

Loving Like Jesus – Dan Hitz

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"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." – John 13:35 NIV

Love is important. In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus tells us that the "first and greatest commandment" is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." He then tells us that the second commandment is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Living a life of love is extremely important to God.



Oddly enough, even most non-Christians would agree that showing love is pretty important. Both Christians and non-Christians may have problems living it out, but we know we're supposed to. What is true love? Popular culture says we should show love by accepting everyone just as they are and celebrate their worldview and self-proclaimed identity. Essentially, celebrating "their truth", and erasing their need to surrender their heart, mind, and soul to Jesus. I agree that we need to love those God puts in our lives whether we agree with them or not, but is accepting a misguided worldview and celebrating an identity that God didn't give them really love? We aren't showing true love unless we're loving like Jesus loves.

How does Jesus show love? John 6:37 NIV reads, "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Jesus truly accepts everyone who comes to Him, right where they're at. He accepted the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. He accepted the woman caught in adultery in John 8 with the precious words, "Neither do I condemn you." Jesus loves sacrificially. John 15:13 tells us that "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus showed His ultimate love for us when He willingly surrendered His life to those who would mock, torture, and murder Him. Jesus loves us enough to pay the ultimate price for our redemption and transformation. He truly accepts anyone who comes to Him, right where they're at. Yet, He wants more for us. He wants our hearts. He wants our lives. He wants full surrender. He showed much grace and acceptance to the woman caught in adultery when he spoke the words, "Neither do I condemn you," and yet He also said to her, "Leave your life of sin." True love calls us out of sin, and into the fullness of what the Father has for us.

Jesus shows us our responsibility to surrender in John 14 as He tells the disciples that He will send them the Holy Spirit. First, He gives them the instructions, "If you love me, keep my commands. [14:15], and then He gives them the promise, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to



help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth." [14:16-17a] After surrender comes the beautiful promise of the Holy Spirit, followed by Jesus' deep expression of love and belonging as He shares with the disciples that He is the vine and they are the branches. [John 15:1-17] Jesus explains part of the transformation process, the "pruning" that comes with being a part of the vine. The promises of love and joy are wrapped up in calls to obedience and loving each other. He says in verse 14, "You are my friends if you do what I command."

Obviously, this is a tall order. No one can keep God's commands in their own strength. Jesus isn't looking for Pharisaical legalism, He's looking for a willing heart. He's looking for those who will open their hearts to Him and allow Him to transform them into the sons and daughters of the Father that they were created to be. There is grace. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." [1 John 1:9 NIV] True love calls to us in our sin, accepts us, and calls us to forsake our sin. It empowers us to embrace our true identity in Him. Christ, who is true love, walked where we walk and understands us. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." [Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV] As we surrender to Him, He will complete the work that He has begun in our hearts. [Philippians 1:6]

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