

# Liberty Online Ministries



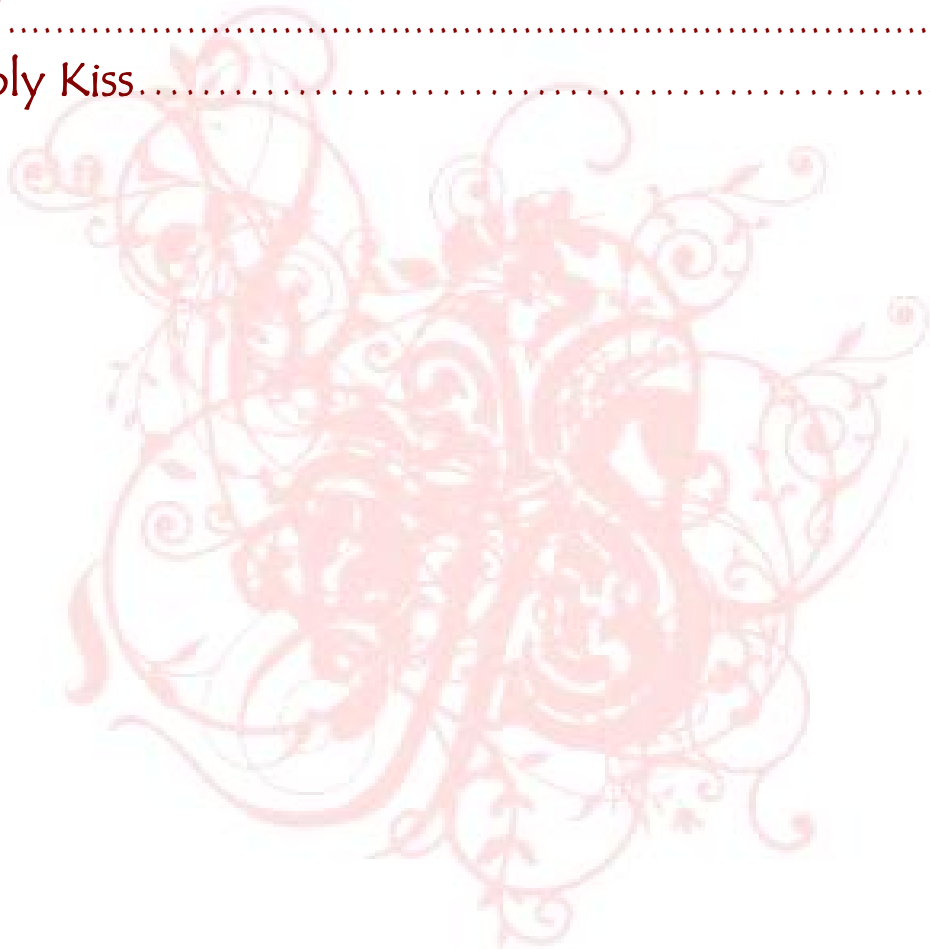
## One Anothers



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“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”  
James 4:1

## Me, Myself, & I

### An Introduction: One Another – James 4:1

Have you ever heard this jingle?

“I love me, I love me, I'm wild about myself.  
I love me, I love me, my picture's on my shelf.  
You may not think I look so good, but me thinks I'm divine.  
It's grand when I look in my eyes and know I'm mine, all mine!”<sup>1</sup>

As the story goes, Jack Hoins, the original writer, was enjoying a performance. The entertainer was speaking very highly of himself and Jack took it upon himself to write a song about the performer's ego. He sent it up to stage by way of a waiter and the performer sung the song. Everybody had a laugh and the song was eventually recorded.

Most of us would have joined in the laughter if we had been there. The song is funny, but in some part true of all of us. Even the most humble heart is not completely rid of self-centeredness. It is a disease that secretly attacks our hearts while convincing our minds that everything is good. Before we know it, this disease has convinced us that the world, for some the universe, revolves around us.

Think I am wrong? Go ahead and take a drive to Wal-Mart and get your groceries for the week. Count the number of people who consider themselves more than others: the people who pull out in front of you, the people who leave their carts in the parking lot, the people who stop in the aisle and no matter how many times you say, “Excuse me,” they do not hear you.

You may say, “But they just don't realize what they are doing.” I agree they do not. They are wrapped up in their own little world. They are not paying attention.

How often do you find people who are in their own little world? How do you respond?

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Here is the kicker, I sometimes (okay – often) get angry because they are not thinking of others. I ask myself, “Don't they realize that I am waiting to get by them?” Of course, I neglect to see that I want them to adjust their world to my world. I am being self-centered.

James tells us the reason why we cannot get along. Read James 4:1 and write down the reason.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoins, Jack and Will Mahoney. “I Love Me.” Lyrics. Perf. Tiny Tim. [I Love Me](http://www.alligatorboogaloo.com/uke/tabs/070127.html). Seeland, 1995. 2 July 2, 2007. <<http://www.alligatorboogaloo.com/uke/tabs/070127.html>>

You may not have needed all the space because it can be summed up in one word. Self.

So I come back the fact that it is a disease, but there is a cure. Praise God there is a cure. The cure is the cross. Paul explains that we are crucified with Christ. The self must die.

When a sinner recognizes his need for a Savior, he is made into a new creation and given the power through the Spirit to live a victorious life.

As we live this new life we need heavy doses of “one anothers” in order to keep self at a distance.

God gives us a number of passages that call us to practice “other” thinking. These passages, when practiced, will aid us in becoming more like Christ. It is not easy, because it flies in the face of all that society claims. It will turn heads and warm hearts.

It has the potential to change the world because:

"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).

Practicing the “one anothers” will reach into eternity; so let’s get to work.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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# The New Commandment

## Love One Another – John 13:34

“A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**, even as I have loved you, that you also **love one another.**”

John 13:34

Love is an overused, over-abused and greatly misunderstood word.

The phrase, “I love you” has been said to spouses, children, pets, sports heroes, possessions, God, and just about anything else that exists.

It is often said that love is an action, but even that can be easily confused. I can think of actions that mean “I love you” like giving flowers, a card, a gift, physical touch, physical intimacy, kind words, or self-sacrifice, but every one of these could be simple gestures of kindness or forms of self gratification.

There are an unfortunate number of marriages that started with the words, “I love you”, but ended in conflict and pain.

How would you define love?

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How has love been shown to you?

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I have no doubt that most people have good intentions when they use the word love. They have good intentions when they act out love, but we, in our sinfulness, cannot fully comprehend love.

There are no less than fifteen verses that specifically tell us to love one another. It is the only “one another” that has been spoken from the lips of Jesus. He told His disciples that he had a new commandment for them. “Love one another!”

