

Facebook Message on Loving One Another

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Part 1

Hello family in Christ (whether tagged or just curious):

So what am I writing to all of you about today? Well, in some ways, it's more of a personal manifesto than it is theological writing (although it has lots of scripture because, well, what would else would any personal manifesto of mine be based on?). I'd like to not only share what I think is some godly wisdom with you, wisdom that I believe I am largely applying in my own life (lest I be a hypocrite), but I also want to explain myself and how I roll in greater detail so that there will be no confusion.

Now anyway, I can be a hard person to read at times - I think we all are to those who don't know us all that well, and even those who do get it wrong a lot. That's just the nature of things.

So anyway, I am going to talk about love. By love, I'm don't mean romantic love (although that is relevant and will come up), but the love we have for one another because God loves us. It is something of the highest importance.

Now, I'm not the authority on this (some of you are certainly better about this than I am). But I think what I am saying is true and of God. Here is what I would say about it:

First of all, I'm sure these passages have been thrown out to you before, but it's always important to remember this most basic truth of God:

We are to love one another.

Even going back to the days of Israel, the greatest commandments of the Law (according to Jesus in Matthew 22.36-40) were "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind" (Deuteronomy 6.5) and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19.18). The second is especially pertinent (although none of this will matter if we don't follow the first). Love your neighbor as yourself.

For us believers under the new covenant, this commandment is all the greater. Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another, even as He had loved them (John 13.34-35). That's a pretty tall order... Like most of the Lord's commands, it is not burdensome if you live by the Spirit, but I dare say it is impossible otherwise. And this is not just a specific instruction for the 12.

It is written elsewhere:

- Love is greater than even faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13.13)

- We are to do good to all people, but especially the family of believers (Galatians 6.10)

- " Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves "

(Romans 12.10)

-"Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16.14)

-Just as Jesus declared that the "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (the two above, Matthew 22.4), Paul declares that to love fulfills the Law (Romans 13.8)

-Those who sin and are disciplined should then be welcomed back with love and forgiveness (2 Corinthians 2.5-8)

- When we call one another "brothers and sisters in Christ," it isn't just Christianese; "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as

brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Timothy 5.1-2). That surely wasn’t just an instruction for Timothy, especially since the Lord said "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12.50).

Epistles of Peter:

Peter, inspired by God, writes about love a good bit.

-“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1.22).

- “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3.8).

- “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4.8).

- “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love” (2 Peter 1.5-7).

1 John:

The book of 1 John makes some of the most direct and extreme statements and commandments regarding how we are to love one another:

- Whoever loves God must also love his brother (4.21)

- Loving one another perfects God's love in us (4.12)

- Whoever loves is born of God, and who ever does not love does not know God (4.7-8)

- Just as Jesus laid down his life for us, we should be willing to die for our brothers!

(3.11).

- Love requires a willingness to act and give sacrificially (3.17-18)

- John doesn't hold back at all: "Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (4.20b).

"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (3.15).

There is no ambiguity here. John's words are radical, and there is no way to get around them.

It was largely a good reading of 1 John that really changed my outlook on so many things. Some of you I may have reached out to in the past. I meant every crazy thing I said. I still do. Some may think "you've never done anything for me." Try me. I mean sure, I'm not superman, and there's only so much I can do, but I would do a heck of a lot more than you would expect a person to if you so needed it. I love you all, if for no other reason than out of fear of God. Sometimes it is easier and more natural than other times, but we don't have a choice but to feel and act this way!

How can one even attempt to live up to such tall orders? It doesn't matter how naturally warm or loving you are. None are worthy of God, not live to His standard, so we all need to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, go beyond what is natural to ourselves. For me, it is through prayer and thoughtfulness. I ask myself if my actions are consistent with love. I also consider those who I naturally love and am inclined to have affection for. I ask myself, "how would I treat (insert name)?" More importantly, are there any in the body whom I do not love from my heart? Through prayer, I am given the power to actually change how I feel and how I act. The same is

true for anyone. Some of us may naturally be more loving than others, but all fall short of the glory of God, so we need His Spirit to do it.

The heart and the mind are not mutually exclusive - as former sinners who now know God, we had to and have to change both. It is the same here. If you only love who your heart naturally loves, you fall short. I might love those who are good to me, or girls who are pretty, or even some who appeal to my emotions for bizarre subconscious reasons. But I'm not going to be able to do like God demands. You need to commit to it. It has to be intentional. Yet if you do not ask God to change your heart, your mental commitment can only go so far and last so long. You can't do it alone any more than you can be righteous by your own power. The heart and the will need to go hand in hand.

Lastly, it is not enough to just not sin against one another. Even unbelievers believe in not doing wrong to others. We would expect a normal person to act a certain way towards others. That's not good enough for us. We are no longer normal people. We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5.17). We have to be special. Are we not the light of the world (Matthew 5.14)? I think the scripture speaks for itself. "Whoever loves God must love his brother" (1 John 4.21).

II. A NOTE ABOUT LOVING OUR ENEMIES

The main focus of what I am writing is how we believers love one another, but God did all the same command that we love our enemies. I think we are all fully aware of the Lord's words in Matthew 5.43-48 and Luke 6.27-36. If not, why not take a look? Anyway, what does truly set apart a child of God from everyone else is that we can love those who do not deserve our love, following in the footsteps of our Father and our God who loved us when we did not deserve it. We are not saved for being good (since only God alone is good). We were evildoers same as every unbeliever. Some of us were worse human beings than even many unbelievers. But now that we are saved, to put it bluntly, we should be better than unbelievers. We are to be kind and merciful to our enemies, even to the points of ridiculousness, as Jesus commands (letting them keep what they steal, doing more labor for Roman soldiers than they even demand etc.). Why? Because that is how God is (Luke 6.36). To let the bad person take your tunic is the same as giving it to them. To not retaliate is commanded because that is God's job (Romans 12.19) Beyond even that, however, to not defend yourself with violence, even when you are justified, is tantamount to sparing them the violence you are justified in inflicting upon them, at your own peril. Are there ever situations where we do protect our property or selves? Of course. Letting a bad person steal a tunic is far different than letting him steal the house we need to keep ourselves and our families sheltered. Turning the other cheek to one who slaps you and not defending yourself from murder are not the same thing at all! Remember, the Lord told His disciples, soon before His death, to buy swords (Luke 22.35-36). But even within reason, what Jesus commands is still absurd and goes against our nature. Doing the absurd and unnatural makes us sons of the Most High.

