

# ONE ANOTHER

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*Cultivating Christ-Centered Community*

LESSON ONE

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# “ONE ANOTHER” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- In the NT we see a recurring word pattern: an action verb followed by the words one another. In English grammar this is called a reciprocal pronoun: *I am to act a certain way toward you and you should act the same way toward me.*
- The phrase "one another" is derived from the Greek word *allelon* which means "one another, each other; mutually, reciprocally."
- The word occurs ~100 times in the NT. Approximately 59 of those occurrences are specific commands teaching us how (and how not) to relate to one another.
- These phrases are commands for us to obey; we can't opt out and choose not to participate. We shouldn't pick and choose which of the "one anothers" we'll give (i.e. I'll encourage people but not accept them).
- Together they form the basis of all true Christian community and have a direct impact on our witness to the world (John 13:34-35)

Over the next several weeks we'll be looking at many of the "one another" commands in Scripture and exploring the ways in which they call us to treat others with love, care, compassion, hospitality, and so much more. These passages aren't reserved for only a few to follow, nor were they meant to be optional suggestions. Rather, they command us to treat people as Christ treated people. As people who have committed our lives to Christ and to becoming like him, we can't opt out or choose not to participate. *All* of us should give *all* the "one anothers" to *all* people at *all* times. In short, we are *to give all to all*. We love, serve, forgive, and care for one another because God first loved, served, forgave, and cared for us.

We must remember that as followers of Christ, we are people in whom Christ dwells. This is our fundamental identity. As people in whom Christ dwells, we are empowered by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 6:3-4). This awareness is essential for us as we strive to live as disciples of Jesus. Even though we live in a fallen, broken world, we also live under the strength and provision of the kingdom of God.

What does this mean for how we live in community? As people in whom Christ dwells and who live in the kingdom of God, how should we live in relationship with one another? To faithfully enact the "one another" passages, we have to know who we are, whose we are, and where we live. In other words, we can do these things because Jesus has done them and has shown us what life looks like in the kingdom of God. We can do those things for one another because Jesus does those things for us. We are empowered not only by his example but by his life, the gift of his Spirit, and the strength he provides.

What would happen in the church if every single Christian lived out these verses, and how might the world see Christians differently if we really lived these out? Our daily encounters with others are the spaces in which our relationship with God becomes most visible. We need to be reminded that as followers of Jesus, our lives are empowered by his Spirit, which gives us the strength to live unselfishly, to strive for unity, to forgive even when it's not easy, to live generously, and to devote ourselves in full commitment to one another.

We also need a community around us to help us remember who and whose we are, and what that means for our daily lives. These things must be lived out in the context of the church community. And they *must be lived* out. That requires a willing community – a church willing to be led by the Spirit to practice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in all of our dealings – with each other and with the world.

May the blessings of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon us as we work to live this life together in community.

# FOUR THEMES OF THE ONE ANOTHER STATEMENTS



1. **LOVE:** “Love one another” encompasses the entire range of *One Another* statements. As Jesus taught us, the two greatest commands are “Love God” and “Love others.” Many of these statements speak to the outward working of love in our relationships and in various situations.



2. **UNITY:** God calls us to be of one mind as members of the body of Christ. These statements focus on mutual devotion, faithfulness, reconciliation, and commitment to bearing witness to Jesus in the world around us.



3. **HUMILITY & SERVICE:** Jesus’ ministry and leadership was one of humility and service. As we share in Jesus’ death and resurrection, we take up this role reversal of humble service, as well. We are not to seek to put ourselves above one other but to clothe ourselves with humility and to seek one another’s needs above our own.



4. **ENCOURAGEMENT & EDIFICATION:** We build one other up by speaking life-giving words to one other. In the same way, edification should also build others up. Our teaching, instruction, and correction should always deepen one another’s relationship with God rather than tear them down.



THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDS US TO TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH LOVE, HUMILITY, AND RESPECT. WE ARE ALSO TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND BE UNIFIED.

# BE DEVOTED

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## “Be devoted to one another in love” Romans 12:10

### *Read Romans 12:3-10*

The present passage has a good deal in common with other passages in which Paul calls the church to live as a single community, notably 1 Cor 12 and Philippians 2. In both cases what really counts is that the community Paul is addressing is to be shaped by Jesus himself. In the present passage, too, we would be right to see Jesus as the shaping force underneath the argument (12:5). Paul is not merely suggesting ways of behavior in his letter to the Roman Christians. He’s instructing the Romans that this is the kind of behavior that is expected of a Christian in response to the grace of God.

