

THE GREATEST IS LOVE



The bible clearly emphasises that the most important aspect of our faith as believers is LOVE; that we have a genuine love for God and for others. Jesus Himself said,

“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.” **(Mark 12:30)**

“And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” **(Mark 12:31)**

It is our love for God and for others that will help us to shine in this world as Christians and help us to make a great difference in our world for eternity. We best represent God when we learn to unconditionally love others. The Apostle John wrote, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11) “...for God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

Jesus Himself 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.

It is also God’s love in our heart that will cause us to lay down our lives for the Kingdom Cause. Jesus willing went to the cross to lay down His life as a ransom for our sins so that we can be forgiven and have an eternal relationship with Him when we commit our lives to Him. Jesus Himself said,

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” **(John 15:12-13)**

In a world which is becoming less and less loving and more materialistically and technologically focused, our unconditional love and concern for others will make a great impact on the lives of others and help them to come to Christ. People are now craving genuine love in the world as we see the world becoming more and more impersonal.

In particular the way that we relate to other believers will be a great example to those in the world of what Kingdom Living is.

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)**

The Apostle Peter clearly emphasised the importance of loving others in the times that we are now living in when he wrote,

“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

(1 Peter 4:7-9)

There is a big difference between God’s agape love and human love which is so often conditional. It is also completely different to the love that is portrayed in Hollywood. True Christian love also involves commitment and sacrificially giving of oneself.

The Apostle Paul gave a great definition of what real agape Christian love is like. 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)**

As leaders the way that we live our life has a great impact on the culture of our churches and workplaces. So as leaders and parents it is crucial that we model what it is to love others UNCONDITIONALLY with Christ's love to those that we lead and parent.

The Apostle Paul emphasised the importance of modelling Christian living to the young pastor Timothy when he wrote,

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” **(1 Timothy 4:12)**

The Apostle Paul continually emphasised the importance of having a genuine love for others in his epistles. In the book of Colossians he wrote,

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” **(Colossians 3:12-14)**

The Apostle Peter also emphasised the importance of genuinely loving others in his first epistle when he wrote,

“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” **(1 Peter 3:8-9)**

Having God's love in our lives and churches is a great key to revival within the Body of Christ. As we seek God's face and gain His heart of compassion for the lost and hurting, our lives will make a great difference in this world for eternity.

It is in God's presence that our hearts are filled afresh with His love and compassion for others. How important it is in the days that we are now living in, that our primary focus is to pray for and to seek God's presence in all of our meetings and to love and encourage other believers in their walk with the Lord.

As believers God's love has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us

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)**

It is our love for God that empowers us to love others UNCONDITIONALLY and that enables us to bring the goodness of God into our world

The world is crying out for genuine love

As believers the greatest thing that we can do is love others into the Kingdom of God as we share the hope that we have in Christ with others. In the book of Proverbs we read, “...And he who wins souls is wise.” **(Proverbs 11:30)**

For this reason we must not allow the spirit of the world to stop us from loving others unconditionally. Jesus Himself said in relation to the days that we are now living in that because of lawlessness the love of many would grow cold

Jesus said, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” **(Matthew 24:3-13)**

The Apostle Paul clearly emphasized the importance of having a genuine love for others and that all that we do in life and ministry being undergirded by love.

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)**

It is our consistent and genuine love for other people that will make the greatest impact on their lives. As pastors and leaders we need to reflect in our own lives what we preach in our sermons and messages so that we can also model what it is to live a God glorifying Christian life. The most important thing that people want to see in our lives is that we have a genuine love for them.

In many ways we are all under the microscope as believers as those in the world look to see if there is anything different in our lives as Christians. It is our consistent love for others that will make us truly stand out in the times that we are now living in.

People do not care about how much we know, but they do want to know how much we care about them

So given that we have the ability as believers to love others UNCONDITIONALLY with the agape love of Christ due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our life, what can firstly stop us from doing so?

