

**40 DAYS
OF LOVE**



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ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament (OT)

- Gen. Genesis
- Exod. Exodus
- Lev. Leviticus
- Num. Numbers
- Deut. Deuteronomy
- Josh. Joshua
- Judg. Judges
- Ruth Ruth
- 1 Sam. 1 Samuel
- 2 Sam. 2 Samuel
- 1 Kgs. 1 Kings
- 2 Kgs. 2 Kings
- 1 Chr. 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chr. 2 Chronicles
- Ezra Ezra
- Neh. Nehemiah
- Esth. Esther
- Job Job
- Ps. Psalms
- Prov. Proverbs
- Eccl. Ecclesiastes
- Song Song of Solomon
- Isa. Isaiah
- Jer. Jeremiah
- Lam. Lamentations
- Ezek. Ezekiel
- Dan. Daniel
- Hos. Hosea
- Joel Joel
- Amos Amos
- Obad. Obadiah
- Jonah Jonah
- Mic. Micah
- Nah. Nahum

- Hab. Habakkuk
- Zeph. Zephaniah
- Hag. Haggai
- Zech. Zechariah
- Mal. Malachi

New Testament (NT)

- Matt. Matthew
- Mk. Mark
- Lk. Luke
- Jn. John
- Acts Acts
- Rom. Romans
- 1 Cor. 1 Corinthians
- 2 Cor. 2 Corinthians
- Gal. Galatians
- Eph. Ephesians
- Phil. Philippians
- Col. Colossians
- 1 Thess. 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thess. 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Tim. 1 Timothy
- 2 Tim. 2 Timothy
- Tit. Titus
- Philem. Philemon
- Heb. Hebrews
- Jam. James
- 1 Pet. 1 Peter
- 2 Pet. 2 Peter
- 1 Jn. 1 John
- 2 Jn. 2 John
- 3 Jn. 3 John
- Jd. Jude
- Rev. Revelation

Latin Abbreviations

- c. Latin *circa* "around" or "approximately"
- cf. Latin *confer* "confer" or "compare"
- e.g. Latin *exempli gratia* "for example." Literally, "for the sake of example."
- etc. Latin *et cetera* "and others" or "and the rest."
- ff. Latin *folio* "and the following" (verses, paragraphs, pages, etc.) Literally, "on the next page."
- i.e. Latin *id est* "that is." Literally, "that is to say."

40 DAYS
OF 
LOVE

**DEVOTIONAL
& JOURNAL**

INTRODUCTION

God is love. Love is not just a virtue of God, but it is God Himself. One of the ways that God reveals Himself to us is through giving of Himself. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). His perfect love is seen through His faithfulness and even His wrath. Through the next forty days, we will be examining how love is the very person, nature, and character of God.

There are three things we hope to accomplish through 40 Days of Love. First, we hope that you will discover practical application for the Great Commandment. Jesus was asked, “‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:36-40). There was something very practical about Jesus’ commandment of love. We will examine the whole of Scripture in search of practical application to love as Jesus commanded. Second, we hope that your understanding of love will mature. Christ desires for His Church to be diverse while at the same time experience unity. The unity and diversity of a church must be balanced by maturity, and that maturity only comes through love (cf. 1 Cor. 12). We cannot truly understand love apart from God. The world offers perversions and counterfeits of love, but they all fall short because they do not flow from the person, nature, and character of God. Not everything the world labels as “love” is of God. The more time we spend with the LORD, the more we love Him because we understand Him better. Third, it is my prayer that our church will be unified in love, spirit, and purpose as together we seek to know the LORD even better. We hope that your daily devotions will serve as a catalyst for discussions around the dinner table with your family, around the coffee table with your friends, and even around the conference table with your co-workers.

Here are some of the components and how they can help you deepen your walk with the Lord over the next 40 days:

- **Scripture Verse:** Each devotion begins with a verse of Scripture that you can meditate on throughout the day. You could even develop the spiritual discipline of Scripture memory as well.
- **The Devotion:** The devotion provides a brief understanding of the Scripture passage often through illustrations and application.
- **One Last Thought:** The “One Last Thought” is a short synopsis of each day’s devotion. It provides a summary of the biblical truth or closing thought.
- **Prayer/Challenge:** This section provides you with a brief action step/challenge to move you toward application of the biblical truth. It may provide direction for what to pray.
- **Journaling:** There is space with each day’s devotion to write down your own personal thoughts on what God is teaching you. Your retention for learning is increased when you write things down in your own words, even if you never look at it again!
- **Small Group Curriculum:** While the daily devotions are for your individual walk with the Lord, the Small Group material will serve as a guide for prompting discussion

among a small group of believers over the next six weeks. If you are not currently in a small group, visit our 40 Days of Love table in the lobby to find out how you can join one of our small groups.

I am looking forward to discovering how the Lord will challenge us as a church over the next 40 days as we learn to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and love our neighbors as ourselves!

Lord, teach me to love like You!
Pastor Chris Dortch

40 DAYS OF LOVE

WEEK 1

LOVE Is Essential

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

This week we will examine why love is essential to the Christian life. With 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide, our focus this week will be upon the absolute necessity of love within all we do as believers.

We will discover that God Himself desires to teach us and equip us to love. We will explore such themes as the source of love, the context of love, and the impact of love. Through our journey this week, it is my prayer that you will experience the joy and love of Christ. I pray His love will also shine through you and that your face will start to shine with the glory of Jesus Christ as you spend time in His presence.

Pastor Chris Dortch

DAY 01: LOVE Is Our Educator

by Chris Dortch

...for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another (1 Thess. 4:9).

Satirical author, Jonathan Swift, of *Gulliver's Travels*, wrote, "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." Love is the defining factor of our faith in Christ. Jesus explained to His disciples, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). The Apostle Paul uses the imagery of the body to describe the church (e.g. 1 Cor. 10; 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 7; Rom. 12; and Eph. 4). In all of Paul's "body" passages, the central theme is love. Love is the evidence of a maturing Christian believer; whose life reflects love for the LORD and love for one another.

Our church's purpose statement reflects the importance of love: First Baptist Church Mount Sterling exists to LOVE Christ and others, LEARN from Christ, LIVE for Christ, and LEAD others to Christ. It can be summed up in four words: LOVE, LEARN, LIVE, LEAD. Love is the essential ingredient to fulfilling our God-given purpose. If we borrow Paul's description of the church as the "body," then love is the "circulatory system" that is essential to all other systems of His church. For example, we cannot "LEARN from Christ" apart from a love for Christ and others. Otherwise, our learning would be purely academic and void of life-transformation. As believers, we are "taught by God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9). God the Father has taught us to love by sending His Son (cf. 1 Jn. 4:19). God the Son has taught us to love by giving His life and instructing us to love (cf. Jn. 13:34-35). God the Holy Spirit has taught us to love by His indwelling in our hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5). Likewise, we cannot "LIVE for Christ" apart from a love for Christ and others. Any attempt of ministry that is empty of love may cause damage to our witness and the kingdom of God. Our lives should reflect the love of Christ and enrich the whole church. We cannot "LEAD others to Christ" without love. We must have a desire to honor the Lord through faithfully sharing Christ with others. When we attempt to "learn, live, and lead" without first demonstrating love, our actions are meaningless and our words are just a lot of noise (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3)!

Take some time to answer each of these questions.

1. How does my life honor Christ? (LOVE Christ)
 2. Who is my small group of believers? (LOVE others)
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- 3. What am I doing to grow in my faith? (LEARN from Christ)
- 4. How am I serving the needs of others? (LIVE for Christ)
- 5. Who am I trying to reach for Christ? (LEAD others to Christ)

God is committed to teaching us to love and through the power of His Holy Spirit we are equipped to demonstrate the love of Christ to others. Because of the fall, it is necessary for us to learn to love. When we “LOVE Christ and others,” we are demonstrating a maturing faith that is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask Christ to be your Teacher as you commit to learning about LOVE over the next 40 days. Ask the Holy Spirit to equip you with His power to put LOVE into practice.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: God is love. Love is our Teacher.
LOVE | LEARN | LIVE | LEAD

DAY 02: LOVE Is Enriching

by Kris Mann

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:37-38).

Through the Apostle Paul’s writings we learn that the ultimate goal for the Christian believer is to come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. If we are to become like Jesus, we must first learn to love like Jesus. This week, as we explore the theme “Love is Essential,” it seems logical to examine what Jesus said about love.

In Matthew 22 we see the Pharisees, supposed experts in the Law, challenging Jesus with the question of which commandment is the greatest. Jesus responded that they were to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind. Of all the commandments that have ever been given, love toward God is the GREATEST. Jesus’ words undoubtedly fell on the ears of those who were busy trying to earn something (i.e., God’s favor) instead of trying to give something (i.e., their love and devotion to the Father). Aren’t we often guilty of this very thing? We run around attempting to follow all the rules whenever God just wants our love. Jesus’ ministry brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. His ministry was so effective because of His love for His Father and His obedience to the law and commands of God was the result of His intense love for His Father’s will to be done.

The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus knew that before He could ever love others as Himself, He first had to love God with all He had. We too must focus our love on the Father if we are ever going to love others like Christ.

In Luke 10 we read of an account of Jesus visiting Martha’s house. Martha’s sister Mary sat listening at the feet of Jesus while Martha troubled herself with the chore of serving. When Martha became upset with Mary and urged Jesus to bid Mary’s help, Jesus responded by saying, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Jesus’ response teaches us that spending time with Him in loving adoration and fellowship is more important than doing good things. Only through a loving devotion to

DAY 03: LOVE Is Excellent

And yet I show you a more excellent way
(1 Cor. 12:31b).

Have you ever heard the expression “majoring on the minors?” The idea is that we get so distracted by the little things that we miss the most important elements. This is one of the problems the Corinthian Christians were facing. They had become so concerned with their spiritual gifts they had lost sight of why they had those gifts in the first place. Their gifts had become signs to them that they were loved by God and in the center of His will. However, spiritual gifts and great acts of faith are not indications of God’s favor, as Jesus stated:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matt. 7:21-23).

Spiritual gifts are tools that God gives us to minister to others, nothing more. Proof of God’s presence and favor lies elsewhere (as we will see this week).

Instead of letting the Corinthians continue in the false estimations of their gifting, Paul shows them the “more excellent way.” Many have taken this statement to mean that Paul is saying that love should be pursued in place of spiritual gifts, but this is not entirely accurate. He has just concluded in 12:31a that the Corinthians are to desire (literally, “have zealous concern for”) the greatest spiritual gifts. Looking at the greater context of 1 Corinthians as a whole, it becomes clear that Paul is concerned with activities which serve others and build up the community (cf. 14:1-5). For Paul, this concern for the welfare of others above self is the definition of love; and it is the exercise of the gifts in love that is the more excellent way. This means love is not something to be desired in place of spiritual gifts, but as the method and means to carry them out correctly. Love makes the spiritual gifts function as God intended. As we will see in the coming days, the exercise of spiritual gifts without love is useless in God’s eyes.

DAY 04: LOVE Is God's Essence

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 Jn. 4:7)

Yesterday, we saw that the Corinthian Christians thought of their spiritual gifts as proof of God's favor. However, Paul makes it clear that the gifts are only tools to show God's love to others. Therefore, proof of God's love in our lives rests elsewhere. It is John who gives us the answer. He lists three tests for knowing that we have a relationship with Christ in 1 John 4: the test of righteousness, the test of truth, and the test of love. The greatest of these tests is love for one another, for having correct doctrine and good outward moral behavior are easy to possess without love. The Pharisees are a good example of this. They knew the Torah better than anyone else and they were meticulous at keeping correct outward behavior, but they were completely devoid of love. This is why they are called "white washed tombs," perfect on the outside but full of death on the inside. John makes it clear that to be a child of God, we must show love for one another.

John provides three reasons why love is such an important test. First, we must love one another because love comes from God (cf. 4:7-8). God is love and the source of love in this world. It is impossible for us to love, at least like we are supposed to, apart from God's presence in our lives. Without Him, our thoughts will always turn to ourselves by default. We need His love flowing through us in order to love others the way they are meant to be.

Second, we must love one another because it follows God's example. God gave His Son to die for us because of love (cf. 4:9-11). Paul tells us, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Having received the gift of God's love through Christ and coming to realize how special this gift is, we are in turn to share this love with each other. Receiving this gift and refusing to offer the same to others is a grievous sin that God will not overlook (cf. Matt. 18:27-35). Our debts have been canceled and we must, therefore, do the same for those who have wronged us, showing God's love to a fallen world just as Christ did for us.

Third, we must love one another because it continues

God's work of redemption (cf. 4:12). Showing love to each other is proof of God abiding in us and carries out our own sanctification. As we imitate Christ's act of love, we are "perfected" by the Spirit through our actions and obedience.

Did you notice the connection between John's reasons? Each of these reasons connects love with one of the members of the Trinity (cf. 4:13-16). The first reason, God is love, is attached to the Father. Love is not just an attribute like omnipotence, but something much more. It describes His very essence. The second reason is attached to the Son. Jesus is the greatest example of love that has ever existed, just as His death on the cross is the greatest gift and act of love that has ever been given. Finally, God's current work of "perfecting" love is through the Holy Spirit. God's love flows from the Spirit through us to the lost world carrying out the gospel.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Today, ask God to confirm His presence in your life by helping you to love others in specific ways. Do not allow yourself to simply go about your day without doing something out of love for someone else.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Being loving to others is our greatest proof of God's love in our own lives.

DAY 05: LOVE Is Encompassing

Before continuing today's devotion, take a moment and read 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Did you notice anything odd about the flow of Paul's argument? Chapter 13 sticks out a bit, almost like it was inserted as an afterthought. In fact, this supposed diversion has led many people throughout the years to come to this conclusion. However, they missed the fact that Paul diverts in chapter 13 to highlight, not a new subject matter, but his primary topic for the whole letter; he isn't changing the subject but identifying his true subject all along.

Everything Paul says to the Corinthian Christians is addressing their lack of concern for fellow believers. They were more concerned about showing how spiritual they were than edifying each other. They were more concerned about social status at the Lord's Supper than serving those less fortunate than themselves. They were more concerned about demonstrating their freedom in Christ than guarding the conscience of their weaker brothers and sisters. Paul's discussion about gifts had nothing to do with the gifts themselves, but why the gifts were given. Don't forget, Paul has already told them that "you come short in no gift" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7). What he is concerned about is their lack of love and concern for one another.

To illustrate his point, Paul walks the Corinthians through three examples. He begins with the spiritual gift that is most important to the Corinthians, speaking in tongues. For them, speaking in tongues was an outward sign of one's spirituality and connection to the next age. However, even if this were true, this gift is meaningless unless it is expressed through love and in some way builds up others; hence, Paul's command to remain silent unless someone is present who can interpret (cf. 14:6-19). Speaking in tongues is no better than a noise unless someone understands what is being said. It only builds up the self, not others.

Next, Paul turns to the gift that he sees as the most important, prophecy. This is a gift that is meant to build up others. To prophecy, Paul also links the gift of knowledge; not just human knowledge (although this would be included through the use of the word "all") but knowledge of the mysteries of God that can only be discovered through the Holy Spirit. Yet, Paul does not stop there. He also connects faith, a faith so powerful

that it can accomplish impossible tasks like moving mountains. All of these together are still nothing without love as their foundation. The simple truth is, it does not matter how spiritual you are, it does not matter how much knowledge of God you possess, it does not matter if you call fire down from heaven, if you are not concerned with loving others around you. This not only means our spiritual gifts are nothing, we are nothing according to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2).

Here is the heart of the matter. Activities are just that, activities. They are meaningless without a relationship of love behind them. If there is not a heart surrendered to love behind an act it will not accomplish anything in God's kingdom no matter what our intentions may be.

Hence, love is not found in the action or gift, but in the person. To drive this point home, Paul turns to the example of total altruism. It almost seems illogical that sacrificing for others could be meaningless and devoid of love. Yet, this is exactly what Paul is saying if the sacrifice isn't done for the right reasons. This passage is the strongest argument against deontology (i.e., ethics based on rules). Think of it like this, do you do what Scripture commands because Scripture tells you to; or because you genuinely possess the heart of Jesus? Do you look at the poor and have your heart broken as He did or do you simply help because it is the "right" thing to do? God wants loving children who follow His example, not dutiful servants who follow out of fear and obligation. This is why love is so important.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to reveal your heart to you and ask Him to replace any unwanted motivations with His love.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love is the encompassing context of God's relationship with us and must be the context of our relationship with others as well if our actions are going to accomplish anything for God's kingdom.

DAY 06: LOVE Is Empathetic

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering
(Ps. 51:1).

Many Christians measure their love for God by their religious devotion; how many times they go to church, how many Bible verses they have memorized, or how much they put in the offering plate each week. Paul, before his conversion on the Damascus road, was the epitome of religious devotion. In his letter to the Philippians he stated:

If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Phil. 3:4-6).

Despite all his devotion and zeal, he was still lost in his own sins. This is why he says that boasting in our accomplishments is useless. All of our own righteousness, even that done in the name of God, mean nothing without a transformed heart for God behind them. In Malachi, God asked for someone to shut the doors of the temple to prevent blind ritual without changed hearts (cf. Mal. 1:10). Therefore, it does not matter how faithful to church attendance, Bible memorization, or Scripture reading you are if those things do not change your heart.

David stated that what God truly desires is a “broken and contrite” heart. In the context of Psalm 51, this brokenness is in regards to one’s sinfulness and need for God’s salvation. However, in the New Testament, Jesus expands upon what having a “broken” heart means. Matthew stated that when Jesus saw the multitudes He was “moved with compassion” for them because they were like lost sheep. Even though they had “spiritual” leaders, they were still hopelessly lost. Their leaders were more concerned with obeying rules and showing outward devotion than with what really mattered: showing love and compassion for those around them.

The Corinthian Christians were now guilty of the same error. They were more concerned with their own spirituality than with the needs of others. Paul writes them to show that, like Jesus, for their gifts

and knowledge to make any difference they must be “moved with compassion” for others as well. Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan: when the priest and Levite encountered the wounded man on the road, they were more concerned with staying ritually pure than helping someone in need, their faith never led them past themselves to compassion for others. We must take the example of the Samaritan (i.e., Jesus in the story) as our own and choose to help (cf. Lk. 10:25-37)

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to fill your heart with compassion for others and to break your heart for what breaks His.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: As believers, we are called to move beyond “brokenness” over our own sinful conditions to sharing in Christ’s compassionate “brokenness” for the lost. This is what it means to show Christian devotion.

