

Living Like Christ



SABBATH—AUGUST 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 9:36; Mark 10:21; Luke 10:30–37; Matthew 25:31–46; Luke 6:32–35; John 15:4–12.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I give you a new command. Love one another. You must love one another, just as I have loved you’ ” (John 13:34, NlrV).

THE COMMAND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR IS NOTHING NEW. In the Old Testament, God already had commanded His people to “ ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Leviticus 19:18, NKJV) and to “ ‘love him [the stranger] as yourself’ ” (verse 34, NKJV).

Then why did Jesus say, “ ‘A new commandment I give to you’ ” (NKJV)? Jesus’ teaching was new because it had a new addition: “ ‘as I have loved you’ ” (NKJV). Before Christ came to earth, men did not have a full example of God’s love. But now, through His selfless life and death, Jesus showed the real and deepest meaning of love.

“Love was at the heart of all that Christ said and did. He came to hold the world in the arms of His love. . . . We are to follow the example shown by Christ, and make Him our Example. This we should do until we shall have the same love for others as He has shown to us.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, page 27.

This week we should think about Jesus’ loving, thoughtful, and merciful life. Let our hearts be touched and influenced by His active principle (important rule) of love. This is the perfect example of true Christianity.

HOW JESUS LIVED (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus was always under Satan's fiercest attacks. But He lived an unselfish life of loving service. His important goal was always centered on other people, not on Himself. From childhood to the cross, Jesus showed a loving ministry (work done for God) to others. His willing hands were always ready to lessen the suffering of each person. He lovingly cared for those who were not valued greatly by society, such as children, women, foreigners, lepers, and tax collectors. He " 'did not come to be served, but to serve' " (Matthew 20:28, NKJV). So, He " 'went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed [attacked] by the devil' " (Acts 10:38, NKJV). Showing mercy to others was more important to Him than satisfying His own physical need for food or shelter. 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; Matthew 14:14; and Matthew 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 mercy to many people who were weary and scattered. He was moved with mercy toward helpless people, such as the two blind men near Jericho (Matthew 20:34), a begging 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 mixed with different people? Read Mark 10:21 and John 11:5.

Every act of mercy, every miracle, every word of Jesus was influenced by His limitless love. At the end of His life, Jesus clearly 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, Jesus showed the entire universe that selfless love is greater than egoism.¹ The Cross makes it clear that the principle of selfless love is the only meaningful way to live our lives.

" 'No one has greater love than the one [person] who gives his life for his friends' " (John 15:13, NIV). How do you understand what this means to you in daily life? How does a person, day by day, do this?



Even at the cross, Jesus cared more for His mother than His own sufferings.

DEFINITIONS

1. egoism—the belief that each of us should act in such a way as to put our own interests first, ahead of the interests of others.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR (Matthew 7:12)



Our neighbor is everyone who needs our help.



Our love toward our neighbor should be independent of how our neighbor treats us.

DEFINITIONS

2. parable—a short story that teaches a spiritual lesson or truth.

3. the golden rule—the biblical principle (law; rule) that teaches each one of us to “do to others what you would want them to do to you” (Matthew 7:12, NIV).

To live like Jesus means to show the same love He showed. He showed this kind of love through the parable² of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). There was a lawyer in the crowd that Jesus told the parable to. The lawyer explained that love was our duty to God and fellow humans: “ ‘ “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” ’ ” (verse 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 showing love to his neighbor. He tried to make himself look good by asking Jesus: “ ‘Who is my neighbor?’ ” (Luke 10:29, NKJV).

How did Jesus explain who our neighbor is? What lessons does the parable of the good Samaritan have for us? Read Luke 10:30–37. How is the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” connected to the golden rule?³ Read Matthew 7:12.

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

Jesus also went above the negative thinking of this rule at that time: “do not do to others what you yourself dislike.” He taught His truth in a positive way. He showed what we have to do. We need to remember that this principle does not tell us to treat others as they treat us. It is easy to be kind to those who are kind to us or nasty (impolite) 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 them in return? Christ gave us an example of how He treated those who mistreated Him. What does this teach you about how you could better deal with those who do not treat you kindly?

LOVING SERVICE (Matthew 25:31–46)

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

In the last days, there will be many surprises. Those at the right hand of the Son of Man never imagined that their examples of unselfish love would make such a difference. Christ will not honor them for the smooth sermons they have spoken. He will not praise them for the valuable work they have done. He will not praise them for the donations they have given. Instead, Christ will welcome them into heaven for the little caring things they have done for poor, needy, and suffering people.

Those at the left hand will also be surprised at the reason given by the King for His decision. Some of them will even say, “ ‘ Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied [foretold] in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ” (Matthew 7:22, NKJV). These are “good” deeds. But without a loving and caring attitude (feeling), they are worthless. These people claimed to serve Christ. But the Lord never knew them (verse 23) because they never really loved Him or His people. They did not practice the principles of true religion (read James 1:27).

