

☛ WWJD Series

To be more like Jesus, we need to be selfless, humble, and obedient. We are to be servants who trust God and live for righteousness. We must put off the old life and put on the new by remembering who we are in Christ; by running from temptation; and by relying on the Holy Spirit. Like Christ, we are to be kind, compassionate and forgiving.

☛ The Core of Christlikeness

Ephesians 5:1-2

☛ Here's the summary for today... **the Core of Christlikeness is love.**

What's love got to do with it? Tina Turner asked this question but for a different reason than what I'll be focusing on today. In fact, in her song, she downplays the significance of love; calling it a 'second-hand emotion' and a 'sweet old-fashioned notion'. She couldn't be more wrong. What's love got to do with it? Everything.

A life of love = Not just an emotion; but a lifestyle
Just as Christ loved = He's our ultimate example
Gave himself up = Unselfish; willing to deny himself
As an offering and sacrifice to God = His motive was to honor God
Fragrant = When you live this way, you smell good to God

Every year millions of couples celebrate Valentine's Day by sharing flowers, chocolates, romantic dates and other kind gestures with their significant other. It is nice to express our love to those who are important to us. However, there was One who expressed love in the greatest way it could ever be expressed. It has been said that it wasn't nails that held Jesus to the cross. It was love! Jesus endured the cross. How? By love!

☛ 1 John 4:7-21

To be Christlike is to be loving. It is to love as God loves. The question then, is "How can we show love?" Love can be an ambiguous term. Its meaning has been hijacked by popular culture. And what makes it even trickier is that we only have one word to cover a whole range of meanings. The word "love" is used in many different expressions. Love is something that we "fall into." Love brings stars into our eyes, & causes our hearts to go pitter-pat. "Love makes the world go 'round." Someone even said, "Love is never having to say you're sorry." Now, whoever said that must not have been married or must not have a family.

So I can say: "I love my wife," or "I love my children, or my parents," or "I love chocolate," or "I love Star Trek," etc. In the Greek language it was a bit easier. There were 4 different words in Greek that were used for love. There was family love, Storgé; that kind of love you might have for your parents or your children or your brothers and sisters. There was sensual love, Eros, the sort of love you have for your spouse. There was social love, Phileo, that sort of love you have for your social group, your friends.

But then there was Agape love; the kind of love used to describe God, and the kind of love we are told to have toward one another. Why does the Bible use the term agape to describe Christian love? What was wrong with the other words for love? They were all right. There's nothing wrong with loving your family, or your friends or your spouse. So why agape love? Because **agape love is selfless.**

The other Greek words for love aren't as selfless. Eros is all about self-gratification. Even Phileo and Storge tend to expect something in return. In fact, those kinds of love can easily come to an end if they are not reciprocated. But Agape is selfless and unending.

--J.I. Packer... The Greek word agape seems to have been virtually a Christian invention -- a new word for a new thing. Agape draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in Christ. It is not a form of natural affection, however intense, but a supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is a matter of will rather than feeling (for Christians must love even those they dislike -- Matt. 5:44-48). It is the basic element in Christ-likeness.

The chief model for Agape love, of course, is God himself. John says: "God is love. This is how God showed his love among us..." How? Not by serenading us, not by offering us roses and chocolates. No, God loved us by sending his Son into the world to die for us.

There's no sense that God loves in response to our love for him. Rather, it was **while we were still his enemies that Christ died for us.** God's love is a love that knows no limit. It's a love that forgives over and over again, without warrant, without tallying up the score, without retaliation.

Do you want to see love acted out? Then look at **1 Corinthians 13**, the "Love Chapter" of the Bible. Those familiar words are practical words, too because what Paul is saying is, "This is how agape love acts. This is how it behaves."

In vs. 4, he says, "Love is **patient.**" That means that I don't get into a hurry with you if you don't do things the way I would like for you to do them. I'll wait. I'll wait for things to change. I'll wait for those edges to be knocked off, and I hope that you'll wait for me in return.

