

No Greater Commandment:

Christ's Love in Us Teaches How to Treat Others

Christ's example to love our neighbor and treat them well, to be an escort in faith and bear one another's burdens, to share His saving gospel with those who wish to believe teaches us much. His example is perfect, yet we are human and earthly. How can we, even in a small way, share Christ's love with others? Writers share thoughts and experiences on this important topic.

Love Your Neighbor

Christ condensed the commandments into two: first, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and second, "Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself."

This second commandment directs our love to our neighbor rather than to ourselves. Yet we first must know what it means to love oneself, and then how we apply that love to our neighbor. We know our own needs and feelings, but how can we be sensitive and understand the needs and feelings of others?

Here, Christ is our model. Christ's caring love, understanding and compassion for others show His sensitivity to others' needs through noticing them, asking and listening, and in forgiving sins. His sacrifice on Golgotha fully exemplifies the greatest love that one can show for another.

Christ Is the Good Samaritan

Christ tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which the Samaritan finds the traveler who "fell among thieves," pours oil on his wounds and binds them and takes him to an inn where he can receive further attention. The parable affords us a model of Christ's love for sinners and how Christ wants us to treat others.

It is significant that the Samaritan noticed the fallen one in the story. Noticing denotes both seeing and bothering to see. This shows a special aspect of Christ's love: He notices others and sees them as equally important—even more, He considers them as important as He considers us. We also want to notice others, a service we extend because of the love Christ has shown for us.

Approach One Another

Why, then, is it so hard to approach a person who is alone, left out, a newcomer, or even someone who is an acquaintance but not in our inner circle? Often we have a prejudice or false assumption that prevents us from showing God's love. Our corrupt nature would have us turn away from those who think or live differently than we do.

It is important that we remind ourselves of God's Word regarding love for our neighbors. We are instructed to be friendly, helpful and put the best construction on all they do. Christ's example shows

that we should not fear or assume. He approached the leper and “put forth his hand, and touched him” (Matt. 8:3).

This divine love was shown to all people, regardless of status or race or appearance. Christ died for the sins of the entire world. He readily showed mercy to those who were despised by the people of His time.

Listen

When we approach someone unfamiliar to us, we can speak to that person as we would hope to be addressed. Maybe we would like to hear a warm greeting, a general question about the drive, the weather or the common “how are you?” If we begin with pointed questions immediately, we risk making the person feel uncomfortable, anxious or even out-of-place. Kind, general exchanges establish comfort and a safe tone in which the conversation can be continued.

When we listen, we need to keep silent and use active listening skills to be “swift to hear and slow to speak.” Active listening requires attention, paraphrasing, clarification and affirming words of compassion. Christ was an active listener when He affirmed Martha’s concerns: “thou art careful and troubled about many things.” Once He showed He understood her, He responded with His message: “Mary hath chosen that good part...”

His example teaches us what we can do to serve others. Active listening helps in both personal conversations and in formal meetings. We encourage others to speak with careful and active listening.

Serve One Another

A time for questions will come, and we pray that we can ask using words that show God’s love. Christ commanded that the blind man who cried out at the side of the road be brought before Him, and asked specifically, “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” (Luke 18:40). He did not assume He knew what the man wanted; rather He asked.

Christ healed his blindness, and we too want to be ready to serve our neighbors with love and the gospel. At services we wish to notice others, especially those who are not familiar friends and those who are alone. These people also need to feel God’s love. Serving according to Christ’s words, “go and do ye likewise,” can often begin with noticing, asking and listening.

Christ’s redemption work was complete, so complete that even we, the most undeserving, can believe sins forgiven. Can we ever look on another person and see them as not worth our time or attention?

Instead, we see the one in need of help, the forgotten friend we seldom call, the newcomer alone in the coffee line. This is an opportunity to notice, to step out of our way to approach them and speak a soft word of care. As we consider that we need kind attention from others, so can we treat others likewise.

Martin and Sandra Pylvainen

God's Children Have Served Me

On our journey through life, we wish to support and help one another. Forgiveness of sins to care for our life of faith and offering temporal support in times of need are a few of many ways to treat others with Christ's love in God's kingdom.

