



## **WEEK 1: LOVE We Love Like Jesus - John 13:34-35**

**NKJV:** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

**NLT:** "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

### **CONTEXT SETTING**

**The Setting:** Jesus speaks these words in the Upper Room on the night before His crucifixion. He has just washed His disciples' feet — the job of the lowest servant. Judas has left to betray Him. Jesus knows the cross is hours away.

**The Command:** "A new commandment" — Why new? The Old Testament commanded love for neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). But Jesus raises the standard: love one another **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU**. The standard is no longer just "love your neighbor." The standard is now "love like Jesus."

**The Measure:** "As I have loved you" — Jesus becomes both the command-giver and the example. His love was sacrificial (laying down His life), unconditional (loving even Judas), practical (washing feet), and persistent (loving to the end).

**The Evidence:** "By this all will know" — Love is the identifying mark of Christ-followers. Not doctrine. Not worship style. Not political position. Love. The world watches how we treat each other and concludes whether Jesus is real.

**The Key Phrase:** "As I have loved you" — This is what makes Christian love different from worldly love. We don't love based on feelings or worthiness. We love because we have **BEEN** loved. We give what we've received.

## COMMENTARY INSIGHTS

### Jack Hayford — Spirit Filled Life Bible Commentary

**On John 13:34-35:** Hayford emphasizes that Jesus' command introduces a revolutionary standard: love one another AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. This isn't merely ethical teaching — it's a call to supernatural love that can only be lived out through the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples had just witnessed Jesus wash their feet, an act of humble service that demonstrated love in action. Hayford notes that this kind of love is sacrificial, practical, and visible — it costs something, it does something, and it shows something to the watching world.

On evidence of discipleship: Hayford points out that Jesus didn't say the world would know His disciples by their theological precision, their spiritual gifts, or their moral performance. He said they would be known by their LOVE for one another. This love becomes apologetic — it makes the case for Christ more powerfully than any argument.

### Matthew Henry — Matthew Henry's Commentary

**On John 13:34-35:** Henry explains that the "newness" of this commandment lies in its depth and measure. While the law commanded love, Jesus now provides both the pattern (His own love) and the power (the indwelling Spirit that would come at Pentecost). The disciples were about to face the most difficult season of their lives — and Jesus gave them love as their anchor. Henry writes that believers are distinguished from the world not by avoiding sin but by displaying love.

On transformation: Henry notes that this love transforms communities. Where there is genuine Christian love, there is unity, forgiveness, sacrifice, and joy. The early church experienced this: "See how they love one another" was the observation of the watching pagan world.

## **Jimmy Swaggart — The Expositor's Study Bible**

**On John 13:34-35:** Swaggart emphasizes that this love is not an emotion to be felt but a choice to be made. Christian love (agape) is not based on the worthiness of the recipient but on the character of the one loving. We love because God IS love, and His love has been poured into our hearts. This love is deliberate, sacrificial, and Christlike.

On the world's observation: Swaggart writes that the church's greatest witness and its greatest failure both center on love. When Christians genuinely love each other, skeptics are drawn to Christ. When Christians fight, divide, and gossip, the gospel is discredited. The command isn't optional — it's essential to our mission.

### **THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE**

#### **1. LOVE IS THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF CHRIST-FOLLOWERS**

**John 13:35:** "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

**The Reality:** Jesus didn't say the world would know us by our doctrine, our political views, our worship style, or our building. He said they'd know us by our LOVE. Love is our logo. Love is our brand. Love is our witness.

**The Application:** When someone encounters The Gathering Place, the first thing they should experience is love. Not judgment. Not performance. Not evaluation. Love. "You belong here" before they've proven anything or contributed anything.

#### **2. LOVE IS A DECISION, NOT JUST A FEELING**

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT):** "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."

**The Reality:** Notice the verbs. Love IS patient — that's a choice. Love IS kind — that's an action. Love does not demand, is not irritable, keeps no record — these are decisions made regardless of feelings. Biblical love isn't primarily an emotion; it's a commitment.

**The Application:** You can choose to love someone even when you don't feel loving. You can be patient with the difficult person. You can be kind when you'd rather be harsh. Love is available to you every moment of every day because it's a choice you make, not a feeling you wait for.

### 3. TRANSFORMATION BEGINS WITH COMPASSION

**Romans 2:4 (NLT):** "Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?"

**The Reality:** It's God's KINDNESS that leads to repentance — not His anger, not His judgment, not His condemnation. Kindness. People don't change because they're shamed. They change because they're loved. Jesus didn't shame the woman at the well — He offered her living water.

**The Application:** If you want to see someone change, love them first. Meet them where they are. See them. Value them. Honor their humanity. Then trust the Holy Spirit to do what only the Holy Spirit can do.

