

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Ethical Issue: Relationships

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Ethical Issues: Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Understand a basic characteristic of Christian theology, the humility of God
2. Explore the various “one another” texts in the New Testament
3. Deepen your understanding of the communal nature of Christian life
4. See the missional nature of the ethics of humility
5. Explore the Christian practice of foot washing as a “sacrament” of humility

Content Outline

- A. The Humility of God
- B. A survey of the “one another” texts in Scripture
- C. Foot washing, the sacrament of humility

Background Material for the Presenter

When most people think of God, they think of descriptors such as omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere-present). In the battle between world religions, everyone imagines their God to be the most powerful. In head-to-head combat, we know our God will **win**.

This is part of the reason why God is described in these powerful and impressive terms. The Israelites celebrated the mighty acts of God in their worship and annual festivals. Passing on the memory of God’s mighty acts in history is a major part of what it means to be Jewish, even today. Christians celebrate the fact that our God is powerful, even over death, as demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

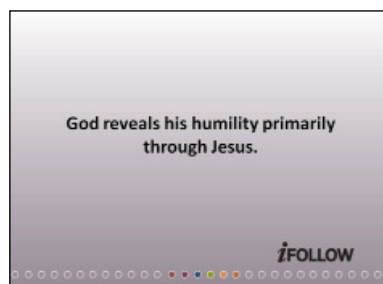
All of this is an accurate, but incomplete picture of God. One striking characteristic of the Judeo-Christian God, which is completely unexpected, is the humility of God. After all, who needs a humble God? We want a God who can beat up all the other gods. We know what happens to humble people in this world; they get beat up by the bully on the playground. We want the God who speaks in Job 38:4-13:



“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone-
while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels [a] shouted for joy?
“Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt’?
“Have you ever given orders to the morning,
or shown the dawn its place,
that it might take the earth by the edges
and shake the wicked out of it?

You can read the whole thing for yourself. It goes on like this for four chapters. Job is cut down to size by God as he is reminded of the awesome creative power of God.

But there is another picture of God that is equally important, **the humility of God**. God reveals his humility primarily through Jesus. Jesus is born into humble circumstances. He is the son of peasants from Nazareth with cannot even afford a decent place to sleep on the night of Jesus birth. When Herod orders the slaughter of all baby boys two years of age and under, Jesus and his family spend the next several years as refugees in Egypt. If you were planning the greatest event in human history, we probably wouldn’t script it this way. No even recognizes Jesus as a king (with the exception of a few mystics from the East).



His humble circumstances continue throughout his life. Jesus said to one would-be follower, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Luke 9:58) Even at his death he is buried in a borrowed tomb. Isaiah had it exactly right in this prophecy of Christ:

He grew up before him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:2-5)

Isaiah understood that the coming of Messiah would be characterized by a kind of strength unlike anything anyone had witnessed before. It is the power and strength of humility.

Still, Jesus disciples could not grasp the concept of God as suffering servant. In theory? Maybe. But in practice? Never. So Jesus repeatedly instructed them about his role as servant. For example, when two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, come to him to ask for the top spots in his administration, Jesus finds this the perfect teaching moment.

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

The classic moment which illustrates the servanthood and humility of God in Jesus Christ is the Passover meal the night Jesus is betrayed and crucified. Prior to the meal, as the disciples are gathering, Jesus quietly and without fanfare, stoops to wash his disciples' feet. You don't need to be a New Testament scholar to realize that this is below Jesus' "pay grade." The disciples are shocked, but none more than Peter, who tries to refuse. Once again, Jesus finds an opportunity to teach about his true nature.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me

'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (John 13:12-16)

Jesus has just acted in the role of the lowest servant, not as an object lesson, not to make a point, but because this is who Jesus *is*. This is his nature. He is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

In Luke's account, a debate breaks out at the table that same night. Perhaps this is Luke's recollection of the same event we read in John. Here are Jesus' words according to Luke.