Lastly, regarding loving our enemies, consider this: if we have to show kindness and love to our enemies, how much more should we love our brothers?!

PART 2

III. LOVE IS SELFLESS

They say love hurts, but it should never be the case that our love hurts the one it is directed towards. If love is patient and kind and not-self-seeking and always protects etc, then how can it be something that hurts those who it is aimed at? Love can hurt - it can hurt the one who loves. This is because love is selfless and involves sacrifice. Jesus' love for us obviously hurt Him quite a bit (although obviously it was worth it, or He wouldn't have gone through it all, "being in very nature God" and all). Therefore, whatever love you feel for another, be it romantic love, brotherly love, other forms of love, we as children of God are commanded to love one another selflessly, whatever that means. Do you question if I can live up to my standard? Try me. Ultimately, it is not my standard, but God's. It does me no favors to say this and set the bar for myself so high.

And this principle is not only something that applies regarding romantic love. We are all spurned at one point or another. Sometimes we reach out to those in need and are bitten. Sometimes we try to be friends and are turned away. Sometimes we offer a shoulder to cry on but are told to back off. When spurned, is it love to push yourself on the other? Some people don't want you to express love to them- what is love, to "love them" by doing so anyway, or by backing off even though it hurts you? Some people will never want to open up to you, even though all you want is to heal them. It is out of love that we put ourselves on the chopping block, reaching out to them. For some, like me, who are emotionally fragile, that is really hard to do. But if it becomes apparent that they do not want us, is it not love to back off (though all the while being willing to be there for them again should they call on you)?

PART 3

IV. THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES

A. Brief Background

Dr. Gary Chapman, who apparently a lot of people had heard of long before I did, theorizes that people are most affected by one of five expressions of love: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch. Although this isn't from the bible, it seems to nicely fit what I'm talking about, so I'll touch upon each of them (though in my own order).

B. Physical Affection

At the risk of making a bad pun, this is probably the touchiest of the 5 love languages. And it makes sense for a number of reasons. Not the least of which is that for many (including myself), it is their primary love language. I'm only going to touch upon it a little because in large part this tends to be one of those things that it is usually better not to talk about. But, that's never stopped me, so I am going to say what needs to be said.

One thing that I have become very aware of since joining Crusade and for that matter the whole Christian world is how affectionate Christians can be with those who are neither blood relatives nor romantic partners. I probably got more hugs from non-relatives my freshman year than I did my whole life before. Now that said, as is the case in any cross-section of people, some of us are more physically affectionate than others. Some people might declare "drugs, not hugs, man" while others will embrace total strangers upon meeting them for the first time. Some have qualms about showing physical affection to people of the opposite gender (or even the same)

while pouring it out on their own (or the other, respectively). Some, like me, are not quick to hug others but are happy to receive hugs. You might say such a person is not a hugger, but is huggable.

Now you might ask, given that I claim to be so full of love and that physical touch is my primary language why I am not more affectionate than I am. First of all, I'm not exactly Mr. Bravery, and there is quite a bit of emotional danger involved for anyone. But beyond even that, because that has become less and less of an issue (Jesus has, more and more, given me the gift of a spine), just think about it: what if I were? What if I were more expressive about it in this manner? Just think about how that would probably work out... In fact, I was a bit more in the past, and it did not work out well at all; not for me, and more importantly, not for anyone else.

Like I said, this is a dangerous topic to discuss, with all kinds of different views, many of which are unspoken and probably not even thought about most of the time. As with anything, I will put forth this principle: love your brothers and sisters and put their interest above your own. You won't go wrong if this teaching of God guides you.

Ultimately, the one thing that I do have no qualms about saying is this: be consistent, and don't be a hypocrite. If for example, you don't like to give hugs to members of the opposite sex because you think it's impure, or because you think it is inappropriate because you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, fine. I would strongly disagree with you on both counts...but fine. However, if that is your stance, then that is your stance. Don't go using these excuses with some, only to break your own rule for others. I got news for you, if you actually think it is impure, then it is no less impure if you hug some guy/girl you like more or who is closer to you or even because it seems more appropriate given context (such as seeing someone you haven't seen in a long time). If it is impure because of their gender, than no ordinary circumstance, even if "they

are like a brother/sister” to you, changes that (especially since you should be treating all believers as though they were like a brother/sister). Likewise, if you make excuses because of your boyfriend/girlfriend, it is no less “inappropriate” if you only hug a few special people (in fact if anything it is more inappropriate, since rather than you just being a hugger, there are clearly a few of the opposite sex you hold in very high regard, which according to this line of reasoning would likewise, and even more so, threaten your boyfriend/girlfriend). People notice this kind of stuff (I don't just mean freaks like me). Don't do it. It's wrong. It's tantamount to lying. And it's downright hurtful. There's no excuse for it.

Now again, you might be saying "why are you lecturing me? I don't do that!" If you don't do it, then good! This is aimed at a cross-section of people. No need to worry about any bad behavior I rebuke if you don't do it. Keep doing what you are doing. There's no problem. A lot of people are being addressed, and indeed some things I talk about might not even apply to any specific individuals tagged here. But this bad stuff does happen, so be sure to avoid it.