1) Allowing offences into our heart through not quickly forgiving those who have hurt us

Being unforgiving towards others will affect our heart attitudes and prevent us from loving others unconditionally. Especially when under pressure and in the heat of the moment, what is in the heart will surface in the words that we speak because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45) Our words have the potential to either wound or to bring encouragement and healing to others.

2) Allowing critical and judgmental attitudes to develop in our heart

We cannot be constantly critical and judgemental towards others and truly love them at the same time. We all have made mistakes in life and we all need grace from others. This is why Jesus said,

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” **(Matthew 7:1-5)**

Maintaining both an offence free heart and a heart free of critical and judgemental attitudes is crucial if we are to consistently love people with the love of Christ. For this reason it is crucial that we always maintain a soft heart. In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”
(Proverbs 4:23)

3) Allowing our focus in life to become more centred on material things than on nurturing and cultivating our relationships with God and others

The more that we get caught up with the things of this world the less our love will be for both God and for others

Jesus made it clear that we cannot allow the things of this world to take our focus off Him. When the things of this world become too great a priority in our life, it will greatly affect our love for others.

Jesus made this very clear when He said,

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” **(Matthew 6:19-21)**

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” **(Matthew 6:24)**

4) Allowing selfish ambition to develop in our life. We must continually examine our heart to ensure that all that we do in life is done from a pure motivation. As Christians we have been called to serve others with our gifts (1 Corinthians 14:12) (1 Corinthians 12:7)

If the enemy can get us to focus on ourselves too much there is potential for problems to develop in our relationships. It is impossible to love others unconditionally when we allow selfish ambition to develop in our lives.

In the book of James we read,

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” **(James 3:13-16)**

As Christians it is so important that we continually choose to live for and to serve others as we follow in Jesus footsteps of sacrificially living for others.

Jesus Himself said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 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 20:25-28)**

5) Allowing envy and Jealousy to take root in our hearts

Being envious and jealous of others will also prevent us from freely loving others. We can see a great example of this in the life of King Saul when he became jealous and envious of David after initially being very supportive of him. We see this in the book of 1 Samuel.

“So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments.

So the women sang as they danced, and said: "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands."

Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?"

So Saul eyed David from that day forward.

And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played music with his hand, as at other times; but there was a spear in Saul's hand.

And Saul cast the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" But David escaped his presence twice.” **(1Samuel 18:5-11)**

We must continually refuse to entertain any envious and jealous thoughts that the enemy would try and put into our mind so that we can continue to love others unconditionally. We need to always rejoice with those who rejoice, especially when we ourselves are going through trials

6) **Having wrong friendships in life. Who we spend time with will greatly shape our lives and influence the way that we relate to others**

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.” **(Proverbs 22:24-25)**

We become very much like the company that we keep. We must not spend too much time with people who are always critical and judgemental of others and prone to gossiping about others.

In the book of Proverbs we read, “A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.” **(Proverbs 16:28)**

7) **Having a fear of being rejected by others**

Having a fear of man or a fear of being rejected by others will prevent us from opening up and loving others unconditionally.

Having a fear of being rejected by others will cause us to put walls up around our heart and prevent us from being open and transparent in our relationships with others

We must not allow our past betrayals and disappointments to stop us from reaching out to others in love. Jesus is our example for loving others unconditionally. Though He was rejected by others, Jesus continually loved people unconditionally. In the gospel of Matthew we read,

“And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.” **(Matthew 8:34)**

None of us have experienced personal rejection to this degree. Like Jesus we need to simply choose to love people and to not allow a fear of being rejected to stop us from reaching out to others with the love of Christ

A great key to overcoming a fear of being rejected by others is to be filled with all the fullness of God’s love by spending quality time with the Lord.

In the book of Acts we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” **(Acts 4:13)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” **(2 Timothy 1:7) and**

8) Becoming too busy in life so that we no longer spend quality time with the Lord being replenished with His love.

