

Grow in Christ's Likeness (1): Love

John 13:34-35 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁴ I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.

1 John 3:18 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁸ Little children, let's not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Introduction

I am excited to kick off a new sermon series today, titled: Grow in Christlikeness. The goal of this series is to explore what it means to become more like Jesus in our daily lives. There will be six sermons altogether. We are starting with the topic of love.

When we commit ourselves to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, the Bible calls it spiritual rebirth or being “born again.” From that moment on, we are like spiritual newborns who begin to grow in faith. As we grow in Christlikeness, the first thing that begins to show in our lives - the first thing people will notice – is a change in how we love. This isn't about loving ourselves more. It's about a love for others that reflects Christ. As Christ in us gradually transforms us, we shift from being self-centered to Christ-centered.

My sermon isn't a list of quick tips on how to be more loving. It isn't a self-help talk about love, either. Instead, it's about Christ. It's about growing into Christ-like character; it's about "how to be like Jesus" and partaking in His character.

When we become more like Christ, His attributes—such as love, grace, kindness, and truth—don't have to be forced. They naturally flow from us and are expressed in our daily lives.

Think of it like this: In John 15, Jesus says He is the vine, and we are the branches. As we remain connected to Him, drawing our strength and life from Him, we will naturally bear the fruit of His character—including love.

My goal today is to encourage all of us to imitate Christ in every way, so that we might become, what C. S. Lewis called, "little Christs."

Let's dive in and explore what this looks like, starting with **love**.

Content

Let's turn to our key passage for today: John 13:34-35. ³⁴*I am giving you a new **commandment**, that you love one another; **just as I have loved you**, that you also love one another.* ³⁵*By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.*

First, notice here that Jesus is giving us a **commandment**, not a suggestion. A commandment is not optional. It's not negotiable. We can't decide to love others only when it is convenient

or when we are in a good mood, just as we can't be choosy which of the Ten Commandments to keep. Christ commands us to love one another. Period.

Next, let's explore the phrase "love one another **just as I have loved you.**" To love others in the way Jesus loved us, we must **first** truly know and experience His love for ourselves.

We can read or hear about Christ's love and try to understand intellectually how Christ has loved us, but it's not the same as, in fact, far inferior to the first-hand experience of Christ's love. For example, you can read all the books in the world about love between man and woman, but all that information cannot trump (or even come close to) your own experience of falling in love with your sweetheart.

Likewise, we can begin to genuinely offer Christlike love to others only when we have personally received and been transformed by His love.

A Firsthand Experience of Christ's Love

I've told you that the key to loving others with Christ's love is to first experience His love for yourself. As I was preparing my sermon, I asked myself: *O.K. I am going to talk about Christ's love for us, and do I truly know what I'm talking about? Have I experienced His love firsthand?* That self-reflection led me to three questions that I want to explore with you today: *how did Jesus love His disciples back then? How does Jesus love me now? And what does the Bible say about His love for us all?*

To help us grasp this firsthand experience, let's reflect on three key questions.

Let's answer the first question: **"How did Jesus love His disciples 2,000 years ago?"**

Here's how He did. He loved them as God loved Him. Jesus experienced God's love firsthand and then passed the same love onto His disciples. He loved them with truth and grace. He loved them, not just in words, but through His example. He demonstrated great mercy and forgiveness, like when He let go the woman caught in adultery without condemning her (John 8) and when He forgave Peter for denying Him three times. He also loved them with humility, washing their feet as recorded in John 13. Ultimately, Jesus loved them by laying down His own life on the cross, dying on their behalf. That's how Jesus loved them.

The second question is a personal one: **"How has Jesus loved me?"** *Have I experienced Christ's love in my life personally? Can I testify and explain to anyone how Jesus loved me?* So, one day, I asked the Lord, "How did you love me, Lord?" Then, I took time recalling every single incident I could remember where Christ appeared and demonstrated His love for me personally.

As I reflected on how Jesus has loved me, several examples came to mind: Jesus patiently tolerated my foolishness like the time I gave Him a two-hour ultimatum, demanding an immediate answer to my prayer. Numerous times, He has put up with my stubbornness of heart. He has consistently forgiven my sins over and over again. He would *answer my questions in ways that I could clearly understand*, sometimes even as a dialogue in my prayers. He has also given me

direction through biblical narratives. For example, after finishing three years of seminary, I prayed for guidance on my next step. The Lord reminded me of the story of Daniel, who also was educated for three years in King's court and then entered into the king's service (Daniel 1:5), which I felt was a clear sign for me to enter into ministry rather than pursue more education.

