

Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for John 15:9-17 (August 2, 2026)
Abide in Christ: Love, Obedience, and Joy

Central Truth: You can experience the fullness of the Christian life as you abide in Christ's love thereby producing the fruits of obedience, sacrificial love, and enduring joy that glorifies God and demonstrates that you belong to Him.

John's purpose (20:31): "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Key passage (11): "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Opening Question: What is one relationship in your life where simply "being connected" has made all the difference? How would that relationship change if that connection were broken?

Lesson Objective: to abide continually in His love as you allow His life to flow through you so that you will bear lasting fruit, obey His commands, love others sacrificially, and experience the fullness of His joy.

Background: Jesus and His disciples have left the Upper Room and are on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane where He would be betrayed and arrested. Along the way, He prepares His disciples for what's about to happen. Jesus uses the illustration of a vine and branches to explain that our relationship with Him isn't merely an association or an obligation--it's a

vital, life-giving relationship. Just as a branch can't survive or produce fruit apart from the vine, we can't experience the fullness of life, fruitfulness, or joy apart from abiding in Christ.

- A. Abiding speaks of a “mutual indwelling”--“ a reciprocal, covenantal union established by grace and sustained by obedience”: “Abide in me, and I in you.” B. Abiding produces fruitfulness: “Lasting spiritual productivity flows from continual communion”: “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.”
- C. Abiding produces security and safeguards us against deception: First John 2: 27: “The anointing that you received from him abides in you.”
- D. Abiding gives believers “eschatological confidence.” It “cultivates endurance amid suffering” and “portrays the believer’s union with Christ, the constancy of Scripture, the Spirit’s indwelling, and the ultimate permanence of God’s kingdom, while exposing the fleeting nature of this world and the peril of unbelief”: First John 2:28: “Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”

I. As We Abide in Christ, We Rest Securely in His Unchanging Love for Us (9)

- A. Christ’s love mirrors the Father’s love
- B. It’s the greatest love relationship imaginable
- C. The Father’s love for the Son is
 - 1. Complete
 - 2. Eternal
 - 3. Perfect
 - 4. Unchanging

5. Unconditional

D. Jesus doesn't say, "Earn My love," but "Abide in My love." We don't succeed in the Christian life by trying harder but by deepening our love for the Lord Jesus.

Reflection Questions

1. Do I truly believe that Jesus loves me with the same perfect love He has always known from the Father?
2. Are there times when I measure God's love by my circumstances rather than by His unchanging love for me?
3. How would my life change if I lived every day knowing that Christ's love will never change?

II. Abiding in Christ's Love Produces Obedience (10)

- A. Obedience is the natural result of abiding
- B. Those who love Christ obey Him.
- C. Those who obey Christ experience the security of His love.
- D. Obedience isn't the price we pay to receive God's love, it's the response we give because we've already received His love.
- E. Jesus modeled obedience to the Father and flowed from His relationship with the Father.

Application: The more we embrace God's love, the more naturally obedience flows from our hearts.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do I view obedience as a burden or as a response of love?

2. What areas of my life do I need to commit to follow Christ in response to His love for me?

III. Abiding in Christ Produces Fullness of Joy (11)

A. Jesus desires that His joy would become our joy

1. In spite of the fact that Jesus is hours away from betrayal, arrest, humiliation, torture, crucifixion, death, and propitiation for our sin, He tells them about joy.
2. His joy wasn't based on temporary comfort or circumstances but from His fellowship with the Father

B. Christ offers complete--not temporary--joy. The world offers temporary pleasure; Christ offers eternal, lasting joy.

Reflection Questions

1. What things do I often look to for joy besides Christ?
2. Do I experience the difference between happiness based on circumstances and joy rooted in Christ?
3. How does obedience actually increase joy rather than diminish it?

IV. Abiding in Christ Means Loving Others Sacrificially (12-13)

A. Love is Christ's defining command

1. Jesus doesn't leave His disciples with a complicated formula.
2. He gives one, simple, essential command: "Love one another as I have loved you."

