

## JESUS' COMMAND

John 15:9-17 Text vs. 17 *"This is my command: Love each other."*

Last Sunday we learned that *"if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."* (Matthew 6:14-15) And we learned that *forgiveness* means letting go of anger, bitterness, and a lot of resentment in order for you to show God's love and mercy to others. And when *you are* forgiven by God, *your* responsibility is to forgive *others*. Forgiveness restores broken relationships. Forgiveness reflects love. And forgiveness will ultimately affect your eternal destiny. Now today, we're right in the heart of Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verses 9 thru 17 where Jesus gave instructions to His disciples on how they should maintain fellowship and be fruitful in the difficult days which lay ahead. Why? Because the relationship between Jesus and His followers was about to change from being a physical relationship to one that was spiritual. This was all about how that kind of relationship could be kept.

So, Jesus was speaking to his disciples during the Last Supper in the Upper Room and sharing with them deep truths about love, friendship, and discipleship. He began by saying, *"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love."* That was an invitation for His Disciples to have a love that reflected the love between Him and His Father, who is God. What a sweeping invitation! It wasn't a fleeting sentiment. It was for the disciples to have a commitment not only to remain in His love, but to live in His love. And you are called into that same love. Not just when life's easy. But especially when life's challenging.

Now, if you apply this lesson to your daily life, it's going to require careful actions and different attitudes on your part. If you're going to *Abide in Love*, you're going to have to begin each day by acknowledging, *God loves you*. Reminding yourself you are chosen. And that you're loved unconditionally by God. Every day you're living in God's presence, you will need to spend time in prayer deepening your relationship with Jesus. Now, if you do those things, that's a pretty good start. But, if you're going to *Love Others*, you're going to have to extend your love to your family, your friends, your coworkers, and even strangers. Because kindness and concern takes you right back to forgiveness. You can't get away from it! Remember, last week we learned forgiveness isn't easy. But it's necessary!

One of the most powerful examples of forgiveness in the Bible was when Jesus was forgiving those who crucified him. Even as He was dying on the cross Jesus prayed *"Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34) And as Jesus continued teaching the Disciples at His Last Supper, He said, *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."* Jesus is the model for this deep-seated love. He laid down His life for *you*. Not as someone distant. But as a close companion. He called you His friend. Not a servant. His friend! And that reveals the closeness of your relationship with Him. Jesus *redefined* friendship. It's not about having the same interests. It's about giving love. As a friend of Jesus, you are called to love, *sacrificially*, even if it costs you.

Sacrificial love is also known as *agape* love, a Greek word meaning selfless and unconditional love. A love that seeks the well-being and the good of others over and above yourself. It goes beyond mere emotions. Sacrificial love puts others *first*. It's not about personal gain or benefit. It's about serving and caring for others without expecting anything in return. Sacrificial love doesn't depend on getting something in return. Sacrificial love is given. Even when the other person doesn't deserve it. Sacrificial love involves putting the needs, the happiness, and the welfare of others *first*. It's a deliberate choice you make to act in someone's best interest.

When you love sacrificially you forgive generously. You let go of grudges. You spread grace, which is "God's kindness toward the unworthy, or the undeserving". Even when you're hurt or wronged, the best example of sacrificial love is Jesus Christ. Going back to His death on the cross, that was *agape love*—taking your place. Bearing your sins while offering you eternal salvation. In your relationships, whether with family, friends, or strangers, if you practice sacrificial love, it will transform lives and reflect God's love for everybody. It's a powerful force. It heals. It restores. It brings hope. Love for one another shows evidence of discipleship. It's not about theological debates. Or religious rituals. It's about how we treat each other. Love is your witness to the world. And you can start by trying to be present when someone needs to talk. Listen to them without judgment. Be understanding. Then, Jesus told the disciples, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."*

The American church today has allowed weakness to creep in. Every day 10 churches go under in the United States. And every day 7 new churches are started. That's a net loss of 3 churches, *every day*. In the last 10 years church attendance has remained, on average, the same across America. But it's reported that in churches today, 90% of the work is performed by 10% of the members. So, a lot of church members have come to the conclusion that it's okay being a Christian, if you don't bear fruit. But you have been chosen! Your purpose *is* to bear fruit! Fruit that remains. And what is that fruit? It's the love you share with others. The lives you touch. The kindness you extend. Bearing fruit means serving others. Looking for opportunities through acts of kindness, service, and generosity. Volunteering at a food bank. Helping a neighbor. Supporting a cause. When you share your faith, you let your love for others be your witness. Sharing your faith doesn't have to be a sermon, but a genuine discussion.

Remember the song by Burt Bacharach, “What the World Needs Now” - is love. Well, what the world needs most is the influence Christians can make upon it. One of the best ways you show God’s love is in a practical way. In relationships. Whether with family, friends, or strangers, practicing sacrificial, joyful love transforms lives and reflects God’s love for everyone to see. It’s powerful. It heals. It restores. And it brings hope. Loving others can be expressed in many ways, often starting with small, everyday actions. Like trying to understand things from another person’s point of view. Listening to their experiences, their feelings. And not judging them. Looking for opportunities to assist. Whether it’s doing a favor for a neighbor or volunteering in your community food distribution, it’s simple acts of kindness. Like a having smile on your face or giving a kind word. Those can go a long way in showing love to others. But you need to let go of grudges. Forgive those who have wronged you.

Forgiveness is a powerful expression of love. Encourage and support your family and friends. Celebrate their successes. Be there for them in difficult times. And be sure to make time for the people you care about. Show appreciation for the people in your life by saying, “thank you.” That’s a great way to show love and build stronger relationships. And be sure to let them know how much they mean to you. But be patient. Patience is a form of love. Being patient with others’ shortcomings shows that you understand everyone is on their *own* journey. Don’t shut someone off! Keep lines of communication open by sharing your thoughts and feelings and inviting others to do the same. But always, look for ways to serve others without expecting anything in return. When you do acts of kindness, it demonstrates love in action. Remember, loving others is not just about impressing someone. It’s about being consistent in your daily acts of kindness, your compassion, you’re your understanding. It’s a way of life!

Remember Jesus’ commandment. Write it down. John 15:12. *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”* Put it where you’ll see it often. Stick it up on your refrigerator. Let it guide your daily behavior. And always check your heart before you respond to a situation. Ask yourself, “Am I loving as Jesus loved me?” And always be grateful, thanking God every day for the privilege of being called a friend of Jesus. Remember, when you apply these principles as part of *your* journey, it won’t always be easy. But with God’s grace, you can live in deep-seated love and still have friendships. So, abide in the love of Jesus. Be a friend who will lay down your life for another. Bear fruit that remains as the inheritance of love, remembering Jesus’ words: *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* Let your life bear abundant fruit so it will point others to the love of Jesus. Then, you will be known by *your* love. Amen.