

## Jumpstarting My Love for My Spiritual Family John 13:34-35

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* Do people know you’re a Christian? Do they know it, as Jesus said in John 13:34-35, because of your love for other Christians? *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Jesus didn’t say we’d be known by what church we go to or how often we go, how big our Bible is or how well we know it, how much money we give, how much we serve or pray. Jesus He said the number one indicator you’re a Christ-follower is your love for other Christ-followers. Do you love other Christians? Do you love your brothers and sisters in this church?

There is love, there is fellowship in the Godhead, in the Trinity. Because we’re made in the image of God, God designed us for fellowship. It’s the way we’re wired. It’s part of our DNA. We require meaningful fellowship with other people to be happy and whole. It’s as it says in the Owner’s Manual: *“It is not good for man to be alone”* (Genesis 2:18).

It’s not just a relational need, it’s a physical one too. In his book, *The Broken Heart*, Dr. James Lynch (**picture**) cites statistics showing that adults without deep relationships have a death rate twice as high as those who enjoy regular caring interaction with others. Ironically, we live in a culture where many scrupulously monitor their cholesterol intake and calorie consumption, yet ignore their relational life which has as much impact on their physical health as obesity, smoking, high blood pressure or a lack of exercise.

God designed the church to be a place where people come and have this need met. Local churches like ours are to be known for getting relationships right. This is to be a place where fellowship is healthy and strong—as it’s described in the early church. This relational admonition is all over the New Testament. Ephesians 4:3, *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.”* The New Testament overflows with this command.

How do we do that? How do we increase our love for each other? We’re continuing our series, **Jump Starting My Faith**. Today we want to talk about **Jump Starting My Love for My Spiritual Family**. This is one of the most important messages in our series. It’s also the most difficult for us to apply. Though Jesus said, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,”* we resist it. We’re selfish. We hold grudges. We’re prejudiced. Yet, it’s the best indicator you know Jesus. Because if you love Jesus, you’ll love His family.

In His book, *The Invested Life*, Joel Rosenberg (**picture**) writes, *“Christianity is not a solo sport. It’s about building strong, healthy teams of fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ whom God can use to change the world. It’s about older believers taking younger believers under their wings to love them, help them grow in Christ, and help them reproduce their faith in the lives of other younger believers. Making disciples of all nations can only be done one person at a time.”*

God’s never intended us to live the Christian life alone. The Christian life means you’re part of a new family. We’re to love each other. How can we jumpstart our love for each other? It’s really not all that complicated...

**1. If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must spend time together.** The church is where we find friends that stick closer than a brother...friends who divide sorrows and multiply joys. It's where burdens are shared. It's one reason healthy churches can have such an impact. When communities see church-members loving one another, when they see us meeting each other's needs for connectedness, they want it too. They come running because they need connectedness as much as we do. The relational health of our fellowship pulls them like a magnet pulls iron filings.

One young boy would travel all the way across Chicago each Sunday to attend D. L. Moody's church. Someone asked why he went to so much trouble just to go to that particular church when there were several churches closer to his home. And the little guy replied, "Because they love a fellow over there." So how do we do this?

**a. Make it a priority.** If you don't make it a priority, it probably won't happen. You show up at work because it's a priority. Some of you have a movie or game you're planning to go see. Why will it happen? It's a priority. Not only that, you'll probably get there early...and you'll linger. What does it say about our values when we're early for a ballgame or movie, but drag in at the last minute or late to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Then we rush out the door as soon as the last "Amen" is said. Even when we're there, we're not all there. We're thinking about all of the things we have to do, or what we're having for lunch. Then, we wonder why we didn't get much out of it.

**b. We stop making excuses.** If one of your kids is sick, does the whole family miss work? When we're tired, do we cancel lunch with a friend so we can sleep in? Would you skip a family reunion because your kids might act up or be bored? If a friend has a birthday party, do you tell them you can't make it because you have so many things to do at home?

