

Sermon Growth Guide

March 21, 2021

To Give His Life - Greater Love

John 15:1-13

Key Verse: John 15:13

“Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Big Idea: Until we grasp Jesus’ love for us, we can’t truly love anyone else with God’s love.

Foundations

Can anyone agree on what true love really is?

Is the height of love a feeling? If I feel positively toward someone, have I arrived at the height of love?

Is the height of love a promise? If I tell someone I’ll be there for them no matter what, have I arrived at the height of love?

Or is the height of love an action? If I lay down my life for the good of another, have I arrived at the height of love?

In John 15:13, Jesus tells us that “Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” When we consider that Jesus knew He was about to give His life away for “the life of the world,” this passage deepens in its meaning.

Ponder how this instruction to live sacrificially for others clarifies in direction with other words of Christ: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” (Matthew 6:33).

What is the height of love? The height of love is sacrificial action, completely unconcerned with one’s own temporal self-preservation, with the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God as the lens by which action is carried out.

Understanding God’s Word

According to John 15:1-2: What happens to one who does not bear fruit?

What happens to one who does bear fruit?

How does one bear fruit?

According to verse 11, what purpose does Jesus give for saying these things?

What command does Jesus give us in verse 12 and how is it defined in verse 13?

Applying God’s Word

God is reconciling the world to Himself through His people laying themselves down for the inbreaking of the salvation of the Lord. Until we grasp Jesus’ love for us, we can’t truly love anyone else with God’s love.

How might you abide in the love of Christ more consistently, more authentically, so that you come to cherish every opportunity to live for God and God alone?

Witnessing God’s Word

Who can you sacrificially move toward this week with the love of Christ? What tangible action do you anticipate will be needed?

My wife and I have two boys who are about to turn 2 and 4. So, when we're in Mommy's car, we listen to Disney compilation soundtracks. Like, if you are ever on a gameshow and need to know the words to the songs in *Frozen*, *Aladdin*, *Lion King*, even *Wreck-it Ralph*, my wife needs to be your "phone-a-friend." On the other hand, in Daddy's truck we listen to country radio, because that's what you do when you're in a truck!

And that's been a good balance for us but as Judah gets older, he's starting to ask me questions about the lyrics to some of these country songs. The other day he asked, "Daddy why is that man's brother in jail? What did he do?" I'm not sure buddy; the song didn't tell us! Or, "Daddy why doesn't he 'love her like he used to?'" (Which is a song about falling deeper in love, but initially sounds like falling out of love.) We're also allowed to listen to Taylor Swift in the truck. And Taylor is the voice of a generation when it comes to love songs. I came across a post on Reddit recently in which a person had analyzed all of Taylor Swift's lyrics and concluded that over 80 percent of her songs are about relationships and half of those are about breaking up or unrequited love.

Between country radio and Taylor Swift, we've been talking about love a lot in Daddy's truck. Love and **love gone wrong!** I'm not suggesting Taylor Swift should be the only barometer for how we gauge what's happening in our culture, but I think it's safe to say we're generally not all that good at love as a society! I mean, this is no surprise, right? Our world, our nation, our extended

families are tearing themselves apart right now. Division runs rampant!

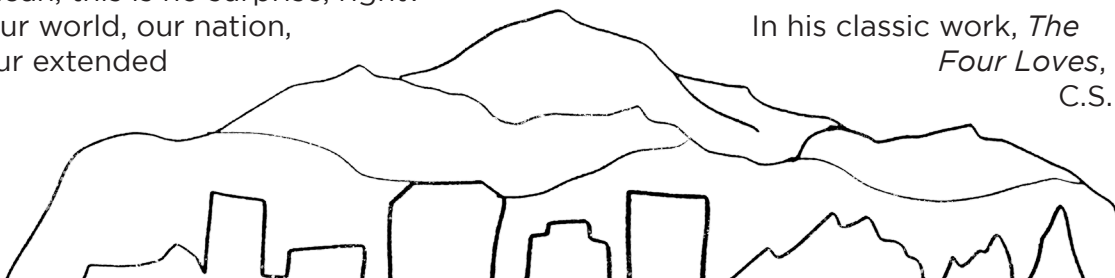
There's a Netflix documentary that came out a few months ago: *The Social Dilemma*. It describes a lot of the shadow-side of social media, including how social media shows different content depending on your age and where you live, which only serves to reinforce our biases. Similarly, it's been pointed out that we no longer have a common news source in our society. We don't listen to facts communicated on the nightly news; we primarily listen to pundits on blatantly biased podcasts, radio shows and news networks. Everything in our world today is so divisive, if we try to just go with the flow, to drift along, we actually just continue to drift apart because that's where everything is headed. But, that's not really an option for us. In verse 12 of our passage Jesus says, "This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you." Not just vaguely "have love for people" but actively "love each other."

