

Living Like Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 9:36, Mark 10:21, Luke 10:30–37, Matt. 25:31–46, Luke 6:32–35, John 15:4–12.*

Memory Text: “‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another’ ” (*John 13:34, NKJV*).

Contrary to what many think, the command to love our neighbor is not something newly taught by the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God already had commanded His people to “love your neighbor as yourself” (*Lev. 19:18, NKJV*) and to “love [the stranger] as yourself” (*vs. 34, NKJV*).

Why, then, did Jesus say, “‘A new commandment I give to you’ ” (*NKJV*)? The newness of Jesus’ instruction was in that it had a new measure: “‘as I have loved you’ ” (*NKJV*). Before the incarnation of Christ, men did not have a full manifestation of God’s love. Now, through His selfless life and death, Jesus demonstrated the real and deepest meaning of love.

“Love was the element in which Christ moved and walked and worked. He came to embrace the world in the arms of His love. . . . We are to follow the example set by Christ, and make Him our pattern, until we shall have the same love for others as He has manifested for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 27.

This week, as we consider Jesus’ tender, sympathetic, considerate, and compassionate life, let our hearts be touched and molded by His divine active principle of love, which is the watermark of true Christianity.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.

How Jesus Lived

In spite of being constantly under Satan’s fiercest attacks, Jesus lived an unselfish life of loving service. His priority was always centered on other people, not on Himself. From childhood to the cross, He showed a constant tender disposition to minister to others. His willing hands were ever ready to relieve every case of suffering He perceived. He lovingly cared for those who were considered by society to be of little value, such as children, women, foreigners, lepers, and tax collectors. He “ ‘did not come to be served, but to serve’ ” (*Matt. 20:28, NKJV*). Therefore, He “ ‘went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil’ ” (*Acts 10:38, NKJV*). His sympathy and merciful interest for the well-being of others were more important to Him than satisfying His own physical need for food or shelter. Indeed, even at the cross He cared more for His mother than He did about His own sufferings (*John 19:25–27*).

What do Matthew 9:36, 14:14, and 15:32 teach us about how Jesus looked at people?

Jesus was sensitive to the needs of people, and He truly cared about them. His heart reached out with compassion to great multitudes that were weary and scattered. He was moved with compassion toward helpless individuals, such as the two blind men near Jericho (*Matt. 20:34*), a pleading leper (*Mark 1:40, 41*), and a widow who had just lost her only son (*Luke 7:12, 13*).

What principle of action guided Jesus as He related to different people? See Mark 10:21 and John 11:5.

Every act of mercy, every miracle, and every word of Jesus was motivated by His infinite love, an unwavering and permanent love. At the end of His life, He vividly showed His disciples that, having loved them from the beginning, “He loved them to the end” (*John 13:1, NKJV*). With His death on the cross, He demonstrated to the entire universe that selfless love triumphs over egoism. In the light of Calvary, it is clear that the principle of self-renouncing love is the only valid foundation of life for earth and heaven.

“ ‘Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends’ ” (*John 15:13, NKJV*). **How do you understand what this means in daily, practical terms? How does one apply this principle day by day?**

Love Your Neighbor

To live like Jesus means to show the same love He demonstrated. He illustrated this kind of love through the parable of the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:30–37*), which He told in dialogue with a lawyer. The lawyer summarized our duty to God and fellow human beings: “ ‘ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself” ’ ” (*vs. 27, NKJV*). The lawyer knew His Bible well (he quoted by heart Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), but he must have felt guilty for not demonstrating love to his neighbor. In an attempt to justify himself, he asked Jesus: “ ‘ Who is my neighbor? ’ ” (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*).

How did Jesus explain who is our neighbor? What implications does the parable of the good Samaritan have for us? See *Luke 10:30–37*. How is the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” related to the golden rule? *Matt. 7:12*.

To the question: “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered, basically, that our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Thus, instead of asking: “What can my neighbor do for me?” we should ask: “What can I do for my neighbor?”