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:24-27)

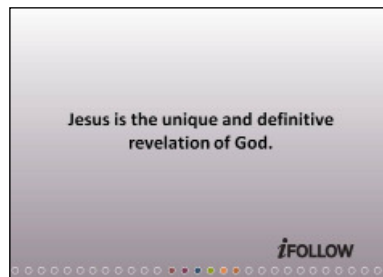
This servanthood of Jesus illustrates the humility of God. It is so counter-intuitive to the disciples, and even to us today, that it bears repeating over and over again. Perhaps Paul captured this truth the best in Philippians 2:3-11 where he describes, in the words of an ancient hymn, the self-emptying humility of God in Christ.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

What we see here is that this beautiful, poetic description of Jesus is, in fact, a description of God. Notice, Paul says that Jesus, the Christ, is “in very nature God.” This is consistent with everything else we’ve seen from Isaiah on down—**Jesus is the unique and definitive revelation of God.** And what do we learn about God from this revelation in Jesus? The revelation is clear:



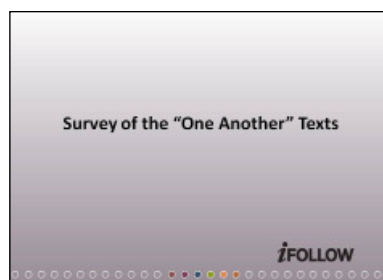
He made himself nothing
He took the nature of a servant (as we’ve seen clearly from Isaiah and the gospels)
He humbled himself
He submitted himself to death—even death on a cross, the most humiliating death of all.

In short, he didn’t consider his position in heaven—his position of equality with the Father—something worth holding on to. He gave it all up so that humanity—indeed, all God’s creation—might be redeemed.

This is the humility of God, clearly demonstrated in our Lord Jesus. The cross was the clearest picture of God’s humility and love that humans have ever seen or will ever see. Paul elsewhere tells us that we are Christ’s body. Literally, the physical manifestation of Christ on earth. Naturally, Jesus is the one-of-a-kind, irreplaceable Son of God. To say that the gathered followers of Jesus are his body on earth is not to foster a kind of messiah complex, but to recognize that by the Holy Spirit, we are to represent Christ in the world. This is our mission. Paul writes, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:7). We belong to one another!

Survey of the “One Another” Texts

One of the most vivid ways the Lord Jesus reveals His intention for the church as his body is by a series of statements given about our responsibilities toward one another. These attitudes and behaviors described by the apostles are based upon the central “one another” teaching spoken by Jesus, to “love one another.” It is through these practices that we reveal the humility and love of God that is the character of God himself.



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The phrase “one another”, as translated from the Greek word **allelon**, provides us with what some call the **allelon** principle of the New Testament. This principle provides us with a tremendous picture of what **koinonia** (community) in the body looks like in action.



It is largely from this literature of **allelon** texts that we can formulate an ethic of community in the church. What follows is an annotated list of “one another” texts from the New Testament grouped topically.

Love one another—Far and away the most common “one another” teachings in the New Testament is the teaching to **love** one another. (John 13:34-35; Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 4:11-12; 2 John 5)



It’s important to recognize that this teaching—*love one another*—is not something we find first in Paul or the other epistles. This first appears in the New Testament on the lips of the Lord Jesus. It is found first in John 13:34-35. In the context of this passage, Jesus’ earthly ministry is winding to a close and he instructs his disciples in the most important lessons they need to learn to get them through the dark days ahead. How will the message of Jesus have credibility in the wake of the crucifixion? How will anyone believe that Jesus is who he said he was? Jesus says everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. This is their watchword. This is the identifying mark by which anyone would be able to tell that a person was a follower of Jesus.

It is also significant that of all the New Testament uses of the expression “one another” it is used in relation to love more than twice as many times as any other usage. This insight is crucial. Just as *love* stands at the head of the list of “fruit of the Spirit,” so love is the first among the **allelon** principles. As Paul says, “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

In these passages love is said to be the only debt we are to owe each other. Peter says that it is an essential feature of holiness. But the most striking passage about loving one another comes in 1 John 4.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God,

because God is love.