Throughout my life, I have experienced support from the believers. In receiving help and support, I have felt Christ's love. Giving is what believers do.

Confirmation school was an exciting time in my life. Important lessons of faith and friendships I developed there have helped me over the years to remain a child of God. Graduation from high school brought well-wishes and gifts to celebrate that milestone in my life.

When I was engaged to be married, I felt much love and support. On our wedding day, we felt the congregation's support and prayers as we exchanged our vows. Listening to God's children singing at our wedding was amazing. We received many temporal gifts then also that were needed and greatly appreciated.

We continued to receive love and support as we waited for our first child to be born. Also, when we were expecting our tenth child, we received many needed gifts. I felt so happy.

When I felt weak and poor in times of temporal challenges, our dear friends encouraged me. We felt the believers' support in many ways when death touched our family.

Our dear friends joined in our joy and supported us when some of our children got married. They too were excited when they heard the news that we were going to be grandparents.

I often wonder how I can give back what has been given to us. Oh, how I have been blessed!

God gave me the gift of faith and I want to take care of it. Christ's love towards me shows in my believing friends and escorts when they have preached my sins forgiven again and again. This is the help and support I have needed most. God's kingdom is where I want to be.

When I reflect on the blessings I have received over the years, I understand that they are given because the givers held Christ's love in their hearts and wanted to help as they did. I am reminded of the importance of giving in the following verse: "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Tim Kesti

God's Love Spoke to Grandpa

When I was a young girl, I began to wonder about the one grandparent I had never met. I knew my dad's mother because we lived in the same city, but I hadn't met dad's father. He and Nana were divorced; he lived in another state. I felt like I was missing a grandparent, so I asked my dad if I could have Grandpa's address. I started writing to him—he answered every letter!

After a while I asked dad if we could invite Grandpa to come and visit. I explained that I wanted to spend time with him in person! Dad hesitated and explained that it might upset his mother, Nana. I replied that Nana lived in the city and we lived in the suburbs, so it shouldn't be a problem. I was determined!

Treasured Visits

My parents were able to plan the visit and to my delight, Grandpa came! Grandpa was fun! He played games with us and played music on the harmonica and the piano every day. We loved him. When it was time for Grandpa to leave, we were sad. We made him promise to come and visit again. He kept his promise and came several times. Grandpa lived in California and it was a long trip to come see us. He didn't like to fly in airplanes and the bus ride was long, but he was cheerful and determined to make each trip.

When I was a young teen, Grandpa came to visit again. We had recently moved to a new neighborhood with new houses, and my mother knew that Grandpa's clothes were sometimes in disrepair. She wanted him to be comfortable and feel good, so she decided to buy him a set of new clothes. She hoped he would not be offended by her gift. When Grandpa arrived, he graciously accepted the gifts. He looked wonderful in his new suit!

The same year, Nana had become a believer in God's kingdom. On this trip, Grandpa brought some books about faith from a different church and wanted to show them to me. I was a little nervous to read them, but I knew he was excited to share them, so we read his books. I noticed that verses were quoted in his books out of context. I told Grandpa that we should find the same verses in the Bible and read the whole chapters. We did and agreed that it made more sense when we read the whole chapter.

The Gospel's Miracle

That Sunday, Grandpa came to church with us. After church my brothers came up to me and said, "Marleigh, did you hear about Grandpa? He had his sins forgiven!" I was so happy! It was clear that day how our Heavenly Father puts love in our hearts. Everyone was happy, including Nana. After church we had dinner and from the living room, I heard the sweet words of Nana and Grandpa blessing each other with the forgiveness of sins, putting away all their past differences.

Soon Grandpa went back to his home in California and we continued our weekly letters. He lived the rest of his life preciously believing!

I recently went to visit Grandpa Stewart's grave in California with my daughter, Ingrid. When we found his grave, I heard myself saying, "Hi, Grandpa." Suddenly I missed him intensely! Tears were followed by the joy of knowing that God's love took Grandpa to eternal peace where we will meet again!

Marleigh Lang

The Golden Rule

How should we treat others as a result of Christ's love in us? That seems like a simple enough question, and it seems the answer would be simple as well. We can remember the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. We all appreciate people who treat us well. However, is there also more to this?

