

Growing in Love

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[0 : 0 0] to the Gospel of John. And for some of you who are new or visiting, we have been working through the Gospel of John. I actually look back to see when the start of this series was, and it looks like it was the start of January 2020.

So we've actually been working through this Gospel for three years now, and here we are going on to year four. So there's a lot in this book of the Bible, and we've tried to really slow it down and linger over the words that are here.

We want to understand what did Jesus mean when he said some of the things that he said, when he did some of the things that he did. What's it all about? Right now, we're in John chapter 15, and this is where we're at in the story of Jesus, in case you're kind of just joining us this morning.

Jesus is right now speaking to his disciples on the evening prior to his crucifixion. So all the public ministry of Jesus, that's already all happened.

We heard John talk about the many miraculous signs that Jesus did, and the teachings that he gave to the crowds. We heard about the tensions rising between Jesus and the religious leaders.

[1 : 1 1] It's estimated that from the time that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and began his public ministry till this point in the story, it's been about three years, and Jesus has now made his last trip down to Jerusalem for the week-long Passover festival.

He entered the city to joyful shouts of, blessed is the king of Israel. But then all through the week, tensions have been rising between Jesus and the religious leaders and some of the Jews who were there.

And we're here now at the end of the week, and Jesus has just eaten that Passover meal with his disciples. Judas has left to put his plan into motion to betray Jesus.

Jesus has been giving some of his last words to the disciples before his death. He's been encouraging them. He's been comforting them. He's been giving them instructions about how to live in these days that are upon them.

First, they were at the place where the supper was eaten. Now they're likely somewhere else in the city or just outside the city, perhaps at a vineyard where they stopped before heading to the Garden of Gethsemane. So we pick it up this morning in John chapter 15, verse 9.

[2 : 3 0] I'm just going to read this paragraph so we can get a little bit of context here. This is Jesus talking to the disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this.

Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business.

[3 : 3 9] Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.

Fruit that will last and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command.

Love each other. As usual, there is a lot here that we could ponder but this morning we want to focus in on one thing Jesus seems to emphasize perhaps the most in this paragraph and it's this command that He gives to His disciples in verse 12.

Love each other or love one another as I have loved you. Now you might be thinking oh man love each other? That's the most obvious thing here.

We all know what that means. Let's go on to the other interesting things that Jesus has to say here. I mean we already talked about love one another back in chapter 13 verse 34.

[4 : 55] If you'll recall Jesus earlier this evening said a new command I give you love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another.

So why do we need to hear this same basic thing again? Well maybe you could tell me why does Jesus the master teacher the greatest teacher who ever walked the earth feel the need to repeat Himself and tell them to love each other three times in the same evening?

There's this one in 13:34 it's here again in 15:12 and it's there again in 15:17 this is my command love each other.

Why does Jesus say it three times to the men who are with Him that night? Well I'll tell you one thing He doesn't have short term memory loss it's not as though He forgot that He said it earlier it's that we the disciples of Jesus need to understand the importance of this.

Probably like the disciples we too are prone to thinking that we've already got it we've already understood it when maybe we haven't or we already know that but are we doing it?

[6 : 22] So saying it three times in one evening I hope gets your attention it sends a clear message to us this command to love one another is very dear to the heart of Christ it's of the utmost importance to us living as followers of Jesus in this world now I already explained in my previous message on June 19th 2022 you can find that sermon on the church website I already explained what makes this command new we talked about this I'm not going to re-preach the whole thing but basically the command to love people is old God gave that command a long time ago at Mount Sinai through Moses love your neighbor as yourself and in that previous message I said that what makes this command new is that we are now called to love one another by a new standard not as we love ourselves but as I have loved you said Jesus there's a new standard

Christ has defined he has modeled how we should love one another and if you were here in that sermon on June 19th you'll recall that I opened it right up for discussion in the middle of the sermon and I asked the question how did Jesus love his disciples and you guys were telling me all kinds of things we talked about how he washed their feet how he spent time with them how he chose them and initiated with them how he was patient with them when they didn't get it how he spoke the truth to them even when it was hard for them to hear it we talked about how he kind of just invited them along for the ride for this great adventure wherever they went he revealed who he was to them he encouraged them like a father does his children one day he made breakfast for them on the beach a little thing but a token of love he forgave them when they sinned against him he cared about their needs even when he was going through his own time of struggle and suffering he did all kinds of wonderful things for them he loved them humbly rather than lording it over them he cared for them when they were sick he loved them when they were proud and argumentative having fights with each other he bore with them when they said hurtful things behind his back he went to their funerals and cried with them he went to their weddings he celebrated with them he helped out with that supply shortage in the back without drawing attention to himself there were some who followed Jesus who were considered untouchables unclean