Jesus went far beyond the usual negative rendering of this rule at that time: “do not do to others what you yourself dislike.” By presenting it in a positive way, He addressed not only what we need to avoid but especially what we have to do. We need especially to remember that this principle does not tell us to treat others as they treat us. After all, it’s easy to be kind to those who are kind to us or nasty to those who are nasty to us; most people can do that. Instead, our love toward our neighbor should always be independent of the way our neighbor treats us.

Think of someone who has treated you in a bad way. How have you treated him or her in return? What does Christ’s example, and how He treated those who mistreated Him, teach you about how you could better relate to those who don’t treat you kindly?

Loving Service

What is the basic message of Matthew 25:31–46?

At the final day there will be many surprises. Those at the right hand of the Son of man never imagined that their manifestation of unselfish love would be so decisive. Christ will not commend them for the eloquent sermons they have delivered, the valuable work they have done, or the generous donations they have given. Instead, Christ shall welcome them into heaven for the little caring things done to the least of His brethren.

Those at the left-hand will also be surprised at the reason given by the King for His verdict. Some of them will even say: “ ‘ “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” ’ ” (*Matt. 7:22, NKJV*). Although these are desirable deeds, without a loving attitude they are worthless. These people professed to serve Christ, but the Lord never knew them (*vs. 23*) because they never really loved Him or His brethren. They didn’t practice the principles of true religion (*see James 1:27*).

Commentators have suggested various interpretations regarding who are “the least of these My brethren” (*Matt. 25:40*). It is important to determine who they are in order to know the extent of our Christian responsibility. Some interpreters argue that Jesus’ “least brethren” are the apostles and other Christian missionaries. They find support for this view in Matthew 10:40–42 and conclude that the fate of all human beings depends on how they treat Christian missionaries. Other scholars claim, based on Matthew 12:48–50, that Jesus’ “least brethren” are His followers in general. There is no doubt that all the disciples of Jesus are His brethren; but the scope of Jesus’ words seems to be even wider. Christ “identifies Himself with every child of humanity. . . . He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

Think of a time when you were in desperate need of help, and someone came to your aid. What did that aid mean to you in your suffering and pain? How did that experience show why it’s so important that we be willing to help others who are in need in any way we can?

Love Your Enemies

The supreme proof of genuine Christianity is loving our enemies. Jesus established this high standard in contrast with the prevalent idea of His time. From the commandment, “ ‘ “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” ’ ” (*Lev. 19:18, NKJV*), many had inferred something the Lord never said or planned: you shall hate your enemy. Of course, that wasn’t implied in the text itself.

In what practical ways is love toward our enemies manifested, according to Christ? See *Luke 6:27, 28*.

An adversary can show us enmity in three different ways: hostile attitudes (“hate you”), bad words (“curse you”), and abusive actions (“spitefully use you and persecute you” [*Matt. 5:44, NKJV*]). To this threefold expression of enmity, Christ instructs us to respond with three manifestations of love: doing good actions to them (“do good” to them), speaking well of them (“bless” them), and interceding before God for them (“pray” for them). The Christian’s answer to hostility and antagonism is to “overcome evil with good” (*Rom. 12:21*).

Notice: Jesus requests us first to love our foes and then, as a result, to demonstrate this love through good actions, kind words, and intercessory prayer. Without heaven-inspired love, those actions, words, and prayers would be an offensive and hypocritical forgery of true Christianity.

What reasons did Jesus mention to explain why we have to love our enemies? See *Luke 6:32–35*.

In order to help us to understand this high command, the Lord used three arguments. First, we need to live above the low standards of the world. Even sinners love each other, and even criminals help each other. If following Christ doesn’t raise us to live and love in a way superior to the virtue of the children of this world, what would its value be? Second, God will reward us for loving our enemies; even though we do not love for the reward, He will grant it graciously to us. And third, this type of love is an evidence of our close communion with our heavenly Father, who “ ‘is kind to the unthankful and evil” ’ (*Luke 6:35, NKJV*).