We must stop making excuses. A tragic one is believers who convince themselves they don't need to be part of a SML class or small group because "they already know all that." Really? This one is nearly as bad, "I don't have time to attend the group, but I'll buy the book and read it on my own." But what do you think is more important to Jesus? That we have more spiritual facts or we grow in our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Now I understand it can be difficult to come out another night. That's why at Grace we work to keep our schedule limited. We don't want you out every night. We want you to have family time. We want you to have time to interact with lost friends or neighbors. It's why our primary small groups meet between our Sunday services. You can come an hour early or just stay an hour longer.

I don't know about you but I don't want to stand before Jesus at the Bema and tell Him, "Lord, I really needed that extra hour. I didn't have time to get to know my brothers and sisters in Christ and learn to love them."

SMLs include Bible study but that's not our main purpose. They're for fellowship, so you get to know your brothers and sister in this church. It's so your children develop Christian friends. It's so we grow in obeying Scripture in all of those New Testament "one another" commands.

**c. There is a high price for not spending time together.** Do you remember this song by Harry Chapin, *The Cats in the Cradle*? To refresh your memory, we want to play it this morning. **(Play song).**

Our children and grandchildren are watching. Some of you are reaping your harvest for your casual attitude toward fellowship. It wasn't a priority and your kids got the message. Now your grandkids are getting the message.

Usually, the next generation is only half as committed as the previous one. If you're Sunday Morning only but went every week, your children may make it a couple of times a month. The potential of them dropping out increases if they knew you weren't really committed to being there.

So what should you do now? Own it. Confess to your adult children you blew it. Tell them God has gotten ahold of your heart and you realize you didn't set the example you should have. Just coming clean with God and with them will have an impact that may shock you. Then, without nagging, plead with them to please get themselves and your grandchildren faithfully in a Bible-believing church.

You may be thinking, "Wow Scott! It's a big price." Do you have a better way to reach your children and grandchildren with the Gospel? If you don't encourage them. If you who love them so much don't urge them, who will?

This is really simple. **If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must spend time together.**

**2. If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must serve each other.** What's the context of our passage in John 13? What's going on when Jesus tells His disciples we'll be known by our love for each other?

Jesus had just given them a real life example of what love looks like. He'd just washed their feet. We show our love by serving each other. Jesus is our model. No task should be beneath us as we serve others for Christ's sake.

A man went to hear Dr. Alan Redpath (**picture**) speak. At the time, Dr. Redpath was the pastor of the large Moody Church in Chicago and was a widely known speaker and author. But the man didn't know what Dr. Redpath looked like. So he arrived early and saw two men setting up chairs before the meeting. One was the janitor. But the man didn't realize until Dr. Redpath got up to speak that the other man was Dr. Redpath. He was there early helping the janitor set up. He wasn't advertising it. If this guy hadn't gotten there before the meeting, he'd never have known what Dr. Redpath had done. That's the kind of humble service Jesus is talking about.

A practical way we all can serve on Sundays is to pick up paper or litter we notice around the building. Maybe you're thinking, "Doesn't our custodian do that?" Yes, he works hard at it. It shouldn't just be his job, What if a visitor walks in before the custodian has a chance to pick up and the visitor thinks, "This place is a dump. I'm going to find a church that's clean!" You can serve the Lord and that visitor by picking up the trash that you see.

Another way we can serve one another is to invite someone for a meal. We're commanded to show hospitality to each other (1 Peter 4:9-11). It doesn't need to be complicated. It can be as simple as Culver's. And not just your social circle. We all have folk we're comfortable with. We must step out of our comfort zones. Someone stepped out of theirs for you at one time.

Serving others is as simple as calling someone up to see how they're doing. If you know they've been going through some deep waters, check on them.

When someone is sick or has surgery, make a meal. Someone has young kids, offer to babysit. If someone moved here from another area, invite them over for a holiday. We have widows and singles at Grace. Do you know what it would have meant to some of them if someone had invited out last Sunday on Valentine's Day? If you have a skill and someone has a project going on, offer to help. Don't wait to be asked.

I sent out an appeal recently for meals for the Alvarezes. I'm so thankful for those who responded. Then, we had folk who interrupted their work day to go to the visitation for the funeral of Janell's and Steve's Mom.

