

WEEK 4: Rooted in Covenant – Rooted in Love: Building Christlike Relationships

Scriptures: John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; Colossians 3:12–14; Ephesians 4:1–3

Focus: God cares deeply about how we relate to others. This session focuses on cultivating biblical traits that lead to strong, lasting relationships rooted in Christ.

Opening Prayer: "Gracious God, thank You for the gift of relationships. Teach us today how to love like You—whether in marriage, family, friendship, or community. Grow our character and deepen our commitment to one another as we study Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Icebreaker: "What's one trait that makes someone a joy to be around?"

Read: John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Teaching Summary: Christlike relationships are clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness – and most of all, love. Whether you are married or single, your character is the foundation of your relationships. The love described in these verses isn't romantic—it's transformational. It reflects the love Christ shows us: selfless, enduring, and redemptive.

Jesus commands His followers to love one another 'as He has loved us'. This is the identifying trait of a disciple—not theological brilliance or church attendance, but sacrificial love. The credibility of the Church is tied to how we love.

Illustration:

Like a sports jersey identifies a team, love is the visible uniform of the Christian.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean to love someone "as Christ has loved us"?
- How have you seen this kind of love transform relationships?
- Why do you think Jesus made this the identifying trait of discipleship?
- Is the way you love others the most defining trait in your life? If not, why not?

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Paul's description of love is action-oriented—patient, kind, not boastful, not resentful. Biblical love is a decision, not just a feeling. It is other-centered and often sacrificial, especially in conflict or stress. This kind of love can only be produced through the Spirit of Christ living in us.

Modern Illustration:

Think of a garden—love grows through daily nurturing, not occasional grand gestures.

Discussion Questions:

- Which part of this passage do you find hardest to live out?
- How does this passage challenge the world's definition of love?
- How can we cultivate this kind of love in all our relationships?
- What does patient Christlike love look like in conflict?

Read:

- **Colossians 3:12–14:** *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*
- **Ephesians 4:1–3:** *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Paul urges believers to clothe themselves in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Unity isn't automatic—it's something we "make every effort" to maintain. Love is the "belt" that holds all other virtues together. Forgiveness is a command—not a feeling—because

the Lord forgave us. These verses remind us that forgiveness is a decision to release the offense and entrust justice to God.

Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 4:1–3 reminds us that love, unity, and peace are possible when we are led by the Spirit. We're called to walk in humility and to be patient with each other's imperfections.

Modern Illustrations:

- Think of a toolkit—love is the handle that connects all the tools needed to build healthy relationships.
- Holding onto bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to suffer.

Discussion Questions:

- How has forgiveness impacted a relationship in your life?
- What's the difference between forgiving and excusing someone?
- Why do you think "love binds them all together in perfect unity"?
- What would it look like to "make every effort" to keep unity in your relationships?
- How do humility and patience shape a community of love?

Potential Additional Discussion Questions:

- What quality from Colossians 3:12–14 do you most desire to grow in?
- How can we show compassion and kindness in everyday interactions?
- Why is forgiveness essential in all relationships—not just romantic ones?
- Which trait from 1 Corinthians 13 do you find most challenging? Why?
- How does humility affect how we handle conflict and disappointment?
- What does Ephesians 4:2–3 teach us about preserving unity?
- How can patience and gentleness be cultivated in your life?
- What does it look like to love sacrificially?
- What does it look like to show "love is patient" when someone close to you repeatedly disappoints you?
 - Can you share a time you had to choose patience instead of reacting?
- How do you practice forgiveness when the person who hurt you doesn't acknowledge the offense?
 - What boundaries or heart shifts help you live in peace?
- What is a practical way you can "clothe yourself in humility" during an argument or disagreement?
 - How do you catch yourself when pride begins to rise?

- Think about someone who is hard to love in your life right now. What would it look like to love them like Jesus this week?
 - What steps would you need to take?
- How do you repair relational trust once it's been broken, whether in marriage or friendship?
 - What does rebuilding look like beyond words?
- What routines or habits can couples or close friends develop to regularly check in and build each other up spiritually and emotionally?
 - What's worked for you or what have you seen modeled well?
- When your needs or expectations go unmet in a relationship, how do you keep from growing resentful?
 - What does healthy communication look like in that moment?
- What are some warning signs that pride, comparison, or selfishness are creeping into a relationship?
 - How can we lovingly confront or confess those tendencies?
- How can single people and married couples partner together in community to model healthy relationships and support each other?
 - What role can the Church play in fostering this unity?
- What's one character trait from this study that you want to actively grow in over the next 30 days, and what's your plan to do that?
 - How can the group help hold you accountable?

