

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

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Verses: John 15:12,13, 1 Timothy 5:8

Topic: Love Is Local First

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John 15:12-13 *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (13) No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (14) You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. (15) No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

1 Timothy 5:8 *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.*

Loving one another begins with your friends and family. This is always its primary locus of action. We are to love "our circle" of people that God has "given us". Love is local first! Jesus regarded the disciples as His friends and as those whom God had given Him:

John 17:6 *I have revealed Your name to the men whom You gave to Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.*

If we put these things together we can conclude that God brings certain people into our lives and we are to love them. They are our friends and those friends are gifts from God, given to us by God Himself!

In contrast God does not ever tell Christians to love a church building, a cause, a project, a denomination, a political party, a nation or even a particular doctrine (though we are to love the truth). We are also NEVER given the impossible task of "loving everyone" since God knows well that we are "dust" and very finite and limited in our ability to love. The closest we get to this starts with "as far as it is possible with you.."

Romans 12:18 *If it is possible, as far as is in you, being in peace with all men.*

I cannot concretely "love Africa" but I can love wife Minda, and make her a cup of coffee!

The starting point for love is the twenty or thirty people who make up those you are most responsible for. For Jesus this was His mother, brothers, sisters, the twelve and some close friends like Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Perhaps this was the 120 on the day of Pentecost, the inner circle. Those whom Jesus personally "loved" as He loved John the apostle. For Paul it was his central band of apostles and elders (Timothy, Titus, Silas etc).

Now you and I don't have the capacity for love that Jesus had (at least I don't) so twenty to thirty is a good starting number! We can still be benevolent and minister to strangers and to those we meet but the "friends and family" circle is where our heart is to be.

In biblical terms those in our inner circle of general intimacy is called our "household" - those we have in our house regularly. If we are selfish and inconsiderate toward the obvious needs of our "household" then we are worse than an unbeliever and have denied the faith (1 Timothy 5:8). Christian parents who neglect or seriously abuse their children are in serious trouble with God! And adult children of older parents who refuse to help them in their old age are in for a shock on Judgment Day!

Never mind what society says or what the government provides, we are to care for our own. If "love one another" is Jesus' central command, and if "love one another" is central to the entire Christian faith, then we CANNOT neglect those closest to us "because its not convenient" to do so. Your agenda is not more important than God's agenda and God's agenda says "love one another". It is a commandment, not a suggestion!

This local, specific and personal nature of love is a huge blow to many of us in the ministry. Being in the limelight is immensely rewarding and very seductive. It is fun to travel and to speak at conferences. Applause is great and we can want more and more of it until our schedules are crammed, our bodies are worn out and our families hardly see us at all! Of course everything is being done in the name of "important ministry" but often there are emotional compensation things going on as well. We think we love the world, but often, in truth, we just love ourselves and almost no one else and no one knows us or spends any time with us because we are "just too busy".

To put it bluntly, a minister without any true close friends has forsaken the gospel. I fully understand the need to have some "distance" and the treacherous nature of church gossip and politics, but if you cannot have friends in the church, then you MUST find friends outside the church because the "love one another" command is non-negotiable. One of the best ways to do this is to have a "band of brothers" ministry team approach.

Be like Jesus and select a band of people, a team, who you will "go into battle with" and do the work of God. Think of group ministry, not personal ministry of "our" significance, not your significance. Build loving faith-filled teams of transformational Christians.

For Jesus His friends WERE His ministry and His friends were the reason that He laid down His life! At one point Paul could not rest until he had fellowship with Titus. Love is central to who we are as Christians and love means that we should be totally committed first and foremost to our "household".

Love is local and practical and particular. It is Dorcas knitting a sweater for an older widow to keep out the cold. It is Jesus cooking fish on the beach for a very broken Peter or Timothy bringing Paul's cloak and his scrolls before winter.

For us "local love" is remembering birthdays and anniversaries, bringing small gifts, thinking of a neighbor going through a divorce, seeing your wife is tired and doing something thoughtful, listening to your kids when they are telling a story about what happened at school and believing that its important to you because its important to them.

Local agape love is all about turning up, being there, and reassuring your friends and family that they truly are a top priority for you even though you truly are awfully busy

with "stuff". But "stuff" is not the same as love!

At my funeral no one is going to say something like: "Wow, John preached over two thousand sermons and knew lots of bible verses..". No one will care how many days I spent at the office. They will care about who I was as a person, how I loved them, how I prayed for them, treated them and the example I was (or was not) to them.

You have to love your wife, even if she snores, and you have to love your husband even if he likes to sleep in on weekends while you are busy doing chores. Love involves deep humble considerateness and caring for real people in real contexts in real ways and we can only do "so much" caring, so stick to your thirty folk and treat them well.

By the way you are allowed to choose your friends prayerfully (just as Jesus chose His disciples). You can choose who to love (God does and its called election). But once you have chosen to love them don't try "loving Africa" as well. Love them, your friends and family, love the ones that God has given you to love!

1. Choose good wise friends with whom you can do things with for God.
2. Develop those friends and let them develop you
3. Honor your family, all of it!
4. Be aware of who your "household" is – make a list of your core people
5. Prioritize them. Make quality time for friends and family
6. Center your life around your friends and family more that around church activities.
7. Make financial sacrifices for your friends and family.
8. Be aware of their needs, both large and small, and meet them.
9. Ask them for help, be open and vulnerable
10. Teach them how to love you and show them how love works
11. Verbalize how much you love them + be practical about it
12. Pray for them and let them pray for you
13. Tackle projects together, such as fixing a bicycle, planting a garden or going hiking together. Projects create opportunities to know each other and work together.
14. Don't worry about how you are feeling instead worry about how you are acting.
15. Remember there is nothing less important than "being important" so don't let "being important" take you away from loving one another!

Blessings,

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