

Shadowing the Actions of Yeshua

What is love? Poets pine about it. Writers describe it as something sought after and often elusive. Hollywood portrays it as lust. On social media we “love” posts. Couples divorce and the words “I love you, but I’m not *in love* with you” hang in the air as a sacred covenant dissolves. Love. The word seems to be tossed about, used, discarded, too often forgotten in the heat of an argument and unbelieved in the wake of hurt. I have heard people say, “love is a verb,” and clichéd as it is, it is true.

In 1 John 4:7-8 it says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.” This seems such a Greek thing to say - God is love. It seems almost an abstract idea. But John, a Jewish believer and disciple of Yeshua, knows that YHWH is love because of what He has done and the whole of the Tanach is testament to that love. And as John sits penning these words, only a few years prior God had come to dwell among us and in a selfless, sacrificial act, died on a cross to be the atonement for the sins of His created.

We can say we love God, even say we love each other, but it is our actions that make the statements true. Even in Paul’s exhortation on love, the descriptions of what constitutes love are all rooted in actions. Loving your neighbor as yourself means loving others as YHWH loves us, and to love without exception and without bias is to bear Yeshua’s image in the world. We are all created in YHWH’s image, but that does not mean we perfectly emulate His attributes. Our love is defined by our actions and as a believer our actions ought to be governed by the words of the

Torah for it is within those sacred words, we learn what God defines as love. The whole of Scripture is a letter, God breathed words on parchment, of how much God loves His people.

In a world crippled by a me-centered mentality, how do I love my neighbor? I believe it requires two things: dying to self and living for Yeshua. It means taking our eyes off ourselves and placing our gaze upon Yeshua where it ought to be; it means a perpetual purging of anything contributing to the unholiness within us. It requires being still before YHWH and meditating on the words of Scripture to learn about how our God loves.

I love how Rambam¹ explains this commandment in Sefer HaMitzvot:

Mitzvah #206 is that [the Holy One] commanded each one of us to love others of us just as we love ourselves. And that my mercy and my love for my brother will be like my mercy and love for myself, in his property and his body, and in whatever is under his authority or anything he might want; anything I want for myself I want for him as well. And anything that I hate for myself or for those closest to me I likewise hate for him. And this is what the Blessed One said, *And you shall love your neighbor as yourself*.

But I question how he defines “others of us.” Does he mean only others who share his faith commitment? How do I define myself and how do I define my neighbor? We are both God’s created and in Psalm 145:8-9 is says,

YHWH is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving devotion. YHWH is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.

I think about how God did not just bring the Hebrews out of Egypt, there was a entire mixed multitude that accompanied them; I think about Yeshua healing those who were not Jews,

1. Moses ben Maimon, also know as Maimonides, was a Sephardic rabbi and philosopher who was an influential Torah scholar in the Middle Ages.

such as the ten lepers one of which was a Samaritan, and also the centurion's servant². Doesn't this define my neighbor as anyone God has created? We are called to love everyone and there is no limit placed on that love just as there is no law against joy and peace, patience and goodness, kindness and faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and of course, love. We are to bear these fruits without limit and without prejudice. Yeshua died for my neighbor the same as He died for me. We are both His created. The only difference between us is I am in covenant relationship and I am to bear an image of love and my neighbor may or may not be. If I only love those who are also in that covenant relationship, I have failed in doing the work Yeshua commanded me to do. As believers, we must accept that each encounter we have with another person, no matter who they are, may be the only reflection of Yeshua they ever see. It is imperative that all my thoughts, words, and deeds are rooted in love. And like Rambam says, I ought to want everything for my brother or sister that I want for myself and ought to hate whatever for them which I would hate for myself.

But what if we don't love ourself? I never thought about not loving myself nor that it could be used as a measure of how I loved others. This took me down a path I was unprepared to travel. Yeshua loved me enough to atone for my sins and yet I still view myself as unworthy of such a love. If I do not love myself, how can I love others? I know there have been times I have told others there is no sin too great Yeshua's sacrifice can not cover it. Why would I not believe this about my own sin? This goes beyond humility or counting others better than myself. This goes to the very depths of what I believe.

Self-loathing is not a synonym for humility. Humility is birthed from understanding our place in the divine created order and it is evident in our obedient submission to God and in our

2. Exodus 12:38; Luke 17:11-19; Matthew 8:5-13 (Luke 7:1-10)

willingness to serve others. Self hate would be indicative of not letting go of the old me, not allowing Yeshua to fully cleanse me and make me a new creation. Would it not mean there is disbelief within me, that somewhere in my mind I believe there are works I must do to absolve myself, that Yeshua's sacrifice was somehow lacking? Is there unrepentant sin in me? Or is this simply part of the process of being refined as I walk this path of sanctification, recognizing that even though I was not worthy Yeshua loved me anyway, loved me enough to lay His lay down His own life for my own? And He calls me to that same level of commitment of love to everyone - and that means people I do not like, people I disagree with, people who have betrayed me, those with a different faith commitment than my own, and especially those who are of the world - those are the people I need to love the most because they don't know Yeshua. In Isaiah it speaks of caring for the fatherless, and spiritually speaking, someone not in covenant with YHWH is fatherless.

If I am not loving, why? Ramban gave me pause to consider the purging of unholiness and how it would be crucial to loving my neighbor.

For sometimes a man will love his neighbor in matters that are known, for his financial wealth, but not in wisdom or similar things. And if he were to love him in all things, he would desire that his beloved neighbor would gain for himself wealth, properties, honor, knowledge, and wisdom, and not (desire) that he would be equal (to his neighbor). But there will always be a desire in his heart that he will be better off than his neighbor in every good thing. And the Scripture commands that there will not be this wretched jealousy in his heart, but that he will love his fellow in abundance of good just as a man does for his own soul and not give love in fixed measures. Concerning this Scripture says about Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:17) *For with the love of his own soul he loved [David]*. Because he had removed the attribute of jealousy from his heart, and he said, *and you shall rule over Israel* (1 Sam 23:17)

And there it was. The answer to why we often don't love. Jealousy: unholiness left to fester like a wound, a poison to our spirit. We live in a world where the most important thing is self. But here is a perfect example in Jonathan who loved David with the love of his own soul. And when Saul is seeking David's life, Jonathan goes to David and "strengthened his hand in God." (1 Samuel 23:16) The son of a king who will never sit upon the throne, but desires God's will to be done through another. Most are so afraid they will not be noticed or recognized as important, forgetting the most important thing is for God's will to be done and through our actions that He be glorified. But love, it is so hard sometimes. Maybe that is the point. There is a cost, a sacrifice involved if we love the way God loves; for God is love and to bear His image in this world requires submission and obedience and the purging of all that is unholy.

I once wrote down this quote by Dr. A. J. Roberts, a California high school teacher, that has been a great reminder to me when I study:

The most important distance in a Christian's life is the 8-12" between your head and your heart. You need to know not just about God, but to know Him personally.

I can study about God all day long, but it is impossible to love if we are not in a covenant relationship and walking with God. We can not love fully and without measure unless we are steeped in Yeshua's presence; and we can not bring glory to God until we are bowed before our King in service to the Kingdom. When our focus is narrowed to the purposes of the Kingdom and the will of God, then love will be evident in everything we do and when people look at us they will see the image of our Creator because our actions will shadow Yeshua's.