

Love

John 15:12-17

And as we start our time together, I want to show you all a **photo**. These are some of my good friends from my time in middle school and high school. How we all came to know each other was through our youth group. We all began as 6th graders in the same youth group and spent 7 years journeying together in our pursuit of the Lord (show photo from Snow Camp).

While you may see happy and excited faces in this photo, what you don't see is the deep hurt and pain we experienced as a group together. At the church I grew up in, it was expected and understood that adult small group leaders would stay with our individual small groups in our youth group until the end of our group's senior year of high school. As a group of sixth graders, we did not expect to have the same leader throughout our entire youth group experience.

But between our 6th grade and 9th grade years we experienced three leader changes. In every change, we were promised it was going to be the last one. I remember showing up to my first day of youth group my 8th grade year and finding out that our small group leader of two years had decided not to serve as a leader anymore.

By the time we reached our sophomore year of high school, we were not a happy, joyful group but rather we were a group of 10th graders who were bitter, upset, confused, and abandoned. We felt unloved. Personally, even though I was committed to showing up every Sunday for youth group, I was angry with the church. I watched friends leave my youth group from burnout and inconsistency. I watched the hearts of those of us who stayed begin to harden and move from a place of disappointment to a space of complete and utter discouragement. I felt unwanted. I felt unheard. In a time and place where I needed consistency and structure, every week was a toss up on who would be leading our small group. This might seem like a minor issue, but I felt abandoned, unsure, and unloved.

When was the last time you felt unloved? Was it a close friend, mentor, or family member? Was it your church family? Was it by a world that seeks to invade and destroy your joy and happiness? Was it waiting for God to answer your prayers? When was the last time you felt unloved?

In today's conversation, we will be discussing this idea of love. We will be gleaning from John 15:12-17 and discussing Jesus' desire for his disciples to participate in a culture of love to bear external fruit, the fruit of ministry impact in the world. **The main idea is that God's people have experienced Jesus' love and are called to express Jesus' love in response.** There will be three parts to this message, first, we will have a command from Jesus and two applications for this command provided by Jesus. With all that said, let's dive in together.

Jesus starts of this passage by commanding his disciples they are to love one another:

Jesus uses the word “command” in regards to love three times in this passage.

In verse 12 he says, “This is my **commandment**, that you **love** one another as I have loved you.”

In verse 14 he says, “You are my **friends** if you do what I **command** you.”

In verse 17 he says, “These things I **command** you, so that you will **love** one another.”

This command to love serves as the backbone and structure for this entire passage and is even previewed in John 14 when Jesus says, “**If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**”

Jesus is making it clear that this love he is describing is closely tied to obedience. But obedience and commandments, especially in today’s world with the effect of sin on authoritative and fallen leaders, can seem like a disdainful topic that seeks to take from and constrict our lives. But the obedience that Jesus is asking for serves a purpose.

Jesus makes it clear early in John 15 that obedience directly results in abiding in Christ. Jesus says “**If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love**” (v. 10).

Other parts of Scripture clearly support this view as well:

Let’s go to the Old Testament and we find a people called the Israelites who have been under the captivity as slaves of the nation of Egypt for 430 years. God takes these slaves and frees them from their captivity and take them to a place called Mount Sinai. They spend eleven months at this space to turn this once oppressed people group into someone special. God said to the Israelites at Mount Sinai “**Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession**” (Exodus 19:5). God desired to use the obedience of a nation to bring about His purpose of blessing Israel but also blessing the entire world through their witness of being God’s “treasured possession.”

Jump to the New Testament and we see a church that in the midst of persecution under the boot of a pagan, ungodly empire called Rome. Paul said to the Roman church “**through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous**” (Romans 5:19). Paul is explaining that obedience to God’s commandments does not just spur on the internal fruit that Jesus talks about in John 15:1-11 but brings about the external fruit of ministry impact on a world in need of Jesus’ example of love and righteousness.

[slide] Jesus’ command serves a purpose. An image that really visualizes what Jesus is talking about is the image of a Trellis and a Vine. In agricultural terms, this trellis, a framework of light wooden or metal bars, is used to support and optimize the production of fruit from the grape

vines. In the same way, Jesus desires our obedience to serve as the trellis to our grape vines. Our obedience serves as the support system that helps us to bear good fruit. Jesus wants us to produce and bear good fruit and he knows that by abiding in him and his commands this can come to fruition.

Also, Jesus' command serves a purpose that is not supposed to be a burden. **1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."** By pursuing God's and keeping God's commands, we are not participating in a burdensome task but in the abiding love of God which brings life.

In John 15:11, Jesus says, **"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."** The commandments that Jesus is asking is not a burden and its purpose is to fill the disciple with Jesus' joy!