B. This love is a selfless, sacrificial commitment for the good of another.

C. Christ defines love by His sacrifice: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Reflection Questions:

1. Whom has God placed in my life that needs Christlike love?
2. What does sacrificial love look like in practical terms?
3. Am I more concerned with being served or with serving others?

V. Abiding in Christ Results in Friendship with Christ (14-15)

A. Jesus changes their relationship from servants to friends

1. A servant carries out orders but doesn’t know the master’s plan or purpose
2. A friend shares the heart of another, understands his mission, and participates willingly

B. Friendship with Christ involves surrender

1. True friendship with Jesus isn’t casual familiarity.
2. True friendship with Jesus is trust, loyalty, obedience, and a shared purpose

Reflection Questions

1. Do I relate to Jesus most of all as Master, Savior, or Friend?
2. Do I actively seek His plans or simply ask Him to bless mine?
3. What does friendship with Christ mean in my daily life?

VI. Abiding in Christ Produces Fruit That Remains (16-17)

A. Christ chooses and appoints His followers

1. The disciples didn't "discover" Jesus; He chose them.
2. His choice included a purpose: "That you should go and bear fruit."
3. The Christian life is not just about receiving salvation; it's about fulfilling God's mission.

B. The fruit God desires is lasting: Christlike character, spiritual growth, love for others, and lives changed through the sharing of the gospel

C. Everything comes back to love: "These things I command you, so that you will love one another." Abide in Christ → Receive His love → Obey His commands → Experience His joy → Love others → Bear lasting fruit.

VII. Summary: Jesus' message to His disciples--and to us--is simple:

- A. Anchor your hope, your faith, in Him
- B. Rest in His love
- C. Follow His instructions
- D. Experience the fullness of His joy

** The branch doesn't struggle to produce fruit through its own effort; it simply remains connected to the vine.

Personal Applications

1. Rest in Christ's unchanging love.
2. Stop measuring God's love by your failures or circumstances. Anchor your trust in His promise:
3. Let love motivate obedience.

4. Ask:

- a. “What is Jesus asking me to surrender?”
- b. “What command of Christ am I resisting?”

5. Pursue Christ’s joy, not temporary happiness.

6. Seek joy through deepening your love for Christ through abiding in His Word, prayer, worship, obedience, and serving others

The world should recognize followers of Jesus by the way they love: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)

Closing Discussion Question: If Jesus said the defining evidence of His followers is their love for one another, what would people who know me say is the clearest evidence that I belong to Him?

Sunday School Lesson for August 2, 2026
John 15:9-17

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this first Sunday in August, we've been discovering how John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, describes the life and ministry of the Lord "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

As we've seen that purpose played out in every word on every page of this precious book, we come to chapter fifteen where we hear the Lord's words to His disciples as they made their way from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane.

During their conversation there in the Upper Room, some incredibly remarkable things have taken place, beginning with Jesus washing the disciples' feet as a model of what they were to do for one another. He's told them that one of them would betray Him, and He shows John who it will be. When Judas leaves the room to carry out His devilish plan, Jesus tells them that He and the Father are about to be glorified, and then He says to the disciples--chapter thirteen, verse 34: "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."

In chapter fourteen, this message of love continues as the Lord Jesus shows His love for His disciples by explaining how the Holy Spirit will continue His work among them, assuring them in verse twelve that "Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

But this love must be reciprocal. In verse fifteen the Lord says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he

will give you another Helper, to be with you forever;” and this love is made even more compelling in verse 23 when Jesus adds, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

The setting is remarkable, the tension is unmistakable, and the disciple’s uncertainty is overwhelming. For just a moment, try to imagine yourself with Jesus that night. Dinner is over, and Jesus calls us to follow Him from that upper room where He’s just told us about the fact that He’s going away, and where He’s going / we can’t come, but He’s going to prepare a place for us. He’s sending a Comforter, an Advocate, a Helper, Who will somehow take His place. Unknown to us, He’s now on his way to His greatest trial, his most humiliating and unimaginably painful death, and somehow taking upon Himself the infinite punishment for all the sin of every person who has ever lived. On the way, it’s almost like He’s oblivious to what’s about to happen, focusing more on **us** than His own safety as we walk together. He continues to comfort us by His words, assuring us of His continual presence and giving us direction for the troubles we’re about to face.

