

In the Sound of Music, Max Detweiler, a decidedly unprincipled man, vacillates between being a friend to Captain Von Trapp and simply using the Captain's abundance to benefit himself. When it comes to showing his true colors as it refers to his Mother Country of Austria, Max shows himself to be even more of a chameleon, making friends with both loyal Austrians (including Von Trapp), and cozying up to Hitler's Third Reich as they invade his country. At one point in the play, Max tells a humorous story about a dying man who, having been given last rites is asked by the priest something to this effect: "Do you renounce Satan and reject him in your life?" To which the dying man responds, "Until I know where I'm going, I'm keeping my options open. I won't reject anyone." Max is the epitome who loved himself above all others.

When considering some of the more notable traits of the early Christian community in the Book of Acts, a clarion characteristic is the Love they had for the Lord and for others, a selfless love. How they loved Him! And how powerfully their love for Him was transferred to others! But why think about this at all? Because the love He has gave to them (and now gives us) is so completely "other" than the kind of love we so often walk in.

What drove the first Christians in the Book of Acts was exactly what drove Jesus during His life on earth. Jesus was literally DRIVEN by His love for us. And, as amazing as it might seem, His love for us is the EXACT measure of God the Father's love for us! That is precisely WHY Jesus came to earth, so that we could see and experience exactly how God feels about us, what His heart's attitude towards us is. So very much could be written about how He loves us. The world could be filled with books about His love, yet not begin to describe it. But let's look briefly about what we know about this God of ours whose love for us drove Him to die for us so that we could live for and with Him.

It was Jesus who said, **"...God (our Father) loved the world SO MUCH that he sent His Son, His only son, whom He loved so very much, into this world. He sent His Son Jesus so that every single person who trusts in Him would be given the gift of eternal life. God sent Jesus into the world so that the world through Him might be saved."** (my paraphrase of John 3:16-17)

Jesus also said, **John 10:15 – "... I lay down my life for the sheep."**

and again

John 10:17 – "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again."

John 13:14-15 "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

John 15:13 - "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Or how about these words of Jesus?

John 13:34 - "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

John 15:9 - "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."

John 15:12 – "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

John 17:23 – "(Father,) I in them and you in me. 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."

Now having such an example before them in Jesus who was God in the flesh, how do we see our forefathers relating to Him and to one another?

- 1) "These all continued **with one accord** in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (Acts 1:14
- 2) "and they continued steadfastly in.....fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:42
- 3) "Now all who believed were together.....had all things in common,.....sold their....goods....and divided them among all, as anyone had need..... Acts 2:44-45
- 4) "So continuing daily with one accord.....they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...." Acts 2:46
- 5) "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul;they had all things in common." Acts 4:32
- 6) "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." Acts 4:34
- 7) "And they were all with one accord....." Acts 5:12b
- 8) (the 12 apostles said) "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore seek out....seven men of good reputation.....whom we may appoint over this business." Acts 6:2-3 (This Scripture points out that earthly temporary needs were taken care of by the early leaders of the church.)

And in a non-biblical reference, noted theologian and apologist Tertullian (c. 160-230 AD) commented on the effect early Christians had on non-believers who observed them when he wrote

"But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another,..."

This could go on and on. We could list Stephen's glad surrender of his life for those who murdered him; the churches taking up offerings for one another during hard times; the innumerable exhortations in the Epistles to believers to have Christ's love for one another.

So what is the point of all this? Simply this: Many of us LONG for the Lord to come visit us with a wave of His Presence and Power unheralded in the history of the world. We long to see multitudes come to Him. We ache for the Bride of Christ to look like who and what she really is. If we can learn what the early church had that is lacking in our lives today, we could change our behavior and our hearts so as to be in position to be able to withstand, to contain the outpouring the Holy Spirit of Jesus longs to pour upon us. I believe a major characteristic of the early church was **unselfish commitment to Him and to others.**

Jesus gave all of Himself for us. He plainly stated that the condition of the Father's abiding within us as believers was inextricably tied to both our devotion to Him and to one another.

It is time for each of us to take a personal inventory, to make an honest assessment of our true relationship of affection to our Lord. It is time to consider how we really "love the brethren" beyond mere words. It is one thing to say we love the Lord and our brothers and sisters in Him; it is another thing to live that live out. Here are a few points to ponder.

- **What does the Lord think of the time you spend with Him?** What about those the Lord has given you as a faith family? It is true that we spend time with what we love and with those we love. When a person comes to love someone or something, he or she re-orders their life just to be with this love.
- **What description would you give to your words about other believers?** What about Christian from traditions different than yours? If the most convincing witness for Christ is the love we have towards one another, how are you doing? **John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**
- **Where is your life's biggest investment? Where do you deposit most of your resources?** We invest the most in that which we love the most.

Rather than being threatened by such considerations, how about asking the Lord to help us tweak those areas that need tweaking, replace those unworthy of Him, and making us as lavish a lover of Him as He is of us?

Jesus is one outrageous Lover and Friend! He gave all to you and me – simply because He loves you - and me. Could we give Him anything less? Could we give one another anything less?

Wouldn't you just love for people to be bowled over by our love and care for one another? It really is **THE** biblical way to relate to one another! Is not your heart's desire to be exactly the opposite of Max in the Sound of Music? Would not the Father be thrilled to find His family of faith passionately devoted to Him and to the welfare of one another?

How about it? Let's turn a new page in the way we care for one another. Let's really be living epistles, living tabernacles, one in Him and devoted to one another in brotherly love.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.

Anyone who does not love remains in death.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

1 John 3:14,16