

What Does Brotherly Kindness Mean for a Christian? (Christian Character Series Part VIII)

2 Peter 1:6-7: *6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*



The blueprint for Christian character development the Apostle Peter gives us in **2 Peter 1** lays out a ladder of Christian character development that we, as disciples of Christ, are to climb. Each rung of this ladder is vital to our ability to progress up to the next rung. As we have focused on one rung of this ladder at a time in this extended series, we have worked on making the connections between what our foundation is and how each step makes us more like Jesus—that’s the key. Now comes the seventh rung, and this one really begins to reveal what a truly developed Christian character should look like.



Let’s quickly recap the first six rungs of Apostle Peter’s “virtue” ladder of Christian character:

2 Peter 1:5-6: *5 ...in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness...*

The first two rungs:

- **The Allegiance Attribute of Faith—the allegiance of our life’s direction.**
- **The Allegiance Attribute of Moral Excellence—the allegiance of our heart.**

With faith in God’s power and plan as our foundation, a godly standard of moral excellence will drive everything else we strive to build upon our faith with the highest moral excellence and integrity.

The third and fourth rungs:

- **The Allegiance Attribute of Knowledge—the allegiance of our intellect.**
- **The Allegiance Attribute of Self-Control—the allegiance of our passions.**

Moral excellence built on faith keeps our knowledge from being tainted by the agendas and opinions of our world. Knowing God is true knowledge and this knowledge forms what the pivot point of Christian self-control should look like. Here we begin to build a genuine Christlike character.

The fifth and sixth rungs:

- **The Allegiance Attribute of Perseverance—the allegiance of our energy.**
- **The Allegiance Attribute of Godliness—the allegiance of our character.**

Perseverance is the continual reapplying of our discipleship decisions. It is consciously staying the course of bearing the weight of our assigned burdens.

Godliness is the payoff of perseverance, as it drives us to fight our old selves. When we are godly, our very character is always seeking God.

What's next?

2 Peter 1:7: *and in your godliness, brotherly kindness <5360>...*

Love: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5360 *philadelphia*;
fraternal affection:—brotherly love (kindness), love of the brethren

● **The seventh rung: The Allegiance Attribute of Brotherly Kindness—the allegiance of our relationships.**

Brotherly kindness, also translated into English as “brotherly love” or “brotherly affection,” is the Greek word *philadelphia*. In the ancient Greek world, *philadelphia* referred exclusively to the bond between blood relatives—a tight, loyal family devotion. It’s the instinctive loyalty siblings show when they protect and support each other, share burdens and maintain family honor. It has the sense of deep loyalty within a household, the kind of affection that is expected and not optional.



Why is brotherly love the NEXT quality after godliness?

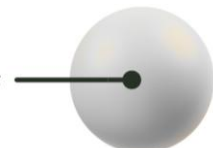
Keep this question in mind. We ask this question with each of the rungs and will answer as we go. We will unfold its importance and its interlocking relationship with the previous and the next rungs.

Brotherly love is actually built on a more foundational kind of love and is an integral part of the process of learning how to TRULY love ALL, no matter who they are. Let’s briefly examine three specific variations of *love* in the Greek that can flourish in the give-and-take of daily life. These set us up to better grasp the eighth rung, which is *agape* love, a selfless, unbiased love.

When it comes to the word “love,” the English language is surprisingly imprecise. We use the same generic word to say “I love my husband” and “I love chocolate.” Even modern Greek has simplified the categories of love, so we’ve lost some of the beautiful nuance. Ancient Greek gives us multiple words—each capturing a different texture of love, such as affection, friendship, loyalty, family devotion and sacrificial commitment.

Think of this first kind of love as a small circle—the affection between spouses, and parents’ love of their children.