John has shown us throughout his gospel how Jesus has carefully and systematically laid out the command to His disciples to love one another, and their love for one another will show the world that they are His disciples because their love will reflect the love the Son has for the Father, the love the Son has for the disciples, and the love the disciples have for the Son and the Father. This mutual, reciprocal love is at the heart of what Jesus has been calling His disciples to understand and engage with, and now, as He makes His way to the Garden of Gethsemane where He will allow Himself to be arrested, tried, and crucified, He prepares to demonstrate the depth of His love for His disciples and for us.

To help them and us understand what He’s been saying, He draws this picture, beginning in the first verse of chapter fifteen: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he

takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 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. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 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.”

Trey will speak to this passage in his sermon, but since many of you will hear Sunday School On the Go before you hear the sermon, it's important to set the context for the application of Jesus' illustration about the vine and the branches which is the focus for our lesson today from verses nine through seventeen.

We can't be sure what exactly prompted Jesus to speak of Himself as a vine and His disciples as branches. On the hills around the city, Jesus might have pointed out the fires on the slopes of the Kidron Valley. At that time of year, the vinedressers would have been pruning the grape vines, cutting off all the dead wood and all the unproductive branches and then burning them, and Jesus and His disciples surely saw the pruning process in operation as they passed through the valley.

On the other hand, it might have been that, after the meal, He passed by the Temple, pausing to direct their attention to the huge, ornate complex; the Passover moon hanging in that star-studded Palestinian sky clearly illuminating the huge, gold grapevine carved into the archway above the sixty-

feet-high doors to the Holy Place in the Temple, perhaps like the artist's rendering you see here. Its trunk of this vine was taller than a man's head and its branches stretched out wide above that entryway, ornamented with broad, gold leaves and bearing great clusters of grapes covered in gold leaf. This could well have been the backdrop as He illustrated for them the secret of experiencing the fullness of joy by abiding in His love.

The vine can't bear fruit if it has no branches, and the branches can't live apart from the vine. Without the branches, the trunk is nothing more than a stick in the ground. Trunk and branches together make up one, fruit-bearing vine. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches;" and the two together form a complete vine, essential to one another as trunk and branches.

The second idea He presents is that this unity of the vine is not the result of mechanical connectedness, but by an essential, organic relationship. The Lord and His disciples then and His disciples now form one vine because one common life unites them: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." The branch is one with the vine because it draws its life from the vine and bears the fruit appropriate to that vine. We are one with Christ when we make His purpose in the world the real objective of our life, and we find our strength for the fulfilment of that purpose through fellowship with Him and His eternal purpose to bring salvation to all.

The third point is that the intended result of our vital unity with Christ is fruit-bearing. Fruitlessness isn't an option. More fruit is expected year-by-year as the vinedresser prunes away unproductive shoots. God has prepared for us in this life all the soil, water, sunshine, and nutrients intended to produce the quantity and quality of fruit He desires us to bring forth. Whatever He does--pruning, sending water, sunshine, and nutrients and withholding those elements at just the right time--aren't intended to make us happy, but productive. All the branch needs is the vine. The vital, life-giving connection

to the vine alone is sufficient for the branch to accomplish its purpose--to bear fruit.

Jesus calls this connection “abiding” or “remaining,” a word that we find seven times in the first eight verses of chapter fifteen and 118 times in our New Testaments, more than half appearing in John’s gospel and his letters. One word study names four aspects of this very important word. First, it refers to what it calls “mutual indwelling” as we find in verse four: “Abide in me, and I in you.” “The verb denotes a reciprocal, covenantal union established by grace and sustained by obedience.”