For most of us, it's a really big deal to admit we need help. Everyone in this church does...in some area. Admit it so we can grow in our faith by serving you. **If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must serve each other.**

**3. If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must pray for each other.** Paul wrote, *"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy"* (Philippians 1:3-4). Though Paul was imprisoned, his chains couldn't prevent him from thinking about friends and praying for them. His remembrance of them filled him with thanksgiving, as he thought about how God was working among them. Those thoughts turned to frequent prayers on their behalf.

Our thoughts of other believers shouldn't stop with warm feelings. They should be turned God-ward, into heartfelt prayers for one another. In Ephesians 6:18 we're told to *"pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."* Romans 12:12 tells us to *"be devoted to prayer."* In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we're told to *"pray without ceasing."* The word translated *"without ceasing"* was used of a hacking cough. Someone with a hacking cough always comes back to it after brief intervals. Prayer for other believers is to be a frequent, common conversation between us and the Lord. The subject of our prayers should often be other Christians and their walk with God.

The prayers of the saints are part of God's method for accomplishing His sovereign will. He uses prayer to change the heart of the one doing the praying, as well as to work in the hearts of others. As you bring your requests before God, your motives are exposed. You quickly realize you can't honestly bring certain requests before God because your thoughts about a brother or sister aren't pleasing to Him.

If you're having trouble with another believer, pray often for that person. It's hard to stay angry at someone you're regularly praying for. James Boice (**picture**) wisely observed, *"I think that ninety percent of all the divisions between true believers in this world would disappear entirely if Christians would learn to pray specifically and constantly for one another."*

**4. If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must encourage each other.** Charles Swindoll (**picture**) re-wrote the old campfire song *"Home On the Range."* It goes like this:

*"O give me a church  
where folks in the lurch*

*are encouraged, then healed from above;  
where seldom is heard  
a discouraging word,  
and the truth is there modeled in love.”*

I like that! It's what our church should be like! We all need a place we can go to be encouraged. Our world is such a discouraging place!

The Greek word for *encouragement* is from the same root of the word for the *Holy Spirit*. The Greek word for Holy Spirit, *parakaleo*, means “*one called alongside to help*” It's the same meaning of the Greek word for encouragement. It means when we encourage others in the church, we come as close to the work of the Spirit as anything else we do in God's family. We're never more Christ-like than when we're full of compassion, coming alongside those who are discouraged to encourage them.

We have some great encouragers here at Grace! One who's been encouraging me almost since day one is Ray Ziebell (**picture**). For almost three decades Ray has been a blessing to me. He consistently encourages me with his words. He's so complimentary! Mark Twain once said, “*I can live for two months on a good compliment.*” I thank God for his skill at this vital form of one-anothering. We all need encouragers like Ray.

Mountain goats (**picture**) live in a dangerous environment. Anywhere you look it's a long way to the bottom! They live on steep mountain cliffs. One wrong move and they can fall to their deaths. Young mountain goats, known as kids, can be in grave danger because of their inexperience and playfulness. Those kids are, born to romp and leap, twist, skip, prance but high spirits and wandering attention can be fatal for young goats. Fortunately, nannies dote on their offspring, tending them from the downhill side to block falls.

What a beautiful image for how mature Christians should care for new and maturing believers. New Christians stumble and fall on occasion, so we must protect them from the downhill side, ready to block them when they fall, helping them to learn and even grow from their mistakes.

God commanded us to encourage each other because He knows we need it. Are you an encourager? Do you look for ways to encourage your brothers and sisters? When encouragement is absent from the life of a church, people feel unloved, unimportant and forgotten. God knows His people are in need of grace-filled reminders, so He calls us to encourage each other every day until His Son returns (Hebrews 3:13).

Biblical encouragement isn't about complementing someone's haircut or telling them how good their homemade pie tastes. That kind of encouragement is important, but the encouragement the Scriptures refer to is explicitly Christian encouragement. It's shared with the hopes it lifts someone's heart toward the Lord. It points out evidences of grace in another's life to help them see God is using them. It points them to God's promises assuring them all they face is under His control. Encouragement is an essential way of extending grace to each other.

