



LET'S BEGIN HERE

David, the psalmist, wrote, “Even when I walk / through the darkest valley, / I will not be afraid, / for you are close beside me” (Psalm 23:4). David sought refuge in the Lord’s close company, especially when hemmed in by the threat of death. Even Jesus didn’t want to step alone into the shadow of the cross (Matthew 26:36–38). It’s no wonder that as He prepared for His execution, Jesus had on His mind the importance of abiding relationships.

Death’s specter strips away the superfluous and refines our focus to that which is genuinely important—our faith that holds us and those few choice individuals who, like branches of a sheltering tree, cover us through grief’s blows. The characteristics of such true friends? Jesus, the Friend of sinners, told us in His own words.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

When searching the Scriptures, there’s no substitute for simply reading God’s Word and allowing His Spirit to speak to you *personally*. Whether studying to deepen your own understanding or preparing to minister to others, allowing truth to transform *you* becomes the primary goal. Remember: God’s Word, like a *mirror*, reflects areas in your life otherwise hidden.

With that in mind, begin your time today in prayer; invite the Lord into your study by asking Him to open your eyes to what He wants you to see, particularly regarding your relationship with other believers (James 1:22–24)!



Observation: Looking Closely at the Words of Jesus

In the *Searching the Scriptures* process, observation helps us piece together the interpretation puzzle. Often, biblical writers use comparison and contrast to communicate meaning. In John 15:12–17, John highlighted a comparison Jesus made in explaining the nature of genuine love.

Quotable

There are individuals in the body of Christ who are waiting and available to be nurtured as friends—to be known and deeply loved by us, that they might know and love us in return.

— Charles R. Swindoll



What strong command did Jesus issue His disciples in John 15:12?

How did Jesus use comparison to illustrate the kind of love with which His disciples are to love each other?

Read back through John 15:12–17. What was the significance of Jesus repeating His command?

What single word or idea is emphasized in this section?



Interpretation: Discovering the Meaning of Christ's Command to Love

As Jesus neared His imminent death on the cross, He had love on His mind in a big way. In this short section of John 15, known as the Upper Room Discourse, He commanded His disciples to love one another. Surrounded by His closest companions, Jesus described the love and communion believers should demonstrate. Let's take a closer look.



Understanding the Command to Love—John 15:12

Jesus issued a compelling command to His disciples: *Love each other*. According to Chuck Swindoll, the word *love* comes from the Greek word *agapē*, which carries with it the idea of a deep, abiding love resulting from a deliberate decision to love another.¹

Knowing the essence of *agapē* love, what do you think that kind of love would look like among believers? Give some specific examples.

Jesus used His own love for the disciples as a model for the kind of love He expected from them. How had the disciples experienced *agapē* love from Jesus?

Exploring the Characteristics of Love—John 15:13–16

After issuing the command to love, Jesus presented four aspects of *agapē* love. Let's take a closer look at each one.

A Disregard for Self—John 15:13

How did Jesus refer to His disciples in this verse?

What did Jesus say is the ultimate expression of sacrificial love?



The primary interpretation of verse 13 refers to Christ laying down His life for the disciples. But He linked His own sacrifice to the idea of friendship. Do you think Jesus expected His followers to willingly die for their friends if that's what was required? Explain your answer.

A Dedication to Mutual Aims—John 15:14

By using the metaphor of friendship, Jesus put forth the principle of friendship that is rooted in obedience to Him. Why is this significant?

What contrast did Jesus employ to highlight the significance of His relationship to His disciples?

A Commitment to Mutual Confidentiality—John 15:15

What reason did Jesus give for referring to His disciples as “friends”?



Why do you think Jesus mentioned His relationship to His Father?

A Shared Desire for Success—John 15:16

Jesus made an astounding assertion that aligned His mission, which culminated at the cross, with the consecrating impact of *agapē* love.

What did Jesus say is the result of this covenant-love relationship between Himself and His disciples?

Jesus conferred upon His disciples a certain spiritual authority. What is that authority related to? Why is this significant?



**Correlation: How Does It Relate?**

Often biblical scholars substantiate their interpretation of a passage of Scripture or even a single word by comparing it with other passages in the Bible. This is called correlation. Respected New Testament scholar D. A. Carson explains the great honor Jesus bestowed on His disciples in this passage from John 15. (Watch for the correlating passages!)

An absolute potentate demands obedience in all his subjects. His slaves, however, are simply told what to do, while his friends are informed of his thinking, enjoy his confidence and learn to obey with a sense of privilege and with full understanding of their master's heart. So also here: Jesus' absolute right to command is in no way diminished, but he takes pains to inform his friends of his motives, plans, purposes. . . . In times past God's covenant people were not informed of God's saving plan in the full measure now accorded Jesus' disciples. Although there is much they cannot grasp (16:12), within that constraint Jesus has told them everything he has learned from his Father. The Paraclete [Holy Spirit] whom Jesus sends will in the wake of the cross and resurrection complete the revelation bound up with the person and work of Christ (14:26; 16:12–15), thereby making Jesus' disciples more informed, more privileged, more comprehending than any believers who ever came before.²

**Application: How Will You Respond?**

Returning to the image of Christian friendship being like branches of a sheltering tree, Chuck offers two general applications from this passage:

1. *Sheltering trees have fruit that promise security, confidence, care, and encouragement to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.*

Write down some specific ways you can offer these things to your fellow believers.



2. *Sheltering trees have roots that abide.*

Write down some things you can do continually to assure your friends in Christ that your love is unconditional and will go the distance.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Jesus, my Brother and Friend. Form in me the fruit of Your Spirit that offers sacrificial love to my fellow believers. Teach me to love them like Christ loves me. In His exalted name, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 (Carol Springs, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 291.
2. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 523



EXALTING CHRIST . . . THE LAMB OF GOD

Qualities of a Friend

John 15:12–17

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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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