The statement here that everyone knows is this simple equation: God is love! It's a remarkable statement and worthy of much thought and prayer. But what is even more striking is the previous section about knowing God. John is telling us that loving is knowing. People the world over, including those you're working with, want to know, "How can I know God?" or "How can I know God's will" or know Him better? People are usually wondering about cognitive truth—a thought, a teaching, or ideas about God that will help them wrap their minds around the concept of God. Notice that this is all in the abstract realm. But what John says is this: when you love one another you know God. That very act of being loving toward others is the knowing. Why? Because God is love. When we love another person—perhaps especially those who are least prone to love—we experience God, because that is simply who God is.

Finally, John tells us that loving one another is a response to God's love toward us. (1 John 4:11) He loved us first. We are only capable of loving one another in the way the Bible describes if we have first been recipients of God's love.

So, in summary, chief among the "one another" passages is the command to love one another. It comes first from the lips of Jesus and is repeated by the apostles at least 8 times. It is the key that unlocks all the other "one another" passages because it is the very nature of God.

Forgive one another—Colossians 3:13 says, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (NIV) The New Revised Standard Version says, "Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other...." This whole section of Colossians 3 is full of practical advice rooted deeply in Paul's theology of Jesus (Christology). Notice, just as in the case of "love one another," that the rationale for forgiving one another is that just as the Lord has forgiven you, you are to forgive one another. Who are we that we should withhold our forgiveness from each other? We who have been forgiven much should naturally forgive others. Indeed, if we are reluctant to forgive each other, it may be that we have not experienced the liberating power of being fully forgiven by God.



The expression, "Bear with each other," is so realistic, is it not? Sometimes the best we can do is just bear with each other. We sometimes say to each other, "bear with me," when we mean that this may be getting long and tedious and you may grow impatient with me, but **bear with me**. This **allelon** principle of bearing with one another recognizes the reality that we won't always feel warm and fuzzy feelings for each oth-

er, but we can always bear with each other. The text also assumes that there will be “complaints” and “grievances” between members of the body. This is simply a reality for Paul and for us, in a sinful world. More important than not having any complaints is learning to bear with one another in our difficulties and, more than anything else, to be quick to forgive, just as our Lord has forgiven us.

Accept one another—Under this heading are several very important principles about life in God’s family. Romans 15:7 just says, flatly, “Accept one another” (NIV) or “Welcome one another.” (NRSV) In the prior two verses, Paul enjoins the church to unity: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is out of this context that Paul then says, “Therefore, accept/welcome one another.” Out of a desire for unity, that will bear witness to the humility and love of God, we are to accept each other.

The irony is that when most people who are not religious think about the church, the first adjective that most of them think of probably isn’t “accepting” or “welcoming.” Indeed, most people who leave the fellowship of the body of Christ do so because they were rejected or condemned by others in the church.

Paul must have had this same thing in mind because a few verses earlier we encounter another “one another” verse, Romans 14:13. “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”

These two passages, separated by only a few verses are part of the same logic, in Paul’s mind. “Stop passing judgment on one another” is simply the negative way of saying, “Accept one another.” These are opposites. This, again, is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus, who “did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through him, might be saved.” (John 3:17) Imagine what people might experience of God if they experienced the church as a place where people lived by this axiom, “Accept and welcome one another. No judging allowed!”

Closely related to these two passages which are categorized under the heading “Accept one another” is a final **allelon** text found in James 4:7-12.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.



Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

The “one another” statement comes in verse 11, “do not slander one another,” but the context here indicates that this command is given in relation to resisting the devil, grieving over our sins and humbling ourselves before God. And what is the one key characteristic that James highlights to give some specifics to all this? Slander! Nothing tears the body of Christ apart more than slander and judgmentalism. So, when James, who is the bishop of the church in Jerusalem, wants to pen a few words to the church, one of the big issues on his mind related to the ethics of community, is acceptance and welcome of one another. The opposite of this is judgment and slander. There is no room for this in the body of Christ, says James. It’s a cancer.

Be patient with one another—Patience is another key part of the ethics of community in the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:1-2 we read, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; **be patient, bearing with one another in love.** Here again we find a “one another” text along side a call for humility. This should not be surprising by now. Our God, who demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to die for us, calls us to be humble and gentle with each other. These are all qualities that lead us to patience. We grow impatient with each other when we hold each other to impossible standards; standards to which we do not want to be held ourselves. We expect from other what we are unwilling to do, and therefore we grow impatient.



