



Weekly Devotional

A large, solid red heart graphic that serves as a background for the main title text.

YOU & Me

Relationships in
a Modern World

A photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, positioned to form a heart shape. The hands are light-skinned and the background is a bright blue sky with white clouds.

January 9 - 13, 2012

Questions & Prayers

1. Small, but important: What is the significance of the little words if and but in verses 1-3?
2. Try restating the passage in verses 4-7 in completely different language.
3. Paul speaks in verse 10 of the coming of “perfection,” or “that which is perfect.” What do you think he means by this?
4. What do you find the most challenging about this chapter?
5. Practically, from an action perspective, what does it look like not to delight in evil but to rejoice in truth?
6. What kind of mental habits do you think could most easily block the words in this chapter from staying alive in your mind and heart?
7. Note Galatians 5:5-6, Colossians 1:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 5:8 and Hebrews 10:22-24. What more do you learn about the triad of “faith, hope and love”?
8. Note 1 John 4: From what you see in this chapter, what is the proof of God’s love, what is the power of God’s love and what is the promise of God’s love?

Monday: Pray for the homeless who have been staying at our church, for those serving them, and for the church they will go to next.

Tuesday: Take a look at this morning’s headlines. Ask the Spirit to lead you in a time of prayer with these headlines **in mind**.

Wednesday: Pray for those who are trapped in various forms of human slavery throughout the world today. Pray for families who sell their children into slavery because of dire need and pray for those working to rescue them.

Thursday: Pray for Christians you know today that they might display the love of Jesus.

Friday: Pray for weekend services around the world.



Monday

1 Corinthians 12



We are at the beginning of a new series on relationships. This Sunday we will be exploring 1 Corinthians 13. As you go through the week, you might read the chapter in a variety of different Bible translations and paraphrases.

The Apostle Paul wrote this chapter in response to questions the Church at Corinth had about spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church was one of the more conflicted churches. We know that blatant sin (sins that even non-Christians would not practice) existed within the church. We know that there were class distinctions between rich and poor, slaves and free people, and there were questions about the role of women. We also know that there were perceived “theological” camps, some stating that they followed the teachings of Peter; others, Apollo; and some, Paul. We also know that they lifted up some people over others because of their giftedness. Paul’s epistle 1 Corinthians was a rather harsh letter written to correct the church’s everyday practices.

In Chapters 12 and 14, Paul talks about Spiritual Gifts. In Chapter 12 Paul says that we are all given gifts to be used for the building up of the church. No one gift is more important than another. In fact, Paul says that those gifts that are less attractive are actually more important. When I read Chapter 12, I am often reminded of a mother. Mom’s historically have not been the “bread winners.” They are often the ones picking up after others, waiting on the various family members. In fact, they often take care of the needs of the family members in order that these members can be productive at school or at work. At the end of the day, Dad has produced a pay check, the children excelled in school with sports, a hobby or a class, and Mom has washed the cloths, picked up the house and made the meals, only to do it all again the next day. And yet where would we be without the sacrificial love and encouragement of our moms.

Paul says that we are each needed! Each job is extremely important even if it seems small. (I once heard about a great runner who cut off the tip of his big toe by accident and lost all his speed.) None of us can say, “I am not needed.” Nor can we say that we don’t need someone else. Jesus set up the church to be interdependent on Him and each other.

In what ways have you been overly self-sufficient? Do you feel unvalued, or that your place in the kingdom is of little worth? Not so! Is there a gift you have that you are not using?

Tuesday

1 Corinthians 13



The Corinthians were focusing on the productive value of individuals. Paul's response is that everyone is important; but that rather than focusing on our productive value, we need to focus on loving one another. The greatest gift, Paul writes, is love; and it is a gift we all have and are called to share.

The Christian church today is known for many things; unfortunately, all too often one of them is not its love. As Jim pointed out on Christmas Eve, we are known for being people who seem to have it all together. We are known for being hypocritical. All too often we also are known for having answers to questions that many are not asking, or for being judgmental. Our response: But that's not who we really are. We give to the poor; we try to be like Jesus, living lives without sin; we are upright, hard-working citizens. And Paul would say: "Awesome, but how is your love?"

Over the holidays I had the opportunity to be with a number of different groups of people. In one particular instance, I remember being with a group with whom I have a lot in common, including my beliefs. It was not a fun gathering, but one instead filled with tension and judgmentalism. The very next day I was with a group who basically are my complete opposite, and definitely not believers. But this group was welcoming, friendly and outgoing. In fact, they seemed to genuinely care more than the first group.

One day we will stand before Father God and give an account for our lives. Yes, He will ask about what we did with the gifts we were given. Yes, visiting the sick, giving to the poor, and sharing our faith with others will be important, as well as leading lives of obedience. But according to Paul one of His major questions will be about our love. Our response at the time might be: "But look at how sinless our lives were, how upright we were." And the Father's response will be: "My Son took care of your sin. How was your love?"

Jesus came to display a life of love, a life that gave up itself for sinful people. In what ways am I becoming more like Jesus?

Wednesday



1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Wow! “Love never fails.” What a challenge. Someone said that when we read these verses we should substitute the word “God” or “Jesus” for the word “love.” Jesus never fails. Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus is not self-seeking. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes. And I am to be like Jesus.