It is in continually abiding in Christ's love that we have the ability to love others UNCONDITIONALLY

The more time that we spend with the Lord the more we have the ability to love others unconditionally and the more we grow in Christlike character.

Jesus Himself said,

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” **(John 15:4-5)**

Spending intimate time in the presence of the Lord helps us to love others better and to grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” **(Galatians 5:22-23)**

On the other hand if we fail to spend quality time with the Lord we will invariably become less loving and gracious to those that we relate to. It is in abiding in the presence of God and being continually filled with the Holy Spirit that we have the ability to love even those who are opposing us in life unconditionally.

In Chapter 10 of the gospel of Luke we see Jesus emphasising the importance of spending quality time in His presence.

“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.

But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” **(Luke 10:38-42)**

We must never get too busy so that we do not spend quality time with the Lord

SO HOW CAN WE BECOME CHRISTIANS WHO CONSISTENTLY SHINE IN THIS WORLD BECAUSE OF OUR GREAT LOVE FOR OTHERS

- 1) We need to allow the Word of God to change us.** As we regularly meditate on the Word of God and apply it to our life we become more Christlike in the way that we relate to others. We need to study, think about, memorize, believe and live the Word of God so that it becomes part of who we are. The Apostle Paul wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” **(Romans 12:2)**

The LORD said to Joshua just prior to him leading the Children of Israel into the Promised Land,

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” **(Joshua 1:8)**

In a world that is getting less loving and more materialistic and lawless, how important it is that we regularly renew our mind with the Word of God so that we do not allow the spirit of the world to negatively influence us in the way that we relate to others.

Continually meditating on the Word of God helps us to relate to others in a right and loving manner. The bible is full of Scriptures that can help us to love others in a right way. The following Scripture written by the Apostle Paul is one such example. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, “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. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us...” **(Ephesians 4:31-32, 5:1-2)**

- 2) We need to cultivate a lifestyle of genuine and sincere worship.** In doing this we will consistently have God's love and compassion for others and in particular for the lost and hurting

King David wrote, “**Delight yourself also in the Lord,** And He shall give you the desires of your heart.” **(Psalm 37:4)**

Worshipping God in Spirit and truth helps us to connect with His heart of compassion for people so that we can love people in a genuine and sincere way. Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes in need of salvation.

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)

Having a lifestyle of worship helps to keep our heart continually soft towards both God and others, so that we can consistently love others unconditionally with the love of Christ

Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of true worship when He said,
“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” **(John 4:23-24)**

King David is the only one in the bible who was referred to as being a man after God’s own heart. (Acts 13:22) King David was a great worshipper who wrote many of the Psalms. In Psalm 63 King David wrote,

“O GOD, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for you; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.” **(Psalm 63:1-3)**

3) We must always be quick to forgive others. Praying for God's help to forgive others is a great key to giving us the ability to always forgive others

We must always guard our heart by not allowing offences to enter into our heart. In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”
(Proverbs 4:23)

What is in our heart will always come out when under pressure in the words that we speak. If we allow resentment and offences to lodge in our heart, it will eventually become apparent in the words that we speak to others and in the tone in which we speak them in.

It is impossible to love others with the love of Christ if we harbour unforgiving attitudes. We must always be quick to forgive others that hurt us. This is simply an act of our will. As we choose to do so God will always give us the ability through His love to forgive others.

The more we see people the way that Jesus sees them, the easier it is for us to forgive others.

Jesus clearly emphasised the importance of forgiving others when He said, “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” **(Mark 11:25-26)**

4) We need to always LOOK for the best in others.

It is always important that we continually look for the best in others rather than always examining the faults in others. None of us are perfect and we all need grace from others in life. This is why Jesus in His teachings emphasised the importance of working on one’s own faults first before we start critiquing the lives of others. Jesus Himself said,

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” **(Matthew 7:1-5)**

We will always have a far more loving atmosphere in our homes and churches if we always look for the best in others and appreciate the differences in those around us.

