

Loving with a Heart Like Jesus

TWELVE PAIRS OF DUSTY feet stood awkwardly on the wooden floor of the upper room. The table was set, the food was ready, water had been carried from the well, and clean linen towels had been folded neatly on a bench. But someone was missing. Eyes avoided contact, elbows nudged, someone coughed nervously. But no one wanted to do the work of a servant. No one was willing to kneel at the feet of his friends. No one was humble enough to wash away the dirt from two dozen dusty feet.

They all stood proud and tall—except Jesus, who quietly picked up a towel, poured the water, and knelt on the ground to show His love. For three long years He'd shown them that true love kneels to serve and is willing to make sacrifices. For three long years He'd shown them that true love puts others first. But they still didn't understand.

Years later, Paul wanted to help Christians love each other with a heart like Jesus. So he shared what he'd learned about love in a letter to the Romans. His practical ideas for healthy relationships are as relevant today as they were two thousand years ago.



“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

Romans 12:10, NIV

LOVING DEEPLY AND PURELY

Romans 12:8, 9

Jesus' love for us is deep and pure. In its depth He is totally forgiving, and in its purity He leaves no room for anyone to doubt His love.

- How deep is your love for your husband or wife? What do you need to forgive, and what do you need to say you're sorry for?
- How pure is your love? Do your words or behavior ever prevent your spouse from experiencing your love as pure and transparent?

LOOKING FOR THE DIAMONDS

Romans 12:6-8

Make a list of your partner's special gifts, qualities, and strengths. Write down as many as you can, and add more when you notice them. When we focus on positive qualities, we help each other to blossom and grow.

- How can I show appreciation for the spiritual gifts and character strengths of my spouse?
- How can I develop my own spiritual gifts and character strengths, and what positive effect might they have on our relationship?

BEING AFFECTIONATE

Romans 12:10

Love needs to be expressed in warm words, eye contact, smiles, gentle touching, time together, thoughtful gifts, or helpful support. Different cultures and families express affection differently, but the important thing is to love others the way they like to be loved, not just the way we want to love them.

- Ask your husband or wife to write down ten times when they felt especially loved by you and three other gestures that would make them feel loved. Then spend at least five minutes a day doing whatever makes your partner feel loved. Notice the difference it makes to your relationship.

CONNECTING EMOTIONALLY

Romans 12:15

Jesus was happy with His friends when they were happy, and sad when they were sad. When something amazing happens to your husband or wife, celebrate together! And when your spouse is sad, just sit and be sad together. When our partners don't share in our sadness or joy, we can feel very alone. But when we share in each other's emotions, we strengthen the love-bond between us.

- How can I be more responsive to my partner's emotions so that we can strengthen the love-bond between us?

CROWNING YOUR PARTNER

Romans 12:10

When Jesus met people who felt downtrodden and rejected, He lifted them up and showed them how valuable they were to Him. Healthy relationships are based on mutual respect. When we place our spouses a little higher than ourselves, we're both lifted up. When we look down on our spouses and act superior in some way, we're both dragged down. See your partner as a unique and amazing creation that God has made just for you. Honor your spouse as the king or queen of your home. Discover what makes your spouse especially happy, do it for them, and watch what happens to your own joy.

- What can I do to honor my husband or wife and to show them how valuable they are to me?

HUMBLY HOSPITABLE

Romans 12:13

When Jesus knelt down to wash His disciples' feet, He wasn't only being humble but also hospitable. Hospitality is doing whatever it takes to make someone feel comfortable, welcome, and special. It's pouring a glass of water for your spouse on a hot day, setting the table attractively, turning the heated blanket on to warm their side of the bed, or doing anything else to touch their heart with a smile.

- How can I show warm hospitality to my partner today?

LIVING PEACEFULLY

Romans 12:18

Loving like Jesus means creating a peaceful atmosphere where people feel safe, forgiven, accepted, and heard. It means going the extra mile to make sure conflicts are resolved by listening to the other person's concerns and by exploring their ideas for a win-win outcome. It also means letting go of your desire to win the argument, to get your own way, or to have more power than the other person.

- How can I prevent an argument by putting my partner's needs and wishes first?

DEVOTION—LISTENING TO THE HEART

Romans 12:10

Jesus listened to the heart. He wanted to hear the real needs in people's lives. When your partner is hurt, tired, angry, disappointed, afraid, or sad, respond to their unspoken needs rather than reacting to their frustrated words. See the difference it makes!

- When does my partner most need a hug, a helping hand, some time together with me, or some appreciation, respect, or encouragement?

DOING WHATEVER IT TAKES

When we love with a heart like Jesus, we do whatever it takes to show the other person how much we love them. Jesus laid down His life for us so that we'd never have to doubt His love for us.

- What sacrifices do I need to make for my partner's happiness?

SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS

Romans 12:1, 2

In order to love like Jesus, we need to spend time with Him studying and praying, learning about His love, and listening to His heart for our partners and for us. This is how we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1, 2).

- Which aspect of my life most needs to be renewed so that I can love my partner more like Jesus does? j



Karen Holford is a family therapist working with troubled families and couples in Edinburgh, Scotland.