Jesus was not afraid to touch them to give that human contact and connection that we all need he loved them despite their lowly professions he loved them despite their low social status he never played favorites he didn't give extra time and attention to the wealthy or the prominent ones he spent time with the kids and loved the kids he treated the women with absolute purity he kept his promises and the list goes on and on and on we could just go on all day here these are all the ways in which Jesus loved his disciples and of course most important of all he died for them he gave up his life for them to atone for their sins so what's new about this command to love one another is that we're commanded by Jesus now to love one another as he has loved us and as I said in that previous message this is it this is the most important thing in the

Christian life except of course for the call to love God himself this is it this is Christianity at its core this is why Jesus says it commands them three times in the same evening because once and even twice isn't enough this is just too important to say just once or twice this is the thing that I want my followers to keep coming back to as the most important command I've given aside from loving God love one another as I have loved you it's one of the most important and at the same time it's one of the things that we just struggle with at times and wrestle with I know if I was to ask any of you what

does it mean to love one another what does that look like I'm sure that probably all of you could answer that question even the kids we know what that means we know what love looks like but this is a command we need to go beyond understanding the question is are we actually living this command are we loving one another like Jesus has loved us you know what really struck me as I was meditating on this in the shower

I do a lot of meditation in the shower it's a great place of solitude there's a direct connection here between our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with each other do you see that there's meant to be a flow here as I know and experience Jesus love for me it comes to me first and then it's meant to flow out of me to you to one another do you see that here I'm commanded to love you Charles and my template my example is right here in how Christ has loved me there's a flow there's a connection here but here's the trouble all too easily we as followers of Jesus struggle with a disconnect here we want to enjoy and live in

[13:03] Christ's wonderful love for us but then sometimes the flow stops right there and we don't treat one another the same way Jesus was the one to highlight this problem this tendency in all of us listen to what he said in Matthew chapter 18 verse 23 to 35 it's the parable of the unmerciful servant he said therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants as he began the settlement a man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold was brought to him since he was not able to pay the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt at this the servant fell on his knees before him be patient with me he begged and I will pay back everything the servant's master took pity on him canceled the debt and let him go but when that servant went out he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 silver coins he grabbed him and began to choke him pay back what you owe me he demanded his fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him be patient with me and I will pay it back but he refused instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt when the other servants saw what had happened they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened then the master called the servant in you wicked servant he said

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 in anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart wow what was Jesus getting at when he told this parable of the unmerciful servant I mean isn't it ironic that a man who had been forgiven a massive debt 10,000 bags of gold was unwilling to forgive the much smaller debt of his buddy in this parable we see the disconnect between the king's mercy coming to that servant and the mercy flowing from that servant to his fellow servant

Jesus is saying this disconnect that happens with people it's a problem in fact he says it's wicked God's love God's mercy has been given to you so graciously so freely so generously would you now withhold love and mercy from your brother or your sister now it's easy for us to look at this little parable and agree and say how could he do such a thing what a wicked servant but you know this is not a story that Jesus you know he didn't see somebody that actually did this he made this parable up to teach us a point the point of this parable is to tell you and me what we all too easily do it's to convict us of our lack of love toward one another it's to show us the irony and the audacity of our own attitudes and behaviors when we have been loved and forgiven by

God so much and yet how easily we stop the flow of love and forgiveness to one another so this is why I think Jesus repeats this simple command three times in one night love one another as I have loved you because it's rooted in our sin nature to turn off the taps towards one another and the disciples of Jesus did this a lot they fought with each other they argued with each other they jockeyed for position amongst each other wanting to be first wanting to be the greatest and it broke Jesus heart when they did that because it was so out of sync with the love of God and with the love of Jesus here he was loving them so purely so deeply despite who they were despite the things that they had done and there they were all too happy to soak in

Jesus great love for them but then turn around and treat each other with contempt harboring grudges getting into fights and arguments giving each other the cold shoulder and silent treatment and it wasn't just back then that this disconnect happened in the hearts of Jesus followers it happened years later among the Jesus followers in Corinth Paul wrote a letter to address the divisions that were going on in the church there it happened also among Jesus followers in Philippi

maybe you remember some of those words in Philippians where Paul urges them to not just think of their own interests but think of the interests of one another have the same mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus that humble love and I plead with Lodia and Syntyche to agree with each other many of the