The second aspect is that of fruitfulness--verse five--: “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” “Lasting spiritual productivity flows from continual communion.” Third, abiding produces security--First John, chapter two, verse 27: “The anointing that you received from him abides in you.” “[A]biding safeguards [us] against deception.”

Fourth is what this word study calls “eschatological confidence,” First John, chapter two, verse 28: “Now, little children, **abide in him**, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” Abiding “cultivates endurance amid suffering.” The article concludes with this: “[Abiding] portrays the believer’s union with Christ, the constancy of Scripture, the Spirit’s indwelling, and the ultimate permanence of God’s kingdom, while exposing the fleeting nature of this world and the peril of unbelief. Thus the call to ‘[abide]’ is simultaneously an invitation to rest in grace and a summons to steadfast obedience until faith becomes sight.”

John records the Lord’s first use of the word after the feeding of the five thousand when Jesus told the people in chapter six, verse 56, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood **abides** in me, and I in him.” Jesus told the Jews who had believed in Him--chapter eight, verse 31, “If you **abide** in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” And the Lord concludes His illustration here in chapter

fifteen in verses seven and eight with these words: “If you **abide** in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

What immediately follows beginning in verse nine is the application of the illustration He’s just given them--it’s the whole point--the fundamental idea of the description of the vine and the branches--, developed in three aspects: love, obedience, and joy: “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. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. 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. 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. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

The Lord’s first command here is that we abide in His love. Using repetition to drive home the importance of abiding in the Lord and keeping His commandments, Jesus returns to the foundation of their relationship--that agape love that we were first introduced to in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus back in chapter three. He points us first to the example He has set in His own relationship with the heavenly Father: “You have seen how the Father has loved Me; I have loved you in the very same way.”

Now, think about that for just a moment: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.” Jesus is the object of the Father’s love, and the Father has loved Him fully, deeply, purely, eternally, and with all the indescribable

perfection that comes from the very heart--the very nature--of God. In a very similar way, Jesus loves you and me: fully, deeply, purely, eternally, and with all the indescribable perfection that comes from the very heart of God.

Max Lucado reminds us that “If you were better tomorrow, He wouldn't love you more, and if you're worse tomorrow, He wouldn't love you less. The love of the heavenly Father does not ebb and flow, it does not come and go.” If you've ever had a time in your life when you doubted God's love; if there was ever a moment when you really wondered, “Does God really love me?” here's your answer: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.”

One commentator calls this “a fact of stupendous interest and transcendent claim” and adds, “Heaven had opened over the incarnate Word, and other ears as well as his own had heard the Father say, ‘You are my beloved Son.’ ... The Lord was conscious of being the Object of this infinite love before the foundation of the world” as we'll find later in verse 24 of this chapter.

The depth of that love was about to be shown in a way that no one else could. He was about to lay down His life for His friends. So, He tells them to abide in His love, to imitate that love, to love in the very same way that He had loved and would continue to love--a love demonstrated in the greatest sacrificial commitment to others so that they and we might enjoy the very best God has for us.

Not only are we to abide in Christ, we are to abide in His love--to rest securely in Him as the Son of God as well as to rest in His demonstration of His amazing love for us. Having to tell His disciples then and now to abide in His love implies the possibility that we could stray from abiding in His love. Although our love for Him might fade as we fail to continuously and consistently abide in Him, our love for Him and His love for us could never be completely lost.

One commentator notes that “Obviously, what is meant is not our continuance in the attitude of love to Him, but rather our continuance in the sweet and sacred atmosphere of His love to us. For the connection between the two halves of the verse necessarily requires that the love in which we are to abide should be identical with the love which had been previously spoken of, and *that* is clearly His love to us, and not ours to Him. But then, on the other hand, whosoever thus abides in Christ’s love to Him will echo it back again, in an equally continuous love to Him. So that the two things flow together, and to abide in the conscious possession of Christ’s love to me is the certain and inseparable cause of its effect, my abiding in the continual exercise and outgoing of my love to Him.”

