Lesson 12

When Love Doesn't Come Easy

Class Objectives

• The expression of our love toward others is not always based on their *worthiness* or *lovableness*. There will be times we will be called to love people when they are far from lovable. It is our love for our Father and obedience to His will that motivates us to demonstrate sacrificial love.

It wasn't Jesus' love for us that led him to the cross.

• The Father's will is expressed by the Spirit through Peter in 1 Peter 3.8-12.

We have been called to be initiators of peace, harmony, and love ... *in all circumstances*. In cases where we suffer mistreatment for the pursuit of peace, God is aware and will protect us.

Think About It

- 1. What are some situations you feel comfortable sharing where you have had to love someone even when it wasn't easy?
- 2. What are some things you have done in these situations to love another person effectively and thereby demonstrate the Father's love?
- 3. What things have you struggled with in carrying out the Lord's expectations?

What the Savior Said

John 12:23–28 (CSB)

²³ Jesus replied to them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.
²⁵ The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name."

Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

What if I told you that the ultimate thing that led Jesus to the cross wasn't about His love for us? Now there is little doubt of His love for us. Jesus Himself said, *No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends,* John 15.13. This statement must not be ignored. However, there was something higher that drove Jesus to the cross. It was Jesus' unflappable commitment to being obedient to the will of the Father. Jesus chose to allow himself to be crucified because of his obedience to God.

Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will," Matthew 26.39.

Now, consider Paul's writing:

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross, Philippians 2.5-8.

What pushed Jesus to the cross? It was his complete surrender to the authority of God in his life. In going to the cross, He was not focused on His love for us, as great as it was, instead he was focused on being obedient to the will of the Father. When He went to the cross, we weren't that lovable. In fact, Scripture describes our condition thusly:

- We were ungodly, sinners, and enemies, Romans 5.6, 8, 10.
- We were *alienated* and *hostile* toward God, Colossians 1.21.
- We were *dead* in our trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2.1.
- We were *darkened* in our understanding and *excluded* from the life of God, Ephesians 4.18.
- We lived in *darkness* and needed *mercy*, 1 Peter 2.10.
- We were like *sheep going astray* who were in need of being found and returned, 1 Peter 2.25.

We need to see there was within us no redeeming quality or thing worthy of generating love. We were hopelessly lost, bound up in sin, and trapped in our own filth. (Think of the imagery in Ezekiel 16.) We were completely unlovable. And yet Jesus still went to the cross. It was not easy. Early in his ministry he said:

"I can do nothing on my own. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me, John 5.30.

For us, Jesus sets the perfect example of what it means to love others when it is not easy. And He also shows us the secret of how to accomplish this. It is the choice to focus on the expectations of the Father ... rather than the *worthiness* or *lovableness* (or lack thereof) of the object of our love.

- 4. From the passage we just read in John 12, what can we learn about Jesus' highest motivation in going to the cross?
- 5. How did this *higher* focus allow him to express his love for us, even when it wasn't easy to do so?

6. What are some situations where we may have to apply this same principle in our life?

A Passage to Explore

1 Peter 3:1-12 (CSB)

WIVES AND HUSBANDS

3 In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live ² when they observe your pure, reverent lives. ³Don't let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, ⁴ but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also adorned themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands, ⁶ just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation.

⁷Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

DO NO EVIL

⁸ Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, ⁹ not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.

¹⁰ For the one who wants to love life

and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, ¹¹ and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it, ¹² because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

- 7. What are the basic expectations in marriage when it comes to loving one's spouse? (See 3.1, 7.) Is marital love always based on *lovableness*? What principle here is a key to a long-lasting sustainable marriage?
- 8. 1 Peter 3.8-12 applies to the relationships between brethren in the local church. Are brethren always worthy of our love? To what are we called regardless?

Life Application

This week, make some time each day to spend a few moments alone with God. Every day we will consider how we can demonstrate our love even when it doesn't come easy. Take your time with each passage(s) so you can concentrate on what is being said. Use the questions as a springboard for your positive thoughts throughout your day.

Monday

9. Read 2 Samuel 9.1-13. Who was Mephibosheth? Why would it have not come easy for David to love him?

- 10. What redeeming qualities did Mephibosheth possess in himself that would have made him *worthy* of receiving David's love?
- 11. How can we use this story as inspiration in loving others in our own life when it doesn't come easy?

Tuesday

- 12. Read Acts 9.26-28. If you were a Jew, how might you have responded when Saul of Tarsus tried to join up with your congregation?
- 13. How does Barnabas demonstrate how to love someone else when it isn't easy?
- 14. What are some practical applications you can apply in your own life from this story?

Wednesday

- 15. Read Matthew 18.15-22. When people sin against us, what is to be our aim in resolving the problem?
- 16. When a person repents after wronging us, what is God's expectation?
- 17. How does Matthew 5.18-23 stress the urgency of making things right when there is a problem in the relationship? Does the principle in Ephesians 4.26-27 fit in here? How?

February 20, 2022

Thursday

- 18. Read 2 Corinthians 2.5-11. What sin had the man committed? (See 1 Corinthians 5.1-11.)
- 19. What was to be the spirit or attitude toward the brother after he repented of his sin?

When someone sins against you and repents, what are some ways you can reaffirm your love for them?

Friday

- 20. Read Ephesians 2.11-21. Before Christ, how wide was the division between Jew and Gentile?
- 21. How did Christ bring these two racial/ethnic/religious/cultural groups together?
- 22. How can this passage fill us with hope as we live out our Christian lives with those of different races, cultural, educational, and religious backgrounds?