Love for spouses *philandros* and children *philoteknos*



This inner circle is the most basic and instinctive kind of love:

Titus 2:3-4: (NKJV) *3 The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior... 4 that they admonish the young women to love <5362> their husbands, to love <5388> their children...*

Love: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5362 *philandros*; fond of man, i.e. affectionate as a wife:—love their husbands

Love: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5388 *philoteknos*; fond of one’s children, i.e. maternal:—love their children

These are two kinds of *love*. In the preaching of the gospel, the apostles preached to Jews and Gentiles, to people from all kinds of different circumstances and societies. The message was to not lose this basic instinct of loving our nearest and dearest. This is the baseline to build upon.

Now the “circle” expands to include *philadelphia* love:

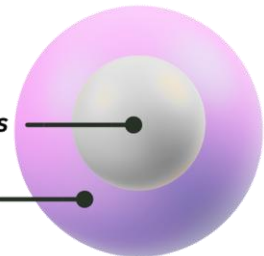
Romans 12:10: (ESV) *Love* (meaning, warm affection) *one another with brotherly affection <5360>...*

Love: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5360 *philadelphia*, #5361 *philadelphos*: brotherly love – fraternal affection, fondness

This kind of love was expected, not optional.

Love for spouses *philandros* and children *philoteknos*

Love for siblings *philadelphia*



Hebrews 13:1,3: (NKJV, NASB1995) *1 Let brotherly love <5360> continue... 3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.*

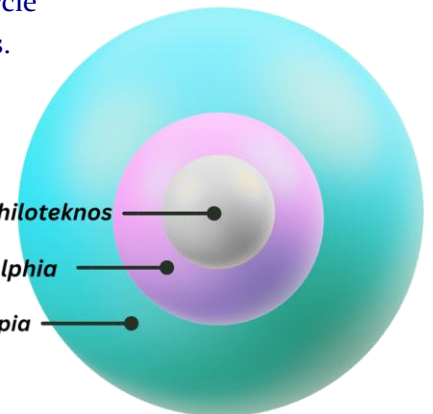
This gives a sense of connection. Even if they were not related to us, we would feel a connection to those in prison, especially if for their faith.

The next circle expands from relationships that are natural or forged by common ground, into relationships with no previous commonality. The circle expands to a love for someone with no previous ties to us.

Love for spouses *philandros* and children *philoteknos*

Love for siblings *philadelphia*

Love for humanity overall *philanthrōpia*



This large circle is *philanthrōpia*, the basis of our modern word “philanthropy.” It’s a love for mankind, kindness, benevolence—loving people simply because they are fellow human beings.

philos (loving) + *anthrōpos* (human being) → *philanthrōpia* = love for humanity, kindness, benevolence

Let’s look at one verse in the Old Testament that opens the door to understanding this concept in the New Testament:

Leviticus 19:34: *The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.*

God warned Israel not to treat strangers in their land as they were treated in the land of Egypt. They were to love the stranger as they love themselves, even if they had no commonality.

This gives us the basis to take God’s warning in Leviticus and look in the New Testament to see how God and Jesus demonstrate this kind of love. *Philanthrōpia* is used only twice in the New Testament.



The first time was when the Apostle Paul and his companions were shipwrecked after a severe storm:

Acts 28:1-2: (NKJV) *1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness <5363>; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.*

Kindness: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5363 *philanthrōpia*; fondness of mankind, i.e. benevolence (“philanthropy”):—kindness, love towards man

The native residents of Malta didn’t know Paul or his companions, but they showed basic human kindness to them. It was cold and raining, and they had been shipwrecked. This was kindness to fellow humans.



The second time this word is used, it comes from God Himself:

Titus 3:3-5: (ASV) *3 For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived... living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4 But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and His love <5363> toward man, appeared, 5 ...He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit...*

Here we see God’s benevolent love for humanity.

He had *philanthrōpia* love, even to Gentiles, at a time when previously only the Jewish people had a connection with God. But after Jesus’ death, God gave His holy spirit to both Jews and Gentiles, saving us all through *the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit*. God’s love was expressed even though the human race was alienated from Him.

