

John #42: No Greater Love (John 15:12-17)

PRAY

Loving one another does not come naturally to us... Do you agree with that claim?

It might not seem accurate at first, that: Loving one another does not come naturally to us

‘Cause think about how a newborn baby automatically loves their parents

That seems pretty natural, right? And yes, biological or familial love is natural

However, I’m not talking about love as the feeling of affection

I’m talking about love as the action—the giving of ourselves for others’ sake

That love—which is, more definitionally, true love—doesn’t come naturally

No, what’s natural to us is looking out for ourselves... Gobbling up what we need,

grabbing what we want, and grappling with anyone else who gets in our way

We need to be told to love and taught how to love... We need to see examples of love

Or else we will never love as we need to love

Thankfully, most of us can point to people in our lives who taught us or showed us how to love

But even more than any of them, we have a supreme teacher and example in Jesus Christ

He commands us to love, teaches us to love, and shows us by example what love is

I’d like to show you this from the Bible... So please **OPEN** up with me to John 15 [page #902]

We’re smack dab in the middle of Jesus’ final discussion with his disciples before his death

He just made his final ‘I Am’ statement in John, claiming to be the true vine: **READ v.5¹**

He went on to say: **READ v.9-11²**... So remember: He is after our complete joy

He wants the absolute best for us... Let that frame his words we’ll hear today

We’ll start in v.12: **READ v.12³**... That might sound familiar to you...

As he said almost the same thing back in chapter 13, probably like an hour before this:

“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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Why was Jesus being so repetitive?

Well, this a discourse... And we all naturally repeat ourselves in discourse

I mean, if you listen closely, I’ll repeat myself numerous times in this sermon

Even when it’s not the exact words, it’s the same ideas, concepts, and themes

Why? Sometimes we’re forgetful, but usually it’s when we want to emphasize something

We want to make sure that whoever we’re talking to *gets* what we’re saying

If you’ve been with us throughout John, I’m sure you noticed John as a whole is repetitive:

Father, Son, Spirit, life, light, love, glory, believe, behold, obey, abide, and so on

John doesn’t want us to miss the truth of things, like they, the first disciples, often did

I’m sure that’s part of why Jesus was so repetitive: they didn’t get it yet

So today, don’t get annoyed by Jesus repeating the same things over and over

Ask yourself: Do *I* get it yet? Have I grasped it? And am I living it out?

[tr] So what did Jesus want to emphasize here? His command to love, based on his love:

READ v.12⁴... Obviously this isn’t Jesus’ *only* commandment for his followers

But love does beautifully sum up the heart of his commands
Here, Jesus wanted to get it through his disciples' thick skulls—and ours'
By repeating it again and again... He would have us know, as J.C. Ryle
commented, that *"We can never think too highly of love, attach too much weight
to it, or labour too much to practice it."*

And Jesus doesn't just demand that we love, he demonstrates real love for us... So we see:

Jesus loves us so we'll love one another (v.12)

[r] That's the big idea: We must love one another, as he loved us

[r] Jesus loves us so that we'll love one another (See? Repetition!)

Now, be careful: We're tempted to hear this command and immediately apply it to other people
To think things like, 'Yeah, they should be apologizing to me... Or forgiving me... They
really need to stop being so angry... They should be contributing more to our church...
I've served before; now it's someone else's turn...' And on we go
But no! We need to consider how we ought to love one another as Christ has loved us:
Where we are not loving well, where we need to grow, and where God is at work in us

Back in v.9, Jesus said, *'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.'*

Incredible... Incomprehensible... Amazing love, how can it be?

But now he goes: **READ v.12b⁵**, and we're not so quick with the hallelujahs, are we?

We think: Unreasonable... Impossible... How can it be?

Loving like Christ loved can seem insurmountable... How can we ever live up to this standard?

On one level, we can't... It's beyond us

No matter how much I try to love you, I won't love you as much as Christ did

He loved us when we were unlovely... When we were his enemies... Unthinkable!

Yet despite the fact that we can't reach this goal perfectly,

He still sets the standard for us to aspire to and aim for

But no wonder God sent us a Saviour to save us and a Spirit to help us!

With God purifying us and working in us, changing us,

We can, in truth, obey this commandment—and increasingly so

In fact, 1 John 4 says God perfects his own love in us

Let's take heart that Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything he doesn't do first

He wants us to love one another... But he loved us first

Giving us both the example and the motivation to obey his commandment

I was horrified this week when I heard the lyrics of a new song by a formerly Christian artist

Who sang: *"This is love. There is nothing that divides us from this boundless love divine"*

OK, in Christ, that's true... But outside of Christ, sin does divide us from God's love

I guess it shouldn't surprise me, though, that heretics gonna heresy

But the part that was most disturbing was the conclusion of the song:

"This is love: This my mind, this my breath, this our life, this our death"

What?! No! We are not love... We don't mystically find love within ourselves!