In fact, Jesus summed the entire Law up into two commandments for the religious leaders (Matthew 22:37-40). He said the first is to love God and the second is to love others. The whole Law and the prophets hang on those two commandments. Love God. Love others. Two things, and we can't even obey those two.

Paul explains in Romans that the only thing we owe each other is love (Romans 13:8). In the letter to the Thessalonians, he explains that we do not need to be taught how to love one another because it is something that God has placed in us (1 Thessalonians 4:9). To those who know Christ as our Savior, God is teaching us to love one another.

Paul explains what love is in 1 Corinthians 13. Most of us are familiar with this passage, as it is often read at weddings and seen on apparel. It is a list that is hard to live up to. Think about the person you like the least. Now think about what love really is. Not the movie kind of love, but real love.

“And He said to him, “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 22:37-40

"Owe nothing to anyone except to **love one another**, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."  
Romans 13:8

Loves is patient, kind, not jealous, not boastful, not arrogant, self-controlled, not self-seeking, not provoked, does not hold a grudge, does not praise unrighteousness, praises the truth, positive, long-suffering, and never-ending.

Maybe you are better than me, but I have a hard time with loving my wife like this. In fact, none of us are capable of this kind of love. If all believers showed this kind of love, what would your home look like? Your city? Our world?

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Jesus said that the world will know that we are believers, not by our doctrine or denomination, but by our love (John 13:35). I have to be honest with myself and say that I have not always been a shining example. If I thought back on just the events of today, I would find times that I have not shown love.

What is one way that you could have shown more love today?

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Like I said, we are not capable of that kind of love. Is it a lost cause? Certainly not! Let me share with you the story of a man that taught me love.

This gentleman was an outspoken man of God. He was a solid preacher of the Word and would not step down from his convictions. Because of this, he had a critic that was equally outspoken and caused him much grief. He would verbally abuse and degrade him. The gentlemen began to despise and hate his critic. He finally got to the point of wishing ill and even death on this man. It was then that he realized he needed to love this man. He wrestled with God about this. Over time his conviction to love this man and his desire to hate him brought him great suffering and drove him to resolve the two feelings. He locked himself in his bathroom and vowed that he would not come out until he could say that he loved his enemy. He spent hours in agonizing prayer crying out to God. After many hours, a truth was revealed to him. He cannot love his enemy. He was not capable of that kind of love, a love that would suffer long and endure his enemy's attacks, a love that would desire this man to be saved. He wasn't capable of it. It was then that God brought him to see that God desires to love this man through him. God was capable of that kind of love, and it was God who would love his enemy through him.

This call to love one another cannot be accomplished apart from God. I cannot love others as God has loved me unless God is in me, for God is love. John says in his letter, "For love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

I love my wife and my family. I love my friends. But the kind of love we are called to is far greater than the love I have. It is a love from God that flows through us into the world with no other motive than to glorify God. It is a love that will:

"Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to **love one another**."  
1 Thessalonians 4:9

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”  
Romans 12:10

- Serve one another
- Honor one another
- Live in harmony with one another
- Instruct one another
- Encourage one another
- Be kind to one another
- Forgive one another
- Submit to one another
- Be hospitable to one another
- Confess to one another
- Pray for one another
- Help one another
- Accept one another

Is there someone in your life that God wants to love through you? Who?

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Paul says that if I have not love, I am nothing.

Start today to let God love through you.

Love one another:

John 13:34

John 13:35

John 15:12

John 15:17

Romans 12:10

Romans 13:8

1 Thessalonians 3:12

1 Thessalonians 4:9

1 Peter 1:22

1 Peter 4:8

1 John 3:11

1 John 3:23

1 John 4:7

1 John 4:11

2 John 1:5

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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# "How May I Help You?"

## Serve One Another – Galatians 5:13

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Galatians 5:13

I own my own home and I like to do work on it.

We have plans to update the bathroom and kitchen, finish the basement, and install some landscaping. I enjoy having renovation projects because it gives me a chance to go shopping for some new toys. Some men turn into boys when they enter a home improvements store. I am one of those men.

I do have my preference which store I go to. Because I do not want to hurt anyone's feelings I will not tell you the name of this home improvement store that has a lot of orange and no blue. I love walking through the aisles and figuring out new projects I could do, if only I had the money. It is not long, maybe only two minutes, before someone comes up in their orange, not blue, apron and asks, "How may I help you? Is there something I can help you find?"

Now get this, when I tell them what I am looking for, they take me to it and pull it off the shelf for me. Other places have a tendency to point me to the other end of the store and tell me it's down on one of those aisles, and then they disappear.

Maybe I am being just a little dramatic, but some places are more famous for their service than they are for their product.

Lambert's Café is one of those places. I think there are only three, but this place is a wonderful place to eat. When you ask for a roll they will throw it to you from across the store. I am convinced that no one has ever walked out of this place hungry.

Is there a place that you enjoy going to because of the service? What do you like about the service?

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Service is a big thing. We want the product we paid for and we want it from a smiling face. I have known companies to lose money because they were not good at service.

Get your towel and roll up your sleeves because God calls us to serve.

Paul explains that we are now free, but it is a freedom to serve others. Did you catch what we are to serve through? Love. It all goes back to the love that God wants to work through us. Our service is an outpouring of our love.

Peter encourages us to use our gifts to serve others (1 Peter 4:10). As we use our gifts to serve, we are being good stewards of what God has entrusted us with.

How are you using your gifts to serve in the church?

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"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in **serv**ing **one another** as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 1 Peter 4:10

Notice that there are no conditions on our service. We are simply to serve whether someone notices or not.

Let's look at an example of serving one another. John records this example in thirteenth chapter of his gospel. Read verses one through seventeen.

Describe in your own words what act of service took place.

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The disciples had come in for the Passover feast. It was a room that they rented, so there was no host to wash their feet as they came in. Remember that the roads were dirt and their shoes were sandals. Their feet would have been dirty, but not just because of dust. There would have been all kinds of junk and nasty stuff on their feet. Who knows how many times they stepped in camel dung or possibly sewage along the road. Either way, their feet were dirty and no one wanted to clean them.

No one, that is, except Jesus.

Jesus removed his outer garments and stooped down to wash the disciple's feet. Would you have done it?

I would have had a hard time washing their nasty feet, but Jesus did it and then tells us to do it. He says "This is an example of the kind of service I am asking each of you to do." Jesus then explains that we are all equal. There are no differences when it comes to serving, as we all are to serve.

Have you ever seen trash on the ground and felt an urge to pick it up? Then maybe you thought, "That's not my job?" You are right. It's not your job, it's your responsibility.

Describe a recent time of when someone went out of their way to serve you even though it was not their job?

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How did you feel about it?

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I am humbled when someone serves me. I am thinking that I do not deserve this kind of service and I am right. I do not deserve it, but they are not serving because I deserve it, but because Christ has called us to serve.