How do we abide in His love? The Lord says in verse ten, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,” and He has given us His own life and relationship with the Father as the example of keeping His commandments and abiding--resting, securely anchoring our heart of hearts--in His 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.”

But it’s not a question of whether or not we keep His commandments. The “if” might be better translated, “**since** we keep His commandments” or “**as** we keep His commandments.” The more we prayerfully contemplate, study, examine, and explore the Father’s love for His Son Jesus, and our Lord’s love for His disciples, / and respond to His drawing us to Himself in love, / then embrace and apply the insight we’ve gained from that love relationship to our own lives by following His instructions for life--, we’ll understand more and more how to abide in His love. But it’s an on-going process to know more and more of the love we are to bind our hearts to and live it out in our daily lives.

Alexander MacLaren writes, “In this mysterious, awful, tender, perfect affection, He exhorts us to abide. ... “What a quiet, blessed home that is for us! The image, I suppose, that underlies all this sweet speech in these last

hours, about dwelling in Christ, in His joy, in His words, in His peace, and the like, is that of some safe house, into which / going, we may be secure. And what sorrow or care or trouble or temptation would be able to reach us if we were folded in the protection of that strong love, and always felt that it was the fortress into which we might continually resort? They who make their abode there, and dwell behind those firm bastions, need fear no foes, but are lifted high above them all. ‘Abide in My love,’ for they who dwell within the clefts of that Rock need [no] other defence; and they to whom the riven heart of Christ is the place of their abode are safe, whatsoever befalls. ‘As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love.’”

Then, what’s the end result of abiding in Christ and in His love? As you abide in Christ, you will experience the fullness of God’s joy--verse eleven: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” As you abide in Christ and He works His will and His way in you, His joy will abide in you--not just a partial joy, but the fullness of the joy of the very Son of God.

All the things that He’s been telling them about His leaving, the coming and work of the Holy Spirit, His love, His commandments, and His provision for them in eternity has had a single purpose--“That My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” Their willingness--our willingness--to trust Him and His word, and to do the things He’s instructed them and us to do, in spite of the uncertainty and agony they’re about to experience, would result in their joy.

Of all the paradoxes we can imagine, this may be the greatest. In just a few hours, Jesus will be pouring His heart out to the Father in prayer when He’ll be betrayed by one of His own disciples. He’ll be arrested, mercilessly interrogated and ridiculed, brutally whipped and beaten, and finally horrendously murdered, and here He’s talking about joy? But the great joy of His life had been found in the fellowship of the Father’s love and in the keeping of His Father’s commandments, so He naturally desires that His

disciples might experience the very same joy that has brought delight and blessedness to His own heart.

Not only does He pray that they might experience the same kind of joy He's had from His relationship with the Father, He prays that their joy would be made complete--filled up and perfected beyond the extreme capacity of their ability to experience it, leaving no room for fear or doubt, despair or hopelessness.

MacLaren writes, "This joy He offers to us--a joy coming from perfect obedience, a joy coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love, to a love that--to us--seems absolutely good and sweet. There is no joy that humanity is capable of / to compare for a moment with that bright, warm, continuous sunshine which floods the soul, that is freed from all the clouds and mists of self and the darkness of sin. Self-sacrifice at the bidding of Jesus Christ is the recipe for the highest, the most exquisite, the most godlike gladness of which the human heart is capable. Our joy will remain [as] His joy is ours. Then our joy will be, up to the measure of its capacity, ennobled, and filled, and progressive, advancing ever towards a fuller possession of His joy, and a deeper calm of that pure and perennial rapture, which makes the settled and celestial bliss of those who have 'entered into the joy of their Lord.'"

The apostle Paul had much to say about the fullness of joy that he experienced in such places as Second Corinthians, chapter two, and his letters to the Philippians and the Thessalonians. John Himself had been so touched by our Lord's provision of joy, that, in the opening words of his first letter, he explains: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete." They would come to know the fullness of the joy of the Lord, as we can, too, as we abide in the Lord in all the ways He's just explained to His disciples. And the Lord will have even more to say about His joy in the next chapter.