On the contrary: *"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. 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. Beloved, if God so loved*

us, we also ought to love one another... We love because he first loved us... And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”
(1 John 4:9-11, 19, 21)

[tr] So... We're going to spend the rest of this time considering *how Jesus loves us*
Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so
John 15 tells us so and tells us how Jesus loves us, from his own mouth
I want to show you 4 ways Jesus loves us in order to motivate our love for one another... First:
Jesus loves us so we'll love one another [keep on screen with each sub-point]

➤ **He loves as our Substitute (v.13)**

[r] Jesus loves us as the ultimate, greatest substitutionary sacrifice... He's our Substitute

When we hear the word 'substitute' today, we may think of substitutes in sports,
Like a basketball or football player coming off the bench, taking someone else's place
Or perhaps a substitute teacher, who replaces your normal teacher for a time
But I want you to picture something else: I want you to imagine being on death row
And someone coming and saying, 'I want to take their place in death... Substitute me for them'
Or... Picture a hero, maybe a superhero, swooping in to save the day from an existential threat
Fighting off the bad guys, stopping the destruction, but losing their life in the process
Now listen to how Jesus describes the greatest possible love: **READ v.13⁶** (or 'those he loves')

READ v.13a⁷... That just means: 'No one has a greater love than this'

This is the pinnacle, the apex, the zenith... This is peak love: **READ v.13b⁸**
If we think about it, almost no one would deny that sacrifice is the epitome of love,
And that life itself is the highest form of sacrifice

We see it baked into our collective consciousness as a culture

One movie, show, or book after another... Our stories echo the greatest story
From Baloo saving Mowgli to Anna saving Elsa to Iron Man or Black Widow to
Harry Potter to Baymax to Obi-Wan to Gandalf to Spock to Bing Bong...
Even in very non-Christian works, heroes die so others won't...
We all know, instinctively, the highest form of love is sacrifice, even unto death

READ v.13⁹... Jesus' disciples didn't realize yet that he was about to do this himself

He was going to die on behalf of his friends, the very next day
God's love would reach its climactic, greatest expression on the cross:
In the Father sacrificing the Son and the Son sacrificing himself
Which doubled as the Son substituting himself in death for those he loved
We were the ones that deserved to die... We are the ones destined to die, left on our own
But Jesus came to live the life we should have lived, yet fail to live
Though he had no sins for which to die, he died in our place, under God's judgment
He then rose from the dead, triumphing over our enemies of sin, death, and the devil
The world has *never* seen a greater display of love than in Jesus... There *is* no greater love

Do you know this love? Have you seen the lengths and depths God went to to love you?
Have you believed that Jesus really did live, die, and rise again?
Have you received his mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, and loving care?

If not, what are you waiting for? There is no greater news than this for you
There is no greater grace... No greater life-changing truth... No greater
gift... No greater affection... And it can all be yours through faith in Christ

And believer, have you grown numb to the greatness of this love? Does it move you still?

Do you recognize how this love should fill us with confidence, peace, joy, and endurance
After all: *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but
gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*
(Romans 8:31-32)... Who can bring any charge against you? Who can ever condemn you?

Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ?

*"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor
things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will
be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

Then, so loved by God, we ought to live with a deep-set love for others, particularly believers

As 1 John 3:16 says: *"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we
ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."*

Now, not many of us will likely actually, literally die for someone else

But we must all die to ourselves, living sacrificially for one another

The opposite of laying down our lives would be clinging to our lives and all that is ours

Refusing to share with those in need, not sacrificing our schedules for the sake of
someone else, always talking and never listening, always keeping to ourselves in private,
growing angry and bitter, not forgiving, not giving, not serving, or not praying for others

Positively, what does this look like? Loving others will always mean the sacrifice of something

Whether our pride, our wealth, our time, our energy, our attention, our privacy, our
comfort, our priorities, our getting even, our grudges, our winning, or our rights

If love is patient, it means we sacrifice our time and our tempers

If love is kind, it means we give up the habit or the right to be nasty or cruel

If love doesn't envy, we sacrifice our yearnings (our dreams) for what others have

If love doesn't boast, we stop putting ourselves above others in our speech

If love is not arrogant or rude, we won't emulate popular figures of the day
who are constantly insulting, cursing, or demeaning others

If love doesn't insist on its own way, we must be OK with others getting their way

If love is not irritable, it means crucifying our yelling at family members

If love is not resentful, it means doing hard heart work to make sure we forgive

If love doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, we'll sacrifice our comfort or reputations
to keep speaking the truth in love

If love rejoices with the truth, we should be encouraging and celebrating others

If love bears all things, it means putting up with a lot of negative stuff

If love believes all things, it means believing the best about others,
not jumping to conclusions or interpreting things uncharitably

