



A Well-Defined
FAITH

[fāth] (noun)

Biblical words used in church...
Discover what they really mean.



Sunday
July 12, 2026

John 13:34-35

Example Teaching Rhythm

Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes

This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.

Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes

Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.

Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes

This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.

Prayer: 10 Minutes

Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond**. Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

Highlight - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.

Explain - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Apply - This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

Respond - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? - Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

“Love” To Will and Work Toward Someone's Best Interest

Introduction

Love is the word the Christian tradition has done the most with – and possibly the most to.

It shows up in wedding ceremonies and bumper stickers, in the name of wars and the justification of almost everything. It is the word people use when they mean affection and the word they use when they mean tolerance and the word they reach for when they have run out of other words. By the time it arrives in a church context, it has been handled so many times it has lost most of its edges.

Which is exactly the problem Jesus is addressing in John 13.

The Greek word He uses – *agapē* – was not the ordinary word for love in the ancient world. Greek had several: *eros* for desire, *philia* for the warmth of friendship, *storge* for the natural affection of family. *Agapē* was different. It described a love that was not primarily a feeling at all – it was a settled orientation of the will, a commitment to seek another person's genuine good regardless of what that cost or what they offered in return. Not what you feel toward someone. What you decide to do for them.

That is what Jesus commands in the upper room, the night before He is crucified. Not warmth. Not affirmation. Not the feeling that rises when someone is easy to love. A love with enough will behind it to cross the room, to serve, to give, to stay – even when nothing in you wants to.

The command is also new, which is worth pausing on. Jesus has spent three years with these men. They have heard Him teach about love. And He still calls this a new commandment. Not because love had never been commanded – it had, going back to Leviticus. But because He is giving it a new shape and a new reason: as I have loved you. The measure is not the Law. The measure is what He is about to do.

Before we go further: What do you actually mean when you say you love someone? And how much of what you call love is contingent on something they are offering you in return?

Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- What is the difference between loving someone and liking them - have you ever had to love someone you didn't like? What did that require?
- Jesus says love is the mark by which the world will recognize His disciples. Does your community – this group – look like anything that would require explanation?
- Is there a person in your life right now whose genuine best interest you are not currently willing to work toward? What is in the way?
- What is the difference between working toward someone's best interest and simply giving them what they want? Where have you confused the two?
- The command is to love as I have loved you. What does that standard add that the word love alone doesn't already carry?

In 1854, during a cholera outbreak in London, physician John Snow traced the source to a single water pump on Broad Street – not by waiting for the feeling to move him, but by going door to door, gathering data no one had bothered to collect, and persuading the local council to act. The work saved hundreds of lives.

- That is the shape of *agapē*: not the love that responds to what is easy or reciprocal, but the love that asks what this person genuinely needs – and pays the cost to work toward it.

Highlight | John 13:34-35

John 13 is set in the upper room on the night of the Passover – the last hours before the arrest, the trial, the cross. Jesus has already washed the disciples' feet. Judas has already left. What remains is the final teaching Jesus gives before He goes to the garden.

The commandment He issues is placed here deliberately. These are not casual words at the close of a long ministry. They are words spoken into the knowledge of what is coming – by someone who is about to demonstrate *agapē* at its fullest possible extension, in a matter of hours.

The command has two parts that belong together. First: love one another as I have loved you. The standard is not a principle or a general disposition. It is a person – specifically, what this person is about to do. Second: by this everyone will know that you are my disciples. The love is not a private spiritual exercise. It is the community's public testimony – the thing visible from outside that requires an explanation.

Worth noticing is what Jesus does not say. He says they will know you by how you love each other. The distinguishing mark of the community is not a belief it holds. It is a practice it embodies.

- What does it mean that love is described here as something that can be commanded? What does that assume about what love actually is?
- Jesus says this love will be visible to people outside the community. What would a person watching your group from the outside actually see?

Explain | Consider the Context

John writes as someone deeply formed by *agapē* – he calls himself the disciple Jesus loved, not as a boast but as the fact that most defined him. By chapter 13, he has been building toward this moment: the hour has come, and what He does with the final hours is wash feet and command love.

Agapē in the New Testament is consistently distinguished by its direction and its cost. Paul will later write that it seeks not its own, is not provoked, bears all things. John himself will write that God demonstrated this love while we were still sinners – before we were lovable, before we had anything to offer in return. The pattern is always the same: *agapē* moves toward the other person's genuine good regardless of what it receives back.

The phrase *as I have loved you* is the weight-bearing hinge. It relocates the standard from feeling to action, from the general to the specific, from "be loving" to "love the way the cross looks." Jesus is not asking for warmth. He is asking for the willingness to will and work toward another person's actual flourishing – at cost to yourself, without requiring reciprocity, toward their genuine good rather than your own comfort.

- What changes when love is defined by what it costs rather than what it feels?
- Why does Jesus anchor the community's witness to its love for one another – not its love for the world? What is the logic of that sequence?

Apply | Discuss as a Group

The practical failure of *agapē* is rarely dramatic. It is the accumulation of smaller choices: the willingness to speak honestly when it would be easier to be vague, to stay present when it would be more comfortable to withdraw, to seek someone's actual good when what they want from you is simply agreement.

