

On Mission Together: *Loving One Another Part Two*

For our guests this morning we are in a series called *On Mission Together* and last week, this week, and next week we are looking at the Bible's call for us to love one another. So turn with me please to 1 Cor. 13.

If we were to boil down what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, at its core it means to follow Jesus. Jesus gathered his disciples with two words: follow me. Discipleship calls us into relationship with Jesus and it calls us to follow him into his mission in this world, but it also inescapably calls us into relationship with each other. Relationship is intrinsically a big part of discipleship –you can't follow Jesus without being spiritually and relationally connected to others who are following Jesus. Peter didn't have the option of following Jesus alone. When he left his nets and followed Jesus, his life became intertwined with James and John and Matthew and all those who also left everything to follow Jesus. They followed Jesus *together*. We follow Jesus, *together*.

So our focus in this series isn't just on *what* God's called us as the church to do, but *who* He's called us to do it with. As the church we are to be on mission, together. God has designed it such that we can bring Him more glory together than we ever could alone. But the church will only bring Him the glory God intends us to bring Him if we love one another. Last week we considered four extreme things the Bible says about our need to love one another. Extreme because the NT language presses the importance of our loving one another beyond it just being important to Christian discipleship, to it being the make it or break it ingredient of Christian discipleship.

1. Love is evidence that we have been born of God – God is love and it's our love for one another that reveals that we have God's DNA in us. John writes if we don't love our brothers, we aren't born of God. That's extreme, but true.
2. Loving one another is the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples – Jesus gave us many commands, but only one *commandment* – to love one another.
3. Loving one another is the most effective evangelistic strategy the church has – In John 13 Jesus said that the world will be able to identify us as his followers by our love for one another.
4. Without love our spirituality (no matter how intense) is worthless – the opening verses of 1 Cor. 13 describes an uber-spiritual person but Paul says it's all worth nothing if there is no love.

Loving one another is essential, but what does it mean to love one another? And how do we do it? And how do we grow in it? In 1 Cor. 13 Paul gives a beautiful description of what love looks like, and we are going to read the whole chapter even though we're going to focus on vv. 3-7.

1 Cor. 13:1-13 (pray)

Paul shares eight positive aspects of love (what love is and does) and eight negative aspects of love (what love isn't and doesn't do). But when you add it all together, what, ultimately is love? When you add these 16 aspects of love, when you add up all the Bible has to say about love, in particular the agape kind of love that the NT speaks of – what is love?

1. **Love wants and works for the highest good of others**

JC Ryle writes about love: *the true nature of Christian love is a righteous principle which seeks the highest good of others. It is a powerful desire to promote their welfare.*

That's really it. Love isn't the same thing as sentimentality or being especially sensitive about people's feelings. Let's be honest, Jesus was very loving, but he wasn't a particularly mushy guy and sometimes he could be pretty hard on people. When Peter said, "hey Lord, you're never going to the cross" Jesus leveled him by saying "get behind me Satan." When the rich young man came to Jesus asking how he could inherit eternal life, the Bible says Jesus looked at him and loved him. But he didn't make it easy for him. He challenged him to make a drastic life-changing decision right there on the spot. He didn't ease him into it, or try to work him there in baby steps.

Both cases, hard stuff. Hard words. But both times Jesus wanted what was best for these men. Peter would spend eternity separated from Jesus and in hell if Jesus had listened to him. And the young man had an idol of wealth that was keeping him from the highest good and greatest treasure ever: knowing and following Jesus. Love wants and works for the highest good of others.

Loving people (and unloving people) come in all personality and temperament types. There are loving people who just kind of gush all over you, and there are loving people who are reserved and restrained. There are loving people who are soft touches and there are loving people who are strict disciplinarian-types. Don't think that you can identify whether a person is loving or not by their personality type. It's more complex than that. There are people who will gush all over you who may not be loving at all. It might be their way of getting in your good graces, or even of manipulating you. Don't be deceived: Love isn't emotion-driven and it's not limited to one type of personality or another. Love is wanting and working for the highest good of others. That brings me to a second essential attribute of love.

2. Love gives for the good of the other, even at great personal cost

In verse 3 Paul does a strange thing: he describes the ultimate in loving acts: *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.* This is a man who empties himself of all material goods and then gives the most costly gift, his life. It would be hard to not see that kind of sacrificial giving as the ultimate in love, and that's exactly why Paul paints such an extreme picture – not because giving doesn't have anything to do with love, but because giving always is a part of love. It's in the nature of love to give. But, Paul says, even extreme sacrifice, if it's not done out of love, is worthless in God's sight. You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving. Giving is always an expression of love and there are many passages that show that giving is an expression of love, and in particular of God's love.

- *God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*
- *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Eph. 5:1-2*
- *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Gal 2:20*
- *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life (give his life) for his friends. John 15:13*

If we are to grow in love, we need to be prepared to grow in giving of ourselves. Love and selfishness are not compatible. Selfishness wants to hoard what we have so we can have it all ourselves. Love opens

our hearts to the needs of others and *gives*. It's painful at times. It's costly. Sometimes it's even sacrificial. But if we are to want and work for the good of others, it will cost us something. Love gives.

