

John 13:31-38 “A Life of Love”

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Date: 18 August 2024

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. Thank you, Chad. Let's continue that prayer together. Will you pray with me? Father, we may not sing exactly like that, but would you make our hearts echo with that desire? Would you take our lives? Would they be yours? Would they be consecrated to you? We surrender control, that illusion of control that we have, and we ask that you would shape us, Father, even now by your word and by your spirit, that we might be yours, that we might love as you love. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Turn with me to John chapter 13. John 13, where we just last week saw Jesus washing his disciples' feet, lowering himself to love them, to lead them.

[1 : 21] Quite a few of you have remarked to me since last week how beautiful his humble service is, and yet at the same time how hard such humble service is.

I agree with both of those. How thankful I am that we have both the example of Jesus and the spirit of Jesus with us.

We so need that as we live with him and for him. We're going to need both of those again this morning. Remember Jesus here in his last night before the cross is commissioning, is charging his followers with vital marching orders.

What are they going to do when he's gone? And now Judas slips out the door to betray Jesus and Jesus ramps up the intensity even a little further at verse 31.

When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and glorify him at once.

[2 : 33] Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, where I am going you cannot come.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? And Jesus answered him, where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward. And Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now?

I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Thus far God's holy word that endures forever, for which we give him great thanks. Whose disciple are you?

[3 : 44] Who do you spend the most time with or listening to? Who most shapes the way you spend the rest of your time each day and each week?

Maybe it's the business guru whose books you've read over and over so you learn habits of efficiency and productivity and success. Organizing your business, investing your money, structuring your day exactly the way he does.

And other people who follow him recognize that you're living more and more like him. Maybe it's the influencer with your favorite life hacks and advice.

You watch and listen multiple times a day. You eat when she tells you to. You sleep and wake when you're told. You share her advice with others all the time.

Friends who follow her have heard you talking and they've started to recognize you're living more and more like her. Maybe you're a disciple of Jesus.

[4 : 51] How would you know? That's an important question to answer, isn't it? It's something we're going to be talking about with our grace group leaders today and more and more.

That we're going to be processing together with one another. What would it mean if I was a disciple of Jesus? Does it make me a disciple to go to church some Sundays? What about if I tell people I'm a Christian?

Is that it? Well, do you spend much time with Jesus? Does he shape the way that you live every day?

What you do and how you do it? Do people who know you recognize you living more and more like him? These are the kinds of questions Jesus' first disciples are facing, aren't they?

Jesus says that he's about to be gone from them and they all along have been identified very easily as his disciples because they're the band of people walking around with that rabbi.

[5 : 59] Those are Jesus' disciples. But when he leaves, how will their lives reflect that they're his disciples?

Unfortunately for them, they did not have cars that you could put a fish on the back of or a bumper sticker. And it would be so easy. Then everybody would know you're a disciple of Jesus.

But Jesus has a better idea than that, actually. Love. I know you didn't see that one coming, right?

This is shocking. I came to church this morning and the message is that Jesus calls those of us who want to follow him to live a life of love that's new and unexpected.

No, it's not complicated or confusing, the message Jesus gives here. It's too late for anything like that, right? It's his last night with him. Love one another.

[7 : 00] Just as I have loved you, love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

As Jesus sends his followers out here, you're going to notice him using this word love a lot. Agape love.

It's quite frequent here in these next five chapters we're going to work through this fall. It sounds familiar, perhaps, that we're to love.

Whether you've been in church before or not, you've probably heard it. But Jesus actually says here it's a new commandment. Why would he say that?

I mean, the command to love one another is in the Old Testament multiple times. As Jesus here this Thursday night institutes the new covenant in his blood, what is new about this new commandment?

[8 : 01] We'll see a couple aspects of this newness. But one to start with is the root of the life of love. It's source.

It's power. Love, Jesus says, as I have loved you. This life of love Jesus is calling us to grows from sinking your roots deep into the soil of his love.

And I mean deep because as we saw last week, he is going low, right? He is stooping to wash their dirty feet. He's getting ready to die for them.

In fact, notice as soon as Judas goes to betray him to his death, Jesus announces, now is my glory coming. Not just his glory, but God's glory.

God the Father and God the Son glorified together, given appropriate weight, lifted up high. Where? On the cross.

[9 : 12] By a sacrificial death will he be glorified. Amazing love. How can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?

The love of Jesus is now the new source of power for our love. And that's great because we're walking with him now, right, Southwood?