DAY 07: LOVE Is Edifying

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies (1 Cor. 8:1).

Aγαπη (Agapé) is the primary Greek word for love in the New Testament. On its own this word has no special meaning that separates it from the other Greek words for love. In fact, to a large degree these words are interchangeable. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and secular Greek writing, αγαπη is used in many diverse ways. Even Amnon's perverse love of his half-sister Tamar, which led to him raping her, is translated into Greek by the word αγαπη. Likewise, in the New Testament God's love for the Son is describe by both αγαπη and φιλω (commonly expressed as brotherly love). The specialness of αγαπη comes from how the New Testament authors began to use it to express the unique kind of love that God possesses and the love that believers are called to express for others. Since this usage developed over time, we must be careful not to assume that every instance of this word means God's love is automatically being discussed in the text. The context must decide this for us.

In Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 13, however, the context makes it clear that this unique divine love is in focus. Human nature leads to everything that this kind of love is not. For human love does envy, it is self-seeking, it does keep record of wrongs, and it can fail. Only God's love can match Paul's weighty description.

Paul's discussion about love begins not in chapter 13, but in 8:1, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." In fact, this can be seen as Paul's main point in the entire epistle. What is important to notice about Paul's definition of love is that it builds up others. The Corinthian Christians were more concerned with social status and their own spiritual freedom than they were with showing hospitality and love to one another. Paul is emphatically stating that if our actions do not promote the wellbeing of others, then we are not loving. It may seem as if I am on repeat here (since, I am), but this is a repeated theme in the text and cannot be over emphasized. Again, we must build others up if we are to be loving.

This is a scary thought, as it should be. As John will write, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8). Just five chapters before his discussion of love, Paul discusses the effects of believers not considering the consequences of their

choices. Some had been eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. While it is just meat and a believer is free to eat whatever is set before them (cf. 1 Cor. 10:27), the Corinthians were doing so at the expense of the consciences of others, “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (1 Cor. 8:13). Our rights and freedoms must never come between anyone and the gospel. If Paul is willing to give up something as basic as eating meat for the sake of the gospel, as believers we must be willing to give up anything that does not build up others.

Before we are quick to judge the Corinthians too harshly let’s take a look at a modern equivalent. This is especially dangerous for believers in the United States. Often we become distracted by our own preferences, creature comforts, political rights, and, dare I say, pointing out the sinfulness of others more than we are about helping those who are in need or hurting. As Americans we have the freedom of speech and as a part of that the freedom to display any flag we choose (you can probably already guess where I am going). There may be a variety of reasons why a particular flag may be displayed by someone; perhaps they are proud of their heritage which the flag represents or out of remembrance for a beloved family member. However, if the same flag also represents hatred and repression to others, should a believer display this flag? Paul’s answer is obvious, no! As believers, all our actions and choices are to express love and care for others even if it means denying our own freedoms. Actually, especially if it means denying our own freedoms.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: There are probably things in all our lives that we should give up for the sake of the gospel. The second verse of “I Surrender All” reveals an important truth that we should all keep close to heart:

All to Jesus I surrender
At Thy feet I humbly bow
Worldly pleasures all forsaken
Take me, Jesus, take me now

We should be willing to give all earthly pleasures and freedoms for God. The next time you sing “I Surrender All” in church, ask God to reveal to you what He is calling you to forsake in this life on behalf of the gospel.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Anything that can hinder the gospel should be given up in the name of love, even when those things are things that we have a right to have.

40 DAYS OF LOVE

WEEK 2

LOVE Is Bigger

Love suffers long and is kind.

1 Corinthians 13:4a

This week we will examine the edifying impact that love has in our lives and in the kingdom of God. With 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide, our focus this week will be upon the selfless love that is known through the patience and kindness of God.

We will discover that love is “bigger” than emotional feelings, but it is the very fabric that produces the tapestry of God’s work among us. God is actively at work around you and His activity of love brings edification to those who encounter Him. I pray that His love will motivate our church family to demonstrate the love of Christ in all circumstances.

Pastor Chris Dortch

DAY 08: LOVE Is Bigger Than Baseball

by Chris Dortch

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins' (1 Pet. 4:8).

When I was a kid, I had an album by the DeFranco Family called, *Heartbeat, It's a Lovebeat* and my favorite song on the album was "Love Is Bigger Than Baseball." The message of the lyrics was that love is better than all of your favorite things (e.g. baseball, Superman, cotton candy, Disneyland). The song was intended to be fun and light-hearted, however its superficial portrayal of love is prevalent in our culture. Love is often painted as emotions. Love will certainly impact our emotions, but love is more than the emotions themselves.

If we as Christians want to look beyond the emotional pleasantries of love and discover why our emotions are so deeply moved, we must look to the cross. It is at the cross that we see love at its best. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). Our emotions are stirred when we observe gospel-like love because it is a reflection of God's love for us. When we see love that is self-less and sacrificial, even if it is displayed by unbelievers, our emotions are moved because it is a reflection of the gospel.

Furthermore, the results that come from self-less and sacrificial love also stir our emotions. There is something instinctive about "covering" our mistakes. Adam and Eve attempted to "cover" their shame with leaves. We want to "hide the evidence" that we broke the lamp in the living room (Sorry about that mom!). We are attempting to put the "offense" or "mistake" out of view. When I have hurt someone and they "cover the offense" with forgiveness, it is refreshing. When I try to "cover it up," it makes things worse. Peter writes, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Pet. 4:8). Jesus said, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). If we are going to love others as Jesus has loved us, we must be willing to forgive others by putting their offense out of sight where few will know about it.

Think about the love of Christ. Christ sacrificially gave His life so we can have life. Christ's death on the cross covered a multitude of sins. Sure, love is bigger than baseball, but not because it makes us feel a particular

way. Rather, it is because when we experience authentic love it is a reflection of the gospel.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Give thanks to the Lord for His sacrificial death on the cross that brings life and covers a multitude of sins. If you would like to accept Christ and experience His “covering” of your sin, please turn to “APPENDIX 2: How to Become a Christian” on page 145.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: The gospel-like love that “covers a multitude of sins” is not easy because it requires personal sacrifice.

DAY 09: LOVE Is Bigger Than Our Emotions

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23a).

Love is not an emotion. That might seem counter intuitive. After all, everyone knows that love is an emotion, one they experience on a daily basis. However, real love is much, much more than just an emotion. The emotional aspect of love is only the surface of something much greater. To see why, take a look at the definition for an emotion:

A conscious mental reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body.¹

Our emotions are tied to our circumstances. You feel happy when your circumstances are pleasant and good. You feel sad when your circumstances are causing you distress and pain. Contrary to this, however, Scripture tells us that we should love no matter the circumstances. In fact, it goes as far to say that “love never fails” even in the face of opposition.

To see more clearly why love is not just an emotion, take a look at the fruit of the spirit in today’s focus passage above. Two of these, love and joy, stand out as different at first glance because we typically think of them as emotions. However, Paul placed them side by side with peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, and self-control, things that are clearly not emotions but behaviors, behaviors characteristic of the way God has dealt with humanity throughout history. A way of behavior that God intends believers to show to each other and the world in their daily lives. A way of life in which the Spirit empowers the believer to express in their own life because of and through our relationship with Christ. Basically, if God had His way, if you looked up the definition of Christian in the dictionary you find only one word: love.

When we make the mistake of thinking of love as just an emotion we set ourselves up for failure when we can’t “feel” love for everyone. Love, as a way of life, is about “seeing” people differently and “showing”

¹ www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotion.

love to everyone through our actions. You can choose to “see” people how Christ does and “show” love without needing to “feel” an emotion. This is why Jesus and Paul can tell us to “love” our enemies, because it has nothing to do with our circumstances. We do not have to change our feelings in order to show kindness and generosity to others. However, we shouldn’t be surprised if God also changes our feelings to match our actions along the way.

CHALLENGE/PRAYER: Ask God to open your eyes and show you the world as He sees it and to free your ability to love from your circumstances.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love is about a way of life focusing on “seeing” others as God sees them and “showing” His love in response.

DAY 10: LOVE Is Bigger Than Our Words

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 Jn. 3:18).

Baptists believe in personal faith in Christ as the only means of salvation. This means that there is no way to earn God's favor and no measure of "works" will ever be enough to get ourselves into Heaven. Because of this, we have developed an apprehension when people start talking about works as a necessary part of our faith. Yet, Scripture is clear that it is. Observing the law does not bring salvation, but serving one another does express love, the one word that sums up the entirety of the law (cf. Gal. 2:14). As Paul stated, when it comes to our actions, the only thing that really matters is "faith working through love" (cf. Gal. 2:6). Faith in Christ, therefore, produces works of service through love.

Take a moment to read Ephesians 2:1-10:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Notice that this passage does not say that we were saved to sit in a pew at church. Notice that it does not say that we were saved to read our Bibles, for church attendance, or for singing in the choir. While all of these are important parts of the Christian life, they are not

what we are called to do. God saved us to do good works, he saved us to love others.

Yesterday, we saw that love is about behavior and not emotion. This is a truth that can be seen clearly in the very words of 1 Corinthians. However, this is a fact that is somewhat hidden in many English translations. Many translations use adjectives to describe what love is, but this is not what the Greek on the page is doing. Paul is not describing the attributes of love but the actions of love. For example, the literal translation is not “Love is kind,” it is “Love shows kindness.”

Along with our faith in Christ comes this way of action based on love, just as James stated, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam. 2:26). This is why faith and works cannot be separated in Christian thought. Faith that is not expressed through works is of no benefit to anyone, as Paul makes clear in 13:1-3. This is what makes it impossible for a believer to say “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” and not do anything to make their statement a reality (cf. Jam. 2:16). The glue that holds these two aspects of the Christian life together is love, or as Paul calls it in Colossians, “the bond of perfection” (cf. Col. 3:14). Love puts faith into action.

CHALLENGE/PRAYER: Ask yourself how your faith is being put into action in practical and tangible ways. How am I showing the love of Christ to my fellow believers? How am I showing the love of Christ to my neighbor? The place to begin is in a small group for it is the perfect environment for putting your faith into action. Consider how your small group interacts with the mission field. Does your small group cease to exist outside the walls of the church? Your small group should be in the center of the mission field where the gospel meets the lost world.

Tonight’s the night
For the sinners and the saints
Two worlds collide in a beautiful display
It’s all love tonight
We may step across the line
We can sail across the sea
To a city with one King
A city on our knees¹

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love will transform our faith in Christ into action for the sake of the gospel in our communities.

¹ Toby Mac, *City on Our Knees*, in *Tonight* (Forefront Records, CD, 2010).

DAY 11: LOVE Is Bigger Than Our Ego

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (Rom. 12:10).

As Americans, we like to compete. The amount of money spent on sporting events each year proves this fact. We like to be the best and hold that trophy over our heads. Like most things, Scripture has a way of turning our desire for competition on its head. Instead of competing to be the first, we are to compete to be last:

But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Lk. 23:11-12).

We are called to be examples for each other in showing love. The ESV translation of today's passage translates the last portion as "Outdo one another in showing honor." The idea here is that love generates more love. Always giving preference to one another fosters the same attitude in others.

Jesus presented a parable to illustrate this point in Luke 14:7-14:

So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And

you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Our natural inclination is to seek the best spot for ourselves, but this is not how God’s kingdom works. Being a follower of Christ demands that we humble ourselves and serve others, putting their interests before our own. Becoming a servant is what brings us honor, not taking it for ourselves. As in all things in the Christian life, this points us back to Jesus. He humbled Himself, setting aside His glory in Heaven to take on the sin of the entire world. This is the greatest act of humbling oneself that has ever occurred. It is for this supreme act of humility that the Father now exalts the Son:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

This is a debt that we can never repay. It is in this same attitude that we are to compete. This is why we are to seek to show love and honor to those that cannot possibly repay us in kind. This ensures that we are not seeking earthly honor but only that which comes from the Father.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Start looking for ways to show others that you love them. Specifically, those who are not likely to be able to repay you.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: We must humble ourselves and try to outdo one another in showing love.

DAY 12: LOVE Is Bigger Than Our Enemies

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion (Lk. 10:33).

Samaritans and Jews hated each other. So much so, that devout Jews would go out of their way to avoid going through Samaria which lay directly between Judea and Galilee. They would rather walk through Gentile lands, which they had to do to avoid Samaria, than take the quickest route. Samaritans were seen as socio-religious outcasts by the Jews. This is what makes Jesus' interactions with the Samaritans so remarkable and instructive to modern believers.

Other than the Word of God, the two greatest weapons a believer possess are kindness and patience. There are few things that tear down walls as quickly and efficiently as these. As believers, we are called to always show kindness regardless of the circumstances because it has the potential to open many doors for the gospel message. The Samaritan had every reason to leave the wounded man on the side of the road. As a Jew, the man was part of the reason the Samaritan was barred from the temple in Jerusalem and why he was treated as a social outcast. However, the Samaritan looked upon his enemy and was filled with compassion. He goes above and beyond to show care for someone he does not even know, someone who would likely not do the same for him if the roles were reversed.

As believers familiar with this parable, we like to think of ourselves as the Good Samaritan. But let's be honest for a moment. Most of the time we are not. The religious freedoms that we possess have caused us to be more concerned about ourselves than the needs of others. We are too busy to pay attention to the injured man along the roadside. Even worse, sometimes we are the people who left the man on the side of the road in the first place. Instead of helping people see Jesus, we are more concerned with condemning their sinfulness and drive them farther from God than they were from the start. It is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who is the hero in this story, and every story. However, as imitators of Christ, we must strive to act like Him and show kindness to others.

The parable of the Good Samaritan makes it very clear what a believer's response is to be in situations where we find people in need. We are to open our arms

DAY 13: LOVE Is Bigger Than Our Patience

Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1a-3).

Waiting patiently is difficult to do in today's world. We have become so accustomed to getting what we want when we want it; the idea of waiting for anything can be frustrating. There is no better example of this than waiting in traffic. Only a hundred years ago it took most people hours, if not a couple days, to travel more than a few miles. Now we get upset if we have to stop at a few lights between our house and the grocery store. Our culture's impatience on the road is so prevalent that there is even a name for it, road rage.

The pace of modern life doesn't do our spiritual lives any favors either. We pray wanting an immediate answer and get frustrated with God when He doesn't respond when we want Him to. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, God's timetable works on a different scale. God only moves in His own, perfect timing. Being all knowing, He knows when it is best to act and when best not to act according to His will. He has the patience to wait until everything His will requires is in place.

Love, coming from God, works on this same time scale of patience as well. God patiently waits for each and every one of us to repent and return to Him. This is what delays Christ's return:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Of course, all of this waiting allows for struggles and trials to come our way. We often get impatient because of the trials that we must go through. These trials and sufferings seem like a lot to take from our perspective. But think about what God experiences while He waits patiently for the lost to return to Him. He not only has to watch as you suffer, but He must watch as every one of His children suffer. Every time they go through trials He is there holding their hand promising them it will be over soon, even if they are too scared and angry to notice. Yet in all of this, the world continues because

God's love is not just for those of us who are already saved but for those who are still lost and in need of Him. This is why some translation render the Greek as "longsuffering."

Likewise, we are called to suffer offense in order to give time for reconciliation. This is for the benefit of the offender, ourselves, and the unity of the community as a whole. Just as love motivates God's patience, Paul establishes love as the means for us to do so in Ephesians 4, "bearing with one another in love." Think about it this way, how much more are you willing to endure from someone you love as compared to a stranger? If a stranger or even acquaintance wrongs us, we are quick to write them off and remove them from our lives. However, with loved ones we will allow ourselves to be hurt time and again because we value the relationship more than our feelings at the moment. As imitators of Christ, we must seek to do so with everyone and not just our family or those closest to us.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to help you wait patiently in all of your relationships and ask Him to reveal to you His will as you wait.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Waiting patiently allows for God's will to be carried out in our lives and the lives of those around us.

DAY 14: LOVE Is Bigger Than Our Fear

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love (1 Jn. 4:18).

We usually think of hate as the opposite of love, but this is not actually true. True opposites have nothing to do with each other; think oil and water, they simply cannot mix. Love, at times, requires hate. In order to love, we must hate everything that threatens that which we love. This is why God hates sin. Therefore, hate cannot be the opposite of love. Scripture tells us the real opposite of love is fear.

It is difficult to imagine sometimes surrendering everything we know in order to take the gospel to the far reaches of the world. People who do seem like spiritual giants to us. However, they are no different from you or me, they simply have not allowed their fears to get the best of them. Instead of focusing on what God has called us to do, we focus on our fear of the unknown or fear of losing what we have.

John tells us that love conquers these fears. If we truly love Christ and those He has sent us to reach, then any fear that we may feel will disappear; we will not have to wrestle with ourselves. Love is the strongest motivator that exists. It causes people to take all kinds of risks for those they love. It causes mothers to be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of their children. It causes fathers to jump headlong into danger to protect their family. It causes soldiers to risk their own lives to protect their comrades in arms. Love casts out our fear.

What this means for the gospel is knowing God's love for us conquers all our fear so that we can confidently step out on mission for Him. No matter what we face, we know no one can bring a charge against us, no one can condemn us, and most importantly, no one can separate us from Christ (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). No matter what comes our way in this life, even if it kills us, we still have our relationship with God and that is all that matters. This is why we should have no fear and why Paul can boldly state that we are "more than conquerors" through Him who loves us.

CHALLENGE/PRAYER: So, what has fear kept you from doing lately? Has it kept you from talking to a coworker about Christ? Has it prevented you from getting to

40 DAYS OF LOVE

WEEK 3

LOVE Is Thoughtful

Love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity.

1 Corinthians 13:4b-6a

This week we will examine the seven negations of what “love is not.” With 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide, our focus this week will be upon developing the mind of Christ.

We will discover what love IS by examining what love is NOT. Sometimes it is what we don’t do as much as what we do that matters. This week we will search the depths of our own hearts to uncover prejudices, thoughts, and behaviors that have no place in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

Pastor Chris Dortch

DAY 15: LOVE Does Not Burn with Envy

by Chris Dortch

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious

(1 Pet. 2:1-3).

