



# LOVE BOLDLY - SACRIFICE

## CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... how are you celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?! Are you a fireworks aficionado, touring as many displays as you can schedule in a weekend? Do you host the Independence Extravaganza, grilling burgers, lighting sparklers, and rocking out around the backyard bonfire? Or is this weekend like any other, save for the stress it puts on your dog? Discuss!

## OPENING PRAYER

God of All Love, grant us the opportunity to love others the way you so boldly love us.

## INTRODUCTION

Let's return to our sandwich shop from last week. You've just written this brilliant vision statement describing the characteristics of a

disciple of Jesus Christ: to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously. But the joy of the accomplishment quickly fades as another question enters your mind, “how does a committed follower of Christ live each of these out? It sounds good. It looks good. But, geez, that’s a tough calling.” Realizing this is going to take some time, you grab a refill of vanilla hazelnut blend with a shot of half-and-half and get to work. You noticed, first and foremost, the commands of Jesus all seem to stem from one overarching theme: love. Everything begins with love. “A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 15:34 NIV) Everything else grew from this. So, you decide to start there. But as you pour over Jesus’s commands concerning love, one thing becomes starkly, and almost painfully, obvious... this is no ordinary love. The way Jesus loved others was more than just being nice. The way Jesus loved others went so much farther than simply being friendly. Jesus loved *boldly*. And as you start to outline what it means to love like Jesus, you begin to realize the depth and power of what this truly means and how this kind of bold love can transform the world.

**Setup Question: Ah crap, that nosy person in Panera is back at your table. This time, he asks, “what do you think it means to love others?” What’s your answer? Come up with something thoughtful, or he might just come back. Ready, go!**

## SETUP

Last week, we introduced the new vision statement given to us by the United Methodist Council of Bishops. Let’s refresh our memories... if

you're in a group, say it together aloud and worry the people at the tables in the coffee shop around you. It's fun.

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who,  
empowered by the Holy Spirit,**

**LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY  
AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY  
in local communities and worldwide connections.**

That first characteristic isn't first by accident. We begin our series of series with this one because it's where Jesus began. Everything begins with love. The Bishops knew this and started there, too. They even gave us a description to go with it...

*"United Methodists passionately love God and, like Jesus, embrace and include people of every age, nation, race, gender and walk of life."*

This description breaks down into two parts, (and might look a little familiar.) Love God and (paraphrasing the second part,) love others. We'll spend the first two weeks looking at the *loving others* part, and finish with the *loving God* part. Let's dive in.

Now, there have been a million sermons, series, and studies on what it means to love others. So, for the basics, go find one of those. Instead, for the next 3 weeks, we are going to focus on what takes that love to the next level. See, that second word of this characteristic

is what makes this difficult. If the statement just said, “love others,” you might respond, “Great! I can do that. I can be nice. I was a Scout... I can help little old ladies across the street. I can even let someone merge in front of me in traffic. It’ll be tough, but \*swallows\* I can do it!” Loving others like this is easy. But darn it, this vision statement (and Jesus) adds another word: *boldly*. Love *boldly*. And that’s where this gets tough. Anyone can be nice. Anyone can smile and say a kind word. But loving boldly the way Jesus did requires so much more.

**Question 1: Given your response to the previous question, does the world “boldly” change your answer? Was your answer bold enough? What might you add to it such that Jesus would say your qualifications for “loving others” was up to his standards?**

## SCRIPTURE

The command Jesus gives to love others comes from the night he had his last supper with his followers, first in chapter 13. He then spends the next 4 chapters talking about what that kind of love looks like. So, that’s where we’ll look, too. He gives them some very difficult examples of what bold love is and then, in chapter 15, sneaks in a comment that describes it better than any other.