[19 : 52] New Testament letters were written to churches and highlighted interpersonal conflict within the church caused by sinful and selfish attitudes and in many of them instruction was given again and again for the people of the church to love one another sincerely from the heart this disconnect was there and it's been happening ever since then among the followers of Jesus throughout church history and this disconnect happens even here among us followers of Jesus here in Davidson right here in our own church it's something that we participate in on a regular basis every time you say something nasty to hurt someone every time you attempt to control or manipulate someone every time we say something in pride or arrogance standing in judgment over someone every time we act selfishly out of disregard for others what I'm trying to say is that this is a pervasive problem it's not as though some of us are loving like

Jesus did and others are not and let's figure out who's doing a good job and who's not no we all wrestle with this disconnect at some level or in some relationships in our lives and some of us maybe still don't think we have this disconnect maybe we're still pointing the finger at somebody else it's their fault it's the things they're doing and they're saying I've been treating them well I've been loving them ironically just like with the parable of the unmerciful servant there seems to be a sort of blindness towards this disconnect in our lives the servant in the parable seemed to feel absolutely justified to throttle the neck of his fellow servant even after his own neck had just been spared it's like he couldn't even see what he was doing how out of sync that was with what he just received amazingly when we lack love it often seems that along with that we aren't aware of it we're blind to it

I'll give you an example isn't it amazing for those of us who have been parents how we can feel so justified in our frustration and anger and impatience towards our children even saying things unkindly rudely we can be harsh you know what I'm talking about I told you that once already how many times do I have to tell you it's like we're expecting their hearts to change overnight or them to become mature by the end of the week meanwhile we're not becoming mature by the end of the week we hear God saying all kinds of things to us and giving us his commands and yeah I'm still struggling I'm still wrestling with that be patient with me God thank you for your patience but then we turn around and we don't show that same patience to our own kids it's just one example this disconnect is something we all struggle with and how easy it is to be blind to this disconnect in our own lives if you want to grow and become a more loving person just like

Jesus commands here would you do this thing would you ask someone in your life perhaps a family member or a close friend ask them this question am I a loving person do you see me as a truly loving person what do you see in my life that that I need to grow in to become a more loving person to become more like Jesus to love more like he does am I kind am I slow to anger am I quick to listen am I compassionate what do you see in my life now don't ask someone who you know will just tell you what you hope to hear

I think you probably know who some of those people are ask someone you know will tell you the truth and then just humbly listen and thank them for whatever they share with you blindness is a problem where love is lacking over the past year we conducted a membership review here at the church we sat down with all of our church members and we asked them a series of questions we just wanted to get a sense of where people were at and how things are going with people in the church and of course as we began to do that we started thinking about everybody who comes here and where are we at as a church what are those areas in which we need to grow and it was really good we had many good conversations we're still reflecting on those we're still processing those and as we were going through this process one thing just kind of came into my heart as we were doing this and

[25 : 54] I have to say it it's that we here at the Davidson Community Bible Church we need to grow in our love for one another don't get me wrong there were many good things many encouraging things that we we've been looking at over the past year and seeing but this thing of loving one another as Jesus has loved us it's an area where we need to grow as a church now that doesn't mean that there's no love flowing between us that we're totally loveless no there is love and we've seen lots of that over the past year we've seen people caring for each other we've watched

as people go and meet the needs of others in the church we've seen people serving each other doing sweet things for each other offering words of encouragement to each but there is still room for us to grow in our love for one another here in the

Davidson Community Bible Church one of the things that I have been noticing is that we and I'm going to include myself in this many of us are just not good at handling conflict and I'll be the first to acknowledge that conflict with other people is hard nobody likes conflict we want peace we want unity but we see these dynamics at times people afraid to speak the truth and love worried that it's going to start an argument or start a fight I hear people tell me things about other people that's kind of what happens when you're the pastor and I hold those things in confidence oftentimes it goes something like this somebody did or said something and

I'm upset about it it offended me and you weren't able to just overlook it and let it go because you're still hanging on to it even at this point as I'm hearing about it and instead of going to that person and talking with them telling them how you're feeling how what they said or did hurt you or offended you you've been kind of just holding on to that offense and it's been festering and suddenly the way you see that brother or sister is in a negative light without even realizing it you misinterpret things that they say assume the worst of their intentions become suspicious suddenly there becomes a whole list of things that you start to notice about this person and it's growing and it's affecting your relationship with that person the way you interact with them and treat them and suddenly you don't want to be around them or talk with them at church anymore or if you have to keep it shallow keep it pleasant some of you are holding on to bitterness and grievances some of you may think