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.” **(Philippians 2:3)**

5) We need to always QUICKLY take all negative and critical thoughts captive and replace them with Christ centred thoughts. Having a lifestyle of meditating on the Word of God helps us to quickly replace all wrong thoughts with God’s Kingdom way of thinking

We need to quickly take all wrong and critical thoughts captive before they take us captive. What we think upon will greatly affect our heart attitudes towards others. We must not allow wrong thoughts to remain in our mind but be quick to replace them with Christ centred thoughts. The real battle is always for the mind. We must win this battle by continually filling our minds with wholesome and Kingdom based thoughts and by refusing to entertain negative and critical thoughts towards others.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” **(2 Corinthians 10:4-5)**

- 6) We need to purposely look for opportunities to encourage people and to speak gracious and uplifting words into their lives and circumstances of others** (Compliments help people to feel valued)

As Christians we should be distinctively different to those in the world. As Christ’s disciples filled with His love we can make a great difference in our world as we actively love and encourage others. Words of encouragement give strength to others and makes people feel loved and accepted. Jesus continually spoke words of life to others.

Jesus Himself said,

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” **(John 6:63)**

In the gospel of Luke we also read in relation to Jesus,

“So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son” **(Luke 4:22)**

In the Proverbs we read,

“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” **(Proverbs 15:23)**

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT HELP PEOPLE TO FEEL LOVED AND APPRECIATED

- 7) We must refuse to speak words in haste when we feel that we are being put down by others or when experiencing relational difficulties.** This will help us not to say things in the heat of the moment that we later regret. We must refuse to speak words that pull down and belittle others.

In the book of James we read,

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;” **(James 1:19)**

If we do not exercise self-control in the heat of the moment we can speak out words that we later regret having spoken.

Our words have both the potential to build others up or to wound others. We need to always be slow to speak and careful in the use of our words when relating to others. Words spoken in haste and anger have the potential to greatly harm our relationships with others. For this reason we need to be careful to only speak words that promote life and love in our relationships with others.

- 8) Being careful about the company that we keep.** We invariably become like those that we most associate with most. We need good loving role models in our life as our significant friends

In the book of Proverbs we read, “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.” **(Proverbs 12:26)**

Again in the book of Proverbs we read,

“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.” **(Proverbs 22:24-25)**

- 9) We need to be always sensitive about how our actions and words affect others.** Hence we need to weep with those who weep rather than telling them how great our life is going when people are going through struggles. Though we have great liberty in Christ we must always be mindful of how our actions affect others. The Holy Spirit will always give us a great sensitivity in this area and help us to love others in a healthy and right manner.

Sometimes just being clumsy in how we do things or simply saying things without giving much thought to what we are saying, can cause people to feel that we do not love and respect them.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” **(Romans 12:17-18)**

- 10) We need to consider how we would want others to relate to us.** In doing this it will always help us to relate to others in an appropriate manner. Even in the way that we do things we need to consider how we would want others to treat us in the same situation. Practical love is to do unto others as you would want them to do to you. For example when I was cleaning houses for work I would always consider how I would want others to clean my house if I was paying them to do so.

This is why Jesus said, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” **(Mark 12:31)**

11) We need to learn to continually walk in the Spirit and to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit

Being continually filled with the Holy Spirit is a great key to consistently loving others. The Holy Spirit helps us to be emotionally healthy and loving towards others. (Just as a car engine needs oil to run smoothly so too our emotions need the oil of the Holy Spirit to operate properly)

This is why the Apostle Paul wrote,

“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Learning to walk in the Spirit is also a great key to consistently loving others. We must continually make this choice and refuse to allow our flesh to rise up when we do not get our own way in life.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:13-16)

Being continually filled with the Holy Spirit and learning to walk in the Spirit helps us to consistently love others and to always see the best in others. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