You will find this in common with all of the "one another" passages. We are called to serve one another not because of the persons we serve, but because of the Person we serve. Did you get that?

We are to serve because Christ served, regardless of the people we are serving.

I am feeling convicted. I need to find some feet to wash. Are you with me?

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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# I Will Defend My Honor!

Honor one another – Romans 12:10

Do you have an honor code?

Many colleges and universities have codes of honor. It is a statement that outlines the standard of the community. If an individual does not live by the code then they are disciplined and eventually cast from the community.

The idea of an honor code has been passed down through the ages. Medieval knights would have to give mercy if their opponent yields to them in battle. A samurai could not use stealth to attack his opponent. He was bound by honor to announce his presence.

How would you define honor?

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Describe a time when you may have had to defend your honor?

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Alexander Hamilton, who played a key role in the early formation of the American government died for honor. Alexander believed Aaron Burr was unfit for government leadership and through his influence caused Burr's defeat. Burr challenged him to a duel. They met on July 11, 1804. Tradition has it that Hamilton intentionally missed, which gave Burr the opportunity to cause a mortal wound. Hamilton died the next day.

For some reason that just seems chivalrous and honorable. I would also add that I would not have found myself in that same place if it were because I lost an election.

What things in your life would you defend in your life?

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At the top of my list would be my wife and then my children. In many cases, when honor is mentioned it is fighting for one's own honor. Honor can be a very self-serving characteristic. Think about it. If I said, "I will fight for my honor" what in that statement is not self-serving? I am making the assumption that I am right and that I am more important than you. Honor boiled down is high reputation, respect, or esteem.

How would you describe an honorable person?

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Here is another way that honor can be very self-centered. We honor people or consider them honorable because we hold them in high esteem. We hold them in high esteem because of the values and character that they possess, but these values and character are based on our own biased opinion. Consider

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."  
Romans 12:10

*“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”  
Philippians 2:3-8*

those involved in radical religious movements. They will honor their fallen comrades, who may have died while setting off a bomb in a local mall. Others will honor political figures that brought a country together through dictatorship. Still some would honor scientists who give their lives to the study of stem cell research. Yet, many Christians would not honor any of these people. We honor people based on our own convictions.

In Romans 12:10, Paul calls us to honor one another. The word “honor” means to respect or value, but there needs to be a standard. I value the pictures that my son draws for me. I am not sure there are too many people outside my family that would value them. We need a standard.

Paul provides that standard in Philippians 2:3-8. We are not to be self-centered or conceited, but with humility, honor others. We are not to look out for ourselves only, but we are to consider the community.

In what ways would your community change if everyone honored each other?

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My community would be radically different. We would not fight each other for the closer parking space, and there would probably be fewer horns in traffic. We may even start smiling at each other.

Paul continues by giving a standard. Notice it is not our own understanding or virtues that define honor, it is Christ. Paul tells us to have the same attitude as Christ.

Jesus was God. He knew that all heaven and earth existed to bring praise and glory to Him because He is God. Yet, he chose to set that praise and worship aside to serve us. He set aside his right to be praised to fulfill his responsibility to serve even to death. He gave up his rights and chose to wash feet.

Sit and meditate on Philippians 2:3-8. Write what you are feeling or thinking.

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We are called to honor one another. We are called to set aside our rights to fulfill our responsibilities towards one another. It may be my right to disagree with that person, but it is my responsibility to love him and show kindness to him. It is my right to rule my family, but it's my responsibility to raise them to love God.

Christians have a hard time with honor when they are hung up on rights.

What rights have you found yourself demanding from others?

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What responsibilities have you neglected because of your demands for your rights?

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Maybe we need an attitude check. Do you have the same attitude as Christ?  
Honor one another.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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“...and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. **Live in peace with one another.**”  
1 Thessalonians 5:13

## Stop Fighting!

### Live in Peace with One Another – 1 Thessalonians 5:13

I had three brothers. My mom did not know what peace was.

There was always one of us picking on another until we got to that breaking point and then came the fighting. I remember books being thrown at each other and a lot of pushing and shoving. My parents were always able to get to us before we did any real damage to each other. I wish I could say that same for the house.

Even when we played we fought. It was never a peaceful playtime. One of us was the good guy and one of us was the bad guy. We had tanks and action figures with guns. We built forts and bases from which to attack our enemies. Everywhere was a battle ground and everything was a weapon.

Peace and quiet. Do we know what that is?

Describe the last time you had a time of peace with no interruptions. What did you do?

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For many of us, these times are few and far between. When you add people to my world then it makes peace even harder. If I lived on an island by myself, I would still not have peace, as I would find something to argue with myself about.

Paul calls us to live in peace with one another. Stop fighting!

Church would seem to be a place to find people who love each other and never fight with each other, but that is the farthest from the truth. Unfortunately, we fight in the church and try to justify it as our convictions or Biblical stance when most arguments are as a result of personality differences and personal opinions. We let ourselves get in the way of fellowshiping with others.

Do you have a grievance against a brother in the church? Describe why you feel that way.

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How have you tried to live at peace with that brother?

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In 1 Thessalonians 5:13, “live in peace” is an imperative, a command. Some would suggest that it is directed to the congregation in reference to the leaders in the previous verses. The congregation should submit peacefully to the leaders. Paul gave it as a command to all. The leaders are to live in peace with the people and the vice versa.

“...so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”

1 Corinthians 12:25

“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.”

Romans 15:5

How would you define “living in peace”?

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The sense of the word carries with it the idea of oneness, quietness, or rest. Have you ever seen a show where two siblings or people are fighting, so they take some tape and mark off the middle of the room? This is an effort to make peace between the two feuding people. They tell each other to stay on their own side and even though they may not talk to each other, that is not peace.

Peace is not just putting up with each other. Notice Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:25. He explains peace as having no divisions, and it is having the same care for each other. Another way of saying it is “having the same mind”.

Like I said, I have a hard time living at peace with myself. There is no way that I am going to be able to live at peace with that brother that can be so annoying.

Why is it sometimes so hard to have peace in the church?

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It boils down to our own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is hard to be at peace with ourselves and others if we are not at peace with God. Paul expresses this in Romans 15:5. It is God who gives us the ability to live at peace. Remember the fruit of the Spirit? Love, Joy, PEACE. It is God who gives us the perseverance and strength through the Holy Spirit to accomplish this task.

James explains why we have such a hard time living in peace. He says in chapter four, verse one that the source of the quarrels and conflicts is from our own self-centeredness. I must point the finger at myself when it comes to conflict.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring us to the point of peace, but it needs to start now. A great resource is Peacemakers written by Ken Sande. It is all about resolving conflict and living at peace.

Remember that this is a command, but God give us the ability to follow this command.