How to Live Like Jesus

Jesus' teachings set such a high ideal of a selfless, loving life that most of us probably feel overwhelmed and discouraged. How can we, who are selfish by nature, love our neighbor unselfishly? Moreover, is it even possible for us to love our enemies? From a human point of view it is utterly impossible.

But the Lord would never ask us to love and serve those who are hateful and unlovable without providing us also with the means to accomplish it. "This standard is not one to which we cannot attain. In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76.

What is the promise underlying the command to love our enemies? It is the assurance that God is kind and merciful to the unthankful and evil (*Luke 6:35, 36*), which includes us. We can love our enemies because God loved us first, even though we were His enemies (*Rom. 5:10*). When we daily reaffirm our acceptance of His loving sacrifice for us on the cross, His self-denying love pervades our lives. The more we realize and experience the Lord's love for us, the more His love will flow from us to others, even to our enemies.

What is the relationship between abiding in Christ and His love and loving our neighbor? See *John 15:4–12*.

Our daily need is not only to accept Christ's death for us again but also to surrender our will to Him and abide in Him. In the way Jesus Himself did not seek His own will but the will of the Father (*John 5:30*), so we need to depend on Jesus and His will. For without Him, we can do nothing.

As we choose every day to submit ourselves to Jesus, He lives in us and through us. Then " 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' " (*Gal. 2:20, NKJV*) and changes my egocentric attitudes into a selfless, loving life.

Read again John 15:4–12. What is the joy that Jesus is talking about there? How can we experience for ourselves the joy that comes from serving Him, even when we don't necessarily feel happy about our immediate circumstances?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505; and “The Least of These My Brethren,” pp. 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“All around us are poor, tried souls that need sympathizing words and helpful deeds. There are widows who need sympathy and assistance. There are orphans whom Christ has bidden His followers receive as a trust from God. . . . They are members of God’s great household, and Christians as His stewards are responsible for them. ‘Their souls,’ He says, ‘will I require at thine hand.’”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 386, 387.

“It is not the greatness of the work which we do, but the love and fidelity with which we do it, that wins the approval of the Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 At first sight, the parable of the sheep and the goats seems to teach that salvation is by works; that is, the more good works we do, the better our chances of getting into the kingdom of God. But the surprise of the saved ones shows that they did not demonstrate love in order to gain merits. Jesus clearly taught that eternal life is the result of believing in Him (*John 3:15; 6:40, 47; 11:25, 26*). True loving deeds come from faith and love to God (*Gal. 5:6*). These deeds are the evidence, not the cause, of salvation. How can we endeavor to act in a loving manner while, at the same time, avoiding the trap of thinking that we are doing these things in order to earn our right to heaven? Why must we always distinguish between the fruit of salvation and the means?
- 2 It’s one thing to love your “enemies” when they are nothing but annoying, unfriendly creatures, such as difficult coworkers, rude acquaintances, or ungrateful neighbors. That’s hard enough. But what about true enemies, people who have done you harm or who intended to do you or your family harm? How are we to love them?
- 3 People can argue with us over our theology, doctrine, lifestyle, pretty much everything. But who can argue against unselfish, disinterested love? Unselfish love reveals a power that transcends rational or logical argument. How can we learn to express this love, no matter the cost to ourselves?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 13:34*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Examine Jesus' personal lifestyle and teachings to derive a biblical understanding of love.

Feel: Passionately desire the replication of Jesus' loving lifestyle through his or her daily choices.

Do: Practice loving through forbearing attitudes, forgiving dispositions, and practical service.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus' Lifestyle and Teachings Define Authentic Love.

A Because loving as Jesus loved is obviously predicated upon knowing *how* Jesus loved, what loving actions did Jesus take that you find most memorable?

B Which of Jesus' narratives or parables best define the meaning of love for you?

C Loving neighbors and strangers may be challenging enough, but how can people love their enemies?

