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Be Joyful and Demonstrate Sacrificial Love

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Be Joyful and Demonstrate Sacrificial Love

Joyful, sacrificial love. Love that doesn't make sense. The verses above are woven together by this thread of humble, selfless, freely given love.

In the clip from *Les Miserables*, the Bishop freely gives away his wealth for the sake of a stranger he calls "brother." The joy of that sacrifice astounds the stranger, Jean Valjean, who actually had stolen the Bishop's silver, but is now free to go.

Jesus's example is even more striking. He who was the teacher and master, stooped to wash feet—a job usually reserved for the lowliest of household slaves. Jesus served others, indifferent to position or title. Ultimately, He demonstrated the craziness of His love for us when He who is God chose to be ridiculed and tortured to death in our stead.

"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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." John 13:12-15

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." Romans 16:16

"All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss." 1 Corinthians 16:20

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." 2 Corinthians 13:12

"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." 1 Peter 4:9

"Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ." 1 Peter 5:14

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." Galatians 5:13

Notice that Jesus doesn't tell His disciples to follow his example and serve sacrificially until after they had accepted his service to them. The Galatians passage above summarizes the order necessary in our service: we're already free, therefore we can serve one another in love.

The joy in sacrificial service comes from knowing and reveling in the fact that we've been served first. Everything hinges on the fact that God's love for us was proved in Jesus's sacrificial death. But it isn't a cold, utilitarian sacrifice. It is a loving sacrifice that welcomes us into a family where we are not seen as problems to be fixed but beloved children to be celebrated!

Christians have always flung open the doors that separated actual blood relatives from non-family. Yes, God still graciously gives us families, but to become a Christian is to suddenly find out you have brothers and sisters you've never met!

This expansion of family is what's behind the passages above that urge us to greet each other with a kiss. Roman, Greek, and Middle Eastern cultures kissed as an expression of familial affection or to show respect to someone in authority.[1] It was not just a normal greeting given to everyone, like a handshake might be in Western cultures—it expressed affection and acknowledged the bond between the people. So it like the writers of these passages are saying, “forget your preconceived ideas of who you'd define as a stranger and warmly and joyfully welcome one another as family members!”

We are family. Even if we have never met, we are family. The commitment to each other suggested in these verses only makes sense if we are related. When we are at the end of ourselves with no place to go, we turn to family, even to a broken or dysfunctional family. And if unhealthy families can still be supportive on some level, how much more beautiful is the support given by a healthy family.

Like hikers who jump to divide up the gear so the guy who just sprained his ankle can walk without extra weight, we come around each other to ease and support each other in the hard times of life. We bear with each other, not to be repaid, but because that's what family does.

Some Challenges

1. Before we can serve with joyful, sacrificial love we need to have truly received this love from God. How freely do you **accept** God's love for you? Does your sense of unworthiness keep you from believing that and feeling like you are a beloved child? If so, talk about why and when you feel this way with Christians you trust. Regularly pray and talk about this with your community and then be on the look out for how God builds your community through your vulnerability as well as the glimpses He gives of His heart for you.

2. How free and joyful is your sacrificial love for others? Do you keep track of how much you are serving compared with others? Does your love and service come with an expectation of repayment or at the very least appreciation? If your sacrificial love isn't free, talk about it with your community of Christians. Consider practicing the discipline of anonymity. That means do some act of service every day in such a way that there is no way the person or group being served would know it was you or even notice that something had been done for them. Beware of starting to keep a mental tally of "good deeds," however!
 3. Being a Christian means joining a family. Who in your local community of Christians do you hesitate to be hospitable to or welcome? Begin praying for opportunities to become more open towards them. The next time you see them, imagine you just found out they were really your brother or sister!
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Footnotes

1. Peter H. Davids. *The First Epistle of Peter*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990) 204-205.