Often we think of love as an abstract concept. The Greek language actually has three different words for love. Eros is used for the passionate love between a man and a woman. Philos is used for brotherly love or the love shared between friends. But there is a third word for love, a word seldom found in secular Greek literature but one that is found abundantly in Scripture, the word that Paul uses here, the word agape. The old King James Bible use to translate agape as “charity”; we are to act with charity towards one another. Actually it is not a bad concept. I give charity to those who do not deserve it. I give charity without ever expecting to receive something in return. I give charity when I seek the best for another without worrying about myself. For Paul, showing love to another involves concrete actions towards another, actions that lift up the best for the other while not worrying about myself.

In three and a half verses Paul uses sixteen action verbs to denote how we are to behave towards others. The early church lived these words out to such an extent that others came to know Jesus. What would happen if we did the same? What does it mean to always protect another? What does not rejoicing in evil look like? Is it possible to not envy? Have I given up on someone, on a relationship?

The church today is more known for its controversies than for its love. In the midst of controversy and broken relationships, the first thing to go is love. Maybe if I was more concerned about living out Paul’s checklist of love than I was about myself, I too would be known more for my love than for anything else.

What do people say of you? That you are upright, intelligent, successful . . . or do they know you for your ability to love as Jesus loved? Love is not easy. Maybe that’s why Paul begins: “Love suffers long (is patient).”

Thursday

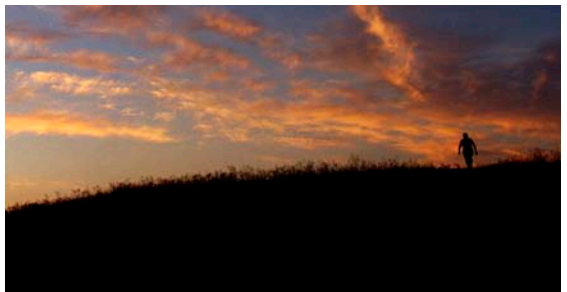
1 Corinthians 13:8-13

When you were in junior high, what did you imagine life as an adult would be like? Did you ever wonder while you were growing up why you needed to learn certain things, and now as an adult you are grateful that you learned them? Have you ever looked back over an experience that was either painful or bewildering only to realize the purpose or value later? They say hindsight is 20/20. If we really knew exactly what was to occur in the next 24 hours, 12 months, or 20 years, the decisions we make today might be radically different. What Paul is getting at in this passage is that life from the perspective of heaven looks entirely different.

Now we do not understand God's large picture; some day we will. Being that we do not currently know everything from an "adult" perspective, we learn obedience—just like children. Because we do not yet see things as God does (from a heavenly, return of Jesus, eternal perspective), we are dependent on prophecies, gifts of knowledge and even tongues to help us pray correctly. But one day when we are "adults" living in heaven, we will fully get it.

This foundational principle is both challenging and comforting to me. On the one hand, it is always a challenge to realize that what I perceive might not be a full representation of reality. I might perceive that the best thing to do concerning an individual in my life is to hold them accountable, or to cut ties with them. The Holy Spirit might call me to love them, to be patient, to forgive them, and not to give up on them. This truth can be comforting when I am struggling to understand why something is happening and why God might be disciplining me or allowing something to occur in my life. I find comfort knowing that God is working all things to the fulfillment of His glorious purposes.

The Pharisees crucified Jesus in part because He ate with sinners. He loved those whom the Pharisees did not deem worthy of love or forgiveness. Personally I am thankful that Jesus loves me in the midst of my sin. It enables me to receive new life and a new beginning. The question is: In my lack of understanding, will I also love sinners?



Friday

1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 3:16-18; 1 John 4:7-21



What does John 3:16-17 say? How does it compare with 1 John 3:16-18? How does 1 John 4 help us understand the everyday outworking of John 3:16-17. What would you say is God's highest value? If you were to watch television, what would you say our world's highest values are? How do they compare? If one were to look at your life, what would they say your highest values are?

Paul and John would both agree that the greatest value in life, the foundation upon which all decisions are made, is love. But love is impossible without faith and hope. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is "being sure of what we hope for, certain of what is unseen." When I am in a broken relationship, what I see is hurt and pain. I see where another is wrong and how I am right. What I see all too often is someone who is unwilling or unable to change. But love changes all that; love has faith, love has hope. The hope and faith of love are not dependent on the individual or on my abilities. The hope and faith come from power that is found in God's Holy Spirit working through me, as I obediently love. "For Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." The world is saved by Jesus lovingly giving up His life to pay for what was lacking in the lives of others. And the ultimate gift of love is when I give up my rights in order to make up for what is lacking in the lives of others.

Read 1 John 4 again, and then turn back to 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. If love defines someone who "lives in God," then do I live in God? Am I a Christian if I am unloving? Luckily, Jesus died for me in the midst of my failure, but my inabilities are never an excuse to stop trying. But my love does help me see how immature I still am. In many ways my ability to love shows how much faith I have. I can only love if I have faith and hope; faith that God will care of me, hope that my sacrifice will pay off in the life of another as Jesus' sacrifice paid off in me. Faith, hope and love are the necessary triad to navigate life as God intended. How is your faith, hope and love?



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