Indeed, most cases are not nearly as clear cut. If only they were. All I can really say is that I believe we should follow the biblical principle of loving our brothers and sisters, and love is selfless. This goes for both sides. Huggers, respect those who aren't very physically affectionate, or even who, rightfully or wrongly, are only selectively so. Even if you totally disagree with their positions (as I usually do), put their well-being above your own. You're not doing them any favors if you push yourself on them, even if it is only out of affection for them. If you love that person, you will do what is best for them, even if it means not expressing your love for them the way that seems most natural. And to those on the other side of the spectrum, if someone tries to hug you, is it gonna kill you to humor them? Maybe that person isn't a super close friend, but how does it make you feel when you get rejected, be it with hugs or whatever

your love language is? Think about how bad you'd feel if someone responded to your hug attempt with an aloof "side-hug," especially if you know that that person has no issues hugging others, even those of your gender (so you know "purity" or the like isn't an issue). If it is relevant to you, think about what I say. I think I'm on pretty secure ground when I say we should put the interests of others above our own.

C. Words Of Affirmation

Many say that "sticks and stones can break my bones but word can never hurt me" and that "talk is cheap." I believe those words first came from a talking snake back in the Garden of Eden...Words are extremely powerful. There are many times where words are not enough, obviously. But they are not nothing. We all know better. Those who have hurt us the worst, if we are willing to admit it, probably did it with words. Words can also do a lot of good. When we use words to tell people the Gospel, do they not sometimes follow Jesus? Sometimes a complement or a word of affirmation is just what the doctor ordered and can make all the difference.

For some this is their love language. It is not my primary language (physical affection is), but this one is second for me.

Now, what of passages like James 2.15-16, which reads "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" Does this indicate that words are not important? As most of you probably see right away, this is a case where words are meaningless without action. Obviously, telling someone that you wish that they would have food doesn't do anything; giving them food would. Yet an encouraging word in times of strife can do a lot. Context is what matters. If a person is suffering because they lack something, words don't

do much. But what if that person is suffering a bout of low self-esteem? What would you have at your disposal but words? Ultimately, James found words very important - just read on to chapter 3.

Some have even pointed to 1 John 3.18, which reads "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." I have a feeling John that never meant this to be a commandment AGAINST using words. The emphasis is on the importance of action. Verse 17 was the one about the importance of helping your brother. If John were saying we actually shouldn't express love with words, he'd be quite the hypocrite! Nine times in the NIV he refers to the reader as "dear children" or even "my dear children" (including in this very verse!). In the NASB (which translate "dear children" as "little children"), John refers to the reader as "beloved" 6 times. (In the NIV, "agapétos," literally "beloved," is translated as "dear friends" in 1 John) ("27. agapétos."). The other New Testament authors speak to their readers likewise, in a manner that would be quite uncommon in our culture today among men speaking to other men. He and they were very affectionate with their words. Do we really think he is saying "don't use words"? Or, since he's using the words he is said to forbid, might he instead be saying "don't just say nice things - act on them!"?

What do I think? I think we should use our words carefully. Words of affirmation can, at the right time, be enormously helpful. Other times, the same exact words can be terribly destructive. It shouldn't be this way, but I know from experience that sometimes it is. So be wise. As should be the case always, and as is James' point in the first half of chapter 3, control your tongue. I don't mean I think you should hold your tongue. Sometimes that is the right thing, but James didn't say to stop your tongue, but to control it, so it leads you in the right direction (as a rudder controls a ship's direction). I've never been one to say "the closed mouth gathers no fly."

Nobody really means follows that doctrine they preach anyway, it just sounds good because it is conservative. It is my belief that one should speak when it is good to speak, using words that are good to use. I want to emphasize that. I know I am saying very simple and obvious things, but I think they are worth saying. Above all else, apply your wisdom to the core principle that is this: put the interests and needs of your brothers and sisters above yourself.

D. Gifts:

Gifts are good. Unless it is a situation where giving gifts can actually hurt someone, by all means do so. When might it hurt someone? Use your head. A boy giving a girl he isn't even dating a diamond ring might make her a little uncomfortable, which doesn't do her any good, does it? But remember this: Jesus said we should lend money to our enemies with no expectation that they return it (Luke 6.35). Only then is there a reward in it (since not expecting repayment is tantamount to giving it to them). So, if we should give gifts to enemies, how much more our brothers?! Be kind and generous. Regarding gifts, put the other person above yourself.

E. Acts Of Service:

In biblical days, believers were told to wash other believer's feet, for this was an act of service that was very undesirable and very lowly. Traditionally, slaves did it. Today, we have showers, so we don't need others to wash our feet. But the idea is still there. Like Jesus said when washing the disciple's feet "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than

the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13.14-17).

Really, little should restrict us from serving one another besides the other person's interest. Doing too much might make someone uncomfortable, and perhaps to a point where the harm to them exceeds the good. It shouldn't be this way, but sometimes it is. Other than that, it's good to serve one another, for "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23.11). So don't hesitate to serve your brethren; jump at the opportunity. It is even rewarding in and of itself, because you will find (if you haven't already, though I'm sure many have), that you actually enjoy serving those you love.

F.. Quality Time:

I think that it is good that we enjoy each other's company. Obviously, we get along with some better than others. Someone whose personality is more compatible with mine and who has similar interests as me I will surely spend more time with. That's fine. King David, who was a man after God's own heart had, a special relationship with Jonathan (1 Samuel 18.1). Even Jesus, who was perfect and perfectly loving was apparently closest to John, as he was the "disciple that Jesus loved" who would rest on His bosom, which was normal for close friends to do back then (John 13.23).

All I can really say here is this: if there is some brother you really could never spend quality time with, figure out why that is, and do something about it, always acting in the other's interest. If it is because of some flaw of there's, love them despite it, and if it can be profitable, point it out to them, in love, if doing so will benefit them. If it is something in you, ask God for help. Again, not everyone will be or even could be best of friends. There just isn't enough time

for us on this side of eternity. That is ok. But we still have to love one another. And if we are a family, can one honestly say "I love so and so, I just don't like him..."? Just think about that.

