

# Love Does What is Best for the Other Person

By Wendy Wood



Love does what is best for the other person. As a biblical counselor, you are probably thinking this is obvious. We look at Christ on the cross and see God's love in action for those He loves. We look at Christ showing compassion to the woman at the well and the confrontation that she not only doesn't have a husband, she's had five. Jesus doesn't ignore the truth to protect her feelings, but points out the sin and gently restores. While we clearly see this principle of love throughout scripture, many of my counselees struggle to believe that loving someone may be saying "no" to what the other person wants or exposing sin and calling for genuine repentance.

Worldly love focuses on what we get from another person. We feel loved when someone makes much of us. When someone goes out of their way to do something for us, we feel loved. When someone gives us a gift that we've wanted for a long time, we feel loved. When someone showers praises and kind words on us, we feel loved.

When we get what we want, we feel loved. Sadly, many counselees believe that making other people feel good is what it means to love them.

Typically I go to John 11 to help my counselees understand this truth about love. In John 11, Jesus and his disciples are traveling outside of Judea. Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that Lazarus is sick and dying. The sisters refer to Lazarus as “the one whom you [Jesus] love”. Jesus’ response is that the sickness will not lead to death but is for the glory of God to be displayed. John records again, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” This is repeated three times in the passage because it is essential to know that Jesus is acting out of love. Jesus doesn’t rush to cure Lazarus. He doesn’t immediately fix the problem. John 11 says Jesus stayed where he was two more days. Then he tells his disciples they will return to Judea. And, they had to walk to Judea. This wasn’t a quick trip where they arrived a couple of hours later. This took them several more days to arrive.

Martha and Mary are upset, as anyone would be at the death of their brother. But, they also know that Jesus could have done something to change the outcome, and He didn’t. They still have faith in His ability to do whatever He purposes but are deeply grieved that he didn’t come in time and that Lazarus died. Jesus knows the plan ahead of time. Verses 14 and 15 “So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” These verses are amazing and turn the definition of love upside down. It was **better** for Lazarus to die so that their faith may increase and for God to be glorified as His power and grace are displayed.

Jesus allowed Lazarus, Mary, and Martha to suffer greatly. That was loving them best! Jesus knew that a confident faith in Him was better than making life easier for them. Love did what was best by giving them what drew them closer to the Lord.

In Matthew 16, Jesus again does something surprising, yet extremely loving, with Peter. Jesus had just been telling the disciples that He would suffer and die in Jerusalem. Peter is upset and concerned for Jesus and himself. Peter doesn’t want Jesus, his good friend, to suffer and he doesn’t want to be without his good friend. Peter exclaims that he will never let Jesus suffer. This seems like a loving thing to do. After all, he is trying to protect his friend. But Jesus responds with “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Jesus loves Peter too much to let him go on thinking that Jesus shouldn’t suffer. Jesus knows that suffering is part of God’s wonderful plan for sinners. Loving Peter meant giving him a sharp rebuke. Jesus draws Peter closer to Him by showing him that God’s plan is always better and showing him what it means to submit to God’s purpose.

Jesus demonstrates this love with unbelievers, too. In Matthew 23 Jesus issues seven “woe” statements to the Pharisees. It’s not loving to let the Pharisees believe that they know God. They are far from God but are so deceived they think their legalism is pleasing God when in fact it is self-righteous and self-focused and has nothing to do with loving God. Jesus is loving them by showing them their hypocrisy. The Pharisees respond with anger, but that doesn’t change the fact that Jesus showed them love. This is important for our counselees to understand. The other person’s response does not determine if love was shown. Only God’s definition of love, doing what brings the other person closer to Him, is truly love. The Pharisees had a worldly view of love and wanted to be praised and adored as they were. Jesus’ true love was rejected and that may happen to us and our counselees as we live out God’s word.

How does your counselee need to love someone in their life? Do they need to confront someone who is caught in a sin and seek to gently restore him or her? (Galatians 6:1). This confrontation may or may not be received as love, but God declares that it is the most loving thing to do! Does your counselee need to bring along another person to confront the sinner with them? (Matthew 18:15-20). Maybe your counselee needs to say “no” to an adult child or teenager who could respond angrily. Does your counselee need to tell their spouse they are no longer going to participate with him or her in sinful actions like pornography or lying?

Perhaps it is you, counselor, who needs to be reminded that loving your counselee could mean having very difficult conversations with him or her. Do you need to address a sinful habit or a concern over their salvation? Do you need to help them see an area of their heart that they are blind to? The most loving thing you can do is help them see Christ and how to draw closer to Him.

Love does what is best for the other person. Love doesn’t do what is easy. Love doesn’t do what feels good for self or the other person. Love looks at God and is willing to do whatever is most beneficial to the other person’s relationship with God.