What's so bad about envy? Is it really so terrible? It doesn't seem to cause harm to others. Envy might be defined as a discontented feeling that longs for someone else's possessions, attributes, status, or circumstances. The Bible lists envy as the product of a "debased mind" (cf. Rom. 1:28-30). It is the type of sin that is seeded in the mind and produces a behavior that is contrary to the person, nature, and character of God. As Christians, we are called to have the "mind of Christ" (cf. Phil. 2:3-5) not a "debased mind." How we think determines what we feel. What we feel determines how we act. If we have jealous thoughts, we will feel envious. If we feel envious, it will produce negative behaviors. For example, envy may discourage personal achievement. Envy may inspire a desire to take something that doesn't belong to you. If the other person is perceived as undeserving, it can evoke additional feelings of resentment. Envy is dangerous because it is the seed that produces selfish behavior.

Take a moment and read 1 Peter 1:22 through 2:3:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers, and its flower falls away,
But the word of the Lord endures forever."

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

DAY 16: LOVE Does Not Boast

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it (1 Cor. 4:7)?

We have all met people who like to talk about themselves. They have a never ending list of the things that make them so great and why we should like them. Ironically, however, all their bragging usually leads to the exact opposite effect and we do everything we can to avoid these people. This is the boasting that Paul has in mind here in 1 Corinthians 13. The basic meaning of the word here translated as “boast” means “to heap praise on oneself” and expresses this sense of ostentatious bragging. There is something inherently repelent to us about this kind of behavior and Paul shows us why.

Society places value in status, accomplishments, and possessions. We tend to look at people who have more than us as more successful and, thus, more important. This is true for both Paul’s day and ours. Because of this, we tend to view ourselves on a similar system. By letting people know about what we have done and possess we increase our own self-image. We feel that if people know these things they will value us more. However, this is a self-defeating system. When people begin to brag about themselves they are not actually increasing their value in the eyes of others, but reminding others of the lack in their lives and their own desire for being valued. We hate bragging because it makes us devalue ourselves.

Even if the problem ended here, it would be enough to cause a believer to avoid bragging out of love for others. However, the problem goes even deeper. The main problem is not that bragging makes others feel devalued, but that bragging places value in the wrong place from the start. In reality, value does not lie in our possessions, accomplishments, or even reputations. A person’s value is in the love God has for them. As believers, we know that nothing we have comes from ourselves. Every blessing, ability, and talent we possess comes from God. Paul, in effect, by removing our grounds for boasting is protecting us from our own fallen nature to place value in the wrong things.

Love, seeking to build others up, cannot have anything to do with bragging or attempts at building up ourselves.

Love must place the welfare of the other's first and base their value on God's love for them and not their place in society.

But, while we are on the subject of boasting, there is one area a Christian can boast. It is in what God has done for them through Jesus. This kind of boasting draws others to God because they too can share in it. Everyone has equal access to God's grace and blessing regardless of what they have done or possess, no one is better off or worse than anyone else, and no one gains value by devaluing someone else. Boasting in Jesus is emphasizing a person's correct value since Christ died out of love for everyone. So, go make Jesus famous!

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: In your daily activities are you seeking to make yourself more known or are you seeking to make Jesus famous? Ask God today to show you where your true value lies: in your relationship with Him. Also, ask Him to help you remember to not promote yourself to others but to build others up with your praise of them and Jesus.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love does not seek to promote its own worth but seeks to humble itself to promote the worth of others.

DAY 17: LOVE Does Not Inflate Its Own Importance

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise (1 Cor. 3:18).

Yesterday, we looked at the tendency of people to boast about themselves. Today, we look at the flip side of that same coin: pride. Bragging is the outward expression of what is happening on the inside. We feel prideful when we increase our value to ourselves. If we value our own accomplishments and abilities enough, we begin to believe that we are owed the respect of others. This causes us, in turn, to feel cheated and resentful when people do not praise us or give us the respect we feel we deserve.

The problem with this is the same as it was with boasting to others, our value is not found in what we do. We have no grounds for feeling pride in any of our accomplishments. Even our most righteous deeds are really nothing in themselves. In fact, Isaiah describes them as “filthy rags” (cf. Isa.64:6). This is one of those instances where the English translation seeks to euphemize the original meaning. The Hebrew word translated as “filthy rags” literally means “menstrual cloth.” This is how God views our righteous deeds, as a bloodied and soiled cloth destined for the trash heap. Anything good in our lives comes from God and God alone.

Since our own accomplishments do not increase our own value, believers are called to a life of humility and service to be a testimony to what Christ has done:

And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:27-28).

Love does not concern itself with its own self-worth because its value lies secure in God. This frees us to humble ourselves and serve others without fear and resentment. There is no pride left to wound. Consider Jesus, the only one to ever exist who could genuinely claim superiority:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but

made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

Love is not concerned with increasing its own reputation but with serving others, just as Jesus did by washing His disciples feet (cf. John 13:1-10). Peter tried to stop Jesus because he was thinking as a human, in terms of reputation. Under normal conditions, the master would never wash his followers' feet. However, with God things are reversed.

To the world, humbling ourselves often appears as foolishness. It means we must pass up plenty of opportunities to increase our reputation and station in society. However, becoming proud about one's spiritual gifts makes little sense in the context of how God's kingdom really works. God has chosen the foolish to shame the world's wisdom. Does it not make more sense to humble ourselves and become foolish then?

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to help you see your talents and accomplishments, not as means to increase your own place in society, but as means to further the kingdom of God.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: God's ranking system works on the reverse principle of the world: the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Boasting to attempt to be first is, therefore, counter-productive.

DAY 18: LOVE Does Not Behave with Ill-Manners

Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another (1 Cor. 11:33).

The lengthiest examination of the Lord's Supper in Scripture occurs just two chapters before our theme passage for 40 Days of Love. In this discussion, Paul instructs the Corinthian Christians to examine themselves before partaking in the Lord's Supper:

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:28-29).

Often, these instructions are presented as a call to reflect upon unrepentant sin. While this is an important task, this is not what Paul is actually instructing the Corinthians to do in this passage. The context reveals that Paul is discussing the Corinthians behavior towards other believers, not about their spiritual condition. Some members of the church were proceeding with the fellowship meal before others arrived and in the process were not leaving anything for the less fortunate who arrived late. The clues in the text even reveal that this is divided across social classes. The hosts, the wealthier members of the church, were treating the Lord's Supper as their own private dinner parties and letting the poorer members go without. It is this ill-mannered treatment of other believers that is disrespectful of Christ's body, the church.

The situation here is similar to what Jesus taught about in Matthew:

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matt. 5:23-24).

What Jesus is saying is that our relationship with others directly effects our relationship with God. Love dictates that you treat everyone with the same respect and propriety you would God Himself. While the Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice, it is commemorating the

Sacrifice and the same rules would apply there as they would at the altar. Examining oneself before partaking in the Lord's Supper is meant for us to reflect upon our relationships with those we have covenanted with in the local church. It is the grievances we may have with others and ignoring our social failures that brings judgment upon ourselves.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: The next time you observe the Lord's Supper, take some time and reflect upon your relationships with the other members of the church. Have you done anything that could damage the relationship? If you have, remember that we are called to abstain from partaking until we have made the relationship right, so begin to seek reconciliation.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Our relationship with other believers is an important part of our spiritual health and we must be mindful of how we treat each other.

DAY 19: LOVE Does Not Seek Its Own Interest

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty;
only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the
flesh, but through love serve one another
(Gal. 5:13).

The world tells us that looking out for our own interests is what will make us happy. Think about all the movies you have seen recently. How many of them involved a happy ending because the main characters finally got what they were looking for? Only if we can make more money, then we'll be happy. Only if we get that really big house, then we'll be happy. Only if we marry Mr. or Mrs. Right, then we'll be happy. Instead of looking at the movies, consider the contrast of the message of the movies and the lifestyles of those who live in Hollywood. If it teaches anything it is that being self-seeking and obtaining everything our heart desires leads not to happiness and contentment but to misery and ruin. Think of how many famous people end up dying of drug overdoses or committing suicide because they are lonely and unhappy.

Instead of looking out for our own interests, believers are called to look to the interests of others and to imitate Christ. As Paul stated:

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." (Rom. 15:1-3).

As believers we are called to freedom (cf. Gal. 5:13). But this freedom cannot be used for self. This is why Paul warned the Galatians not to use it for the desires of the flesh, but in service to others. The Corinthian Christians clearly valued the freedom they had found in Christ. However, they had taken this freedom beyond God's intentions. As mentioned before, eating meat sold at the market from sacrifices is in no way a sin in itself, for it is just meat. However, eating this meat in front of others who have weaker consciences is sinful since it causes others to stumble. It is far better to deny our own freedoms for the sake of others than it is to exercise these freedoms for our own interests.

If Christ was concerned about His own interests, He

DAY 20: LOVE Does Not Get Irritated

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye (Matt. 7:3)?

Irritability is one of the best warning signs that we are not being loving. Think about it for a moment. It means we are not patient. It usually leads us to being unkind. It stems from a sense that our time is too valuable to put up with whatever/whoever is irritating us. It causes us to treat others with disrespect and contempt.

The Greek word *παροξυνω* (*paroxuno*) literally means "cut close alongside" which carries the meaning to "incite, jab, provoke" an emotional response (i.e., irritate). Here in 1 Corinthians 13 we find it in its passive form meaning that someone else is doing the irritating. This means that love does not allow itself to be irritated by whatever is loved.

Anyone who has ever been in a long-term relationship knows this is easier said than done. It is usually those we love the most who end up irritating us the most. We can all probably name a handful of little things our loved ones do that always get under our skin. However, if we stop to think about what is irritating us, it is usually rather trivial and insignificant. So, why do we get irritated over such small things? Simple, we lose sight of the purpose of love: building up others.

Instead of thinking about what we can do for our loved one, we become bothered by their "inconsiderate" decision of not changing to make us happy (insert lots of sarcasm here). It is intriguing how often we concern ourselves with trying to change other people to suit our desires and how little we try to change our responses to others. The truth is that we all have so many issues ourselves that if we took them seriously we wouldn't have any time to nitpick others over such minor issues.

At the end of the day, does it really matter which end of the toothpaste tube to squeeze from or whether over or under on the toilet paper roll is correct (over by the way)? The answer is almost always going to be no of course. So, instead of getting irritated at the other person for not changing, why not adapt and change yourself? Out of love, simply choose not to get upset.

This also applies to situations that are more serious as well. Paul makes it clear that the life of a believer is to

be defined by persecution and trials. A natural response to these kinds of situations is to become angry and frustrated. However, we are called to do the opposite:

Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now (1 Cor. 4:12b-13).

These kinds of situations are going to call for a great deal of patience and will-power to respond in a Christlike manner. Ask yourself how you can expect to face life's toughest situations with Christlike behavior if you cannot manage in the small areas with your own loved ones.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Try to come up with a list of things that others do that irritate you. Then ask God to help you keep a keen grasp on reality and to know how to let these things go instead of getting irritated.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Our relationships are the boot camp for the real world. Approach your daily routine as the training you need to develop your Christian character. Remember, the other person's salvation may just depend upon our response to their "irritating" behavior.

DAY 21: LOVE Does Not Remember Faults

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Ps. 103:12).

Forgetfulness is one of the most wonderful truths about love. No, I'm not talking about forgetting your anniversary (sorry guys). Love's forgetfulness is about forgetting past wrongs. Love forgets every bad thing that has ever happened to it. In fact, this is the very heart of the gospel. God, in His love, chooses to forget and forgive every wrong we have ever done. So much so, that He has figuratively thrown them as far as the east is from the west. Yet, this is one of the hardest aspects of love for us to grasp and even harder to practice in our own lives.

As mentioned earlier in our devotions, context is everything when it comes to determining meaning. Words can have multiple definitions, but usually only one possible meaning based upon the context they are used. Many theological mistakes have been made throughout the centuries because too much was made out of a particular word/phrase.

However, in some instances, the context allows multiple meanings to be possible. The word can legitimately convey a range of meaning and this is precisely why the author chose it. God wanted to communicate all the possibilities to us so that it can speak into a number of possible situations we will face. This is what we have here with the Greek word λογίζομαι (logisdomai). It is the root for the English word logic and the general meaning of the word is to "count, charge with; reason, decide, conclude; think." When it comes to wrongs done against love, these are things it chooses not to do.

First, love chooses not to "count" past wrongs against others. We like to keep score. Have you ever been in an argument where past grievances are brought up as ammunition against you? Have you brought up past offenses to wound or disarm someone else? Or, even worse, have you used your own past wrongs as an excuse not to accept Christ into your life because He can't possibly forgive you? Due to our own nature of wanting to hold on to things, we apply those same tendencies to God. However, God looks at things very differently. If sin itself was brought to its knees at the cross and death robbed of its victory with Christ's resurrection, why would something as small as our past

prevent God from forgiving us? Through Christ our sins are not counted against us, so neither should we count others sins against them. We are quick to forget that our own forgiveness depends on us forgiving others (cf. Matt. 18:21-35). Jesus built this into His instructions on prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). We must forgive!

Second, love chooses not to make “decisions” based on past wrongs. Because love does not count wrongs against it, it also does not make decisions based on those wrongs. The father in the parable of the prodigal son had every reason not to accept his son back. However, when he saw his son on the horizon, nothing his son did mattered. All that mattered was that he was back. Far too often, we take the track of the elder brother. We use others’ past failures to deny them acceptance and reconciliation. We would rather stand outside in the cold and complain about fairness than to rejoice in the return of our own family. However, take note that this does not mean that there are no consequences for past actions. Although God completely forgives us and restores us to His family, there are still consequences of our choices in this life. Note the father in the parable. He restores his son, but he doesn’t place his son in charge of his money. Not holding past wrongs against someone means we seek reconciliation and restoration, but it does not mean we place that person in a position that they will potentially fail again right out of the gate.

Third, love chooses not to “think” about past wrongs. Here is the heart of why God casts our sins out of His presence. If they are not counted against us and are not factors in our relationship with Him, there is no reason to ever think about them. So why even keep them around? Thinking about past wrongs only keeps them before our minds and before long they will again be used as ammunition and affect our relationships.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: So, what past wrongs have you been holding on to? Have you sought forgiveness while denying it to others? Today, ask God to help you let go of these past wrongs and seek to celebrate restoration and reconciliation along with the angels in heaven, “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Ask God to help you forgive those who have wronged you just as He has forgiven you.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: The forgetfulness of love helps us to seek restoration with others and welcome them back into God’s family.

40 DAYS OF LOVE

WEEK 4

LOVE Rejoices

[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.
1 Corinthians 13:6

This week we will examine the idea that love rejoices in the truth. There is joy and pleasure when we seek truth. With 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide, our focus this week will be upon the “who, why, and how” love rejoices in the truth.

God is love. God is truth. Again, these are more than merely attributes of God; these are descriptions of the very essence of God’s nature, person, and character. God takes pleasure and rejoices when He sees Himself (i.e. Love and Truth) within you! We will discover that God, who is Love, rejoices over you with gladness.

Pastor Chris Dortch

DAY 22: LOVE Rejoices over You

by Chris Dortch

The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing
(Zeph. 3:17).

You probably don't remember your mother singing songs over you while you slept in the crib or while you sat on her knee. Yet somehow we remember the songs. "Pat-a-Cake, Pat-a-Cake" or "Ride a Little Horse" or "Rock-a-bye Baby." Did you know that God rejoices over you with singing? He takes delight in you.

Take a moment to read Zephaniah 3:14-17:

Sing, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away your judgments,
He has cast out your enemy.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
You shall see disaster no more.

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
"Do not fear;
Zion, let not your hands be weak.
The Lord your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.

The idea of this short hymn of salvation is that God takes great joy when the lost are saved. Jesus is the King of Israel (cf. Zeph. 3:15) and He is in our midst continually. God's love for you is unquestionable. His expressions of affection for you upon your repentance are duly noted in this passage. The redemption of those far from the Lord is the joy of angels and the joy of God Himself. Therefore, the things that bring joy to the Lord should bring joy to you and me.

Love that rejoices in truth is, in part, a love that rejoices when the lost are saved. It is an invitation for you to join YHWH in song. Take some time to write down the names of those whom you love that are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. It can be family members,

friends, it may even be those who have already gone to be in His presence. Take some time to thank the Lord for His saving grace. Now, take some time to write down the names of those whom you love that need to know that God loves them and desires for them to repent unto salvation. As you write down their names, consider what role you could play in demonstrating the LOVE of Christ and the TRUTH of His word to them? Love that rejoices in truth is, in part, a love that shares the gospel for the lost to become saved.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: The song “Amazed” by Jared Anderson and sung by Lincoln Brewster on his 2005 album *All to You* is one of my favorite worship songs. The lyrics are reminiscent of Zephaniah 3:17, “You sing all around, though I never hear a sound.” Take some time to listen to the quietness of the moment and know that the Lord is singing over you. Why not join him in song today and sing of His goodness?

ONE LAST THOUGHT: As you consider His love for you, know that Christ “dwells in your heart through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height” of His love for you!

DAY 23: LOVE Rejoices with Others

[T]he manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all (1 Cor. 12:7).

Before moving on to this week's emphasis, it is important to look at one alternative interpretation from last week. Some translations do not include "keeps no record of wrongs" but "resentful" instead. While this does not directly translate the Greek, it does highlight what Paul was trying to communicate. For the Corinthian Christians, envy came in the way of social status, both secular and spiritual. In Roman culture, social status determined a person's value in society and the amount of respect they would receive. However, in Christ, all of these distinctions had been done away with (cf. Gal. 3:28). Despite this, the Corinthian Christians had allowed these social distinctions to creep back into the church and affect their relationship with one another. This can be seen in their arguments over who they followed and how they treated each other during the Lord's Supper. The Corinthian Christians had created a breeding ground of envy and jealousy. Now people were becoming resentful of each other's status and spiritual gifts. This is because envy festers within the soul:

A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rotteness to the bones (Prov. 14:30).

Our bones are the foundation of our bodies. This means that envy, by causing rotteness in our bones, effects our entire spiritual health and not just our relationships. Envy and resentment go hand in hand. If we envy someone, it is only a matter of time before we begin to resent them because of it. We begin to question why they get to be blessed and we do not? It simply doesn't seem fair. It is this lack of fairness that turns envy into resentfulness. However, love is not about being fair. Love is about going the whole way in the direction of the other person.

