

# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

***WEEK 1: August 29, 2018***

***Topic: Love Matters***

***Scripture: Luke 10:25-37***

What is love? Love is not just a meaningless word that is found in our dictionary. Love is not just a representation of intense feeling and deep emotion. Love is not just a word that is represented as a noun, but love is a word that should be used in our everyday actions. In other words, love should go beyond a spoken word. It should be shown in our lives every day. As Christians, we are challenged to love one another and to demonstrate the love of God, just as the love of God was demonstrated to us.

The only way we can effectively live a Christian life full of love, is if we love God with all of our heart and love our neighbor. On one hand, it might seem easy to love God. We can love God by giving our tithes on Sundays, we can love God by our commitment to the ministry, we can love God by praying to Him, and we can love God by trusting in Him. Yes, these are the easy task that we can accomplish on a daily basis, but when we learn to love our neighbors, we are taking a step higher in our Christianity.

On the latter, we must acknowledge that loving our neighbor is the embodiment of what it means to be like Christ. Loving our neighbor is the action and verb of what it means to mirror the life of Jesus.

One might ask, "How do I love my neighbor?"



We can look at the narrative of the Good Samaritan and witness and learn how to better love those who do not look like us. This narrative teaches us that if we love others, we have a better chance of becoming Christians who can lead people to Christ.

**Ways to love our neighbors:**

**1. Let your love be proactive**

In the parable, we must notice how the Good Samaritan “went to him”. The Samaritan was on his way to a different location but when he saw someone in need, he stopped.

Often times in life, we can find ourselves busy with the many obligations that surround our everyday living. Due to our schedules and plans, often times we tend to look over the needs of others who we tend to cross paths with. In spite of our busy lives, we have to keep our eyes open at all times to see who God might place in our lives, to demonstrate love to.

**2. Let your love be “sharp-eyed”**

In the parable, the Good Samaritan “saw” a hurting man.

In life, we must make an attempt to see and do for those who are in need. This need could be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or financial. Regardless of what type of need it is, sometimes God will put us in situations to be a Good Samaritan.

To “see” others in need with our sharp-eyes, grants us the opportunity to show love where it is needed. We can look to Jesus and observe how he always “saw” the needs of others and expressed the love of God. (Example: Matthew 9:36)

**3. Love is compassionate**

Luke 10:33 also states, that when the Samaritan saw the injured man, he had compassion on him. He went towards the injured man and responded to his needs rather than simply feeling sorry for him.

As sung by: Mahalia Jackson:

If I can help somebody, as I travel along  
If I can help somebody, with a word or song  
If I can help somebody, from doing wrong  
No, my living shall not be in vain

#### **4. Love is responsive**

When the Samaritan saw the man, he responded immediately to help meet the man's needs. He bound his wounds using the resources he had on hand

#### **5. Love is not cheap**

When the Samaritan tended to the victim's wounds, he gave of his own resources. One of the most valuable resources we have is our time. Loving his neighbor not only cost the Samaritan at least two days' wages, but also his time.

Moreover, after the Samaritan binds the wounds of the man, he continues his care by taking him to an inn and looking after him.

#### **6. Love involves sacrifice with no expected dividends**

The Samaritan gave two denarii to the innkeeper, which is approximately two days' worth of earnings. Yet the only instruction he gave is to take care of the wounded man. The text does not record the Good Samaritan looking for any return of his good deeds. He simply sacrificed his personal resources for the priority of someone else.

#### **7. Love is continuous**

After the Samaritan leaves the man with the innkeeper, he is still willing to help in the midst of his absence. The fact that he was willing to cover any additional cost that might have transpired, shows that love is not just something that we can turn on and off. Love is something that does not have an expiration date.



Dr. Joe S. Ratliff, Senior Pastor

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# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

***WEEK 2: September 5, 2018***

***Topic: Relationships Matter***

***Scripture: Acts 2:42-46***

Relationships in the kingdom of God are extremely important.

In fact, the concept of a “relationship” can be defined in many ways.