You might be asking the question, "Sam, you are talking a lot about love and how we are supposed to love one another? This seems like a broad term in today's world?" You would be correct that in today's world, love is defined broadly amongst many religions, cultures, and worldviews. It's hard to distinguish what is real or not when everyone seems to be fighting for your opinion and voice.

I feel that Martin Luther King Jr. does a great job of describing love in a sinful world best in a sermon he gave called "Levels of Love" at Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1962. He provides a list of different kinds of love. To spare us time I want to look at two types of love he describes which really epitomize the love of this world and the love of God. He describes a utilitarian love which is basically the love for another based of their usefulness to him/her. **The use of the word "utilitarian" is meant to describe how treating a person is for a desired result.** It is based on true selfishness, for in reality, the person who engages in utilitarian love is merely loving himself through somebody else.

On the other end of the spectrum, Luther describes an **agape love**. Agape is the Greek word for "love," and its meaning is rich. It is a love that unmotivated; it is spontaneous; it is overflowing; it seeks nothing in return. It is **the love of God operating in the human heart**. The greatness of it is that you love every person, not for your sake but for his sake. And you love every person because God loves him. Martin Luther King Jr. describes it as so,

But you might be asking yourself, how? How do we get to this kind of love? How do we live out an agape love now? How can we live out agape love in a sinful world? The simple answer is this, someone already paved the way for us so we could. And his name is Jesus.

This is the next part of the conversation we will be diving into two questions of application. The first application question we will look at is “**How have we been loved?**” We are going to now look at “Three ways that Jesus loved us.” Jesus himself describes in this passage how He has loved us and set an example for us of how to live out an agape love lifestyle.

The first way that Jesus loved us is that **Jesus loved us through His sacrifice**. In verse 13, “**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**”

I want us to understand the significance of this statement. This is not just a great quote that Jesus wants us to put up and frame in our homes or on our desks, rather it is a foreshadowing of the greatest act of love in history. Understand the emotion that Jesus is speaking with. This conversation Jesus is having with his disciples is occurring not in Jesus’ ministry hub of Capernaum or around some ordinary meal in a disciple's home. This is after the last supper. Jesus has already washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus has broken the bread and drank the wine. Jesus and his disciples are on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is hours away from being betrayed, beaten, tortured, abandoned by his closest friends, and hung and crucified on a cross in the most shameful and gruesome way possible. This is the first example of how Jesus loved us. **Jesus loved us through His sacrifice.**

The second way that Jesus loved us is that **Jesus loves us through His fellowship**.

In verses 14-15, Jesus says, “**You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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.**”

Again, we have Jesus reminding us of the importance of obedience to his commands. Jesus anchors his relationship with his disciples in the obedience of his commandments. Jesus does this because his commandments serve a purpose. Jesus does not think of his disciples as servants but as friends who are so intimately involved in his ministry that Jesus would share and make known everything that His Father in Heaven has given to him. Jesus chose to come to this earth, not as a ruling king to overthrow the world's superpowers. Rather he came as a lowly carpenter on a heavenly mission of agape love. He came and spent years with the same people in his region of influence investing in them out of his love for them and for the Lord. **Jesus loved us through His fellowship.**

Last, the third way that **Jesus loved us is through His commissioning**.

In the first part of verse 16, Jesus says, “**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.**”

Jesus does not think little of His church. He does not want His church, His friends, to play a backseat in his mission of love and restoration to a world in need. Rather he chose and appointed us. He appointed us so that we may bear fruit and that our fruit should abide.

I'm convinced that the fruit Jesus is talking about is not just talking about the internal fruit of growing in love, joy, peace, patience, and other kinds of godliness described in Galatians 5:19-23, rather I believe Jesus is stressing the external fruit of His ministry of love. Jesus does not just want us to bear fruit in our own lives but to seek to share his love with others so they may bear God's fruit and abide with the Lord. **Jesus loved us is through His commissioning.**

This then brings us to the second question of application that Jesus answers: **How are we supposed to love?** Simple answer, by following the example of Jesus. Are you starting to see a pattern? Jesus is laying out the pathway for us to travel so that we may love one another. Let's look at three ways that Jesus describes how we should love one another.

If we go back to **verse 13**, we see Jesus' example of love provides us with a straightforward application. The first way we should love one another is to **love in sacrifice.**

As a person who has recently just got married, I am becoming more aware of love through sacrifice. I have a wonderful wife, and God has given me the blessed opportunity of loving her through giving myself fully for her. No longer must I think for myself, but I must love my wife by thinking about her needs before myself.