I like seeing you all at events and in places, even though some are not my closest friends. Heck, some of you I hardly even know. But surely, I am all for quality time with any one of you (though with us being college students, that isn't always easy).

Of course, it probably wasn't that easy for the first Christians either. Most of them were poor laborers who worked their lives away. It's not like they would have tons of free time to hang out and get to know every individual brother really really well. But they did fellowship regularly. They even called the meal they shared before the Lord's supper "love feasts" ("Entry for 'LOVE FEAST'"). Now, while the Lord's Supper was commanded in some form or another, love feasts weren't, at least not by name. But think about what that meant. A bunch of people in a given area, living different lives, all got together and enjoyed each other's company, all in the name of the Lord.

Or consider this modern example: when someone has a birthday or something, is it not uncommon to see on the Facebook page invites to way more people than you are close friends with that purpose? We are believers in Christ, we love one another, and we get together and enjoy each other's company. In a sense, these are like our "love feasts." It doesn't matter that a few are close friends and the rest are just those you see once or twice a week at Cru or church or whatever else. Really, we live this idea out without even thinking about it, which is really good. Just remember that. We like being with one another, be it between closest friends or just what the world would call "acquaintances."

It's not like a lot of us really do know a lot of use well at all. Just think about that. How little do you know about most of your brothers and sisters except for the select group you hang

out with regularly? This may be truer for me than some of you, but I think it is safe to say that it is true for all of us. But that's okay. We are not the world, and we can love one another and have fun and enjoy one another despite this. That's not to say unbelievers don't get along well with acquaintances – I mean, ever heard of a party? I'm just saying, it should be the case for us all the more so.

I think the one thing to remember, no matter what your love language, is to love your brothers, which means putting their needs and wants above your own. Let that guide you. Don't worry, loving others feeds your soul (and when they also follow God and love you back, it's even better).

PART 4

V. DATING/“RELATIONSHIPS”

As some of you may know, I have never had a girlfriend in my life (except maybe when I was 5, but that doesn't really count). For most of my life that wasn't by choice. Today, it isn't my willful choice, but it is not against my will either. I simply am not seeking a romantic relationship. That's not to say I have any vow or decision not to date. Who is to say that tomorrow something might come up and things would change. However, I am not seeking to change it. It's not a priority. There are so many more important things I have to deal with right now.

It was once said, something to the effect of "maybe men and women cannot be friends" because of the tendency of intergender friendships to lead one party to develop romantic desire for the other. Indeed this is a common occurrence. And as I am very well aware, unrequited desire can unfortunately ruin great friendships. There are some things that I have to say about that.

When I read this (it was on Facebook), I came up with a crazy idea based on how I was already acting. If we have close and beloved friends of the opposite sex, and we develop such feelings, how about we consider NOT acting on them if we know it will make things worse? Novel idea I know. That's not to say I think it is necessarily wrong to act on them. I am not one of those who preach "dating is bad; your relationship should be with Jesus!" What I am saying is this: the world is wrong when it tells us we should just "take a chance" and "you'll never know if you don't try." Step back for a moment. Consider what might happen if it doesn't work out. You aren't just asking out some stranger at a bar. (Given that the bible teaches us not to yolk ourselves

to unbelievers - 2 Corinthians 6.14 - I would like to be able to accept it as a given that nobody is seeking to ask someone out unless they know that person is a true believer). You can cause serious damage. These close platonic relationships can breed a great deal of trust. These close friendships can make people very comfortable with one another, and usually this is good. Unwisely trying to "take things to the next level" can really screw this up. This can cause a lot of emotional trauma. At this age now more than ever, we lean on our friends quite a lot. Like I've always said, if your faith in Jesus is strong you'll survive being hurt, but you hardly want to put your brother or sister through that.

One reason I am so very hesitant to ever consider seeking a relationship now is because of the damage it may cause. Granted, most of you sisters who receive this aren't really close to me on that kind of level (though I certainly love you as if you were). This will vary from person to person. For some of you it will be much more like this than others. But I certainly like to think that I have been good to you in one way or another. Now anyway, how can I expect you to trust me if I started looking at you as potential girlfriends? How could I expect you to trust me if my intentions were in doubt? Will I develop crushes? Have I already? Of course! I'm a 21-year old male with the same hormones and unspoken emotional needs as every other. However, I don't act on them. My intentions are not to seek from you anything from you. We are to carry one another's burdens. I hardly look at myself as some superb selfless servant; after all, you have carried my burdens as well, probably without even realizing it. But if I started acting in order to gain this kind of favor, how could I be trusted? Obviously I want you all to like me - your presence brings me great joy. But even if I were to "like" you, I would not act upon it if it would damage things between us, which pretty much means I won't be acting upon it. I would rather miss out on every "relationship" than leave one of you disillusioned. I hardly think me missing

out on anything will be much of an issue given my virtually non-existent dating history and the nature of things...but the idea is the same.

It is easy for me - the bible commands that I treat you all as sisters, so no matter what my immediate feelings for you, or lack there of, I'm gonna be there for you all the same. I have no choice, if I am to call my self a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and a child of God. I don't say that to make it sound like this is all unwilling. I genuinely feel this way about you all - I merely point out it is all God's mandate so you know it all isn't as unpredictable and unsecured as my feelings. My emotions are fickle, but God is not.

You have only gotten a small taste of what I would be willing to do for you. Maybe I have given you a little money when you needed it. Maybe I have been an ear for you, or a metaphorical shoulder to cry on. Maybe you're thinking "what have you ever done for me?" (Again, if that's you, then now you know I am here and will do things for you). It doesn't matter - the bible says that we should be willing to lay down our very lives for our brothers. Therefore, in all circumstances, I have to be there for you, even if I naturally wouldn't want to be because I am not naturally like our Lord. My heart belongs to God now, and He can make a lot of great things happen within it.

