

Leader's Guide

Following Jesus

Choosing to Love

John 13:31-38

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Conversation Goal

To help group members understand Jesus' command to love one another as He has loved us, honestly examine what makes that kind of love difficult, and identify how the Holy Spirit may be inviting them to demonstrate Christlike love through their attitudes, words, and actions, especially when relationships are strained or circumstances are uncertain.

Synopsis

In John 13, Jesus has just washed His disciples' feet, demonstrating humility and sacrificial service. Judas has left to betray Him, and Jesus knows that suffering and death are approaching. In the middle of this uncertainty, He gives His disciples a new command: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Jesus gives this command to a group of men who have different backgrounds, personalities, expectations, and opinions. Their unity isn't based on always agreeing, but on their shared relationship with Jesus and His example of sacrificial love. Jesus tells them that the way they love one another will become the identifying mark of His disciples.

This message carries particular weight as Clinton Frame navigates a difficult pastoral transition. Loving like Jesus doesn't mean ignoring pain, avoiding hard conversations, or pretending to agree. It means choosing to treat one another with grace, humility, honesty, and care even when relationships are complicated. Our love for one another is both evidence of our discipleship and a witness to the world around us.

Special Guidance for Group Leaders This Week

Given what's happening at Clinton Frame, I (Julie) want to offer some additional guidance for leading discussions this week:

Begin by acknowledging the situation

You could open with something like:

This has been a difficult week for our church family, and we may be processing what's happened in different ways. Some of us have questions, some are hurting, and some may not know what to think yet. That's okay. Our meeting this week isn't

about reaching agreement on the situation or deciding who is right or wrong. We're here to consider Jesus' command to love one another and ask how He might be inviting us to live that out in this season.

Establish a few conversational boundaries

- Make room for honest emotions. Sadness, frustration, confusion, and concern don't need to be corrected or dismissed.
- Don't speculate. Avoid assigning motives or filling in gaps about conversations and decisions that haven't been publicly explained.
- Don't require agreement. People may understand or respond to the transition differently. A healthy discussion doesn't require everyone to arrive at the same conclusion.
- Protect those directly affected. Speak respectfully about Ian and his family, church leaders, youth, parents, and others involved. Don't ask people to disclose private conversations or information.
- Keep the focus on discipleship. The question is not, "Who is responding correctly?" but, "How is Jesus calling me to respond?"

If someone raises a legitimate concern or question about the decision, I wouldn't discourage it. Acknowledge the question, distinguish what is known from what isn't, and encourage them to bring it to the appropriate church leadership. Group leaders are not expected to defend or explain decisions they weren't part of.

One question I would intentionally avoid

I wouldn't ask, "How can we show love and unity as we support this decision?"

That wording could imply that loving one another requires agreement with the decision. It also risks turning the group into a place where people feel pressured to demonstrate loyalty rather than honestly process what Jesus is teaching them.

A better question is: "How can we remain committed to loving one another even when we have different feelings, questions, or perspectives about what is happening?"

That allows for honest engagement while keeping Jesus' command at the center.

Group Discussion Questions

1. UNDERSTAND LOVE: Jesus had already taught His followers to love their neighbors as themselves. What changes when He commands them to love one another as He has loved them?

Teaching Point

Jesus raises the standard of love by making Himself the example. We are no longer measuring love by what feels reasonable, what another person deserves, or even what we would want for ourselves. Jesus demonstrates love through humility, sacrifice, service, patience, forgiveness, and ultimately the cross. The question shifts from “How would I want to be treated?” to “How has Jesus loved me, and how can I extend that love to someone else?”

Follow-Up Prompts

- How had Jesus already demonstrated His love to the disciples?
- What makes Jesus' example more challenging than simply being kind?
- How is Christlike love different from affection or getting along?
- What does it mean to love someone sacrificially?
- Why is it important to remember how Jesus has loved us before considering how we're called to love others?

Additional Scripture

- John 13:1–17 — Jesus demonstrates love by washing His disciples' feet.
- 1 John 4:9–11 — We love because God first loved us.
- Philippians 2:3–8 — Jesus' humility and self-giving love.
- Ephesians 5:1–2 — Walk in the way of love, following Christ's example.

2. ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHALLENGE: Jesus gave this command to disciples who had different personalities, perspectives, and expectations. Why is loving one another sometimes most difficult when we disagree, feel disappointed, or don't understand someone else's decisions?

Teaching Point

Jesus didn't wait until His disciples were unified in every opinion before commanding them to love one another. He gave this command knowing their weaknesses, their disagreements, and even their coming failures.

It's relatively easy to love people when we agree with them and feel understood. But Jesus calls us to a love that extends beyond agreement. Christian unity doesn't require uniformity of opinion. It requires a shared commitment to treating one another as people loved by Christ.

We can disagree without becoming enemies. We can acknowledge disappointment without allowing it to become contempt. We can ask difficult questions without abandoning kindness.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why do disagreements sometimes begin to feel personal?
- What happens when we assume that someone who sees things differently must have bad intentions?