I think deep down we really do WANT to love one another! We want to get along with others. We want to know and be known. We want to have loving families, friendships, marriages, etc. But we just seem to struggle.

And, here's my hypothesis: **On our own, we're always going to struggle; but when we encounter Jesus' love for us, it changes us, and we can truly love others.**

When we encounter Jesus's Love, it changes us, and we can truly love others.

In his classic work, *The Four Loves*,
C.S.



Lewis unpacks four ancient Greek words for love. There's a familial love, love between friends, and romance. And these generally fall into a kind of category that almost sounds like a transactional love. A love based especially on having one's needs met. These loves would say, "I love you because of how you make me feel, because you satisfy something in me." Like loving a glass of ice water after mowing the lawn because it quenches your thirst. Or, I love our friendship ... BECAUSE you're always there for me; or always know how to make me laugh. To some extent, these loves have an unwritten, underlying contract, "If I put "x" in, I expect "y" in return."

But all of these hint at another kind of love. A kind of love that changes things. That makes our world better in a deep and real way. It's a radical, selfless love. It's a love that says, "I want you to be filled, to be whole, even if that requires me to sacrifice." Living in this kind love transforms our hearts. It reshapes our thinking so that we become people who see the world through a new lens. We grow to see people as beings to be loved at all costs, because that's how God sees them. And this "love" is the call of our passage today. To know Christ's radical love for us, and to love others, to live our lives for others.

So then, how do we KNOW, how do we encounter Jesus' love for us? As we've walked through Lent together, we've been looking at what is called the "Farewell Discourse" in John. These are Jesus' final words to His followers before His death. As part of His final instruction, Jesus tasks His disciples, to "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). This word "remain" shows up 11

times in our passage. In other Bible translations, it's translated as "abide" or "stay." Or, my favorite, "Make your home in me." Jesus says, "Make your home in me, as I also make my home in you..." And Jesus says when this happens, when we make our homes in Christ, our lives become fruitful.

There was a young adult who went through the Alpha course with us last winter. I was talking to a friend of his a few months later and the friend said, "You know, he was heading down a pretty dark path, he was feeling lost, he was making some bad choices, and his life was starting to crumble. But now, six months later, he's following Jesus, he's pursuing a job in education so he can serve others, and he's actually thinking about proposing to his girlfriend. And when I talked to him about the dramatic shift in his life, he said encountering Jesus at Alpha was what changed him!" This is the difference Jesus makes. Not that everything is now perfect for this guy, but love, joy and kindness are starting to grow in a space they weren't before.

Remember: **When we encounter Jesus' Love, it changes us, and we can truly love others.**

Love grows in our lives when we make our homes with Christ. So, how do we do that? How do we "remain/abide" in Christ? Well, a couple of ways to figure this out. One way is to look back and see how Jesus has talked about "remaining/abiding in him" up until this point in John's gospel. We can do this by tracking this Greek word *meno*:

"Come and See" - Conversion / Prayer

Early in the Gospel of John, the followers of John the Baptist see Jesus. They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" **"Making your home"** "Come," he replied, "and you will

see.” So they went and saw where he was staying “**Making his home**”, and they spent that day with him **Meno - “REMAINED with him.”** It was about four in the afternoon. “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ) (John 1:38-41).

“Jesus where are you making your home?” Come and see... They made their home where he made His home. This is the same call to us today. Come and make your home with Jesus. Respond to Jesus. And once you have, continue the conversation. We talk honestly with Jesus through prayer, and our relationship with Him grows throughout our lives.