- A relationship can be found in a BOND
- A relationship can be found in a FRIENDSHIP
- A relationship can be found in a MARRIAGE
- A relationship can be found in an ORGANIZATION (fraternities, sororities or other social and political groups)

But the most important relationship that one can have, is a relationship with Jesus Christ and His Bride.

Who is Jesus’ Bride? **The Church.**

*Reference:*

- Ephesians 5:25-27
- Revelation 19:7-9
- Revelation 21:10

Because God desires for us to know His Son Jesus, it is imperative that we realize how important it is to be have a relationship with the Church of God.



Having a relationship with Jesus and His Bride (the Church) will help the believer grow in many ways.

- We can grow in our spiritual lives
- We can grow in our devotional lives
- We can grow in our earthly relationships
- We can grow in our marriages
- We can grow in our friendships
- We can grow in love

In Acts 2:42-46 we can become reading witnesses that the early church was able to grow numerically because of the relationships that were established during that particular time.

If we pay close attention to the passage presented, we can learn how these different types of relationships can become a benefit to our lives.

**1. They had a relationship with THE WORD OF GOD (Acts 2:42)**

Luke (the writer of Acts), suggest that a Spirit-filled Church is one who has a committed relationship with The Word of God.

During this particular time, the Apostles teaching of the Word, refers to the **AUTHORITATIVE MESSAGE** of Jesus Christ; which consisted of Jesus' **MINISTRY**, His **PASSION** and His **RESURRECTION**.

As followers of Jesus, it is our duty to have a committed relationship with the Word of God.

If we desire to grow closer to God, the only way we can learn more about Him, is if we **read** His Word, **grow in** His word, **spend time** in His Word and **depend on** His Word.

**2. They had a relationship with the SURROUNDED SAINTS, by means of FELLOWSHIP (Acts 2:42)**

The fact that Luke informs us that a Spirit-filled Church is a Church of **FELLOWSHIP** and **RELATIONSHIPS**, also indicates that they were a **LOVING Church**.

Our membership in the Church should become more than our "section of the pew". Instead, our membership in the Church should reflect the love, fellowship and kindness of Jesus Christ.



If we are attending Church every week and have yet to develop **STRONG, HEALTHY** and **GODLY** relationships with others in the pew, we have failed in Christian relationship and fellowship.

Jesus did not call us to be **isolated**, but Jesus called us to be **inclusive**.

Building relationships with our brothers and sister is what makes us examples of what it means to have an authentic Christian relationship.

**3. They had a relationship with each other because they BROKE BREAD TOGETHER**  
(Acts 2:42)

The question is raised...."What is Luke referring to when he talks about the Church and what it means to **BREAK BREAD** together?"

Is Luke referring to the **JEWISH MEALS** of this time?

Is Luke referring to this as the **FIRST AGAPE FEAST** or **LOVE FEAST** that places an emphasis of **JOY** on the **COMMUNION/LORDS SUPPER**?

Is he referring to an **ORDINARY MEAL** that Christians **DECIDED** to **PARTAKE** in?

Although, it is **NOT CLEAR** on what type of **BREAKING** of the **BREAD** Luke is referring to, we do know there is **JOY, LOVE** and **PRAISE** amongst those who are **BREAKING BREAD** together.

**4. They had a relationship with God by means of PRAYER** (Acts 2:42)

- Prayer is a form of communication that allows us to talk to God at any given time of the day.
- Prayer is our access to God when we are down in spirit
- Prayer is our direct line to God in the midnight hour
- Prayer is our star in the night during the moments of adversity

Our relationship with God cannot be proper if prayer is not in the picture.