He says, "Love is **kind.**" I wouldn't say anything unkind to you because you are the object of my love, and I want to make sure that you feel loved. Therefore, I couldn't be

unkind.

☞ I **won't envy** you. I **won't boast** about myself. I **won't become proud**, because I am more concerned about you than I am about myself.

☞ "Love is **not rude**," means that I won't crowd before you in line, and if we get to the door at the same time, I'll open it graciously and let you go before me. It means that I am **not self-seeking**.

☞ It means that I am **not easily angered**. I won't throw temper tantrums any more. It means that I **won't keep any record of wrongs**. We must all tear up our lists and throw them away and start anew with each other.

☞ Love doesn't delight in evil, but it **rejoices in truth**. And it always **protects** and it always **trusts**. Love has to trust. I open myself to you. Here I am, vulnerable. You can hurt me. But I trust you not to do that, because I love you, and because you love me.

☞ Love always **hopes**. It looks for and expects the best. And it always **perseveres**. It hangs in there, no matter what. When the going gets tough, love stands strong.

Jesus tells us in **John 15:13**, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." **The sacrifice of one's own life for another** is the greatest act of love, or agape that can be shown.

C. S. Lewis has a helpful comment on what Christian love involves: It would be quite wrong to think that the way to become "loving" is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings. Some people are "cold" by temperament; that may be a misfortune for them, but it is no more a sin than having a bad digestion is sin; and it does not cut them off from the chance, or excuse them from the duty, of learning "love." The rule for us all is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we learn one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will come to love them.

George Crane tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. "I do not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has me." Dr. Crane suggested an ingenious plan. "Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him, to enjoy him. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really hurt him." With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful. Will he ever be surprised!" And she did it with enthusiasm. Acting "as if." For two months she showed love, kindness, listening, giving, reinforcing, sharing. When she didn't return, Crane called. "Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?" "Divorce?" she exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him." Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in

emotion. The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promise as often repeated deeds.

--Sam Levenson... Love at first sight is easy to understand. It's when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle.

God has known us forever and still shows us love even when we don't deserve it. Doesn't he say "You deserve death, but I offer you mercy and life"? He shows us the ultimate example.

Loving God is tied to loving others (verses 20-22). Be careful! Don't claim to love God, if deep in your heart you're really harboring hatred for someone else. The two are incompatible. You can't love God at the same time as hating another person. The key to agape love is to show love to others whether they reciprocate or not. And, that is very hard to do!

General Robert E. Lee was asked what he thought of a fellow officer in the Confederate Army who had made some derogatory remarks about him. Lee rated him as being very satisfactory. The person who asked the question seemed perplexed. "General," he said, "I guess you don't know what he's been saying about you." "I know," answered Lee. "But I was asked my opinion of him, not his opinion of me!"

We all have many opportunities to love others. Let's not worry about how loved we are by others. Let us concern ourselves with showing others love.

Why does the Bible make such a big issue of Christians loving each other? Why couldn't God leave it at telling us to put up with each other, or to tolerate each other? This concept of love is very difficult to live out. Some simply give up on the idea because it seems too lofty, too unrealistic for modern people. Others pretend like they love each other, but peel away the surface and you find the poison of bitterness and resentment, seeping out in gossip and slander. But genuine love can change the world! It did 2,000 years ago when God demonstrated his love in the cross. And, it still can today.

This doesn't come naturally does it? It only happens as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts  to change us. So we should be **praying that God would change us to be more like him.**

We are called to be Christlike and be loving to others. To love with agape love, that unselfish, "totally concerned with the other" kind of love. Christ set us the example.

Church, God is saying, “the most basic ingredient of Christlikeness is love.” We are called  to **love one another**. Through thick and thin. In good and bad... God still loves... so also are we called to love.

In quiet, think about how you can best express Christlike love to others. Perhaps it's simply to say the words, “I love you” to someone. Maybe someone that you've disagreed with. Perhaps it's to offer hospitality or helps to communicate love in a tangible way. Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart for a few moments.

 **WWJD** (*in this ppt*)