

CHAPTER 7

LOVING PEOPLE

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
—John 13:34

As we finish this study on following Jesus, I can't think of a better way to wrap it up than by talking about love—which is the essence of our Savior.

The Bible says in 1 John 4:8 that “God is love.” Love is such a powerful force on the earth. Every time we love someone, we display the very heart and nature of the Savior we follow. Nothing is more attractive than love. In the first chapter we read about Jesus telling us that the greatest and most important commandment is to love God with all that we are—but then he also says:

And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
—Matthew 22:39

Jesus reminds us that everything comes down to loving God and loving people. Genuine love is the primary distinguishing characteristic of a follower of Jesus.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
—John 13:34-35

Jesus says, “As I loved you, so you *must* love one another.” We often feel like love has to be deserved before it's given. But as

someone who has received the unbelievable grace and love of God, how can we not extend love to others?

FORGIVE FREELY

Forgiveness is a hallmark of Christianity because it's a hallmark of Jesus. Jesus forgave us, so we must forgive others when they sin against us. Many people live crippled lives because they withhold forgiveness. Jesus tells a story about a man who has so much debt he'd never be able to repay it. The king forgives all the debt and sets him free. Then he goes and throws his friend in prison over a small amount of debt. The king is angry and replies,

I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.
Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I
had on you?

—Matthew 18:32-33

Someone may owe you because of what they've done or haven't done to you, but nothing compares to the forgiveness that Jesus has extended to us. God expects us to cancel the debt or the offenses of others, just like Jesus did for us.

LOVE IN ACTION

Little children (believers, dear ones), let us not love [merely in theory] with word or with tongue [giving lip service to compassion], but in action and in truth [in practice and in sincerity, because practical acts of love are more than words].

—1 John 3:18 (AMP)

Our human nature tends to be selfish and self-centered, but God calls on us to live a life of love. Love is so much more than a feeling. Love is sacrifice; love is considering the needs of others before your own. Love may begin with words, but must go beyond words to action.

Most of the time loving your neighbor as yourself will translate into giving of yourself in some way. It may be through your

time, your money, or your wisdom. God himself went beyond words when he showed us his love on the cross. John 3:16 reminds us that God so loved that he GAVE.

“WE ARE NEVER MORE LIKE JESUS
THAN WHEN WE LOVE.”

As we follow Jesus, let’s give ourselves fully to loving God and allowing the love of God to flow through us to the world around us. God is passionately pursuing the people around you; allow God to love them through your life. Following Jesus is a life of love. Love calls us to reach out to meet the needs of the world around us, and love compels us to lead people to the only love that really satisfies— the love of Jesus!

Follow the way of love.
—1 Corinthians 14:1

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CHAPTER CHALLENGE

STUDY IT THROUGH:

What does love cover? 1 Peter 4:8

Did God wait for us to get it right before he loved us? Romans 5:8

Whose interests are you supposed to consider first?
Philippians 2:3-4

WALK IT OUT:

- Take time today to thank God for his great love for you!
- Take time to think of people who have hurt you and choose to forgive them today.
- Consider someone who needs your help. What can you do? Is there a local outreach that you could give to or volunteer for in order to show the love of Jesus?