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Identity, Purpose, Belonging / Love / John 13:31–35

Notes

See pg 103 Who am I Lord?

Pg. 122, 125-126 Who Am I Lord?

Maybe pg. 133-134 Who Am I Lord? (Prodigal son)

pg. 47-50 practicing the way

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The passage for today comes from John 13:31-35:

John 13:31–35 NRSV

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In reading this you might think, how is this a new commandment? We have been told before in Scripture to

love one another. In fact it's one of the ten commandments. Leviticus 19:18 says "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Matthew 22:36–39 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

John knows of the greatest or first commandment and the second like it, but here Jesus is focusing attention not on the neighbour but rather on the fellow believer or disciples, thus accenting love's mutuality. Secondly, it bases the command very explicitly on Jesus' love for "his own" disciples, based in turn on the Father's love for his Son.

Jesus was saying, Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. He had come to the Earth as a living example of God's love, as we are to be as well. To love others as much as Jesus loved others was revolutionary. Or I love the phrase, radical love. Do people know you follow Jesus through your love? Do people know we follow Jesus through our love for each other? Or do people see petty bickering, jealousy, and division?

We are to love others based on Jesus' sacrificial love for us.

Such love will not only bring unbelievers to faith in Jesus but also keep believers strong and united in a world hostile to God. Think to those people in your life that may be hard to love. The love Jesus calls us to show may seem humanly impossible. In order to have this kind of love, we need to humble ourselves by realizing that Jesus died for us and our unlovely sins. As it says in, Romans 5:5 “and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” We have the Holy Spirit such that we can love others by God’s love being poured into our hearts.

Love is more than a feeling, it is revealed in action.

Do you have people in your life who are hard to love? Today, I want to tell you some stories, true stories, of where people overcame circumstances to love those that others would have found difficult to love, given the circumstances that brought them together. Love in action.

Matt Swatzell was driving home after a 24 hour shift as a firefighter and EMS, with only 30 minutes of sleep. He was less than 4 miles from his home when he fell asleep at the wheel, crashing into a car holding a 30 year old pregnant woman, June Fitzgerald, with her 19 month old daughter Faith also in the car. Faith survived the crash, but June and her unborn baby passed away. June’s husband, Erik Fitzgerald, a full-time pastor, grieved the loss of his wife and child with close family and friends, including young

people from his student ministry. One young girl told him she couldn't help but think of how the driver of the car was feeling. Erik said, she was right, and that they should all pray for him. It was his opportunity to practice the forgiveness he had preached so many times before. As Erik said, "You forgive as you've been forgiven. It wasn't an option. If you've been forgiven, then you need to extend that forgiveness." This forgiveness created a friendship between Erik and Matt that continues. The men stayed connected by meeting at least once every two weeks, attending church together, and sharing meals. As Erik says, "We recognized that when we first started meeting it was unusual. We knew it was God." Erik extended his forgiveness to Matt during his time of sentencing. Matt was facing a felony and long time in jail, but Erik, the husband and father who lost some of his family, pleaded with the courts for a lesser sentence. In his words, "I didn't see why this accident and tragedy needed to ruin any more lives." Matt expected hate from Erik, but instead received love.

30 years ago one of the worst genocides of the twentieth century took place in Rwanda. Families were ripped apart as neighbours attacked neighbours and friends turned against friends. In about 100 days, that's less than 1/3 of the year, more than 800 000 individuals (men, women, and children), that's just a little less than the population of all of Nova Scotia, were killed as Hutu militias took up arms

against the ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus. By the end of the genocide more than 12% of the Rwanda population had been killed.

There was a boy named Methode, who was six years old during the Rwanda genocide. His father, mother and three of his siblings were brutally killed. He and his aunt barely escaped by hiding in a swamp. For days he witnessed thousands being killed and dumped in the swamp where he was hiding, without being seen. He and his aunt were spared by God's grace. He lived in fear, was bitter, and had nightmares, and really when you think of everything he went through, it is understandable. He wanted to become a soldier to seek revenge for his family, when he received trauma counselling through a Compassion program at his local church. He started to realize that he could get peace from God, asking God to take away all that was heavy in his heart. His family saw a huge change in his behaviour. He took healing steps toward forgiveness, discarded the list of those he wanted to kill and instead chose forgiveness. He is now a successful business owner in Rwanda's tourism industry, as he strives to understand God's love for him, he extends love to those he once hated and even hires Hutus - his former enemies - to work for him.

Christine was four years old when she witnessed her mother's death, when a bullet went through the back of her head during the Rwanda genocide. She recounts of her

last memory of her mother, as her mother pleaded for both her life and her child's to be spared. Christine's father was also killed and Christine was tortured. Christine was a Tutsi who found herself in the care of her aunt and grandmother. After the genocide, the population of Rwanda was made up of 70% women, so the survival of families relied mainly on women. From the grassroot to the government, Rwanda women took on roles that were often done by men, in order to try and create some stability after such brutal violence. In 2011 Rwanda became the first country ever to have a female majority in parliament and in 2021 became the second African nation to announce a gender-balanced cabinet. After accepting Jesus in her teenage years, Christine decided, by God's grace, to forgive the people who murdered her parents. She let go of the hatred she had been holding onto for years and had to give it to a gracious God who notoriously makes beautiful things out of dust. She went on to study political science at the Rwanda National University. When she graduated she worked at the Rwanda parliament in the senate and today is a child protection officer for Save the Children International.