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# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

***WEEK 3: September 12, 2018  
(Rev. Kevin Williams)***

***Topic: Kingdom Works Matter  
Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16  
(The Parable of the Generous Landowner)***

**Saints:** the Lord has called each of us to work for the Kingdom of Heaven at different times. Some of us since we were very young, others have been called late in life. Still each of us have been called to labor for our King. Even in the Kingdom of GOD, there are those who think they will get more than someone else because of what they have done or for how long they have done it. It's not church membership that will earn you a greater reward than someone else, it's not being a pastor, preacher or Sunday School teacher, Heaven is the eternal reward to all who are called to labor for the King. It matters not when you were called to God's work; it only matters that you have been faithful in carrying out the work that you were called to do. The long or short hours, nor cool or hot days matter, **just** your faithfulness to the task. Jesus even reminds us that many who were last will be first and many who were first will be last. In this, Jesus is letting us know that there may be some who will do even greater things than the people that we read about in God's word. Your story is a story that is not yet completed, and it is not to be judged what a person's reward might or might not be because it is up to the Landowner of the vineyard! He has the right to be generous to whomever He wants, He sets the wages and hands out the rewards. WE should all be satisfied with what we receive. S. Michael Houdmann, CEO of GotQuestions.org puts it this way: "Rewards in Heaven glorify God and provide us with joy and peace. The closer we were to GOD during this life, the more centered on Him and aware of Him, the more dependent on Him, the more desperate for His Mercy, AND the more there will be to celebrate".

We are like characters in a story, who suffer, doubt, and fear wondering if we will ever really have our hearts' desire when the happy ending comes and the desire is fulfilled which brings completion. The story will not be satisfied without that completion. Rewards in Heaven are the completion of our earthly story and those rewards will be eternally satisfying. There are 5 Heavenly Crowns mentioned in the New Testament that will be rewarded to believers:

- 1) **The Imperishable Crown, 1 Corinthians 9: 24-25 (NLT)**
- 2) **The Crown of Rejoicing, 1 Thessalonians 2:19 (NLT)**
- 3) **The Crown of Righteousness, 2 Timothy 4:8 (NLT)**
- 4) **The Crown of Glory, 1 Peter 5:4 (NLT)**
- 5) **The Crown of Life, Revelations 2:10 (NLT)**

**Saints:** Work for the Lord in the Vineyard that you are called to so as to win one of these crowns. This parable that we will be studying may rub many of us the wrong way. I have even heard Christians say this parable offends them. Listen to what four different bible scholars in different centuries have to say about this parable. One Commentator from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century writes this parable is "...harder to interpret than any other which our savior uttered". Another from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century says "we are confronted here with the most puzzling of all of the parables". A 3<sup>rd</sup> commentator from the last Century writes "this parable irritates the modern listener because it goes against sound human logic". Lastly, a 4<sup>th</sup> writer from 2001 says "this parable more than any other is likely to offend the modern reader's sense of equality". There are 5 Questions that we have to ask and answer for ourselves. **SO JOIN ME** as we dig into this parable that has been described as "puzzling, irritating and even scandalous".



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***WEEK 4: September 19, 2018***

***Topic: Forgiveness Matters: 7 Benefits of Forgiveness***

***Scripture: Genesis 50:15-51***

Many times, in life we are faced with the heartache of unforgiveness.

So often, we struggle with the idea and the concept of what it means to forgive.

In fact, we go through life thinking and believing that we have forgiven those who have hurt us, wronged us, destroyed our Spirits and crushed our lives, attitudes and hearts; but the reality of the Christian life reveals to us; that many of us are still dealing with the idea of unforgiveness in our HEARTS, because OUR memories have not yet released us of our HURT, PAIN, TRIALS, DAMAGE, INJURY, WOUNDS and ABUSE of those who we have been connected to in the past.

The actuality and authenticity of the Christian life should remind us, that when we cannot let go of the PAIN of the PAST, we CAN NOT RECEIVE the PEACE of the PRESENT.

Moreover, when our hearts can afford the price of forgiving peace, we can effectively move forward and make progression in our Christian lives.

The real price of forgiveness is what it cost us to give up an UNFORGIVING ATTITUDE. Why? Because choosing not to forgive has too great of a price tag that our souls cannot afford.