So, stop fighting and live in peace with one another.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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“And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.”

Romans 15:14

## Watch out!

### Admonish One Another – Romans 15:14

I was curious as a kid. It caused my parents much grief.

My dad was cleaning out the floor vents. These vents were bigger than the vents we have today. Maybe it is because of my story. I had already learned to crawl and was getting into everything. Of course, I was curious about what my daddy was doing. He had that big noisemaking, sucking thing and was sticking it down into the hole that shoots up air. I had sat on that hole when the air came up and thought it was fun. I crawled over there and thought I would take a look into the hole.

I looked too far.

I tumbled into the vent and ended up on the floor of the basement. I wish that was the only time that my curiosity got the best of me. We've all been there. Our parents yell from across the room, "Don't touch that!" We are then faced with a dilemma. Should I touch it really fast or just make a slow move toward it. Either way, we touch it. It may have been a light socket, the burner on the stove, a glass vase, or an electrical cord, but we touched it and paid the price of being curious. I have caught myself saying, "If only I had listened when I was a kid!"

Describe a time when your curiosity got the best of you even though you were warned.

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I know I am not the only one to ignore the warnings of parents. The children of Israel were the same way with God. God had given them many warnings. He had explained to them that these warnings were for their own protection and safety, but Israel didn't listen. Just read through the wilderness wanderings or maybe the time of the judges. It is a sad story, but even sadder because we still do the same thing.

Describe a time when God warned you of something. How did you respond?

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Paul talks about the need for believers to admonish one another. How many of you have used the word "admonish" in the past month? This was a word that is only used by Paul in just a few instances in Scripture. In most cases, it is translated "warning". In his letter to the Romans, he compliments them on their growth and their ability to admonish one another (15:14). Then again in Colossians 3:16, we are called to teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”  
Colossians 3:16

What do you think Paul is meaning for us to do in these passages?

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The word carries with it an idea of warning, but also the idea of friendly, earnest advice. For some reason we have lost the idea of admonishing one another. We may hesitate to say anything or to offer “friendly, earnest advice.”

Why is it that we sometimes hesitate to warn someone?

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It may be because we do not want to look like judges or look too legalistic. It may be because we don’t want to offend someone or call attention to them. We may not want to embarrass them.

When we think of admonishing in a negative sense it can seem very challenging, but let’s consider the positive side of admonishing.

Have you ever told someone to avoid a certain area of road because of the traffic in that area?

Have you ever let someone know the best place to eat a good meal in your town?

Have you ever told someone to slow down because you knew the area had little children?

I could go on, but I think you see where I am headed. We admonish people often. We let them know the good places to go and the bad places to avoid. We let them know if something is going to hurt them. We give them friendly, earnest advice.

Paul calls us to admonish one another, but he gives us a help in knowing how. He first tells us to let the word of God dwell richly or abundantly in you. It is the Word of God that brings us to warn one another and caution each other. This caution comes from the love we are to have for each other.

Love compels us to keep each other out of trouble. If we are to love one another, then we will admonish each other through the Word of God.

It all comes back to our personal relationship with Jesus. Paul says God’s Word needs to dwell in us abundantly. We cannot hope to warn our brothers if we do not know what to warn them of, so let God’s Word challenge you and grow you, then admonish one another.

Don’t be afraid to say, “Watch out!”

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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“Therefore **encourage one another** and **build up one another**, just as you also are doing.”  
1 Thessalonians 5:11

“Now it happened after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, ‘Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth.’ So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. Ahab called Obadiah who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly.)”  
1 Kings 18:1-3

## I Beseech You

### Encourage One Another – 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Have you ever beseeched someone?

It is an odd word that you probably do not find too many people using unless you are watching a Shakespearean play. It has to do with calling out or encouraging.

When was the last time you were encouraged? What happened?

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Why was it an encouragement to you?

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The power of encouragement can reach into the saddest heart and lighten it. I have heard stories upon stories of children of God reaching out to others in seemingly insignificant ways, but because they reached out, people were encouraged and strengthened.

Satan has a tendency to attack our hearts in the hopes of discouraging us. Discouragement can cripple us in many ways. It can cause us to be unproductive, unresponsive, depressed, and in some extreme cases may cause someone to consider taking their own life. Some may never come to that end, but others see it as the only option out of the depression and heartache that they have. Discouragement can drain our energy and destroy our motivation. It can cause sleepless nights and restless days. Satan would love to discourage us.

Let's look at the story of Elijah the prophet.

In chapter eighteen of 1 Kings, Elijah faces off with 450 prophets of Baal. As you read through the chapter, it is easy to picture Elijah bigger than life. He stands tall in the face of Ahab and his prophets. God breaths down fire and consumes the entire altar. Elijah then kills all 450 prophets. The chapter ends with much needed rain.

How would you have felt if you were in Elijah's shoes and saw the fire come down and the rain come?

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That must have been something to have seen not only the fire, but the faces of the prophets as God revealed Himself as the One true God. You would think the story would continue with something like Elijah leading a multitude of people in revolt against the wicked king and his iniquitous wife. Read the first three verses.

How does Elijah's response make you feel?

*"But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."  
Hebrews 3:13*

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I could not believe that Elijah would be scared of a woman's threat after defeating and killing 450 prophets. He had just seen God breath fire out of heaven, but he still got scared and ran. The rest of the chapter works through how God lifted him up in his time of discouragement, but one thing we can learn from this is that anyone could become discouraged. Discouragement is a part of life and may be just around the corner for some of us.

We all need encouragement, hence, the reason why Paul calls us to encourage one another.

I want to take us back to the word encouragement. There is some good meaning packed into this word. The Greek word is παρακαλέω (parakaleo). It is formed by two words, παρά and κελέω. The first word is normally a preposition which means near, from beside, at, in the vicinity, or proximity. The second word means to call, to bid, to name. Now we put the two together and what would you suggest they might connote together?

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Think about when you were encouraged. For most of us, it is those that are close to us that encourage us the most. It is not necessarily what they did as much as it was who they are. This word carries with it the idea of being called by someone close.

When people are discouraged, things around them seem dark. Remember back to your childhood when the lights went out during a storm. Things would be dark, but everything would be okay when we would hear a parent's voice. We may not need to see them, but when they call out we were encouraged. When we are discouraged, we need people that are close to us to call out to us.

Paul encourages the believers to encourage one another. In order to accomplish this, we need to get close. It is so easy for people to distance themselves from the world around them. We want to protect ourselves from being hurt, but in the process we hurt ourselves. It is hard to encourage one another if we do not know one another.

When was the last time you had a good conversation with another believer?

When was the last time you spent time with another believer (one-on-one)?

When was the last time you prayed with another believer (one-on-one)?