Be kind and compassionate to one another—Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” This is a lot like Colossians 3:13, but is included here under a slightly different heading for a couple of reasons.

1. The emphasis here is to the importance of being kind and compassionate to one another. Kindness and compassion with make forgiveness so much easier, but the emphasis here is on kindness and compassion.



2. The second reason to highlight this very similar verse is because it bears repeating. We find almost identical teachings in many of Paul’s writings because he is addressing different audiences with somewhat different circumstances in each letter. So it is with

us.

In verse 31, Paul makes the negative argument, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” We heard a few of these mentioned before, too, haven’t we? I’m sure if you think back over your church experiences you don’t have to work very hard to recall moments of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander. There are stories of fistfights breaking out at board meetings. We all have experienced people shouting at each other over the Sabbath School lesson or a Bible study. Somehow the irony of shouting at one another about the Bible always seems to escape us.

If you have small children in your home, you frequently find yourself trying to make things very simple. “Be kind!” is one of those simple instructions. We all have a gut level sense of what kindness means, right? Our children know what kindness means. And, when you’re talking to small children, what is the opposite of kindness? Meanness. What Paul is saying is, “Don’t be mean!”

Notice what Dallas Willard has to say about “mean Christians” in *Renovation of the Heart*,

The leader of one denomination recently said to me, “When I am finished with this job I am going to write a book on the topic, **Why are Christians So Mean?**”

Well, there actually is an answer to that question. And we must face this answer and effectively deal with it or Satan will sustain his stronghold on spiritual transformation in local congregations. Christians are routinely taught by example and word that it is more important to be right (always in terms of their beloved vessel or tradition) than it is to be Christ like. In fact, being right licenses you to be mean, and, indeed **requires** you to be mean—righteously mean, of course. You must be hard on people who are wrong, and especially if they are in positions of Christian leadership. They deserve nothing better (p 238).

Willard puts his finger on one of the most important causes of meanness in the church. Our pride over being right! But these “one another” texts are about Christlikeness. How can we focus more on Christlikeness which would require us to be humble about what we know and kind toward others who have different ideas?

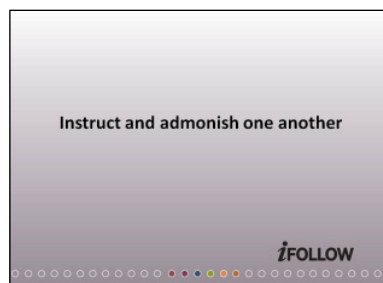
Get along with one another—There are a series of “one another” texts that speak to the importance of simply getting along with one another. But this is much deeper than simply glossing over our differences so we can “get along.”

Romans 12:16 says, “Live in harmony with one another.



Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” So according to this text, “getting along” is about putting aside our pride, especially as it relates to those we **perceive** to be of a lower station in life that we are. Understand that this is a perception, not necessarily a reality because how we measure people (which is really a nice way of saying “judge people”) is a matter of our perceptions and societal norms. Today we would call this “elitism” and it creates deep rifts in the church. The basis of our elitism could be economics, race, gender, age, education, or other life achievements. Paul says, “Do not be conceited.” That’s pretty straightforward. So, how can we live out this “one another” command? One way would be to intentionally cross boundaries in order to love a person who is different from you. See also 1 Peter 3:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Instruct and admonish one another—There is another set of “one another” texts that have to do with teaching, instructing and admonishing one another in the church. Romans 15:14 says, “Instruct one another” and Colossians 3:16 says, “Teach and admonish one another.” Some church members justify their arrogance and judgmentalism by saying that they are doing what scripture commands, teaching and admonishing others. But if one thing should be obvious by now it is this: whatever these texts mean by teach and admonish, it must be in harmony with all the other “one another” texts regarding love, humility, kindness, patience, acceptance, submission and non-judgmentalism.



Actually, when we pull back and look at the wider context the meaning and application of these verses become clearer. Romans 15:14 actually says, “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” So this text is actually about qualifications to teach. And at the top of the list is being **full of goodness**, which encompasses so much of what this lesson is about. There is also the question of knowledge and competence. These qualifications indicate that this is more than simply individuals going around telling other individuals what to do.

