

How To Love In Jesus' Name: Part Two

Romans 12:9–16

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I like the challenge of working alone almost as much as I like the challenge of telling people what to do. You probably never noticed that, right? My challenge in working alone or telling people what to do is that I always make it harder than it needs to be.

In hopes of never having to take the air conditioner out the window, I built an elaborate shell around it. Then when I need to replace it, yesterday, I end up with an all day job, twenty times from the second floor to the basement to the second floor, cut twice and measure once, and sweat in my eyes.

Last week I talked, you listened. That's how it goes every week, right? My goal last week was to help us get a clearer spiritual picture of our purpose and our mission. We are called to serve others as Jesus served others. Each one of us is a precise part of the body of Jesus. Regardless of our place in the body of Jesus, we serve others. All of this has to do with how to love in Jesus' name. Today is part two of three in this series.

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Romans 12:9–16 (NLT)

The love of Jesus is ongoing actions and activities. We say we love people but our thoughts and actions are not always honorable and helpful. I don't mean that we're lying or being hypocrites. We don't follow through when we use the word love. Love isn't a program or a ministry. Love is seeing people with the eyes of Jesus. Love is knowing people are trapped by the power of sin. Love is holding onto them and not giving up.

Love is a tall order. Love is hard to fulfill. Love is always demanding and never-ending. Some biblical examples to get us started. God loved King David although he sinned many times. God loved Jonah and the Ninevites even though their sins were different. Jesus loved Peter through his brash, bold, and unachievable claims. Jesus loved us and died on the cross to save us from our sin.

I am constantly beating back the idea that love is a feeling. I know that, I get that, but so many people are bound to the idea that love is a feeling. This blocks us all the time from taking action. I know that it isn't the most profound motivation in our culture. If we don't love something or someone then all is lost. So, when we can't feel it we aren't doing it.

I've realized how much this attitude has impacted me. I'm more in love with speaking in front of a crowd than I am with meeting sinners on their turf. One feels empowering and the other feels, well to be honest, at times pointless. We might even think they aren't going to change.

Picture Jesus sitting beside the Father in heaven saying that. Jesus would never say that, He is love in action. He was actively loving people from the moment He thought about creating the first one.

We don't always express hope, patience, and empathy. I'm speaking for myself, this may not apply to you. I already said that I've been guilty of thinking people won't change. It's not that Jesus can't save anyone and everyone, its that I sometimes think people don't want to change. That is people don't want to be saved. That is hard to empathize with someone who doesn't want to be saved. Empathy is our capacity to identify with another person's feelings or ideas. The empathy I need is to identify with their misery and their need, even if they don't know their misery and need.

I confess that it can be difficult to watch a person fall back into their sin again and again and again. But, none of us are really any different. We fall back into our sins on a daily basis. We don't think our sins are as bad as the sins of others.

All of this goes back to is hope, the faith to see what we can't see. We're all sinners, Jesus sees underneath the sin to a person who is saved and redeemed. I need, and I think you need, the hope of Jesus' promises to transform any person: David, Jonah, the Ninevites, Peter.

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.
Romans 12:9-10 (NLT)

Honestly, we don't like to love the unlovable. They aren't like us, because we like ourselves. We like our routine. We like to be with people who are like us, dress like us, eat the same foods, watch the same sports, and talk like us. We are able with these folks to tolerate the little things.

But if they aren't like us, it's hard to spend time with people. The unlovable can be selfish, and at times they make demands. Unlovable people talk about themselves. They focus their lives on themselves. They make us do what they want. The people who have given up, who have lost hope don't make the best companions and friends. They are lovable only for a few hours or minutes. Their negativity starts to become irritating or it becomes contagious. We either want to leave the unlovable or join in with their complaining.

It's hard to get on their side, to see life from their situation, to understand their problems. Unlovable people just don't think like us. They have a different mindset. They keep making the same mistakes. They keep saying the same things over and over again. When a person wants to argue and debate, it's a challenge to have a conversation. You've been in these situations. The conversation isn't a conversation, but you and the other guy are never able to agree on anything. It's not just politics and sports, it's the color of the sky, the length of the grass.

Just one more thing, we might be better than the unlovable. We are more lovable, more tolerant, and more humble.

It's hard for us to love the unlovable because we have our own problems. Our troubles are enough, we can't take care of anyone else. We can identify those moments when we had one too many projects. Then we got one more and that was too much. Our attitude can easily shift to, "everybody take care of themselves and leave me alone." The unlovable are always in need of something, and we only have so much to give. The unlovable have too many problems. We can't pick up their problems with all the work we're already doing.