Is It Respect?

When I was a child, we were taught to have respect for our elders. One way we showed respect was to address them as "aunt" or "uncle," even if they weren't related to us. Another way we showed respect was to let them go first in the coffee line after church. The elders felt free to lovingly remind us that children were welcome to go through the line after the elders had gone through. And, of course, we respected them by not running them over in the sanctuary or talking back to them.

As teenagers and young adults, we were encouraged to visit the elders in our congregation. By this time, we were familiar with them: they were Sunday school teachers, Bible class leaders, friends of our parents and parents of our friends. I have fond memories of visits with them. They had so much wisdom to share about life, about people and most importantly, about faith. They were interested in what I was doing and had words of encouragement to help me on the way.

Now as an older single, I appreciate when younger folks and families take time out of their busy schedules to visit me. We share hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows and discuss the way and the journey.

Is It Friendship?

Friendship is a big topic, one that could take up many pages. Although there are many ways friendships develop, it seems it often begins with an act of kindness. Perhaps a thoughtful word, a friendly smile, an acknowledgement that the person is there: It's good to see you! Perhaps it's volunteering to fill in at the last minute, lending a helping hand with a project, lightening someone's load. Perhaps it's the recognition, heart to heart, that there is something to share. I'm blessed with many believing friends who each have something different to share with me.

Is It Love?

I experienced a trying event several years ago. It was unexpected and scary. I had no idea how I was going to handle the situation or what my future might hold. It turns out there were people who cared about me. The outpouring of love and caring from people in my local congregation and elsewhere was overwhelming, humbling and heart-warming. I knew I had done nothing to deserve such love and encouragement, but I was and still am grateful for it.

We often go about our daily lives giving little or no thought to the way things are. Instead we trust that they are so and will continue to be so—until something unexpected happens and we experience how great God's love is for us.

Song of Zion 376, *Commit Whatever Grieves Thee*, has become one of my favorites. The entire song speaks of God's presence and guidance in our lives. The last line is particularly comforting: "since He to bless His children will always find a way." I'm sure you, like me, have experienced this. God always provides.

Writer's name withheld

God's Love Teaches

When I consider how we treat others as a result of Christ's love in us, many thoughts come to mind.

I have lived in Minnesota for eight years. Before moving here, I lived in Ontario. I grew up in the Toronto congregation and lived there until I got married. It's always so nice to visit my childhood home congregation—I definitely feel God's love. Everyone comes to welcome us, and we exchange greetings and share stories.

We recently moved to the Monticello, Minn., area, and we have been warmed by how welcoming and friendly everyone has been towards us. We feel God's love and unity among our new home congregation. With my experience of moving to a different country and not knowing many people, I have felt love within the congregations here and with fellow travelers in faith. Without my own family relations in Minnesota, it has been important to meet new friends, which helps me on this journey to heaven.

God's Forgiveness, Respect

In our homes we strive to teach our children how important it is to show love to each other and to others around them. Teaching of forgiveness and respect, of God's love in everyday life, helps to create a loving atmosphere. If children are treated with love and respect, they will in return give this love at home, in school, at work and in other life experiences.

Parents also learn from their children with respect to fairness, reminding them to preach the gospel and be kind to one another. It is so important for us to be good examples to our children; in this way we show God's love. It is important to take our children to services and Sunday school to listen to God's Word.

This song of Zion verse came to mind while thinking about this topic and my experiences: *May our home be filled with peace, charity, and goodness. When we wound or cause offense, may we ask forgiveness. On the seedlings planted here, Father, shed Your blessing. Keep us all in faith and love, heaven's hope possessing* (SHZ 429:3).

Kristen Wuollet

Discussion Points

1. Describe a time when you felt comforted at services even though your close friends were not there. What did others say to help you feel God's love?
2. How can we reflect God's love to newcomers to our congregation? Do our signs and our announcements reflect sensitivity and welcome?
3. In what ways are we welcoming to the neighboring community? Can we put ourselves in the place of an outsider and think of how it would feel to come to services?
4. How do we teach our children to notice and include those who are outside their immediate friend group?