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Bible Study | Faith in Action

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Prepare

- Bible
- Journal
- Pen/pencil

Get Started

Love is one of our culture's greatest values. But when we try to love others without following the right example, our attempts to love others can be shallow at best and self-serving at worst.

- Complete this sentence: "When I think of loving others, these actions come to mind . . ."

Study and Learn

- **Read John 13:31–38. Now reread verses 34 and 35.**

In Jesus' last teaching session with His disciples before His death, He began by highlighting the importance of *love*. Let's make a couple of observations:

1. Jesus said this was a *new* command.

In the Greek, "new command" is moved to the very front of the sentence, which is essentially the same as putting it in bold font. Jesus was really emphasizing the *newness* of this command.

But wait—God commanded Israel to love others in the past too. In Leviticus 19:18, God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to "love your neighbor as yourself," and Jesus quoted this as one of the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:27). So how is Jesus' command *new*?

When we compare God's previous command to Jesus' new command, we see one stark difference: the standard for love is no longer how we love *ourselves*, but how *Jesus* loves *us*.

2. Jesus used *Himself* as the example of love.

While we may wish Jesus had listed exactly *how* to love one another, love is contextual. For Jesus, washing His disciples' feet a few moments earlier acted as an exclamation point to His previous three years of self-sacrificing love; in our contexts, loving one another may look like letting an elderly church member recover from surgery in your home or helping a mom with her children during the church service.

Regardless of our contexts, the principle remains: *love places the needs of others above ourselves through self-giving actions* (Phil. 2:3).

Jesus was about to give the ultimate example of love by dying for His enemies. This is something we'd *never* do (Rom. 5:6–8). But because Jesus is now the standard for love, we are called to love one another with this kind of self-sacrificing dedication.

3. Jesus said *love* identifies His disciples.

The self-giving love we show one another shines as a beacon to the world, letting them know we're different. This is the ultimate evangelism strategy—showing the world Jesus' sacrificial character by living it out ourselves. We won't love perfectly, but our efforts will make an impact in showing someone Jesus is worth following.

Apply

- What current struggles are you facing with other Christians? What would loving them as Jesus has loved you look like in those situations?
- What are some self-sacrificing actions that would benefit members of your local church? What's hindering you from doing them?

Follow Up

Read John 15:9–17. How do you see God's love for Jesus and Jesus' love for you fueling your ability to love others well?

Commit to Memory

Verses: **John 13:34–35**

Challenge: **John 15:9–17**

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Faith in Action | A Resource Closet for Foster and Adoptive Parents

By Nell Branum

Though not always obvious to the casual observer, foster parents or adoptive parents are likely nearby. Approximately 600,000 children in the United States are served by the foster care system each year. Their circumstances are often urgent, requiring sudden placement with a foster family due to abuse, neglect, or other situations that necessitate removal from their home. Similarly, adoptive parents often find they have little advance warning that a child is ready to join their family.

Perhaps God is leading your missions group, your family, or you to help support foster and adoptive families with a resource closet. Such a ministry takes careful planning, so here are some pertinent questions to ask before you start stocking diapers and toys:

What is the need in your area?

Talk with an adoption agency or foster care representative in your area to determine the range of foster and adoptive needs in your community.

What resources are most needed?

Ask foster and adoptive parents to help you make a list of what is most often needed on short notice. Needs might range from everyday items (diapers, wipes, baby formula) to equipment (cribs, car seats, booster seats, strollers), items for older children (bedding, backpacks, electronics), clothes (including underwear, socks, shoes, and pajamas), and comfort items (toys, stuffed animals, blankets, games).

Where can you house your resource closet?

After discovering the range of needed items, evaluate the storage space your church can provide. Are shelves needed? Can you store furniture? Will you need to concentrate on certain types of items because of space?

How will you collect items?

Who can you ask to participate? Will your missions group take the lead in sponsoring collection boxes or showers? Is someone available to pick up or deliver larger items? Should you partner with other churches to keep the resource closet stocked?

How will you make it known the resource closet is available?

Be sure any foster or adoptive parents in your church know about the resource closet. When you are certain you will have enough items to fulfill needs, inform community agencies and other churches about the resources you can provide.

Who will maintain the resource closet?

Someone will need to commit to keeping the closet organized and serving the families who come. Who will ensure the list of needed items is current, relevant, and well publicized?

Who will pray for the families and the ministry?

As you pray, consider whether God is calling you to become a foster or adoptive parent.

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