Now obviously I'm not superman, and there is only so much I literally can do. Literally and figuratively, I can spare a kidney, but whether I would be a match or not would be beyond my control. Nor could I give each of you one; that would literally be impossible. However, I am crazy enough to mean the things I say and totally go out of my way for you if need be. After all, if we are to show unnatural kindness even to our enemies, how much more should this be the case for the family of believers?! Any desires I may have, though not in and of themselves sinful, if they would cause harm to you, must and will be put aside.

Now, that said, I do think that we as humans do have a tendency to let issues of romance too easily ruin what was good and what should be stronger if it were as good as we say. Do any of you ever watch iCarly? Probably not, since you aren't between the ages of 11-14...However, one running gag is the unrequited crush Freddie has on Carly. Carly is fully and openly aware of it. However, Carly and Freddie remain as close as ever before. Freddie's unrequited feelings did not destroy what they have. Believe it or not, I am not always on Freddie's side of this situation. There have been times where I have been "liked" unrequitedly. In instances since my acceptance of Jesus, I have willfully and intentionally not allowed myself to be pushed away. These weren't with super close friends, but they were with friends nonetheless. I have not pushed away in any sense, and in some senses have sought to be kinder and more loving as a friend as part of my development in Christ (though when necessary, making it clear that my feelings haven't changed). Just as we should all be aware of the damage acting on such feelings can have, we should also treat others as we would want to be treated. Would you want your best friend to turn away from you just because it became known you wanted more? Of course not. So show the kind of emotional endurance that you wish they had. Be the change you want to see, be like you wish others to be.

Summed up, I am not opposed to having boyfriends or girlfriends (depending on your, ya know, gender). However, to me, such is not a priority. My concerns are not "how can I get that girl I like" or "who would make a great girlfriend." Such ideas come to me, but they must take a back seat to my role as your brother, as a disciple, as a member of the body. I'm not looking at you as mates. Indeed, one day God may will it differently. It may even be soon, but that is for Him to put together. It's not as though I don't think I'm special enough for that to never take place. It doesn't matter. I'll cross that bridge if I find it. Today, I know full well that to look at

things in terms of “romance” will hurt those I love (as well as myself). Romantic relationships come and go, but you will always be my sisters. If my looks, personality, cowardice, or any of the other things which have kept me single until now do not themselves keep me single, this attitude probably will. So be it. My duty to you as your brother is number one, because that is the will of the Lord, to whom my allegiance is the most important thing.

PART 5

VI. BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

The scripture tells us that we are to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6.2). That can refer to so many things. In context, it refers specifically to helping one another stay righteous and deal with spiritual weakness. Surely though, given all kinds of commandments to love one another, to do good to one another, to treat one another as family, surely the idea of bearing each other's burdens can be applied to other aspects in life. And indeed, you all already do this with one another. It is encouraging that you all have shown kindness and loving towards others. It is good when you care for one another when in need, be it of someone to talk to, some sort of material favor, prayer, a hug, whatever else. I would only say that, for those who do this well, continue doing so, and keep getting even better each day. Like Paul said when lauding and affirming the Thessalonians for their love for the saints, "Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4.10). For others, if you have not lived up to God's standards, then start doing so today.

I will add, it's not enough to only do this for your friends and be unwilling to help or love others. Don't get me wrong. None of us can be expected to be there for every person for their every need. I would be a hypocrite above anyone else if I were saying that, because I'm no risen Lord. You can't offer a hug or kind word to someone who you don't know is even hurting. You can't serve your brother who you are unaware is in need. There are millions of believers on earth, most of whom we'll never even meet. But if your brother or sister is before you, and you can help them, why wouldn't you? It is written: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1 John 3.17). For us in Irvine,

material needs are much less of an issue (though if it is, this surely applies all the same). But the principle is right there, and it surely applies to all aspects of life.

I also am well aware that it is easier to get your friends to let you help them. I would be willing to be there for any of you, but it's not as though the majority of good I do to believers isn't directed to my friends. That's just how it goes. Strangers tend to be less willing to tell you their problems, or ask you for help. Plus, I'm not exactly Mr. Bravery, and reaching out isn't easy for me. That's largely why I'm being so upfront here. Often, I may be afraid to do anything because doing so, in the wrong situation, only harms both of us. So now you know that it's not that I don't care. So know that you can just come to me. Surely I'll do something, whatever it is I can do. I am willing to be there for you, as I have for friends and people I hardly know alike. Helping my brothers and doing the will of God brings my heart great joy. Consider this: do you not feel really good when you help your friends or loved ones, someone you really care about? Just doing it is its own reward. That's how it's supposed to be with one another! We are supposed to actually love one another from our hearts, which manifests itself in action.

What does this mean practically? When your brother or your sister comes to you, be there for them. We need to be able to trust one another.

This is really important to me, because I have been on both sides of this. If your brother or sister comes to you, and they seem to want a hug or a moment of your time, be kind to them, even if you don't really want to. Whatever is happening with them may not seem that important to you at the time, but for all you know they might be going through a really tough time. They may be brokenhearted and just not willing to say so. At any time, the littlest thing could be your time to shine or to fail. You may only find out later that when your brother needed you, you were there for him, or, when your sister reached out to you, you turned your back. Always show one

another kindness and love. If you already are, then just keep doing what you are doing. If you are not, turn things around.

Now, I do realize that I am not always Mr. Extrovert, and knowing how to best express one's godly love, which I am full of, is not always easy for people like me. That said, there is an obvious difference between being a coward and being wise. I don't only hold back out of cowardice. It can be a tricky thing. Not only is reaching out to anyone in any case emotionally dangerous, but it isn't always the right thing to do for them either. How many genuinely caring individuals (especially guys) are all too often misunderstood, making uncomfortable and ultimately harming those they wish to heal? It shouldn't be that way, but in a world where you generally can't trust anybody, this is inevitable. If I have not reached out to you when you think I should have, then genuinely I am sorry. And I do have my biases of course, and such biases always need to be overcome. Like I said before, you have to be intentional about it, every day with every person. I must remind myself of this, that to be good to everyone, you need to be intentional about it. No matter how well and how much better than me you reflect our Lord by nature, you need to be intentional about it, for we are never perfect by nature.

