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Title: Not Like, but Like...

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Scripture: [1 John 4:12-17, 19](#)

Text: [John 15:9-17](#)

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NOT LIKE, BUT LIKE

Some of you are aware that I traveled to Oklahoma ten days ago to bury my last Aunt. She was over 90 years old; she had a wonderful life. The trip was good, one which brought back many childhood memories of community, family, and love. Is there anything greater than the love of family?

We flew into Will Rogers International Airport in Oklahoma City. Have you been there? It is a great looking airport if airports are supposed to look like their surroundings. It looks like Indian Territory on the plains, complete with red rocks, grasslands and little architectural structures that look like teepees. Out front is a statue of Will Rogers.

Do you know who Will Rogers was? I didn't know who Col. H Weir Cook was when they named our new airport for him. I still can't tell you much about him. Maybe you know about Will Rogers from the 90's musical. It won a Tony for Best Musical in 1991. But it had a short run. You might remember when there was an offering of loose change collected at movies for the Will Rogers Foundation.

Growing up in Oklahoma, it was impossible not to know Will Rogers, even though he died in a plane crash more than 20 years before I was born. He was a Vaudeville comedian who told jokes while spinning a rope. He said some funny things, some of which could be used today, almost a century after he said them. Like "I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts." His most famous quote is on his tombstone. "I never met a man I didn't like."

I grew up hearing that as an example of how we are to live. It was right alongside the Golden Rule and our text today. I'll be honest, it bothered me. I can't say that I've never met someone who I didn't like. How about you? If we are honest, all of us know people who we don't like. I have a colleague who likes to say, "There are some people to whom I couldn't warm up to even if I were cremated with them!"

Let's get this out of the way before we dig deeper. Christians are not called to like everyone. The song is titled, "They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love" not by who we like or don't like. If there are people in your life whom you do not warm up to, please know that it isn't a violation of any Christian norm.¹ Jesus did not say, "like like I like," Rather, he said, "love like I love." Not like... but like... I love. Following Jesus isn't about *the feeling like* but *the behavioral like*. It's not about who you like but who you act like. Not like, but like.

Confused? Perhaps the earlier followers were too, and it was their business after Easter to try to sort it out. They needed more than stories and experiences of seeing the Risen Savior. They had to make sense of who he said he was, so they went back to his last words and put them into the context of Easter. They remember that on his last night, after Jesus washes their feet and after they ate and drank, Jesus taught. He says: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." (John 13:34) Not like, but like ...I love.

Minutes later, Jesus expands on this. "As the Father has loved me, so I have 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." (John 15:9). Again, not like, but this time, like God loves me and like I love you.

He takes a breath and says again, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) Not like, but like... I love. And then, while they were still listening, he gives and an example. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Not like, but like... I love.

Then, one more time. "I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." (John 15:17). Not like, but like...I love.

OK, Jesus, we get your point; or do we? We don't have to like but we do have to love. Love like Jesus, abiding in his love, showing the world our love. But here is the sad truth: love is not what the world generally sees in us. Love is not the first word people think of when they hear the term, Christian. Not by a long shot. Perhaps you are aware of the research done by the Barna group that makes this point. A few years ago, that well-respected organization finished a five-year study that found unequivocally that when asked what word or phrases best describe Christianity, the most popular responses were "hypocritical," "insensitive," and "judgmental." We are known more for what we stand against than what we love. We are famous for what we don't like than who we are like. In short, the survey confirmed

the impression that Christians are simply, "UN-Christian", which became the title of the book of finding. The authors conclude that Christianity has an image problem" that can only be remedied by "becoming more Christ-like."²To be people of the Resurrection, to live our lives in the power of an open tomb, we've got some work to do.

How do we do that? Jesus maps it out for us. First, we love like God who loved us, even though he didn't like us. You might not have ever thought of it that way but it is what scripture teaches. Paul says it a little different way. "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us....while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son..." (Romans 5:8, 10) Why would God do that? Because we are God's children, created in God's image and as such, we are very special. The Psalmist says that "...what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." (Psalm 8:4-5) That means God created every person, whether you like them or not, as special, honored, important, with dignity, worth, and highly esteemed.

And these special, honored children were intentionally created by God to be unique. You're not one in a million, you're one in seven billion. Most of the time, the people we don't like are people that are different from us, look different, think different, act differently. If you've got a problem with people who are different from you, you've got a problem with God. Racism, prejudice, and bigotry are like telling God he messed up because God didn't make everyone exactly like you. If you don't like diversity you're not going to like heaven³

Not like but like God loves is to grant everyone dignity and honor, to love them despite differences because they are family and there is nothing like the love of family. We love because he first loved us, by creating us as honored, special and unique and then, even though he didn't like us, God loved us by sending Jesus.