If love hopes all things, it means believing God is at work in them too

If love endures all things, it means going through tough times together

And if love never ends, it means never giving up on a Christian relationship

Do you see? Love always will cost you something... It's always a sacrifice

But if Christ sacrificially substituted himself for us, we *can* follow in his footsteps
And in countless, daily, small or big ways, echo the greatest love ever seen

[tr] Jesus loves us as our Substitute... But his love becomes much more personal than that
He doesn't just die in our place in the past and then disappear
No, he wants to be an ongoing, intimate, core part of our lives
Which is an unimaginably glorious privilege for us... See:

➤ **He loves as our Friend (v.14-15)**

[r] Jesus shows us his love as the greatest, ultimate friend we could ever have

Right after saying how the greatest love lays down its life for friends, Jesus says: **READ v.14**¹⁰
Now, that doesn't mean his friendship with us is conditional upon our faithfulness
Obedience doesn't make people Jesus' friends, it's what characterizes his friends
After all, look what he says next... Their friendship was already a done deal: **READ v.15**¹¹

In chapter 13, after washing the disciples' feet, Jesus said they should serve as he had served
But now he says their relationship was much closer than servants are to a master: **READ v.15a**¹²
A servant relationship is a contractual or legal obligation...
There is not necessarily any intimacy, closeness, or confiding in each other
But that's not the relationship Jesus wants with us... He wants friends! **READ v.15b**¹³

This is crazy on a number of fronts...

Compare this to other religions, almost all of which have distant and demanding gods
They'll give the orders from afar, but they won't draw near in love, let alone friendship
There's always a strong boundary between us and them... Transcendence, not nearness
But in Jesus, we have the transcendent Creator coming down to our level,
and pursuing a close, personal relationship with us... It's scandalously intimate!
Yet in no way does Christ being our Friend diminish his awesome holiness
No, Jesus is not your homeboy or BFF! He hasn't made us equals... We still worship him
Yet if friendship is partly defined by affection, there can be no greater Friend than Jesus
Which of your friends has better stuck by you, through good and bad?

And think of what a special experience it is when anyone calls you their friend
Friends aren't stuck with you like family members are
Friends don't just happen to be around you, like mere acquaintances, peers, or co-workers
Friends *choose* to be part of your life... They want you to be part of theirs
Through some common interest or passion, your hearts are drawn together
And how special it is when a true and lasting friendship is discovered!

Like, I don't even consider every one of you to be my friends!

I want to and hope I do love all of you

But I don't and I can't let you all in on the most inner circle of my life

There's only so much of me to go around!

Not so with Jesus... There is plenty of breadth, length, height, and depth in him to go around!
And how incredible is it that the God of the universe would want me as a friend?

Dane Ortlund asks: *"What if you had a friend at the centre of your relationship circle, whom you knew would never raise his eyebrows at what you share with him, even the*

worst parts of you? All our human friendships have a limit to what they can withstand. But what if there were a friend with no limit? No ceiling on what he would put up with and still want to be with you?" ...That's what we have in Jesus!

Tim Keller has said that besides common passion, there are 2 key features of real friendship:

Transparency and constancy: *"Real friends always let you in, and they never let you down."*

And it's the transparency that Jesus was stressing here in John: **READ v.15b**¹⁴

He's let us in, in mind-blowing ways... All the Father told him, he shared with them
(As an aside, this doesn't mean God the Son wasn't all-knowing himself)

It just means that in his humanity, Jesus shared everything the Father gave him to share)
What do you choose to share with people around you?

With acquaintances, you'll have casual conversations, make small talk and such
With online "friends", you'll share your interests, activities, and pictures of food
But how about with your friends IRL (in real life), sitting with you over a meal?

There's not much, if anything, you *won't* talk about with them
Jesus has made God known to us, to the extent and effect that we are his IRL friends
He hasn't held anything back from us... He's told us all kinds of intimate details

Think of it this way: A king of a nation can demand obedience from all his subjects
His servants are simply told what to do, and they must do it, no questions asked
But his friends? They enjoy his confidence and he informs them of his thinking
So that, while they too obey, they obey with a full understanding of their king's heart
Jesus, as our Friend, is still our Lord who is to be obeyed
But now we obey out of love, with an understanding of his motives, plans, and purposes¹⁵
And that makes it so much easier to obey and follow him

As Dane Ortlund also says: *"Incredible: the triune God brings us into his plans to restore the universe. He makes us part of his inner circle. He informs us of what he is doing and welcomes our participation in it."*

If we're his friends, it means we can come to him with familiarity and boldness in prayer
He has shared everything with us... We can share everything with him
Pouring out our hearts, disclosing all our secrets, letting him know the real us