We’ve looked at different aspects of love through various human relationships. Brotherly love sits in the middle of all of this.

In Peter's ladder of Christian character development, he focuses us on brotherly love, this allegiance of our relationships, to help us see its grand power and to help us recognize the absolute necessity of its godly development.

With all of this solid foundation for brotherly love in place, let's take another look at this verse and add on:

Romans 12:10-11: (ESV) *10 Love one another with **brotherly affection** <5360>. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

It's hard to appreciate just how radical an idea the Apostle Paul is first introducing here in Romans. He's calling the Christians to live in a way that would stand out in the ancient world by extending that family, blood-relative devotion regardless of ethnicity, economic and social boundaries. This was revolutionary within the culture of its day. Christians were to think of themselves as a new family, united by faith rather than ancestry.



When Peter wrote our character theme texts in 2 Peter years later, he put this *brotherly affection*, brotherly kindness, on our ladder right after *godliness* and right before *agape love*.

Where did the Apostle Paul get this important, revolutionary idea? The answer is simple: From what Jesus taught.

While Jesus didn't specifically use this word, this is what he taught. Think about when his disciples asked how they should pray. In **Matthew 6:9-13** (KJV), he instructs them to pray, *...Our Father which art in heaven...* The relationship of God as Father makes us brothers; we are all siblings because we are children of God.

So, Jesus is our brother, and we are brothers and sisters. Jesus is the one who, without using the word, told us, *This is your connection. Love one another as I have loved you.*

Now let's put godliness in place with this brotherly love. A godly character opens the door to genuine brotherly love, which is built upon applying the instinctive love of family affection. To see others through the eyes of brotherly love is to see them as God always intended for us to see them. *Our Father which art in heaven...* We are a collective family.

Thousands of years later, this is still a revolutionary idea. Our culture values being self-sufficient, emotionally independent, led by "my truth" and what makes "me" happy. Needing others is weakness. We keep relationships shallow. Our "friends" are through screens. Conversations are text-length. We can mute, block or unfollow instead of working through conflict. We can attack anonymously without consequence. Relationships are optional and disposable today, which completely misses the point of having this brotherly love.

**What does MY devotion to the brotherhood look like to those around me?
Let's test your answer:**



- ***If I see someone struggling, am I compassionate or critical?***
Having brotherly love would mean we have patience for those in our fellowship who are struggling with anxiety, shyness or slower spiritual growth. We are gentle towards them and seek to help.
- ***Do I protect someone's reputation when they are not in the room?***
Brotherly love steps in when conversation drifts toward criticism or gossip. It redirects the tone—offering something kind, giving the benefit of the doubt, or reminding others we don't know the whole story—so the absent person is treated with the same loyalty we'd show family. Do I respond as though they were my natural brother? Will I run to their defense as if they are a part of my family?

This is how we begin to learn to express the brotherly love allegiance of our relationships. This is how we begin to learn to connect!

Julie's Example

When I think about *philadelphia*, I think about walking with my only sibling, Laurie, through her divorce. She was completely blindsided by her husband's cheating and was devastated. The years that followed required far more than polite concern for her well-being. Initially, I sat through hours of meetings with her lawyer, helping her organize paperwork, and handling the practical things she couldn't face. But it wasn't just logistics. It was the late-night calls, the repeated stories she needed to process, the tears, and even the small moments of laughter in the middle of the mess. For years—not weeks—I called her every single morning just to help her find the strength to get through the day, but sometimes she had multiple emotional breakdowns throughout the day, and she knew she could reach out to me. She had to claw her way back to some sort of new normal.



I didn't do any of that out of obligation. I did it because she's my sister. There's a built-in loyalty there—a protective devotion that rises up without being asked. She needed a steady presence, patient listening and emotional and spiritual guardrails as she rebuilt her sense of worth and faith from diminished levels.