12) Knowing the love language of others is also crucial to making people feel loved. If we love people using their primary love language they will feel more appreciated and loved as we meet their felt needs. People FEEL loved in different ways. Gary Chapman identified five primary love languages;

- i) Physical Touch
- ii) Acts of Service
- iii) Words of Affirmation
- iv) Gift Giving, and
- v) Quality Time

Knowing the love language of others helps us to love people better

13) The importance of being faithful and loyal in all of our significant relationships. “Love suffers long and is kind; ...” (1 Corinthians 13:4)

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” (**Proverbs 17:17**)

It is important that we do not give up easily on people. Our true friends are those who stick by us during the tough times. As Christians living in a world of very little commitment, we should be shining examples of what true friendship really is as we display loyalty in all of our significant relationships.

God Himself is our example of what true loyalty is when we look at His unflinching and unconditional love towards all those who receive Christ and become part of His family. (John 1:12)

In the book of Hebrews we read,

“...For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (**Hebrew 13:5-6**)

14) Like Jesus we need to treat all people with dignity. Jesus did not condemn the woman caught in adultery. (John 8:1-11) He simply said to her "sin no more" because He was headed to Jerusalem where He would be crucified to pay the penalty for her and our sins.

Like Jesus we need to love all people and not be prejudiced towards others. God has a great love for all people and is no respecter of persons. Every person is of equal value to God and His desire is that none would perish but that all would receive the gift of eternal life. God has a great heart to see all people living a life of great purpose and meaning

In the book of James we read,

“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” (**James 2:1-4**)

James then goes on to explain God's concern for the poor.

"Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?"

If you really fulfil *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself,"^[a] you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." **(James 2:5-9)**

In Psalm 102:17 we read again about God's great concern for the poor, "He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, And shall not despise their prayer." **(Psalm 102:17)**

As Christians we need to treat all people with love and respect as we live out God's biblical standards for our own life. We need to just lovingly point all people to Christ who is able to do a work of change in every life that is consecrated to Him. He who the Son sets free is free indeed.

Jesus Himself said,

"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." **(John 8:36)**

- 15) True Agape love is prepared to sacrificially give of itself and is always others focussed.** Now more than ever before God is looking for those who are prepared to sacrificially give of themselves and to be His hands and feet and to reach out to others with the love of Christ and the gospel message

As Christians it is our unconditional love for others that will be our greatest witness to others. With God's unconditional love we are also prepared to make sacrifices and to readily lay down our lives to serve others. It is God's love in our heart that will cause us to truly lay down our lives for the cause of Christ and unselfishly serve others, even if not appreciated by others.

Jesus Himself said,

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 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 20:25-28)**

It is only in wholeheartedly surrendering our lives for the Cause of Christ and in living for others that our lives make a great difference in this world for eternity.

Jesus Himself made this clear when He 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. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour.”
(John 12:24-26)

16) The importance of looking for practical ways of expressing our love towards others as we look for opportunities to help people in need through acts of service and giving

Sometimes the best way that we can love others is in a practical way as we help to meet the needs of others when we have the ability to do so. Often it is our practical expressions of love that can best open up people’s hearts to receive Christ such as buying someone who is hungry a meal.

In the book of James we see the importance of the practical side of our faith. James in his epistle wrote,

“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” **(James 2:15-18)**

The Apostle John wrote,

“By this we know love, because he laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word of tongue, but in deed and in truth.” **(1 John 3:16-18)**

The bible clearly emphasises the importance of being naturally spiritual and the importance of helping those in need as we have opportunity to do so. Love in action

17) The importance of caring for the individual. Every person is special to God

In a world which is getting more and more impersonal, where loneliness is becoming an increasing problem in our society, how we need to be prepared to stop and reach out to people and to encourage them with the love of Christ. Jesus in His parable of the lost sheep clearly emphasised the importance of every individual to God.

