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The Disciple's Character



Genuinely Following Jesus - Steve Gregg

In this teaching by Steve Gregg, he expounds on the kind of person God desires his disciples to become. According to Gregg, being a disciple of Jesus means becoming like Jesus, exemplifying his character and values. He emphasizes that God values character above charisma and highlights the importance of love for one another, including enemies. Gregg emphasizes the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the need to serve others sacrificially, in line with Jesus' teachings.

Transcript

Tonight, we're in our seventh study in Genuinely Following Jesus, or what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. And this lecture is called The Character of a Disciple, and this is a very important subject, because it's often not well understood that the Christian life calls us to be different kinds of people, not just people who believe different kinds of things than other people believe. A lot of people believe that they're a Christian because they've come to believe Christian doctrines.

Or even because they attend church or have been baptized. But it's the kind of person that you are that God wants to change. And discipleship is for the purpose of changing your character.

I want to define character, first of all. For that, I just go to a regular dictionary, American Heritage Dictionary in this case. First definition they give is the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another.

Their second definition is a distinguishing feature or attribute as of an individual, group, or category. And I think this definition here, which is the fifth one in the American Heritage Dictionary, is the one that most closely describes what we're talking about. A description of a person's attributes, traits, and abilities.

What kind of a person does God want you to become? What is a disciple becoming? Well, according to Scripture, we are becoming like Jesus. Now, what does it mean to become like Jesus? Does that mean we grow our hair out and wear sandals? Well, I'm working on that, but that's not what it really means. I've got sandals on.

But that's not the way you become like Jesus. You don't become an itinerant preacher or remain single necessarily. You may, but that's not what it means to be like Jesus, though Jesus was those things.

We're talking about Jesus' character. The attributes, the moral attributes, the character attributes of Christ. That's what we're to become like.

And we know that Jesus said in Luke 6:40, A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. So if we are disciples, a disciple is a learner, a student, someone who's sitting under a teacher, being trained. And Jesus says when that disciple has been fully trained, he'll be like his teacher.

And that's exactly what God has in mind for us as the end result of our life of discipleship. In 1 John 3:2, John said, Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul said, But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. By that he means Jesus. He says we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the spirit of the Lord.

Now, that's what's happening as we are keeping our eyes on Jesus as we're following him. We're not just going someplace different. We're becoming different people.

We're being transformed into that image. And I pointed out in an earlier lecture that word transformed is the word metamorphosis, which is the word we get the English word metamorphosis from. And we talked about that on a previous lecture.

Now, the main thing to realize is that God values character more than ritual and religion. This is something that Pharisees did not understand. It's something that many Christians don't understand.

Many people seem to think that as long as they are faithful in church and they've jumped through the hoops of being baptized and they take communion as often as the church serves it, even if they do nothing else, or especially if they do more for the church, then that's pretty much what God wants for them. And that's going to be their plea on the day of judgment. I was a baptized member of the church.

I attended church regularly. But the Pharisees did all the religious things that anyone could be asked to do under their religion. And their character was what was flawed.

Jesus said to the woman at the well in John chapter 4, verses 23 and 24, but the hour is coming and now is when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Now, in spirit and truth is in contrast to externalism and hypocrisy. Now, the Pharisees, which were the leading paradigm of religiosity in that society, Jesus criticized their

religiosity, their worship, as being externalistic.

He said all the things they do, they do to be seen by men. And therefore they have no reward from their heavenly Father. He also said they were hypocritical.

Now, to worship in spirit means it's spiritual, it's inward, it's not externalistic. It's a difference in what you are inside. And in truth means genuinely, not hypocritically.

And he said, for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God, who can see everything in the whole universe, is looking for something. Apparently, it's rather hard to find.

He's looking for people who know how to worship him in spirit and in truth, rather than the externalistic, hypocritical worship that was so common at that time, and which is common in all times, really, in all religions. Jesus said God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. So it's a matter of what's inside.

It's in your spirit. It's in your integrity. It's in your genuineness as a worshiping person.

It's what you are as a person inwardly and truthfully that God's looking for. He's not looking for you to jump through a number of religious hoops and then remain crotchety and ill-tempered and impatient and bitter and all those things that people are who aren't like Jesus. He wants us to become like Jesus, and it's character that he's looking for.

Christ-like character, not religion. In the Old Testament, Proverbs 15, 8, he says, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. Now, sacrifice is worship.

That's what the Jews did. That's how they worshipped. They went to the temple and they offered a sacrifice.

That is worshipping God. But if a wicked person, that is someone whose character is evil, is offering that kind of worship, it might be proper worship, but it's an abomination to God. An abomination is something that's loathsome, something that's foul and disgusting.

It's not just that the man's, you know, his sacrifice, his worship is somehow slightly tainted by the fact that he's not a good man. It's an abomination to God because it's so hypocritical. Because all his life through the week, he is a wicked man.

And then he comes and offers a sacrifice to God as if that is enough. And it says it again in Proverbs. In Proverbs 21, 27, it says, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.

How much more when he brings it with a wicked intent? Jesus, when he was criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners by the Pharisees, he told them, go and learn what this means. And then he quoted from the Old Testament, Hosea 6, 6. Hosea 6, 6 says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. This is where God tells the Israelites what his priorities are, what he really wants from them.

Not sacrifices, that's ritual worship. Sacrifices, that's offering worship in a formal setting. But I'm looking for people who are merciful, people whose character is, they're compassionate, they're loving, they're merciful.

I'm looking for mercy in people, not their sacrifices. And he said it again to them three chapters later in Matthew 12, 7. He said, if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. So this is something in the Old Testament that Jesus also brought out and emphasized.

He quoted it from the Old Testament. The Pharisees, what you need to learn about God is his desire is not for you to do more ritual religious stuff. More sacrifices.

No, that's not what he needs. He's looking for mercy. And not not more religion.

In Romans 12, 1, we know this verse, I'm sure. Paul says, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice. What do you mean to present your body? It means that you yourself are on the altar.

You yourself are committed to God. You're devoted to God as a person, your body, your hands, your feet, everything about you. Your behavior is offered to God in reality as if it's a spiritual sacrifice to God.

Holy and acceptable. He says, which is your reasonable service? Now, the New King James and the King James says, which is your reasonable service? Most translations, the modern ones recognize that that's not really the very best translation of that line. The New American Standard, for example, says, which is your spiritual service of worship? Instead of reasonable service, it's spiritual service of worship.

The NIV says, this is your spiritual act of worship. And the English Standard Version says, which is your spiritual worship? The reason I bring that out is because Jesus said God is looking for those who worship him in spirit and in truth. God is spirit.

Those who worship must worship in spirit. Well, what is spiritual worship? Well, Paul says, you present your body to God. You don't bring a lamb to God and then you serve the devil with your body all week long.

Or you serve the flesh with your body. Or you serve yourself with your body. Or you serve mammon with your body and then you just bring a sacrifice to God.

No, God wants you to bring a sacrifice of yourself. It's not religion, it's your whole life, your whole body. And elsewhere in Romans, in chapter 6 and verse 13, Paul uses this same verb, present, where he says, you present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

He uses that same verb in Romans 6, 13, where he says, present your members, the members of your body, as instruments of righteousness and not as instruments of

wickedness. So what he's talking about is presenting your body is that you enlist your body in the service of God. Not in religiosity, but in the things you do every day.