Paul begins this section by telling readers not to think too highly of themselves (12:3). This sets the stage for everything else that will follow. If we have a proper view of ourselves (and thus, a proper view of others), then we will be more inclined to follow Paul’s instructions regarding how to treat one another. Paul reminds his readers that they all play a different but equally important role in the body of Christ (12:4-8). No one person can exist without the rest of the believers. So no one should think his/her role is more important and worthy of praise than others. He says that **love must be genuine and sincere** (12:9) and then shows what this love looks like: **Be devoted to one another in love** (12:10).

- ◆ Paul uses the word *agape* for love in v.9, but becomes more specific by using *phileo* in v.10 to refer to the family love of those living in community.
- ◆ The word he uses for “devotion” is *philostorgos*, which means “to cherish one’s kindred, loving dearly, tenderly affectionate.” It’s a combination of the word for family and the word for the natural affection/love among family.
- ◆ It seems, then, that “devotion” is something that is (or should be) naturally occurring among the family of Christ followers.

In other words, the body of Christ is supposed to be a family where each person actively practices servanthood love to meet the needs of others. The result is a vibrant, exciting fellowship centered on Christ, where loving relationships thrive.

Consider the image of the church described in Acts 2:42-47 and the examples of their devotion to one another:

***They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

In the midst of persecution and struggle, they maintained their devotion to one another and flourished as a result. They cultivated devoted relationships through fellowship, prayer, teaching, support, encouragement, and shared meals — relationships that made evident Christ’s love for all the world.

# WORDS THAT EXPRESS DEVOTION

- **Value:** "I highly value you; you are important to me."
- **Priority:** "My life, like yours, is multifaceted. However, you are a priority to me."
- **Commitment:** "I am committed to you; I pledge to be lovingly involved in your life. I'm in this relationship for the long haul."
- **Meeting needs:** "I am aware of your physical and emotional needs and want to be a part of meeting those needs."
- **Faithfulness:** "Relationally, I'm going to bind myself to you. I'll walk with you through good times and bad. I want you to find security in my commitment to you."
- **Transparent communication:** "I am willing to share with you the deep issues of my life, and you can trust me with the deep concerns of your life."
- **Consistency:** "You can count on me to be a consistent source of love and care."

Time after time we see the central theme of Scripture being others-centered rather than self-centered. Other-centeredness is to focus on the needs of others, even at the expense of meeting personal needs. This is what it means to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God which Paul sees as our spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1-2). We are to do this as we interact with each other in the body of Christ and as we interact with those outside the body of Christ. When Jesus walked the earth he interacted with all levels of society and expressed the law of love to all he came into contact with.

Through the years, however, we develop a very deep sense of devotion to certain individuals, but not to everyone. Those who are married would likely say their highest devotion is to their spouse and family. Even among your friends, you are likely more devoted to some than others.

Jesus did the same. He had a small group of people he was deeply devoted to — his twelve disciples. Even among the twelve, there were three in whom he confided the most: Peter, James, and John. He didn't love these three men more than the others, but he did spend more time with them, allowing them to know him in ways the others didn't. They were invited to be with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, certainly one of the major events of his earthly ministry; they were also with him in the Garden of Gethsemane, arguably the lowest point in his life. Jesus didn't have favorites, but he did have close confidants. He loved everyone, taught thousands, but was devoted to a few.

Likewise, if we were to list the people to whom we are deeply devoted, it would be natural for that list to be limited. On a practical level, it would be impossible for us to express deep devotion to the hundreds of people that we're acquainted with. An authentic sense of devotion can be reserved for a few (see the list to the left to help you consider what authentic devotion entails).

The crucial point, however, is that we are in fact deeply devoted to a group of people. We need these relationships in our lives in order to flourish and become all that God created us to be. We each need a small group of people, both within and outside of our immediate family, who are devoted to us and to whom we devote ourselves — helping and encouraging one another to live out God's will in our lives.

# DISCUSSION

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1. Life is really hard these days. Who is helping you cope and get through it all? Who would you like to thank for being there when you've needed them?
2. Families are bonded by blood or adoption. What bonds members of the family of God together? What is the foundation of this special devotion?
3. In Romans 12:3-10, Paul seems to assume that this kind of loving devotion is naturally occurring among Christians. Do you agree? What are the limits of our devotion – in other words, what keeps us from showing the kind of devotion Paul imagines?
4. As suggested by the “devotion” word list on the previous page, true devotion requires tremendous commitment. Which words on that list stand out most to you? Would you add any others?
5. Have you made a commitment to be devoted to a small group of people? What's one way you can live out this “one another” this week?