Think about it this way, if love was concerned about fairness we would all be on our way to Hell right now. No part of God's gift of salvation is fair. In fact, it is its unfairness that makes it so wonderful. On our own we are dead in our sin without any hope of redemption or restoration. What would have been fair was for God to let us perish in our sin and allow us to pay the penalty of our deeds for all of eternity. Good for us, God is not in the business of being fair but about being loving.

DAY 24: LOVE Rejoices over Reconciliation

For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights (Prov. 3:12).

God, in His wisdom, made Scripture versatile. Frequently, a passage can be just vague enough to allow for a number of equally valid interpretations that fit the context. This is no mistake, however, it is intentional to allow for the infinite possibilities that life can throw our way. This week's passage is a perfect example. First, "does not rejoice in iniquity" clearly means that love does not praise others for their sin. This is something that the Corinthians had clearly been doing (cf. 1 Cor. 5:2). Instead of correcting the immorality among them, they boasted in the freedom they had in Christ.

There is an obvious modern equivalent, many churches have begun to openly embrace homosexuality as a viable (i.e., not sinful) way of life. This goes beyond being loving to denying the truthfulness and relevance of Scripture, something that is just as important. Yes, God loves all people, including homosexuals, and will welcome them into His family with open arms. Their sin is no greater than anyone else's. However, He will not leave them unchanged. Jesus may have said to the woman charged with adultery "neither do I condemn you," but he also said "go and sin no more" (cf. Jn. 8:11). Somewhere along the line, acceptance and love became synonyms in our society. This means that love can have nothing to do with truth if it denies someone's feelings, desires, and identity. However, Paul is clear that this is not how real love operates. We cannot allow human desire to take the place of God in our lives. Love includes correction!

There is a second possible application in this passage. One that is more subtle, but no less a problem for many people. This text is a warning against those who delight in other people's failures because it provides them the opportunity to correct them. I do not mean someone who enjoys helping others in their struggles and lead them to reconciliation (for we are all called to do this), I mean someone who actually gains pleasure out of someone else's failures because it makes them feel superior. Someone who cultivates a sense of self-righteousness and self-importance out of scolding someone else for their shortcomings.

The best example of this is the tattletail. Think back to

your school days and you'll likely remember someone who liked to point out other students' bad behavior to the teachers. Usually, this wasn't done out of a sense of justice, but to make themselves look better to their teacher.

Another example of someone who matches this description is the gossip. They are always on the hunt for the next piece of juicy news to begin spreading through the grape vine. No part of their activities is meant for the benefit of the person, in fact, their actions show that they care nothing for those involved. All that matters is that they are able to satisfy their urge to benefit from the failings of others. Paul makes it clear that love has nothing to do with this kind of behavior.

We all probably know people like this. But, before we start pointing fingers, we should start looking at ourselves first. As horrible as it sounds, we all have a little bit of this in us. After all, everyone enjoys seeing the bad guy get what is coming to them. Much of the film industry is based on this. Justice is an important pursuit, but we cannot let our own fallenness warp it into pleasure. Our goal is not revenge or punishment but reconciliation. As believers we must seek what is best for all parties involved, not just the victims or ourselves.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to reveal to you how you may be guilty in taking pleasure in the failures of others. Ask Him to help you to seek reconciliation in your relationships instead.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Instead of delighting in someone's failure, we should delight in their restoration. Jesus told us that there is rejoicing in heaven over every repentant soul (cf. Luke 15:10) and we should seek to give God many opportunities to throw another party.

DAY 25: LOVE Rejoices in the Truth - Part I

Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:10).

Truth can hurt. It is not always pleasant to have our failures pointed out to us. In fact, people dislike being corrected so much that our society shuns disagreement and demands political correctness as a way of avoiding judgment of each other's choices. However, truth, even truth that hurts, is not something from which love shies away. Instead of rejoicing in someone else's sin (something modern society is demanding of us), love confronts people's failures. This is not done out of malicious intent, but out of genuine desire to see the person reconciled to God and the Christian community.

While this seems at odds with last week's lesson about the forgetfulness of love, it is not. Last week's lesson was about not letting grudges keep us from seeking reconciliation. Instead of being opposites, seeking to deal with others truthfully has the exact same goal.

For example, the Corinthian Christians had allowed sexual immorality to creep into their church. Instead of correcting the behavior for the benefit of the sinner and their own unity, they had become arrogant in their spiritual freedom. Paul's instructions show us that drastic steps should be taken to restore those who have fallen away from the truth, "Purge the evil person from among you" (cf. 1 Cor. 5:13b). However, it is equally important that this be done for the correct reasons. Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul instructs the church to receive the wayward brother back once he has repented of his sin (cf. 2 Cor. 2:8). Reconciliation is always the goal, never punishment, and especially not condemnation.

There is another danger associated with the truth. Just as we can ignore the truth and allow others to go their own way, we can also emphasize the truth to the point of destroying reconciliation. This is particularly true in regards to those outside of the church and the primary reason why the world hates the truth so strongly. Paul shows us that judgment by the church is reserved for its members and its members alone. In this age, the church has been given no authority to judge the world for its sinfulness. Those who do nothing but point fingers at the lost and condemn them are not acting

DAY 26: LOVE Rejoices in the Truth - Part II

by Kris Mann

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk. 23:34a).

God’s word is rich with examples of those who had such a love for others that they would be willing to lay down their very lives for them. Today we will look to Moses and Jesus to show us that true love does not rejoice nor delight in the sins or injustice of others but rather it rejoices whenever truth wins out.

In Exodus 32, Moses was delayed on top of the mountain communing with God. While Moses was away from the people, the Israelites turned to creating and worshipping an idol of gold. Scripture tells us that God’s anger was kindled and He vowed to destroy the people and make a great nation out of Moses alone. If you know much about the exodus of the Israelite people from Egypt, you know that these people had been extremely disobedient and stiff-necked toward God and Moses. Moses could easily have taken pleasure in God’s wrath upon the people, however, that was not his reaction. In fact, his reaction was quite the opposite:

Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (Exod. 32:31-32).

Ultimately, God heard Moses plea for the people and He spared them due to his intercession. Moses’ actions are a reflection of this week’s theme verse about love from 1 Corinthians 13:6. Indeed love does not rejoice in the iniquity of others but rather it rejoices in the truth of a merciful and loving God! Moses could not fake the genuine love he had for God’s chosen nation. He offered himself in the place of the sinful people.

In Luke 23 we read of Jesus’ crucifixion. A more heinous and humiliating death could not be conjured up by the Romans and on an old rugged cross, Jesus was found hanging for the sins of humanity. At His spoken word, all those present could have been annihilated and Jesus could have been set free. But out of His great love for us, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” What love! Jesus did not take delight in knowing that wrath awaited those who opposed Him but rather He begged of the Father to forgive them of

their iniquities. Nowhere else in scripture can a more beautiful depiction of the love Paul preaches be found. Jesus was willing to display His love through the very sacrifice of Himself—not for a holy people—but rather for a broken, sinful, and selfish people.

We live in a fallen world, the same fallen world of Moses and Jesus, yet they found ways to show love and mercy to others despite their sins. We can look to their examples to aid us in delighting in the truth of love!

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Today, look for opportunities to show the love of God and refrain from the thoughts and desires of wrath toward others for their iniquities. Pray that God will help you rejoice in the truth of love and take no pleasure in the iniquity and wrath of others.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Indeed love does not rejoice in the iniquity of others but rather it rejoices in the truth of a merciful and loving God!

DAY 27: LOVE Rejoices Regardless of Logic

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

Insanity may not be a word you have ever considered as descriptive of God's love before. Webster's definition of insane has two uses that are relevant to our discussion of love today: absurd and extreme. Think about it for a moment, an infinite, all-powerful, perfectly good God loves greedy, self-absorbed, sinful people who want nothing to do with Him most of the time. If you have ever wondered what man's true nature is apart from God, here it is: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). This means God has absolutely no reason to love us; yet, He chooses to anyway. If there has ever been a perfect picture of absurdity, that is it.

On top of love being absurd, it is also extreme. The best known verse in the world tells us that God's love is so great that He gave His only Son to restore us to Himself. Imagine for a moment that you had in your power to save the entire world from Hell. The cost would be the life of your only child. Would you be able to do it? God's love for us is so strong that this was His plan from all eternity. Knowing that we would fall and He would need to send His Son to die did not prevent Him from creating this world. Can you imagine something more extreme than this?

Only a love this "outside the box" can overcome death and sin to make us children of God. It is mind boggling that despite once being enemies of God in our sin, He desires to call us His children, as John stated:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 Jn. 3:1).

Even now, as believers, we often do everything we can to avoid showing love to God. We make excuses why we can't possibly make time to spend with Him. If you are a parent, you have probably experienced this with your own children. Despite the disrespect they often show, you continue to love them. Here lies the irony of God's love:

While God doesn't need us but still wants us, we

desperately need God but don't really want Him most of the time.¹

Just like children, we like to call on Him when we need Him, but are happy to ignore Him the rest of the time. Despite this, He is constantly by our side working out His plans for us. Insane, no?

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to give you an overwhelming sense of what He has done for you and ask Him to show you how to have an insane love for Him and those around you.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: God's love is both absurd and extreme making it our only hope for freedom and redemption.

¹ Francis Chan, Crazy Love (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 63. .

DAY 28: LOVE Rejoices through Community

If you love Me, keep My commandments
(Jn. 14:15).

Jesus is clear about how we are to show that we love Him, we must obey His commands. Period. We are not to try to rationalize away why His commands don't tell us to give up on what we desire or why it means something other than what it clearly teaches. We are simply to follow His instructions as they are given. Scripture makes this very clear:

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments (1 Jn. 5:2).

So, do we need to sell everything we have? Do we need to drop everything and move to some distant land? Maybe, some are definitely called to do this. However, before we all rush off to have a yard sale and jump on a plane to Abu Dhabi, there are many commandments that we can begin to practice a bit closer to home.

These commandments have to do with showing care for one another as believers. In fact, there are 46 of these commandments spread throughout the New Testament. These passages are about putting God's love into practice and demonstrating to a fallen world what it truly means to be a follower of Christ. Eighteen of them directly deal with showing love:¹

1. **Jn. 13:34** - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
2. **Jn. 15:12** - This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
3. **Jn. 15:17** - These things I command you, that you love one another.
4. **Rom. 12:10** - Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;
5. **Rom. 13:8** - Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.
6. **Rom. 16:16** - Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.
7. **1 Cor. 16:20** - All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
8. **2 Cor. 13:12** - Greet one another with a holy kiss.

¹ For a complete list see "Appendix 1: One Another Passages" on page 131.

9. **Gal. 5:13** - For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
10. **Eph. 4:2** - with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,
11. **1 Thess. 3:12** - And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,
12. **1 Thess. 4:9** - But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;
13. **1 Jn. 3:11** - For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,
14. **1 Jn. 4:7** - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
15. **1 Jn. 4:11** - Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
16. **2 Jn. 5** - And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.
17. **1 Pet. 1:22** - Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit[a] in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,
18. **1 Pet. 5:14** - Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

This means that over a third of these New Testament commands deal specifically with love, revealing the heart of what the “one another” passages are about. With the Law, the Pharisees lost sight of why God gave it to them and turned it into a set of rules that needed to be observed at all costs, even if that cost was the souls of other people. It was more important to stay ritually pure than it was to help a lost soul. In the New Testament, the “one another”-ness of God’s commands is clear, we must show love.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Living in community with other believer’s is important to our own spiritual health. It provides us with opportunities to put love into action, “iron sharpening iron” if you will. Following the commands is not the purpose, expressing the love behind the commands is. Therefore, if you are not already a part of a small group, ask God to help you find the right one this week.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love is at the heart of the Christian community and the basis for all our relationships with “one another.”

40 DAYS OF LOVE

WEEK 5

LOVE Always

[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:7-8a

This week we will examine the limitlessness of love. With 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide, our focus this week will be upon the idea that love never gives up.

When I was in school, I was taught to question any statement that contained the words “always” or “never.” My teacher said that one major exception was in matters pertaining to God. Hebrews 13:8 reminds us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” That doesn’t mean that He is static; it means that He is unchanging in His person, nature, and character. Since He is love, we can trust that His love will ALWAYS bear, believe, hope, and endure.

Pastor Chris Dortch

DAY 29: LOVE Always, Like Jesus

by Chris Dortch

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 Jn. 3:16).

It is easy to say the love of Christ will ALWAYS bear, believe, hope, and endure. The challenge is that we are to apply these verses to our own life. We are to love like Christ. We are to do something that is beyond our own capacity. How can we accomplish this seemingly impossible task?

1 Corinthians 12:27 says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." In other words, you are not alone. Christ established the church and together we form the body of Christ. Our church family provides the environment for us to practice being unselfish toward one another. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

Through the participation in your small group (whether a Sunday School Small Group or a Home-Based Small Group), we can learn what it means to have authentic fellowship with one another and love like Jesus. Our small group should move us away from our self-centered sin nature. Instead, authentic and biblical fellowship is in our commitment to love one another. Consider the following verse from Ephesians 4:16, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." Love is the defining quality that will edify the church. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

What words characterize your small group? Is "love for one another" at the top of the list? Through your small group, you can demonstrate the love of Christ to one another. Your small group should provide the encouragement you need to love like Jesus.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: You may never be in a situation to lay down your life for someone else, but how can you demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus to other believers (like those in your small group)? How can you demonstrate the love of Jesus to non-believers?

DAY 30: LOVE Always Overcomes

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

We are finite. There is an end to what we can accomplish. At some point our energy, ability, or resources are going to run out. This is why we can never achieve our own salvation. The gulf that is between our sin and God is so great that nothing in all creation can ever hope to span it. However, what is impossible for us is not with God. He is infinite. Nothing will ever exhaust Him. This is true of His love as well, nothing can overcome it. Because His love is the only thing great enough to span the gulf between us, there is nothing left that can overcome it. There is now nothing that can undue that act of love, nothing can outstrip what has already been accomplished upon the cross. This is why Paul could say:

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

This week's portion of 1 Corinthians has a fourfold repetition of the word πάντα (panta, "all"). Here we find the Hebrew mind of Paul seeping through into the Greek of the text. In Hebrew thought it was common to repeat a word or phrase to add weight to its meaning (i.e., Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, cf. Isa. 6:3). Paul is repeating the "all" in this way to show the exhaustiveness and limitlessness of love. Πάντα, can be translated in two possible ways given the syntax of the sentence (i.e., no noun in the sentence). It can either mean "all things" or "always." The more traditional and numerous translation of "all things" is a bit misleading. After all, what does it even mean to "believe all things" (something not logically possible) and "hope all things." While it may have a poetic ring to it, the best translation is not "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" but "always supports, always believes, always hopes, always endures." Unlike the first translation, this one implies that love is actively overcoming the obstacles it is facing instead of merely passively letting them happen. This is a much better expression of the limitlessness of love that Paul is trying

DAY 31: LOVE Always Bears Up & Endures

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord, “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”
(Jer. 29:11)

Verse 7 in 1 Corinthians 13 is chiasmic in nature, meaning it follows a pattern that repeats itself in reverse.

- A – Love bears
- B – Love believes
- B’ – Love hopes
- A’ – Love endures

Chiasmic structures were common in Hebrew writing. This is another example of how the Hebrew mind of Paul is demonstrated through the Greek text. The chiasmic structure provides a clue on how we need to understand what Paul is writing. The paired phrases aid in interpreting each other.

The first verb, translated as “bears” in the NKJV and has a number of possible interpretations, as the various English translations attest:

- “bears” (NKJV, NASB, ESV)
- “protects” (NIV)
- “supportive” (CEV)
- “never gives up” (NLT)

Out of these, “bears” is by far the most frequent choice. However, this does not necessarily make it the best choice, at least not how it is worded in this verse. For it does not just have the idea of persevering through difficulties, as endure does at the end of the verse. Paul is the only New Testament writer to use this verb and all of his other uses imply that this verb carries the meaning to “bear up against difficulties.” This doesn’t so much imply simple endurance, as it does fortifications against difficulties. Think of it this way, part one is about resistance and part two is about persistence.

This nuance is confirmed by the noun from which the word “bears up” is derived from, “roof.” A roof is meant to cover and protect that which is underneath. Here, the idea is that love is our defensive fortification that will resist any opposition that comes its way. Once again, Paul is emphasizing that love builds up, supports, and protects that which is loved.

Love is not docile, but active in its protection, making plans to resist opposition. It makes plans before the opposition even arrives. Sound familiar? This is precisely what God told Jeremiah. Sometimes we question why God puts us into situations that seem beyond our ability to face. We forget that His plans for us are always good and that He is always in complete control of our circumstances. His love towards us always seeks to protect and support us, even if we do not understand how that can be. The problem is that we are focused on the here and now and not eternity. Any problem that we face while on this earth is nothing in comparison to the protection we have from our Father.

Despite our reactions to our circumstances, His love for us keeps working. It does not give up on us when we fall down and turn away. He is always there to welcome us back and help us face life's trials. Support is not there to just prevent bad things from happening, it is there to help us pick up the pieces afterwards. Just as parents know that they need to let their children fail from time to time in order to grow, so does God:

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Rom. 5:3-5).

Love can keep going because it already has a plan to overcome the opposition to it; just as God's plan to redeem us predates sin.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to surround you with a sense of His love as you go about your day and help you remember that He is always in control even when you do not understand His plan.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love does not "give in" and it does not "give up" in the face of opposition.

DAY 32: LOVE Always Believes & Hopes

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).

Yesterday we learned that love protects and endures through all circumstances as the first and last part of the chiasmic pattern in verse 7. Today we look at the middle portion of the verse. Faith and hope go together throughout the New Testament. The most famous of these is undoubtedly Hebrews 11:1. Faith is our certainty of what we know to be true and hope expresses our desire for God's promises to us as His children.

With "always believes," Paul shows us that love never loses certainty, despite circumstances to the contrary. In the face of overwhelming odds, it seems natural to "give up" and "give in" to what we perceive to be our fate. However, love does not do this; it perseveres through the obstacles and never waivers in its certainty of God's deliverance.