Bible thinkers have suggested different interpretations about who are “ ‘ the least important of these brothers of mine’ ” (Matthew 25:40, NIV). It is important to really know who they are in order to know what our Christian responsibility is. Some interpreters argue that Jesus’ “least brothers” are the apostles (leaders and teachers) and other Christian missionaries. They find support for this view in Matthew 10:40–42. They believe the future of all humans depends on how they treat Christian missionaries. Other thinkers claim that Jesus’ “least brothers” are His followers, according to Matthew 12:48–50. There is no doubt that all the disciples of Jesus are His brothers. But Jesus’ words seem to cover a wider area. Christ “recognizes Himself as One with every child of the human race [group]. . . . He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 638.

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



Christ recognizes Himself as one with every human child.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES (Luke 6:27, 28)

The greatest proof of true Christianity is loving our enemies. Jesus established this high principle as opposed to the popular idea of His time. From the commandment “ ‘ “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” ’ ” (Leviticus 19:18, NKJV), many thought that it meant something the Lord never said or planned, which was *you shall hate your enemy*. Of course, that is not what the verse itself suggested.

In what useful ways is love toward our enemies shown, according to Christ? Read Luke 6:27, 28.

An enemy can show us hate in three different ways: (1) by a negative attitude (“hate you”), (2) through bad words (“curse you”), and (3) with abusive actions (“ ‘hurt you’ ” [Matthew 5:44, NIV]). To these three types of unkindness, Christ teaches us to act with three examples of love: (1) doing good actions to them (“do good” to them), (2) speaking well of them (“bless” them), and (3) asking God to help them (“pray” for them). The Christian’s answer to unkindness is to “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

Notice that Jesus asks us first to love our enemies and to show this love through good actions, kind words, and selfless prayer. Without love, those actions, words, and prayers would be an insulting and false example of true Christianity.

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

In order to help us to understand this noble command, the Lord used three arguments. First, we need to live above the low standards of the world. Even sinners love one another. Even criminals help one another. If following Christ does not raise us to live and love in a way that is better than the children of this world, what would its value be? Second, God will reward us for loving our enemies. And third, this kind of love gives proof that we are close to our heavenly Father, who “ ‘is kind to the unthankful and evil’ ” (Luke 6:35, NKJV).

HOW TO LIVE LIKE JESUS (John 15:4–12)

Jesus' teachings set a high goal of a selfless, loving life. Most of us may feel we cannot live up to it. We are selfish by nature. But how can we love our neighbor unselfishly? Is it even possible for us to love our enemies? To us humans, it is impossible.

But the Lord would never ask us to love and serve those who are hateful and unlovable without helping us do it. "This goal is not something that we cannot do. In every command that God gives, there is a promise that comes with the command. God has arranged that we may become like [having the same character] Him. And He will do this for all who do not rebel [war] against His will and thus frustrate His grace."⁴—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 76.

What is the promise that comes with the command to love our enemies? It is the promise that God is kind and merciful to the unthankful and evil (Luke 6:35, 36). This includes us. We can love our enemies because God loved us first, even if we were His enemies (Romans 5:10). Daily we must accept His loving sacrifice for us on the cross. Then His self-denying love influences our lives. As we understand and experience the Lord's love for us, His love will flow more and more from us to others, even to our enemies.

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

Our daily need is to accept Christ's death for us again. But we also must surrender our will to Him and stay in Him. Jesus Himself did not do His own will but did 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 surrender ourselves to Jesus, He lives in us and through us. Then "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20, NKJV). And this choice also changes my selfish 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?

DEFINITIONS

4. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “The Good Samaritan,” pages 497–505; and “ ‘The Least of These My Brethren,’ ” pages 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“All around us are poor, suffering souls that need merciful words and kindness. There are widows who need sympathy and help. There are orphans whom Christ has commanded His followers to receive as a trust from God. . . . They are members of God’s great family. And Christians as His servants are responsible for them. He says, ‘I require [ask] you to care for their souls.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 386, 387.

“It is not how great the work is that we do. But it is how we do it with love and faithfulness. This is what wins Christ’s approval [acceptance].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, page 325.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① At first sight, the parable of the sheep and the goats seems to teach that salvation is by works. But the surprise of the saved ones reveals that when they showed love, their purpose was not to gain rewards. Jesus clearly taught that eternal life is the result of believing in Him (John 3:15; John 6:40, 47; John 11:25, 26). True loving actions come from faith and love to God (Galatians 5:6). These actions are the proof, not the cause, of salvation. How can we act in a loving way while, at the same time, avoiding the trap of thinking that we are earning our right to heaven? Why must we always be careful to know the difference between the fruit of salvation and the way of salvation?
- ② It is hard enough to love your enemies when they are simply being unfriendly, rude, and ungrateful. But what about enemies who have done you harm? How are we to love them?
- ③ People can argue with us over our theology (study about God), doctrine (teachings), lifestyle, pretty much everything. But who can argue against unselfish love? Unselfish love shows a power that goes above human reasoning. How can we show this love, no matter how much it costs us?