What your hands do and your feet and your eyes and your mouth. Those are who you are. Who you are has got to be devoted to God, not just what you do at a religious service where you're trying to make up for what you are by a ritual procedure.

Psalms 40, verse 6 and 8 says, sacrifice an offering you did not desire. I delight to do your will, oh my God, and your law is with my heart. David wrote this, and of course the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews chapter 10 that this is Jesus speaking, but David also spoke of himself.

I mean, David's a type of Christ and they apply to him too. But he says, what God wants is not sacrifice and offering. Boy, you sure could have fooled me reading Leviticus.

You read Leviticus, it sure sounds like he wanted sacrifices and offerings. He hardly said anything about anything else. He got all these rituals about how to do it, how to cut the throat, how to drain the blood, and what to do with the fatty call above the liver.

He had to do everything just right. A whole book of the Bible about how to offer sacrifices. David, you know, 500 years after that says, you know, God's not, that's not what God's about.

He's not about sacrifices and offerings. What he's about is having his law written in my heart and me delighting to do his will. That I'm a person who from my heart love to do what God wants.

That's my character. The sacrifice and the offerings, those are not worth that much. And that's a statement made even in the Old Testament when sacrifices and offerings were still required.

As I've said, God desires and values character above religion. He also desires and values character above charisma. Now, what is charisma? Charisma is the Greek word for gift.

And it's the word that is used by Paul whenever he talks about the gifts of the Spirit. And so if you hear about some Christians being charismatic, it's from that word charisma. It means that these are people who believe in and affirm and maybe practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If somebody's non-charismatic, it usually means that they believe that a lot of those gifts of the Spirit are not really for our time. Those are, they died out in the age of the apostles. But the word charisma or charismatic has to do with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you've heard the term used in secular terms. People would say, well, you know, Barack Obama, he's a charismatic speaker when he has a teleprompter. They don't

mean he has any of the gifts of the Spirit.

What they mean is that he's kind of a gifted speaker. The word charisma means gift. Now, when I say that God values character above charisma, what I mean is this.

Lots of people think that if a person can preach well, that's a gift. He must be pleasing to God. He's a good preacher.

Or if he can heal the sick. Or prophesy. Or speak in tongues.

Or do signs and wonders. These are different gifts of the Holy Spirit that we find operating through Jesus, through the apostles. And at various times in church history, too, as well.

Many people have the impression that if somebody can heal the sick, he must be really a spiritual person. He must be a true disciple. But the Bible makes it very clear that gifts of the Holy Spirit do not tell you one thing about a person's spirituality.

Or even about whether they're saved or not. In the Bible, Balaam prophesied. Now, he was a false prophet.

But he prophesied. He actually got genuine prophecies from God. But in his life, he was an occultist.

It just so happened that on one occasion, God wanted to speak through him. And so he kind of overrode his occultic background and spoke genuinely through him. But the man was an evil man who loved the wages of unrighteousness, the Bible says.

King Saul prophesied. Not when he was a godly man. But when he was chasing David to kill him.

He accidentally fell among a group of prophets and the spirit overwhelmed King Saul. He fell down on the ground and he prophesied. It was so contrary to his character that it became almost a joke in Israel.

People said, is Saul also among the prophets? It seems so crazy that Saul would be able to prophesy because he was such a wicked man. But that's just the point. He didn't have good character, but he did have a charisma.

Briefly, he was able to prophesy. That's a gift. Caiaphas, the chief priest of the Sanhedrin who condemned Jesus.

He prophesied according to John chapter 10. He didn't know he was prophesying, but John the apostle tells us that Caiaphas being high priest, that you're prophesied unknowingly. He prophesied when he said that it's better for Jesus to die than for the whole nation to perish.

And John said he didn't realize he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation. Well, the guy wasn't a good guy. He didn't go to heaven.

But he prophesied. He had a charisma one time. Even a donkey prophesied for Pete's sake.

I mean, you know that a donkey is not a good Christian. Not a bad one either. It's no kind of Christian at all.

No kind of a prophet either. It's not a spiritual being. And the fact that God could open his mouth and it could supernaturally speak words from God, that's what prophecy is, proves, and maybe God did that to Balaam, in order to show Balaam that being able to speak from God doesn't make you anything.

He showed him by letting his own donkey speak to him. That's really what he's trying to get across to us too. Just because you can prophesy doesn't mean you even know God.

You might be a rebel against God. That's not something that God necessarily values you for. The same is true of working miracles.

Pharaoh's magicians worked wonders and miracles, it seemed. Maybe they faked them, but they looked real, and therefore people looking on would say, Well, they have it. They've got the same thing Moses has, but they didn't.

False prophets can work wonders, according to Deuteronomy 13, verses 1 through 3. If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass whereby he says to you, Let us go and worship other gods. He says, Don't follow that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, because the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul. Deuteronomy 13, verses 1 through 3. False prophets can give signs or wonders.

That actually happened. Simon the sorcerer in Acts chapter 8, before he was a Christian, when he was serving the devil, when he was in the bond of iniquity. Actually, he never did become a real Christian, it seems.

He actually was an occultist late into his life from what the church fathers tell us. But we're told in Acts chapter 8, he did wonders so much that people actually called him the mighty power of God. But he was not the mighty power of God, more like the power of Satan.

Likewise, in 2 Thessalonians 2, the man of lawlessness is going to come with all kinds of signs and wonders and lying deeds by the power of Satan, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2, talking about the man of sin. So you've got prophecies and wonders and signs being worked by people who are in no way Christians, much less spiritual people. So charisma

doesn't prove a thing.

In fact, Juan Carlos Ortiz, I may have told you this before, I'll give you his actual words. He was an assembly of God that is a Pentecostal pastor in Buenos Aires. He's in this country now.

But he, of course, he believed in signs and wonders and all of that. But he wrote a book called Disciple back in the late 70s, I think it was. And in that book, he said what we're going to have in the next few slides.

He says, some people fool themselves by seeking the Spirit's gifts instead of his fruit. Even though we appreciate the gifts, we must be careful where we put the emphasis. Jesus never said you will know them by their gifts.

He said you will know them by their fruits. Gifts do not indicate spirituality because gifts on a person are like gifts on a Christmas tree in a crowded city like Buenos Aires. We do not have many trees.

Most of our Christmas trees are artificial creations of wire and cable and green paper. But we fix them nicely. We buy them for two or three dollars and hang watches and rings and other gifts on them.

They look very nice, even though they're not natural trees. But when you step outside on December 26th, all the Christmas trees are in the garbage. They may have carried expensive Omega watches yesterday, but today they're in the garbage.

So you can't say much about the tree on the basis of its gifts. The gifts do not indicate what kind of tree it is. Only by the fruit can you tell something about the tree.

If the apples are good, you can say you have a good apple tree and so forth. Of course, the best thing would be for a tree to have both good apples and Omega watches, both fruit and gifts. But if that is not possible, at least the fruit should be good.

A person may be excused if he doesn't have gifts, but there's no excuse for not having fruit. If we say to the apple tree, why don't you have a nice ring on you? The tree could say, excuse me, but no one has put a ring on me. But the apple tree cannot get away without having apples on it because apples are the result of a normal apple tree.