**Read John, chapter 15, verses 9 through 13.**

Jesus talks a lot about love, and the disciples are probably thinking, “love others, okay. Got it. Easy Peasy, Jeezy Creezy.” But then he sneaks in a sentence that changes the game. He describes, so that

there is no question, what this love should look like. “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (v.13)

**Question 2: Consider this scripture, specifically verse 13. Jesus gives the command to love others, and then describes how far it could go. How does this strike you? Is it disconcerting to you that Jesus calls potentially for such extreme measures? Discuss!**

## REFLECTION

What does loving boldly look like? It’s possible, in verse 13, Jesus may have simply been hinting at what would happen only a day later. He knew he was about to live this out, laying his life down for his friends. And so, he may just have been letting his followers know how much he loved them, that they would look back on these words after he did this very thing. But, he was also proving a point, “Be nice. Be good, sure. But the kind of radical, reckless, relentless love to which I am calling you is *more* than being nice. It’s more than being polite. The bold love I am calling you to requires such a selfless approach, it will often cost you something... up to, and maybe even including, your life.” What makes love bold? First... it requires...

## SACRIFICE

Loving boldly often requires sacrifice. If it doesn’t cost you anything, it’s probably not bold enough. If it’s easy, it’s probably not bold enough.<sup>1</sup> Jesus said that others will know his followers by their love. Doing nice things isn’t enough. Everyone does nice things these days.

But *sacrifice*? That still gets people's attention. We've come a long way since the first century Roman Empire in terms of helping our fellow humans. But, sadly, we still live in a me-first world. We, even as Christ-followers, often make sure we've taken care of ourselves before we take care of others. Jesus calls us to something more radical... and *sacrifice* takes love to a bold level.

**Question 3: Consider an instance when someone has sacrificed for you. What did it mean to you that they would give up something for themselves so that you could be taken care of?**

How do we approach sacrifice? Well, let's explore two tips that can set us up to show this kind of love. First, sacrifice that leads to loving boldly starts with being self-less. That may seem obvious, but it's shockingly easy to forget. Even those of us with the best of intentions still bury our heads in our phones, wrap ourselves up in our "to do" list, and become completely oblivious to the rest of humanity. Here's your challenge. The rest of today, the rest of this week, open your eyes to the world around you. Look at the people you are on this planet with. When you're at the park at your 8<sup>th</sup> kids-pitch softball game of the week, or shopping at Target for that next pair of Crocs, take a moment, (maybe even right now if you're doing this study at a public place,) and look at the people in the room with you. (Don't be creepy, just look.) Really look at the people around you and ask, what need might they have that I can fulfill? Remember the description that our Bishops gave for this characteristic of a disciple? Love God, but then also... "*like Jesus, embrace and include people of every age,*

*nation, race, gender and walk of life.”* You can’t do this if you are wrapped up in you. You can’t embrace the world around you if you are only focused on yourself. You can’t include ages, nations, races, genders, and walks of life, if you don’t adjust your vision to see them. Ask the question, how might I be able to show them God’s love, and God will give you the opportunity to make a sacrifice to show them the kind of bold love Jesus has called you to. Which leads to the second tip for bold, sacrificial love... say “yes.” If you have your eyes open, thinking about the needs of others, God will give you the opportunity to prove your love for them, and then, all you have to do, is say “yes.”

**Question 4: What prevents you from showing a bold kind of love for others? What would free you up to do more of the kind of sacrificial love Jesus talks about? Share example of a time when you feel you got this right. (As Yogi Berra said, “it ain’t braggin’ if ya done it.” It’s okay to acknowledge the wins.)**

## CLOSING

At first glance, a command to love others can seem easy. But when Jesus says, “love others *as I have loved you*,” and then spells out what that means, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” this gets pretty radical pretty quick. Jesus loved boldly. And if the world is going to see Jesus through the way we love, we must follow his lead. Love boldly. Love with such a reckless, relentless love that the world cannot help but see Christ through you. Begin with sacrifice. What can you give up that will show someone else

God's love? Open your eyes to the world around you, and when the opportunity presents itself, say "yes." Make the sacrifice. Lay down your life a little. You never know whose world you might transform.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations  
and close in prayer.**

<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: the definition of *sacrifice* intended here is only that which Jesus displayed, one of putting others before yourself, focusing on the needs of those around you. Jesus's sacrificial love in no way suggests that you should simply endure bullying or abuse, or putting yourself in situations at the cost of your own safety. If you are in a situation like this, please seek help. Jesus wants better for you.