That long, sustained commitment—that instinctive, family-level devotion—is exactly what Peter is talking about. He's saying: let that same reflex shape how you care for your brothers and sisters in Christ—not forced. Not formal. Not an obligation. Just the natural response of someone who knows, "This is my family, and I'm committed to them."

She is my sister. What else would I do?!

Ideally, our brotherly love should be a given. It should be a "go to" basis for our communication:

1 Thessalonians 4:9-11: *9 Now as to the love of the brethren <5360>, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to (agape) love one another; 10*

for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you,

We love how the apostle says to the Thessalonians that they had no need for anyone to write to them about brotherly love, because they already knew it so well. They embraced it. But he wanted them to do even better. He wanted them to be even more engaged in the building up and helping of others.

How often do we think about what we can do to express this brotherly love to one another? This is about actively looking for opportunities. Let's test this question:



- ***When I see a need, do I quietly step in or quietly step away because someone else will do it?*** Brotherly love notices when someone is overwhelmed—caring for aging parents, juggling work and kids, or dealing with illness—and quietly steps in with help: dropping off a meal, running an errand or sending an encouraging note.
- ***Am I making others feel welcomed and valued in spiritual settings?*** Brotherly love offers spiritual encouragement—listening, sharing Scripture or simply sitting with someone so they're not alone. It also honors our leaders and others in our congregation by showing up prepared, ready to contribute and to bless others rather than only expecting to receive blessings.

There is a lot to process about how we express brotherly love. Many of the ways we can show brotherly love are subtle and do not need to be advertised to the world. It's simply being someone's spiritual brother or sister, much like being a natural brother or sister.



Do we ever minimize its power and its importance? The power of brotherly love can easily be underestimated.



- ***Am I ever jealous of someone else's blessing when my own prayers remain unanswered?*** Brotherly love won't ask, "Why them and not me?" It reframes it by saying, "Look what God can do!" We thank God for the good He's done for that person. Remember that someone else's blessing is not our loss. Give thanks for at least one of our own blessings, helping us not to get stuck in comparing ourselves to others.
- ***Do I fellowship in a spiritual setting with only those I like or get along with?*** Brotherly love looks for those sitting alone and welcomes them in. We might choose one person we wouldn't normally gravitate toward and have a brief, warm conversation, even though it's outside our comfort zone.

We are supposed to apply the same brotherly caring we show to our families to those in our Christian fellowship, even though we might not be as comfortable with those not naturally related to us.

How well do I recheck and rebalance the natural give-and-take of life? How well do I love as a brother:

1 Peter 3:8-9: (NKJV) *8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as **brothers** <5361>, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*



- **Am I keeping score?** Brotherly love gives others the same patience we hope they would give us. When someone disappoints us, this patience pauses long enough to ask, “What burdens might they be carrying today?” It assumes good motives, gives the benefit of the doubt and refuses to keep a secret scorecard of faults or favors owed.

It is important NOT to return *evil for evil*—or neglect for neglect—or *reviling for reviling*, not just checking the boxes, but by being the sibling, the brother or sister, in the most positive way. It is called brotherly “love” for a reason.

The brotherly love allegiance of our relationships needs to be developed and regularly put into practice. This allegiance forges a powerful and constructive connection between us as brethren.



Julie

Let’s let our listeners know what was happening a full two years before my sister even told me what was going on. I didn’t know the marriage was in danger because she did an amazing job of pretending. She was mortified, humiliated and working hard to secretly fix everything before our family found out what was really going on. This story now shifts to you, Rick.

Rick

Two years before all the things came out, your sister came up to me at one of our Bible conferences and said, “Hey, can I talk to you for a minute?” We sat and talked, and she just spilled what was happening. She said she was in trouble and didn’t know what to do; she didn’t want anybody to know. “Please don’t tell anybody!” She knows I know you, Julie, very well, but she didn’t want me to tell anyone, even you.