Now, this is not just a cute illustration. This is a profound observation. Gifts of the spirit can be given by God to the most unworthy persons, as we saw in that list.

We looked at some of the people in the Old and New Testament who are not even Christians who prophesied or did other supernatural things by the power of God. But the fruit of the spirit is character. Love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control.

These are character traits. This is the character of Jesus. And therefore, to have the fruit

of the spirit means that you are becoming like him inwardly and exhibiting the same behaviors naturally, just like a tree produces fruit naturally.

God can hang gifts on you if he wants to, but it won't tell anyone about whether you're a good Christian or not. You can be a great preacher, a great prophet, a great miracle worker, but you might not even be a great Christian. Might not even be a Christian.

Might be a donkey even. But the point here is the fruit really does tell you something because fruit is generated from within the organism. And spiritual fruit is created from within the Holy Spirit's working in your spirit.

And therefore, it has to do with your character. So, character is more important than charisma. Remember this.

We've used this many times. Matthew 7, 22 through 23, but it certainly illustrates what I just said. Jesus said, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name? Those are charismatic folks.

Casting out demons, prophesying, doing mighty wonders. But Jesus said, then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Their problem was they were lawless. They weren't obedient. They weren't living an obedient life.

They were not Christ-like people. And therefore, their charisma didn't count for anything. Now, of course, the essential mark of discipleship, if I ask you what that is, I hope everyone would say without blinking an eye, it's love.

Jesus said in John 13, 34 and 35, 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 one for another.

Not if you prophesy, not if you speak with tongues, not if you heal the sick or cast out demons. But if you love others, then people will know that what you are is a disciple of Jesus. He said, that's the true mark of true discipleship.

Paul said it this way in a very famous passage in First Corinthians 13, verses one through three said, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels. But have not love. I have become sounding brass or a clean cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy. And understand all mysteries and all knowledge. And though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love.

I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and though I give my body to be burned and have not love it profits me nothing. He says.

In other words, no matter what I do, if I don't love, I'm worthless. It says nothing favorable about me. I can speak with tongues and interpret them.

I could speak in the tongues of men or even the tongues of angels. It wouldn't mean a thing if I don't have love. If I prophesy, if I can move mountains, that's a that's a powerful ministry, moving mountains by faith.

He said, it's still I'm nothing. I am nothing. If I don't have love, it's not that I'm worth a little less if I don't have a lot of love.

It's that I don't I'm not worth anything at all. When it comes to being a Christian. Because being a Christian is about love.

Love is not one of the important virtues of Christianity. Love is Christianity. Love is discipleship.

By this, people will know that you are my disciples. If you love, Jesus said, and not by any other means. Now, there's different aspects of love that the Bible tells us about.

Of course, the most basic, most fundamental is that which I'm sure we're all familiar with. The love for my neighbor. We know there's famous scriptures about that, that probably almost every Christian can quote.

Matthew 22, 37 through 38. Jesus said to the lawyer, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. It's interesting that he said that second one is like the first one.

Because the first one certainly seems lofty and seems very important. And something God would really place a priority on. His people loving him.

Actually, do you know that Judaism and Christianity are the only major religions in the world. Where the deity asks the worshippers to love him. No other religion requires that the worshippers love their deity.

Only submit. Only fear. Only obey.

The God of Israel, who is also the God of the Lord Jesus Christ and our God, is the only God who puts a premium on loving him. But he says, but loving your neighbor is like it, too. It's kind of on the same level.

They had asked Jesus, what is the great commandment? He could have just stuck with one, but he couldn't stick with one. Because there's two that are kind of equally, you know, they tie for first place. That loving my neighbor is as important to God as loving

him is.

Jesus couldn't separate them or couldn't limit it to just one. In James 2.8, James said, if you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You do well.

Now, what's interesting about this, he's quoting the same thing Jesus quoted, a quote from Leviticus. But James refers to this as the royal law. Why does he use a term like that, the royal law? What does royal mean? It means of the king.

It's the king's law. If you're in the kingdom, if you're a disciple of King Jesus, then there's a law for you. He called it a new commandment I give to you.

The royal law is that you love your neighbor as you love yourself. James said, if you do that, you're doing good. But also, some of my neighbors are not friendly.

And so Jesus tells me that not only am I to be aware of the need to love my neighbor, I need to love my neighbor even when my neighbor is an enemy. And Jesus said, we have to love our enemies. You know, Luke 6, he said, but I say to you who hear, love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who spitefully use you.

Wait a minute, let's look at that again. Can we do those things? Love your enemies. How do you do that? Well, this is how you do it.

You do it by doing good to people who hate you. You can do that. Blessing those who curse you.

When people say, I can't love my enemies, I think, well, wait, can't you do good to somebody? Can't you bless somebody? The fact that he hates you and that he doesn't do good things to you, that should be irrelevant, Jesus said. This is what love does. Praying for those who spitefully use you.

In other words, bearing no grudges and wishing well for those who don't wish you well. You do not let them determine how you will respond to them. When someone is your enemy and hates you and curses you and spitefully uses you, you know they're not trying to win your friendship.

And it's got to frustrate the heck out of them when you are their friend anyway. I remember a story, I don't know if I can quote it exactly, but, you know, Abraham Lincoln was known to be a very cordial and generous man, even toward his political enemies. And once one of his advisors was saying, Mr. Lincoln, you're too kind to your enemies.

You're supposed to be defeating them. And Lincoln said, well, if I make my enemy my

friend, haven't I defeated my enemy? Now, that wasn't the wit and wisdom of Lincoln. Of course, he got that from Jesus.

He was a Bible reading man and he knew what Jesus said. And that is true. You make your enemy your friend.

You've defeated your enemy. Because your enemy is your enemy because he doesn't like you and he doesn't want you to like him. He's trying to offend you.

He's trying to destroy the relationship. And you say, sorry, it's not going to work. Not going to work on me.

Try it with someone else. I'm going to still love you. I'm going to still do good to you.

I'm still going to pray for you. I'm still going to bless you. That's love for your enemies.

Now, Paul said in Romans 12:20, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

That's being kind to somebody who's your enemy. For in so doing, you'll heap coals of fire upon his head. Now, you might say, well, that doesn't sound very nice.

But what that's meaning is this, that if you retaliate against those who are your enemies, then you will have repaid them and there'll be no room for God to repay them. But if you do good to them and they continue to be evil to you, they're just heaping up judgment for later upon themselves. And Paul actually associated this with not avenging yourself, but leaving room for God's wrath, because God said, Vengeance is mine.

I will repay. And therefore, Paul says, therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him, because God is the one who will ultimately pay. You don't have to you don't have to square the deals and settle the books with this person.

God will do that sometime. You just keep doing good. It's true.

If he doesn't respond favorably to you doing good, then he's heaping up a much more severe judgment when God does come to settle the scores. But that's really not your problem. That's his and it's not your business.

It's your business to respond in love. And remember, that is not just a New Testament teaching, because Paul is quoting Proverbs 25:21 and 22 there. So it's actually an Old Testament teaching.