Even more telling is Colossians 3:16 which, taken in its entirety says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

This teaching and admonition is taking place in the community worship experience. Here is a picture of the community in praise and worship, edifying each other with instruction from scripture, a song or a hymn. And the precursor to this experience of mutual edification is that the “word/presence of Christ dwell in you richly.” It is as we allow the Spirit of Christ, or the word of Christ to dwell in us that we are equipped to

instruct and admonish others.

Perhaps Hebrews 10:24-25 sounds the most practical note on this topic. “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Once again this admonition is in the context of corporate worship and the clear emphasis is on how we encourage each other; lift each other up! More than just being moral support for each other, this text says that we should find ways to help each other be good people by spurring one another on to good works.

Encourage one another—These “one another” passages are very similar to the previous set about teaching and admonishing. But these are specifically focused on encouragement. And again, they are about a particular kind of encouragement.



1 Thessalonians 5 begins with a reminder about the times in which we live. “Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (v. 1-3)

It is in this context that Paul admonishes the church to “encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (v. 11) Living out our faith in the world as we know it is a challenging proposition at best. We need the encouragement of those who are on the same journey to the new world God is creating. We certainly don’t need to be tearing each other down.

Hebrews 3:12-14 is similar in tone and context: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”

Here again the concern is that some in the body of Christ would fall away when the times get tough. The Christian life is an endurance race more than a sprint. And if we are running that race in the face of the idolatry of the world all around us, we will most certainly have a difficult time enduring to the end.

Serve one another—Once again, Paul confronts us with an enormous challenge: “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” (Galatians 5:13-15)



Apparently some people in the church took it that their new found freedom in Christ was a license to fulfill every desire of their sinful natures. Translation: to live a totally selfish existence. We were not set free from slavery to sin so that we could live for ourselves! God set us free to join him in his mission to help others experience the same freedom. How are we going to do that? Paul predictably says, instead of living for self, you are called to “serve one another in love.” In fact, he reminds us, the entire law, is summed up in a single command, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

The opposite of loving your neighbor and serving her in love is “biting and devouring one another. This, Paul assures us, we ultimately lead to us destroying each other. Many pastors have witnessed this very thing; people destroying one another by biting at one another and devouring one another through gossip, slander and judgments. This “one another” passage tells us that freedom in Christ **equals** serving one another in love. That really would be freedom, wouldn't it?

Submit to one another—Now we have come to the “one another” passage that no one likes—“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). Our society has made submission a dirty word. The reason for that is that so many abuses have been perpetrated upon people who were supposed to submit—people of different races and ethnicities, women, and children to name a few. Part of doing justice in God's world is to help liberate these very oppressed people. So what are we to make of “submission”?



The most important thing to notice is the primary feature of this whole lesson: the mutuality of each of these commands. These are, after all, “one another” texts. That means the action described flows two ways. It is mutual submission that Paul is describing here, not one person submitting to another.

Whether in marriage or parenting or church leadership, mutual submission is a way that we can serve each other and love each other. It simply means that our will bows to the other person. It means we learn to forgo stubbornness and bend ourselves to meet the other person. But the mutuality of the arrangement means that the other also bends to us. And as we bend to each other, God blesses the relationship as something truly born of heaven.

Be humble toward one another—It seems like every other text we’ve looked at has an element of humility as a part of the instruction. After all, this entire lesson is about an “ethic of humility.” But there are a couple of “one another” texts that take this issue of humility head one.

The first and perhaps most powerful text about humility in all the Bible is found in Philippians 2:3-4—“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than your selves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

This is Paul’s preamble to what most scholars feel is an ancient hymn about the self-emptying humility of God in Christ. (See above for more about Philippians 2.) The other significant “one another” passage that speaks directly to humility is 1 Peter 5:5—“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

Just by sheer repetition it should be clear even to the casual observer that God wants us to consider others with a higher regard that we consider ourselves. That means we prioritize other people’s comforts and needs. We give deference to those around us.