If anyone ever had reason to doubt God, it was Abraham. God had promised him a child through Sarah, but he was already one-hundred years of age and she ninety (cf. Gen. 17:17-18). However, his love for God manifested itself through faith in His promise. So much so that he was able to place that child on an altar, knowing that God would still be faithful (cf. Gen. 22:8). Even when we fail to have faith, God will never fail to deliver on His promise. This is why He knocks Abraham out and walks through the animal halves Himself (cf. Gen. 15:1-21), knowing that only He would be able to remain faithful to the covenant. His faithfulness remains constant even when we fall away and doubt. This is the idea behind the "perseverance of the saints." God's faithfulness means that He will never go back on His promises of salvation to us (cf. Rom. 8:37-39). Even when we fail, He will see us through.

"Always hopes" goes naturally with "always believes." No matter how bad the circumstances, love always hopes for the brighter tomorrow of God's promises. One day this world will pass away and a new world with no more pain and suffering will take its place. Love never loses sight of this, giving it the strength to continue. Likewise, this means that love never gives up on people but continues to hope in their reconciliation to God. This does not mean that love allows them to take advantage, but quietly and patiently seeks the

DAY 33: LOVE Always Monopolizes

Do not love the world or the things in the world.
If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father
is not in him (1 Jn. 2:15).

Just about everyone is familiar with the board game Monopoly and likely played it at least once. The object is to gobble up as much of the real-estate on the board so that everyone will give you all their money when they land on it. Basically, you want every piece of the board to be your own, hence the name, Monopoly.

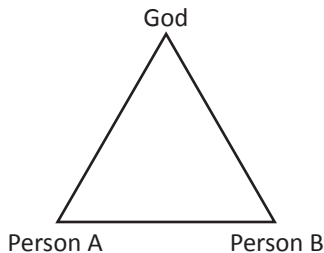
The object of our love monopolizes us in the same way. It consumes our time, our energy, our money, and our devotion. In order to love two different things, sacrifices for one have to be made from the other. This means that perfect love cannot be given to two things. To love something perfectly, we must hate the other. This is especially true when the two things are opposites. John tells us that we cannot love both God and the world for the two are mutually exclusive.

Of course, this raises the question how we can love both God and others. Does this not divide our love? After all, Jesus did say:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple (Lk. 14:26).

This is where the uniqueness of divine love shines. Loving others more than God (i.e., putting them first in our considerations), logically, leads to less love for God. By focusing on our love for something other than God we naturally have less time to devote to Him. However, loving God more (meaning, putting Him first in our lives) increases our love for others. In fact, placing God first is the only way to truly love others. God has designed service to others to show love to Him. As John stated, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments" (1 Jn. 5:2).

Think of it like a triangle. If two people focus on each other, neither



of them gets closer to God. If one focuses on God and the other on them, they get no closer to each other. However, if both focus their love on God, they not only get closer to God but each other as well. This is why it is so important that love for God monopolize our lives.

The inverse of today's focal passage would mean that we are to love what is of God. This makes sense since part of being in love is loving what the beloved loves. If your loved one enjoys spending time doing a particular activity, spending time with them frequently causes you to begin to enjoy it too. God loves people, so we must love people as well. The closer we get to God on the triangle the more of His love for others shines through us.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to fill you with love for Him and to help you purge anything from your life that is currently taking His place.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Learning to love God more helps us to love others the way they are meant to be.

DAY 34: LOVE Always Provides

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 Jn. 3:17).

John tells us in 1 John 3:16 that we should be willing to lay our lives down for our brother. This is something that we can easily agree to. Not because it would be easy to do in reality, but because we do not actually expect to have to do it. This is why John does not stop there. He places the test in a more mundane everyday experience. Everyone has seen others in need. John makes it clear that if we have love, we will provide for those needs out of own possessions. We will not just offer up a prayer. We will not just bring the need to the attention of the church, but we will take care of the needs ourselves.

Sacrifice to express love is a theme that runs throughout Scripture. This is precisely what David was expressing when he demanded to pay for the threshing floor:

Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam. 24:24).

True acts of love cannot exist without sacrifice. If we do things for others because we get something out of it, we are only showing love for ourselves; the benefit to others is merely a byproduct. We may like to think that we are doing it for others and that the benefit to ourselves is the byproduct, but human nature speaks against us. If our intentions are for the sake of others then it should be easy to make sacrifices for them, but often it is not. It is easier for our loved ones, but not so easy for others—and reveals our true intentions.

Sacrifice is so important because it emulates what God did for us. God did not create a way of relief that did not cost Him anything. He made a personal sacrifice of His only Son in order to meet our need. In fact, He created us knowing that this sacrifice would need to be made.

When we stand before Jesus at the Mercy Seat, He will not ask us how many times we went to church. He will not ask us how many Bible verses we have memorized.

He will not even ask how many hours every day we spent in prayer. While these things are important and necessary, they are not the most important thing. These activities only prepare us for the real work of Christ, the things that truly matter. For He will notice how many of those in need we fed, how many strangers we welcomed into our homes, how many of those in need we cared for:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' (Matt. 25:34-36).

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to make you aware of the needs of others around you that you can help meet them in practical ways yourself.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love takes out of its own abundance to provide for others.

DAY 35: LOVE Always Remains

by Charlie Holder

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10).

What does “unfailing” mean? Google defines “unfailing” to be something or someone without error or fault; it is also reliable and constant. Look at it this way, we will fail, but God’s love will last. Your money will run out, but his love never will. You are probably thinking that human love does not last forever and that it will fade away. You are right, but God is not human! Unlike our love, His never fails. His love is immensely different from ours. Look at the way you describe love for a moment; is it a feeling? Is it how others make you feel? If that is how you base your love, then it’s not real love, it is selfishness. True love is others-focused. We need to feel loved, don’t get me wrong, but if that’s all we are looking for then it will fade eventually. 1 John 4:10-11 tells us, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Verse 10 explains that God doesn’t love us because of our goodness, our kindness, or even our great faith. God loves us because of His goodness, His kindness, and His great faith. Think about it this way, God’s love does not depend on your love for Him or your love for others. Your goodness and kindness does not make Him love you more, but then again your lack of goodness and kindness does not make Him love you any less. God’s love is reliable and constant. Verse 11 tells us that we should love others the same way. We begin to see that when we love others the way God loved us then we will truly see love throughout our community. I believe that these 40 Days of Love will show us how to truly Love God and Love Others. We must begin to love like God and that is what this series is about. Going back to God’s love reminds me of a song by Brian Johnson and Jeremy Riddle titled, “One Thing Remains (Your Love Never Fails)”. Chorus two of that song goes like this,

Your love never fails
It never gives up
Never runs out on me
Your love Your perfect love oh Lord

Singing this song during worship is amazing! It begins to show you that no matter where you are in life or what you may be dealing with that God’s love is unfailing.

The Bridge of that song tells us that in death and in life that we are covered by His great love and that our debt is paid. With this nothing can separate us from God's unfailing love.

PRAYER/CHALLENGER: Today, thank God for His unfailing love. Thank Him for loving you in times that you did not love Him or in times that you abandoned Him. His love never changed and it was constant through all the ups and downs in your life. Ask God to teach you and show you how to love like Him more. Ask Him to teach you to love others in a way that is unfailing and in a way that will lead others to God.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: God loves you when no one else does. God's love remains constant even when others abandon you, and ignore you. No matter what, God's love will never fail. The best part is that God has chosen to love you and that love will never fail.

40 DAYS OF LOVE

WEEK 6

LOVE Is Paramount

But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:8b-13

This week we will examine how to abide in faith, hope, and love. With 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide, our focus this week will be upon the idea of abiding in Christ.

In John 15:1-11 the word “abide” is used eleven times. If we are to abide in Christ, we must understand what the word means and how to act upon Jesus’ command. First, the biblical concept of abiding in Christ is to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. So, what does it mean to “produce fruit”? The Bible provides us with several examples of the fruit that God desires from those who follow Him. Fruit will serve as evidence of authentic Christian faith...

- Love for God (Ps. 42)
- Repentance from Sin (1 Jn. 1:8-10)
- Genuine Humility (Matt. 5:1-12)
- Devotion to God’s Glory (1 Cor. 10:31)
- Continual Prayer (Eph. 6:18)
- Selfless Love (1 Jn. 2:9)
- Separation from the World (1 Cor. 2:12)
- Spiritual Growth (Eph. 4:12-16)
- Obedient Living (Rom. 16:26)
- Hunger for God’s Word (1 Pet. 2:1-3)
- Transformation of Life (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Other Believers (Rom. 1:13)

I pray that the fruit of love that comes from an abiding walk in Christ will be evident in your life.

Pastor Chris Dortch

DAY 36: LOVE Is Prevailing

by Chris Dortch

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing (Jn. 15:5).

There are 65 references to producing fruit in our lives within the New Testament alone. In John 15, there is a progression that moves from “no fruit” to “lasting fruit.” As Christians, our desire is not simply to “produce fruit,” but to produce “lasting fruit.” Take a moment to read John 15:1-16 and notice the progression in bold.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that **does not bear fruit** He takes away; and every branch that **bears fruit** He prunes, that it may **bear more fruit**. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, **bears much fruit**; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you **bear much fruit**; so you will be My disciples.

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should **go and bear fruit**, and that **your fruit should remain**, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He

may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

The progression looks something like this: no fruit >> bears fruit >> bears more fruit >> bears much fruit (x2) >> go and bear fruit >> lasting fruit.

The key to lasting fruit is found in abiding in Jesus. When we focus on the fruit, we become prideful and we think... look at what I'm producing. When we focus on abiding in Jesus, we become worshipful and we think... look at what the LORD is producing.

Abiding in Christ always begins with changing your mind and aligning your mind with the mind of Christ. If we are not careful, our focus will become the fruit of "doing good things" or "avoiding bad things." The problem with "doing good things" and "avoiding bad things" is it produces fruit that doesn't last. Non-believers can "do good things" and "avoid bad things." As Christians, we have been called to abide in Christ. A common example of this is that many Student Ministries have traditionally been focused on "keep youth off drugs, keep them out of trouble, make sure the girls don't get pregnant, don't drink alcohol, etc." Instead, we must begin with the idea that our highest priority must be to abide within Christ. It begins with a change of mind.

When we abide within Christ it produces the character of God within our lives. When we attempt to produce the character of God without abiding in Jesus, we have developed a legalistic religion that is void of the Gospel. Only abiding in Christ ensures that the fruit we produce is lasting fruit.

How then do we abide? God's Word is central to your life (cf. Jn. 15:7). Worship of the LORD is your highest priority (cf. Jn. 15:8). Your love for others is always increasing (cf. Jn. 15:9-16). You have a desire to be obedient to the commands of Christ (cf. Jn. 15:17).

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Is your walk with Christ focused more on "doing good things" or "abiding in Jesus"? Ask the LORD to help you abide in Him and begin to produce fruit and move toward producing lasting fruit!

ONE LAST THOUGHT: A prevailing love cannot occur apart from abiding in Christ.

DAY 37: LOVE Is Permanent

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three;
but the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13).

The last section of Paul's argument (8b-13) highlights the temporary nature of the spiritual gifts. They are necessary in this life, but not the next. Think about it, what need will there be for prophecy when we have arrived into God's glory? Or what need will there be for tongues when we are standing before God Himself, no longer needing to communicate in some private language? The Corinthian Christians placed a lot of value in their spiritual gifts but Paul shows them the more excellent way because these gifts are only temporary. Once Jesus returns there will be no more need for any of the gifts because all will be made new and complete.

Contrary to the temporary gifts, however, Paul tells us that love is eternal. It will never pass away but will continue to be present in the next age as well. This is because of the close connection with God and love, in a way that His mercy and grace do not have. God's essence has never changed and never will change. However, His relationship to others has and continues to as they return to Him in repentance. Think of it this way, we can say that God possesses mercy and grace, but these are only contingent (i.e., dependent on circumstances). This means that God, while always containing the ability to be merciful and gracious, did not always express them. Likewise, God was not always omnipresent since there was not always a place to be present in, once He created space He expressed this attribute. However, this is not true of love. He has always been and will forever be love.

Scripture tells us there are four things that God "is:" spirit, light, truth, and love. These four things don't just describe His actions (like mercy and grace do), but define His very essence. He "is" these things. He was always loving since there were always objects of love found in the Trinity. God the Father has always loved the Son and Spirit, just as they have always loved the Father and each other. This makes love eternal in a way that some of the other attributes of God are not. Love is truly eternal.

Being eternal means that love must also be unchanging. In fact, apart from God Himself, it is the only thing in this fallen world that Scripture tells us will never

through his people is the strongest apologetic that God has in this world.”¹ People can argue with you all day about your beliefs, but they cannot argue with your acts of love; as Thistleton states, “Love is that quality which distinctively stamps the life of heaven upon the character of believers.”²

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Ask God to remind you of the times you have felt His presence in your life and to help you experience His power more on a daily basis.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love is the power of eternity flowing through us to impact others for the gospel.

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 109.

² Anthony C. Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1035.

The world craves love because, whether we acknowledge it or not, we were created in the image of the One who is love.

Paul uses the terms and ideas of faith, hope and love throughout his letters to the early church to express to them what was fundamental in the life of a Christian. Many other things might come and go (1 Cor. 13 1-3,). Eloquence, knowledge and generosity are good but they aren't the foundations of our walk with Christ. Faith, Hope and Love are. Paul goes on to explain that the greatest of these three is love.

If you're anything like me you've asked why? Paul doesn't elaborate further here on why love is the most important but it is interesting to note and apply a few things here. The Greek word that he uses in this passage is ἀγάπη (agapé). Selfless and godly love. When we love in this way we are being Christ-like. God has never hoped and never had faith. Those things are reserved as beautiful necessities of a broken mankind. God, however, does and is love.

Love is the greatest because unlike faith and hope, which are still immeasurably important, love is what caused God to send His Son to die in our place. Love is what God uses through His people to change the world. Love compels us to live and act differently. It compels us to share that faith and hope and it has made a difference in lost souls more than any eloquence, history lesson, or brimstone fueled revival sermon ever has.

The beginning of chapter 14 seems to be Paul's closing thought about love in this passage. The Bible is clear here about how this passage is meant to be applied. Paul writes, "pursue love and desire spiritual gifts..." What a beautiful thought that no matter who we are or where we are, this should be our goal. When we switch the two and pursue spiritual gifts and desire love we struggle because we focus on ourselves when we should focus on God and others. Agapé is always focused outward.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: Today, ask God to help you pursue love above all else and remind you that the world's version of love and His are not the same. Pray for Him to help you to love Him and others unconditionally no matter how difficult it may be.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: When we love biblically we are being Christ-like because God is love and it is love that God has used and continues to use to change the world.

DAY 40: LOVE Is Personified

He who says he abides in Him ought himself
also to walk just as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6).

Of all the pictures of love in Scripture, the clearest example of what real love looks like is the life of Jesus. Everything He did was out of love for the Father and us. He laid aside His glory in order to come to earth to redeem us to Himself and he laid down His life in order to pay the price for our sin.

To illustrate this point, take some time to read through 1 Corinthians 13, but as you do replace the word love (or a pronoun representing love like "it") with the name of Jesus.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not [JESUS], I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not [JESUS], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not [JESUS], it profits me nothing.

[JESUS] suffers long and is kind; [JESUS] does not envy; [JESUS] does not parade [HIMSELF], is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek [HIS] own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[JESUS] never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

And now abide faith, hope, [JESUS], these three;
but the greatest of these is [JESUS].

Did you notice that every statement still works? Just as the personification of wisdom in Proverbs points to Christ, so does the personification of love here. God is love, therefore Christ is love. Everything He did is love in action. As much as the believer expresses the character of Christ, they too are love in action. Jesus expresses love perfectly and completely. Now, read through the following section again, but insert your own name.

[NAME] suffers long and is kind; [NAME] does not envy; [NAME] does not parade [THEMSELF], is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek [THEIR] own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [NAME] never fails.

Doesn't quite work anymore does it? However, if we are living the lives we are called to, it should. God intends us to express this kind of love to the world around us, it is the whole reason the church was left on earth. We are the expression of God's love and Jesus is our model. Our actions should point others to Jesus and the gospel.

PRAYER/CHALLENGE: There are likely pieces that stung a bit more than others. Perhaps your guilty of boasting or have a hard time of letting old grievances go. I would suggest that these are the areas in your life that God is calling you to work on the most. If we truly want to begin to reach our community, we must focus on showing Jesus to them. The best way to do this is to love them just as Jesus loves us.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: We must seek to imitate Jesus as our perfect example of how to love.

EPILOGUE

I hope that the personal devotions, small group involvement, and weekend sermons have challenged you to live out the love of Christ. I believe that if our church is going to be the New Testament church that Christ has called us to be, we must demonstrate the love of Christ to one another and to those outside of our church walls.

“40 Days of Love” is only the beginning. As we have discovered, love is central to all we do in the Christian faith. It isn’t something we stop doing at the end of our “40 days.” It is my prayer that “40 Days of Love” is the catalyst for a lifetime of abiding in Christ and demonstrating the love of Christ to everyone we encounter.

I have provided space below for you to personalize your spiritual growth journey over the past 40 days. I hope you will prayerfully write down your thoughts in each area.

Take a moment to consider how God has used this spiritual growth campaign to produce spiritual maturity in your own life.

Before “40 Days of Love” I was struggling with... _____

(Tell what questions you had or life issues you have been struggling with.)

Because of this I’ve been... _____

(Share how the issue/question has affected you, other relationships, other activities, etc.)

But through the “40 Days of Love” I learned, read, saw, heard, ... _____

(What did God reveal to you through this spiritual growth campaign?)

A big help during this time was... _____

(Tell who helped you and what Bible verse/story/incident got your attention.)

As a result... _____

(Describe what conclusion you came to as well as any commitments you made.)

Some of the things I learned were... _____

(Detail what you learned about yourself, God, the Bible, others, etc.)

Based on what I've learned I... _____

(Share your current strategy and game plan.)

As a result I... _____

(Tell whether or not you feel equipped to help others with similar issues/questions.)

One of the biggest surprises through this process was... _____

(Tell about your biggest surprise during the lesson, and whether it was good or bad.)

I'd love it if you'd pray that I...

(Share how others can pray for you.)

Once you have written your thoughts in each area, prayerfully consider sharing your story with others in our church during the "40 Days of Love" Celebration Worship Service. If so, please email Pastor Christopher Wilson at christopher@fbcmtsterling.com and include "40 Days Testimony" in the subject line.