For some of us, it is hard to open up. It is hard to develop close relationships with people because this world is so fast-paced and busy, but the busier it gets the more encouragement we will need from each other to carry on.

Who would you consider to be in your close circle of friends?

“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”  
Hebrews 10:24-25

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Now here is a revealing question. When those people that you just listed encourage you, does it lift you up? Does their encouragement work well? If not, then you need to work a little more in becoming close.

We need to get close to encourage. Here's the clincher. I could give a list of how we encourage, but that list is different for each person. A kind word may encourage one person, but it is an act of service which may encourage another. How we encourage one another is based on that person and we cannot possibly know how to encourage until we know the person we want to encourage. It all comes back to that little preposition.

In order to encourage one another, we have to get up close and personal.

Let's find someone to put our arm around and encourage.

Romans 14:19  
1 Thessalonians 4:18  
Hebrews 3:13  
Hebrews 10:24-25

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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## Will You Be My Friend?

### Be Kind to One Another – Ephesians 4:32

Did your parents ever tell you that you have to be a good friend to have a good friend?

My wife tells of a story from grade school. Her family had just moved to a new state and therefore had to go to a new school. The thought of making all new friends was horrifying, but it could not be avoided. She asked her mom for some help in finding a friend. Her mom gave her some powerful advice. She said, "Go up to someone and ask if they will be your friend."

She made her way to school and, of course, was seen as the new girl. She was able to find another girl and asked if they could be friends. That friendship proved to be one of my wife's deeper friendships through those years. Even after my wife's family moved away they still kept in touch and that same friend was a part of our wedding.

How would you describe a friend?

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Friends are easy to find. It is good friends that are scarce.

I am reminded of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. It is a short story. Jesus is replying to a question about who our neighbors are. Jesus explains that a man came upon robbers who left him for dead. A priest and a Levite walked by him and ignored him, but it was a Samaritan who felt compassion and tended to this man's needs. A lesson to be taken from this story is that we need to show kindness and compassion towards all.

Interesting side note: Nowhere in the passage is the Samaritan called good. It was something we have added. Makes me wonder if it is not in there because his actions are what is expected.

This Samaritan was kind to a total stranger. He did not regard his background, race, or status as something to be considered. He was simply showing kindness. His kindness flowed out of his character.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 tells us to seek after what is good for each other. We are not to seek revenge for wrongs made to us. How many of us have been guilty of that?

Describe a time when you wanted to get revenge for a wrong done to you?

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The car is one of the worst places for me. When someone pulls out in front of me or cuts me off, I get this huge desire to speed ahead and show him how it feels. Maybe some of you have felt that way about different things. I hope you have, so that way, I know I am not alone.

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."  
Ephesians 4:32

"See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people."  
1 Thessalonians 5:15

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.”  
Proverbs 4:23

Paul calls us to be kind to one another, to seek after things that are good for each other. The word “kind” carries with it an idea of having a courteous, polite attitude. We are called to be polite to each other. Sometimes in church or out and about people will be polite by asking, “How are you today?” Sometimes they wait to listen and hear your response, but other times they continue about their business. That is not the “polite” we are talking about here. Paul explains the quality of kindness in both passages. In a verse in Ephesians, we are called to let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice be kicked out of us. In 1 Thessalonians he talks about seeking after what is good.

Let me put it another way. Politeness or kindness is not a surface-level action. It is something that comes from the heart. We can do a good job of putting up a front of kindness for a little while, but that front will eventually fail us. Proverbs says, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). What is in our hearts will come out.

Describe a time when you could tell someone was being polite, but not genuine about it.

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It hurts when we realize that someone is not genuine. We do not think of them as polite and kind as we once did. Now, have there been times where you were not genuine in your kindness? We are all guilty of it. Maybe that is why Paul reminds us to be kind to one another.

How can you show kindness to those around you?

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Remember, it starts in the heart and flows from there. If our hearts are not centered on God, then neither will our motivations and kindness be. It all comes back to those two greatest commandments.

Love God.  
Love Others.

Let’s remember to check our attitudes when being kind to make sure we are being genuine, and I’ll remember to drive more safely.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”  
Ephesians 4:32

## I Forgive You

### Forgive One Another – Ephesians 4:32

“Say you’re sorry, now!”

Did you ever hear that from your parents? With four boys in the house, we were often getting into fights. There was one girl, but we never tried to take her toys. We would get into some fierce fights and it didn’t help to be sent to our rooms because we shared a room. Mom would finally get us off each other and then came the apology. We would have to tell each other we were sorry. I want to say that every time I was genuine about it. I want to say that, but I can’t

Forgiveness is a lost discipline. I say discipline because it takes work sometimes to forgive people. How would you define the word forgiveness?

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When my son wrongs someone, he is learning the need to ask for forgiveness. He will go to that person and say, “I apologize for . . . Will you forgive me?” Unfortunately, many will respond with, “It’s okay.” I cringe when I hear that response because it is not okay, and because it was not okay he needed to ask for forgiveness. I know their heart is to say, “I forgive you,” but for some reason we have a hard time saying that.

Why is it that some people cannot say, “I forgive you”?

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Think about it. How often do you say, “I forgive you”? There are other responses that we give:

It’s okay.      It’s alright.      Don’t worry about it.      Forget it.

These seem to be programmed responses when someone says they’re sorry. I am sure we have the best intentions in mind when we say these things, but why can’t we simply say, “I forgive you”?

In Matthew eighteen, we see Jesus helping Peter to understand this aspect of forgiveness. There is a sense that Peter is trying to look good by asking if it is good to forgive seven times, but Jesus replies with, “Seventy times seven.” Jesus then tells a parable. A rich ruler calls in the debt with one of his slaves. This slave could never hope to repay him and falls to his face with promises to repay. The ruler had compassion and forgave his debts. This same slave goes out and finds a friend that owes him a small amount. He demands payment and then throws him in jail. The ruler hears of this and calls the slave back in to explain why he could not forgive a small debt even though his large debt was forgiven. The slave ends up in jail. Jesus explains that this is how God will treat those who do not forgive.

Why is it so important for us to forgive?

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“...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”  
Colossians 3:13

Paul says in Ephesians 4:32 that we need to forgive one another “just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Just like the slave in the parable, we have been forgiven a debt that we could have never repaid. That same forgiveness that was given to us, we need to give to others. The meaning behind the word “forgive” is to give freely as a gift or to pardon. It carries with it that there are no strings attached. When we forgive, we are not to hold it over each other’s heads as if to say, “I forgave you, now you owe me.”

Have you ever thought you forgave someone, but then brought it back up? Why?

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We may have told them, “It’s okay”, but in our hearts we were still holding a grudge. Maybe that is why we have such a hard time saying it. It comes down to our hearts. Let me explain.