Some people think that when Jesus said, Love your enemies, he was, you know, invoking a totally new ethic that was unknown in the Old Testament. Far from it. Proverbs was written a thousand years before Christ.

And it's what Paul is quoting about. If your enemy hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him a drink.

It's Proverbs 25, 21, 22. But you can go further back than that. You can go back to the law of Moses.

In Exodus 23, 4 and 5, Moses said, If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. That's what he'd want. He's your enemy, but he would want his ox back, so you take it back to him.

A bit of an inconvenience to you. And the fact that he's your enemy might not easily dispose you to want to do him any favors, but that's what the law of Moses required. Love your enemy.

He said, If you see the donkey of one who hates you, lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping, you shall surely help him with it. You might prefer to refrain, but the law said, No, you don't. If he hates you and his donkey is under the load, he can't get up, you help him up.

You help out the one who hates you. You do good to those who persecute you and so forth. That's an Old Testament teaching as well, because love has always been what God requires of people, because God is love.

There's also, of course, the emphasis in the Scripture on love for fellow disciples, and this is really our priority. In fact, the great commandment that Jesus gave when he said, A new commandment I give to you is that you love one another. He means you disciples.

He was talking to the disciples in the upper room. You guys need to love each other. There's a family kind of love that Christians all share with each other.

We're supposed to love everybody, even our enemies, but there's a special obligation to love those who are part of the family of God. So said Paul in Galatians 6.10. He said, Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially those who are of the household of faith. That is especially our Christian brothers and sisters.

Do good to everybody, but especially do good to your Christian brothers and sisters, he says. In 1 John 3.14, John says, We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren. That's our fellow Christians.

He who does not love his brother abides in death. That means he's not born again yet. If you don't love your brother, you're not saved yet.

Now, that's the first priority, and it should be the easiest person to love, shouldn't it? I mean, he at least has the same faith you have. He's pursuing the same goals you have. If you're in a position to do good to him, then he must be in the same fellowship you're

in.

You guys have some things in common, and the most important thing you have in common is Jesus and the fact that he has Jesus and you have Jesus, and that's the most important thing to both of you means that you should love him. If you can't love your brother, you can't be saved. You remain dead if you don't love your brother, and we know that we've passed from death to life only because we do love the brethren.

Now, loving your enemies, that can be obviously something to work on because it's a little more difficult, but loving your brother shouldn't be difficult, and it's an obligation. Love, however, we often misunderstand. We think love is an emotion.

Say, I just can't love that person. I can't love that person because of what they did to me. That person just isn't attractive to me.

That person is not appealing to me. That person is annoying to me. Well, you can't choose to feel certain emotions, and therefore, you could not be commanded to feel them.

When God commands you to love, he's not commanding you to feel a certain way. In the Bible, although love is generally accompanied with feeling, as it is in our lives, it is primarily a form of behavior. Love in Scripture is something you can do by choice.

Feeling good about somebody is not something you can do by choice. Remember that love is not just a more strong kind of liking, and that's what we generally think just by nature. We think, well, I like most people.

I really love that person. That means I like them more than I like most people, right? Because I like these people, but I especially like, I love this person. And loving to us, we think it means especially liking.

Liking more than average is loving. But loving and liking are not, biblically speaking, even in the same category. One is not a more extreme form of the other.

Liking is a matter of taste, and you cannot be made to like things that are not your taste to like. There might be certain colors you don't like. You might put up with them because your wife likes them, but the whole house may be painted that color, but you may not like it.

And it's not a vice that you don't like it. It's just something you don't like. Liking is taste.

Who knows? Who can account for taste? There's no accountant for taste, right? And you can't really change your taste at will. You can maybe, in some cases, develop a taste for something by forcing yourself to eat it a lot and then eventually develop a taste, but that's not what love is. Love is not liking.

Liking is an emotional response to something, and we are not called upon to feel feelings by command. We are commanded to love by command, because love is behavior. And we can see that very clearly by what the Bible tells us about love.

For example, in Galatians 5.14, Paul said, All the law is fulfilled in one word, even this you shall love your neighbors yourself. And in Matthew 7.12, Jesus said, Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. Now, what do these scriptures have in common? They have this in common.

They both say that all the law is encompassed in this rule. The way that Paul puts the rule in Galatians is, You shall love your neighbors, you shall love yourself. What Jesus said is, Whatever you want men to do to you, do to them.

That's the same thing. Love your neighbors, your love yourself, is not about how you feel, it's what you do to your neighbor. What do you want someone to do to you? Well, you can be sure that whatever you want people to do to you is because you love yourself.

You certainly do, by the way. Don't let psychologists tell you otherwise. The Bible says, No one yet ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church.

This idea that we need more self-love is simply an anti-biblical concept, I think. But the point is, the Bible assumes that we love ourselves very much. In fact, it's our natural instinct to put ourselves above everyone else.

And we'd sooner run away and let everyone else die than die for them. Love is when you are willing to sacrifice yourself for the one you love. And so, it's what you do.

You love yourself. You know what you want people to do to you. How do you want people to treat you? Kindly? That's because you love yourself.

You want to be treated kindly because you like yourself. You love yourself. You want a certain thing for yourself.

And therefore, to love your neighbor as you love yourself means that you do to them the thing that you want done to you. You see, the two are equated. Love is what you do.

Of course, it has to be properly motivated because you can do things in order to manipulate. I mean, you can do nice things for reasons other than love. But if you're seeking to love your neighbor as you love yourself, it boils down to not feeling a certain way.

It boils down to doing a certain thing, behaving toward them. It's a pattern of behavior. It's a pattern of relationship that you adopt toward them.

In 1 John 3, 16 through 18, he says, By this we know love because he laid down his life for us. That's what love looks like. It looks like laying down your life for someone.

And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Does this mean we all need to be martyrs? We all need to go and die for each other? We can't do that. First of all, not all of us are being invited to lay down our lives for others.

I mean, not everyone has the opportunity to be a martyr, but everyone must lay down their life. You lay down your life when you give up your prerogatives, when you give up your time, when you give up what you would want in your life for what someone else wants. You lay down your life for the others.

That's what Jesus did. Of course, he did it ultimately when he died on the cross, but he laid down his life for us from the moment he set foot in the ministry. He gave his time, his energy for others.

His life was totally given over for other people. And John gives this example. He says, But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? In other words, this isn't love.

If you see someone in need and you can help them and you don't, you shut your heart from them. Now, that doesn't mean you shut your hand because sometimes you can't help. You'd like to help, but there's so many needs.

You can't help everybody. There may be people you would like to help, but you can't. But if you shut your heart to them and you don't even want to help them, then what God calls love isn't there in you.

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed. That is, in action and in truth. To love is an action.

We are to love in deed, not just talk about loving. Not in word or in tongue, but in fact in our actions we're supposed to love. Love is behavior.

Jesus said to the Pharisees in Luke 11, 42, Woe to you, Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Now, I want to talk about that highlighted line there, you pass by justice and the love of God, but I want to compare it first with another passage.

This is Matthew's version of the same statement in Matthew 23, 23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

You can see it's the same statement, but it's slightly different because in Luke, he says that what they have passed by or neglected is justice and the love of God. Now, the love of God means love for God. We know Jesus gave two commandments as the great ones.

