

Scribbles

**31 DAY DEVOTIONAL &
JOURNAL**

Love

A collection of colorful, hand-painted Easter eggs scattered on a wooden surface. The eggs feature various words and designs. Visible words include 'Love' (on a red egg with a smiley face), 'blessings' (on a purple egg with white dots), 'TRUTH' (on a grey egg with a newspaper graphic), 'GRACE' (on a blue and yellow striped egg), 'GOD' (on a yellow egg), 'FAITH' (on a blue egg), 'PEACE' (on a green egg), 'HOPE' (on a purple egg), 'LOVE' (on a blue egg), 'TRUTH' (on a blue egg), 'GOD' (on a blue egg), and 'PEACE' (on a blue egg). The eggs are painted in various colors including red, purple, green, blue, yellow, and grey.

31 DAY DEVOTIONAL & JOURNAL

LOVE

A Roaring Hearts & Scribbles Publication

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We recommend that you do not print this page (3) or the cover page (1) in order to save ink.

Scribbles?

Scribbles is a series of devotional journals that contain encouraging words and scriptural themes where you have an opportunity to “scribble” things down. Each volume has a particular topic that we explore, finding ways to support and lift you up in your walk with Jesus. They are expressly meant to be tools for your life. We appreciate feedback from you and ideas for future Scribbles.

Each day starts its own “Verse of the Day”. This verse is meant to be the foundation of sorts for that day’s devotional.

Use the journal to scribble your thoughts down on what we talk about. Ideas that might help you down the road. Thoughts that God gives you in your study. Scriptures that impact you and so on.

You can also make copies as you see fit to give to others. And it is available for a free .pdf download on the website, www.rhrministries.org.

LOVE

Love is explored infinitely across the world in many, many ways. From stories of romance to movies about the hero getting the damsel in distress, to great tributes of sacrifice and unselfish acts. Love is a profound part of who we are as people.

The Bible speaks of Love greater and more powerful than any other book ever published. Partly because it is the book that talks of God's Love. A Love that is unmatched.

In scripture, Love is expressed in four specific ways. With a few others not so obvious.

The first four are:

- Agape Love – Unconditional Love that is most often expressed by God towards His creation – US!
- Philia Love – Love for each other from us. Brotherly Love. The city of Philadelphia gets its name from the use of this word. In fact, their city motto for many years was, “The City of Brotherly Love.”
- Storge Love – The Love we have for family. Between parent and child, brothers and sisters.
- Eros Love – This is Love between a man and a woman. It involves affection, sexual desire, physical attraction, etc. It is meant to exist between men and women who are married to one another and can imply a “selfish need”.

These Greek words cover the various ways that Love is expressed and given to each other. As you wander through this devotional, try to pick out these expressions in what is given for you on your journey to getting a tad bit more understanding about this thing called Love.

The journal is for thoughts and ideas. Maybe to see how a particular day's readings helps to move you forward in your understanding of God's ceaseless Love to mankind.

DAY ONE

LOVE IS BORN

“Hi, I’m Adam!”

“But as it is written, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who Love Him.’” 1 Corinthians 2:9

Love appeared the first time between two people the moment Adam saw Eve. She was created for Adam. The match was, literally, made in Heaven. The idea of Love at first sight was born.

Can you imagine that first encounter, “Wow, who are you?”

“I’m Eve.” She looked at him. “Who are you?”

He went silent, in awe of her. Nothing he was going to say would do to her what she had already done to him by just showing up. Adam was smitten.

But Love existed before that moment. Love existed in the form of a God Who Loved. He Loved His creation, Adam. They had a friendship, not just an awareness of each other. They took walks in the Garden together. They “hung out.” Think about that! They were Buddies.

Understanding Love has been a quandary that men and women have spent thousands of years trying to comprehend and put into a box. But Love is bigger than any box can hold. It forges bonds between enemies. It resolves thousand-year feuds. It turns words into promises and makes sure they are kept. It makes us cry for joy and laugh cynically from the pain of its loss.

There is mystery in Love. Between man and woman. Between best friends. Between a parent and a child. How many times have we heard the story of a parent and a child reconciling after years apart? There is a mystery in the bond that Love creates.

Love between a parent and a child shows us how we can set differences aside. How we can grow from a child who needed constant attention to an adult that returns that attention as mom gets too old to get around very well. That’s what Love is. But, it’s much more.

Understanding Love is not something that just up and happens. In fact, the greatest psychologist will never be able to put it fully into words. The most skilled minister will always be just a little bit dumbfounded. There is no walk of life that will have greater understanding than another. We’re all in the same boat. All mystified as to comprehending Love.