Abiding in Him,

Pastor Chris Dortch

40 DAYS
OF 
LOVE

**SMALL GROUP
GUIDE**

SPIRITUAL GROWTH CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW AND COMMITMENTS

Over the next 40 days we will be focused on developing and/or deepening our church's understanding and practice of the biblical definition of love. Through our weekend worship services, small group studies, and the daily devotions and journal, our entire church will focus on the biblical definition of love for 40 days! Imagine the impact of our entire church focused intently on loving each other and our communities for a period of 40 days. Each person devoted to spending time in God's Word and time in prayer on a daily basis. Undoubtedly, individuals will grow in the faith. Our church family will be better equipped to fulfill the Great Commission. Our families will be strengthened. Even our community will benefit from our growth! This is the type of unity that Paul wrote about in Philippians 2:2, "Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

There are three major commitments of this spiritual growth campaign:

1. Individual Commitment (Daily Devotional & Journal)

This campaign is designed to help you develop and strengthen your daily time with the Lord in His Word and in prayer. In addition to strengthening your daily time with the Lord, it will challenge your understanding of how to fulfill the Great Commandment to "love God and love others." Each day, you will read a brief devotion, followed by a "Prayer/Challenge" and a "One Last Thought" that are designed to assist you with application of the biblical principles. Ministers of the Gospel, who are part of our very own church family, wrote these daily devotions!

2. Small Group Commitment (Sunday School & Home-Based Small Groups)

One of the powerful elements of the spiritual growth campaign is encouraging one another through authentic biblical community called "small groups." Whether your small group is Sunday School Based or Home-Based, it is essential to the "40 Days of Love" campaign to commit to a small group for the six weeks. You can visit the "40 Days of Love" Information Table in the lobby to commit to a small group for 40 days!

3. Worship Service Commitment (Weekend Worship Services)

Each Sunday of the campaign, we will focus on a particular aspect of 1 Corinthians 13, known as the "Love Chapter" and discover personal application. There is no need to sign up, just show up!

The Small Group aspect provides an environment for discussion, application, and accountability. Through our time in small group, we hope that you will be encouraged, you will grow in your faith, and our church will be unified in love, spirit, and purpose as together we learn how to love like Jesus.

SMALL GROUP LEADERSHIP

Small Group Coach

The Small Group Coach oversees all of the Small Group Leaders within a particular type of small group. For example, Lea Prewitt serves as our Sunday School Based Small Group Coach. Charlie Holder serves as our Student Ministry Small Group Coach. We are currently praying and searching for a Home Based Small Group Coach. There are three primary roles of the Small Group Coach.

1. Huddle: Meet regularly with your small group leaders to pray, train, and equip. Always make sure that your small group leaders have the resources they need.
2. Visit the Group: Visit each small group at least twice each year to affirm the leader and the group.
3. One-on-One: Make personal contact with each small group leader and seek opportunities to shepherd them.

Small Group Leader

The Small Group Leader provides personal leadership to their small group. There are six primary roles of the small group leader.

1. Prepare the lesson and facilitate discussion. As soon as you receive the material, review the lessons and become familiar with the “bid idea” of each lesson. Prepare your mind for leading your small group.
2. Select at least one apprentice and possibly two apprentices to train and give opportunities to lead.
3. Shepherd your small group by helping them develop Spiritual HABITS and movement in spiritual growth.
4. Meet with your Small Group Coach on a regular basis.
5. Attend huddles with your coach for prayer, training, and equipping.
6. Guide the group toward reproduction of another small group within 18-24 months.

Small Group Apprentice

The Small Group Apprentice is being prepared for the role of Small Group Leader. It is the understanding that they will launch their own small group within 18-24 months and develop their own apprentice(s). There are six primary roles of the apprentice.

1. Identifies, welcomes, and introduces guests.
2. Takes attendance and reports to the SG Coach.
3. Makes preparations for and opens the group with an ice-breaker or topic-teaser.
4. Ensures a refreshment schedule is developed.
5. Leads the discussion/teaching time once each month.
6. Leads the group in developing a group mission project (if the group does not have a Small Group Missions Coordinator).

Small Group Host (Home-Based Groups)

The Small Group Host is primarily concerned with creating a welcoming environment. There are six primary roles of the small group host.

1. Provides a location for the group to meet (Home-Based Small Group).
2. Arrives early and greets everyone as they arrive.
3. Sets up refreshments at least 15 minutes before the meeting time.

4. Arranges the chairs for best small group interaction.
5. Sets the temperature around 70 degrees (Home-Based Small Group).
6. Make sure pets are put away (Home-Based Small Group).

Additional Small Group Leadership Opportunities

The small group environment can be a great place for providing every individual in the church with some ministry role. It will ensure that our church does not operate with 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. Here are some additional ideas for members of your small group. Your small group may come up with many other leadership roles not listed here.

1. SG Prayer Warrior: Organizes and communicates prayer requests.
2. SG Spiritual HABITS Champion: Provides resources and accountability for those in the group developing spiritual disciplines.
3. SG Refreshments Coordinator: Develops the refreshments schedule for the group.
4. SG Missions Coordinator: Oversees the logistics and communication of SG mission projects.
5. SG Childcare Coordinator: Develops the childcare schedule for the group (Home-Based Small Groups).
6. SG Ice-Breaker / Topic Teaser Coordinator: Makes preparations for and leads the weekly ice-breaker.
7. SG Card Coordinator: Responsible for sending out cards to the group (e.g. we miss you, get well, etc.).
8. SG Fellowship Coordinator: Responsible for logistics and communication of SG fellowships.
9. SG Worship Leader: Responsible for leading worship songs/hymns during your small group gathering.
10. SG Facebook Page Coordinator: Responsible for managing a Facebook page for SG activities and communication.

SPIRITUAL H.A.B.I.T.S.

What are Spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S.?

We want every member of our small groups to be developing spiritual disciplines that will help them grow on their own. As you have no doubt experienced, there are some awesome things God does in the lives of His children when we “take a break” from life and draw near to Him. Learning some classical spiritual disciplines won’t just enhance your maturity; your growth will not be dependent on a program. To help members of every small group develop these disciplines we have developed some resources. It would be good for every small group leader to know what the HABITS are and to practice them in your own life as you encourage your small group to do the same.

Spiritual Disciplines:

Hang Time with God

(Daily time in prayer and reading God’s Word.)

Accountability in a Small Group

(Small Group involvement. Small Groups provide a relational community for discussion, application, and accountability of the Christian faith. Small Groups are the perfect environment to learn to love like Jesus. This is the emphasis of this year’s spiritual growth campaign: 40 Days of Love.)

Bible Memorization

(Memorizing and meditating on God’s Word. We have free Scripture memory key tags available at the “40 Days of Love” information booth in the lobby.)

Involvement in Ministry & Mission

(Where do you serve? Actively serving in the church as well as actively involved in missions. Every believer has a ministry in the church and a mission in the world!)

Tithing Commitment

(Stewardship over God’s resources. This discipline is about giving regularly and generously with a cheerful heart to the local church.)

Sermon Notes

(Actively listening to the sermon by taking notes. Learning can be increased 5 to 10 times by writing something down, even if you never look at it again!)

This is not an exhaustive list of spiritual disciplines, but it serves as a starting point for personal spiritual growth.

SMALL GROUP SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Time	Element	Description	Leadership
	Refreshments	Your group can decide the best placement for refreshments (before, during, or after).	SG Host
1 min.	Welcome	Take a brief moment to welcome everyone.	SG Leader & SG Apprentice
5 min.	Prayer	Lead your group in prayer.	SG Leader
	Spiritual HABITS	Take a moment to discuss Spiritual HABITS on previous page.	SG Leader
5 min.	Topic Teaser	The “topic teaser” should introduce the topic to be discussed during the small group lesson. It should also engage the group in discussion.	SG Apprentice
	Bible Study	Facilitate discussion as your read through the lesson and questions.	SG Leader
	Mission Project Update	Take some time to update the group on your current mission project.	SG Apprentice or SG Missions Coordinator
	Preview Next Week	Take about 30 seconds to share what next week’s lesson will cover.	SG Leader
	Prayer Requests	Near the end of your gathering take time to hear prayer requests from your small group and close in prayer.	SG Prayer Warrior or anyone from the group
	Dismiss	Once you dismiss, make sure you stick around for a moment in case someone wants to speak with you after small group.	

WEEK 1: LOVE Is Essential

WELCOME: If your group is new or if you have new members, take time to briefly introduce yourselves.

SERIES OVERVIEW & PRAYER: Take a moment to read through the “Spiritual Growth Campaign Overview and Commitments” on page 111 to the rest of the group. Ask for a few people from your small group to share what they hope to get out of the next 40 days. As your group shares, you may want to write down some of their hopes for the series below. Once people are finished sharing, take some time to pray for your small group.

What I hope to gain from 40 Days of Love... _____

SPIRITUAL HABITS: One of the ways we grow in our faith as Christians is by developing spiritual disciplines. To help you remember some of the basic spiritual disciplines, we use the word HABITS. Not all habits are bad. In fact, these habits are worth developing. See page 115 for a list and description of the Spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. Over the next 40 days, we are encouraging our church family to learn to LOVE like Jesus!. We hope your small group will be a place where you can share your challenges and victories.

LEADER NOTE: Consider having your group form accountability groups of 3 to 5 to discuss your progress in developing Spiritual HABITS. It is best to allow groups to select accountability partners and not assign them.

TOPIC TEASER: “Modern Necessities”

The modern world is full of conveniences. Some of which we have come to see as being absolutely “essential” to modern life, such as electricity. What is a modern luxury that you cannot live without, and why? (Allow 3-4 responses)

QUESTION: What makes something essential? (Allow 3-4 responses)

READ: There is a famous thought experiment in philosophy known as “The Ship of Theseus.” Imagine an old wooden sailing ship. Over time the parts on the ship begin to wear out and need replacing. So over the years, he replaces one piece at a time until eventually no original piece is left.

QUESTION: Is it still the same ship? If it is not the same ship, at what point did it start being a new ship? (Allow 2-3 responses)

READ: At some point Theseus' original ship stopped existing and became a new one, but the question is when? Was it after the first piece was replaced, was it half way, or only when the last piece was replaced? The idea behind this thought experiment is about identity and what is essential to that identity. To be essential, the lack of that element will cause the object to cease being what it is. For example, if a tree loses all its leaves, we still recognize it as a tree. It still possesses its "treeness." So, leaves are not an essential element. However, if a tree were missing its trunk, it is no longer a tree. A Christian is exactly the same. There are essential qualities that define a believer of Christ. If those qualities are missing, then it is reasonable to assume the person is not a believer.

BIBLE STUDY

TASK: Divide your group into 5 teams. Have each team read one chapter of 1 John, looking for what John says is essential for the Christian life (i.e., what proves we are believers). Write your discoveries in the space provided below. When finished, have the teams share with each other what they found.

READ: The essential quality that stands out the most in 1 John is displaying love for one another. However, we cannot limit our love "to one another" as believers. It is easy to agree to loving fellow believers, even if it is still difficult to put it into practice at times. Jesus told us that we must love our neighbor as ourselves, (cf. Luke 10:27) and then proceeded to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan, showing us that our neighbor is the one we see as our enemy. This is difficult to even assent to, but to be a follower of Christ we must. We do not have the luxury of hating or looking down on anyone... ever. If we hate or look down on others, we display a lack of maturity in Christ because we are not abiding in Him. If we were abiding in Him, we would see His character flowing through us. He came to earth to die for His enemies.

QUESTION: What makes a person mature? What makes them stop being a child and become an adult? (Allow 2-3 responses)

SCRIPTURE: (Ask for a volunteer to read 1 Cor. 3:1-4) “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?”

READ: While Paul does not specifically mention love here, he does mention the things that love does not do. These are the clues that identify love as Paul’s primary subject throughout the book. Everything that he addresses with the Corinthians is related to their lack of love and can be found in chapter 13. Here it is envy, strife, and divisions. Acting in love is part of our sanctification and, therefore, matures us, making us ready for the “solid food” God wants to give us. Having love is what makes us spiritually mature. It forces us to deny our own desires and do what we are called to do and acting in love demonstrates that we already understand God’s heart for people.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:12, “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

QUESTION: So, if showing love demonstrates our maturity, what does acting immature mean for the Christian? (Allow 3-4 responses)

READ: Being immature means focusing on yourself. Ask yourself, why do children cry? There is either something they need or want that they are not getting. As they get older, this has less and less to do with needs and more and more to do with things they simply want. Children come to know that their parents are going to give them what they need and cry less about these things but throw tantrums over not getting their way. The concepts of sharing and being patient have no meaning for young children. They are things that must be taught. As love matures us, we learn to focus less on ourselves and more on others.

QUESTION: So why is love so essential to our maturity? (Allow 3-4 responses)

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Love is all about identity for the Christian. It is what God intended His followers to be known by, their love for others. Acting in accordance with our identity in God moves us in the direction of spiritual maturity faster than any amount of Bible studies ever will. We must get out and love others if we are ever to become mature in Christ.

MISSIONS PROJECT: If your small group does not already have a Small Group Missions Coordinator, please take time to choose a leader for this role. The Small Group Missions

Coordinator will coordinate the logistics of all small group projects. They will also provide a weekly update of progress toward the mission project(s). Once you have selected your Small Group Missions Coordinator, then take some time to brainstorm a few missions project ideas that your small group can implement during the “40 Days of Love” campaign. The goal of this mission project should be to demonstrate the love of Christ to our community. Be prepared to share possible mission projects (write some ideas below) and then make a final decision during next week’s small group gathering.

Idea 1: _____

Idea 2: _____

Idea 3: _____

Idea 4: _____

Idea 5: _____

READ: Next week we will focus on the idea that love requires action. We will look at the relationship between patience and kindness.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER: Take prayer requests and close in prayer.

DISMISS: Dismiss your group, but make yourself available to anyone who has questions.

WEEK 2: LOVE Is Action

WELCOME: If you have new members, take time to briefly introduce yourselves.

PRAYER: Take some time to pray for your group before you begin the lesson.

SPIRITUAL HABITS: Take some time to review the Spiritual HABITS from the previous week. While this is not a complete list of spiritual disciplines it is a beginning point for spiritual growth and maturity. Ask how the group is doing keeping up with the daily devotions (this is the “H” in HABITS).

TOPIC TEASER: “TV Personalities”

In nearly every television show, there are characters that require a lot of patience. Perhaps they always mess things up or they have a personality quirk that demands our patience. Likewise, every show seems to have a character that demonstrates kindness to those who need our patience. Can you identify the character that demonstrates kindness and the character that requires our patience from the following list of TV shows? Can you think of other TV shows and characters?

	Person Needing Patience	Person Showing Kindness
Seinfeld	_____	_____
Andy Griffith Show	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____
The Office	_____	_____
American Idol	_____	_____
Downton Abbey	_____	_____
The Big Bang Theory	_____	_____
I Love Lucy	_____	_____
M*A*S*H	_____	_____
All in the Family	_____	_____
Sandford and Son	_____	_____
Happy Days	_____	_____
Cheers	_____	_____
The Golden Girls	_____	_____
The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air	_____	_____
Family Matters	_____	_____
Full House	_____	_____
Boy Meets World	_____	_____

Loving the unloveable

QUESTION: Why is it easy to love characters like Urkel and Sheldon, but have trouble loving real people in our lives?

In our devotions this week, we learned that love is more than just an emotion but is faith in action. This is a fact that can be seen in the very words that Paul chose. Love is defined by what it does and does not do. The first two types of actions that Paul mentions are positive in nature, meaning that we are to do these. One is passive and one is active. We are to be both patient and kind when dealing with other people. If our actions display these two characteristics then we can reasonably say that we are loving. In fact, it isn't a coincidence that we find patience and kindness together here in 1 Corinthians 13, they are found together throughout Scripture (cf. Exod 34:6; Gal. 5:22; 2 Cor. 6:3-10; Col. 3:12).

BIBLE STUDY

QUESTION: Why do you think these two qualities are found together so frequently? (Allow 2-3 responses)

QUESTION: Share a time in your life when you experienced kindness and patience together? (Allow 2-3 responses)

SCRIPTURE: Romans 15:5, "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus."

READ: Notice that Paul is connecting patience and comfort (i.e., kindness) with being "like-minded toward one another." Instead of highlighting each other's differences, we are to be patient with one another and allow God to change our hearts and minds. By serving one another in love we give God the time to do the convincing Himself. This is why acts of service

are so important to both discipleship and evangelism. Patience and service break down barriers that argument and debate never will. Generally, people are going to believe what they want to believe and will seek out the proof that confirms their desire and reject anything that doesn't. This is how things like slavery and exploitation were rationalized using Scripture in the past and homosexuality is today. The key to convincing others of truth often has little to do with reason, as much as we would like, but with humility, patience, and kindness. Through our actions we are confirming the truthfulness of the gospel and the work is left in God's hands, not ours.

QUESTION: Does being "like-minded" mean that believers have to agree about everything?

READ: We are all very different people with different experiences, desires, and knowledge. Seeing things from different perspectives is a natural consequence of this. Being "like-minded" is about a way of viewing the world and agreeing to work together.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:2, "[F]ulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

READ: The Greek word behind "like-minded" is *phroneó*. It doesn't just mean knowledge, but what they have set their minds upon. Being "like-minded" means setting our minds on the same purpose and goal. As believers of the same church, we have covenanted to work together to accomplish the work of the gospel in our community. This is where our "like-minded"ness comes into play. The things that effect this mission are what we must agree upon and if we cannot, we have to at least agree not to let it hinder the mission. If something does, it must be dealt with and released.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:13, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

ONE LAST THOUGHT: All of our actions should promote the gospel. Paul links the display of patience and kindness directly to this goal.

MISSION PROJECT UPDATE: Ask your Missions Project Coordinator to give an update.

READ: Next week we will focus on the idea that love is thoughtful. We will look at the "7 things love will never do."

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER: Take prayer requests and close in prayer.

DISMISS: Dismiss your group, but make yourself available to anyone who has questions.

WEEK 3: LOVE Is Thoughtful

WELCOME: If you have new members, take time to briefly introduce yourselves.

PRAYER: Take some time to pray for your group before you begin the lesson.

SPIRITUAL HABITS: Take some time to review the Spiritual HABITS. Ask how the group is doing keeping up with the daily devotions (this is the “H” in HABITS).

TOPIC TEASER: “My Thoughts Exactly”

Everyone gets an index card and writes their name on it. The apprentice shuffles the cards and passes them out (making sure no one receives their own name). Give the group three minutes to write something encouraging about the person whose name is on the card. When everyone is finished, the apprentice collects the cards and distributes them so that the author remains anonymous.

