



# SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

## NO GREATER LOVE

**KEY PASSAGE:** John 13:34-35; 15:12-13 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** Leviticus 19:18 | Deuteronomy 6:5  
Matthew 20:28; 21:12-13; 23:37-38 | Mark 8:34 | Luke 13:34-35 | 1 Corinthians 13:1 | Ephesians 5:2

### ► SUMMARY

**Love is one of the most overused and misunderstood words in our vocabulary.**

We use it to describe how we feel about our families, spouses, hobbies, favorite foods, and television shows. It conveys our fondness, desire, or need for another person. Modern culture largely defines love in terms of the emotions the beloved feels or the benefits of being loved, rather than what it asks of the lover to give up. However, Scripture defines this concept in terms of actions—sacrificial ones.

Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). He instructed His disciples to love each other sacrificially: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you” (John 13:34). The way we treat other people demonstrates to the world that we are followers of Christ.

### ► SERMON POINTS

#### Four Different Loves

Greek—the language of the New Testament—has specific words for various types of love. *Eros* is the word for passion, infatuation, sexual, or romantic love. *Storge* refers to the natural affection a mother has for her child and the child for his or her mother. *Phileo* refers to the intimacy that good friends share. *Agape* is sacrificial love—a commitment that motivates us to deny ourselves on behalf of another. This is the type of love Christ had in mind when He commanded His followers to love one another.

### Jesus’ Command to Love

- **This was a new commandment.** Leviticus 19 commanded the Jews to “love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 18). How was Jesus’ command any different? We are to treat people with the same affection and mercy that God has shown us. Christ’s instructions to the disciples raised the standard for how we are to treat others—thinking of *their* needs, not primarily our own.
- **Jesus told us to love our enemies.** That doesn’t mean we have to like the actions, attitudes, or philosophies of those who oppose us. However, we are called to love them. When Jesus cleansed the temple of the money-changers, He hated what they were doing (Matt. 21:12-13). However, that didn’t change His feelings towards them (Matt. 23:37-38).
- **The distinguishing characteristic of a believer should be love** (John 13:34-35). First Corinthians 13:1 says that if we don’t have love, we are like a solitary cymbal clang or a noisy gong—loud, unpleasant, and meaningless. We should be so kind to others that no one wonders whether or not we are Christians.
- **We are to walk in sacrificial love.** In other words, it should be our lifestyle, part of our character (Eph. 5:2). More than our words, our deeds should convey God’s love.

### Loving as Jesus Did

John 15:12 says, “This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” How did He love?

■ **Selflessly.** Our love should not be centered on what someone can do for us, but how we can bless him or her. Our attitudes should be the same as Jesus, who “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28).

■ **Understandingly.** Jesus knew the backgrounds and limitations of His followers. He realized that sometimes they were fearful and weak. This is one reason why He was able to have compassion on them when they failed.

We should show the same consideration for others who mistreat us or live sinfully. Instead of judging them, we should ask ourselves, *What happened to them in the past? How did their parents raise them? What is going on now in their lives?* There is always a reason why people rebel against God. Trying to understand doesn't change their guilt before Him, but it can help you love more freely.

People say, “Love is blind.” Yes, infatuation is usually rooted in ignorance, but true love sees people as they are and cares for them anyway. That's why I counsel couples to really get to know each other before marrying. Everyone has faults and shortcomings, but it is wise to discover who someone really is before committing to a lifetime together.

■ **Forgivingly:** A person who loves genuinely will also be forgiving. For example, I remember a believer who told me he was heading to the prison to share the gospel with his mother's killer, who had been driving drunk. That is real forgiveness!

There are countless ways we can take offense at what others do or say. Forgiving isn't easy, but an unforgiving spirit has painful consequences. If we hang on to bitterness and resentment, our health will suffer, not just our relationships with God and others.

No matter what you have done, Jesus is willing to cleanse you. Keep that in mind the next time He asks you to extend mercy towards someone.

■ **Sacrificially:** In Mark 8:34, Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” The highest form of love is to be willing to lay your life down for another. You may not ever have to die to save someone, but genuine love almost always involves some level of sacrifice. Although we will never duplicate Christ's atoning death on the cross, we can deny ourselves and serve others in love.

Love of this kind can be painful. In marriages where one partner is impossible to please, it might result in rejection and heartache. But those who love sacrificially aren't focused on what they can get from the relationship. They seek to give. Remember, love doesn't mean granting someone's every want or demand. Genuine affection gives only what will ultimately benefit the beloved.

True love takes many forms. I've heard of loving husbands or wives who won their spouses for Christ through their selfless affection. In college, one particular friend went out of his way to demonstrate God's sacrificial love to me. Godly mothers lay down their lives for a season to care for their infants and small children. And I am highly impressed by servicemen and women who are willing to risk death for our country. Sacrificial love has certainly inspired many to greatness.

## ▶ RESPONSE

■ Has someone ever demonstrated God's love towards you? Can you name a person whom you have loved sacrificially? Unless you experience genuine affection, you will never know true joy and contentment in life. To love and be loved—that is God's best for us.

Maybe you feel all alone. Remember the Father's love is always available if you have accepted His gift of salvation. Because Christ laid down His life on the cross, you and I can be reconciled to our Creator and have constant fellowship with Him. There is nothing more fulfilling and meaningful than experiencing His divine affection. Draw near to God, and let Him fill your heart with His perfect love.

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