We've talked all summer. How are we walking with Jesus? Spending time with him as his disciples. We're wanting to be marked by his cross-shaped love.

That's our heart's desire. And in a way never before seen or experienced by anyone ever loved, by anyone else in all of history, this love is going to have to involve what?

Sacrifice. As we saw last week, you have to lower yourself to love someone else. It's costly.

[10 : 13] Agape love stoops. See, when Jesus tells us to love one another, he's not just telling us to be generally nice people. Certainly not to be doormats without passions or convictions.

That's not it. Rather, it's to live sacrificially, passionately. And some of us object to this call right here, if we're honest. I mean, ask yourself in your heart.

Do you feel something like, love doesn't pay the bills? I mean, maybe you've thought, I'm just trying to provide for my family.

I don't have time for sacrificial love. Or, come on, Will, all day long, all I'm doing is taking care of these kids and trying to get them where they're supposed to go.

A life of love sounds like a great thing in some other life. When you give me a second set of days to work with, I hear you.

[11 : 15] And we all need to hear Jesus saying, here's life. Here's what you need to do. Love one another.

I'm going to work this kind of love in you, but I'm calling you to wash one another's feet. I'm calling you to sacrifice for your brother or sister. I'm sending you to live for me by loving my people.

Oh yes, love God. Of course, the first and greatest. Of course, love your neighbor, the second that's like it. In fact, love your enemy. But especially here, disciples of Jesus, love one another.

Third century church father, Cyprian of Carthage said, no one can love the head and hate the body. That's the focus here.

It's a beautiful thing. A life of love. But I don't want to lie to you. It's not comfortable or clean or easy, this kind of love.

[12 : 25] Some months ago, I shared with many of you how a leak under our house had caused some serious problems.

And we discovered it under my house in my crawl space. And I told you how utterly uncertain I was how to handle any of it. I don't really know how to change a light bulb. Now, if you've never been in a crawl space, I need you to get a little bit of a picture of what a crawl space is.

Most of them, especially if they've had a long-term leak in them like ours, they are characterized by darkness. Mud.

Spiders. Mold. Rotten subfloor. And rancid water. Yes, gross. That's what they are.

They're disgusting places to be. And yet, I came home that day to a guy from my grace group crawling around in my crawl space.

[13 : 29] With industrial fans, water pumps, flashlights, everything you need under there. He was crawling around in filth to love me and my family.

Southwood, so many of you have loved us in so many ways over the years. But that moment pictured that lowering, stooping, sacrificial love really, really well.

Novelist Walker Percy said this so beautifully. We love those who know the worst of us and don't turn their faces away. That's agape love.

Moving toward the mess, not turning away from it. Even laying down our lives for our brothers, Jesus says elsewhere.

It cost my friend money to rent equipment. Other money he could have made if he were at his job time with his family. The discomfort of being covered in all that stuff and probably not smelling real great over many days ahead.

[14 : 36] Sacrificial love. It's actually not to be unusual among us. It's to be a lifestyle, right?

What does sacrificial love look like for you? What does it cost you? You do what in your retirement? That doesn't sound relaxing. You do that for other people's kids and grandkids? Every week you do that? Yes, many of you do serve and teach and pray for the youngest in this family.

Some of our oldest do this most often. Yes, because you promised once upon a time on a day like today that you would do that. But I've heard you and I know that the biggest reason you do it is because you long for the next generation to know the sacrificial love of Jesus.

And even before they know to recognize it in you, you're pouring it back into them. Many of you sacrifice your time caring for your own kids.

[15 : 51] You sacrifice your health, your plans, your dreams, caring for your kids. Some of you for others' kids as well. Kids, I know you sacrifice too, by the way.

You may be asking this morning, how do I love my parents when they are so ridiculous? Don't raise your hand, okay? You just tell me, okay?

It's between me and you. You may have to sacrifice. It may involve sacrifice, kids, of what you think is best in order to love the parents God has given you.

You may be asking, how do I love my spouse who is so selfish? You'll have to sacrifice some of your comfort, die to some of your own desires if you're going to love like Jesus.

How do I love my friend whose needs are so extensive, whose mental illness is so persistent, whose requests are so inconvenient?

[17 : 00] And y'all, in these and many other situations, a life of love requires sacrifice, doesn't it? And yet it is the repeated call of our king.

