

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi, “And, this is my prayer: that your love may abound *more and more* in knowledge and depth of insight” (Phil. 1:9). He said to the Thessalonians, “May the Lord make your love *increase and overflow* for each other and for everyone else...” (1 Thes. 3:12). On another occasion he declared, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing” (2 Thes. 1:3).

We are exhorted to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24).

Wherever you are on your Christian journey, make it your goal that your love for others will constantly, grow, increase, and overflow more and more.

Love, the Test of Our Relation to God

Since man only looks on the outward appearance it is not always easy to determine a person’s true relation to God. However, there is one test that is final:

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 Jn. 3:10).

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 Jn. 3:14).

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God” (1 Jn. 4:7-8),

All that Counts

Love is such an important part of the Christian life that Paul exclaimed, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6). Again, he exhorts, “Do everything in love” (1 Cor. 16:14).

Your Commitment

We suggest that you review this lesson several times until you have caught the vision of living a compassionate lifestyle. Make a firm decision to love (love is a choice not just a feeling), your brothers, your neighbors, and your enemies. Pray that your love will constantly abound, increase, and overflow! Express your love to someone today.

Lesson Eight Loving Others (Developing a Compassionate Lifestyle)

Love is at the very heart of Christianity. It sums up in one word the very essence of the Christian faith. It was the major focus in the ministry of Jesus. It is a thread that runs through the entire New Testament.

The Biblical message of love has two principal dimensions: love between God and man, and love between human beings. We have already studied about God’s requirement for a total love for Him. In this lesson we want to learn more about our love for each other.

Love for each other is so fundamental in the teachings of Christ, He gave it extremely high priority among the commandments, second only to our love for God (Mt. 22:37-39).

Many complicated laws were given in the Old Testament, but Jesus simplified them all when He said. “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor...’” (Gal. 5:14). When we love like we ought, all of the commands will automatically be obeyed.

Love Commanded

The things that are really essential are expressed clearly in the Bible. Consider the following commands:

“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn. 13:34).

“This is my command: Love each other” (Jn. 15:17).

“Follow the way of love...” (1 Cor. 14:1).

“Do everything in love” (1 Cor. 16:14).

“... love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22).

The list could be very long, but the command is so simple and clear it is unmistakable.

Love Described

1 Corinthians chapter 13 is the classic description of “God’s kind of love.” Please find it in your Bible and check it with the following statements about love.

There is no substitute for love: Even such wonderful things as eloquence, prophecy, knowledge, and faith are worthless if not accompanied by love.

Love is patient and kind.

Some things love does not do:

- Love does not envy.
- Love does not boast.
- Love does not keep a record of wrongs committed.
- Love does not delight in evil.

Some things love is not:

- Love is not proud.
- Love is not rude.
- Love is not self-seeking.
- Love is not easily angered.

Some things love *always* does:

- Love protects.
- Love trusts.
- Love hopes.
- Love perseveres.
- Love never fails.
- Love rejoices with the truth.

How do you think your love measures up to this standard? Think about it!

Love Illustrated

Jesus gives us a perfect example of what God’s kind of love is like. Let us look at the way He loved:

The word that most commonly describes the attitude of Jesus to those around Him is “compassion.” Compassion may be defined as sorrow for the sufferings of others, accompanied by an urge to help.

“When He saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt. 9:36).

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Mt. 14:14).

“Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people...’” (Mt. 15:32).

“Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man” (Mk. 1:41).

His lifestyle could only be described as compassionate. He was always moved by human need. Wherever it is stated in the Bible that He had compassion, He immediately took action to help the needy. He always responded to human needs. He never turned anybody away. What an example to follow!

Love Reaching Out

Who are included with those we are supposed to love? The Bible mentions three categories:

Love for our brothers and sisters: “... so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers” (1 John 3:14). These are the ones who are the easiest to love: our fellow Christians, members of the church, those who are the closest to us.

Love for our “neighbors”: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:39). When Jesus was asked the question, “Who is my neighbor?” He answered with the story of a Jewish man who fell into the hands of robbers and was laying by the road wounded and bleeding. Two religious leaders passed by and ignored him. Then a Samaritan (whom the Jews despised) stopped and took care of him. Jesus then asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The answer is obvious. We are neighbors to those around us who have needs.

Love for our enemies: Jesus carried the scope of love one step further when He said, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Lk. 6:27-28). This is the most difficult kind of love, but it is necessary for our love to be complete. Jesus perfectly illustrated it when He forgave those who were nailing Him to the cross.

Love Expressed

True love is not just sentiment or theory; it seeks practical expression. “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 Jn. 3:18). “Therefore show these men proof of your love...” (2 Cor. 8:24).