It's a sad truth that we do not always know when this has occurred. Who knows who I have failed before? (I know I failed many as an unbeliever). But now, it is my conviction that I will do as I say, lest I be a hypocrite. If I failed you before I am truly sorry. The last thing I ever want to be is like those who have failed me. Please forgive me for when I didn't show you the love I should have. I am not the same infant I was when I first came to belief some 2 1/2 years ago.

PART 6

VII. FORGIVENESS

Along those lines, forgiveness is beyond crucial. We all know the parable of the unmerciful servant from Matthew 18. Where Jesus uses a stick, Paul uses a carrot. Remember that it is written: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4.32). There's more to forgiveness than just the legalistic rule that "if you have been forgiven, you must forgive." Forgiveness is what you do when you have compassion for someone else. When you love someone, you forgive them.

Consider this: God is often compared to a father (and on a few occasions, a mother). Most of us have had good parents. (For those who did not, I am truly sorry. In that case, remember that in God's eyes, even good parents, the kind of sweet and loving parents that your friends or the kids on TV had that you always longed for and should have had, are evil. God, who is so much better than even them, who alone is good, is now your Father).

For the rest, consider this: how many of you have, while growing up, wronged your parents? How difficult is it to be a parent? Surely it is more difficult than just about anything else! Having issues with guilt myself, I am fully aware of how hard I made things for my parents (and my mother actually brags to her friends how EASY I and my sisters were to raise!). Despite all this, do not (good) parents love their children more than their own lives? Of course, parents will punish their children when they do wrong, but only for the child's sake (that's the difference between vengeance and discipline) (Good) parents would do just about anything for their children. I'm sure many of you can relate to this. Your parents loved you, and you know that their love overlooks all the wrong you have ever done. (Good) parents love their children so

much that, even though raising the best of them was extremely difficult and full of emotional pain and distress and sacrifice, it was absolutely worth it. Who of us who have (good) parents would even question that our parents are glad that they had us?

Consider the import of that? Despite all the burden of having kids, a (good) parent would never think twice, because they are so full of love and compassion for their children that all they did wrong, for all intents and purposes, never happened.

It is written "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him" (Psalm 103.13). The same Psalm also says "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Verse 12). God's love for repentant sinners is so great that it will overshadow all that we did wrong. Those of us who fear God are so deeply loved that, just as our parents do not even take our sins against them into account, God Almighty loves us too much for it to matter.

(Now, I'm not saying He does not love the lost as well. His love was shown at the cross, so that they might be like us, His children).

If that is how God treats us, and we are to forgive like God forgave us, then does it not follow that we are to be like God, so full of love and compassion that we naturally forgive from the heart? Obviously the relationships between us aren't really like parents with children, since almost all of us are about the same age, but you get the idea. We should still be ready and willing to forgive easily.

Of course, we are still weighed down by the flesh, and so forgiving isn't always easy and can take work. Like I said before, you need to be intentional about it. Even if you are generally spirit-led, your natural inclinations can lead you in the wrong direction. If you don't love one of your brothers, if you can't forgive, then say to yourself "this is wrong." Turn to God, because He

will empower you. If your heart belongs to Him, then he will change it and make it pure.

Remember, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5.8). There is no coasting in the Christian life, especially regarding the heart. Know your heart. When there is love in your heart, let it lead you, and don't let your better judgment, which is hardened by sin and the pain of life, stop it. If there is not love, be intentional and do what you know is right. If your heart is not as it should be, turn back to your Lord. After all, He is the vine and we are the branches. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15.5).

Always be there for your brothers and sisters. Your brothers should always be there for you. But if they fail you, forgive them. Please forgive my failures. Know that I will always forgive you. Our Father's love endures forever (Psalm 118.1) – we should do likewise.

Also, never hold onto anger. If it something small you can easily overlook, then it's probably fine to ignore it. But generally, say something about it. Like Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17.3b-4).

Sometimes, you need to say something to the person who sins against you, or they might not realize they did anything. For those of you whom I have not loved like I am saying we all must, I am truly sorry and I do ask for your forgiveness. But I don't have a list compiled of people I have wronged. If I have, I am not aware of it. If I need to make things right with you, how can I do so without you telling me?

One thing I have learned is this: aside from any implications regarding your own salvation (which opens up all kinds of debates about eternal security and whether or not a

believer actually can go on without forgiving his brother), I have a secret for you. Loving and forgiving builds you up and blesses you. Not forgiving will destroy you even in this life.

If your brother or sister fails you, resents you, even scorns you, and your love still endures, not only have you fulfilled the Law of Christ, but you understand the love of God better. You are evil, and if you can love unconditionally, how much better should you be able to understand the love of Him who is good?! When you just naturally delight in the fact your brother or sister exists, even when they haven't earned your favor, suddenly you can relate to the idea that that is how God delights in His creations, including us. Consider this: you can never be more righteous or more merciful or kind or loving than our Lord. If you are a little bit compassionate, then you can understand that Jesus is at least that loving. If you are extremely compassionate, then you know that Jesus is at least that compassionate!

What of our brothers who will not repent? Make them aware of the wrong they do, and take it one day at a time. This leaves us with a gray area. Given what Jesus said about what to do when your brother sins against you before telling the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18, it seems clear that the repentance of the brother who has sinned is assumed. This seems especially true when one looks at Luke 17.4, where Jesus responds to the same question by Peter that led to the parable in Matthew 18. It is believed these are accounts of the same instance (though Luke's is more concise).

