

The Discipleship Project-Winter 2018–2019

Series 3: Living Unselfishly

A series by Darin Sargent

Series Big Idea: Because Jesus, as our example, chose to live His life unselfishly, we must choose to do the same.

Lesson 3.3: Love without Limits

Lesson Big Idea: We must display love without limits in order to model Jesus Christ and live unselfishly.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: I Thessalonians 3:12–13; Romans 12:9 (PPT)

While traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, a certain man was ambushed by a band of thieves. Caught completely unaware and unable to adequately defend himself, this man was beaten to the point of death, robbed of all his valuable possessions, and abandoned on the side the road.

It was a busy thoroughfare, used by dozens throughout the day. Dazed, confused, and dying, this man assumed he was going to die . . . until he heard the footsteps of an approaching traveler. The wounded man let out his loudest moan, hoping to get the attention of the passerby. He did get his attention; however, the priest who was approaching felt compelled more by his temple responsibilities than he did his moral obligation. The call to serve the people was louder than the call to take care of his neighbor. As the priest faded into the distance, the man was once again left to wonder how much longer he could maintain consciousness and whether this was really the end.

Until he heard more footsteps—the footsteps of someone who sounded in a hurry. Again he let out his loudest moan, hoping to get the attention of the hurried traveler. The religious Levite saw the wounded man and did have thoughts of helping, but he quickly dismissed those thoughts when he realized how late it would make him to his next appointment. His desire for approval clearly outweighed his willingness to show empathy. And as he hurried on past the bloody body, he reassured himself he was doing the right thing.

The man's condition was worsening by the minute. His eyes were growing heavy, his breathing was becoming more labored, and his hope for help was all but gone. Then he heard several footsteps, more like hooves from what he could tell by the rhythm they were making. And then he heard a voice that gave the dying man hope . . . until he recognized the accent. A Samaritan? He's more likely to finish me off than he is to help me, the man thought.

The beast came to a stop and the rider dismounted. As the Samaritan came near, the wounded man lost consciousness, having all but given up, assuming he was going to die at the hand of another enemy. But instead, the Samaritan began bandaging his wounds

and rearranged the blankets spread over his donkey so that the beast could carry the dying man as comfortably as possible.

The Samaritan took the man to a nearby inn, a safe and comfortable place for this beaten man to recover. Staying with the injured man through the night, the Samaritan left the next morning, giving enough money for the innkeeper to provide further treatment for the man until he had fully recovered.

What an incredible display of love for someone other than himself. Whatever the reasons were that the priest and Levite chose not to get involved, this story reveals the power of love and compassion we should have for those who may not be just like us.

- **Who is your neighbor?**
- **What are some excuses we use to excuse ourselves from helping our neighbors?**
- **How can we show true Christlike love one toward another?**

FRAME

One of the key components to the effective teaching ministry of Jesus was His use of parables. In an effort to both conceal and reveal truth, Jesus used parables that approached subjects from the cultural vantage points of His listeners. These parables were basically stories Jesus used to illustrate an attitude or a principle. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one such story Jesus used to answer two questions brought to Him by a lawyer. The lawyer attempted to trap Jesus in some form or fashion. It is quite possible that he tried “to lead Jesus to discredit Himself by giving some unusual answer that would arouse the people against Him” (*The Preacher’s Outline and Sermon Bible: Luke, Leadership Ministries Worldwide*).

Jesus used this parable to impart a much-needed principle concerning loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

It is evident, when we read his epistles, that **Paul cared deeply about those to whom he was writing. (PPT)** As we read the letters he wrote to the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, and even in Thessalonica, we get a sense of deep concern and love that Paul carried for the saints in each of these churches. Along with words of encouragement and correction, Paul included the very prayers that he regularly prayed over them. Here we are given a glimpse of one such prayer:

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. (I Thessalonians 3:12–13, KJV) (PPT)

Paul prayed that the church in Thessalonica would increase and abound in love, not only toward each other, but also to all humanity. Paul echoed the teachings of Jesus when it came to the subject of love, and he found it necessary to remind the church that this

attribute should be something they possessed.

- **What does it mean to increase and abound in love?**
- **What causes us to increase and abound in love?**

By examining the Gospel accounts, we discover that **Jesus spoke often about the subject of love**. (PDG, PPT)

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34–35, KJV) (PPT)

Jesus established a precedent for the disciples and eventually the early church to be often reminded of. **He showed us how we should treat one another in the body of Christ.** (PPT) How we treat each other in the church is a distinct testimony to those outside the church. We never know who may be watching us as we go through life. Our respect and love for one another is key to others recognizing our commitment to God and His ways. This passage of Scripture uncovers the way we are to love one another. **We are to love one another as Christ has loved us.** (PDG, PPT) This unconditional love of Jesus is the true picture of what sacrificial love looks like.

- **What is sacrificial love?**

So it is with this in mind that the apostle **Paul approached the subject of love to the church in Thessalonica.** (PPT) He spoke about this attitude in a prayer, encapsulating his desire to see the love of God increase and abound in the hearts and lives of every follower of Christ. In his first epistle to the church of Thessalonica, Paul provided a path to help us understand this process of growth in our lives.

