

“Love One Another” Emily Orton

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I’m ten years old when my mom says the most beautiful words to me. I will never forget this moment. She said, “You are getting your own room.” I feel a thrill go through my body. Even though it’s unfinished with cement floors, sheetrock walls, and exposed beams for a ceiling; it’s mine. The door closes. I can set it up my way. Listen to my music. Make everything exactly the way I want it to be. No sharing. No dealing with anyone else’s mess. It sounds like heaven.

Have you ever had your own room? It’s pretty great, right?

Then mom says, “I can’t let you verbally destroy your sister anymore. That’s why you’re getting your own room.” Wow. This is not a reward. It’s a punishment. I still want my own room, but I feel the sting. It gives me something to think about. Alone. In my room.

In John 13:34, Jesus Christ said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you.”¹

I obviously had a lot to learn about loving one another. I still do. I’ll share some of my adventures in trying to keep this commandment. I invite you to think about your adventures in keeping this commandant. What works? What doesn’t? How can you partner with the Savior?

In His mercy, Jesus teaches us:

1. Who to love—everyone.
2. What not to do—cause contention.
3. What to do—follow Him as we practice loving one another. He provides instruction and power to help us choose love. Because He was mortal, He understands how challenging it can be to choose love.

4. What happens when we mess up? Through His Atonement, He can heal us when we fall short and give us a new heart when we try to be like Him.

Point #1. Who to Love

One thing I've learned is that anyone who is not you is different than you. For example, my husband Erik and I outlined our first adventure memoir about living on a sailboat with our five kids for a year. We made a list of each standout experience. We rated each experience on a scale of one to ten; one being awful and ten being awesome. We created a double-line chart. We were together almost 24/7 in the same circumstances only inches apart. Our lines were opposite on almost every event. We were both surprised.

Even the person I have the most in common with in this world is different than me. The reverse is also true. The person who is the most different from me has basic things in common. We all have the light of Christ, and we are all God's children.

In God's wisdom and loving kindness, He put all of us here together. We are similar and different by divine design. It is not the Lord's plan that we become identical. He does not command us to be the same. He commands us to love.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you.”²

This “new commandment” has two parts: who we are to love and how we are to love. Let's focus first on who we are to love.

Here's a highlighted version of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-26.

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”

This commandment has three categories. You can do a quick self-check right now. Love God. Love yourself. Love your neighbor. And we know that's right because Jesus says so.

“And [Jesus] said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?”³

Fair questions considering the prescriptive nature of the Law of Moses. What are the boundaries? How will I know I've fulfilled this commandment? When you come to the Lord with a question. Sometimes he surprises you. Raise your hand if that's ever happened to you. Have you asked the Lord a question and gotten a surprise answer? Classic. This lawyer is in for a surprise.

“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho...”⁴

This launches into this famous story where a guy is mugged, beaten and left half-dead on the side of the highway. A priest and a Levite both see the wounded man and cross to the other side of the street.

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him.”⁵

The verse goes on to explain how the Samaritan “took care of him.” The Samaritan did four things. He saw. He had compassion. He went to the wounded man. And he took care of him. You’re probably familiar with this story. We’ll come back to these four things later. For now, listen to this. Listen to what Jesus does with the word ‘neighbor.’

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?”⁶

The lawyer asked, who is my neighbor? Noun. Passive. Other. The lawyer is saying I’m here and who are the ones outside of me who count as neighbors in this commandment? And Jesus responded by turning the word into an adjective or maybe an adverb. He’s describing the quality of the person or the manner or degree of the person’s action. Either way, it’s active. Personal. Jesus changes the focus to be more about the characteristics of the person doing the action.

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?” Jesus is teaching the lawyer and all of us that the neighbor is you. Fulfilling this commandment is not about anyone else. Your choices determine the extent to which you are neighbor unto others or not. [The lawyer] said, He that shewed mercy on him. “Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”⁷

Who are you commanded to love? Love God, yourself, and your neighbor with your heart, might, mind, and soul. If you aren’t loving yourself the way Jesus loves you, what do you need to change? Love your neighbor. Meaning you are “neighbor unto” everyone. No qualifiers. No fine print. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you.”⁸

Point #2. What Not to Do

I recently saw this quote in a storefront window, “Mr. Rogers did not adequately prepare me for my neighborhood.” Can you relate? The good news is, Jesus does.

In 1999, I moved to New York City with my husband and our two small children. One of my favorite things about New York is that eight million of God’s children are gathered together. All different kinds. And that’s amazing. I enjoy the diversity of the city but found that more people mean more interactions. That also means more opportunities for conflict.

I don’t know what vibe I was sending, but several people gave me unsolicited coaching on “how-to live-in New York.”

I was told, “I know you want to be nice, but you got to get aggressive sometimes. If someone gives you a hard time: ‘go New York on them.’”

One day, while riding the A-train with my two little girls and some unwieldy packages, a woman criticized my parenting. This lady says, “Why don’t you watch your kids? If you can’t manage your kids, you shouldn’t have so many.”