He was always there for me in moments of anxiety, fears, and confusion. He kept His promise to provide for my daily needs. He has given me life and health each day. In times of crisis, He has granted me wisdom and courage. He gave me the free gift of eternal life and the hope of resurrection. He has also protected me from the Evil one. In short, Jesus has loved me like a loving parent loves a child. He has been there for me, kept His promises, provided for my needs, protected me from harm, and guided me with truth and grace throughout my entire life.

My personal experience of Christ's love reflects the broader truth we see in Scripture. Let's check it out **How Christ Has Loved Us All**.

The Bible consistently shows His love to be both sacrificial and unconditional. Remember John 3:16? God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son and whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. This verse perfectly summarizes Christ's love. God loved you and me so much that He gave His only Son to us. Christ, the sinless, died for us, the sinful, on the cross and paid the penalty of our sins on our behalf. He died in our place as the "Lamb of God," that's what makes His love sacrificial. In fact, His

love is also unconditional. He loved us even when we didn't deserve His grace, demonstrating a love that goes beyond human understanding and comprehension.

What amazing about His love is that He didn't wait until all of us became lovable (that moment perhaps would never come). His love doesn't depend on how good or bad we are. His love, like the Sun, shines on both the evil and the good. His love, like rain, falls on the righteous and on the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). He is gracious to all—both good and bad. He even loved Judas Iscariot, His betrayer, until the very end (John 13:1). Aren't we glad that His love isn't based on our goodness or on His own mood? Rather, it is absolutely based on His unwavering will to obey God, no matter the cost. That's what took Him to the cross. That's why the Bible says that Jesus loves us both unconditionally and sacrificially.

Our Father in Heaven wants us to live out our faith with the same love as Christ has demonstrated for us. It may seem like an impossible task. Remember, though, God would not command us to do something that we cannot do. Of course, we cannot achieve this kind of love on our own. However, we can do it with the help of the Holy Spirit. That's why obedience to the Lord is essential. When we are obedient, God pours His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), enabling us to love in ways we couldn't before.

Consider the powerful example of a Christian father, Mr. Ho, whose son was murdered by gang members in the back alley of Philadelphia. In court, he asked the judge to pardon the killers. This is the kind of love that Jesus is talking about ---a love that only the Holy Spirit can produce in our hearts. When you love one another as *I have loved you*, Jesus says, *all the people will know that you are My followers*. By your love, He says, they will know that you are My disciples.

Where Do We Start?

The real question is, where do we start? How do we begin to put Christ's love into practice in our daily lives?

As much as we admire the incredible example of Mr. Ho, let's not begin with big things like that. Let's not even think of loving everyone in the world at this point. Rather, let's begin small in the places where God has planted us. This reminds me of a story. During WWII there was a Korean man (Mr. Yong-Ki Kim) who wanted to

liberate Korea from the Japanese occupation. He wanted to join the Liberation Army to fight the tyranny of colonialism. He went to his mentor one last time for advice. The wise mentor asked him if he truly loved his country. Kim said yes. Then, he gave him a huge piece of bread and asked him to finish the whole thing in one bite. Of course, Kim couldn't do it. He had to eat the bread one bite at a time. The mentor said to Kim, "Go home instead and start with small things that matter to the community. One day at a time." The lesson was clear: begin small, right where you are, and with what you can.

Starting in the Home

So, how about being like Jesus in your home first? Begin with your thoughts and words you say. Start with daily interactions with your family members. I don't have to reiterate how many homes and families today are broken and hurting. But I believe that if Christ-like love were practiced within them, many of these problems would be far less severe. So, let's start loving our family members as Christ has loved us, sacrificially and unconditionally. Let's seek to heal the wounds in our homes with His love. Let's ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" Let's serve our loved ones as Christ has served us. Let's lay down our lives for our families, just as Christ has laid down His life for us.

Conclusion

Here are three action points to take with you this week:

1. **Write down your own statement:** How has Jesus loved you personally? Take some time to reflect and write down your own examples.
2. **Pray for the Holy Spirit:** Ask God to pour His love into your heart so you can love others with His strength, not your own.
3. **Start loving others with Christ's love:** Begin small, with those closest to you in your home. Amen.