### 4. LOVE MEETS PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

**Romans 5:8 (NKJV):** "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

**The Reality:** God didn't wait for us to clean up before He loved us. He loved us in our mess. While we were still sinners — not after we got our act together, not after we deserved it, not after we earned it. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. He touched lepers. He welcomed children. He had conversations with people society had written off.

**The Application:** Love doesn't have prerequisites. We don't wait for people to deserve our love. We love them where they are, as they are, and trust God to work in their lives.

## 5. LOVE IS RADICAL, RELENTLESS, AND UNCONDITIONAL

**1 John 4:19 (NKJV):** "We love Him because He first loved us."

**The Reality:** God's love is radical — it goes beyond what makes sense. It's relentless — it doesn't give up. It's unconditional — it's not based on our performance. We love because we have been loved. We give what we've received.

**The Application:** The love you give flows from the love you've received. When you truly experience how much God loves YOU — even on your worst day — you can't help but overflow that love to others.

### SOAP METHOD GUIDE

#### S — SCRIPTURE

*Write out John 13:34-35 in the translation that speaks most to you today.*

#### O — OBSERVATION

##### Key Observations to Consider:

1. **"A new commandment"** — Jesus is giving something fresh, not just repeating the old law
2. **"As I have loved you"** — The measure is Christ's own love, not human effort
3. **"By this all will know"** — Love is the primary evidence of discipleship
4. **"Love one another"** — The focus is on the community of believers

## **Prompting Questions:**

- 1. Why does Jesus call this a "new" commandment when the law already commanded love?**
- 2. What does "as I have loved you" look like practically?**
- 3. Why is love the identifying mark of Christians and not something else like doctrine or miracles?**

## **A — APPLICATION**

### **Personal Application Questions:**

- ☐ Who in my life is difficult to love right now?
- ☐ Am I waiting for someone to deserve my love before I give it?
- ☐ What would change if I loved that person the way Jesus loves me?
- ☐ How would people describe my love? Conditional or unconditional? Patient or impatient?
- ☐ Is my love visible? Would an outsider watching my life see Jesus' love?
- ☐ What's one practical way I can show Christlike love this week?

**This Week's Challenge:** Identify one person who is hard to love. Choose one practical act of love toward them this week — not because they deserve it, but because you have been loved by Jesus.

## P — PRAYER

### Prayer Framework:

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God for His radical, relentless, unconditional love for you.

**Confession:** Confess where your love has been conditional, impatient, or absent.

**Request:** Ask God to fill you with His love and give you the capacity to love others as Jesus loves you.

**Commitment:** Commit to loving one difficult person this week — by choice, not by feeling.

**Prayer:** *Father, thank You for loving me when I was unlovable. Thank You that Your love isn't based on my performance but on Your character. I confess that I've withheld love from people. I've loved conditionally. I've waited for people to deserve it. Forgive me. Fill me with Your love today. Give me the capacity to love [name specific person]. Help me see them the way You see them. Let my love be the evidence that I belong to Jesus. In His name, Amen.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Icebreaker: Describe a time when someone showed you unexpected love or kindness. How did it affect you?
2. Jesus says the world will know we're His disciples by our love for one another. On a scale of 1-10, how well do you think Christians are doing at this? Why?
3. What's the difference between loving someone and liking them? Can you truly love someone you don't like?
4. Who in your life is hardest to love right now? (No names needed.) What makes it difficult?
5. How does remembering God's love for you help you love difficult people?



6. Romans 2:4 says it's God's kindness that leads to repentance. How have you seen this work in your own life or someone else's?

7. What's one practical way The Gathering Place can become known for love in our community?

8. What's one step you're going to take this week to love someone the way Jesus loves you?

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

### This Week's Action Steps:

1. **IDENTIFY** — Who is one person God is calling you to love better? Name them (even just to yourself).
2. **ACT** — Do one specific act of love for that person this week. Not when you feel like it — by choice.
3. **LISTEN** — Give someone the gift of your full attention this week. Put down your phone. Make eye contact. Actually hear them.
4. **SPEAK** — Tell someone specifically what you love or appreciate about them. Don't assume they know.
5. **MEDITATE** — Spend 5 minutes each day this week reading 1 John 4:7-21 and letting God's love fill your heart.

**Daily Declaration:** *"I am loved by God. His love fills me and flows through me. Today, I choose to love like Jesus — radically, relentlessly, unconditionally."*

## CROSS-REFERENCE SCRIPTURES

### On God's Love for Us:

- **Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV):** "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."
- **1 John 4:9-10 (NKJV):** "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
- **Romans 8:38-39 (NKJV):** "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### On Loving One Another:

- **1 John 4:11-12 (NKJV):** "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."
- **1 Peter 4:8 (NKJV):** "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins."
- **Galatians 5:13 (NKJV):** "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

### On Love in Action:

- **1 John 3:18 (NKJV):** "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."
- **James 2:15-17 (NKJV):** "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."
- **Matthew 25:40 (NKJV):** "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"