We began to work on this quietly together every week. Every week, we would talk on the phone (we live 900 miles apart), work on things, put scriptures to it, put principles in place, talk about counseling, and cover all the things that could be helpful. All along, I’m telling her, “You really should talk to your sister.” But she just couldn’t.

So, we just quietly worked together, and I will tell you that during that two-year period, she became like my kid sister. Nobody messes with my sister! She needed

somebody to talk to and some guidance, and by God’s grace, I was there. For me, it was an experience of entering into her turmoil, sadness and confusion and giving her something solid to hold onto—if nothing more than, *Don’t worry, you’re not alone.*

That was the theme throughout this whole thing. She showed (and still shows) tremendous growth through all those very difficult times.

Julie

This is an amazing example of both natural and spiritual “sisterly” and brotherly love. It was wonderful from both sides.

We are not to limit our expressions of brotherly love to just our brotherhood in Christ. It is to be expressed to all of humanity as well:

Hebrews 13:1-2: *1 Let love of the brethren <5360> continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers <5381>, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

Hospitality to strangers: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5381 *philoxenia*; hospitableness

The King James Version translates this as “hospitality” 1 time, “lover of strangers” 1 time

philoxenia is a compound of *philos* ("love") and *xenos* ("stranger" or "guest")

Remember how we talked about *philanthrōpia*—a general love for the whole human family. *Philoxenia* is a more practical Greek word meaning active hospitality towards strangers or guests. That is how we put it into practice.



The Apostle Paul instructs us to let our brotherly love continue, but to also go further and do not neglect to show this hospitality even to those we do not know. This is an important outgrowth of who we are becoming.

We have learned to show brotherly love to those who are not naturally connected to us—now we take that learning and apply it to strangers. It is a beautiful lesson.



Why is brotherly love the NEXT quality after godliness?



We can truly love one another in a fraternal or family way at the highest level only if our characters are focused on daily living in a reverent, godly way. Remember, perseverance drives our development of godliness. Godliness directs our self-expressions of brotherly love toward ever being uplifting and productive. Godliness feeds the capacity and the ability to actually live brotherly love.

With more leisure time than ever in history, we are still too busy to help and too overwhelmed with our own problems to take on those of another. *Philadelphia* is inconvenient and sometimes uncomfortable. It disrupts our plans. It costs us time and sometimes money. It's emotionally exhausting. How can I take on someone else's life or multiple lives when I can barely get my own together? How much is too much?



We have been blessed with the personal experience of entering into others' lives and experiences. When I say "we," I mean this affects my wife, Tricia, and me.

For whatever reason, people talk to me. They are looking for a shoulder to cry on or some guidance. They want to feel they can confide in me when something needs to be kept secret and private, and they need help to grow through it.

I end up getting involved in a lot of these things, not because I look for them, but they find me. My wife is there while all this happens. She is not involved in these private conversations, but it's part of her process as well.

When I asked her about it, the first words out of her mouth were, "Well, this is what I signed up for. Part of my job, my life's work, is to support you in whatever work you have. And this is part of what I am called to do."

Look, it's inconvenient at times. In the middle of the night when the phone rings, you pick it up because there is something on the other end that needs to be addressed.



Just put your phone on "do not disturb" in the middle of the night and get some sleep. There has to be some limits! People shouldn't call you at two in the morning.

That has happened! It doesn't happen all the time, but it has happened. If I put my phone on mute, or Do Not Disturb, or turn it off, I would be shutting down a potential opportunity the Lord God has given me to help someone. When someone does call, I shake the sleep off and talk to the individual—and sometimes they have been suicidal. Why would I turn off my phone to a wonderful opportunity?

I can't even begin to describe to any of you how important it is that I have Trish by my side. She supports whatever is happening.

