

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 26 – THE GREATEST IS LOVE

The Bible makes it clear that love is the most important thing that we should pursue in life as believers, with our love for Jesus being our highest priority. In the book of James we read, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” you do well.” **(James 2:8)** Jesus shared about the incredible love of God when He said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” **(John 3:16)** The Apostle Paul wrote, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” **(1 Corinthians 13:13)**

Having a genuine love for others is actually one of the indicators of a person having a relationship with the Lord. The Apostle John wrote, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” **(1 John 3:10)** The bible is full of references to the importance of people having a genuine love for God and for others. **(Mark 12:30-31)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” **(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)** The Apostle Paul also wrote, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” **(1 Corinthians 14:1)** ***Love always sees the best in others, helps to bring out the best in others, heals broken relationships and helps to build a happy home.***

Jesus Himself also said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this** all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” **(John 13:34-35)** **Jesus in His life here on earth showed what God’s love was through His compassion for the marginalised and less advantaged in society. Jesus had great compassion for the lost, the afflicted and sick and for those who had been rejected by society such as the lepers. In the gospel of Matthew we read,** “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” **(Matthew 9:35-36)**

Compassion is a word that is only ever associated with God and those who demonstrate God’s love. God’s agape love is unconditional. JUST AS GOD LOVES EVERY PERSON WE TOO ALSO NEED TO HAVE A GENUINE LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE. Having a genuine love for one another is a key to maintaining unity in all of our relationships. UNITY BRINGS GOD’S BLESSINGS. In a world full of hate and strife and many broken relationships, the one defining characteristic of Christians should be that they stand out in this world because of their genuine love for others. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” **(Matthew 5:16)** **HAVING A GENUINE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER IS A KEY TO UNITY AND TO SEEING GOD’S KINGDOM POWER OPERATING IN OUR LIFE.** In the book of Psalms we read, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” ... “It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing – Life forevermore.” **(Psalm 133:1 & 3)**

THE FIRST CHURCH WAS UNIFIED AND MOVED IN GREAT POWER

In the book of Acts we read, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.” **(Acts 5:12)**

JESUS HIMSELF SAID THAT A DIVIDED HOUSE WOULD FALL. (Unity is a key to establishing strong churches) **Jesus said,** “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.” **(Luke 11:17)**

In this Growth key I will be sharing seven thoughts in relation to having a genuine love for others.

TRUE AGAPE LOVE HAS THE FOLLOWING ATTRIBUTES:

1) IT IS ALSO PRACTICAL

In the book of Acts we read, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they **distributed to each as anyone had need.**” **(Acts 4:32-35)**

2) IT IS GENUINE AND DEMONSTRATES FORGIVENESS

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” **(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)**

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” **(Ephesians 4:31-32)**

3) IT IS OTHERS FOCUSED

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” **(Philippians 2:3-4) AND**

4) IT IS SACRIFICIAL (Like Jesus we must choose to lay down our life for others)

Jesus said, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” **(Matthew 20:26-28)**

WE ALL HAVE THE ABILITY AS BELIEVERS TO LOVE OTHERS SACRIFICIALLY AND UNCONDITIONALLY BECAUSE GOD’S LOVE HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. **(Romans 5:5)**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control...” **(Galatians 5:22-23)**

WHAT CAN HOWEVER STOP THIS LOVE FROM FLOWING OUT OF THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS??

I will now conclude this Growth key by sharing three major factors which can prevent Christians from loving others unconditionally. These are:

5) A LACK OF INTIMACY IN OUR WALK WITH THE LORD (We must not allow the cares of this world to take our focus off the LORD. We must *purposely* make time each day to spend with the LORD)

i) We must continually abide in His love **(John 15:4-5)**

ii) We need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit **(Ephesians 5:18)**

iii) We need to lead a lifestyle of worship **(John 4:23-24)** and prayer **(1 Thessalonians 5:17)**
(Involving God in all areas of our life) **(Proverbs 3:5-6) (Psalm 37:4)**

6) OUR ATTITUDES (Walking in the flesh)

a. Being critical or judgemental of others **(Matthew 7:1-5)**

b. Being envious or jealous of others **(James 3:14-16)**

c. Having selfish ambition **(Philippians 2:3)**

d. Having pride in our life **(Colossians 3:12 & 4:6) (James 4:1-10)**

7) HAVING A FEAR OF MAN (A fear of being rejected)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” **(1 John 4:18)**

In conclusion, the key to consistently loving others is to put Jesus Christ first place in our life. That self no longer has any place on the throne of our heart, but that Jesus Christ is truly Lord of all. The Apostle Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” **(Galatians 2:20)** **It is only when we live a life that is set apart for God and for others that we consistently begin to love others unconditionally and see our lives bearing much fruit. Jesus Himself said**, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” **(John 12:24)**