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That's the love of God, your love for God. But there's this other part, which is love your neighbor.

And that is in Luke 11, 42, summarized as justice. I want to talk about justice and some other things, but compare that with the parallel in Matthew 23, 23. In the place of justice, Matthew's version expands it out to three things, justice and mercy and faithfulness.

He said you've neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. Now, the weightier matters of the law. What is the weightiest matter of the law? Anyone know? What did Jesus say? What's the great commandment? Love.

Now he says the weightier matters of the law are justice and mercy and faithfulness. Why? Because these are the components of love. Love is a way of behaving and these are the categories where love is shown in behavior.

And I want to talk to you about these things. In Micah 6, 8, the prophet said, he has shown you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Now, do justly and love mercy.

Those are the first two things on Jesus list too. And Zechariah 7, 9 says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, execute true justice, show mercy and compassion, everyone to his brother. We see in the Old Testament, justice and mercy, very important things also to Jesus because he said that love is justice and mercy and faithfulness.

Now, with reference to justice, justice and love are essentially equated in Deuteronomy 10, 18. Speaking of God, it says he administers justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the stranger. The administration of justice on behalf of someone is an expression of love for them.

But we're not talking about justice as opposed to mercy. Lots of people say, I don't want justice. I want mercy.

People often think of justice as a negative thing, partly because we know we're sinners and we know that if we got strict justice, we would be condemned. But that's not what the Bible usually means by justice. It is when when preachers talk about justice, they're often talking about, you know, if we would receive justice, we'd go to hell, but we want mercy from God.

Well, we do want mercy, but justice in the Bible, when it's advocated that we do justly, it's not contrasting justice with mercy. It's contrasting justice with injustice. And injustice is unloving.

Don't you know that if someone treats you unjustly, don't you feel that they didn't love you? You're to love your neighbors. You love yourself is to do to others what you want them to do to you. Right.

So do you want people to treat you unjustly? No. No, you want them to treat you justly if you understand what justice really means. What does justice mean? Justice means the upholding of the rights of others.

That is a very important biblical definition of justice. It is when you acknowledge other people have rights and you do not trample upon them. You will not violate their rights and you'll even speak up for their rights if other people violate them.

To uphold the rights of others, that is justice in the Bible. In fact, the law, the Ten Commandments, is all about justice. After you get through the four commandments about honoring God, you've got six commandments about behavior to man and they're all about justice.

Honor your father and your mother. What does this mean? Parents' honor or parental honor is a debt that is owed. If you withhold from your parents the honor that is owed to them, that's an injustice.

You're depriving them of their right. That's what Paul said over in 1 Timothy chapter 5. He said that if widows have children who can support them, then the widows should not be a burden to the church for their support. But that the children should support their widow mothers and show piety at home and repay their parents.

That's what Paul says. When an adult child supports his widowed mother or his disabled parent, Paul says they are repaying their parents. What do you mean repaying? Because you owe them something.

They took care of you when you couldn't take care of yourself. You owe it to them to take care of them when they can't take care of themselves. Parents are owed something.

And one thing they're owed is respect. Even if they were not honorable people, they were God's choice of the persons to bring you into the world. And if God wanted you in the world, then they served that purpose well.

They may not have done well afterwards. But you honor them as God's selection of the conduit for your coming into the world. And yes, there are things you can't approve, things that you can't recommend about your parents perhaps.

But honor is owed to them. And therefore honor your father and mother is simply to observe justice. You don't deprive them of the honor that is a debt you owe them.

Do not commit murder. Suggests that people have a right to life. You don't violate their

right to life.

Now capital punishment was permitted in the Bible, but that's because people who were to receive capital punishment were people who had forfeited their right to life by doing something worthy of death. You see, capital punishment is different from murder. Murder is an injustice.

That's when you kill somebody who didn't do anything worthy of death. Capital punishment is justice because someone does something worthy of death, you give them what they deserve. That is why it's not inconsistent, although many people think it is, for Christians to oppose abortion, but still approve of capital punishment.

Now maybe some people here may not approve of capital punishment. There was many years in my early Christian life where I didn't approve of it either. In my opinion, I hadn't thought through the New Testament teaching on the subject.

But the point is, many Christians believe in capital punishment, but they do not believe in abortion. And critics say, that's inconsistent. Are you supposed to be pro-life? How can you approve of killing murderers? Well, it's not about pro-life or pro-death, it's about pro-justice.

The infant killed in an abortion is innocent, has a right to live, that it has not done anything to forfeit. It is an injustice to deprive an innocent life. There is a right to life there.

But the person, if you believe in capital punishment, what you believe is that if someone does something that deserves death, then justice gives them what they deserve. Now you might not be for capital punishment. The point is, murder, the command in the Old Testament, you should not murder, presupposes there is a right to life that should not be violated.

That's a matter of justice. Do not commit adultery presupposes that spouses have a right to the fidelity of their mate. After all, they promise it to each other.

If somebody promises you, you come over to my house and I'll be faithful to you for the rest of my life. And she says, okay, I'll come. And then you say, okay, thanks, I enjoyed you for a while, but I really want to do something else now.

I want to go to someone else now. Well, wait, you owe something to that person. You made a promise.

They have the right to expect you to keep that promise. Spouses have a right to the fidelity of their spouses, and adultery is a violation of their rights. It's an injustice.

Do not steal. What does that presuppose? Obviously, that people have a right to their

property. If people didn't have property rights, then there'd be no such thing as stealing.

If everything was everybody's, you could just take my car without my permission and do what you want with it, because it wouldn't be stealing, because I don't have any more right to it than you have to it. The truth is, the Bible does acknowledge the right to property, and violating people's property rights is injustice. Do not bear false witness.

This presupposes that people, or at least good people, have a right to their good name, to their reputation. If somebody has not done something wrong and you malign them, you slander them, you are depriving them of the reputation that they have earned, that they have a right to. If a person strives to resist sin and criminal behavior in their lives, and they're virtuous people, and someone maligns them and lies about them, they have a right to their good name.

They earned it. They have a good reputation because it's really theirs. And if you slander them, if you bear false witness against them, you're violating their rights.

That's justice. The law is about justice. Justice is the upholding of the rights of others.

So if I'm going to do justice, it means I'm not going to trample on your rights. I'm going to recognize that you have rights to your life and to your property and to your wife or husband and your reputation, all those things. And I'm not going to violate those things.

That's a basic commitment that a Christian has to make if he's going to be loving. Because you know that if anyone slanders you, commits adultery with your spouse, murders you, steals from you, any of those things, you don't like it. Why don't you like it? You know that's not fair.

That's not just. Your rights have been violated and you know it. And therefore, if you don't want that done to you, you don't do anything remotely resembling that to anyone else.

Then there's mercy. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Mercy, what is mercy? Mercy is kind of related to justice, but goes a step further.

It is laying aside my rights for the benefit of others. If I'm a just person, it means I will not violate your rights. If I'm a merciful person, I might even give up some of my own rights for your benefit.

Now, some people say, well, we don't have any rights because we're Christians. Remember, we died, we're crucified with Christ, dead people have no rights, so forth. You hear Christians say this a lot.

That's not exactly what the Bible teaches. The Bible does not teach we don't have rights, but the Bible does say we must give up our rights many times. We do have rights.