QUESTION: What does it mean to be thoughtful?

BIBLE STUDY

READ: This week’s focal passage contains a list of seven things that love does not do. The common thread among these seven things is relationship. Each one has to do with our behavior as we interact with other people. Paul is telling the Corinthians that all of their actions must be “other-centric,” meaning that the welfare of the other person supersedes their own desires.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:10, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.”

READ: Being considerate, or thoughtful, means that we are to give “preference” to one another over our ourselves. It is difficult to envy, boast, be rude, or provoke others if you are trying to look out for someone else’s interests. These negative traits are warning signs that we are not acting in a thoughtful way but in a selfish way.

QUESTION: Why do you think it is so hard to look out for the interests of others over our own? (Allow 2-3 responses)

QUESTION: What are some practical ways that we can be more considerate of each other? (Allow 2-3 responses)

READ: Scripture tells us that there are several areas in which we need to be considerate in our relationships.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:26, “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

READ: Our words and actions effect people emotionally. This is not necessarily a bad thing. We can just as easily make someone happy as we can make them sad or angry. We should be mindful of how our actions and words effect other people emotionally. If we are not edifying others then we should alter our behavior. We cannot use our freedoms as an excuse to get what we want no matter how it makes other people feel. Scripture is divisive enough on its own, it does not need us putting up additional barriers that lead to people walking away before they can even hear the gospel.

However, this does not mean that making them feel “bad” is necessarily wrong in every circumstance. Our words and actions are to reflect Christ and promote the gospel. Sometimes this can mean that our actions will make people feel conviction and inner conflict. These are not pleasant experiences, but they lead to the most wonderful experience of all, salvation. What Paul is calling us to do is guard our words and actions from selfish behavior. Looking out for ourselves in no way promotes the gospel. In fact, it promotes the exact opposite, the flesh.

QUESTION: What are some practical ways that we can be more emotionally considerate to help promote the gospel? (Allow 2-3 responses)

NOTE: Have someone read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-33.

READ: Everyone has different things with which they struggle. For this reason, we must be mindful of activities and words that can cause people to stumble. For example, some struggle with alcoholism while others do not. There is no command in Scripture to not consume alcohol. However, consuming alcohol to the point of becoming drunk is declared sinful. Likewise, consuming alcohol that causes another to stumble is sinful, even if the consumption did not lead to drunkenness. This is why many Christians have chosen to avoid drinking alcohol completely. This personal freedom has been forsaken so that the gospel is never hindered.

QUESTION: What are some liberties that we have that can have negative consequences on others? (Allow 2-3 responses)

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14:19, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

READ: Paul is telling us that we should always pursue the things that lead to peace and discard everything else. As a thought experiment, let’s make the statement, as the Southern Baptist Convention just did this year, that it is wrong for a believer to display the Confederate flag due to the oppression it represents. What is your reaction? Did you immediately attempt to defend it using your right to free speech? Did you try to defend it because of what it means to you about your heritage?

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote this article after the Southern Baptist Convention meeting this year:

It’s not often that I find myself wiping away tears in a denominational meeting, but I just did. The Southern Baptist Convention voted overwhelmingly to repudiate the display of the Confederate Battle Flag. This conservative evangelical denomination gathered together just miles from Ferguson, Missouri, to stand together against one lingering divisive symbol.

To understand the significance of this, one must note the “Southern” in “Southern Baptist Convention.” This doesn’t speak to geography; there are SBC churches in all fifty states. It speaks to history. The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845, over a controversy about appointing slaveholders as missionaries. The SBC was wrong, and more than wrong. The SBC of 1845, and for many years after, was in open sin against a holy God, and against those who bear his image.

This afternoon, the Convention voted, from the floor, to amend the resolution about the flag as it was reported out of the Resolutions Committee. The proposed resolution spoke about the way that many people fly the flag out of a sense of family history or honor. The Convention voted to strike that language. The committee version called for Southern Baptists “to limit” the display of the flag and to “consider” stopping flying it altogether. The Convention decided stronger language was in order.

In an amendment, offered by former SBC president James Merritt, himself a descendant of slaveholders, the Convention voted to say this: “We call our brothers and sisters in Christ to discontinue the display of the Confederate battle flag as a sign of solidarity of the whole Body of Christ, including our African-American brothers and sisters.”

Does this change the game as it applies to the crushing issues of racial injustice around us? Of course it does not. But at the same time, we cannot dismiss this as just about symbols. Symbols matter.

The Convention recognized today what the flag represents, and what it says to our African

American brothers and sisters in Christ. The flag hearkens back to a day when in order to justify idolatrous Mammonism, Southern religion wove a counter-biblical folk theology that stood on the other side of Jesus. The flag also points to years and years of domestic terrorism against African-Americans, often with threats of physical violence.

Like James Merritt, I'm a descendant of Confederate veterans too. But my family history is more complicated than just that. I'm a part of another family now, a bigger family that spans heaven and earth, a people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and language. The gospel frees us from scrapping for our "heritage" at the expense of others. The gospel frees us, as the Bible says, to "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19). The gospel calls us to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2). What hurts one part of the Body hurts us all.

As I've said before, the Cross and the Confederate flag cannot co-exist without one setting the other on fire. Today, messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention, including many white Anglo southerners, decided the cross was more important than the flag. They decided our African-American brothers and sisters are more important than family heritage. We decided that we are defined not by a Lost Cause but by amazing grace. Let's pray for wisdom, work for justice, love our neighbors.

And let's take down that flag.

READ: The simple truth is, if we have to appeal to our liberties or rights to justify why we do something then we have already missed the point of the gospel. Scripture demands that we consider the consciences of others over our liberties every single time. It is important to remember that there will be no flags in heaven besides the banner of Christ, so why is it so important that we are willing to wound the consciences of others for a piece of cloth that is only going to turn to dust when Christ returns? It may be that the only hope for people we offend or push away may depend on our willingness to put our own liberties to the side for their sake.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: If something apart from the gospel causes division, it must be discarded.

MISSION PROJECT UPDATE: Ask your Missions Project Coordinator to give an update.

READ: Next week we will focus on the idea that love rejoices in truth. We will look at the relationship between love, rejoicing, and truth.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER: Take prayer requests and close in prayer.

DISMISS: Dismiss your group, but make yourself available to anyone who has questions.

WEEK 4: LOVE Rejoices

APPRENTICE

WELCOME: If you have new members, take time to briefly introduce yourselves.

PRAYER: Take some time to pray for your group before you begin the lesson.

SPIRITUAL HABITS: Take some time to review the Spiritual HABITS. Ask how the group is doing keeping up with the daily devotions (this is the “H” in HABITS).

TOPIC TEASER: “Two Truths and a Lie”

Pass out an index card to each group member. Instruct them to write down two truths and one lie about themselves. Tell everyone to hold onto the index card. It is for their reference as they share. They will then take turns reading their cards and letting everyone else guess which one is the lie. So, group members need to select a lie that is believable, or at least more believable than the true statements.

BIBLE STUDY

QUESTION: What does it mean to rejoice in something? What are some things that you rejoice in? (e.g., When you get a promotion at work? When you have a child? When UK beats Louisville?) (Allow 3-4 responses)

READ: In 1 Corinthians Paul rebukes them for boasting in the sin of one of their members.

QUESTION: What does it look like to rejoice in iniquity?

READ: In today’s society, people want to be able to determine the direction of their own lives and have others accept them no matter what. While we can agree that they do in fact have the right to make their own choices and should not be discriminated against in society, the problem arises when they demand that we grant our assent and praise to the “rightness” of their choices. Anyone who does not celebrate in their freedom is deemed unloving, unenlightened, and bigoted. Paul tells us that our liberty is not to be used as an “opportunity for the flesh” (cf. Gal. 5:13), this means that we are not to use our freedom to satisfy the desires of our bodies. This is precisely what some in the Corinthian church were guilty of, and not only that but others in the church were praising them for it.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 5:1-8, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among

you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

QUESTION: Does Paul’s response seem loving or unloving to you? What would society demand us to do in this kind of situation? (Allow 3-4 responses)

QUESTION: What is so dangerous about rejoicing in someone else’s bad choices? (What if it only affects them and it is what they want to do?) (Allow 3-4 responses)

READ: The problem for Paul is the interconnectivity of the Body of Christ. We are not isolated from one another. What one person does effects the whole group. This is a truth that can be seen throughout Scripture. The sin of one or two people can hinder the entire group.

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 7:1, “But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.”

READ: As Paul stated, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” The world’s demand for acceptance of their behavior as the only way to show love is utter nonsense. Love rejoices with the truth and not iniquity. If we possess the truth, and that truth is the only way to receive eternal life, then we are guilty of being unloving if we do not share it and uphold what it teaches. Truth and love are not mutually exclusive, but must go hand in hand. Instead of rejoicing in the things of this world, we should rejoice in the things of God.

QUESTION: What are some things that a believer should rejoice in?

READ: By looking at what Scripture calls “truth” we can discover the things that God wants us to rejoice in.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:13-14, “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

READ: The gospel is called the word of truth and the “power of God to salvation.” It is what makes it possible for fallen sinners to be reconciled to their heavenly Father. If there has ever been a truth worth celebrating it is this. Just like our heavenly Father, we should rejoice every time we someone come to Christ. Sure, we clap and we shake their hand, but what if we went all out? After all, it is the most important day of their life, the day their relationship with the Father was restored to what it was meant to be. When a person accepts the gospel, God throws a party in heaven. God celebrates every sinner’s repentance because a dear child has returned home.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 15:10, “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

SCRIPTURE: John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

READ: Not only is the gospel truth, but Jesus himself, as the Word of God, is truth. We must rejoice in the relationship that we have with God through Christ every day. Think about it, you have access to the Creator of the universe because of Christ. You have access to the power that overcame your sin and death because of your relationship with Christ. You have an inheritance from the Father because of your relationship with Christ.

ONE LAST THOUGHT: All of these things are worth celebrating. This is why we can rejoice no matter what our circumstances may be here on earth, these things can never be taken away from us.

MISSION PROJECT UPDATE: Ask your Missions Project Coordinator to give an update.

READ: Next week we will focus on the idea that love never fails. We will look at the reason love is always dependable.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER: Take prayer requests and close in prayer.

DISMISS: Dismiss your group, but make yourself available to anyone who has questions.

WEEK 5: LOVE Always

APPRENTICE

WELCOME: If you have new members, take time to briefly introduce yourselves.

PRAYER: Take some time to pray for your group before you begin the lesson.

SPIRITUAL HABITS: Take some time to review the Spiritual HABITS. Ask how the group is doing keeping up with the daily devotions (this is the “H” in HABITS).

TOPIC TEASER: “I’ve Never”

Give each person in your small group an equal number of M&Ms (or similar candy). Somewhere between 6 to 10 for each person. Beginning with the Small Group Leader and continuing clockwise around the group, have the person share something they have never done (e.g. skydiving, visited Canada, skinny dipping, etc.). You get the point. If others in the group have done the activity, they must eat one of their M&Ms. The winner is the person who has the most M&Ms after everyone has shared.

BIBLE STUDY

READ: In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul is comparing love, not just to the spiritual gifts, but to human nature as well. We fail because we are human. When Adam failed to obey God’s command to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge, he doomed all of his descendants to a life defined by the same failure.

QUESTION: What does it mean to fail? (Allow 2-3 responses)

QUESTION: Why do we fail? Are there different types of failure? (Allow 2-3 responses)

READ: As human beings we fail in a number of different ways. We fail because we try to do things beyond our abilities. We fail because we let our desires get the best of us and do something that we should not do. We fail because we don’t do something good that we know that we should.

SCRIPTURE: James 4:17, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

READ: Our fallen natures not only lead us to sinful acts, but it leads us away from things that we should be doing. We fail because we do not even try to do what is right. Love does not fail

into this trap, but always seeks to do the right thing, even when it is not convenient.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, “Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”

QUESTION: Why does Paul say that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will cease?

QUESTION: Why do we spend so much time on things that we know are going to fail us?

READ: The Greek word in 1 Corinthians 13:8 is $\pi\upsilon\pi\tau\omega$ (pipto), which means “to fall.” Paul is literally saying that “love never falls down.” This means it never gets tired or grows weak. It never stops going. It doesn’t take breaks. It never gives up. It is eternal.

You may have heard someone mention the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics before when talking about proof for God’s existence. It states: In a natural thermodynamic process, the sum of the entropies of the interacting thermodynamic systems increases. In its simplest terms it means that all energy will eventually run out. Everything in this physical universe will eventually fail due to a lack of energy. So, if there is one constant in the physical world it is failure. The more and faster we consume, the faster the energy runs out. It is not only possible to fail because you don’t have the ability to overcome something, it is possible to fail because you have run out of energy. Not only did you try and fail, but you weren’t even able to try in the first place.

Everything that is of this life is meant to cease. This does not necessarily mean that they are bad, Paul is clear that some things that are both good and useful will one-day cease. They simply stop being necessary. The gift of prophecy will one day not be necessary because everyone will have perfect knowledge as they stand before God. Prophecy will one day cease because there is no longer any need for it, everything has been fulfilled when everything is made new and heaven and earth become one place.

Yet, Scripture tells us that love does not work this way. The more it is taxed, the more it gives. There is nothing that can ever exhaust it.

QUESTION: Why would Paul say that love is different?

ONE LAST THOUGHT: This is because love has its source, not in this world, but in God. Love always overcomes, because it has the essence and power of God behind it.

MISSION PROJECT UPDATE: Ask your Missions Project Coordinator to give an update.

READ: Next week we will focus on the idea that love is the greatest of faith, hope, and love.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER: Take prayer requests and close in prayer.

DISMISS: Dismiss your group, but make yourself available to anyone who has questions.

WEEK 6: LOVE Is Paramount

APPRENTICE

WELCOME: If you have new members, take time to briefly introduce yourselves.

PRAYER: Take some time to pray for your group before you begin the lesson.

SPIRITUAL HABITS: Take some time to review the Spiritual HABITS. Ask how the group is doing keeping up with the daily devotions (this is the “H” in HABITS).

TOPIC TEASER: “The Greatest”

Take time to debate, discuss, and defend your answer for the “greatest of all time” in each of these areas...

- Athlete
- Movie
- Television Show
- Super Hero
- Actor/Actress
- Comedian

Consider adding your own categories. You might want to avoid political figures though.

QUESTION: According to the world, what makes someone/something greatest? (Allow 2-3 responses)

BIBLE STUDY

SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:46-48, “Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. 47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, 48 and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.’”

READ: Apparently the disciples didn’t get the hint, because later in Luke we find out that they are again debating which of them is the greatest.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 22:24-27, “Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. 25 And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ 26 But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. 27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”

QUESTION: What makes someone “greatest” under Jesus’ definition? (Allow 3-4 responses)

READ: Jesus’ most explicit statement about being great is found in a parallel passage in Matthew 18:4, “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus tells us that humility is what makes a person “great,” not their wealth, not the abilities, not the station in life, but how they are able to set aside their own ego.

QUESTION: What does it mean to be humble? (Allow 3-4 responses)

QUESTION: What does it mean to be humble like a child? (Allow 3-4 responses)

READ: Children have the ability to accept and love without question. They do not yet have a lifetime of prejudices causing rifts in their relationships with others. Also, children do not carry the burden of the shame. Culture divides people into classes and teaches that certain actions are beneath those in the higher stations. Children know nothing of these social mores, they are free to do whatever they want without feeling embarrassed. Peter wanted to stop Jesus from washing his feet because Jesus was doing something that only servants were supposed to do. However, Jesus knew that serving others is never shameful even if it requires someone to humble themselves and take the lower position, no matter what the task.

QUESTION: What does it mean to be humble like Jesus? (Allow 3-4 responses)

SCRIPTURE: John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

QUESTION: What did Jesus have to give up for us? (Allow 3-4 responses)

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:5-7, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

READ: David Crowder recently released a new song called "My Victory." The words of the chorus connect our victory with Jesus' love and humble submission to the cross:

Oh, Your love bled for me
Oh, Your blood in crimson streams
Oh, Your death is hell's defeat
A cross meant to kill is my victory

The cross is the greatest act of love that has ever occurred. It is also the greatest act of humility that has ever occurred. The God of the universe humbled Himself, allowing His own creation to hang Him on a tree for their sin. His humility is what won our victory over sin. We are to be willing to humble ourselves to the same point.

QUESTION: What are some practical ways that we can begin to show the humility of Christ in our own lives? (Allow 5-6 responses).

ONE LAST THOUGHT: Our acts of humility point others back to Christ's actions upon the cross, leading them to the same victory that we, as believers, now possess. If we are not willing to humble ourselves to serve others, how can we possibly claim Christ's victory for ourselves?

MISSION PROJECT UPDATE: Ask your Missions Project Coordinator to give an update.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER: Take prayer requests and close in prayer.

DISMISS: Dismiss your group, but make yourself available to anyone who has questions.

40 DAYS OF LOVE

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

One Another Passages

1. **Mk. 9:50** - Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”
2. **Jn. 6:43** - If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.
3. **Jn. 13:14** - If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.
4. **Jn. 13:34 (x2)** - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
5. **Jn. 15:12** - This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
6. **Jn. 15:17** - These things I command you, that you love one another.
7. **Rom. 12:10** - Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;
8. **Rom. 12:16** - Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.
9. **Rom. 13:8** - Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.
10. **Rom. 14:13** - Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.
11. **Rom. 15:5** - Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.
12. **Rom. 15:7** - Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us,[a] to the glory of God.
13. **Rom. 16:16** - Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.
14. **1 Cor. 7:5** - Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.
15. **1 Cor. 11:33** - Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.
16. **1 Cor. 16:20** - All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
17. **2 Cor. 13:12** - Greet one another with a holy kiss.
18. **Gal. 5:13** - For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
19. **Gal. 5:15** - But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!
20. **Gal. 5:26** - Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.
21. **Gal. 6:2** - Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
22. **Eph. 4:2** - with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,
23. **Eph. 4:25** - Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,”for we are members of one another.
24. **Eph. 4:32** - And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.
25. **Eph. 5:21** - submitting to one another in the fear of God.