Be hospitable to one another—Hospitality is one of the central practices of Christian faith. From the time that Abraham entertained three angels outside Sodom, the practice of hospitality has been central. One of the primary ways we can demonstrate our love and concern for others is to be hospitable to them. 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Hospitality is generosity in action. We open our doors and our pantries and give of what we have been given. Christian hospitality always included an element of welcoming strangers, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

Be devoted to one another—One of our idols of the modern age is individualism. Even in churches today one gets the sense that the congregation is, at best, a random collection of individuals who come to the same place at the same time to get their spiritual needs met. Lost is a sense of belonging to one another in deep fellowship (**koinonia**). This “one another” passage reminds us that we do indeed belong to one another.



Romans 12:10 says, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” This devoted belonging to one another is analogous to being brothers and sisters. This is why, in many churches, people even refer to one another as brothers and sisters. The body of Christ is, in some sense, at least, a family, in which the members of the family belong to one another with bonds that can never be broken. Another characteristic of this devotion is honor. We are told to honor one another above ourselves. This is another way of describing the ethic of humility that pervades New Testament teaching about the church.

How can we truly honor one another above ourselves? This is challenging at best. It must be a conscious effort. A discipline a Christian undertakes because he or she is becoming the person God intends for them to be.

Sing to one another—There are a couple different references to “speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16, also referenced above) Singing is a striking mark of the Christian community. We share our faith and joy together in song and hymn. This is once again an evidence that when we come together our relationships are marked by worship and singing. In this way the body of Christ encourages, edifies and teaching one another.

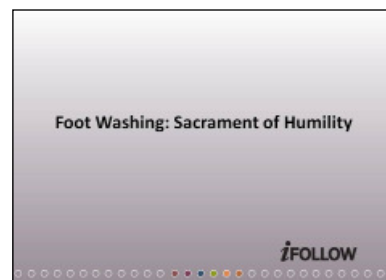


Greet one another—There are two texts that refer to greeting one another with a “holy kiss” or a “kiss of love.” (Romans 16:16; 1 Peter 5:14) This is a sign of greeting and of affection in the body of Christ. In many cultures around the world today, people still greet each other with a kiss on the cheek, or both cheeks. In other parts of the world a hug or a firm handshake would be more appropriate. But the simple point of these texts is that the members of the church were to greet one another affectionately and in a spiritual manner.



Foot Washing: Sacrament of Humility

As with any spiritual religious concept, the understanding is deepened and, more importantly, the character is shaped and formed, by practices. Christianity is a way of life more than a philosophy or ideology. While all expressions of spiritual realities necessitate a measure of



philosophy, the essence of Christianity is a way of life—a practice.

So, you will notice that all these “one another” texts are practices. Hospitality, service, forgiveness, kindness and patience are all things we do, or at least, ways we do things. Patience isn’t an idea. It’s a way of being with people. Kindness isn’t an idea. There is no kindness until a kind deed is done.

Of all the practices of humility that we can do, none compare with the liturgical significance of the foot washing which many Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, practice periodically in worship, often in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper. This practice is done in remembrance of the great act of humility and service of Jesus toward his disciples on the night he was betrayed. It has been a great blessing to many believers and congregations to think of the foot washing ritual as a sacrament of humility. Yes, it is an outmoded practice. No one washes another person’s feet anymore in everyday life. But it is symbolic in as much as we are re-enacting the history of redemption it is formative for the church. Foot washing is a way, in worship, of deepening our commitment to humility, love and service in the body of Christ.

Handouts in this Package

1. Complete List of “One Another” Passages in the New Testament
2. “One Another” Texts Grouped by Topic



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Additional Resources

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Pohl, Christine D. (1999). *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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Discussion Questions

1. Is humility one of the first things you think of when you attempt to define or describe God? Why or why not? Why is it such an important concept?
2. Name three ways Jesus practiced humility besides the foot-washing episode and His death on the cross.
3. There were fifteen “one another” characteristics listed in this unit. How many can the group name? Which are the most difficult? The easiest?
4. Share a time when someone used one of these attitudes toward you, and changed your heart.
5. What do you think “sing to one another” means? Do we think of singing this way, or as singing to God? What differences might there be if we were more intentional about singing to one another?

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Group Activity

Purpose: A fun way to gain new insights into what it means to work together when we don't have all the facts.