If I had no rights, then you could come up here and shoot me in the head and you'd be totally justified because I have no right to my life. You just took from me what I don't have any right to anyway. If you can violate my property or my person or my reputation wrongfully, then I must have rights that you violated.

But I can give up those rights on occasion if that will be good for somebody else. That's what mercy is. Mercy is surrendering or laying aside some of my rights for others' benefit.

All right? One of the rights I may lay aside if I'm merciful is my right to fair treatment. This basically comes down to a biblical virtue called forbearance. Forbearance means enduring wrong from someone or enduring somebody who's difficult.

It means being patient under provocation. Now, everybody wants to be treated fairly, but if somebody doesn't treat me fairly, what do I do? Well, if I lay aside my right to fair treatment, then I'll be a forbearing person. We see this, for example, in Proverbs 10, 12.

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. If you love somebody, mercy is part of that. If you love somebody, you will endure wrong from them and cover for them.

Not in the sense of being an enabler or whatever, but in the sense that when they do you wrong, love for them will make that something you'll pass over. Or as it says in Proverbs 17, 9, he who covers over an offense promotes love. That means if someone does something to you wrong and you just, you don't gossip about it, you don't tell about it, you just kind of are quiet about it, you just endure it patiently, that you're seeking love, promotes love.

That's love. Forbearing. Proverbs 19, 11 says, a man's wisdom gives him patience.

It is to his glory to overlook an offense. That's being merciful. If somebody does something that would offend you and you overlook it, that's being forbearing.

That's putting up with unfair treatment, but you're giving up your right to be treated fairly. They are in the wrong, but you are giving up your right to what you would otherwise have the right to. 1 Peter 4, 8 says, above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

So if you love, you'll forbear, you'll endure, you'll be patient with other sins against you. Like Jesus. Peter said in 1 Peter 2, 21 through 23.

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this end you were called. Did you know you were called to that? When God called you to be a Christian, he called you to do good and suffer abuse for it.

He says to that you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. Jesus didn't suffer for you so that you don't have to suffer. Some people think that.

Jesus suffered for me so I don't have to suffer. No, Jesus suffered for you leaving an example so you'd follow his steps. That is the steps of suffering.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. That's how you forbear. That's how you give up your right to fair treatment.

If someone treats you unfairly, you commit yourself to God. He's the one who will judge righteously. You don't judge.

You don't retaliate. You just commit yourself into God's hands. How do you do that? Well, Peter tells us that too in 1 Peter 4, 19.

So then those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good. You commit yourself into God's hands by continuing to do good to somebody who's not doing good to you. If you retaliate, you're committing your defense into your own hands.

If you refuse to retaliate, if you do good to the one who hurts you, then you are committing justice into the hands of God, not taking it into your own hands. You're committing yourself to God and he's a faithful creator. He'll take care of it eventually.

It's not your business. So, mercy includes laying aside my right to fair treatment. It also means laying aside my right to vengeance.

And this is what forgiving is. Forgiving is simply giving up my right to punish the person who did something bad to me. Forbearing and forgiving are very similar things.

The difference is forbearing means you're just absorbing it. Forgiving means you are absolutely refusing to hold a grudge about it. You're not holding it against them.

You see, you could forbear without forgiving. You could endure quietly and patiently while someone abuses you and still be bitter inside and resentful and thinking, well, they're going to get theirs and I can't wait until they do. But forgiving means you give up your right for vengeance.

And there is a right to vengeance. There is a right to vengeance. That's why God says he will bring it.

He says, do not avenge yourselves for God has said vengeance is mine. That is, the

prerogative of bringing vengeance is God's prerogative. And he says, I will repay.

When people do you wrong, there is a repayment due. It's not yours to give. It's yours to release that.

God will take care of it in his time, in whatever way he wants. But if you're forgiving someone, you're actually hoping that they will repent so that they don't have to have vengeance because you're giving up your right to have vengeance. You're not going to bring it on them yourself.

You don't even really wish for God to bring it on them. You forgive them. Jesus, describing this parable of the king who had a servant who couldn't pay him his debt back, it says, then the master of that servant was moved with compassion.

That's a term that's used of Jesus about four times in the Gospel of Matthew. He was moved with compassion. Compassion is a feeling, a pity that you have for somebody.

But he didn't just feel it. It moved him. He did something about it.

That compassion moved him to do something. In this case, to release the debtor and forgive him the debt. That's Matthew 18, 27.

Mercy surrendered the right to be repaid and allowed this man to rip him off, basically. That's forgiving. Colossians 3, 13 says we need to be bearing with one another and forgiving one another.

Bearing with one another is forbearance. Forgiving is forgiving. Forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, if anyone has any complaint against anyone, you need to forgive.

Even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. It's mandatory. Ephesians 4, 32.

Paul says, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God and Christ forgave you. It's part of mercy to be forgiving. You give up your right to punish the person who's done you wrong.

Luke 11, 4. We're told to pray and forgive us our sins. We all want that. We want God to forgive us our sins.

But he says, for we also forgive everyone who's indebted to us. That is, for means because. God, forgive my sins because I'm forgiving others.

That's what it means. Of course, we know Matthew's version also. In Matthew's version, the verse says, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

The same way as we forgive others, forgive us that way. It's absolutely mandatory that

we forgive others if we want to be forgiven by God. And that's often stated.

We won't go into all the scriptures that state it because we don't have time. Mercy is laying aside my right to my time and my possessions as well. In other words, it may mean helping somebody out at the expense of my time or my money or something else because they need it.

Mercy, therefore, is laying aside my right to fair treatment, laying aside my right to vengeance, and also laying aside my right to my time and possessions. As the first of these, I called forbearance. The second I called forgiveness.

I call this one compassionate generosity. This is the main way that human mercy is described in the Old Testament. Psalm 37, 21 says, The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives.

Shows mercy and gives means he helps people out who are in need. That's mercy. That's giving up his right to his own possessions to help somebody else who has no intrinsic right to them but needs them.

Proverbs 14, 21, He who has mercy on the poor, happy is he. Mercy on the poor obviously means giving to the poor. Happy is that person.

See how the word mercy is used in the Old Testament. Proverbs 19, 17 says, He who has pity on the poor, which is a synonym for mercy, lends to the Lord. Pity on the poor, mercy on the poor, this is of course talking about doing something practical for them at your own expense.

In Matthew 14, 14 we read, And when Jesus went out, he saw a great multitude, and he was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick. He felt mercy and compassion for them, so he did something for them. He took his time for them.

He gave his time to them. Many times Jesus was trying to escape the crowd so he'd get a bit of rest. And he crossed the lake and the people would anticipate and they'd go over there and he was trying to get away from them with his disciples.

He gets over there and he finds a whole crowd has gathered waiting for him and so he just gives up his free time and says, Okay, I'll teach you, I'll heal you, I'll feed you. And he did that. And sometimes he didn't even sleep.

Jesus asked the lawyer after he told the story of the good Samaritan, which we all know to him. Jesus said, So which of these three do you think was the neighbor to him who fell among thieves? And the lawyer said, He who showed mercy on him. Now think of that story.

