another. Then, in verses 18-25 (next week), Jesus will talk about how the world will treat the disciples.

This paragraph begins with a simple command, and it should not be unfamiliar. When we studied John 13:34-35 last year, Jesus said:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35).*

Jesus laid down a marker for the disciples in that text. Three things are important to note here: (1) he commanded the disciples to love each other, (2) he connected that love to the way he loved them, and (3) he identified that love would be the way that the world would know that they are his disciples.

In John 15:10, Jesus linked abiding and keeping his commands. In other words, abiding and obedience go together. In 15:4, Jesus linked abiding and bearing fruit—"apart from you can do nothing." We made that point very clear last week.

But when you think about "nothing without Jesus," what comes to mind? Maybe you think: "I can't do my work well without Jesus. I can't deal with anxiety without Jesus. I can't share my faith without Jesus.

I can't see an answer to prayer without Jesus." All of that would be true, but it isn't the main thing Jesus has in mind.

When Jesus talks about fruit and the commandments as they relate to abiding in the vine, the one thing that we cannot miss is loving one another. Notice the connection in John 15:9-10 to the words love, commandment, and abide.

Verse 12 is a distillation of what Jesus envisions abiding him to look like: "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." Jesus identifies that loving one another is the most significant proof that we really are his disciples. And he connects it to loving each other in a way that mirrors the love Jesus has for them.

This is an example of how the gospel is deeply transformational. Jesus loves and rescues sinners. He entered the mess of our lives and our world in order to provide a way for our sins to be forgiven and to restore a relationship with the Father. This is one of the many reasons why you should become a Christian.

This is how we were loved:

*"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus purchases our forgiveness by the sacrifice of his life. Those who put their faith in Jesus are deeply loved and eternally forgiven. They receive the extravagant grace of God" (Rom. 5:8).*

However, the test of whether or not we've received this grace is in how we respond to other people. Graced people respond with grace. Those who have tasted the love of God share that love with others. They love like Jesus.

John picks up this theme even further in 1 John. A few examples:

*"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:7-12).*

Did you see the connection between abiding and love in that text?

Back in John 15:13, Jesus puts a more specific handle on it. He says, "Greater love has no one than this, than someone lays down his life for his friends." Jesus clarifies that the kind of love he has in mind is directly connected to self-sacrifice. And the disciples will eventually see that through his death. But right now, it is merely Jesus's way of demonstrating what love actually looks like.

This kind of love is costly. And that is exactly why it is so otherworldly. People love to love when it benefits them. There are spouses who love each other as long as it's reciprocal. Some people practice hospitality as long as they are treated hospitably as well. You may know friends who do things for each other but expect something in return.

But we've been loved by Christ in a way that can never be repaid. And that should affect how we think about everything, including generosity.

*"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:16–18).*

Abiding in Jesus looks like loving one another like Jesus did. We share his love because we are enamored with his love for us.

This is where some of us get into trouble. We struggle with loving people and we think it's because of our personality, our stress, or how hard the other people are to love. But it's not too hard to share with just about anyone something we are excited about. We need to be reminded of the way Jesus loved us so that we can love one another *as* Jesus loved us.

Caring well for our people and helping you feel loved are two of our focal points for the first six months of 2020. Our staff is going to be focusing particularly hard on how we love each other and love people in our church more deeply in the next six months. And we'd love to have you join us in that effort.

Help us love each other like Jesus loved us.

### **Friends of Jesus**

To push this concept even deeper into the heart of the disciples (and us), Jesus transitions from actions to identity and knowledge. This expresses itself in Jesus calling his disciples "friends."

In verse 14, Jesus links friendship with himself and doing what he commands. At first, you might think that Jesus is simply saying, "I like the people who do what I want." But that's not what's going on here. Instead, Jesus is linking who they are with obeying Jesus's commands. Obedience doesn't make them friends of Jesus; it is what characterizes his friends.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is trying to help the disciples understand how their relationship with Jesus is unique. Servants are told what to do and they obey. To be a servant is to do what is asked of you. Imagine a waiter refusing to get you a set of silverware when you don't have one and after asking for it. Friends are different. They are responsive to desires or requests because of the relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 522.