The first thing the author reminds the readers of is that this is **a work of God in us:** (PPT)

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you. (I Thessalonians 3:12, KJV) (PPT)

“Paul knew that it was impossible for him or the Thessalonians to work up the kind of love that could reach out and abound toward all men. A love that could love those who ignore, neglect, abuse, and shamefully treat us could only come from God” (*The Preacher’s Outline and Sermon Bible: Thessalonians–Philemon*, Leadership Ministries Worldwide).

- **Is it possible to make yourself love someone? Explain.**
- **How can we love those who are difficult to love?**

Next, the apostle expressed **the direction love must take** in the lives of believers.

(PDG, PPT) He stated that we must increase and abound in love toward one another as well as toward all men. Not only must love grow more and more toward other believers, but it must also be growing in love toward all people. This is why Paul stressed the importance of this kind of love only coming from God and why he prayed as he did over them.

Paul's admonition to the church to **love all men** (PDG, PPT) is an important principle Jesus also talked about. In fact, Jesus told us to love our enemies.

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6:35, NIV) (PPT)

Practicing this kind of love will result in God establishing strong hearts within us (PPT), making us blameless and holy. In no way can we expect this to be accomplished overnight. The reason Paul prayed this prayer was to let us know there is always work to be done when it comes to loving others.

This act of love requires great patience at times. (PDG, PPT) Sometimes some people are difficult to love. However, we must recognize it takes understanding, no matter how others may respond to us or others. We need to pray God will help us increase and abound in the love Paul described in this passage.

- **In what ways can we show love to those who are unbelievers?**
- **Is it possible to show love to people without agreeing with their personal beliefs or lifestyles? Explain.**

In Romans 12, Paul once again established **the need for love to be the overarching Christlike attitude we must possess.** (PPT)

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another. (Romans 12:9–10, KJV) (PPT)

Here Paul highlighted three main points about love and **what it must look like when it is at work in the lives of believers.** (PPT)

1. Love must not be hypocritical; it cannot be fake. It must be sincere and genuine, not just for other believers but for all humanity.
2. Love should result in us hating that which is evil. True Christlike love should be desiring good things for others. If this is the case, we will hate evil because it is set out to destroy humanity. We must stand strong against evil.
3. Love should result in us cleaving to that which is good. This is a clear picture that we must attach ourselves to the things that are good and desire good things to happen in the lives of our brothers and sisters.

- **It has been said that we are to “love the sinner but hate the sin.” How do we**

do that so the individual in question feels love and compassion?

The church in Thessalonica appears to have gained a good grasp on this display of love because Paul would later write in this same epistle that this church really did not need to be reminded of possessing this Christlike attribute:

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more. (I Thessalonians 4:9–10, KJV) (PPT)

Even though it appears they understood this principle, Paul still prayed for them to abound in it more and more. He understood that by increasing and abounding in love toward others, it prepared them for eternity (I Thessalonians 3:13). One of the most important things we need to grasp from this passage is that operating and living with this type of love will keep us moving forward in our relationship with Jesus Christ and will one day lead us on to our heavenly reward.

- **Where have you seen examples of sacrificial love?**

We must also remember that our love for others is not only relegated to the household of faith. Truly, **we must love others and consider others before ourselves.** (PDG, PPT)

FINISH

In World War II, the atrocities of Hitler and the German army were almost too much to fully comprehend. Scattered throughout the ill-fated history of one of the darkest moments in modern times, there were individuals who risked everything so others could be saved.

Just ask the twenty-two people who traveled to London on a fall morning in 2009 to thank Nicholas Winton. They could have passed for a retirement-home social club. All were in their seventies or eighties, more gray hair than not, more shuffled steps than quick ones.

But this was no social trip. It was a journey of gratitude. They came to thank the man who had saved their lives: a stooped centenarian who met them on a train platform just as he had in 1939.

He was a twenty-nine-year-old stockbroker at the time. Hitler's armies were ravaging the nation of Czechoslovakia, tearing Jewish families apart and marching parents to concentration camps. No one was caring for the children. Winton got wind of their plight and resolved to help them. He used his vacation to travel to Prague, where he met parents who, incredibly, were willing to entrust their children's future to his care. After returning to England, he worked his regular job on the stock exchange by day and advocated for the children at night. He convinced Great Britain to permit their entry. He found foster homes and raised funds. Then he scheduled his first transport on March 14, 1939, and accomplished seven more over the next five months. His trainload of children arrived on

August 2, bringing the total of rescued children to 669.

On September 1, the biggest transport was to take place, but Hitler invaded Poland, and Germany closed borders throughout Europe. None of the 250 children on that train were ever seen again.

After the war Winton didn't tell anyone of his rescue efforts, not even his wife. In 1988 she found a scrapbook in their attic with all the children's photos and a complete list of names. She prodded him to tell the story. As he has shared the story, rescued children have returned to say thank you. The grateful group includes a film director, a Canadian journalist, a news correspondent, a former minister in the British cabinet, a magazine manager, and one of the founders of the Israeli Air Force. There are some seven thousand children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who owe their existence to Winton's bravery. He wears a ring given to him by some of the children he saved. It bears a line from the Talmud, the book of Jewish law: "Save one life. Save the world" (www.powerofgood.net/story.php).