What did the guy do who showed mercy? He had compassion on him. He risked his own

safety. He loaded him on his donkey, took him, he paid his lodgings, paid for food, told the innkeeper if he needs anything, I'll come back in a few days and pay you some more.

In other words, he did practical things. He gave up his right to his own safety, his own time, his own money because someone needed it. That's what mercy is, giving up your rights.

And Jesus then said to him, Go and do likewise. Go show mercy in that way. Luke 10, 36 through 37.

Now there's justice, there's mercy and there's faithfulness. What is faithfulness? It's loyalty, it's integrity, it's reliability. You know that love requires faithfulness because you know you don't like it when people are unfaithful to you, when your friends are disloyal, when people lie to you, when you expect them to do something because they said they would and they're not reliable.

It's like a foot out of joint or a broken tooth, it says in Proverbs, an unreliable servant, someone who's unfaithful. You expect them to do something for you and they don't. It's like a broken tooth, Solomon said.

You know, you ever had a tooth that you didn't know was bad until you bit something hard and then it broke? You didn't expect that. You thought the tooth was going to be reliable but it failed you and it's annoying. And that's what an unfaithful servant is like, Solomon said.

In Proverbs 11, 13, Solomon said, A tale bearer, which means a gossip, reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter. Can you keep people's secrets? You can if you're faithful, if you have a faithful spirit. Why? Because you want them to keep your secrets.

If you confide in somebody and you say, now this is just between us, you want them not to spread it around. You want them to do that to you, you do that to them. That's love.

You be faithful. You be a faithful friend. Keep people's secrets if they need to be kept.

Proverbs 14, 5 says, A faithful witness does not lie. That's a given. Faithfulness means you're honest.

You don't lie. You're not going to deceive. Psalm 15, 1 and 4 says, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? If you know this psalm, there's several verses that give a long list of virtues that answer this question.

You want to live with God? You need to have these virtues. And in verse 4, the virtue that's named is, He who swears to his own hurt and does not change. Swears to his own hurt means you make a promise.

You make an oath. I will do it. And then it turns out it's going to hurt you to keep your oath.

You realize later, Oh, I made a big mistake. I shouldn't have made that promise. It's going to hurt.

It's going to cost me more than I thought. But you don't change. You do what you said you'd do.

Why? Because you're faithful. That's what faithfulness is. This is especially true in marriages because people actually do swear oaths when they get married.

They make a, they take a vow. I'm going to stay with you until I die or until you do. And it doesn't matter how bad it gets for better or for worse.

In sickness and health, rich or poor, it doesn't matter. It can get horrible, but you can count on me. I will be here for you.

And because you're making the same commitment to me, we will at least have each other for the rest of our lives. You don't have to worry about a thing. And then you get married and you find out, I didn't know he snored like that.

I didn't know she chewed with her mouth open. I didn't know that he left little hairs all over the countertop of the sink when he shaved. I didn't know he leaves the toilet seat up.

I didn't know she talks on the phone all day. And I think, I made a promise and it's going to hurt me. I don't like this.

This is painful for me. I don't like being married to this person. Well, you swore.

Does it hurt? Well, it doesn't change anything. A faithful person swears to their own hurt and does not change because their integrity is worth more to them than their convenience. Proverbs 27, 6 says, And that's an important thing too because a faithful friend will sometimes wound you if that's what you need.

They're committed to you and they can be counted on. They're reliable. If you need a rebuke, they'll give you a rebuke.

You need a kick in the butt, they'll give you a kick in the butt. The wounds that are delivered by a friend are faithful. They're an expression of the faithfulness of that person if you need it, obviously.

Luke 16, 10, Jesus said, You know, if you think about getting married ever, and you wonder, you know, there's a lot of people who divorce their wives or divorce their husbands nowadays. How do I know if this person's going to be faithful? Look at their life.

Do they pay their bills on time? Do they keep their small promises? If they say they're going to meet you at 7, are they there at 7? If they're faithful in small things, they'll be faithful in big things because someone who's consistently faithful in the small matters is faithful inside, you see.

If somebody's a faithful person, they will be faithful through and through. And faithfulness is a habit. It's love.

And if a person is a loving person, they will be faithful. They will be merciful. They will be just in their dealings.

Now, how can I love like Jesus loves? We'll go through this real quickly because we're about out of time. How can I do that? Well, there's a certain role of humility you have to take into consideration. Namely, you don't think of yourself as more valuable than others.

If you consider others are at least as important as you are, then you'll figure that their needs are as important as your needs. Their desire is as important as your desire. Their need to be loved is like yours.

You're no better than they are. When we don't love certain people, it's because we think we're better than they are and our needs and our interests are more important than theirs. That's the opposite of humility.

Humility is bringing yourself down below others. Remember Micah 6.8 says, He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God? We talked about justice and mercy and faithfulness, but humbly with your God.

This is all part of that because you can't love unless you're humble enough to love because you will not sacrifice what you have if you think it's more important than what somebody else needs. Philippians 2.5-8 says, Let this mind be in you, this mentality which was also in Christ Jesus who being in the form of God made himself of no reputation. That's humble.

When you're God, you'd like people to know you're God, but he didn't make himself of any reputation. In fact, he never said he was God in a public setting. He took the form of a bond servant.

Now, serving is a humble role. And coming in the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, Paul goes on to say, even to the death of the cross. But this is the mind of Christ that we make ourselves of no reputation and we take the form of a servant and humble ourselves.

Paul said in Philippians 2, verses 3 and 4, he said, Let nothing be done through selfish

ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, that's what humility is, let each esteem others better than himself. If you think someone is better than yourself, then you'll put their needs above your needs. That's what love is.

It's sacrificing your stuff for their benefit because you consider them better than yourself. You don't necessarily think they're genuinely objectively better than you. They might not be.

They might be a worse person than you. But you consider that in God's sight, their needs are to be regarded by you as more important than your needs. And thus you're esteeming them better than yourself.

Let each of you look not out only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. That's humility. My interests, those are the most important things to a proud person.

But if I say, well, I'm not all that much. I'm just worm dung. I mean, at least someday I will be.

Right? Worm dung. Not just even worms, but dung of worms. That's pretty low.

Now, my interests, therefore, can't really make very compelling claims. But other people, they're made in the image of God, just like I am, and therefore their interests should be my concern as much as my own, maybe more. Romans 12, 10 suggests more.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love in honor preferring one another or giving preference to one another. Honor the other person above yourself. That's humility.

Jesus did that when he washed the disciples' feet. In John 13, verses 12 through 15, it says, So when he had washed their feet, taken his garments, and sat down again, he said to them, Do you know what I've done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you say, Well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. Being a servant, that's humbling yourself. That's also love, serving others.

Now, washing feet is something we don't do all that much unless you go to a church that does that as a ritual. In those days, they didn't do it as a ritual. It was something people needed their feet washed.

They had dirty feet. And so to wash the feet was actually a very lowly servant's role. The lowest servant in the household usually had the role of washing the feet, and Jesus took that role among his disciples.

And now, I did that so that you'd learn to do that for each other. But it's not really that we have to literally wash each other's feet, but actually do things for each other that need to be done, including the things that we think might be below our dignity to do. Cleaning the toilets, doing the things that no one else wants to do, washing the dirty dishes.