It's not unclear to love one another. Can I push in just one more way? Love one another even across our differences.

Did you know Jesus' 12 disciples voted differently? Significant political diversity among the disciples. No room for hatred along party lines in Jesus' church.

No room at all for classism, racism, sexism, any kind of exclusive superiority. I'm better than you. You're lower than me. No. No disclaimers, y'all. Love one another. Even, perhaps, especially the others who are hard for you to love.

[18 : 03] What if each of us this morning thought of one person who was by nature different from us or hard for us to love? And we committed to loving that one person.

Why? Because Jesus loves him. It would be costly. That would be hard. And it would be beautiful. Perhaps life-changing.

Pastor Andrew Murray, Amid all diversity of character or of creed, of language or of station, they are to prove that love has made them members of one body and of each other and has taught them each to forget and sacrifice self for the sake of the other.

Their life of love is the chief evidence of Christianity. The proof to the world that God sent Christ and that he has shed abroad in them the same love with which he loved him.

Of all the evidences of Christianity, this is the mightiest and most convincing. Interesting that he says that, isn't it? The chief evidence of Christianity.

[19 : 11] It seems Jesus agrees. Verse 35. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

See, it is not merely a mark of discipleship, is it? It is to be a billboard for the love of King Jesus. If you get injured in a wreck, Alabama, you will know that you can call Alexander Shannara.

If you need someone to sacrifice himself to love you, to lift you out of the depths, perhaps because there are a lot of days where you feel unlovable, you need to know that you can call on Jesus.

Jesus is sending us into this world with words and deeds of love so that people, all sorts of people around you, will taste and see not how great you are, but that Jesus is good.

Jesus' love is the root of the life of love, and the fruit of a life of love is people seeing the reality of Jesus' love in you.

[20 : 31] Theologian Francis Schaeffer called our love for one another the final apologetic. Church Father Tertullian, all the way back in the second century, he reports non-Christians saying with astonishment, behold how these Christians love each other, how ready they are to die for each other.

After my friend left the crawlspace that first day and drove back to his house, my next-door neighbor, who had been watching apparently, walked out and at a great distance from the crawlspace said, what's he charging you for all this?

I said, well, he just showed up because he's a friend from church. He found out I was in a mess, and he knows me well enough to know that I have no idea how to handle this.

His eyes got real big, like he'd never heard of something like that before. He said, are you serious? All I could think to say was, it's great, isn't it?

What a blessing to receive love like this. Think of all the opportunities there are here to be a billboard for Jesus' sacrificial love.

[21 : 58] How many people in this entitled world have people in their lives sacrificing their money, their position, their comfort to help them succeed and flourish?

How many people in this divided world have people who are in their lives, who vote differently from them, and yet sacrifice their opinions to eat together, to raise their kids together, to pray together every week?

Maybe invite someone to visit your grace group with you. How many people in this busy world have people in their lives sacrificing their time to seek them out and listen to them when they're hurting?

How many people in this distracted world have people in their lives sacrificing their self-interest to notice when they're missing, to care when they're struggling, to celebrate when they're rejoicing?

How many people in this high-achieving world have people in their lives sacrificing their own advancement to use their strengths and their talents to help them in areas of weakness? How many people in this isolated world have people in their lives sacrificing their own alone time, their own free time, their own family time to draw them out of their loneliness and isolation, to welcome them in, to share community with them?

[23 : 23] See, loving one another is beautiful. It's attractive. We all long for community like that, for love like that.

And Jesus designed his love to be put on display in community. You want to go on a great mission trip this year? Take them a meal.

Rake her leaves. Listen to his story. Cry with them when they're hurting. Celebrate their kids' success.

Take that college student to lunch and hear how the transition's going. Grab a parent who's sending their kids to college and cry and rejoice with them at the same time.

Love one another. It may be awkward, right? But when you show up that you can blame it on me. Pastors said I had to come do this for you. Better yet, blame it on Jesus.

[24 : 22] Jesus told me to love you. That's why I'm being awkward right now. That's why I'm inviting you to lunch. Because Jesus said. That should get over the awkwardness.

That'll take care of it. The fruit will be people experiencing the sacrificial, costly, life-changing love of Jesus.

If you're here at Southwood but don't feel you're experiencing that kind of community and love, I would urge you to jump into a grace group. I'll tell you up front, it will cost you something.

But it will be worth it. And if you say, as you might, Pastor, I'm in a grace group, but we don't love like that. Maybe you could initiate that sacrifice.