Sometimes you may not say, “I forgive you” because you really don’t forgive the person. You would rather hold onto the hurt with the hopes of one day turning it back on them. You want to use the hurt they caused as an excuse to get even so you tell them to forget it, but you don’t forget it. **Revenge**, that’s a heart problem.

Maybe you can’t say it because you never heard it. Some of you grew up in a home where hurt was a part of living and therefore needed to be accepted, but never forgiven. You may have never had someone take responsibility for the wrong they caused and ask to be forgiven. You are hurting, and you’ve been told “that is life,” and because you’ve held onto your hurts, you’ve become bitter. **Bitterness**, that’s a heart problem.

Some of you have a hard time forgiving others because you cannot forgive yourself. You say, “It’s okay” because you know that everyone sins and there is no need to forgive, because you are in the same place they are. You may even wonder how you can forgive others when you know you are just as guilty. You don’t feel you have the right to forgive. **Guilt**, that’s a heart problem.

Finally, there might be those who just don’t think about the issue of forgiveness. One person said that it just sounds so serious. The thing is, if there has been an offense because of sin, then it is serious. I think many of us may fall into this category. Our culture has developed a casual or callous attitude toward sin and forgiveness with each other. This, in turn, may lead us to have a casual attitude about sin and forgiveness with God. I just can’t picture God saying, “Don’t worry about it.” **Callousness**, that’s a heart problem.

Would you place yourself in one of these categories? Why or why not?

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I realize that you may not fit into one of these categories, but I am convinced that our society has lessened the impact of forgiveness. This does have a direct impact on the way we view God and His forgiveness. Maybe that is why it is so hard to share the gospel. People do not see their need to be forgiven.

## Forgiveness...

- Removes the burden of guilt
- Releases the offender from responsibility
- Restores the relationship
- Deepens the relationship

When you have wronged someone and they forgive you, how does that make you feel?

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There are several things that forgiveness does.

- **Removes the burden of guilt** – Forgiveness removes the burden of guilt that is upon those who have wronged someone. There is a burden of guilt that rests on those who have sinned. They may try to bury it, but it will not be released until they have sought forgiveness.
- **Releases the offender from responsibility** – Forgiveness tells the offender that you will no longer hold the offense against them. They are free. This is especially important when the enemy tries to bring the offense back up. The offender can respond with, “Do not bother me Satan, as I have been forgiven!”
- **Restores the relationship** – When an offense has taken place, it breaks a relationship. This is the case with God and others. Forgiveness restores the relationship that was broken. It sets the relationship back on track.
- **Deepens the relationship** – Forgiveness can also deepen the relationship, because to seek forgiveness is to admit a wrong. This is true honesty, which has the potential to deepen a relationship, which brings about more accountability so as to avoid an offense down the road.

We are called to forgive one another. If we choose not to forgive, then we are not obeying God. Some things are hard to forgive, but remember the comparative statement in Ephesians. We are to forgive JUST AS Christ forgave us. Forgiveness is possible.

Is there someone right now that God has placed on your heart? Do you need to forgive? Do you need to ask for forgiveness?

It is hard, but I am comforted by Matthew 19:26 – “With God ALL things are possible.”

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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# Will You Pray with Me?

## Be Accountable to One Another – James 5:16

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”  
James 5:16

If you are having a bad day, do you have someone you can call? What about a bad week or month?

Some of us would rather hold it in than to call someone. I am convinced that is not the best thing to do. We need to lean on each other.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian and German Lutheran pastor during the time of World War II. He lectured on theology in Berlin and wrote several books during that time, but in 1933 moved from Berlin to London to pastor a church. As he watched the events unfolding in his country he was deeply moved with a sense of responsibility and went back to Germany to be a part of the underground resistance. In Germany, he lived in a house with other believers who were a part of this resistance. They developed deep, godly relationships. He understood fellowship and wrote *Life Together*. This book is a challenge to all concerning community and accountability.

He said, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”<sup>2</sup>

What comes to mind when I mention the word “accountability”?

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People have different ideas of accountability. Some see it as an invasion of privacy, others fear it because it may mean being more open than they want, while others see it as just a way to find out about others. James gives us an idea of what accountability in the church is in James 5:16.

James gives two imperatives: confess your sins and pray for one another.

Accountability is small groups of believers within the context of the church coming together to admit where they messed up and then to pray for each other. The conversations are not about the weather or sports. These conversations center around God and His work in the believer’s life.

When was the last time you had a conversation about God with a few other believers? What did you talk about?

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What did you walk away with from that conversation?

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Some of us had to think hard about that question because either we cannot remember the last time we had a conversation like that or the conversation was

<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Life Together* Harper Collins, New York, New York. 1954. pg 19.

“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”  
Hebrews 10:24-25

not personal. Let's look at these two imperatives to get a better idea of what it means to be accountable to each other.

Confession seems like it is primarily an Orthodox Roman Catholic practice. In this belief system, you would enter a confessional and confess to a priest the wrongs you had committed. The priest would then forgive you of those wrongs.

Confession carries with it an aspect of acknowledging something, and in this case it acknowledges sins. In this imperative it is a continual action or repeated action. None of us have reached perfection yet, although there are some days where I think I am close, but my wife reminds me that I have a long way to go. Since we still struggle with sinful acts, James calls us to confess our sins to one another.

How does confessing our sins help us?

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Sometimes we find it easier to confess our sins to God than to a brother in Christ. There is just something about confessing to someone standing in front of you, but confession helps us.

- It reminds us of our dependency. No man is an island unto himself. We are dependant first on God and then on each other as the church. Life can be hard and sometimes we need a shoulder to lean on. Struggles seem to come at us all at once and it is comforting to know that when I make a mistake, someone will be there to help me up. When I confess, I am reminded I am dependant on God and on you.

- It reminds us we are not alone. When we confess to each other, we come to realize that there are others who are facing similar battles and struggles. It gives us a sense of hope knowing that we are not standing alone in our fight to do right. I think of Elijah, who became discouraged. He thought he was the only one left, but God showed him he was not alone.

- It reminds us of our commitment. Confession brings a commitment to do right. If I am practicing confession then I will be more apt to choose correctly for fear of having to confess to another. I am reminded of my commitment to God and to others. Confession empowers me to do what is right.

We will all admit that we would like prayer, but when was the last time you prayed with someone?

The second aspect is to pray for one another. James gives this imperative and then shares the story of Elijah. Elijah prayed for rain and it rained. This is evidence of the power of prayer.

What was the last answer to prayer that you received? (It may not have been the way you wanted.)

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As we confess, we are sharing weakness. These weaknesses then become prayer requests. We then pray for each other.

How does praying for each other help us?

“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.”  
Romans 15:5

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Prayer is a powerful tool in the life of the believer. The Reverend Jerry Falwell often said, “Nothing of eternal significance has ever been accomplished apart from prayer.”

