

# BaptistWay: 14 Habits of Highly Successful Disciples: Love

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- *The BaptistWay lesson for July 6 focuses on Proverbs 17:17 and 1 John 4:7-21.*

My wife and I enjoy catching up on television shows two or three years after they have aired. This way, we can watch full seasons in a short time, instead of having to wait week after week for a new episode. Lately, we have been consumed in the world of *Downton Abbey*. I've become so involved in the lives of the characters, I almost feel as if I know each one of them.

Sometimes, I even find myself thinking in a British accent! The element that attracts us to the drama is that it is so unlike anything we've experienced in our own lives. As two middle-class Americans, British aristocracy is far from any type of life we've experienced.

## **Basic elements of human existence**

In spite of this huge difference in lifestyle, I've been reminded that time, space and money still do not completely transform the basic elements of human existence. The characters have similar joys and struggles as other people, in spite of being so far removed from our culture and time period.

This was particularly impressed upon me when viewing the situation one of the housekeepers, Ethel, found herself in after in becoming pregnant out of wedlock. In those days, such an act was grounds to be fired and shunned. Finding herself destitute with no other way of taking care of her son, she turned to prostitution. After hearing how low she had sunk, the mother to the heir of *Downton Abbey* (Isobel Crawley), made arrangements for Ethel

to work privately in her home as her maid and cook.

To say this was disturbing when discovered by the rest of the family is an understatement. Ethel's former employer and head butler was livid Isobel would open up the family to the ridicule of being associated with such a person. While a few in the family saw the merit of what Isobel was doing, her actions were considered exceptional, not normal in such a situation.

### **Loving without fear**

That's often the way we view the unconditional love Jesus embodied and commanded us to live out—as the exception instead of the norm. As I watched the *Downton Abbey* episode, I couldn't help but wonder what everyone was so afraid would happen by allowing Ethel to work for them. In their time and situation, their fear likely was understood, but that does not make it justified.

1 John 4:18 says: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." Love is not a feeling or a simple disposition one can pick up or leave. It is the lifestyle of people who believe the gospel and open themselves up to the love of God inside them (v. 12).

I do not know how to explain to anyone how to love. It's not something you can check off as being completed or define in detail for every situation. It is simply how people live who have received the Spirit of God (v. 13) and rely on the love they received in him to transform the way they relate to others (vv. 15-16).

### **Loving at all times**

None of this is news to Christians. The Crawley family of *Downton Abbey* prided themselves as being Christians who were part of the Church of England. One dinner conversation even demonstrated knowledge of the

kind of love Christians are to practice when someone spoke about Jesus associating with Mary Magdalene (in reference to the situation with Ethel).

The comment was answered with this snarky response: “Yes, Jesus allowed Mary Magdalene to wash his feet, not serve him dinner.” While the comment blatantly lacks knowledge of biblical context, it correctly demonstrates the indifference we can have for taking God’s love seriously.

Instead of loving unconditionally, we are inclined to love in a way that fits within our agenda and sense of appropriateness. In other words, it’s easy to be selectively loving. However, Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.” Even before Christ modeled for people what sacrificial love looked like and the Holy Spirit indwelt believers to make this kind of love possible, the word of God was pointing the way toward God’s love as the standard.

For most people, regardless of what church they may or may not affiliate with, this is not the standard. They might participate in food drives and give to charity during the holidays out of a sense of obligation; but when given a chance to love radically, they recoil in the same way the Crawley family did without even realizing their hypocrisy.

Brennan Manning has said, “I am now convinced that on judgment day, the Lord Jesus is going to ask each of us one question, and only one question: ‘Did you believe that I loved you?’” What a powerful thought. Is that your belief? If so, how is it influencing the way you love others?