If I'm humble, I want to love others as I love myself. And how do I do it? Well, it's the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I need to be filled with the Spirit.

Paul said, the fruit of the Spirit is love, Galatians 5.22. I don't have time to go into this. We're out of time already. So I'm going to run right through this.

But in Galatians 5.22, it's the fruit of the Spirit. So Paul says, we need to be filled with the Spirit. In Ephesians 5, 18 through 21.

If you're filled with the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit will come in. How do you get filled with the Spirit, or how do you walk filled with the Spirit? Well, Paul tells us something about that. He says, Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

So, in other words, keep an atmosphere of worship and song inside your heart. That's your choice. What songs are running through your head during the day? Probably what's on the radio.

But, you know, when you turn off the radio, they still run through your head. And so you've got to have your heart filled with spiritual songs and worship songs because that sets the mood, an environment that the Holy Spirit is pleased to fill. Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

So, giving thanks for everything. That is a revolutionary thing to do. To thank God for everything.

You can always find something to thank Him for. There's lots of things that happen in your life that you would not naturally be thankful for. But you can always at least find something in those circumstances still to be thankful for.

Remember the old saying, I complained that I had no shoes? Until what? I met a man who had no feet. Oh, I don't have any shoes. Shall I complain? I should thank God I have feet.

If I didn't have feet, I wouldn't know I didn't have shoes. You know? I open my eyes and see light every morning. I see colors.

I met a man on the street this weekend. He's never seen light. He doesn't see colors.

He's a happy man. He's a Christian man. But, you know, there's always something you

can thank God for.

And an atmosphere of thankfulness in your heart is encouraging to the Holy Spirit. It's a spiritual therapeutic, A.W. Tozer said. Thankfulness is a spiritual therapeutic.

It keeps you spiritually healthy inside. Keeps it clean in there. Instead of all the grumbling and resentfulness and so forth.

And Paul said, the third thing is submitting to one another in the fear of God. So in other words, being a servant, being humble and serving one another. This is how you stay filled with the Spirit.

Keep the atmosphere of your heart worshipful, thankful, humble. Then the Spirit will be glad to stay there. Secondly, we need to know that sympathy comes through suffering.

Suffering is good for you. It can help you learn to love. Deuteronomy 1.19 God said to the Israelites, Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

You suffered. Remember that when you meet people who are strangers. You were strangers.

Love them. Hebrews 5.1-2 It says, For every high priest taken from among men can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because he suffers weakness, he can be compassionate toward others.

Paul said in Romans 5.3-5 Tribulation produces perseverance and perseverance character. That's what we're talking about. The character of a disciple.

It's produced through perseverance which is produced through tribulation. And character produces hope and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. It's a fruit of the Spirit.

But as we go through tribulation and perseverance it builds character and the main the chief characteristic it builds is the love of God in our character. We become loving people by nature by inward compulsion. Finally, seeing others as God sees them.

You want to know how to love people like God does? Well, see people like God sees them. How does God see people? Psalm 103.14 He knows our frame. He remembers that we're dust.

Remember that when people are unlovely to you they're just dust. They're not any stronger than you are. They've got flaws just like you do.

They're mortal. Give them a break. You want them to give you a break, don't you? You want God to give you a break? Then give them a break.

God sees them as weak and fragile. That's how you need to see them. It will give you compassion for them.

In fact, it says in Psalm 103.13 As a father pities his children so the Lord pities those who fear him. This is something that has revolutionized years ago. Revolutionized my ability to love people.

I've told my friends this but I may not have told you this. Not that you're not my friends. Whenever I need to love somebody and I'm having a hard time loving them I picture them as if they were my own child.

It doesn't matter how old they are because I've gotten in the habit of even old people I can in my mind shrink them down to when they were a little kid. Having kids of my own I have five kids and I just love them unconditionally. There's nothing they could do to make me not love them.

I just realize that person I find so difficult that could be my son. He's difficult sometimes too. That is somebody's child and somebody loves that kid or should like I love my kids and when I see them like a father sees a child then it makes it much easier to love them.

I've had to do this many times and it always works because I love children and I especially love my children. And so when I think well that person could be my son and I love him that person could be my daughter. Much older perhaps but my kids hopefully will be that old someday too and they will be the same people they are now and they are the same people they were when they were little.

Somewhere in that grown up older body is that same little kid that was so adorable and so wonderful and they've just gotten beat up by the world and they've reacted badly and they've made some mistakes and if that was my kid I just love them to death. So I might as well even though they're not my kid. They're somebody's kid Also, Hebrews 13 1-2 says Let brotherly love continue do not forget to entertain strangers for by doing so some have unwittingly entertained angels.

There's a motivation for you to do good to people. You never know they might be an angel. You never know.

But even better than an angel they might be Jesus. Because Jesus said in Matthew 25 37-40 on the day of judgment the righteous will answer him saying Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you and when did we see you thirsty and give you drink or when did we see you a stranger and take you in or naked and clothe you or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you 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. Not angels Jesus in disguise every Christian is one of Jesus' brethren and is Jesus in disguise part of the body of Christ whatever you do for them you're doing for him.

You want to serve Jesus? Serve his brethren serve people you want to love Jesus then love his people. I often give this illustration Danny Layman first mentioned it to me and I have never gotten that out of my head in fact it changed my whole life he said that when you are finished at the toilet and you are the last person to get the last toilet paper off the spindle and there's an empty spindle sitting there when you leave what do you do? You just say well next person can bother about that. What if Jesus was the next person going to use the toilet? What you think he didn't? You know what if you live in a Christian household or even anywhere there's Christians there's a good chance that Jesus is the next person who's going to do it that you putting that new toilet paper roll there for whoever it is you may be doing that for Jesus himself you can't be sure that it won't be and even in those little things like that doing some small kindness for someone you don't even know who it is you don't know it might be an angel might even be Jesus you might say Lord when did we do that for you? He said well you didn't know it but you did it for me because you did it for my brother so let's quickly summarize we've run way over time God values character above religion God values character above charisma the mark of the disciple is love love equals behavior it's not a fuzzy way of feeling behavior, what kind of behavior? well it's doing justice that's upholding the rights of others it's showing mercy laying aside my rights for others benefit it's faithfulness being loyal, honest, reliable and trustworthy that's what love is so how can I love like Jesus loves? three things know it's the fruit of the spirit so you have to be filled with the Holy Spirit know that sympathy comes through suffering when you suffer more you have the capacity to love more so welcome your sufferings and see others as God sees them and us we need to look at people as God does he sees them as frail he sees them as needy and you love people not because there's something about them that evokes love or that they're lovely you love them because they need it and I'll just close with this testimony that I heard a man saying once that he was driving down the street and he saw a hitchhiker and he said Lord I think I'll pull over and pick up that hitchhiker and he said the Lord said to him why are you going to pick up the hitchhiker he said well because I want to witness to him tell him about Jesus and he said the Lord spoke to him and said why don't you pick him up because he needs a ride I mean what if you don't get a chance to tell him about Jesus is it not worth it to pick him up just because he needs a ride it's seeing others as people in need you do things for people because they need it not because they deserve it not because they inspire sympathy God helped us not because we deserved his help or because we were lovely but he did because we were needy and that's why we love others and that's the only way we can be as disciples that's the mark of being a disciple