- It builds intimacy. In prayer, we hear the hearts of those we pray with. This builds a spiritual intimacy with those people, but we also hear the perspective of those we pray with. This builds deepens our intimacy with God as we see Him through the eyes of another.
- It builds unity. Paul, in Romans 15, desires that the church be in one accord. Prayer is an avenue with which to accomplish that goal. As we pray with each other we come to the throne of God together with the same requests.
- It builds a defense. When we practice praying together, we develop together and will more likely pray for those same people when we are apart. This helps to build a defense against the enemy. The enemy cannot stand against a group of believers who are praying in one accord.

It is a powerful encouragement to know that others know my struggles and are praying with me to have victory over those struggles. I am not alone. I need to find a small group of believers with whom I can confess my sins and pray with on a regular basis.

I need accountability with one another. You do, too.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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# Open House

## Be Hospitable to One Another – 1 Peter 4:9

It has been said that a man's house is his castle.

Unfortunately, some of us take that to the extreme and build a moat around the house and a gate to protect the entrance. Okay, so maybe we don't go to that extreme, but we do put up an eight foot fence around the yard. We have also made the front porch small and the back deck big. We park the car in the garage or around back, and the only time we venture out into the front yard is to get the paper. We have essentially shut ourselves off from the world around us. Do you know your neighbor?

Why do you think so many people have essentially closed themselves off to their neighbors?

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It is really hard to put my finger on why we have come so far from sitting on the front porch and talking to each other. I can remember an older house we lived in as kids. It had a huge front porch that we would often sit out on and talk with the neighbors. It was not a problem for them to come up on the porch and talk. If someone were to come up now, we would think they were selling something. Sad, isn't it?

Peter and Paul call us to be hospitable to one another. Check out 1 Peter 4:9 and Romans 12:13.

How would you define the word "hospitable"?

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The Greek word is actually two words put together. You may recognize one of them. The word is *philoxenos*. *Phileo* is the idea of brotherly love like as in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. The second part of the word, *xenos*, means foreigner, alien, or guest.

We normally think that hospitality means to be friendly to our friends and having our friends over to the house so that we can have fun together, but Jesus talks about that kind of friendship in Matthew.

Read Matthew 5:43-48.

Jesus is preaching to the multitudes. He is essentially explaining the principles behind the law that was given to Moses so many years before. He works through the "beatitudes" in the first part of the chapter and then comes to this famous passage of loving your enemies. I find this particularly challenging because the love we are to have is *agape* love which is the highest form of love, but that is another "one another". Here we want to look at the argument that Jesus provides. In verse forty-six, He challenges His hearers with a question, "How easy is it to love those who love you?" Jesus then hits them hard by comparing that kind of love to one of the groups of people who were despised by the Jews-tax collectors.

"Be hospitable to one another without complaint."  
1 Peter 4:9

"...contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."  
Romans 12:13

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 5:43-48

How often do you strike up conversations with strangers? Why is it so hard for some?

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Jesus concludes this thought with these words, "therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This is a powerful and challenging statement.

What do you think he means by this statement?

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The word "perfect" carries with a meaning of being complete. Jesus is calling us to be complete in our love. We are not to show partiality to friends and family. We are to have the same kind of love for our loved ones as we do our enemies. This carries over into our hospitality. It is easy to be hospitable to friends and family. Okay, maybe family is a little harder, but the idea is that our hospitality should not be selective. It should not exclude any certain group or people.

Come back to 1 Peter 4:9. We are called to be fond of guests. This may include missionaries or groups coming in to stay, providing dinner to those needing the help, and offering your home as a place to gather.

Notice the attitude we are to have. We are to be hospitable without complaint. The idea of hospitality loses something when we complain about it.

Have you ever complained about being hospitable? Why?

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For me, it usually boils down to being self-centered. I open up my home to have people over, but then complain about how it is one more busy night or I had planned to do other things or we do not have the money or something. Whatever it is, I am complaining. I am trying to find excuses to not have to obey what God has called me to do. I would rather keep to myself and not have to spend the time, energy, or money on someone else. I am being self-centered and some of you are too.

Imagine what would happen if we really practiced this. I am not talking about feeling obligated to invite someone over because they had you over last month. I am talking about really opening our homes to each other. Just brainstorm with me a bit. There would be:

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|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| - less conflict        | - less wasted time    | - more encouragement |
| - less loneliness      | - less TV             | - more God talks     |
| - less seclusion       | - more fellowship     | - more compassion    |
| - less sin in the camp | - more accountability | - more networking    |
| - less discouragement  | - more connecting     |                      |

Can you imagine the possibilities? And simply because we would be hospitable to one another. It could potentially change not only us or our church, but the community, the city, and even the world. Being hospitable to one another binds us together as one body of believers. Then the watching world will know us by our love for one another. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

Now here comes the action. Invite someone over. Open up your house.  
What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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*"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."  
Galatians 6:2*

*"But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor {to lead us} to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."  
Galatians 3:23-25*

# Help!

## Help One Another – Galatians 6:2

No one person is an island unto himself.

I would like to think I am sometimes. Maybe you have, too. I even spiritualize it by saying that all I need is Jesus so then I can do it all on my own. I do not need a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear because that is what God is for. Right about then, something in life hits me and I am forced to realize that I need the help of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Why is it that some people feel that they can do it all on their own?

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How has our society at times conditioned us to be independent?

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A quick look through a book store lets us know that there are tons of books on how to better ourselves and become more independent. Television and movies encourage us to retain our individuality even if we are in a relationship.

We are lost in a sea of everybody, wanting to be somebody with the help of nobody.

Independence is a part of the development process, and there are some ways in which independence is positive. What are some areas that we encourage positive independence?

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Positive independence can be a training ground for growth. Consider parenting. Paul talks a little about this aspect in Galatians 3. He explains that the law was humanity's tutor or schoolmaster, but since faith has come, we have matured and are no longer under a tutor. Children need guidance and direction, but the guidance and direction that is provided to them has as its goal independence. Parents would rather not have their children living with them for all of life. They train them to be independent. This aspect of parenting can be seen throughout much of creation.

Another form of positive independence can be seen in electricity and batteries. A drill was not always run on electricity. It was a tool that was cranked by hand in order to make the hole. Electricity made it possible for the drill to work independently of human cranking. Now, batteries have made it possible for the drill to operate independently of a power cord. With each level of independence comes a new level of freedom.

But are we ever completely independent? Even the most independent person is still dependent on many things. Think of the most independent person you know – what are they still dependent on?