In fact, the word “friends” can be translated as “loved ones.” This is another remarkable way that Jesus communicates his affection for these disciples. They are loved as friends of the Son of God. Wow!

Jesus says that they are his friends, because they have heard from him what the Father revealed. Jesus was letting them into his calling. Now, the disciples do not fully understand the plan right now. But they will soon enough. Eventually it will all come together.

They will fully understand the mission of Jesus. And when they do, it will change how they look at their lives and the world around them. These disciples knew more about the plan of God in the world than anyone prior to them. Jesus was slowly revealing it to them.

He calls them friends because of their participation in his mission. And this connection and relationship will propel them to reach people “to the uttermost parts of the earth.” They were compelled both because of what they knew was true about Jesus and their love for Jesus.

This is incredible to me in two ways. First, the simple fact that Jesus calls these men his friends, is just incredible. And we share in that definition and category. We are friends—“loved ones”—of Jesus.

But secondly it reminds me about the importance of Christ-centered friends. We need to have people who understand our collective mission and love one another in that mission. I hope that you have people like that in this church. You need to have people who know you, love you, and spur you on in the mission of God in the world.

The world is hard. The devil is at work. And we need “loved ones” near us. We need people who understand what “nothing without Jesus” and “everything with Jesus” mean.

### **Chosen by Jesus**

With all this talk about Jesus’s love and the disciples’ understanding about the Father’s will, the disciples might have been prone to think pretty highly of themselves. They might have been inclined to misuse or misconstrue the love that Jesus has for them.

They were human. They could easily think that they were somehow special. To circumvent that possibility, Jesus reminds them how they became disciples in the first place:

*“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (John 15:16).*

Here is one of the great tensions in the Bible. The disciples clearly decided to follow Jesus. But they didn’t make the first move. Jesus chose each of them and pursued them. They followed Jesus because he set his love and his choice upon them. And that’s true for every believer. God was pursuing you before you were pursuing him.

But to what end? In other words, why has Jesus chosen them and why has he set his love on them? The answer is really clear in verse 16. They are to “go.” This command is connected to the Great Commission that they will hear about after the resurrection.

They are to bear fruit that abides. In this context, this refers to the people who will be converted in their mission. Jesus’s love for them should compel to go, share, and have Jesus bear fruit through them. And he promises that God will work through their prayers—yet again.

Jesus loved them so that they could love others. He chose them to send them on mission. And that’s also why he pursued you and loved you—to send you on mission into the world to reach others.

Verse 17 concludes this paragraph before talking about being hated by the world (next week’s sermon). Notice how Jesus concludes: *These things I command you, so that you will love one another* (John 15:17).

The vision here is for the church to be a place where we love and care for one another deeply so that we can be sent out to impact the world in thousands of ways this week.

### **Three Applications**

With that in mind let me issue you three challenges:

1. If you have not yet given your life to Jesus, why not today? Why wait another Sunday? You’ve heard stories today from those who were baptized. You’ve witnessed the greatest illustration we have as to what happens to someone when they give their life to Christ. Why not come to Jesus right now?
2. If you are a Christian, I want to encourage you to not overcomplicate the Christian life. It’s as simple as living through the love of God in the gospel. I want to remind you that God loved you; Jesus died for you; and out of that well of spiritual and emotional reserve, we are called to love one another.
3. Let’s work hard together to help people feel loved on Sunday mornings at College Park. Our staff and elders are going to work to that end, but we need you to join us in that Sunday-to-Sunday mission. Take some time after this service to find out how someone is doing. Ask how you can pray for them. Find out how they are doing.

Jesus calls his disciples to abide in him. This means nothing without Jesus and everything with Jesus.

It means that we are to love one another as Christ has loved us.

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