

## Living The 'One Another' Life

When I was a student, I found a part time job to help pay my student fees. I worked in a precious metals refinery where we were dealing with molten silver, platinum and gold. We had all the protective clothing – gloves, steel capped boots, face masks and so on, but one day as I was carrying a crucible of molten silver a splash of this burning hot metal went down the inside of my laced up boot.

Something amazing happened. The nerves in my foot sent a message to my brain. The message said “Pain – this really hurts!” My brain instantly sent a message to lots of other parts of the body saying “Help the foot!” The voice let out a yell, warning others around that something was happening to my body. The eyes began to water, but they still managed to focus on the bootlaces. The back bent over so the fingers could grab the bootlaces. Both hands worked as one unit to tear the boot and the sock off the foot. One leg supported the whole body so I could hop around the room. Some muscles tightened. Others relaxed. Every part of the body was doing all it could to help the foot. And do you know what? The body didn't have to have a committee meeting to talk about what to do. It didn't have to draft up a policy or pass a resolution by the members to decide if it was going to act to help the foot. There were no body members that said “I don't do feet”, or “I've been a bit busy and feel like a break. I'm not going to help today”. Because one part of the body was hurting and had a need, the whole body got busy.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul tells us that we are the body of Christ. He writes this: **“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12:12 & 13)** It's God's intention that we function like a body, where each member of the body works in harmony with all the other members. When one member suffers we all feel that pain. When one member rejoices, the whole body rejoices.

In the New Testament, there are two remarkable words that keep popping up like mushrooms all over the place. Almost always, they refer to the body of Christ. Almost always they are commands about the way we should operate as the body of Christ. They tell us how we should live as Christian brothers and sisters. These commands are not addressed to individuals. They are addressed to groups of Christians. The two remarkable words are **“one another”**. Here are 20 different examples from the New Testament.

1. **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; 1 John 4:12; 2 John 1:5
2. **Be devoted** to one another - Romans 12:10
3. **Honour** one another – Romans 12:10
4. **Live in harmony** with one another - Romans 12:16
5. **Accept** one another – Romans 15:7
6. **Instruct** one another - Romans 15:14
7. **Greet** one another – Romans 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14;
8. **Agree** with one another – 1 Cor 1:10
9. **Serve** one another - Galatians 5:13
10. **Bear with** one another – Ephesians 4:2; Col 3:13
11. **Be kind and compassionate** to one another - Eph 4:32
12. **Submit** to one another – Eph 5:21
13. **Forgive** one another – Col 3:13
14. **Teach and admonish** one another – Col 3:16
15. **Encourage** one another – 1 Thess 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; Hebrews 10:25
16. **Spur one another on** to good love and deeds – Hebrews 10:24
17. **Do not slander** on another – James 4:11
18. **Live in harmony** with one another – 1 Peter 3:8
19. **Offer hospitality** to one another – 1 Peter 4:9
20. **Be humble** to one another – 1 Peter 5:5

Why are we commanded to do these things? Because we are members of one another. Because that's the sort of lifestyle the Lord expected us to live. When you and I chose to follow Jesus there were some things thrown into the deal that we didn't have any say about. God became our Father. That was good. We became sons and daughters of God. That was good. We were adopted into his family. That was

good. But here's the bit where we didn't get any choice. We didn't get to choose the other family members. We found ourselves in this huge big family of adopted children that we didn't pick, but that God picked. It was like Jesus picking the disciples. Do you know what Simon the Zealot's hobby was before he followed Jesus? He was like a suicide bomber. Get up close to the target, and then cut loose, doing as much damage as possible. The Zealots would carry a short little dagger under their cloaks, get up close to a Roman soldier or a Jew who collaborated with the Romans, and stick their dagger up under the ribs of the target. One of the Zealots favourite targets were tax collectors who collaborated with the Romans. People like Matthew. Can you imagine the day when Jesus does the introductions with his new disciples? Simon, I'd like you to meet Matthew. "Hi Matthew. What did you do before you joined Jesus?" I'll bet that was a long handshake. Matthew would have held on to Simon's hand for a long time, to make sure he wasn't reaching for his dagger. Matthew would have been thinking, "Jesus, why did you have to choose him?" And why did you choose that loud mouth Peter? And James and John? Those two upstarts who want the best seats in the kingdom. We love you Jesus, but we don't think much of the bunch you picked to be your followers.