How would you respond?

I thought about my “go New York on them” coaching. The Spirit proposed a different strategy.

I looked at the woman. I saw her. I saw my little girl in her stroller gently swinging her legs. When she did, the side of her foot bumped this woman. Her response was so disproportionate to the offense that I sensed there must be something more bothering her. I felt compassion.

I said, “I’m so sorry, I didn’t realize my daughter was bumping you.” I moved the stroller and sat where my daughter’s swinging feet would tap me instead. I asked the woman where she was from. With that small concession, the woman softened. We ended up having a pleasant conversation and she even shared a bag of garlic knots.

The story didn’t end there. Things took a turn when another mother accused the woman of giving her child garlic knots without permission. They got off at the same stop. As the subway doors closed, I saw two daughters of God standing on the platform, nose-to-nose, shouting.

“How dare you give food to a child without asking.”

“I didn’t see any adults with her. Why did you leave her alone on the subway?”

“I was right there.”

“Why don’t you teach her not to be so greedy?”

That could so easily have been me. The Spirit confirmed to me, early on, that I want to choose love over contention in my interactions with others.

In 3 Nephi 11:28-29 Jesus taught, “He that hath the Spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil... Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”

Elder Dale G. Renlund adds, “Contention is spiritually unhealthy for us as individuals. We are robbed of peace, joy, rest and our ability to feel the Spirit is compromised.”⁹

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you.”¹⁰

Point #3. What to Do

It's helpful to know what not to do. But what should we do? How do we love one another as Jesus did when every person and circumstance is different?

I chaperoned an outdoor field trip for my daughter's kindergarten class. As I smeared sunscreen on my little redheaded girl, the rest of the class formed a circle around us. "What's that? Why are you doing that? Can I have some?" My neighborhood in New York was 95% Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. They'd never heard of sunscreen. These kids saw something different. They didn't get scared. They didn't get jealous. They got curious. Asking questions is a great way to show love and make connections.

Nolong Bonner Bullock does this, too. When we got paired up to share this hour at the BYU Women's Conference, we met over Marco Polo. She is curious. She asks lots of questions and follows up with, "Tell me more. Send videos." She gave me permission to share my life with her. It felt great!

When things are going well, that may be all you need. A little friendly curiosity. One way to say I love you is, "tell me more." That's helped me make friends and have unique experiences all over the world. Some highlights are teaching kids to carve pumpkins in Italy, playing stickball in Finland, farm sitting in New Zealand taking care of over 100 animals. In Yosemite National Park, I met a nomadic van-life woman living in the back of an old Ford van and we all piled in to watch *Moana*. We got a private tour of the Vatican Library. We washed puppies at a library in Puerto Rico. We sang call-and-response hymns with Christian sailors anchored in the Chesapeake Bay.

But people are messy and sometimes things can get tricky. When that happens there are three things that help me the most. I take courage from Nephi who testified Heavenly Father will help me keep the commandment to love. "The Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."¹¹

Alma 32:27 gives me hope and patience, "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words." It helps me to take a half-step here. I ask Heavenly Father to help me desire something. For example, "I don't want to love this person. Help me want to want to love." As God softens my heart, the good desire grows and works in me until I can actually love.

My covenants with Jesus Christ give me power. When I keep my covenants with Christ, I am promised the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Jesus Christ showed love to different people in different circumstances in different ways. And the Holy Ghost can teach me how to love in every different circumstance, too.

In my sophomore year of high school, there was a junior girl who sat in front of me in Spanish 2. She actively disliked me, and I didn't know why. Instead of staying in my underclassman lane and staying out of her way, I decided I wanted to be friendly and always say hello. She didn't respond. One day I noticed she was struggling with an assignment. I offered to help. I ended up

tutoring her through Spanish that year. She even said hello to me outside of class. It made school nicer for both of us.

When visiting teaching was happening, I visited a sweet sister in my ward. Like the story of the Good Samaritan—I did the four things the Good Samaritan did. I saw her. I felt compassion for her. I went to her. I took care of her when I could. I visited regularly, listened for needs, and found and moved living room furniture for her. I was neighbor unto her. We were friends. At least I thought we were.

One day, I saw her cross to the opposite side of the street. I was a couple of blocks away. I thought maybe she didn't see me. This happened three times before I realized it might be because of me. I decided to test my theory. One Sunday, I walked up behind her, put my hand on her shoulder, and said hello. She looked up with a huge smile. She saw my face. Retracted the smile and turned away. I left voice mails and sent emails. She didn't respond.

Sharon Eubanks taught, "Innovation and creation are spiritual gifts. When we keep our covenants, it may make us different from others in our culture and society, but it gives us access to inspiration so we can think of different solutions, different approaches, different applications. We aren't always going to fit in with the world, but being different in positive ways can be a lifeline to others who are struggling."¹²

I counseled with the Lord. He gave me an innovative old-fashioned idea. I decided to send a postcard. This dear sister would have to see my message. I wrote in big letters. It basically said, "I care about you. I'm not sure what I've done to upset you. I would love to fix it. But since I can tell my presence is upsetting, I want you to know I won't try to contact you anymore. I'm always open if you want to talk. But I will give you space."

