

## STUDY UNIT 2

2 Pet. 1:5-8 / 1 Cor. 13:13 / Col. 3:12-14 / Phil. 2:1-5

### HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? – FOR OTHERS!

UNIT 1 of this study series proposed that we are living in a “Post Christian America” that is bringing new challenges, opposition and suffering to committed Christians. If this is true and we will increasingly face these things – how are we to respond? What does God want us to do? How then does God want me to live? The answer is: He wants me to live - **for others, like He does.**

*“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”*  
Phil. 2:3-5

Would you say that you are a mature Christian? The biblical principles of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ that have been presented in Volumes 1 and 2 are listed at the end of this study unit. If you have studied them and are living your life committed to keeping them – does that make you a MATURE CHRISTIAN? It depends completely on the extent to which you are living your life for OTHERS. Because...

*“But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is LOVE.”*  
1 Cor. 13:13

*“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on LOVE.”*  
Col. 3:12-14

*“Applying all diligence, **in your faith** supply **moral excellence**, and in your moral excellence, **knowledge**; and in your knowledge, **self-control**, and in your self-control, **perseverance**, and in your perseverance, **godliness**; and in your godliness, **brotherly kindness**, and in your brotherly kindness, **LOVE** (the consummate quality and characteristic).*

*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither **useless nor unfruitful** in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*  
2 Pet. 1:2-8

**LOVE** is the Greek word “**agape**”. It is a word unique to Christianity. What does it mean? A mature Christian has “put on” **LOVE** and it means to live for others, not yourself.

*“We know **love** by this, that He (Christ) laid down His life for us; and **we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**”* 1 John 3:11

“Agape” love is living your life in self-denial for others. Mature Christians live their lives **for others**. The extent to which they do this determines their “Christlikeness” (Phil. 2:3-5). The extent to which they have this attitude in themselves determines their usefulness in the work of the age. (2 Pet. 1:8) The extent to which they live for others rather than themselves determines how much they please the Lord and therefore their rewards at the Bema (Col. 1:9-10). The extent to which we live for others in self-denial determines our maturity as Christians (Lk. 6:27-35). It is to live like our God lives by His power working in us and through us.

Notice what Paul says to the immature Christians in Corinth. They were very gifted, very committed, and very enthusiastic – but they did what they did for themselves, not others.

*“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, **I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.***

*And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, **I am nothing.***

*And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, **it profits me nothing.**”* 1 Cor. 13:1-3

In contrast to these self-oriented Christians, a mature Christian can be defined as...

**“A Christian Who Lives For Others In Self-Denial, Like His Savior And Lord.”**

*“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me (i.e. be My disciple), **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* Matt. 16:24

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you **LOVE** one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this all men will know that you are My disciples,.... if you have LOVE for one another.**”* John 13:34-35

To what extent do you live for others and not yourself? To what extent does selfless love of others describe you? Loving others in the midst of what is coming is the answer to our questions about how to respond to what lies ahead. So, let us examine biblical LOVE a bit further.

# 1. WHY IS “AGAPE” LOVE THE MEASURE OF A CHRISTIAN’S MATURITY?

## 1) Because AGAPE (or Selfless) Love Describes The Essential Nature Of God.

*God is love.*”

-1 John 4:8

In the Greek language, the presence of the definite article before a noun (*the* temple vs. *a* temple) identifies. The emphasis is upon uniqueness and individuality and identity. The absence of the article (*a* temple vs. *the* temple) qualifies and characterizes. The emphasis in this verse is upon the character and the nature of God. “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8) would be better translated “*God as to His nature is characterized by love*” because the definite article is omitted. He has a nature that is characterized by agape love. God considers others more important than Him

*“By this the (“selfless love of others”) love of God was manifested to us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world (to die) so that we might live through Him .”*

1 John 4:9

Agape love is known only by its actions. God’s acts of love for sinners reveals His true nature. This word (agape) is never used to describe the nature of animals. Starfish are amazing and beautiful creatures, but they are actually some of the most vicious creatures on the planet. After engulfing a stationary mussel or clam and forcing it open slightly, the starfish has the ability to push its stomach into the shell. Then it digests the poor clam or mussel alive. Soon nothing is left and the starfish proceeds to another meal. Starfish are not loving. They do not consider others more important than themselves. Rather, they violate the whole law of God naturally, just like every fallen creature, including man. Including us.