In this parable Jesus said,

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which is lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. **(Luke 15:4-7)**

Jesus also said,

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”
(Luke 19:10)

The world is made up of many hurting individuals who need encouragement. For this reason we must always be mindful of those who are going through trials and challenges and the needs of the marginalized. More than ever before given the times that we are now living in with many Christians being persecuted for their faith, we need to be actively encouraging one another in the Body of Christ.

In the book of Hebrews we read,

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” **(Hebrews 10:23-25)**

It is so important that we never get so busy in life and ministry that we miss opportunities to reach out to people to encourage them in life.

As a church we need to be genuinely loving and accepting of all people so that no person visiting our fellowship meetings ever feels isolated or left out. For this reason it is important as a church to promote and encourage healthy Christian community where lonely and marginalized people can feel accepted and have a real sense of being connected to a church family.

It is in creating a loving and caring Christian community that people can be encouraged and strengthened in their walk with the Lord as they become connected to the life a loving church fellowship (Family).

Secondly it is important as a church that we are good at keeping in touch with people who have drifted out of fellowship. That people know that they are still cared for and loved by those in our church family when out of fellowship. For this reason having a good follow up strategy for our churches is very important. Encouraging those in our church to text and call others who have been missing from fellowship for a while, or who are going through struggles helps to make our churches more caring. When we develop a culture of caring for individuals in our church we will have a healthy and loving church, **AND**

18) Charity (LOVE) needs to begin at home. It is so important that we purposely look at creating a loving environment in our own homes so that we can have a stable home base to live our life from.

We must learn to unconditionally love those closest to us to create a loving home environment. The enemy will always try and magnify the faults in others to try and create friction and strife in our homes and churches. With this in mind we need to pray together as a family and purposely always look for the best in others. Being in a family helps us to learn to love others unconditionally as we learn to live with people that are so often different to us.

The bible makes it clear that before we can be eligible for and truly effective in church leadership, we need to first have our own homes in order. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) (Titus 1:5-9)

Creating a loving home environment is a great key to experiencing the life and life more abundantly that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10

There are many reasons why purposely creating a loving home environment is so important. These include;

- i) It pleases the heart of God and is a key to being blessed by Him (Psalm 133)
- ii) We have a place of refuge at the end of each day's work or school
- iii) We have a support network that helps us to get through life's challenges
- iv) We can have healthy companionship with other family members
- v) We are a great example and role model for other families, and
- vi) That when we have a stable home environment we can function at our highest level and become all that God has planned for our life

SO IN CONCLUSION:

As Christians and as churches our love for people needs to be our greatest priority next to our love for Christ and putting Him first in all that we do. Like never before as a church we can shine brightly in our communities as we share the love of Christ with others in a world that is now becoming less and less personal. It is our genuine love for others that will help us to lead people to Christ as we share the message of the gospel with those around us. It is so important that we learn to appreciate the differences in others and to treat others with respect.

As pastors and leaders we need to seek to create a culture of love and acceptance in our church fellowships so that people can be encouraged to grow in their faith and to fulfil God's plan for their life

The best way to achieve this is to allow the Lord to change us ourselves so that we become an example of what it is to love others unconditionally and to ALSO spend quality time in mentoring our key leaders to become fruitful disciples with Christlike character. What is in the hearts of those in the leadership of our churches will invariably filter down and become the DNA of our churches.

This is why the Apostle Peter wrote,

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." **(1 Peter 5:2-4)**

All that we do in life and ministry needs to be motivated by love. How we need to simply just apply in our own life the two commandments that Jesus spoke of about loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself. (Mark 12:29-31)

In doing this our lives and churches will greatly impact the lives of many as we share the love of Christ to a lost and hurting world. So may I encourage you to keep the goal of loving Christ and loving people foremost in all that you do in the coming season as you help to see God's Kingdom being established here on earth through your life and churches!

I will finish with the words of the Apostle Paul,
"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest is love." **(1 Corinthians 13:13)**