The tension that we are faced with exposes us to the reality that, we usually do not make a move toward forgiveness until we come face to face with what we are missing in life. Which lets us know that many of us are missing out on the BENEFITS of FORGIVNESS.

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### What are the Benefits of Forgiveness?

- 1. Forgiveness brings FREEDOM**
  - 2. Forgiveness brings POWER**
  - 3. Forgiveness brings GOOD HEALTH**
  - 4. Forgiveness RESTORES our RELATIONSHIP with GOD**
  - 5. Forgiveness brings RESTORATION**
  - 6. Forgiveness brings JOY, HOPE and a BRIGHT FUTURE**
  - 7. AND Forgiveness ALLOWS GOD TO BRING JUSTICE**
- Forgiveness brings FREEDOM because it RELEASES US from our PAST HURT
  - Forgiveness brings POWER because it FREES us from the FEEBLE INSECURITIES of our OPPRESSOR and THOSE WHO HURT US
  - Forgiveness brings GOOD HEALTH because we can then LIFT the BURDEN of STRESS, SLEEPLESS NIGHTS and an UNSOUND MIND
  - Forgiveness RESTORES OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD because it ALLOWS us to COMPREHEND how God saw fit to FORGIVE and RESTORE us IN SPITE of our SINS and TRANSGRESSIONS
  - Forgiveness brings RESTORATION because it can BRING TOGETHER a BROKEN relationship with a MOTHER, FATHER, SISTER, BROTHER, AUNT or an UNCLE
  - Forgiveness brings JOY, HOPE and a BRIGHT FUTURE because it allows us to THROW AWAY our SADNESS, by PUTTING ASIDE our DESPAIR, while at the same time, LEAVING BEHIND our SORROWS of the PAST
  - LASTLY, Forgiveness ALLOWS GOD TO BRING JUSTICE because God is the ONLY ONE who knows how to DIVINELY PREPARE a TABLE BEFORE YOU in the PRESENCE of those who UNJUSTLY MISTREAT YOU, while at the same time making them a FOOTSTOOL in your life.



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# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

***WEEK 5: September 26, 2018***

***Topic: Discipleship & Evangelism Matters***

***Scripture: Matthew 28:16-19***

What does Evangelism mean and why is it important to my life? These are questions that often rise in our hearts on our Christian journey.

Many of us have gone through life wondering, what does evangelism have to do with me and why should I participate in it while I am here on earth.

Well, before we dive deeper into scripture; we must first grasp an understanding of what “Evangelism” truly means and why it matters.

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The word “Evangelism” comes from the Greek word “euaggelion” which means “GOSPEL” or “GOOD NEWS”.

Therefore, when we look at what it means to “EVANGELIZE”, we have to look at this word under the lens of what it truly means to “GO FORTH” and spread the Good News/Gospel.

***“To Evangelize” is a phrase that calls the Christian to put forth action behind what they believe.***

It is one thing to **BELIEVE** in the Good News, but we take our Christianity to another level when we learn how to **SHARE** the Good News.



Evangelism Matters because as followers of Jesus Christ, it is our DUTY to SHARE the Gospel with those who we are surrounded by.

Does this mean that we should go around with a big Bible trying to force Jesus into the lives of those who do not know Him? Absolutely not!

On the other hand, since we have been called to follow Jesus, we MUST be prepared to share the Gospel story at all times with someone who may be curious about Christ.

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In other words, we MUST have the same longing and desire as the Apostle Paul, which can be described in Romans 10:1.

**Romans 10:1 (New American Standard Bible)**

*“Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.”*

Paul's **ZEAL, PRAYER** and **DESIRE** was so strong, that he felt it was essential to share the Gospel with his people by any means necessary.

It is only with a **burning DESIRE, earnest PRAYER** and **strong ZEAL** of the Gospel, that we will be able to understand the authentic **LOVE** and **IMPORTANCE** of sharing the Jesus story by way of Evangelism.

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If we properly analyze Matthew 28:16-20, we can continue our Christian pilgrimage understanding why Evangelism Matters.