Inconvenience yourself to show up in someone else's life outside of a group meeting. Pray daily for your group members by name. Ask someone else in the group to help you where you're struggling.

[25 : 25] Invite them into your life so you can share it there. You may also be here this morning and longing for that kind of community and love in your life, but honestly pretty skeptical that church is where you'd find it.

You've heard Christians talk about love a lot, but you've seen us live self-focused lives. You've heard us run one another down with gossip and unforgiveness.

You've watched us live in cliques where we leave one another out. Maybe you've even experienced some or all of those things yourself from church people.

I'm sorry. Sometimes we, like Peter at the end of this passage, think that we are better than we are. We think we love better than we do. Sometimes we talk about following Jesus better than we follow Jesus.

[26 : 36] If that's where you are this morning, I can't argue with your experience of that. My appeal to you this morning would be to come to Jesus himself.

He loves unfaithfully. He sacrifices consistently. He is with you always. And if you come to him, if you wouldn't mind, if you could extend the grace to us, tell church people how they've hurt you and give us another chance to love the way Jesus calls us to love.

Because see, he's still working on us. His spirit is at work in us and among us. So he is remaking us into people of love like him.

So lean in and help us. You can be a part of this with us. We would love that. See, this is the best part of the whole thing. A life of love will take you lower than you can imagine and higher than you ever dreamed.

I think we got the lower part. Crawl spaces. Messy lives. Dark places. But friends, don't miss the higher part.

[27 : 51] Even in relationships with other men and women, deep friendship, real intimacy and marriage. Friends that last a lifetime are forged through sacrifice and suffering together and loving them.

Not turning your face away. Loving right there. It really is, isn't it, the height of human joy to share such love. But I mean even higher than that.

Even higher than anything you've experienced here. A life of love draws you up into the very life and love of Father, Son, and Spirit. Participation in the relationships of the Trinity.

That is actually what you long for. That you're afraid you won't find in the church. I'm telling you this is what it is. Jesus designed his love to be put on display in community because that is its very nature.

It always has existed in community. That's one more way his commandment is new. Notice 1 John chapter 2 as John explains this to it.

[28 : 56] It is a new commandment I'm writing you which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he's in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

Whoever loves his brother abides in the light. See it's new in him, Jesus, and you so you're living in it together because Jesus the light has shined into the world and you actually live in his light when you love your brother.

When you sacrifice for your sister. When you serve those different from you and you so practice loving your neighbor and even your enemy. There is Jesus right there doing that with you.

He's not merely instructing you to live a life of love but he's really inviting you into a life of love with him and his father that overflows into all of your other relationships.

Jesus is there with you washing feet, serving the poor, laying down his life for his friends. Jesus didn't turn his face away from us.

[30 : 07] He set his face like a flint for Jerusalem and for the joy set before him endured the cross. Have you been loved like that?

Has someone seen the crawl space of your heart and entered in to help you instead of running away?

Nothing drags you up out of darkness, out of just the chaos of a busy life, out of self-pity and self-focus like that. It is powerful, isn't it? Many of you have experienced it.

Listen, when someone loved me like that, not for how well I performed or how good I looked, but in spite of my failings and the struggles that she knew I had, I married her. I spent the last 20 years trying to learn to love her the way she has loved me, to live up to that glorious experience of love with her.

Now listen, how much more has Jesus loved you like that? He has seen all your crawl spaces.

[31 : 18] He could have moved on from you to someone else a long time ago, but he didn't.

Instead, he has laid down his life for you.

He forgives our sins, cleans up our mess, and delivers us from darkness into his marvelous light. Love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Won't you find your true life shaped by him living up there with him? He'll help you in that glorious experience of his love where you go, yes, lower than you've ever imagined to invade dark crawl spaces and listen to real pain and sacrifice your comfort and find at the very same time a life higher than you ever dreamed, surrounded by his glory, delighting in his purpose for you, secure in his love that will never fail you.

Pray with me. Oh, Jesus, help us to taste that life of love. Would you make us by your grace, by the power of your spirit, that kind of community, those kinds of brothers and sisters and friends, you have bid us come and die and just at that very moment find that we're truly living, that we are living with you.

How wonderful might we, even this week, get that taste of eternity of life with you in love. help us as we give our lives to you.

[33 : 07] We ask it in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.
www.indswarm.com #Astrovir #detentionNEWS-G