Then in vv. 4-7 Paul then paints a portrait of what love is, using both bright colors and dark colors to paint that portrait. He says what love is, and then he spends a good deal of time on what love isn't, and then he returns to what love is. We can't get through this list even going quickly in one week, so we'll begin the list and finish it next week.

3. Love treats others well

Love is patient and kind. (vs. 4)

Being patient and kind is really not that hard to do – until it's hard to do. There are times when it is easy to be patient and kind. Most of you are being patient and kind to one another right now and it's pretty easy. Personally, I find it very easy to be patient and kind right now. When it's easy to be patient and kind isn't when love measures our patience and kindness. It's when it's hard. Like when your boss is being a jerk. Or when your husband is being a jerk. Or when your wife is being a nag. Or when your kids are driving you crazy. Relationships are intrinsic to discipleship, and relationships will inevitably come to places where it's hard to be patient and kind.

Being at youth camp this past week I had to leave the camp at times to work on the message and so on Friday morning I'm driving to a Starbucks to work and I'm literally just two miles away from the exit it's off of, when I come to a massive traffic jam due to road work. Then after waiting in one line, they then fed us off the highway one exit short of my exit for a detour. OK, I figured a short detour and then I'm there. 15 minutes. 20 minutes. 45 minutes, and according to GPS I'm not 2 miles away from SB anymore, now I'm 7 miles away! And there's no end to the delay in sight. My morning is being eaten away and I'm sitting in traffic and can't do anything about it.

Before all this happened, there was one of those signs that said, *Expect Delays*. Just before I get caught in a long delay, I get a message to expect it. What good does that do me? If they had texted me the night before with that information it might have been useful. If they had even just gotten that message over to me early that morning I could have done something about it. But just before you hit a traffic jam with no where to go, how does it help to read, *Expect Delays*? The only thing that it does is to set my expectations and prepare me to be patient.

When it comes to our relationships, it's easy to be patient and kind when they go where we want them to go and get there in a relatively straight line. But when our relationships take strange and unexpected detours that we don't want, in those moments our natural response is to be impatient and unkind. God says, expect delays. Be patient and be kind, even when it's hard. See, discipleship is intrinsically relational work, but relationships are messy, and unpredictable, and they rarely go in straight lines right where we want them to. People don't always cooperate with our expectations.

Husbands, wives, are there things in your relationship that you really want to see happen in your marriage but it just doesn't seem to be happening – at least not at the pace you hoped for? Expect delays. Parents, did you envision a relatively smooth path in parenting, but you're hitting relational struggles that you never saw coming and it's really, really hard to be patient and kind? It's so tempting to be impatient. To be unkind. Expect delays.

At YC, at the end the youth shared testimonies and it was beautiful, but I was also struck by the depth of the struggles that many teens face. They don't have "kid sized" struggles. Some question their faith. Some deal with depression and don't want to get up in the morning. Some feel like failures, or feel condemned by their sin, as if God must be tired of them. Others don't feel like other people like them, or that they fit in. As parents, we may want our kids to take a straight line to arrive at a deep faith and we

may be impatient when they don't, or not understand why they struggle with what they struggle with. Expect delays – and be patient and kind.

Realized, parents and all of us, we don't always know the whole story. That kid that is driving us crazy may be going through things that are very hard for them. Be patient. Be kind. Hold out the love of Christ to them, whether they're your kid or not. That's true for more than just our teens. It made me want to be more aware of the potential struggles that others may face that I may not be

I've talked to so many people who long for deeper relationships in the church, and often they struggle with disappointment that it isn't happening for them more quickly or more easily. After all, we're Christians. Or maybe there's been a conflict that you're walking through with a friend. Maybe someone in the church is driving you crazy. Expect delays. Relationships take detours and honestly, God is in many of those delays to teach us lessons. Patience is learned when it's hard to be patient. Kindness is etched into our character when it's hard to be kind. There are things we can and should do to strengthen our marriages, raise our kids, and deepen our friendships. But even with all of that, even with our best efforts, relationships will take detours and God teaches us to be loving by teaching us to be patient and kind when it's hard to be patient and kind. Love treats others well.

Conclusion:

I want to pause here, because I think this is an area where many of us are convicted – frankly because we're failing to be patient and kind when it's hard to be patient and kind. I feel my own need for change.

Parents here that are aware you get frustrated – even angry – with your children. Impatient with your spouse. Or a friend. Or that person in the church that drives you crazy.

Believe the Lord wants to minister to you. Ask the band to come back up.

- Lift condemnation – our love isn't what saves us, God's love has already saved us through His Son. We love, because He first loved us. Know that you are loved – even when you are impatient and unkind. God's love is unaffected – He is patient and kind with us when we fail to be patient and kind with others.
- Encourage you that He can help you change. As we pray, ask God to help you change. Ask Him to show you specific relationships or situations where you are tempted to be impatient and unkind and help you to change your expectations. Expect delays, but also expect grace.
- As we sing this song, let the words sink in. Jesus' work is good, and it is finished – there is no condemnation left. No promise unavailable to you if you are trusting in Christ.
- If you aren't a Christian, Jesus gives you the simple invitation *follow me*. Will you decide to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior this very morning?