Understanding that is the first step on the map that Jesus gives. The second step is this. To love like Jesus, you have to really know Jesus. You've got to abide. "As the Father has loved me, so I have 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." (John 15:9-10)

The logic behind this is simple. You can't do what you don't have. You can't give love if you don't experience it. But this is where our language and experience of what love tends to fail us because we equate love as a feeling and of course feeling has an affinity with liking. In our culture, the word love often connotes something romantic for another person or an extreme fondness for something. We throw around the word love all the time. We

can love our spouse, or love the weather or love your new car or love eating Mexican food, which maybe you did yesterday for Cinco de Mayo. In Greek, these types of love have different words, like eros, philia, and storgi. There are need based loves where there is the need for affection, for relationships, for wants are being fulfilled. Need loves is about getting, acquiring, liking.

The type of love the coming from abiding in Jesus is agape love which isn't need love, it is gift love. God has offered a gift in Jesus which doesn't come from within, it comes from above. In Jesus, God comes to live in us and God's love is perfected in us. John says it this way. "God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God." (1 John 4:15) Agape love is a gift that is like a bountiful, artesian well that continues to overflow, exemplified by God and it is found in a relationship with Jesus. Loving one another is not meant to be a task, but a way of life. Loving one another is a natural outworking of being loved. When we abide in the love of the living Christ for us and for all people, then love for one to another flows as naturally as water from a fountain. It's like a tree that bears fruit. The tree doesn't try to bear fruit; it just does, because that is what a healthy tree does! If you don't have that, if you don't abide in that, you can give that, offer that, be that to others, especially to people you don't like.

Love like God. Abide in Jesus and finally, not like but like Jesus, sacrifice. Lay down your life. He said it this way. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15: 12-13) That's a huge challenge particularly when we read this in light of what Jesus did for us. He literally laid down his life, died to demonstrate love. If we have to die to love like Jesus, then all of us are going to fail. But fortunately, not like but like works here too when looking more carefully.

When Jesus refers to being laid down is the Greek word ψυχη, "psuché" which is translated life. Maybe that word sounds familiar and it should because it could also be translated mind or psychic as in the word psychology.⁴ It can also mean being or heart or even ego. Given this, we could suggest that perhaps we are to lay down (or set aside) our heart or lay down our mind or lay down our soul or lay down our being. In fact, it probably wouldn't be too big of a stretch to translate this passage in a contemporary way "There is no greater love than when someone gets their ego out of the way for another." (John 15:13)⁵

I don't know about you but when you read that passage it comes alive in a new way because frankly, when I look at my life, when I look the people I hang out with, when I look at Christians like you and me, I don't see a lot of egos getting out of the way. What gets in the way of us loving one another is our tendency to assert me, my needs, my thoughts, my desire, and my

psychic. It is what I want, not what they need. I actually think that is the key to loving everyone, particularly those who you don't like. It is getting over yourself, getting past your pride and loving not like you, but like him, like Jesus. The challenge of Jesus' to love unconditionally in ego-heart-mind sacrificing ways, runs against the grain of our culture, our context, and our conditioning.

What makes it so hard, what makes this such a tall assignment is nobody doesn't have someone he doesn't like. In fact, they are all around you. No, don't look around. You don't have to. Turn on the news every morning and it won't take long and someone on one side or the other, someone unlikeable will show up. Sadly, I think we've become a nation of unlikeables who constantly want to talk about it, tweet about it or post on social media who they don't like. Maybe this is why we have an image problem.

But that's not what Jesus taught. He said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) This ultimately means that to follow a Risen Savior is to realize that sort of behavior based on a decision to obey. It means that at times, maybe even often, because we've all met and know people we don't like, you'll have to say, "I'll love that person, as unlikable as they are, based not on my feelings but upon God's love of me and my abiding love in Jesus." Why else than there is nothing greater than the love of family? It's not about *the feeling like* but *the behavioral like*. Not like, but like...

Live that way and people will take notice. It might even be something people might say about you when you gone. It wouldn't be a bad thing to put on a tombstone. "Not like, but like..." Then people would ask, "What's that about?" They'd say, "He never met a person he didn't love."

¹ Noblett, Robert. Called to Love, Not Like. Retrieved by subscription at sermons.com.

² Kinnaman, David and Gabe Lyons. unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and why it matters. Baker Books, 2007, Page, 26.

³ Warren, Rick. Loving Like Jesus in a Fractured World. 1/18/18 @ pastors.com

⁴ Lectionary Greek Blogspot, John 15:9-177, May 8, 2012. Retrieved at <http://lectionarygreek.blogspot.com/2012/05/john-158-17.html>

⁵ Woods, Peter. Love, How? Retrieved at <https://thelisteninghermit.com/2012/05/09/love-how-easter-6/>