

7 Ways to Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

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"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:31

This is probably one of the most quoted statements in the bible. It can be found in numerous places throughout scripture, and we reference it frequently. But, do we really know what it actually means to love our neighbors as ourselves? And, could it be, that we actually love some of our neighbors differently than we love ourselves?

Some find it easy to love the elderly man with tattered jeans, ruffled hair, and a hand-scratched sign begging for help. Others find it easy to love the orphan with the bloated belly who isn't even old enough to beg. Other people's hearts are broken for the women who are forced by life's circumstances into the grips of prostitution. Some find it difficult to love the neighbor who is sitting in the pew right next to them. Others find it difficult to love the neighbor who is sitting in a different pew, in a different Church that doesn't hold to the same biblical viewpoints.

Others find it difficult to love the white man who works on Wall Street, the black man in political office, the Hispanic woman who's risen up the corporate ladder, or the Muslim woman who's fighting for her rights. Some find it difficult to love the foreigners among us.

I'm certain that all of us identify with a group of people from a particular life circumstance or background and are filled with compassion and love for them. We find it easy to love those neighbors as we love ourselves.

I'm also certain that all of us struggle—or have struggled—truly loving our neighbor, because our *neighbor* takes on many forms. Our neighbor is the woman we call a gossip who worships right beside us, the young teen who graffiti's the neighborhood playground, the teacher whose curriculum we question, and the man who attends a church that's not in our denomination.

The issue isn't who our neighbor is and who we're supposed to love. The issue is our hearts. Who are we? And, are we willing to show love, mercy, and compassion? Will we get caught up in who we should help and love, how often we're supposed to, and how much; or will we simply allow the Holy Spirit to work through us?

We don't have to confuse unity and love within the body of Christ with passivity and uniformity. We're all different and at different places in our walk with the Lord. He's

working on each of us. **We can be united in love and still stand firm in our beliefs and challenge one another to rise above.**

We're not always moved by compassion for people, especially the difficult people in our lives, but here are seven practical ways we can actually love our neighbors. Let's write these seven declarations on our hearts and commit to being people who fight against bondage, injustice, and the principalities of darkness as opposed to one another.

In loving my neighbor as myself, I declare the following 7 ways to show love to my neighbor as I do myself:

1. I'll See My Neighbor

I will love my neighbors, whoever they are, by truly seeing them. I will look past the obvious, the outer shell, and I will look into their eyes, their hearts, and their circumstances. If I am blinded by my own bitterness or anger, I will beg God to give me His eyes to see His beloved creation as He does.

2. I'll Ask for Forgiveness and Offer it

I'll ask for forgiveness for the strongholds within my own heart that keep me from sympathizing with or loving another. If I am closed off or indifferent towards a particular person or people group, I'll confess it before the Lord and ask for His forgiveness. If I need to ask for forgiveness from my neighbor, I'll humble myself and apologize.

If I need to extend forgiveness towards a particular person or people group, I'll extend it.

3. I'll Pray

I'll love my neighbors by praying for them—even if it's through gritted teeth at first. I'll beg God to give me a sincere heart, and I will petition and pray until I am sincere. I will pray for my neighbors' circumstances, salvation, and walk with the Lord. I'll pray for the everyday and the momentous. I will pray for my neighbors, especially the ones I least want to pray for.

4. I'll Rejoice and Mourn

I will walk alongside my neighbors. I will rejoice when they rejoice and mourn when they mourn. I will align my spirit with theirs as I say, "I'll give thanks with you and I'll cry with you." I'll bear the burden of the pain and anguish, because I know that Christ is the ultimate burden-bearer, and I'll shout for joy in tandem with their cries of thanksgiving and praise.

5. I'll Learn and Be Teachable

Christ's ways are often hard and challenging, and I'll choose the harder path. I'll be teachable, and I'll learn. I'll allow my neighbors to challenge my heart without taking offense or becoming bitter. I'll be teachable and moldable. I'll accept constructive criticism as the pathway that draws me closer to Christ. I won't be self-righteous or act like a know-it-all.

6. I'll Ask Hard Questions About Myself

I'll ask myself hard questions. Why do I think the way that I think? Why do I behave the way that I behave? Was that right? Was that Christ-like? I won't accept the status quo and will ask myself if I'm really living in accordance with the teachings of Christ or if I'm confused.

7. I'll Refuse to Be Judgemental but I Will Spur Others to be Like Christ

God calls us to spur others on to become more Christ-like, but, again, our heart issues often get in the way. We take it to extremes—we often become self-righteous and judgmental or we refuse to point out areas in others' lives where God wants to bring freedom and truth.

I declare that I will love my neighbor by refusing to house a judgmental spirit. I refuse to focus on the sin in my neighbor's life as opposed to the sin in my own. I will, however, be bold enough to challenge my neighbor in love and to pray for areas of bondage, pain, injustice, and sin in his life. I will love my neighbor by understanding that love doesn't always feel fuzzy, but often challenges and calls out something greater so that he can experience the fullness of Christ.

***Holly Mthethwa** is passionate about sharing God's word in everyday life. She has been a missionary advisor in Peru and India, led **Bible** studies in the U.S. and South Africa, and is the author of the Christian memoir, *Hot Chocolate in June: A True Story Of Loss, Love, and Restoration*. She resides just outside of Washington, D.C. where she lives an adventure with her husband and daughter. Holly writes regularly about **faith**, family, and moments that have hooked her heart at www.ruggedandredeemed.com.*