*"For the body is not  
one member, but  
many."  
1 Corinthians 12:14*

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Oxygen. We are all dependent on it. We need it to continue living. It is a simple chemical, yet we are dependent on it to sustain life. Nourishment is another form of dependence. We need to nourish our bodies in order to continue living. Gravity is another form of dependence. We would float away if gravity was not a part of our lives. These, and more, are outside of our being. Our life is also dependent on our bodies working correctly.

I know what you are thinking. "These things are assumed, and the independence we are talking about is independence from other people."

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Paul explains that we, as Christians, are a part of the body of Christ. We each have our part and it would be foolish of us to say to one another, "I don't need you!" It would be like telling your lungs, "Lungs, I do not like being dependent on air, so I am going to remove you from my body." People need each other. Hence, this is the reason why Paul, in Galatians 6, calls us to help one another.

How can being a part of a local church "help" the believer?

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Life is full of challenges and tragedies. Houses burn down. Loved ones pass on. Finances run out. We have all been touched by something that has brought heartache and pain. Paul explains that we need to help each other to carry the burdens of life. The word "burden" means a heavy weight. In some cases this weight may be the weight of sin issues. We are called to help each overcome sin and then we will fulfill the Law of Christ.

What is this Law? It is love as Paul explains in chapter five. It all comes back to "love one another". We do not love one another if we are not helping one another. Now this burden is different from the everyday burdens in verse five. The everyday burdens are like a hikers backpack. Everyone needs to carry their own backpack.

Let me try to paint a picture. A father and son are walking through their neighborhood. This is an activity that they often enjoy together, as it allows them to talk and share. They sit on a bench near their home. It is a familiar area with an ancient oak tree that towers over them. Unaware that the tree can no longer sustain the weight of its massive branches, it suddenly and unexpectedly comes down upon the father and son. The father pulls himself from the gnarled branches only to realize his son is trapped beneath the largest section of branch. The bench is keeping the weight of the branch from crushing his son; the bench will not last long. The father screams for help as he tries to lift the branch off his son.

What would you do? Would you cheer him on? Would you pat the father on the back and tell him he is doing a great job? Would you compliment him on his love for his son? Would you tell him you have experienced the same thing? Would you tell him you are praying for him?

Many of us in our churches are guilty of answering yes to one or more of these questions. We may not admit it, but we do. In the church, we act like we love each other, but we refuse to get into the mess. We refuse to get

tangled up and come alongside that person who is sweating and aching under the burden. We may be afraid of what it will cost us.

Jesus lifted the tree off our backs. Shouldn't we help one another?

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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“Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”  
Romans 15:7

## A Holy Kiss

### Accept One Another – Romans 15:7

I would rather be greeted with a good handshake than a holy kiss.

Paul on several occasions closed his letters with the phrase, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” In this series on “One Anothers”, we come to this one. On the outset, I am not advocating all of us going out and kissing every person we see, nor am I encouraging the greeters on Sunday morning to lean in and kiss those that walk in the door. Our western culture is more accustomed to a good strong handshake.

In the early church, and even in some cultures today, a kiss was the normal greeting. It was seen as a sign of friendship and hearty love. Several people are recorded as using a kiss as a greeting in Scripture (Genesis 27:26, 2 Samuel 20:9). Some greetings were not as friendly. Both Absalom and Judas Iscariot used this form of greeting for the purpose of deception.

What do you think the kiss conveyed when used as a greeting?

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Rather than be preoccupied with the practice of the greeting, we would do well to find the principle of the greeting. Both Paul and Peter call us to greet one another.

Why is it important to greet one another as believers?

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How do those in your church offer greetings to each other?

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If we take a look into the word “greet”, we can find that it means to enfold, welcome, and embrace. There is a level of intimacy that is implied. The intimacy that is present is the intimacy that is found in Christ. It is true that Christians from around the globe should have an instant bond when they come together. This is true even if they have not previously met.

Have you experienced a time when you felt connected to someone because of similar faith in God even though you did not know them? What was it like?

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Paul takes this one step further in Romans 15:5-7. He explains that because we are all one in Christ we must accept one another. The word “accept” carries with it an even more intimate or deeper meaning than does the word “greet”. *Proslambano* is a combination of two words. The prefix *pro* is a preposition of direction with an emphasis on close

proximity. When joined with *lambano*, which means to actively take hold of, we have a word that means to take hold of or receive into ourselves.

This is an active word, yet so many times we find ourselves being passive about our acceptance of others.

What do you think it means to be active about our acceptance?

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Let's consider the culture in which Paul is writing his letter. It is a time of turmoil and conflict. The Jews are crying out for a Messiah who will come and rid them of the yoke of the Romans. They see the Romans as the enemy of God and despise that the Romans occupy Jerusalem. The Jews also have come to despise all Gentiles because they are not of the children of Israel. Couple this with the fact that Christians were despised by all. They were seen as the rebel rousers by the Romans and as a cult by the Jews. It was a very hostile time for the early church.

Let's not forget to whom Paul is writing. The recipients are none other than the Christians in Rome. Could it be any more challenging?

In the midst of all this struggle and hatred comes a calling to accept one another, to "receive into ourselves" one another. This is not a casual acceptance of an individual, but a deep acceptance that looks beyond cultural, physical, relational, and historical differences. This acceptance looks past the exterior and embraces the heart of our fellow believer, which has, like our own, been made new through Christ.

What has been your most recent struggle in accepting someone?

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I will admit that sometimes it is hard to accept people. We can easily fall prey to nonchalant acceptance. We may even accept with our words, but in our heart hold something against that individual. (See the lesson on forgiving one another.)

What it boils down to is genuine love for one another. As we allow Christ to love through us, we will accept one another, not on the basis of personal likes and dislikes, but on the basis of Christ. It comes back to Christ as the Center.

So how do we accept one another?

I am drawn back to Paul's letter to the church in Rome. In Romans 5:8 and 10:13 Paul explains the level of acceptance as God sees it. God showed us His love and acceptance of us in Christ while we were sinners, and whoever will call upon Jesus will be saved and accepted into the family of God. God has no favorites. He accepts all who call upon Him and receives them into Himself.

This is more than just a nod of the head, a handshake, or even a kiss. This is a realization that in spite of my shortcomings and failures, in spite of my downfalls and mess ups, He embraces me and brings me close to Himself.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."  
Romans 5:8

"For 'whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Romans 10:13

Do you think there would be much room to bicker and fight with this kind of acceptance?

It would change a lot. Accept one another.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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Other studies are available at  
[www.libertyonlineministries.com](http://www.libertyonlineministries.com), including:

By Faith – (Hebrews 11)

One Another

The Armor of God – (Ephesians 6)

The Road to Happiness – Beatitudes (Matthew 5)

Strengthening Your Moral Fiber – Moral Purity (Proverbs 7)

One Plus One is One – Marriage as God intended it to be

The Marks of Genuine Godliness – Integrity (Psalm 15)

Practical Faith – (James)