How can you grow in being an encourager? It's simple. Ask God to make you an encourager. Ask Him to give you a heart that loves others and the creativity to know how to show it. Ask him to help you die to self-centeredness and grow in a desire to build others up. Then, make encouragement a daily discipline. For some of us encouragement comes naturally, for others, not so much. I have a reminder in my

calendar to send out encouraging notes. I need this reminder to pause, pray, and then intentionally try to spur someone on in Christ. **If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must encourage each other.**

**5. If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must commit to each other.** In a local church we find others who've also given their lives to Christ. So the church is where we find soulmates in the truest sense of the word. It's why church membership is so important. By publicly committing to join a church we find the kind of deep friendships we all yearn for. Church membership is where you're most likely to find true "extra-mile" friends—friends who'll stick with you no matter what—who come together to do things we could never do on our own.

In our non-commitment day, many Christians disagree with this. They don't think joining a church is important. Or, perhaps they just don't understand its importance. They'll say things like, "Well, I'm a Christian but I don't want to belong to any church." Yet, a local church family is where we live out much of what it means to be a Christian. It's where we commit together to do God's will. It's where we pool our spiritual gifts to strengthen a local church making it possible to do great things. Saying, "I don't want to belong to a church" is like saying, "I'm a football player, but I don't want to be a part of any team." Or, "I'm a bee but I don't want to be a part of any hive."

I don't want to sound overly critical. If you attend here we're going to love you as if you were a member. Yet, I must say in love—without joining and getting involved—by only attending—you're missing out.

The New Testament compares the church to a body with each of its members as body parts. No body part can survive long on its own. When surgeons do an organ transplant, they have a very limited amount of time. They must hurry to get that body part in a functioning body or the organ will die. It's the same with us. Cut off from the lifeblood of a local church body, our individual spiritual life can wither and dry up. We need a church body to belong to, a place to link up with other believers in working to share God's love to our community and world. Making a public commitment to join a church is important. It's covenanting together to help one another as you do God's will.

Maybe the jumpstart for you today is to take our New Members class. It's an opportunity for us to pop the hood for you at Grace Church, so you can see what we're about, our purpose, passion and church philosophy.

Membership says, "I love Jesus and His family so much that I'm officially committing to this local church family." Check it out for yourself. The New Testament knows nothing of Christians floating around in "just me and Jesus" land. Believers belong to local churches.

**6. If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must set aside our minor differences.** Remember the Simon and Garfunkel song, "I'm a Rock": *"I've built walls, a fortress deep and mighty that none may penetrate / I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain, its laughter and its loving I disdain."* There's a line from the song that's haunting. *"If I never loved, I never would have cried."* It's admitting we all tend to build walls around us to keep people away from us.

A lost world builds walls racially, politically, economically, etc. The night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed for us specifically in John 17, *“I don’t pray for these disciples alone, but for everyone who will believe because of their testimony.”* That’s us. Jesus prayed we’d be unified. *“May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”*(John 17:23)

Why did Jesus pray we’d be unified? So the world would see there’s something supernatural about Christianity. Think about how divided our world is. When it sees Christians dwelling together in unity, the world feels a need to check it out. One reason the world scoffs at the church is too often there’s division and animosity in the church, just like the world.

Unity is not uniformity. Some groups think all Christians should look the same, dress the same, smell the same, and worship exactly the same way. The Body of Christ is wonderfully diverse. It’s what makes unity so beautiful. Unity also isn’t man-made. Bringing two groups together or two people together is a union, but it’s not the same as unity. Vance Havner used to say you can tie two cats together by their tails and you’d have unification, but you won’t have unity!

Unity is a bonding only the Holy Spirit can create. What unifies my heart with yours is the fact the Holy Spirit bears witness with my spirit and your spirit that we’re children of God. Only the Holy Spirit can create unity between believers.

Scripture is clear it’s easy to mess up unity. It’s why Paul wrote, *“Make every effort to **keep** the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:3) The word *“keep”* is the picture of a Roman soldier on sentry duty guarding something valuable. We’re to stand guard to maintain our unity. It means biting our tongues before we say something which will rupture unity. We should do everything we can to lovingly deal with those who disrupt unity.

Satan loves division in the church. Jesus commands unity, the unity of the Spirit. We need to passionately guard the unity of Grace Church.