While Christian doesn't remember much about the Rwandan genocide as he was less than a year old, he has turned a weapon into a beacon of hope. His father was killed and his mother, who survived, doesn't speak or share

much information about the genocide as it was so traumatic. During the genocide, the radio broadcasts were used to incite ordinary citizens to carry out unspeakable acts of violence. With the help of the church many years later, in his words, “I was able to come to terms with not having a father because I have Jesus Christ as my Saviour. The opportunity to go to school and accepting Jesus Christ as my Savior are the greatest gifts I received in life.” 30 years later, Christian is using the airwaves to bring hope by sharing the love of Jesus. He is a presenter and news reporter at Authentic Radio and Television. As he says, “On the shows I host, we encourage people. Our message is that despite all the troubles in this world, God’s love is greater than the challenges we face. I want to become an international news reporter for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I want to share love because Compassion taught me how to love selflessly.”

“What would Jesus do?” is a slogan that saw peak popularity during the 1990s, exactly during my teenage years. I remember the “WWJD” bracelets and wristbands especially that were sported during this period of time. A Kansas preacher and author named Charles Sheldon, active in the 1880s and after, is largely credited as the initiator of the trendy phrase many people still refer to. In 1897, he put together the book that would become *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do? A little over 100 years later*, In

1989, youth leader Janie Tinklenberg read Sheldon's book and began sharing WWJD with her students to encourage them to live in such a manner. After her initial run of merchandise sold out, neighboring towns quickly noticed the trend and began making merchandise lines of their own. It rapidly grew into a sensation that has since inspired many individuals.

Despite disagreements in how WWJD should be thought of and lived out in one's life, WWJD was an effective effort to balance two realities about Jesus. Christ's deeply loving approach to personal relationships and His constant focus on truth in action are both defining components of His character. God is both perfectly loving and perfectly truthful, and Christ's life displays this for all.

Sheldon himself encouraged people not to do anything without first asking themselves what Jesus would do in any situation. While Sheldon's work has seen many critics since this idea caught on, some condemning his thinking as self-righteous or even anti-Christian, on the grounds that it encourages people to think their behaviour is on par with Christ, many others believe this isn't what Sheldon was attempting to do. He is not attempting to equate human capacity with Christ; rather, human action can become more God-honoring and biblically aligned via intentional thought about how Christ wants us to live. And so, how would your life look differently if you always asked

yourself, What Would Jesus Do? In particular when it comes to loving all those around you, not just those you get along with?

In turning to the passage found in John 13 from today, right before the part that was read, Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and is having the last meal with his disciples. He predicts Judas' betrayal. He knows that one of his disciples who he has spent so much time with during his ministry is going to betray him. In fact, it is Judas who is leaving the room at the beginning of the passage.

Take a moment to hear these words, written by a guy named Nic Burleson:

“Think about this for a second. Jesus knew.

He goes into that room with His disciples. He knows He is going to be betrayed. He knows it is Judas who will turn against him. He knows that He has been sold out for a handful of silver. Stabbed in the back by one He has poured His life into.

Yet, in that room, hours before the death of Jesus, Judas ate too. Jesus fed Judas too. Jesus prayed for Judas too. Jesus washed Judas' feet too. I struggle to fathom that kind of love. A love that would feed the mouth that deceived you. A love that would wash the treasonous feet of the traitor. A love that could forgive even the vilest of betrayals.

I honestly struggle to comprehend it. And then, suddenly, I realize that I'm Judas. And in that moment, I'm so thankful & altogether overwhelmed that Judas ate too." End quote.

Think about it....right before Jesus says to love one another as he has loved he knew that Judas was going to betray him, yet Jesus washed Judas' feet, Judas ate with them, and Jesus tells his disciples to love one another as he has loved.

This new command, "just as I loved you, that you too love each other," matches the form of Jesus' stated example of footwashing - "so that just as I did for you, you too might do." While the footwashing wasn't a command, but something the disciples ought to do and blessed for doing, the similarity of the structure is evident. Both combine a vertical, one way relationship (from Lord or King to subordinate with a horizontal, two way relationship (that is mutual relationship among peers). Jesus takes the initiative to love (and show his love for) his disciples. Nothing is said of their loving him first, or even in return, and they are not allowed to reciprocate by washing his feet. Instead, they extend his love to each other, whether specifically by washing each other's feet or more generally in the daily conduct of their lives.

Jesus' ultimate act of love, as it says in John 15:13 "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." And as Jesus was hanging on the cross Luke

records in Luke 23:34 “Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” At the height of His agony, at the very moment when most victims of crucifixion might scream out in fury with a curse, Christ prayed for forgiveness for His tormentors: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

**(Make a cross out of paper!)** - Our vertical relationship with God, our horizontal relationship with each other, with Jesus at the center.

The cross, a visual representation of this vertical and horizontal relationship. As we come to the table today, remember God’s ultimate sacrifice in his Son, Jesus. As it says in probably the most well known verse known by Christians and nonChristians alike, John 3:16 ““For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” God loved and continues to love everyone, the whole world, not just the easy to love, not just those who attend church, not just those who can tow the line of following the law, and the list goes on. God loves every single one of you and he loved Judas. God loved the entire world and he asks us to as well. Show Jesus’ love throughout the world, because remember Judas ate too.