26. **Phil. 2:3** - Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
27. **Col. 3:9** - Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,
28. **Col. 3:13** - bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.
29. **Col. 3:16** - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
30. **1 Thess. 3:12** - And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,
31. **1 Thess. 4:9** - But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;
32. **1 Thess. 4:18** - Therefore comfort one another with these words.
33. **1 Thess. 5:11** - Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.
34. **1 Thess. 5:15** - See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.
35. **Heb. 10:24** - And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,
36. **Jam. 4:11** - Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.
37. **Jam. 5:9** - Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!
38. **Jam. 5:16** - Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
39. **1 Jn. 3:11** - For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,
40. **1 Jn. 4:7** - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
41. **1 Jn. 4:11** - Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
42. **2 Jn. 5** - And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.
43. **1 Pet. 1:22** - Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit[a] in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,
44. **1 Pet. 4:9** - Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.
45. **1 Pet. 5:5** - Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
46. **1 Pet. 5:14** - Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

APPENDIX 2

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

God's Purpose for your life

God loves you, and He wants you to have peace and eternal life. This is God's purpose for your life and the first thing you need to know and accept in order to begin a relationship with Christ.

"My purpose is to give life in all its fullness." **John 10:10**

"... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ..." **Romans 5:1**

"The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:9

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." **John 3:16**

Our Problem: Sin

God did not make us robots to mindlessly love and obey Him. Instead He gave us a will and freedom to choose. But we often choose to disobey God and go our own selfish way. This is called sin, and it separates us from God.

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," **Romans 3:23**

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." **Isaiah 59:2**

Our sin separates us from God. It keeps us from realizing God's purpose for us and denies us the ability to have a relationship with God.

God's Remedy: Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the only answer to this problem of sin and separation from God. He died on the cross and rose from the grave to pay the penalty for our sin. He completely bridges the gap between us and God.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Romans 5:8**

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." **Acts 4:12**

"That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for all mankind." **1 Timothy 2:5-6**

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." **John 5:24**

God has provided the only way to salvation and Heaven through Jesus Christ, and we must make the choice to accept Christ as God's remedy for our sin problem.

Our Response: Receive Jesus Christ

We can receive Jesus Christ when we believe in His message and trust in Him alone to save us and forgive us of our sins.

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” **Acts 10:43**

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” **John 14:1**

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” **John 1:12**

How to receive Jesus Christ

1. Admit your need (I am a sinner).
2. Be willing to turn from your sins.
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life.

What to pray

The following is simply a suggested prayer that will help you express this commitment of your heart to God through prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am sinful and I need your forgiveness. I believe You died to pay the penalty for my sin. I want to turn from my sin and follow You instead. I invite You to come into my heart and take control of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

APPENDIX 3

NEW BELIEVER DEVOTIONAL

A LETTER FROM PASTOR CHRIS TO NEW BELIEVERS

Dear Friend,

Congratulations! You have made the most important commitment a person can ever make! Accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior impacts your life now and for eternity. The life-change that you have experienced is what the Bible calls a new birth. When you were physically born, you came into the world as a baby and then grew into maturity. The same is true of your spiritual birth, you need to grow into spiritual maturity. It is our desire, as your church family, to assist you in growing spiritually.

This handbook will help you get started on your spiritual growth journey. During the first seven days we will give you a brief introduction to seven beginning steps for new believers. It is important to follow through on all of these devotionals as they will give you a strong biblical foundation for your faith journey. I have discovered through many years of following Christ that wherever there is divine operation there will be demonic opposition. In other words, whenever God works in our hearts and we respond in obedience (i.e. divine operation) we are going to face obstacles and challenges that will attempt to stop us from growing in our faith (i.e. demonic opposition). Your salvation is secure in Christ and has been sealed by the Holy Spirit. However, Satan does not want you to mature in your faith and continue the mission in which Jesus has entrusted to His followers.

Please know that you have been prayed for! We know that you will need help as you begin living your life for Christ. God has given you a spiritual family to help you mature in your faith. The church is not like a family, the church is a family; and we're here for you!

Celebrating your decision!

Pastor Chris

P.S.

Before jumping into the handbook, here are a couple of things you may want to do...

1. Have you signed up for baptism?
2. Have you completed CLASS 101?

You can call the church offices at 859.498.5645 to sign up for baptism and CLASS 101.

NEW BELIEVER INTRODUCTION

As you begin to work through this week of devotions, let me encourage you to write down questions you might discover along the way. When I first became a Christian I was embarrassed that I couldn't find Scripture passages as fast as others. There is no reason to feel like you should have your Bible's Table of Contents (ToC) memorized. The ToC is there for a reason... use it!

Here is a quick crash course in Scripture references...

The Bible consists of 66 different books. Those books are grouped into two major divisions: The Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books). The ultimate connection between the Testaments is that the Old Testament is a prediction of Jesus Christ and the New Testament is the fulfillment through Jesus Christ. When we reference a particular verse of the Bible we list the name of the book followed by a set of two numbers. For example: John 3:16. Using our Table of Contents we notice there are several books named John (i.e. John, 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John). We discover the "John" in our example is referring to the Gospel According to John in the New Testament. The "3" refers to the chapter and the "16" refers to the verse.

Here are a few other considerations as you prepare to work through this handbook...

1. Get a Bible to use with this handbook. There are various translations of the Bible. These translations are not different Bibles, the translators are simply trying to translate the original languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) into English in the most understandable way. Some translators focus on a word-for-word translation and others focus on a thought-for-thought translation. The KJV, NKJV, and ESV are all examples of word-for-word translations. The NIV, NLT, and CEV are examples of thought-for-thought translations. I often use both the NKJV and NLT in helping me understand what the Bible passage is saying. NOTE: It is best to memorize from a word-for-word translation.
2. Get a pen or pencil for taking notes and answering the questions. Write down your own questions for further study and discussion in your small group.
3. In part, the purpose of this 7-day study is to help you discover truths from God's word (The Bible). As you read each question, turn to the Scripture reference in your personal Bible and search for the answer.
4. As you read God's word in search of the answers, keep in mind that there are no "trick questions." The questions are intended to be direct and the answers will be found directly from Scripture. The primary purpose of this personal learning tool is to encourage your personal walk with Christ and to help you mature in your faith.

STEP 1 ASSURANCE OF YOUR SALVATION

God wants you to have confidence that your salvation is secure. As you already know, salvation is a gift that you cannot earn. Our understanding of the security of your salvation is not based upon feelings, but based upon the facts discovered from God's word.

1. Your Assurance Is Based on the Word of God. The Bible makes it clear in John 3:16 as well as 1 John 5:11-13 that God wants you to know that you have eternal life. Take a moment and read these two Bible verses and highlight/underline them in your Bible.

2. Your Assurance is Based on the Promises of God. In the space provided below, read Romans 10:9 and John 5:24 and then write down the promises found in these verses.

Romans 10:9 _____

John 5:24 _____

3. Your Assurance Is Based on the Character of God. A promise is only as reliable as the person who makes it. That is why the assurance of your salvation rests on God's character. What do these verses teach about God's character?

1 Corinthians 1:9 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:24 _____

Hebrews 10:23 _____

The Bible teaches that God is faithful (reliable, steadfast, trustworthy, and stable). You can believe the promises because you know the Promisor. God, your loving Father, is absolutely faithful. Nothing will change His mind about your salvation. Nothing will separate you from His love. Your relationship to God through Jesus Christ is secure.

What does God's word say about the security of your salvation? Read Romans 8:38-39. Can any circumstance separate you from God?

4. Your Assurance Is Based on the Spirit of God. To further assure you of your salvation, God has sent living, daily proof of your relationship. As an official seal is placed on a contract between two individuals to guarantee the contract's validity, so God has given a seal (guarantee) of His promise to you.

Read Ephesians 1:13-13. What is the seal given by God as a guarantee of His promise?

The Holy Spirit at work within you is indisputable proof of your salvation. The Holy Spirit's work in your life will bring changes. Some changes will be gradual; some will be instant. The inward and outward changes that result are evidence of your salvation.

Step 1 Review

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- What changes have you seen in your life since you committed it to Jesus Christ?

- Don't forget that your assurance is based on:
 1. The _____ of God.
 2. The _____ of God.
 3. The _____ of God.
 4. The _____ of God.

Congratulations! You have completed the first devotional.

STEP 2

PUBLICLY DECLARE YOUR FAITH

After you make a commitment to trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it is important for you to take the first step of obedience to Christ and follow Him in baptism.

1. Why Should I Be Baptized? A test of whether a person is a true follower of Jesus Christ is his or her obedience to Jesus' commands.
 - A. To follow the example set by Christ. (Read the account of Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13-17).
 - B. Because Christ commanded it. (Read Matthew 28:19-20.) Baptism is not a suggestion or an option for His followers. If we are not baptized, we are disobedient.
 - C. It is a public testimony of your faith in Christ. (Read Matthew 10:32.) Therefore, baptism is an act of obedience that publicly declares one's faith.
2. What is the Meaning of Baptism? Baptism is a picture of two things: what Jesus did for you and what has happened to you.
 - A. Baptism illustrates Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
 - B. Baptism illustrates my death to sin, the burial of my old self, as well as my new life as a Christian (Read Romans 6:4.) Remember that baptism doesn't make you a Believer; it demonstrates that you already believe. It's important to understand that baptism does not save you. You are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus. (Read Ephesians 2:8-9)
3. Why Be Baptized By Immersion?
 - A. Because Jesus was baptized that way. (Read Matthew 3:13-17).
 - B. Because every baptism in the Bible was by immersion.
 - C. Because the word "baptize" actually means "to dip under water." The Greek word "baptizo" means "to fully immerse or dip under water."
 - D. Because immersion best symbolizes a burial and resurrection!
4. Who Should Be Baptized? Every person who has believed in Christ. (Read Acts 2:41)
5. When Should I Be Baptized? As soon as you have believed!

There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Christ into your life, you can and should be baptized at your earliest opportunity. If you wait until you are "perfect" you'll never be ready.

If you have not been baptized, you can sign up by calling the church offices at 859.498.5645.

Step 2 Review

- Based on what you just read, fill in the blanks...
 1. Baptism is a public _____ of your faith in Christ.
 2. Baptism is a picture of Jesus' death, _____, and resurrection.
 3. Baptism is a picture of my death to sin, the burial of my old self, as well as my _____ as a Christian.
 4. The word "baptize" actually means "to _____ water."
 5. Every person who has _____ should be baptized.

Fantastic! You've completed the second devotional.

STEP 3

JOIN A SMALL GROUP

You were not created to live life in isolation from others. God has created you to live in community with other believers. Joining a Small Group is a crucial step for your continued spiritual growth. God has placed individuals in families for their care, protection, encouragement, and development. You need your church family for the same reasons (and many more). Consider these biblical reasons for joining a small group.

1. You need healthy Christian relationships for care and support.

Take a moment and read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10. What is one of the benefits of being in a small group according to God's word?

2. You need healthy Christian relationships for encouragement.

Take a moment and read Hebrews 10:24-25. Why do you need the fellowship of a small group?

3. You need healthy Christian relationships for instruction.

Take a moment and read Ephesians 4:1-16. What is the role of leaders in the church (v.12)? What is the role of all believers (saints v.12)? What is the result when everyone works together (v.16)?

Step 3 Review

- Why do you believe it is important for you to join a small group?

- Have you joined a small group? If so, write down a snapshot of your group...

1. Leader(s)? _____

2. When? _____

3. Where _____

- Spend some time in prayer for those in your small group.
- As much as you need your small group, your small group needs you! If you have not joined a small group, contact the church offices and we can help you find the right group!

You're doing great! You've completed the third devotional.

STEP 4

DEVELOP SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

We will explain Spiritual HABITS in greater detail during CLASS 102. In the meantime, it is important to know that developing spiritual disciplines is an important part of your faith journey. Here are six spiritual disciplines that we encourage every believer to develop...

- Hang Time with God (Daily Bible Reading & Prayer)
- Accountability in a Small Group
- Bible Memorization
- Involvement in the Ministry & Mission of the Church
- Tithing/Stewardship Commitment
- Sermon Notes

It is important for new believers to begin immediately developing the discipline of daily Bible reading and prayer. Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and then reach each of the following benefits of reading God's Word.

- 1. God's Word is useful for doctrine.** Reading God's word can teach us about our faith. Take a moment and read Jeremiah 31:3. What does this passage teach you about God?

Take a moment and read Romans 5:8. What does this passage teach you about God?

- 2. God's Word is useful for reproof/rebuking.** Reading God's word can point out a fault and the Holy Spirit brings conviction. Take a moment and read Ephesians 4:26-31. What are some areas in this passage that God's word gives us guidance?

- 3. God's Word is useful for correction.** The Bible doesn't just point out what we are doing wrong, but gives us guidance for living life God's way. Write out the answer to the question that is presented in Psalm 119:9.

- 4. God's Word is useful for instruction in righteousness.** Reading God's word is spiritual food for your soul. Just as your physical body requires nutrients from the food you eat, your spiritual life requires the daily reading nutrients of God's word.

5. Take a moment and read Jeremiah 15:16. What do you think is meant by this passage?

Step 4 Review

- What are the six Spiritual HABITS?
H _____
A _____
B _____
I _____
T _____
S _____

- What are the four benefits of reading God’s word?
 1. God’s word is useful for _____.
 2. God’s word is useful for _____.
 3. God’s word is useful for _____.
 4. God’s word is useful for _____.

Keep up the great work! You’ve completed the fourth devotional.

STEP 5

BECOME OTHERS FOCUSED

The Christian faith is not a self-centered faith. As we become more like Christ, our concern for others should increase. One of the ways that we express our love for one another is through serving on ministry teams.

The Bible teaches that every believer has a role to serve within the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). What God made me to be determines what He intends for me to do. God is consistent in His plan for each of our lives. He would not give us spiritual gifts, passions, talents, temperaments, and all sorts of experiences and then not want to use them for His glory! We will explore these five personal factors in detail during CLASS 103.

A huge indication of spiritual maturity is when you take off the bib and you put on the apron. Instead of saying things like, "I'm not being fed" the mature believer says, "What am I doing to feed others?" Here are three key truths as to why we should serve the needs of others:

- 1. Serving the needs of others reflects the mind of Christ.** Read Philippians 2:1-5. How can you begin to put the needs of others ahead of your own?

- 2. Serving the needs of others produces increased fruitfulness.** Read 2 Peter 1:5-9. What are some of the characteristics that produce a fruitful walk with Christ?

- 3. Serving the needs of others is a testimony of Jesus' love for others.** Read John 13:34-35. What is the identifier of a true disciple according to this passage?

Step 5 Review

- What are some of the ways that you can begin to focus on others...

...at home? _____

...at work/school? _____

...in my neighborhood? _____

- Fill in the blanks: “A huge indication of spiritual maturity is when you take off the _____ and you put on the _____.” Write down in your own words what this phrase means...

You’re almost there! You’ve completed the fifth devotional.

STEP 6

SHARE JESUS WITH OTHERS

People love to share good news. We announce marriages and births. When something good happens, we rush to tell someone. The more exciting the news, the harder it is to be silent.

A Christian has the most exciting news – the life-changing news of eternal life! It is natural for a Christian to want to share this good news. Think for a moment about the various people God used to bring you to the place where you were willing to receive Jesus.

Now God wants you to be part of helping others come to know Jesus.

When Andrew met Jesus, his first inclination was to bring _____ to meet Him (read John 1:40-42).

For a Christian, witnessing is not an option. Jesus commanded His followers to witness.

There are two tools you should use when sharing Jesus:

- Scripture
- Your Personal Testimony

1. Scripture

The following verses will help you explain to unbelievers the good news of eternal life. Take time now to read them and underline/highlight them in your Bible. It would be good to memorize them too!

- Romans 15:13
- Romans 1:16
- Romans 2:4
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 10:9-13

2. Your Personal Testimony

A. Salvation Testimony: Your salvation testimony shares (1) your life before receiving Jesus, (2) how you received Jesus, and (3) how Jesus is making a difference in your life now.

B. Growth Testimony: You will have many growth testimonies as you mature in your faith. Your growth testimonies share (1) an issue or question you've been struggling with, (2) the lesson you learned about the issue/question from studying Scripture, and (3) how you have responded to God's word in light of what you learned.

Take some time to write out your personal salvation testimony. Make sure you include all three parts: life before receiving Jesus, how you received Jesus, and how Jesus is working in your life now.

We cover these testimonies in more detail in CLASS 104. You can also pick up the resource called "Everyone Has a Story," available in the church's Resource Center. Until then, you can begin to share Jesus by simply inviting others to attend worship services with you.

Step 6 Review

- Why should you share Jesus with others?

- Whom do you know who needs to receive Jesus?

- Share your testimony with someone this week.

You're almost finished! You've completed the sixth devotional.

STEP 7

TRUST JESUS DAILY

The Christian faith is more than fire insurance to save you from hell. It is a daily walk with our Creator and living a fulfilled life as God intended.

As you mature in your faith, you will discover more and more what it means to “surrender your life to Christ” and “live for Him.”

1. Jesus Christ has earned the right to give you direction.

[Jesus] “... humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the _____. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of _____ every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that _____ is _____, to the glory of God the Father” Philippians 2:5-8.

Paul (the author of the book of Philippians), understood that Jesus was worthy to direct his life.

Paul also challenged believers to do what in Romans 12:1-2?

2. Jesus Christ desires to give you direction.

Many people want to know God’s will and He desires to reveal it daily through time spent with Him. His direction can be experienced on a daily basis as you:

- A. Recognize daily His right to direct you life (read Luke 9:23).
- B. Confess your sins and accept His promise of forgiveness (read 1 John 1:9).
- C. Trust Him completely as you allow Him to direct you:
 - Time (read Ephesians 5:15-16)
 - Money (read 1 Corinthians 16:2)
 - Abilities (read Colossians 3:17)
 - Relationships (read Matthew 22:34-40)
 - Mind (read Romans 12:1-2)
 - Ambitions (read Matthew 6:33)
 - Morality (read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Step 7 Review

- What areas in your life need to be placed under the direction of Jesus? Don't delay. I always told my son, "Delayed obedience is disobedience."
 - ✓ Time: _____
 - ✓ Money: _____
 - ✓ Relationships: _____
 - ✓ Mind: _____
 - ✓ Ambitions: _____
 - ✓ Morality: _____

Congratulations! Now that you have completed the seven beginning steps, you are ready to continue to develop them more fully.

Your next steps...

Complete

- CLASS 101
- CLASS 102
- CLASS 103
- CLASS 104