She never talked to me again. This is an unexpected ending. But I feel like it's a happy ending. Do you know why? Because the Holy Ghost taught me that this was the best way I could show love for this sister. The Lord knows her story. And He knows mine. Jesus will give us the power to love. The Lord taught me that I don't have to know the end of somebody else's story to have peace. I can leave it in His hands.

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen."¹³

Around age sixteen, one of my daughter's got curious about Japanese. She used Rosetta Stone, watched tv shows, listened to Japanese music, and practiced weekly with a native speaker in our ward. For Christmas, her favorite gift was a thick book of Kanji—basically a Japanese grammar book. My husband, Erik said, "You know, Alison. A lot of people say Japanese is one of the hardest languages to learn." "Really?" She paused. "Maybe they don't love it as much as I do."

What if you apply this to people? It's godly and profound. She taught me when you love something or someone, it still takes time, focus, practice, mistakes, and correction. It may even be frustrating because you want to progress faster. But the effort is not a burden. *When you love, the effort is a joy.* Maybe that's how the Lord loves. Loving others makes us more like Him. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you."¹⁴

Point#4. What if I Mess Up?

If you're anything like me, just because you know something doesn't mean you always do it. Has this ever happened to you? I open Facebook and see my dear friend's combative political opinion. Anyone?

He didn't tag me. I knew he knew my viewpoint. I felt like one of my dearest friends was attacking me personally. We don't have to agree to get along. But if we couldn't leave room for respect on this controversial question—I didn't want to maintain even a long-distance friendship. In that highly charged emotional state, I messaged him, "Never contact me again."

He and his wife called me immediately. I answered. He asked me to forgive his intolerant wording. I asked him to forgive my intense reaction. No political positions were changed but our hearts changed. Our friendship healed and continues to grow.

Our struggles don't always resolve quickly. Without going into great detail, I harbored anger toward our young women's president for many months. Remember the first story about my own room being a punishment? Now, I'm the mom watching my daughters get hurt. I was perplexed and angry. When other efforts failed, my husband and I, discussed moving into another ward. I didn't want to forgive. I wanted this leader to acknowledge she was wrong. I wanted her to take responsibility for all the heartache she caused. Remember my Alma 32 half-step? I took this problem to the Lord. I prayed for the desire to forgive. I searched forgiveness on the church website.

A video came up. Tender music and images represented the Savior in Gethsemane and on the cross. The Spirit witnessed to me of the terrible price Jesus paid. He paid for everything. I imagined myself face to face with Him trying to explain why I clung to my anger. I couldn't look Him in the eye and honestly say His sacrifice wasn't enough to account for this hurt. I could not resist His humility and His pure love. My anger dissolved. A desire to forgive began to grow in its place.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."¹⁵

The Lord started with my heart. In His timing, other miracles resolved the situation in the Lord's spiritually safe way. Through His Atonement, Jesus can heal us when we fall short and give us a new heart when we try to be like Him. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you."¹⁶

Closing Promise

When my oldest daughter was about ten, she made me a wonderful present. It was a 3”x4” card. She decorated it with markers to say, “Second Chance Card” and the expiration date was “infinity.” This was for me to use whenever I made mistakes as a mom. I could present this card to my kids and get another chance. She knew I would need to use it a lot, so she reinforced the card with plenty of clear packing tape. She was already so much smarter than I was at her age.

When I was a little girl, I imagined Heaven was having everything exactly the way I wanted—which meant always being alone. Now I understand we can’t do Heaven alone. We need each other in all our variety. Having experienced mortal life, our Savior understands the challenges we face. Through His Atonement, Jesus Christ offers us so many chances to love and love again.

President Nelson promised, “As we strive to live the higher laws of Jesus Christ, our hearts and our very natures begin to change. The Savior lifts us above the pull of this fallen world by blessing us with greater charity, humility, generosity, kindness, self-discipline, peace, and rest.”¹⁷ And that sounds like Heaven. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you.”¹⁸

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ John 13:34.

² John 13:34.

³ Luke 10:28.

⁴ See Luke 10:30.

⁵ Luke 10:33.

⁶ Luke 10:36.

⁷ Luke 10:37.

⁸ John 13:34.

⁹ Elder Dale G. Renlund, “The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity,” October 2021.

¹⁰ John 13:34.

¹¹ 1 Nephi 3:7.

¹² Sharon Eubanks, “Turn on Your Light,” October 2017.

¹³ Moroni 7:48.

¹⁴ John 13:34.

¹⁵ Ezekiel 36:26-27.

¹⁶ John 13:34.

¹⁷ Russel M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” October 2022.

¹⁸ John 13:34.