“Feeding on” his Word and meal in fellowship

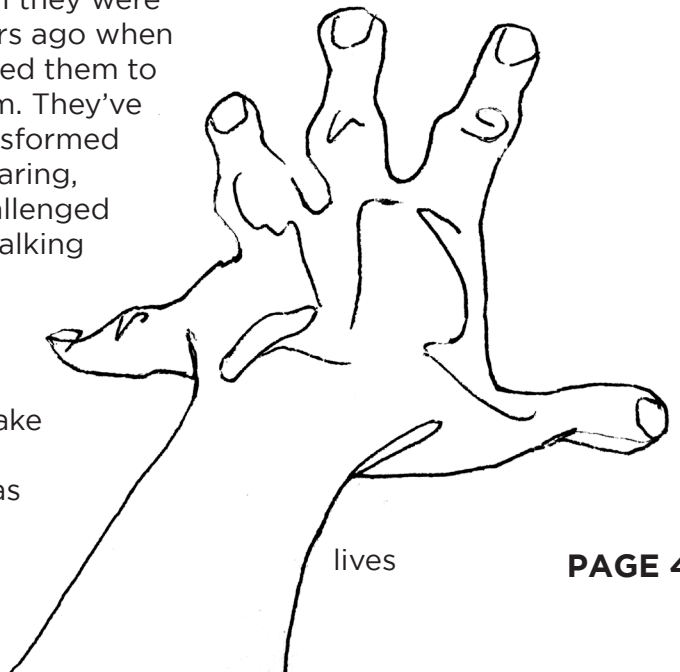
Another place this verb meno is active is John 6. After feeding the 5,000, Jesus says, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains **Meno-Makes their home in me,** and I in them” (John 6:54, 56). Later in the gospels, Jesus would break bread and pour wine, saying that they are his body and blood, the new covenant. This is what we practice in the Lord’s Supper. We come together and the Holy Spirit lifts us to the presence of God as we partake of the elements.

Then, in John 8, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide **Meno-Make your home** in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32, ESV). God’s word shapes us, shapes our lives. In our passage today, Jesus says that God is at

work as the good gardener in our lives, that, “(The Father) cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2). I started gardening last summer. And we planted basil and these crazy tomato bushes. I felt really silly cutting down/pruning the basil plant, but as the months went on, the basil grew stronger and more full, and we had more basil than we knew what to do with! On the other hand, I didn’t know what to do with the tomato bush. I never took a photo of it because I was too embarrassed. Let me tell you, mine did not look like (what it should). Mine outgrew the tiny little cage I had initially put around it, and then I needed to hammer re-bar to try to prop the thing up. All the while, tomatoes were dying and rotting on the vine, and I couldn’t even get to them.

Pruning is actually an act of love, even though it’s painful. Jesus tells His disciples, “You are already clean (This word “clean” is the same Greek word for “prune.”) because of the word I have spoken to you.” We know that the Word of the Lord cuts, and snips, and trims away. Jesus’ words do surgery on our lives, on our hearts. The disciples are not the same men they were three years ago when Jesus called them to follow Him. They’ve been transformed by the hearing, being challenged by, and walking WITH God’s Word.

So, we make our home in Christ as we give our



lives

over to Jesus, as we continue that relationship in prayer, as we join in the Lord's Supper, and as we feast on/internalize the Word of the Lord, both as a community, and in our personal, daily rhythms. But there's more!

Love one another

Look ahead a few verses in the passage. In verse 10 Jesus says, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love..." What are Jesus commands? Well, there are a lot... but we come back to this critical instruction: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:10, 12)"

"Love each other..." One scholar says that "Love makes both the lover and the beloved more truly human." -N.T. Wright

In Genesis, the Godhead said, "Let us make humans in our image." And we know from the New Testament that God is love. So, of course humans are designed to exhibit love. And whenever we love others like God loves us, we become more and more the beings we were created to be; and so does the person being loved. This love, which is born out of "making your home" in Jesus, gets expressed in a variety of ways! Christ's call to us is not one-size-fits-all, but a call to adventure, a call to follow! Look at the history of the church. According to Stephen A. Cooper in *Feasting On the Word*, because of Christ's love: Christians in the early days of the church were known for rescuing children that had been abandoned by their parents for one reason or another (*a common practice in the ancient world*) and raising them as their own. In the 4th century, the church committed to massive building campaigns, creating hospitals for the care of the sick and the dying.

In the 19th century, compelled by Jesus's love, Christians in Great Britain worked to abolish the slave trade.