**1. God DID NOT commission us to SIT STILL on our SALVATION (Matthew 28:19a)**

After Jesus proclaims His authority in verse 18, the first thing that comes out of the mouth of Jesus is **“GO”**.

The fact that Jesus has a desire for us to move/go, implies that **our Commissioned Calling to Christ** does not involve us being lazy.





Many Christians today who have been walking with Jesus for many years, have failed to take heed and observe one of the first words that flows from the mouth of our Redeemer.

If we are going to spread the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, **we must "GO"**.

**"To Go"** does not mean get in our cars and stop everyone we come in contact with, but **"To Go"** means that we must be **OPEN, WILLING, AVAILABLE, READY and PREPARED** to share Jesus with someone who has an open heart to hear the **WORD OF GOD**.

## **2. God has commissioned us to DUPLICATE DISCIPLES (Matthew 28:19a)**

In the same breath, Jesus also told the disciples to **"MAKE DISCIPLES"**.

What does it mean to be a disciple?

- A disciple is a **LEARNER** or **PUPIL**
- A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, who knows how to follow the doctrine and teachings of Jesus
- A disciple is one who can humbly submit to the authority of the individual who carries the wisdom; so that one day, they can go out and share that same wisdom with someone else, in order to maintain the ways of Godly tradition
- A disciple is one who can pick up their cross and follow Jesus, even if it cost them more than they expected
- **TO BE A DISCIPLE IS A LIFESTYLE**

Therefore, if we desire to truly evangelize on behalf of Jesus, we must understand that evangelism also takes on a form of discipleship.

Evangelism takes on a form of discipleship because, after we have spent time **SHARING** the Gospel story of Jesus, we then have to spend time **POURING** a lifestyle of Jesus into the lives of others.

**Duplicating disciples** is only another step toward our **commissioned calling to Christ**.

**3. God has commissioned us to TEACH the ways and commandments of Jesus (Matthew 28:20a)**

What are the ways and commandments of Jesus?

Many scholars, like Matt Slick (President and Founder of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry), would suggest that Jesus left many commands throughout the Gospel.

- a. Repent (Matthew 4:17)
- b. Follow Him (Matthew 4:9 & Matthew 8:22)
- c. Let our lights shine (Matthew 5:16)
- d. Be reconciled (Matthew 5:23-24)
- e. Do not resist evil with evil (Matthew 5:39-42)
- f. Love and pray for your enemies (Matthew 5:44-46)
- g. Seek God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33)
- h. Do not judge (Matthew 7:1)
- i. Treat people as you want to be treated (Matthew 7:12)
- j. Beware of false prophets (Matthew 7:15-16)
- k. Always come to Jesus for rest (Matthew 11:28)
- l. Confront your brother or sister in private (Matthew 18:15-17)
- m. Constantly forgive others (Matthew 18:21-22)
- n. Love God (Matthew 22:37-38)
- o. Love your neighbor (Matthew 22:39)
- p. Partake in communion (Matthew 26:26-27)
- q. Keep guard against sin (Matthew 26:41)
- r. Preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15)
- s. Be on guard against greed (Luke 12:15)
- t. Be welcoming to the poor (Luke 14:12-14)

This entire list reminds us WHAT TO TEACH to individuals we share the Gospel with.

Finally, we must remind ourselves that all three of the primary points above, serve as a reminder that evangelism and discipleship matters.



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# **NOTES**



# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

***WEEK 6: October 3, 2018***

***Topic: Suffering Matters***

***Scripture: 1 Peter 4:12-14***

Suffering can easily be defined as experiencing some type of agony, deep emotion or affliction.

Joseph Henry Thayer, graduate of Harvard Divinity School, says that “The Lord has PRIVILEGED US to have a great capacity for feeling afflicted.

Thayer’s statement is interesting because often times we do not view suffering as a form of privilege. Instead we take on the perception of suffering as something bad, that leads to no positivity.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must understand that when we made the decision to follow Jesus, we took on an opportunity that leads us down a path to experience the PRIVILEGE of spiritual suffering, mental suffering and physical suffering.