Galatians 3:28 is a powerful picture, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* In the body of Christ, there are no races or political parties, no union or non-union, no rich or poor. We’re all just blood bought sinners.

Now I love you. I believe you know that. It grieves me what some of you say about folk who are different or post on Facebook. Is it loving, is it going to bring unity for me to post I hate President Obama or Governor Walker? How am I going to witness to my pagan neighbor if they think I hate the President or the Governor? Have an opinion but our loyalty must first be to King Jesus. It’s evil to say or post hateful things because you disagree with someone. That person, too, is made in the image of God.

Is King Jesus the Lord of your life? If He is, then everything, all my other loyalties, ideology, opinions must submit before Him. I’m first a Christian. I’m first a brother or sister in Christ. Everything else is second!

Let me share an area where I personally am very careful. I believe the Roman Catholic Church, for the most part, teaches and adheres to a false gospel, in that it’s commonly taught being a good or moral person will get you into Heaven. Or, you can pray or pay someone out of Purgatory into heaven. That’s wrong! It’s not what God’s Word says. Now there are Catholics who believe salvation is by grace alone, yet not by in large.

I have many friends who are Catholic. I'd never say or post something bashing their church. It's not the church, it's what do you believe that's the issue. Do you believe the Bible, that salvation is by grace alone plus nothing? I'm not going to build walls which hinder someone from coming to Christ.

There's a powerful illustration of this that took place after the Civil War. The American Civil War divided our nation. It also divided the Church in America. Two months after the war ended, members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond gathered for worship. At the end of the message, the pastor invited worshippers to approach the front to receive communion. To the great shock and consternation of the congregation, the first man to walk forward was a stranger, a black man. Outraged, none of the other worshippers left their seats. After a few moments, a very dignified white gentleman could be seen walking down the aisle to the communion rail. He knelt beside that black man to receive communion. His name – Robert E. Lee (**picture**). After General Lee came forward, the other members of the church moved forward for communion. Robert E. Lee believed the Bible. He believed there is neither free nor slave...or any other division, for we are one in Christ Jesus. Do you? **If we are going to jumpstart our love for each other we must set aside our minor differences.**

**Conclusion:** Earlier in this message we played *Cats in the Cradle* by Harry Chapin. Those words always cause me to tear up because I'm a father. I know I didn't spend time with my children like I wish I had. God has blessed me with three godly adult children who love Jesus in spite of my failures. But do you know the end of Harry Chapin's story?

Tragically, the melodrama of that song was played out in Harry Chapin's own life, almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy. His wife, Sandy, who wrote the words of the song, asked him one day when he was going to slow down the torrid pace of his life and give some time to their children. His answer was, "At the end of this busy summer, I'll take some time to be with them."

That summer, ironically and tragically, Harry Chapin was killed in a car accident. It's not possible to read the postscript of Chapin's death and miss the larger point—something was known, believed, even "preached," but never lived. When we chase anything other than the truth of God's Word, the treasured relationships for which God has made us, life loses its meaning.

What about you? Will you obey? Will your brothers and sisters in Christ become a priority? *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* **Will you today in your heart say?**

**1. I will commit myself to jumpstarting my love for other believers by spending time together.** It probably means committing to a SML class or small group. You can't experience true fellowship if you aren't connected to other Christians who know you personally and whom you know. We must commit to meet and build one another up in Christ.

**2. I will commit myself to jumpstarting my love for other believers by serving others.** Every believer is gifted for service. Rather than being self-focused ("Nobody said hello to me; this is an unfriendly church"), be focused on others ("There is a person who seems to need a friend; I'll go over and reach out to him").

**3. I will commit myself to jumpstarting my love for other believers by praying for others.** I'd begin with the ones you have a hard time loving.

**4. I will commit myself to jumpstarting my love for other believers by encouraging others** Pray before you come to church, "Lord, use me to be a blessing to someone today. Use me to encourage someone today."

**5. I will commit myself to jumpstarting your love for other believers by joining this church and/or going through the New Members' class.**

**6. I will commit myself to jumpstarting my love for other believers by surrendering my other loyalties to Christ and setting aside all minor differences.** "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Is it true of our church? Will you commit to helping it be true?