The diagnostic question is not whether you feel warmly toward the people around you. It is whether you are willing to work. *As I have loved you* sets the standard at the cross – which means the measure is not what you feel like giving but what the other person genuinely needs. Affection rises and falls with circumstances. A settled commitment to another person's good can be chosen on the days when it cannot be felt.

The community Jesus describes is not built by individual spiritual effort. It is built by ordinary people choosing, repeatedly, to will and work toward each other's actual good rather than their own ease.

- Who in your life are you currently willing to be honest with – even when it would cost you something? Who are you not willing to do that for, and why?
- Is there a way you have been giving someone what they want rather than what they genuinely need? What would it look like to love them differently?
- What would this group have to actually do – not just feel or intend – for an outsider watching us to need an explanation?

Respond | How should I live/pray?

John 13 does not end with the commandment. It continues into the garden, the arrest, the trial – the events that give the commandment its content. Jesus does not tell His disciples to love one another and then exit the room. He shows them what the word means by living it out in the hours that follow.

That is what grounds the command. Not a principle. Not an ideal. A person who crossed the full distance between God and human beings and called it love – not because it was easy or because anything was offered in return, but because that is what willing and working toward someone's genuine good looks like when it is taken to its limit.

The invitation this week is not to feel more warmly toward the people around you. It is to choose, specifically and concretely, to work toward the genuine good of someone in your life – especially someone for whom that is not currently easy. Not the good they are asking for. The good they actually need. Not when you feel like it. Now, because that is what was commanded, and because the one who gave the command demonstrated it first.

The world, Jesus says, will recognize something in this. Not because it is impressive but because it is unexplainable – the kind of love that does not come from natural affection or calculated return, and that therefore requires an explanation. The moment the world has to ask why is the moment the testimony begins.

- Is there a person in your life whose genuine best interest you have been withholding – not dramatically, but quietly – because it would cost you something? What would it look like to choose toward them this week?
- What would it mean for this group to love one another in a way that requires explanation – and what would have to actually change for that to be true?

Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead – not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

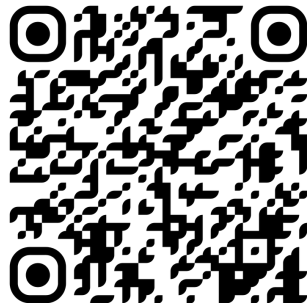
Additional Commentary

- On agapē – "love": The word was relatively rare in classical Greek, which is part of why the New Testament writers reach for it so consistently. It describes a love defined not by feeling but by orientation – the settled will toward another person's genuine good. Unlike eros (desire) or philia (affection between friends), agapē does not depend on the qualities of the one loved or the response they offer in return. It is the word John uses for God's love in 3:16 and the word Jesus uses here. The connection is not incidental.
- On "a new commandment" (v.34): The newness is not that love had never been commanded – Leviticus 19:18 commands love of neighbor. What is new is the standard: as I have loved you. Jesus does not point to the Law as the measure. He points to Himself – and specifically to what He is about to do. The cross becomes the definition of the word.
- On kathōs – "as" (v.34): The Greek means "in the same manner as" – not merely "because" or "in response to." Jesus is not giving motivation. He is giving a model. The love He commands is shaped by the love He demonstrates: initiated rather than reactive, costly rather than convenient, oriented toward genuine good rather than felt need.
- On "by this everyone will know" (v.35): The word gnōsontai is future tense – a promise as much as a description. Jesus is not observing what tends to happen when communities love well. He is announcing what will be true when this love is actually present. The community's love for one another is not one testimony among several. It is the testimony He names.
- On "my disciples" (v.35): Discipleship in the ancient world was primarily about becoming like your teacher – adopting their practices, their posture, their way of moving through the world. Jesus defines the mark of His disciples not by what they know or believe but by how they love. The implication is that a community without this love has, whatever else it has, failed to embody the thing that most identifies its teacher.

Community Group Resource Page

Visit our website to view our **leadership resources.**

From Community Group training and resources to Discipleship Group starter guides, we want to equip you to make disciples.



Additional Study

Watch/Listen

Bible Project - John



See a collection of videos, classes, and articles that dive into [John](#).

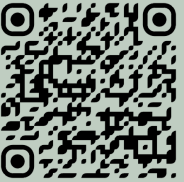
Bible Project - Love



See a collection of videos, classes, and articles that dive into [Love in the Bible](#).

Overview

Enduring Word - John 13



Text commentary, written materials, and audio/video recordings over [John 13](#).

Got Questions - Love



Biblical Q&A, articles, translations, audios, videos, apps, podcasts and more on [What is Love?](#)

Expand

Bible Reference - John 13



Explore chapter and verse commentaries to deepen your understanding of [John 13](#).

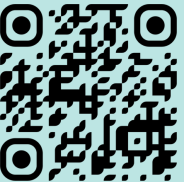
Bible Hub - John 13



Parallel translations, language tools, commentaries, and much more on [John 13:34-35](#).

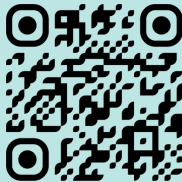
Deepen

Logos Factbook - Love



Logos Factbook shares information resources and articles about [Love](#).

Blue Letter Bible - John 13



Original texts, Translations, Cross-Refs, Commentaries, Dictionaries + more on [Love](#).