She is always willing, even when it is inconvenient. She says, “This is our life. It can be overwhelming sometimes. Yet, this is what we have chosen because this is a privilege. Brotherly love is a privilege.” She said to me, “Rick, working with you on these things is a privilege...but you can be annoying!” (laughter)

We need to grasp the idea that brotherly love isn’t convenient, but we are called to express ourselves in it. How are we doing with that?

● **The Allegiance Attribute of our Relationships:** *To genuinely express brotherly love for one another is to accept each other as peers. It is to step up and fill in the gaps others may have, as they fill in the gaps that we ourselves may have. It is to walk together, work together, strive together, laugh together, suffer together, fall and get up together. This brotherly love allegiance of our relationships is to be the body of Christ together!*

This can be summed up in one simple text:

1 Corinthians 12:27: *Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.*

That is where brotherly love shines!

2 Peter 1:6-7: *6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, (and then in our next episode, we will talk all about the final rung on the ladder) (agape) love.*

Philadelphia is not just being nice at church. It is a serious, mature, daily expression of Christian character. It’s like a training ground for *agape* love. If we can’t love the family of faith with loyalty and tenderness, we won’t be able to *agape* love the world with Christlike sacrifice. Let’s try to be just as radical as in Peter’s day!

As we said earlier, brotherly love outside the family or ethnicity was radical in those days. It is radical for a reason—we are the family of God through Christ; and through Christ, the blessing of the world is to come. We are to learn how to be part of this blessing by loving one another as brothers and sisters. How are we doing?

**So, what does brotherly kindness mean for a Christian?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode

Episode 1427: What Does Christian Love Really Look Like?
(Christian Character Series Part IX)



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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1426: What Does Brotherly Kindness Mean for a Christian? (Christian Character Series Part VIII)

See:  CQRewind
SHOW NOTES

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1426-brotherly-kindness-part-viii/>

God has granted everything needed for life and godliness through His promises. These promises form the foundation of Christian character. Our response is allegiance—loyal commitment to God’s will. 2 Peter 1:5-7 is used throughout the questions.

Overarching Question: Why does the Apostle Peter place brotherly kindness after godliness, perseverance, self-control, knowledge, moral excellence and faith in the “ladder” of Christian character development?

1. How does Scripture show love expanding from family affection to brotherly kindness to love for strangers and all humanity? How does each circle prepare you for the next? (Titus 2:3-4, Romans 12:10, Hebrews 13:1-3, as described at the end of the Rewind)
2. How did Jesus teach the principle of “*philadelphia*” in Matthew 6:9-13 without using the word? Why was this such a radical idea at the time of Jesus? (Romans 12:10-11)
3. When you encounter a struggling brother or sister, what rises up first in you—compassion, avoidance, frustration, or criticism? And when you’re in a group and the conversation turns toward gossip or negative talk about someone, how do you respond? Do you instinctively protect their reputation the way you would a family member?
4. What would it take for brotherly kindness to become your natural, instinctive response rather than something you have to consciously work at? Which habits, perspectives, or spiritual practices help move it from effort to reflex?
5. What does it look like to “excel still more” in brotherly love, as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11? How does this kind of love show up in everyday life, and why are its expressions often quiet, subtle and unnoticed by others?
6. How do you respond when someone else receives a blessing you longed for—does jealousy rise up, or can you genuinely rejoice with them? Do you intentionally seek fellowship with believers you wouldn’t naturally gravitate toward? And when others disappoint you, do you respond with the compassion, patience, and “brotherly love” described in 1 Peter 3:8-9?
7. How do Hebrews 13:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 4:10, and Romans 12:10 portray the power of brotherly kindness? What active, practical expressions of this love do these passages call us to—both toward fellow Christians and toward strangers?
8. How does brotherly love challenge your natural tendencies? Do you find it inconvenient at times? What is one specific but practical action you can take this week to build up someone who is on your heart right now?
9. Why is brotherly kindness the next quality after godliness? What does this kind of love prepare us for?