John 13:34-35 Commentary

13:33–34 In a little while, Jesus would be gone and ascend to God the Father (13:33; see Acts 1:9). In light of this impending departure, He gave them a new command: Love one another (13:34). It was new because it related to what was about to happen within the family of God.

Biblical love is the decision to compassionately, responsibly, and righteously pursue the well-being of another person. It's not the same as *liking* someone. To like someone or something is to express a feeling. By contrast, loving someone may or may not have feelings connected to it. Love is a decision to seek another's best, regardless of your feelings.

13:35 Through loving one another, Jesus told them, everyone will know that you are My disciples. Notice that He didn't say everyone would recognize His disciples by how much of the Bible they knew. Knowing the Bible is essential, but knowledge means nothing without love (see 1 Corinthians 13:1–3). A loveless Christian undermines the Gospel. Why? Because, as John says elsewhere, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). How can people come to know the God Who

perfectly expresses love—both within the Trinity and to humanity—if His representatives don’t demonstrate love?

Colossians 3:12-14 Commentary

3:12–14 What are some of the clothes of “the new self” that we need to wear (3:9–10)? Paul tells the Colossians what to put on: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (3:12). These are the counterparts to the dirty clothes of “the old self” (3:8–9). And over all of this, we are to put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity (3:14). If the qualities in 3:12 comprise the Christian’s new wardrobe, love is the overcoat.

One way we manifest the characteristics of the new self is by forgiving one another (3:13). Some believers harbor unforgiveness, and it results in perpetual anger and bitterness. Why? Because, as far as they’re concerned, offenses committed against them linger like unpaid bills, and they demand payment. However, they forget that our vertical relationship with God is linked with our horizontal relationships with one another.

Forgiveness does *not* mean approving a sin or excusing evil. Rather, forgiveness means releasing people from obligations incurred by their wrongs against you. This may come in the form of unilateral forgiveness—that is, forgiving someone who has not asked for forgiveness. Or it may come in the form of transactional forgiveness, which involves the confession of the offender, repentance, and reconciliation.

What makes forgiveness possible is recognizing that the Lord has forgiven you (3:13). There is an inseparable link between forgiving and recognizing that you’ve been forgiven. To refuse to forgive, in fact, is to burn a bridge over which you must cross (see Matthew 6:14–15). If you refuse to forgive, you have blocked God’s operation in your life (see Matthew 18:21–35). But when you forgive, you no longer “grieve” the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and you imitate the One Who has forgiven you.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Commentary

13:4–7 What does love look like? Paul explains what love does and what it does not do. Biblical love is the decision (not merely a feeling) to compassionately (out of concern for someone else), righteously (based on God’s standards), and sacrificially (giving to meet a need) seek the well-being of another. Notice each of the characteristics of love: it is patient ... kind ... not [envious] ... not arrogant ... not irritable. These things are only possible when we put others before ourselves (13:4–5). Love does not affirm someone in their sin or their false beliefs

because love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth (13:6). Love does not quit; it endures through thick and thin (13:7).

Ephesians 4:1-3 Commentary

4:1–2 Paul begins the second half of his letter with the word, therefore. In light of the gracious riches they have in Christ and the glorious reality of this new community called the Church, there are now accompanying responsibilities.

He urges them to walk worthy of [their] calling (4:1). They must conduct themselves in a way that reflects their new status. There must be humility and gentleness—a willingness to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ—among them. They must have patience, bearing with one another in love (4:2), showing tolerance for others and seeking their well-being.

4:3 By living this way, they will be able to keep the unity of the Spirit. Again, unity is not sameness. We Christians maintain our God-created uniqueness but share a common vision and goal. A football team includes players with different roles, but teammates work together for the same purpose.

Notice Paul commands them to “keep” this unity, not to “establish” it. This is God’s program. The Church didn’t create the unity. God calls us to preserve what He’s already created (see 2:11–22). This unity is tied to our Christian character (4:2) and is based on the work of the Holy Spirit. If your point of reference isn’t the Spirit of God, you’ll be operating from a merely human point of view. But when you relate to people based on God’s point of view, the Spirit can override human differences and hold us together through the bond of peace. Peace—harmony where once there was conflict—will act like a belt to hold us together.

Closing Challenge: This week, choose one relationship you want to strengthen. Identify a way to apply one of the traits we discussed—whether it's an encouraging word, an act of service, or a step of forgiveness.

Closing Prayer: "Lord, thank You for being the perfect example of love. Grow these traits in us. Help us love sacrificially, forgive quickly, and pursue peace in every relationship. Strengthen the marriages, friendships, and families in this group. In Jesus’ name, Amen."