

Just As I Have Loved You: Loving Like Jesus Did Before the Cross

By Daryl Wingerd



The night before Jesus was crucified, during his upper room discourse, he said this to his disciples: “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” (John 13:34). His example of love was to be their *model* for love.

We are right to understand Jesus’ commandment as one they would only fully

understand after he had died on the cross. Only then could they grasp the depth of his love for them. But we should also note that when he said this, he had not yet gone to the cross. Yet, he instructed them to love one another “just as I have loved you” (note the past tense). On the cross Jesus displayed the fullness of his love for them, but his death was not the beginning of his love for them. As John wrote a few verses earlier, “when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). Jesus had loved them all along. If we are to obey his new commandment, we must love one another (i.e., other believers) just as he had loved them up to that point. So how had he loved them?

To answer that question, we should consider first how much time he devoted to them. During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the only significant time when he was not with his disciples was the forty days he spent fasting in the wilderness. Of course he spent other times alone, praying, but all in all, during the roughly three years from gathering his followers until the night described in John’s gospel, he was with them pretty much continually. This was not a once-or-twice-a-week relationship. He loved them by living with them, travelling with them, eating with them, and teaching them at all hours of day and night. He prioritized being with them — a lot!

Later we see the early Christians following this same pattern. In Acts 2, after the Spirit was poured out and three thousand were baptized, they “devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship.” They “were together and had all things in common.” They “were attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes” (Acts 2:42, 44, 46). They prioritized being together — a lot! Even 30 years later, Hebrews 3:13 instructs believers to “exhort one another every day [or, ‘day after day’],” implying regular, even perhaps daily interaction and frequent fellowship.

We consider ourselves faithful if we attend church every Sunday, perhaps twice on Sundays plus Wednesday nights. But if we are to love one another as Jesus loved his disciples, we should prioritize time spent with other believers more than just our faithful participation with the regular meetings of the church. We should pursue more opportunities for fellowship.

To do this, we will need to overcome some of the cultural obstacles that hinder fellowship — things like driving distance between our homes, or the pressure to over-commit our time and energy to other activities, or the non-sacrificial “my needs first” mindset, or the hospitality norm that expects us to have our homes in nearly perfect condition before anyone can come over, or even our own independent spirit of self-reliance.

Are you eager to demonstrate your love for other believers the way Jesus loved his disciples before his death on the cross? You can start by simply devoting more time to them. Consider a few simple ideas:

- Set aside one evening each week, or perhaps twice each month, to have a fellow Christian or Christian family over for supper. Spend the evening getting to know each other better and talking about Scripture or the message you heard from your pastor on Sunday.
- Men, invite another man in your church to meet you regularly for lunch, or early in the morning for a walk, or for a cup of coffee on your way to work. Talk about your lives together. Share biblical insights with each other. Confess struggles and pray for each other.
- Ladies, start inviting women in your church to come over for tea or coffee. If it’s a mom with young children, they can play with your kids while the two of you talk, read the Bible, and pray together.
- Younger moms, invite a godly older woman to your home for the purpose of learning from her. Ask questions about her experience raising and training her children, taking care of her household, and loving her husband (cf. Titus 2:3-4).

Loving one another in these ways, like Jesus did, is not complicated. It just takes a humble heart, a bit of flexibility and creativity, and the willingness to prioritize your time for the most important things.

Will you obey Jesus today by devoting more of your time to fellowship with other Christians?

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