Therefore when we feel like all of our hope is lost, it’s a PRIVILEGE. When we are faced with financial calamity, it’s a PRIVILEGE. When sickness runs through our body, it’s a PRIVILEGE. When the storms of life rage, it is still a PRIVILEGE.

Suffering with Christ should be considered a privilege because “OUR GLORY IS HIDDEN IN TEMPORARY GRIEF”. Although, your situation may look like grief at the moment, it is still all for Gods glory.

In fact, **1 Peter 2:21** says *“After all, God chose you to suffer as you follow in the footsteps of Christ, who set an example by suffering for you”*

In other words, when we decide to follow Jesus Christ, we decide to follow the footsteps of suffering, pain and grief. Yes, this sounds unfortunate; but we can not comprehend grief without looking to the hope at the end of the tunnel. This hope is found in Jesus Christ.

As we observe the words of Peter, who is known by many scholars as the Apostle of hope, we must understand that the book of 1 Peter carries a theme of “Christian hope can only be found in the time of trial”. This lets us know that in our time of suffering, there is hope at the end of the tunnel if we remain faithful to Christ. Likewise, Peter also informs us that hope, suffering and testing coexist with one another.

Throughout scripture, we constantly see how God always gives hope in hopeless situations.

Let us take into consideration:

- Genesis 22 – A ram in a bush was hope in a hopeless situation
- Genesis 39 – Joseph being sold into slavery was hope in a hopeless situation
- 2 Chronicles 20 – The Lord fighting King Jehoshaphat’s battle was hope in a hopeless situation
- Daniel 6 – God sparing Daniel’s life was hope in a hopeless situation
- Mark 4 – Jesus calming the storm was hope in a hopeless situation

Clearly, scripture reveals to us that God has a way of taking situations of suffering and turning them into glorified grace.

### **1. Do not be surprised of your strange suffering (1 Peter 4: 12)**

#### ***Why should we not be surprised of strange suffering?***

- a. We signed up for suffering when we signed up for Christ*
- b. Our temporary trials are only a test*
- c. You are not the only one who deals with trouble*

As believers and followers of Christ Jesus, we have to become mature enough to know that suffering comes with the territory.

When we make the choice to follow Jesus we are making the decision to step in the perimeters of suffering.

Furthermore, we must realize that our temporary trials are the testing grounds of painful grace. Our temporary trails prove us to be living testimonies of one who can carry their cross.

Finally, we should not be surprised at strange suffering because there are others who have gone before us who have conquered the same issues that we are currently dealing with. This is important to remember because we should never feel as though God has singled us out, just so He can pick on us. God does not use our day to day suffering to pick on us. Instead, He used our sufferings to sanctify us.

## **2. Rejoice in the midst of strange suffering (1 Peter 4:13)**

### ***Why should we rejoice in suffering?***

- a. Rejoicing in suffering builds the character of our Christianity*
- b. Rejoicing in suffering develops our relationship with God*
- c. Rejoice because we are not alone (Christ is carrying the load with us and for us)*

If we focus on rejoicing with Christ during the time of suffering, our hearts and minds can tune in on the positivity of God's provisions and not the pain of the present.

## **3. God gives us strength in our suffering (1 Peter 4: 14)**

### ***How do we know we have Gods strength?***

- a. God is present*
- b. God's glory is present*

When we are found weak, we must remember that God is always strong. Many times, in our suffering, we feel like God is not present. Although the feeling of an absent God may rise, we cannot forget that in our dark time, God will never leave us. (God is always present)

Not only will God never leave us in dark times, but He also has a way of allowing His foretaste of glory divine to show up on the scene. We must understand that the presence of God's glory has the ability to change our situations of suffering. When God's glory is revealed, it has a way of giving us strength that can only come from Him. God's glory is so special, that it carries a sense of greatness in our grief, splendor in our suffering, majesty in our madness and opulence in our opposition.



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