II. Feel: God Instills That Passionate Desire to Love as Jesus Loved Within Believers' Hearts.

A How can studying Christ's loving lifestyle uproot our inherent selfishness, replacing it with active compassion?

B How can Christians avoid that isolation from suffering that insulates them from actively loving the downtrodden?

C How can believers overcome feelings of vengeance against those who have wronged them and, instead, actually love them?

III. Do: Christ's Love Is Expressed Through Practical Actions and Humble Attitudes.

A How can believers exercise patience during stressful times?

B How should Christians respond to the accusation that forgiving actually excuses transgression, thus encouraging further hurtful actions?

C How can Christians become more active within their communities in expressing Christ's love through practical service?

► **Summary:** Living like Christ signifies loving like Christ because Christ is love.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 13:34, 15:4–12, Luke 6:27–35, 10:30–37, Mark 10:21*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: *Jesus is the quintessential demonstration of love. As His followers behold His loving character, they are changed into His likeness as loving and lovable Christians.*

Opening Activity: Music, often called love’s language, presents several golden opportunities for launching our investigation about loving like Jesus loved. Give class members the opportunity to sing about God’s love. Memorized lyrics, hymnals or other songbooks, where available, and contemporary Christian lyrics from several Internet sites are all possible sources of music. An option would be surveying your hymnals for compositions that glorify Christ’s loving character. Hymns 181–199 concentrate especially on Christ’s love. (Younger classes may prefer accessing contemporary Christian lyrics from several Internet sites, distributing printouts of these in addition to hymns.) Have members share concepts from these songs, telling how the lyrics affect their understanding of love. Someone might be designated to record and classify the concepts. The simplest classification system would probably have three headings: divine love demonstrated through (1) Creation, (2) Redemption, and (3) daily sustenance. More specificity is acceptable; avoid, however, overly complicated categorization.

An interesting alternative would involve comparing secular lyrics with Christian lyrics. How does Christ-centered love compare with Hollywood-style love? Which version of love is self-centered, shallow, sentimental, and uncertain, and why? Which is self-effacing, concerned about others, self-sacrificial, and everlasting, and why? Which type offers the sturdiest foundation for building God’s kingdom of love, and why?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus Lived Love *(Review Matthew 20:28, 25:31–46, John 11:5, 15:13, and Luke 10:30–37 with your class.)*

Love without action is dead. The beloved disciple wrote, “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So we also ought to

give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God” (*1 John 3:16–19, NLT*). Self-abnegation, a service orientation, and practical love characterized Jesus’ ministry. From Christ’s viewpoint, everyone was included—elderly people, youth, foreigners, children, aristocrats, social outcasts, soldiers, and fishermen. His unencumbered personal lifestyle channeled His energy and finances into a loving ministry.

Jesus embodied the principles of Leviticus that admonished Israel to love neighbors and strangers (*Lev. 19:18, 34*). But by the time He began His ministry, territorial conflicts and religious intolerance had scuttled any realistic attempts to realize these ideals. Present circumstances notwithstanding, Christ overturned Jewish intolerance, embracing Romans, Greeks, Syrophenicians, Samaritans, demoniacs, lepers, and others. Jesus embodied universal love. His parable extolling the virtues of an unnamed Samaritan traveler spoke of universal acceptance. Character rather than skin pigmentation determined virtue. Neighbors had been redefined as anyone in need and, more important, as being a neighbor by serving a need.

Later Jesus would frame the requirement for service within the context of apocalyptic judgment. The standard Jewish interpretation of prophetic utterances pointed toward a closing scene wherein God would judge the nations with various outcomes. Jesus blends this backdrop with current husbandry practices in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. While sheep and goats grazed together during daylight hours, Palestinian shepherds typically separated them after sunset. Goats seemingly required greater warmth while sheep preferred open spaces. Jesus figuratively projects this forward to the final assize when God’s faithful people are separated from those destined for damnation. The pivotal point is how they have served Christ in the figures of societal outsiders. Mistreatment is never alleged against the condemned faction. Their conviction is solely based on withholding treatment. Ignorance was disallowed as a mitigating factor. Thus, Jesus elevated and personalized the importance of serving everyone without distinctions.