Back in chapter thirteen when they were in the Upper Room, just after Judas left, Jesus had given them a new--a fresh--commandment that they love one another. He repeats this commandment to them here in verse twelve: "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." In His conversation with them, He's told them "If you love me, you will obey what I command," but this is the only command that John has recorded for us. It may well have been the only commandment the Lord gave them in this conversation, because, if fully obeyed and practiced, it would be enough to produce the fruit that would confirm that they were His disciples.

MacLaren adds this note here: "Where the heart is right the conduct will be right. Love will soften the tones, will instinctively teach what we ought to be and do; will take the bitterness out of opposition and [conflict], will make even rebuke, when needful, only a form of expressing itself. If the heart be right all else will be right; and if there be a deficiency of love nothing will be right. You cannot help anybody except on condition of having an honest, beneficent, and benevolent regard towards him. You cannot do any man in the world any good unless there is a [spirit] of love in your heart towards him. You may pitch him benefits, and you will neither get nor deserve thanks for them; you may try to teach him, and your words will be hopeless and profitless. The one thing that is required to bind [Christians] together is this common affection. That being there, everything will come. ... As we read in that great chapter to the Corinthians--the lyric praise of [Love],--all kinds of blessing and sweetness and gladness come out of this. It is the central force which, being present, secures that all shall be right, which, being absent, ensures that all shall be wrong."

"And is it not beautiful," he says, "to see how Jesus Christ, leaving the little flock of His followers in the world, gave them no other instruction for their mutual relationship? He did not instruct them about institutions and organisations, about orders of the ministry and sacraments, or Church polity and the like. He knew that all these would come. His one commandment

was, ‘Love one another,’ and that will make you wise. Love one another, and you will shape yourselves into the right forms. He knew that they needed no exhortations such as ecclesiastics would have put in the foreground. ... The ‘one thing needful’ was that they should be knit together as true participators of His life. Love was sufficient as their law and as their guide.”

Then, to validate the essential importance of this commandment, He gives them the example of Himself in verse thirteen, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Just as He’s about to show what loving one another looks like, he leaves them with this command: “My friends, love one another with the same love that I am showing for you.” There is no higher expression of love than this.

Life is the most valuable, most precious thing we possess, and when someone is willing to lay down his life for his friends, it reveals the greatest extent of love. In chapter five, verse seven of his letter to the followers of Christ in Rome, Paul said, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die,” but the Lord Jesus surpassed that, dying not only for His friends but also for His enemies, as Paul writes in the very next verse: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

His command is simple and straightforward: love one another as I have loved you in self-sacrifice even to the point of death--lovingly, voluntarily, and joyfully giving My life for My disciples so that their joy might be full. MacLaren reminds us, “Brethren, it is a solemn obligation, which may well make us tremble, that is laid on us in these words, ‘As I have loved you.’ Calvary was less than twenty-four hours off, and He says to us, ‘*That* is your pattern!’ Contrast our love at its height with His--a drop to an ocean, a poor little flickering [candle] held up beside the sun. **My** love, at its best, has so far conquered my selfishness that now and then I am ready to suffer a little inconvenience, to sacrifice a little leisure, to give away a little money, to spend a little dribble of sympathy upon the people who are its objects. Christ’s love

nailed Him to the Cross, and led Him down from the throne, and shut for a time the gates of the glory behind Him. And He says, “That is your pattern!”

Then, to make His example and His commandment even more personal and compelling, He says in verse fourteen, “You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” In case they missed the connection that He made so clear in the last chapter, He now makes it plain: “Your willingness to do what I’ve commanded you shows that you are My friends, and there’s no greater love I could have for you than to lay down My life for you.”