*“For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.”*

Gal. 5:14-15

## 2) Because Selfless Love Describes God’s Attitude Toward You.

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”*

John 3:16

*“He poured out Himself to death... bore the sin of many... and interceded for the transgressors.”*

Isa.

53:12

This is what selfless love is like. That is God’s disposition towards you!

### 3) Because Selfless Love Describes What God Has Done For Fallen Man.

*“In this is **love**, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*

*1 John 4:10*

*“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

*Rom. 5:8*

### 4) Because Selfless Love Of Others Describes What God Wants US To Do.

In one sense, this is all you really need to know about the Christian life. There are 613 Old Testament commands. Jesus said these are all summed up in loving God and others rather than living for yourself.

*“And He said to him, **“You shall love the LORD your God with ALL your heart, and with ALL your soul, and with ALL your mind.”** This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, **‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’**” *“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”**

*Matt. 22:37-40*

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

***Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”***

*1 John 4:7-11*

*“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. **Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.**”*

*John 15:9-13*

So, in whatever we face in life in the future, in whatever hardships and circumstances we may face in the months and years ahead – how does our God want us to live? He wants us to live for others. Who are these others? God is clear about this and the answer is the subject of Study Units 5-9.

## **UNIT 2 STUDY SESSION #1:**

In preparation for the group study of Selfless Love Of Others, read and study the preceding material and then complete the following self - evaluation.

### **Evaluating My Selfless Love Of Others**

1. I am living my life for God...  
\_\_\_\_\_ Completely. For me to live is Christ. I am and will do whatever He asks.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I am a good Christian, above average in self-denial for Him.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I am a lukewarm Christian. God has me, as long as it does not cost too much.
2. I am living for my family: \_\_\_yes,\_\_\_ doing well \_\_\_ok\_\_\_ no. The issues and variables \_\_\_\_\_
3. I am living for my church family: \_\_\_yes, I love them\_\_\_ not much\_\_\_ I should be doing more\_\_\_ other things have a greater priority that my church.
4. I am living for some who are lost: \_\_\_yes\_\_\_ consistently \_\_\_some\_\_\_ no.
5. I am living for my enemies: \_\_\_no\_\_\_ a bit \_\_\_\_\_ I love them.

### **Discussion Questions For Study Session #1**

1. How hard is it to love others like this, living for them and not yourself?
2. Who, in your life, has been the best example of living for others in self-denial?
3. Living for others as described in the study is a life long battle. Why is this so? Can you describe your battles? What are the “keys” to success?
4. Two different words were used by Peter and Jesus after the resurrection (see John 21:15-17) and translated “love”. What is being revealed here for us?
5. How do I know who to give my life for?
6. What is the “balance” between patiently enduring suffering or wrongs for a season, and confronting sin. Are both “loving”?

### **Prayer Together**

## **UNIT 2 STUDY SESSION #2:**

In preparation for the second study session please consider pursuing one of the following projects and be prepared to share about it appropriately.

### **Preparation For Session #2: Application Project**

1. Identify the WEAKEST area in your life regarding who you are living for (of the 5 addressed in the evaluation) and ask the Lord to show you what to do to give more of your life to them this week. (see Phil. 2:3-5) Start a journal.
2. Set aside time this week to pray for 1 hour a day for:
  1. Your family
  2. Your church family
  3. All the saints in the world (Eph. 6:18)
  4. Some of the lost souls in your spheres of life
  5. Your enemies, past and present (Lk. 6:27-28)

Keep a journal of who and what.

3. Write 7 letters (or make 7 calls) this week to thank and bless those who have given much of their life to you.
4. Consider the following story and commit to apply it, as you are led, regarding your worst “enemies”.

“I know a mature, others oriented man of God who had been opposed by a brother who had done him much harm. I was with him one day when he was asked to share his feelings about this brother by someone who had heard what he had done.

His wonderful response was: ‘Well, he (the one who had wronged him), he has no idea what a blessing he has been to me.’ That was all he said, smiling.”

### **Discussion Questions For Study Session #2**

1. If you had an opportunity to pursue one of the application projects can you share with us how it went?

### **Prayer Together**