Now here's the deal. Jesus didn't just expect them to live together and put up with each other. He didn't expect them to suffer each other. He didn't expect them to get on together. He expected them to love one another. In fact it wasn't just a suggestion. It was a command. **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** (John 13:34 -35) Of all the "one another" commands in the New Testament, the one that comes up the most often is "love one another". Jesus says it. Paul says it. **"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law".** (Romans 13:8) Peter says it. **"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart"** (1 Peter 1:22)

And John is so convinced that loving one another is so essential, he wrote whole letters about it. In fact John says that if you don't love other believers, you don't love God. **"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."** (1 John 3:11) **"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us".** (1 John 3:23) **"If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."** (1 John 4:20-21).

Most people who have been following Jesus for more than a few weeks know this stuff. We know we are supposed to love each other. We read it all over the New Testament. The Holy Spirit keeps reminding us of it from day one. Knowing it is not the problem. The problem isn't with the knowing, it's with the doing.

In three weeks time, I'm going to unpack another of the "one another" passages from the New Testament. I mentioned a whole lot of them earlier on. The more I've thought about it, the more I've come to realise that all the rest of the 'one another' teaching is the outworking of loving one another. Loving one another is the big idea. The **way** we love one another is **be devoted** to one another. To **honour** one another. To **live in harmony** with one another. To **accept** one another. To **instruct** one another. To **serve** one another. To **forgive** one another, **encourage** one another, **offer hospitality** to one another and so on. That's how **"love one another"** is worked out.

So today I'm not going to talk about how we should love one another. Instead, I'm going to tell you a true story, then we are going to finish. There will be no closing song. No prayer at the end. And the end of this story you will have a choice. You can either get up and go home. Or you can love one another. Here's the story.

Many moons ago, when I was pastor at Tauranga Central Baptist, we had Juan Carlos Ortiz speak in our church. He became known throughout the world for a book that he wrote called "Disciple". For many years Juan Carlos Ortiz was Pastor of the largest evangelical church in Buenos Aires in Argentina. One Sunday he had prepared a sermon on 'loving one another'. He had prayed over this sermon. He has spent hours finely crafting every word. He really believed it was God's word for his people that day. As he got up from his chair to preach, the Lord spoke to him. This was his conversation with God.

"How many sermons have you preached on this theme of loving one another?" "I don't know Lord, maybe a dozen or more." "And how many times have you exhorted the congregation in other sermons to love one another?" "I don't know Lord, maybe a dozen or more also." "Have they done any good?"

That conversation with God ended the moment Pastor Ortiz positioned himself behind the pulpit. The Lord's words were ringing in his ears. He thought to himself, "I have preached dozens of sermons on love and what good have they done? This congregation still spends more time looking after their own interests more than others. They barely know one another. They are not friends with each other. They barely talk to one another after the church service." Juan Carlos stood silent in the pulpit. His congregation waited for him to begin his sermon. Pastor Ortiz began his sermon, "Love one another."

He then went and sat down. People looked at one another thinking that they had missed something. They were accustomed to a sermon of nearly an hour, not 3 seconds. The congregation did not know what to do. After what seemed like an eternity, Juan Carlos walked back to the pulpit. The people repositioned themselves in their pews assuming that he would now deliver his message. Juan Carlos again said, "Love one another," and then he sat down again. Heads really began to turn. Some began to murmur. No one knew what to do. Pastor Ortiz again waited and then he again walked to the pulpit. He waited for the congregation to become settled and then for the third time he said, "Love one another". Then he returned to his chair behind the pulpit.

By now there was a stirring through the congregation. People began talking to one another. People started asking each other if they knew what their Pastor meant. Finally, an elder stood up and spoke. He said, "I think that I understand what Pastor Ortiz means. He wants me to love you." (Pointing to someone in the pew behind him) "But how can I love you, when I do not know you." With that, he introduced himself and began to meet the people behind him. Others got up from their pews and introduced themselves to people they had seen but not met. Phone numbers were exchanged. Dinner invitations extended. Arrangements were made for financial assistance. Before the service ended, someone raised enough money for bus tickets so a family could return to their village. Another man arranged employment for a man out of work and someone offered an apartment to a homeless family. The most powerful and most remembered sermon Juan Carlos Ortiz has ever preached was just three words.

People, the word from the Lord today is **"Love one another"**.