Preparation: Put a list on the board or flipchart of the characteristics of the “one another” texts, such as love, patience, forgiveness, etc. Obtain a long rope (20-50 ft) and enough blindfolds for each person. You will need a large open space.

Assignment: Have the entire group hold hands and form a circle, as round as possible, with arms outstretched. Then they let go of hands, sit down, and put on blindfolds. Place the rope in the middle of the circle and tell the group they must get the rope and form a square, with each person holding on to the rope. No one may let go of the rope at any time. When they think the task is completed, they may take off the blindfolds and see how well they did. (Variations: Mute people randomly. Follow up by asking for a triangle or other shapes. Give members time to come up with a plan before putting on blindfolds, then after blindfolds are in place, members may not speak or use verbal signals.)

Debrief: How was this task like or not like life in Christian community? (Can't see all of God's will, some trying to tell others what to do, etc.) Which of the characteristics on the board did you need? What could you have done to improve performance?

Time: The activity itself will probably take about half an hour. Allow another 20-30 minutes for discussion and any analogies that occur to members of the group.

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Group
Activities

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Handout 1

A Complete List of “One Another” Texts in the New Testament

John 13:14—Wash one another’s feet
John 13: 34-35—Love one another
Romans 12:10—Be devoted to one another
Romans 12:16—Live in harmony with one another
Romans 13:8—Love one another
Romans 14:13—Stop passing judgment on one another
Romans 15:7—Accept one another
Romans 15:14—Instruct one another
Romans 16:16—Greet one another
1 Corinthians 1:10—Agree with one another
Galatians 5:13—Serve one another
Ephesians 4:2—Be patient, bearing with one another in love
Ephesians 4:32—Be kind and compassionate to one another
Ephesians 5:19—Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
Ephesians 5:21—Submit to one another
Philippians 2:3—In humility consider others better than yourselves
Colossians 3:13—Forgive...one another
Colossians 3:16—Teach and admonish one another
1 Thessalonians 5:11—Encourage one another
Hebrews 3:13—Encourage one another daily
Hebrews 10:24—Spur one another on toward love and good deeds
Hebrews 10:25—Encourage one another
James 4:11—Do not slander one another
1 Peter 1:22—Love one another deeply, from the heart
1 Peter 3:8—Live in harmony with one another
1 Peter 4:9—Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling
1 Peter 5:5—Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another
1 Peter 5:14—Greet one another with a kiss of love
1 John 3:11—Love one another
1 John 3:23—Love one another
1 John 4:7—Love one another
1 John 4:11-12—Love one another
2 John 1:5—Love one another

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Handout 2

“One another” Texts Grouped by Topic

Love

John 13: 34-35—Love one another
Romans 13:8—Love one another
1 Peter 1:22—Love one another deeply, from the heart
1 John 3:11—Love one another
1 John 3:23—Love one another
1 John 4:7—Love one another
1 John 4:11-12—Love one another
2 John 1:5—Love one another

Get along with one another

Romans 12:16—Live in harmony with one another
1 Peter 3:8—Live in harmony with one another
1 Corinthians 1:10—Agree with one another

Forgive

Colossians 3:13—Forgive...one another

Accept

Romans 15:7—Accept one another
Romans 14:13—Stop passing judgment on one another
James 4:11—Do not slander one another

Patient

Ephesians 4:2—Be patient, bearing with one another in love

Kind/Compassionate

Ephesians 4:32—Be kind and compassionate to one another

Instruct/Admonish

Romans 15:14—Instruct one another
Hebrews 10:24—Spur one another on toward love and good deeds
Colossians 3:16—Teach and admonish one another

Encourage

1 Thessalonians 5:11—Encourage one another
Hebrews 3:13—Encourage one another daily
Hebrews 10:25—Encourage one another

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Serve

Galatians 5:13—Serve one another

Submit

Ephesians 5:21—Submit to one another

Be humble

Philippians 2:3—In humility consider others better than yourselves

1 Peter 5:5—Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another

Be hospitable

1 Peter 4:9—Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling

Be devoted

Romans 12:10—Be devoted to one another

Greet

1 Peter 5:14—Greet one another with a kiss of love

Romans 16:16—Greet one another with a holy kiss

Sing

Ephesians 5:19—Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

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