I would say this: at the very least, wish them no ill, wish them only good, and let yourself be filled with loving-kindness for that person. Consider the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15.12-32). There was nothing the father could do while the son was away. Yet when his son came to him, he did not hesitate to forgive him. He didn't simply say "ok fine, I'm not angry I guess." He ran out, hugged and kissed him, and was overjoyed that the son had returned. That is

how our hearts should be for our brothers who wrong us. The father loved the son as if the son hadn't done all he had done before. That is how God loves us, and that is how we are to treat one another. Things will never be right until you both fully reconcile, yet it takes two to tango. Do your part, so that you will be blameless before God, and pray the rest falls into place. If they are really of God they will eventually come around, even if it takes years (or even your whole life). Patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.22).

PART 7

(The rest is really just some observations and some more stuff about myself).

VIII. JUST AS WITHIN A FAMILY THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF RELATIONSHIPS, SO IT IS HERE

It's no secret that we all have different personalities, and our relationships with any person will be different than with another. And that is okay. We don't all have to be the same or have the same kind of relationships with one another for us to still be good and kind and godly. Just think about what it is like in a family with many children. I am one of 3 children, which isn't a particularly big family, but in a lot of ways it is far different from a family of only 2. As was my experience, and just generally seems to be the case, is that different siblings will get along differently. Is it not normal that two siblings close in age tend to be closer, spend more time together, and also more likely to fight and push each others buttons? On the other hand, older siblings tend to be more serious and more protective of younger siblings, in some ways more like a parent. They are less close in some ways, but in other ways, the older sibling may be seen as the good sibling, because he or she, being more mature, is less likely to provoke fights or be mean. Ultimately, if the family is well and healthy, there will plenty of love to go around. The relationships will be different, but all will be well. Like in a body, your much older/younger sibling is like one part, and those closer in age will be like another.

I think that that really sums up how it is in life, especially in our body. Some of you push each others buttons and stuff, but you are really quite close. When a sister complains of a brother "he's so mean to me!" do you really think I'd sit idly by if I thought this was a problem? Why, it will be those same two who choose to spend more time together than any others! You're like two

siblings of similar age. You're playful; you're friends. For others, you carry on differently. The older sibling is more likely to be more serious and, if a good sibling, more caring and protective (as opposed to just seriously hostile). Maybe you two don't hang out quite as much per se, but you when you do, it is less like two children who play practical jokes on one another, and more like an older sibling with a younger one. And neither is better or worse than the other. Both are really important.

For what it is worth, when it comes down to it, I find my personality type to be much more like the older brother than the twin. You may be thinking, "but you're the silliest goose in the gander." Well, you probably wouldn't have described it that way, but anyway, that may be true, but it's not so much about silliness. We all have different ways of expressing our affection for another. For some, it may be by acting stupid, like a child. Now despite my use of those words, that isn't a bad thing. Siblings who are close in age and treat each other that way, if all is good, are incredibly close. It's not worse, just different. Others are more apt to show their love in more serious ways, through kind words, service, physical affection, and whatever else.

Truth be told, I've never been good at being a nice jerk. What do I mean? I think this is one of those things best described by example. In middle school when boys and girls realized the other didn't have cooties, boys would pick on girls, and at times would play keep-away. Those guys are the nice jerks. They don't act out of malice – they aren't actually trying to hurt anyone; that's just how young people are. I've never been good at being that guy. But anyway, I'm the sensitive guy who pops in, jumps up, catches the girl's backpack or whatever, and returns it. Who do the girls hang out with more? Generally, the nice jerk. But they certainly appreciated the nice guy, and would still be friends with him, even if they didn't hang out as much as with the jerks. Neither guy is bad, but is just like different parts of a family.

When I have tried to be like the cool jerk, I just end up looking like a jerk. I recently came to the realization that it just doesn't work for me. Why I am judged so differently? I don't know, maybe it's my personality, or my size, or just an intangible vibe. Here is an anecdote from TV. Who remembers Doug? If not, just understand this much. A female character named Patty, who was an athlete and quite fit and in shape, started to be concerned about her weight (they're in middle school). Now, on one occasion, she asked Doug if she was fat (like girls tend to do, lol). Doug, at the absurdity of the question, laughed and responded in a clearly sarcastic tone "oh yeah, you're huge." As for how anyone could take Doug seriously is beyond me, but because Patty was having an extended mental breakdown, she took him seriously and tried desperately to lose weight and so on (like so many sitcoms with girls that age). I feel that for some reason I am the Doug all too often, taken seriously when there is no way I should be. I guess it is what it is.

I am willing to talk more individually to any of you who still are hurt, but I in general apologize to anyone I have insulted like that. I never meant those things – that was the point of the joke! I wouldn't say it if it were true; that'd just be evil. But some have been hurt, and if that is you, I really am sorry.

Either way, even the tendency for me to be misunderstood aside, I'm really the serious, sensitive big brother type, especially with my sisters. That's just who I am. In my nature I am much quicker to be protective than benevolently competitive. And this is a reflection of personality. (Obviously for some, I'm like a little brother, but you get the idea). Don't get me wrong, I can be as fun and silly as the next guy, but it's my nature to be the guy who catches the girl's bag.

Now of course this isn't black and white. It's just my general observation.

To those who are like the nice jerks, it's cool. Just be sure to keep being a nice jerk. I know that you are the same ones who will offer your seat to your sister and do the right things. Just always be sure to never go past the line between being silly and being mean. Remember that in a good family, there comes a time where our silliness must be put aside, because ultimately, when it comes down to it, we are all full of Christ's love which is serious. (Ya know, don't make fun of your sister when she is crying about something, but instead be gentle and brotherly; simple stuff like that). Always act with love in all things. If that is your guiding principle, than I believe that I am on safe ground to say that you won't go wrong.

In short, as long as we all act with love for one another, we will be like one big happy family.

