

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, 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?

God Is My Rock

I'm Angelo. I live in Madagascar, the large island off the eastern coast of Africa. My parents are Christians, but they attended different churches and often fought over what to believe. To me, church worship became a source of arguments, not an act of love.

When I was ten years old, my mother wanted to enroll me in a Christian school where I would be in a better environment. She found a Seventh-day Adventist school near our home and asked Dad to let me study there. At last Dad agreed.

Until this time, all I knew about God was what my father had taught me. But in my new school, we studied the Bible as a class. I was used to arguing about God, so if a student said something I didn't agree with, I'd argue with them.

However, I soon learned that the Adventist students knew lots of Bible texts to back up what they were saying. Their knowledge pushed me to read the Bible so I could support my points better. My new Adventist friends encouraged me to study the Bible to see what God said, not to argue points.

My interest in religion grew, and by the time I was 15 I had accepted Jesus as my Savior and asked to become an Adventist. My mother accepted my decision and was actually quite glad. But my father wasn't so happy. We often got into arguments about Bible topics, each of us quoting texts to prove our points.

My parents joined another church together to be united in faith. They hoped I would join them, but I told them that God is my rock, and I want to follow Him only.

I've been an Adventist for three years now. My parents still haven't accepted my faith, but they've accepted my decision. I hope that one day they will worship with me in church. I can see changes in my parents because of my strong stand for God, and that makes me glad.



I thank my parents for sending me to the Adventist school. I thank my teachers and fellow students for leading me to the true path in Jesus. And I thank you, dear Sabbath School members, for sharing your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering with my school in 2012. That offering has helped improve my school and provide more classrooms and dormitory space for others who want to study here and learn that God wants to be their rock as well.

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