Consider This: Based on Jesus’ earthly ministry, define the meaning of loving service.

II. Love Your Enemies (*Review Luke 6:27–35, Matthew 5:44, and Romans 12:21 with your class.*)

Years ago the gospel message swept through the Solomon Islands, transforming cannibals into deacons within a generation. Among those converts were two chieftains named Panapa and Tamati. Before their conversion, there was intertribal warfare involving their opposing villages. Panapa had murdered Tamati's father and then cannibalized him. Although living in different locations, they found themselves attending the same church. Communion was being served. Tamati's emotions boiled over. Enraged, he exited the church. The thought of his father's murderer celebrating Communion overwhelmed him. What hypocrisy! Before traveling very far, Tamati began retracing his steps into the building where Communion was still underway. He was hardly seated when his resentment resurfaced and he hastily withdrew. Outside the church his conscience awakened. He pondered his own spiritual condition and realized that if the gospel were ever to flourish and transform the islands, he must learn to forgive. With great difficulty, he returned to the church once more, still wounded from his loss but finally at peace. When the worship service concluded, the men tearfully embraced, and an island was united. Two liberated men emerged from church. Panapa was liberated from his shameful actions. Tamati was liberated from his thirst for revenge.

Consider This: Why is it impossible to live and love like Jesus if you have not forgiven your enemies? What burdens might you shoulder because you cannot forgive? What freedoms might you enjoy whenever that is reversed?

►STEP 3—Apply

Activity: Break into small groups of two to four people and compose a list of practical ways to love as Jesus loved. Think of specific scriptural narratives and identify the people whom Jesus served. Find their closest parallel in modern society and discuss ways that individuals or, perhaps, your class can love them as Jesus would. Reassemble the class and invite the smaller groups to share their ideas with the entire group. (Some ideas may gather support for future outreach activities.)

Now transition to the second part of the activity. You will need a small piece of lumber (e.g., a 2 x 4 board) and a metal support bracket that fits the size of lumber you are using. Before class, cut across the wood about one-quarter-inch deep. In class show the lumber, pointing out the quarter-inch gash. Ask, "Will the lumber be as strong as it could have been without the gash?" Obviously, the answer is No. Next, display the bracket and demonstrate how it could restore some of the lost strength. The point is that nearly everyone has been wounded at some point. Those wounds will immobilize us if we let them. Emotionally crippled people cannot love as Jesus loved, but Christ's restorative power can reestablish strength so that we may love as Jesus loved.

Substitute Activity (if no supplies are available): Break into small groups of two to four people and compose a list of practical ways to love as Jesus loved. Think of specific scriptural narratives and identify the people whom Jesus served. Find their closest parallel in modern society and discuss ways that individuals or, perhaps, your class can love them as Jesus would. Reassemble the class and invite the smaller groups to share their ideas with the entire group. (Some ideas may gather support for future outreach activities.)

Now transition to the second part of the discussion. Satan weakens our effectiveness and stability through sin. Every member of the human race possesses inherited and cultivated weaknesses. Everyone needs external support to mitigate those weaknesses. Jesus provides that support, which must originate beyond ourselves. The point is that nearly everyone has been wounded at some point. Those wounds will immobilize us if we let them. Emotionally crippled people cannot love as Jesus loved, but Christ's restorative power can reestablish strength so that we may love as Jesus loved.

►STEP 4—Create

Activity: Take one or two of the Christian songs used to open the class and, based upon this week's study and class discussion, craft additional lyrics. They might be worshipful, expressing renewed appreciation for Christ's love. They might be visionary, expressing fresh approaches for sharing Christ's love. Sing your new stanzas during future worship services or for some other church function. Close the study with prayer that God's Spirit will open opportunities to love as Jesus loved and that your class will be willing to answer the call.