

# FOLLOW CURRICULUM

## LESSON THREE

### Loving one another sacrificially

#### **INTRODUCTION (10 minutes)**

*Each person to read a paragraph*

Today we're going to discuss the 3<sup>rd</sup> mark of a follower of Jesus. A follower of Jesus loves their brothers and sisters in Christ sacrificially. When asked for the Greatest Commandment, Jesus said "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-39). In other words, everything contained in the Old Testament is summarized by these principles.

Loving our neighbors has many contexts; however, Jesus' focal point at the Last Supper was on His apostles – the ones who were to carry the gospel message to the world. He told them "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). It seems odd that this is a "new" commandment, when they have often been told in the Law to display love in a variety of ways.

So what is the "new" part of the commandment? Jesus clarified it Himself just before making the statement. He acted as a servant to wash His disciples' feet – a menial and gross task. He did so for those who claimed to love Him but were about to be scattered in fear by the threat of persecution as Jesus was hauled off and crucified. Jesus knew that His apostles would fail Him in His time of need. He even knew that one of them (i.e. Judas Iscariot) would betray Him into the Pharisees' hands. Yet He loved and served anyway. His own description says "If I, then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:14-15). This is the "new" part of verse 34, when Jesus says "even as I have loved you". He was the example to the apostles, and to us as well.

Furthermore, Jesus declared that the world will know we are believers by the love we have for one another. Our faith is not displayed by our church attendance, or by showing kindness to the lost (although there is a biblical place for that, too). Rather, Jesus specifically noted our love for one another in the Body of Christ as proof to the world of our identity as disciples. Lysa TerKeurst said it this way: "God created us to do life in community with others, to show and receive love in such a way that captures the world's attention and draws others to Him." The apostle John was clearly affected by this message, as his first letter is overflowing with the command to love one another in the body as a demonstration of the love which God has shown to us in Christ. It is a great cross-reference to the passage we will look at today.

The command to love one another in the Body is clear in Scripture, but what does it look like tangibly, and how does it propel our mission to make disciples of all nations? There are many places in Scripture that address this issue – far more than a single study can cover. But today, we will study a foundational example from the very apostles who were given this commandment as they begin their mission in the infant church. Perhaps we will find that Christian community and evangelism are more connected than we may have realized.

## **BIBLE CONVERSATION (40 minutes)**

*Read Acts 4:23-36*

- 1) Context: Look briefly at Chapter 4:1-22 to set the scene. What has just happened to Peter and John? What is the larger context in Acts as a whole?
- 2) When Peter and John are released, their first action is to rejoin their community of believers and share what has happened. How is this sharing, by itself, a display of Christian love? Discuss the value of authenticity and vulnerability in developing a loving community. Then consider how this truth applies to our RBC community. What are some barriers that prevent believers from truly being open with one another about their needs and struggles? How might those barriers be overcome?
- 3) Imagine the emotions of the believers after hearing the threats from the religious leaders, then examine their prayer in verses 24-30. How did the believer's prayer show their love for God and for one another? How did it reflect the heart they had for the gospel mission? Then think about the needs around you in the body at RBC. How could you be praying for brothers and sisters in the way the early church did?
- 4) Verse 32 says that the believers were of "one heart and soul." Consider the depth of that statement. Why is this type of unity a unique feature of communities of believers? Who is responsible for that deep fellowship? How does such inward love show itself outwardly?
- 5) The Word says that no one claimed his possessions as his own, but rather that they were common property. In Jewish culture, inheritance meant everything, so selling property to support others (see v. 35) was an incredible sacrifice. What would motivate these believers to act in such a manner? How would these sacrificial actions affect the relationships within that community? Next, apply this principle to your own life. What tasks of service could you perform in our local body to demonstrate you are willing to honor others above yourself (as Jesus did)? Ask God if there is anything (time, talent, treasure) that He would like you to give, and to whom He would like you to give it.
- 6) At first, verse 33 seems unusual, as the author notes the powerful evangelistic efforts of the apostles. Examine the context of verses 32-35, and discuss how tangible love for one another furthered the gospel-spreading efforts. Why is it that meeting needs within the body would result in the abundant grace and strong evangelism we see discussed here?
- 7) Relate what you've just discussed in verse 33 to your life today. Have you ever had an experience where unbelievers took notice of the love and commitment within your circle of Christian friends? What was their reaction? How could those moments be opportunities for gospel conversations?

## **PRAYER (10 minutes)**

- 1) Ask each group member to share, in 20 seconds, a personal burden the group can pray about. Pray for the need of the person on your right.
- 2) Pray for someone who needs to hear and believe the good news of Jesus.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

- See Ephesians 4:1-6, 25-32; Philippians 2:1-11; Romans 12:9-21; 1 Corinthians 12-14; and 1 John (especially Ch. 4) for further discussion of loving one another in the Body of Christ