If we're his friends, it also means we have a source of comfort in any kind of trouble or sorrow
Or in loneliness as well... He was betrayed by a close friend, but he'll never betray us
For he has the other mark of a true friend: constancy

But if we believers are all his friends, true loneliness should be a rarity among us
If he has loved us like this, shouldn't we likewise seek to love others as friends?
Do you have some people in your life who you can be completely transparent with?
Or who think of you as a safe person to be transparent with, themselves?
And do you have some constant Christian friends, who'll stick with you no matter what?
Don't take that for granted... And aim to be that constant friend for others

[tr] So... If we are so loved by God that we are befriended by him,
Should we think highly of ourselves, being proud of our privileged place in God's plan?
Not at all... Jesus lets us into his inner circle entirely by grace

It's not because we are wiser, better, more gifted, or more righteous than anyone else
Listen: **READ v.16¹⁶**... I could have phrased this several different ways, but I settled on this:

➤ **He loves as our Source (v.16)**

[r] His love is seen in the way he is the initiating source of our everything

He is the source of truth and revelation, as v.15 implied

In v.16, we see he is the source of our salvation... Theologians call it our election

READ v.16a¹⁷... Now, we do experience something of a choice to follow Jesus,

But that only happens after he first chooses us...

He chose us... We didn't initiate our relationship with him

Truth is: we never would have, if he didn't intervene in our hearts

So this really is something to praise the Lord for, not be bothered by

He is also the source of our fruit... Returning to the vine and branches metaphor

Remember: Our fruit is any change driven by our faith: changed attitudes, behaviour, character

But if Jesus is the Vine, he is what sends life coursing through our branches,

enabling us to bear fruit for him... He's the source of our life and godliness

READ v.16b¹⁸... Specifically fruit that abides, or remains... It doesn't rot or spoil

Given how these apostles soon started up the church, it's likely

that the fruit that would abide here especially refers to evangelistic fruit

Which would mean: We here today are evidence of their lasting fruit

Are we now participating in this mission in the world, sharing Jesus with others?

But notice: v.16 is not only Jesus' *desire* for us... This is Jesus' *plan* for us

He's '*appointed*' us to bear fruit, setting us apart in this world for this mission

And he'll see it through and make sure it happens

Finally, we see that he is our source of blessings and answered prayer: **READ v.16c¹⁹**

We already addressed, in previous passages, how Jesus could make such huge promises

But evidently, these promises weren't too dangerous to repeat over and over

The focus here in v.16, though, is on prayers related to abiding fruit and the disciples' mission

They're connected... As we bear fruit, that's when God especially answers our prayers

Do you believe God is willing, able, and committed to answering prayer? Are we even asking?

He is our Source... And in this case, we *cannot* love others in the exact same way he does

Because we cannot be the Source of people's salvation, fruit, or answered prayer

But we *can* be conduits, letting God's blessings flow through us to others

If we've been blessed, we are blessed in order to be a blessing

[tr] And just in case we still don't get the point, Jesus goes: **READ v.17²⁰**

Jesus loves us so we'll love one another!

And as we close, I'll point out one final way we can see that he loves us:

➤ **He loves as our Lord (v.17)**

[r] Jesus loves us as our Lord, whom we are called to obey and to love

He's bookended his thoughts with the theme of love, but also the theme of 'command'

'This is my commandment'... **READ v.17²¹**

So always remember: He is our Friend... But he never abdicates being our Lord
It just makes him a Lord unlike any other lord we could imagine

Again, we don't emulate this exact form of love, as we are not lords over one another
But what we should take away here is that his commands are an expression of his love
He has loved us, and he commands us... They go together, hand-in-hand
As one of the songs we sing here goes, He '*shelters us with [his] commands*'
They are for our good, revealing his heart to us, and guiding our ways
What does he command us? To abide in him... To bear fruit... To ask in prayer, boldly
But all of his commands find their heart in love... To love one another

As we'll see in the next passage:

Our love should stand in stark contrast to the hatred we may see and experience in this world
While many may despise us or insult us or even try to hurt us,
Jesus didn't leave us alone... He intentionally left us with each other

CONCLUSION

So the question is: Will we follow his commandment and truly love one another?
Will we, by the power of the Spirit, seek to live out what we have heard?
No, loving one another doesn't come naturally to us, at all
But thank God: Loving one another has come *supernaturally* to us
Because love came to us in our Lord Jesus

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

² As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

³ "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

⁴ This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

⁵ You love one another as I have loved you.

⁶ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

⁷ Greater love has no one than this

⁸ that someone lay down his life for his friends.

⁹ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

¹⁰ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

¹¹ 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.

¹² No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing;

¹³ but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

¹⁴ but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

¹⁵ HT Carson

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ You did not choose me, but I chose you

¹⁸ I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide

¹⁹ so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

²⁰ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

²¹ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.