Those who love Christ, who abide in Christ, / keep His commandments. As a result, there’s a relationship between Him and all those who place their trust in Him that’s characterized as genuine friendship. As MacLaren writes, “For this is the relationship between love and obedience, in regard to Jesus Christ, that the love is the parent of the obedience, and the obedience is the guard and guarantee of the love. [Those] who love will obey, [those] who obey will strengthen love by acting according to its dictates, and will be in a condition to feel and realise more the warmth of the rays that stream down upon them, and to send back more fully answering obedience from their hearts. To submit is the expression of love, and [our] love is deepened by [our] submission.”

Even though He had entrusted them with the task of carrying on His work after His departure, even referring to them as servants in John, chapter thirteen when He said, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be,” as well as in other places, / He now calls them, “friends.” The slave doesn’t know what his master’s doing; he only carries out the orders of his master without being privy to the bigger picture of the reason for, the motivation behind, or the objective of his instructions.

The friend, on the other hand, is the confidant of the thoughts and intentions of his friend and works in harmony with him to accomplish their mutual goals. So the promotion of the disciples from Christ's service to His friendship is accomplished by His entrusting them with the fundamental purpose of His life--His sacrificial death in accordance with the loving counsel of God--and being invited to share in that purpose. That's why He's made known to them everything that He's heard from the Father.

Lest they think that they would fail in this joint partnership with the Lord, He tells them in verse sixteen: "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." He invites them to depend on His strength and not their own. They had not somehow "discovered" Him and thought following Him would be a great way to be rich and famous; He chose them to fulfill His purpose--the initiative was His and His alone. "We love because He first loved us"--as John writes in First John, chapter four, verse nineteen. He made possible a change in our status from sinners to saints when--Romans, chapter five, verse eight, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

He chose them to be His followers, and He also appointed them--set them apart--for the work of apostles--ones sent with a particular mission--in this case--to bear fruit and the kind of fruit that would endure the test of time.

As their effectiveness in abiding in Christ and keeping His commands--particularly His command that they love one another--produced the fruit of Christ-likeness, it would be verified by the fact that whatever they asked of the Father in His name He would give it to them. Not only does the Lord go back to what He began this conversation with in identifying Himself as the True Vine, the Father as the vinedresser, and them as clean branches, // he reaches back to chapter fourteen verse twelve when He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works

than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” They would do these greater things because they abide in Him, keep His commandments, love one another as He has loved them, and because they are able to receive from the Father whatever they ask, because they ask in His Name--in full concurrence with His will and His plan.

Finally, in verse seventeen, the Lord summarizes what He’s been telling them: “This I command you, that you love one another.” Everything that He’s told them of His perfect joy, His friendship, His selection, and their calling is all part of this vital unity that flows from mutual love. Genuine, self-sacrificing, brotherly love is to be the primary evidence of their relationship with Him--a love that will cause their service in His Kingdom’s work to endure and to bring glory to God.

With these words, He entrusts them with the crucial task of accomplishing everything He’s prepared for them and the world by His life and through His death. This great end, to achieve everything for which the Lord Jesus set aside the glory He had with the Father, and for which He would give up His life, / He leaves in their hands. He would still be the Vine--their source of life abundant and eternal--, and they would be the branches--bearing the fruit Jesus came into the world to bear, as they continuously and consistently abided in Him and thus experienced the fullness of the Vinedresser’s--the Father’s--joy. They had but one instruction to carry out; all that’s He’s been saying in the last two chapters--really, from John’s perspective--throughout Jesus’ entire ministry can be summed up in the words of verse seventeen: “These things I command you, so that you will love one another,” with the result--verse eleven: “That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Thank you for being a part of our brief overview of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus seen through John’s eyes that’s meant to lead you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, by believing in Him, you might experience the fullness of life that can only come in Him.

Next week, John leads us to follow the Lord Jesus as He continues to prepare His disciples for the dark and terrifying moments ahead, reminding them of what lies beyond their grief. Following Trey's sermon from the first fifteen verses of chapter sixteen where the Lord explains in more detail the work of the Holy Spirit, we'll hear the Lord's response to the disciples' concern about His departure and the amazing joy produced by their love and their obedience.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

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