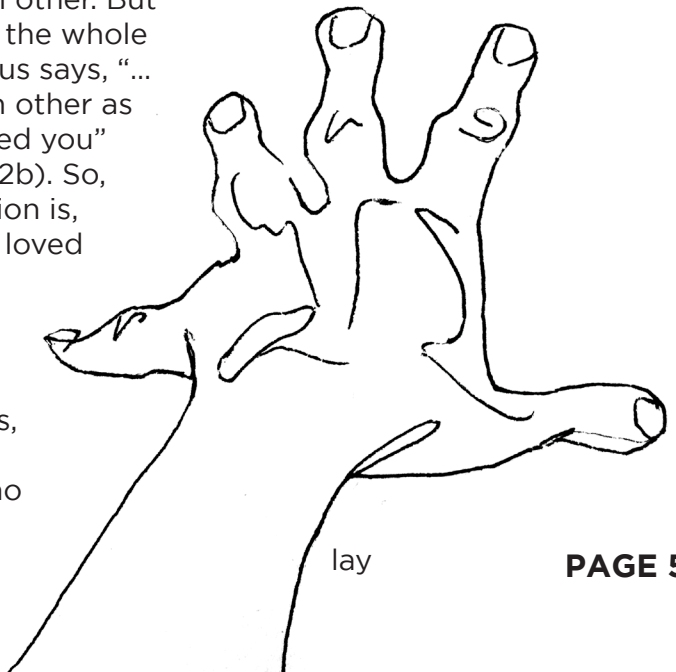
OR how about this one... Compelled by the love of Christ in 2020, First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs raised over \$100,000 for its "Give Back the Blessing" offering in the early days of a global pandemic!

This is love on a grand scale, but I'd add to this: Driven by the love of Christ a few months ago, a kind member of First Pres surprised a pair of exhausted young parents with two kids under 4 years old with a home-cooked meal, delicious dessert, and coffee beans. When we encounter Jesus' Love, it changes us, and we can truly love others. And love in a way that builds them up!

There's something else that happens when we selflessly love others. It somehow transfers to Jesus. In one of his parables, Jesus says, Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:40). Apparently, God has created us with the ability to offer love back to Him. The Christian knows that every stranger we feed or clothe IS Christ.

Well, that's the first half of verse 12. Love each other. But that's not the whole thing. Jesus says, "... Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12b). So, the question is, how have loved us?

In the next verse, Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this: to



lay

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down one's life for one's friends"
(John 15:13).

There's an old story about American prisoners in the Second World War, who were made to do hard labor in a prison camp. Each of the prisoners had their own shovel that they were responsible for. They'd dig all day, and then turn it in in the evening. One night, 20 prisoners were lined up by the guard and the shovels were counted, but the guard only found 19 shovels. Furious, he turned to the 20 prisoners demanding to know who'd misplaced their shovel. No one said a word. Finally, the guard took out his weapon and said that he would shoot five men if the guilty person did not present himself. After a moment of silence, a 19-year-old soldier took a step forward with his head hung low. The guard immediately grabbed him, took him off to the side and shot him. After the guard walked away, the remaining prisoners counted the shovels and found there were actually 20. The guard had miscounted, and the young man had willingly sacrificed his life for his friends. Imagine ... in five seconds of silence, the boy weighed his entire future: a wife, children, a career; and he chose death so that others might live. "Greater love has no one than this..."

Jesus offers this teaching the night before He is about to lay down His own life. When Jesus says, "There is no greater love than to give your life away for your friends," He knows what He's saying. He knows what is about to happen, and He doesn't want His dear friends to fail to understand the love He has for them. And, I would add, he doesn't want YOU to fail to understand the love He has for you.

At this point, Jesus is looking ahead

to what is to come. He already knows what is around the corner and the disciples, and we, the church, are about to find out. In John's Gospel, and in our Lenten journey together, we are about to come to Good Friday.

We're about to come to the betrayal by Judas, to Jesus' arrest, to the flogging/beatings, the ridicule, the mocking. We're about to come to Jesus' long walk to Calvary, to the nails in each of His wrists, the nails in His feet, the hours of agony, slowly suffocating under the weight of the sin of all humanity.

Jesus commanded: "Love each other as I have loved you." And how has Jesus loved us? He's loved us with His life. Jesus came **To Give HIS Life**, so that WE might have life.

Friends, we have to know and embrace this love. Without it, we can never truly love others. We might experience romance, desire, friendship, family, but something greater will always be missing until we are tapped into the deep, deep well of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