- How can disappointment or hurt affect the way we interpret another person's words or actions?
- What's the difference between unity and simply avoiding disagreement?
- What does it look like to maintain love and respect when agreement isn't possible?
- How might remembering that someone else is also loved by Jesus change the way we respond to them?

Additional Scripture

- Romans 12:9–18 — Sincere love, humility, and living at peace.
- Ephesians 4:1–3 — Humility, gentleness, patience, and unity.
- Colossians 3:12–15 — Compassion, forgiveness, and love.
- Romans 14:13, 19 — Pursue peace and mutual encouragement.

3. EXAMINE OUR RESPONSE: When we're hurt, confused, or concerned about something, how can we respond in a way that is both honest and loving?

Teaching Point

Loving like Jesus doesn't require silence or pretending everything is okay. Jesus demonstrated love through compassion and mercy, but He also spoke truth, confronted wrongdoing, and addressed difficult situations directly. Sometimes love means listening. Sometimes it means asking thoughtful questions. Sometimes it means having a difficult conversation or addressing something that needs attention.

Love and truth aren't opposites. Christlike love requires us to practice both. What matters is not simply whether we speak, but how and why we speak. Are we seeking understanding or looking for someone to blame? Are we pursuing what is good for others or simply trying to prove we're right? Are we speaking from firsthand knowledge or repeating something we haven't verified?

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why do we sometimes confuse being loving with avoiding conflict?
- What's the difference between asking honest questions and participating in gossip?
- How can we express disagreement without attacking someone's character?
- What helps us listen well when emotions are running high?
- How do we recognize when our words are motivated by concern rather than resentment?
- What might it look like to speak truth with both courage and gentleness?
- Is there a difficult conversation you've been avoiding or one you need to approach differently?

Additional Scripture

- Ephesians 4:15 — Speak the truth in love.
- James 1:19–20 — Be quick to listen and slow to speak and anger.

- Proverbs 18:13, 17 — Listen before answering and consider more than one perspective.
- Matthew 18:15–17 — Address concerns directly and responsibly.
- Galatians 6:1–2 — Restore gently and carry one another's burdens.

4. PRACTICE CHRISTLIKE LOVE: Jesus says that others will recognize His disciples by their love for one another. What might people learn about Jesus by watching how Christians respond to one another during difficult circumstances?

Teaching Point

Jesus tells His disciples that their love will be a visible witness to the world. People notice how we respond when things are going well. But they may pay even closer attention when we're disappointed, frustrated, or navigating conflict.

Our witness isn't dependent on never experiencing disagreement or difficulty. Rather, our response to those difficulties can demonstrate that Jesus is changing the way we relate to one another. When we choose kindness over hostility, understanding over assumptions, honesty over gossip, and prayer over bitterness, we make something of Jesus' character visible.

That doesn't mean every conflict will resolve quickly or that every relationship will be restored immediately. It means we remain committed to responding in ways that reflect Christ.

Follow-Up Prompts

- What does the world often expect to see when people disagree? How could Christians respond differently?
- What does sacrificial love look like when relationships are strained?
- How can we demonstrate love without requiring someone to agree with us?
- What might it look like to care for someone who is experiencing this situation differently than we are?
- How can our church become a place where people feel safe to be honest while remaining committed to loving one another?

Additional Scripture

- John 17:20–23 — Jesus prays for unity among His followers.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 — The character of love.
- 1 Peter 3:8–9 — Compassion, humility, and blessing instead of retaliation.
- 1 John 3:16–18 — Love expressed through actions and truth.

5. TAKE A STEP: As you consider Jesus' command to love one another, where might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to change an attitude, have a conversation, extend grace, or take a practical step toward someone else?

Teaching Point

Jesus didn't simply ask His disciples to agree that love was important. He commanded them to practice it. And that love will look different depending on the person and the circumstances.

For some, it may mean extending forgiveness. For others, listening without defensiveness, asking a difficult question respectfully, resisting the temptation to repeat unverified information, reaching out to someone who is hurting, or choosing to pray for someone they disagree with.

We don't have to resolve every difficult circumstance to take the next faithful step in love. We also don't have to manufacture Christlike love through our own determination. We can ask the Holy Spirit to develop in us the love we cannot produce on our own.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Has the Holy Spirit brought a particular person or relationship to mind?
- Is there an attitude you've been holding that needs to change?
- Is there someone you need to listen to more carefully?
- Do you need to apologize, forgive, ask a question, or offer encouragement?
- Is there someone experiencing hurt or uncertainty who could use your support?
- What might keep you from taking that step?
- What is one specific action you could take this week?

Additional Scripture

- Galatians 5:22–25 — Love as fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- 1 John 3:18 — Love with actions and truth.
- Romans 12:20–21 — Overcome evil with good.
- Philippians 2:12–13 — God works within us to desire and act according to His purposes.