Just imagine if Jesus had said or thought any of that? Imagine if Jesus looked at your life and said, "He says one thing and does another"? Imagine if Jesus said about you and me, "They aren't worth my time and effort"? Could you ever hear Jesus say, "I can't deal with that person one more day"?

Jesus never said those things about you and me. We may be unlovable people. We may act like were too good. Jesus says, "I love you." Jesus put His body on the cross for us. Jesus became all the unlovable things we despise and reject. Jesus buried every unlovable thought, word, and action. Jesus buried my sins, your sins, and the unlovables' sins in hell. Jesus did this because He always has and always will love us.

Romans 12:12 (NLT) Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.

When joy, hope, patience, and prayer are combined, meeting needs is our reality. We have the message of joy and hope. We are the steadfast, faithful praying people of God. We are empowered and equipped to meet the needs of our community. I know, there are those moments when joy and hope, patience and a praying attitude disappear. But, it's a speck of time on this earth considering we'll live forever.

Just think of the people who need hope. They're living lives without joy. They're impatient to find the next temporary fix. Jesus has filled us with the joy of salvation. His joy and salvation is what everyone needs. Jesus has given us hope and the power of endurance as we face each situation. His hope and power is what everyone needs.

The number of people in need of Jesus seems to always be increasing. Instead of more people coming to Jesus each year, there are fewer. More people stay away from church than attend church. More people are claiming no religious connections. Mental health related issues keep rising each year. People are more divided about specific issues than ever before.

Jesus is rarely the one who is mentioned as the answer. He is the one who provides hope. He is the one who makes us steadfast. It is more and more obvious that people need Jesus. Everyday I meet someone who needs Jesus. I can walk to church or head into Aldi's and there is someone who needs Jesus.

This is not me being judgmental about someone's appearance. People need the love of Jesus to touch their lives. They are hurting physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We don't know what's happening with the people we meet. Instead of assuming they are unlovable, determine that they need Jesus. You need Jesus, so does everyone else.

Being saved we are filled with the joy of our salvation. We may be saddened by our circumstances, but we have the joy of being forgiven. There is something joyful about being forgiven and living in that forgiveness. When you ask Jesus to take away your sins, you are forgiven, the burden of sin has been removed. The freedom that our sin has been taken away results in joy that cannot be crushed by our circumstances.

Everybody needs joy and Jesus is the giver of joy. As Christians we have a hope that extends beyond wishing away our problems. Our hope is for a new life, without sin being in control. Our hope is in the power given by the Holy Spirit. Our hope is trusting God the Father to work out His perfect plans for us and all the world.

This makes us patient through any hardship. We can trust God to be at work. We can trust God to empower us. We can trust God for His strength. We can trust God to listen and to answer. So, we keep asking day after day.

Romans 12:15-16 (NIV) Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.

Pray for the unlovable; go and share the love of Jesus. We want the genuine love of Jesus to change the lives others, specifically the Coshocton High School boys soccer team. I mentioned last week about this ministry opportunity to provide a meal for the team before their first game of the season.

This may not sound like going out on the street corner and shouting the name of Jesus. That's because it isn't.

These young men, their coach, and their chaplain need the support of this church. As the coach gives us permission we can bring the young men to our building to give them more than a meal. We can share through our actions the love of Jesus. I'm certain the coach is modeling the love of Jesus. I believe their chaplain is modeling the love of Jesus. It's our turn to provide the same to the chaplain, the coach, and the team.

I'll be the head chef, if you want to help in the kitchen, join me. Desserts will need to be made. Tables will need to be set, and then cleaned up. The food will need to be served, that's a few more hands. There is a place for all of us to help minister to these young men.

What's important is praying for them. Somehow we'll find out their first names. Everyone of us can begin praying for a player or two. We'll get their game schedule and we can pray for each player before and during their games. Our prayers will be for unity among the team, encouragement for one another, for each player to give their best at practice, on the field, and in the classroom. Most important we will be praying for each player to trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Jesus wants to save every person. He doesn't want anyone to be without hope. He wants each person to experience joy. From His birth in a stable in Bethlehem; to His ministry of healing, miracles, and teaching; to His death and resurrection Jesus has made it clear that He wants people to be saved.

Salvation is straightforward and direct: call upon the name of Jesus and you will be saved. Any person, anywhere can call upon the name of Jesus. It's a simple conversation admitting your need to be forgiven, your need to turn away from your sins, and your need to follow Jesus.

Stop following the things your eyes see and your ears hear. Stop trusting in the things you want. Start calling upon Jesus. Start putting your life in His hands. Trust Jesus.