PART 8

IX. SUMMING IT UP

That is what I have to say about that. We are made anew by the Lord, and this is all part of what that means. Just as God is full of unfailing love for us, as well as anyone who repents (for He shows no favoritism among men), so too should we be full of love for one another. We should be willing to do what is unnatural and crazy. Like I said, don't let your better judgment stop you. It is better to love too much and look silly in the eyes of worldly people than to be "wise" and ungodly. Love, forgive, and delight in each other and the promises of God that we know are true. Got questions or comments? You know me, I'm all ears. And may the love and mercy of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ always rule your every move. Amen.

ADDENDUM October 30, 2011

X. Examining The Greek

Now, it is important to note that in Greek, there is more than one word that gets translated as "love." In the verb form, there are generally said to be three kinds of love.

- "eros": Refers to sexual desire. Although sexual desire, in its place, is good and is discussed in the Bible, this term never appears in scripture (Newman and Newman).

- "Philadelphia": Strong defines it as "brotherly love" (75). Thus, the city, the city in Pennsylvania is called "the city of brotherly love."

- "Agape": refers to a selfless, sacrificial love. It also means "to highly value, and unconditionally have at heart the genuine welfare and best interests of the object loved" (Newman and Newman). It is love in the sense of "benevolence" and "charity" (Strong, 7), though it also refers to the affection for the one loved by the one who loves (7).

Here's why this matters: predominantly, when speaking of us loving one another, the Bible speaks of "agape" love. At first, it may be hard to see how that could lead to anything bad. However, I fear that, given the Bible's emphasis on selfless love that leads to action, there may be a temptation to downplay the idea of Christians loving one another as friends, and people deeply devoted to one another. After all, if love is about selflessness and doing stuff, isn't the Bible saying that, though we have to care about each other's needs, that we don't have to seek out any brotherly connection with one another? In other words, do we have to try to "like" other believers (insofar as it depends on us and not them) as long as we "love" them (in the sense of doing nice things)?

First of all, although the emphasis is on selflessness and kindness towards one another, there is more to loving one another biblically than just doing nice things and giving. There is to be an element of warm, familial fellowship. Love in the form of "agape" is emphasized, and for many good reasons; the biggest reason is surely that it is a reflection of how God has selflessly and sacrificially loved us. First of all, there is an element of affection in the word (Strong, 7). It isn't solely based on cold action. Also, though it is probably the most important description of how we are to love one another, it is not the only love spoken of. In Romans 12.10, cited above, it is written: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." The term used for "brotherly love" is "philadelphia," not "agape." Furthermore, "be devoted to" is the Greek "philostorga," which Strong defines as, among other things, "kindly affectioned" and how one is "fond of natural relatives" (76). That clearly signifies a personal, relational love.

Secondly, the two often go hand in hand. Consider 1 Peter 1.22: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love ["philadelphia"] for your brothers, love ["agapao"] one another deeply, from the heart." You have brotherly love in your heart, and thus, it will manifest itself in selfless action. Yet even the "agape" love we are to have comes from the heart. Love really is a feeling, though it is more than that. To recap, a purified believer will have both "kinds" of love in their heart, and will go from there. Similarly, consider 1 Thesalonians 4.9: "Now about brotherly love ["philadelphia"] we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love ["agapao"] each other." Here again, the two forms of love go together. They love one another selflessly, and thus, they don't need to be exhorted regarding brotherly, affectionate love. It is not as though they have one and not the other. To do one is to accomplish the other. And this shouldn't surprise us; those whom one naturally will love selflessly are those for whom one has brotherly love. God doesn't merely

order us to do nice things for one another. Rather, He renews our minds (Romans 12.2) and purifies our hearts (Hebrews 10.22) so that, as Jesus Himself explained, we and others who follow Him will all be like family (Matthew 12.50).

- Thirdly, the 2 words themselves are at least sometimes interchangeable. There is a reason they are usually translated the same way. Consider when Jesus reinstates Peter in John 21. It's a little long to quote, but recall that Jesus asks Peter, three times, if he loves Him. Three times, Peter says that he does. Now, some harp on the fact that Jesus twice uses "agapao," yet Peter responds that with "phileo." However, at least how John uses them (since Peter and Jesus were probably speaking in Hebrew or Aramaic, not Greek), the two words are rather interchangeable (and John's Gospel, after all, is the inspired text). What happens next? It is written: "The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love [phileo] me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love [phileo] me?'" (John 21.17a). Some see the fact that it changes from "agapao" to "phileo" as indicative that Jesus meant something different the third time. However, that clearly is not the case. What upset Peter, it explicitly says, is that Jesus asked a third time. If the meaning was all that different, it would not have been the third time that He asked, would it? Furthermore, when John tells us that it was because Jesus repeated the question again, and repeats it himself, he uses "phileo." Yet Jesus hadn't asked if Peter "phileo" loved Him 3 times, but only once. The only way that what John says could work, and not be obviously false to the native reader, is if the terms at least can mean the same thing (which they would in this case).

- Fourth, it just sorta makes sense. Even our kindness to our enemies, our selfless "agape" love, isn't going to come out of anger or hatred. It isn't the same situation, obviously; with them we are not brothers, nor are we told to have "brotherly" love per se. However, we will truly want

what is best for them. Ultimately, that is salvation, and if that were to happen, then they would be our brothers, at which point, we would treat them as such, both in heart and action. It all ties together, even then. They are not our brothers with whom we share brotherly love, but we want them to be. Is that not in itself at least some degree of brotherly love (albeit not in the same degree by any stretch)? Or, perhaps that simply blurs lines, but that's kind of how this works.

We are certainly to love one another in selfless action, in caring about each other's needs. However, we are not simply benevolent robots. We care for each other because we genuinely care about one another, as family. That's why the Bible commands us to love one another in every non-sexual way. And that is why, when I find myself not "liking" another believer, I do something about it. If it is outside of my control (like when another professing Christian openly dislikes me), you'll never hear me saying that we could never be friends should things change. That's all on them. You can't control how others treat you, and as I said before, it takes two to tango. But, do your part. Do what the scripture commands, because we are no longer natural men. We are to love one another, in every way that God intends.

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