I'm singling you out in front of the church right now but I promise I'm not I've heard and seen and watched this similar kind of thing happen quite a few times between a variety a number of people in our midst over the past five years and I don't want you to start looking around the room and wondering who are the offended and who are the offenders instead I want to encourage each one of you to pray and to ask God about yourself I want you to ask God about your relationships with each other person in this room in this church I want to encourage you to humble yourself and ask God where the disconnect has been happening in your life between his love coming in and your love going out to one another don't assume it's all someone else that's at fault you know some of these conflicts have been resolved and that's a joy for me to see and watch as a pastor people have had the heart to heart conversation they've admitted fault to one another apologized and asked for forgiveness but it's interesting to me how many times in those situations the person that said something or did something to offend they weren't even aware that they offended you or did something to offend you or hurt you misunderstanding creeps in so easily and the enemy loves to take a hold of those things and run with them to divide us the kind of love that

Jesus has for us it's not easy to love each other like that it takes effort it takes courage it takes intentionality it takes heart but that's what Christ has commanded and that's what he has demonstrated to each one of us would you receive that wonderful love from him and yet withhold it from a brother or sister the gospel is not that we will ever be good enough to deserve God's love or each other's love the gospel is that God has loved us through Christ and made us one with each other in him one body one faith one Lord one spirit okay okay I get it yes I need to love my fellow Christians but that doesn't mean I need to like them right that doesn't mean I need to be best friends with them right this is an attitude

[32 : 31] I've heard and seen in our church as well and it too falls short of the love that Christ has commanded you've heard it said that we are the Bible that most people read I wonder what kind of Bible people outside this church are reading when they interact with you outside these walls do they read from your life a love like Jesus has for us or in the Bible they read from you did Jesus say this is my command just tolerate each other yes I have seen and heard this expressed in our own church just tolerate each other that's good enough that's that's that's being faithful and it might actually describe many of the relationships that some of us are used to having with difficult people in families or friends but it still falls short of how

Jesus has loved us did he just put up with those twelve men did he just tolerate them we know his love went way way beyond that we just saw how he washed the feet of Judas knowing what was in his heart and Jesus is saying here that our love it must go beyond that too not just tolerate but love one another as I have loved you doesn't mean that there won't be conflict it doesn't mean that we will never say things or do things to hurt or offend each other we will things won't always be pleasant but yes it does mean that we have to be friends it does mean that we have to be in each

other's lives more than that it means that we are family in the Lord Jesus brothers and sisters forever and here's the good news with God's help by the power of his spirit that lives in us we don't have to be a dysfunctional and divided arguing fighting family we see that happen in our world that's normal for many but with

God's power with his spirit in us we can actually rise above that but it starts with all of us humbly admitting to God that we fall short of this glorious kind of love that he has commanded it starts with all of us asking him to change our hearts to teach us that way of real authentic kindness gentleness compassion compassion humility and so this is something that I especially want to grow in myself this year in 2023 by God's grace I'm praying that God will make me a more loving person more like Jesus in the way that I think about and treat each one of you the way I think about and treat each person in my family

I want to encourage you to make it your prayer too in this year is there someone in this church who you need to sit down with and apologize to is there someone in this church who you need to talk to because they've wronged you and you can't seem to overlook it maybe there's something they said or did it's just eating you up inside it's festering what did Jesus say Matthew 18 verse 15 if your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault just between the two of you if they listen to you you have won them over or Colossians 3 13 bear with each other it's another word for tolerate so yes tolerate is part of it bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone forgive as the Lord forgave you do you have a grievance against someone in this church that you've been carrying for a while

I want to say to each one of you this morning if there is anything that I have said or done that has offended or hurt you please tell me come talk to me as far as it depends on me I want to take responsibility for that and I want to make it right this is so important for us as a church if we grow in every other way as a church but fail in this way to love one another as Christ has loved us it can spoil and hinder everything as Paul says in that famous love chapter 1st Corinthians 13 we could have all the faith in the world faith enough to move mountains we could understand all mysteries have all knowledge we could have all the giftedness all the self sacrifice and devotion to God but if we don't have love it all amounts to nothing everything is at stake with this one command of [38 : 18] Christ love one another as I have loved you it has to flow from him to us and from us to each other it's by this that everyone will know that we are disciples of Jesus let's pray father in heaven we want to confess we want to admit our own failings to you forgive us for the times when we have not shown the love you modeled to one another forgive us for the times we've hurt people said things we shouldn't have said done things we shouldn't have done thank you Lord Jesus that you died so that we could be forgiven of all of it and now we pray and ask that you would you would come and fix that disconnect in our hearts more and more so that more and more we would be a living testimony to your love for us your awesome love for us please do that work in us we we ask and pray for your glory and for your joy

Jesus amen happen you yeah you amen