This is the beauty of marriage as it serves as an example of the power of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus' death was the giving up of himself so that others may experience the love of God. Jesus' sacrifice serves as an example of how to love one another. Are there things that we need to be willing to give up, our time, our preferences, our desires, our disagreements with another so that we can love others well the way Jesus desired? Jesus himself died a death he did not deserve for people, even his closest friends, who deserted him, ridiculed him, and even spit on him. If Jesus could do that, could we not give up ourselves and relinquish our grip on our version of love to show someone else God's type of love? An agape type of love?

In **verse 15**, Jesus provides another clear example of love by how he encouraged his disciples. The second way we are to love one another is to **love in encouragement.** Jesus called his disciples friends and shared with them himself by giving them all the Father had made known to Him. The act of encouraging those around us is by giving someone support, confidence, and hope. It is the act of providing whether another is in the midst of chaos or peace. Jane and I have been encouraged deeply by Oakwood as you all have just continued to provide and care for us as we have made this transition to Tampa. We have felt God's love being displayed to us here as you all have encouraged us through meals, welcome parties, loving advice, letters, and much

more. Thank you for giving of yourself so that Jane and I may be encouraged by your demonstration of God's love for us!

In the last part of verse 16, Jesus provides us with his last example in this passage of how we love one another, **we are to love one another through exhortation**. He says do all of I command you **“so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”**

Exhortation means to take action to help others move closer to God. Jesus' request for prayer in the Father's name is an other-focused prayer for the purpose of exhortation. He is asking us to be intentional to pray in His Father's name for our love to abound for others, for those inside the church, and those outside the church. He is asking us to pray for ways that God might provide his love to those who desperately need it. He is asking for us to ask for guidance on how we may help others move closer to God so they may bear fruit that abides.

This is part of why we are doing the spiritual life worksheet. We are intentionally bringing ourselves to the Lord and asking for him to bring awareness to our hearts of what we need to prune or grow in so that we can abide in Him. And the reason we are asking that we do this together as a community is so that we exhort each other to move closer to Christ. **Jesus is asking us to love in our exhortation.**

Jesus reaffirms for the final time in the passage this others-centered mission by saying in **verse 17**, **“These things I command to you, so that you will love one another.”** As Jesus was saying this statement, I can't help but feel the emotion of it. This would be the last time before Jesus' death that Jesus and the disciples would be sitting in the same room together. Jesus knows everything is about to change. Upon his death, the disciples will be gifted with the ministry of the church to steward. They will be given the Holy Spirit to guide them as they pursue God's will. But they will be persecuted. They will be tortured. They will be imprisoned. They will suffer. They will have strife between each other and squabbles within their church. In fact, most of them will die as martyrs for their faith.

I can't help but feel Jesus saying to his disciples “please love another, because you are going to need each other. You are going to face extreme persecution in My name, but it is through your love to each other provided through Me that you will know that it is worth it! Please don't forget that! Please don't forget to love one another”

What if our gracious God, in His rich and abounding mercy provided us a way to experience His love through the love of another? What if our love to each other can remind us of the love of Jesus? What if your love to another can remind them in the good times and the most horribly traumatic of times that God loves them?

Well, I'm going to answer that question with resounding yes! You want to know how I know this. Well, I want to bring you back to the beginning of my sophomore year of high school. It was a Sunday night at 6:00 pm, and I was walking into youth group, and I was introduced to this man that you see now on the screen. [slide] His name is Will Postma. I was told by our youth pastor at the time that he was our new small group leader. My first thought in my head was "we will see how long this lasts." I came back the next Sunday and he was there. I came back the next Sunday after that and guess what he was still there.

Not only did he show up for Sunday nights, but he showed up at sporting events, he came to my home with my small group and watched football with us. He had dinners with us at Buffalo Wild Wings and would take weekends to go on youth group retreats with us and entire weeks to go on international mission trips with us. When he was in a job transition and was working 70 hours a week of construction to provide for his family, he still showed up. When Will and his wife had their first two kids while we were in high school, he still showed up. When we were in college, he would invite us to bonfires and meals when we all got home for breaks. What mattered most to us in our youth group was not only that Will would show up but was that when he showed up he cared for us. Will loved us!

Will's love for us chipped away my heart of anger and bitterness towards my church and the Lord. It was through Will's love I began to trust the Lord again. It was through his love that God reached my heart and eventually led me into full-time ministry. It was through Will's love that God took a group of high schoolers with hardened hearts and made us into a group of brothers who loved each other and loved the Lord. So, if Will is listening, thank you brother for being obedient to the Lord and loving a group of high schoolers who need the Lord's love!

I tell you this story to give you an example of the obedient love of an imperfect person that completely transformed a group of people into those who bear God's fruit and desire to abide in Him. So, the question I want to leave you with as I close this message is this: How can you be a "Will" for someone? How can you be obedient to God's command to love one another? How can you demonstrate love to a world in desperate need of Christ's love?