And the greatest ambiguity surrounding Love will always be God’s Love for mankind. He created a Universe full of stars, quasars, nebulae, black holes, and a million other obscurities. He selects one small corner of this vast space to create an unassuming ball of oxygen, water, dirt, vegetation, animals, and countless more details. In the midst of this beautiful place, He creates his greatest achievement: Mankind. You see, Adam was created in a more specific way than the other animals. Pottery, for the most part. He breathed life into him and, voila! Adam, the first.

But He didn’t just make a man, He made a friend. He made a person to tend His garden. To name His other creations. To spend time with. Made in His image - with a spirit. Made to rule the Kingdom God had built on Earth. Perfect. No mistakes. He had no sin. The concept of sin didn’t even exist yet in the heart or mind of man. Or woman.

Life was a beautiful thing. God made man and woman to be blessed and to be a blessing. To know God and be known by God. To feel Love and to give Love.

The greatest revelation of God now existed in two ways: Mankind and Love.

DAY TWO

LOVE IS SET LOOSE

It Floats Around The World

"We Love Him because He first Loved us." 1 John 4:19

The most spectacular act of Love was what God did from before the foundation of the world. He knew what Adam and Eve would do with the fruit of that tree. He knew what the devil would do. He was never caught off guard. And yet He Loved.

God is the originator and embodiment of Love, but that statement alone is not enough. He also made nature that we can see, smell, taste, touch, and hear. Love is not a material we can contain inside a box. We can't even hold it in our hands.

The truth is, we cannot see it, we cannot touch it, we cannot eat it. When scientifically referenced in the physical, it does not exist. What is often considered the most powerful thing in the world has no physical presence. That by itself is proof of God's existence.

Love is something that shows up in dozens of ways. Between people. Between a dog and master. Between a man and his cheeseburger! The term for Love is used in so many fashions.

Love floats around the world as a non-existent that is very, very real. A man who lives in Oregon is in Love with a woman who lives in the Philippines. They have never met, but there is no doubt they are in Love. How can anything that isn't Divinely designed not be responsible for that. Love is in the world because He put it there.

Johnny traipses to off to school each morning. He sees Cindy Lou every day. She lives down the street. They use the same bus stop every morning. He can't take his eyes off of her. She smiles sheepishly. She feels the same way.

They go to the prom together. Then to the same college. They get married and grow old together. That's Love. They have bumps in the road. They have bills. They have kids. They fall in Love again. They change a little part of the world by being devoted to one another. This is Supernatural. This is Love crafted and put into play by a Loving, compassionate God.

To look at Love and how it has changed the world many times over and assume it was just something that showed up one day in the swamps of pre-historical la-la land is foolish.

A child is born and very naturally clings to mommy. The connection is instant and lifelong. The birth of a child is one of the most beautiful, disgusting things we may ever witness. Beautiful in that it is life coming forth. A wonderful miniature of mom and dad, that cries and poops (the disgusting part) and generally causes a significant lack of sleep. Who also creates an air of possibilities and proud sighs. They coo and laugh and giggle. And most people fall in Love with that little munchkin the moment they lay their eyes on them. The bond that will take these three, mommy, daddy and little one, through life is unbreakable. Who wants to tell them that link happened purely by chance?

Imagine for just a moment that Love didn't exist. That God, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, did not place Love on Earth. Everything is done entirely through instinct. No purposes or plans. A world without Love. We all are in relationships much like a fly; propagate, move on, die. Maybe we even make it to the industrial age. Business is booming. The world is the most selfish place in the Universe. Love is a four letter word that was never penned.

No poems. No Love stories. No chick flicks. The flower and candy industry would have likely dried up long before they began. All cars would have one seat. Children, by now, would have to be raised by people paid to do just that.

But wait! Children, would not have exist. No woman, not Loving a child, would go through the misery of childbirth for "something" they were not going to Love. But God made mankind to begin with and He is Love. So, moot point?

DAY THREE

LOVE IS GOD

The Love Chart

“He who doesn’t Love doesn’t know God, for God is Love.” 1 John 4:8

When the world shuttered at the actions of Adam and Eve, life changed. God did not. When they were ushered out of the Garden, the world became hard and mean. God did not.

God’s personality and characteristics do not change. No matter what we might be dealing with, God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8) Though we must increase and be transformed, He does not need to. We must strive to become like Him, not the other way around. And God’s greatest characteristic we must grow to imitate is Love.

Whatever this Love “thing” is, He exudes it. He envelopes it. He exists as Love. “God is Love.” So no matter where the source of Love is that we feel, He provided it in some way. Whether it is from our dog, our child, our spouse, our boss, or the stalker from down the street. Okay, not so much the stalker.

The Love that God provides for each of us is fully incomprehensible, totally real, and 100% free. He is not waiting for a great achievement to begin Loving us. There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn His Love.

We are task driven. We think we matter because of what we have accomplished. And we look at God’s Love in the same fashion. But that couldn’t be further from the truth.

As a Christian we have accepted His Love and have chosen to live for Him. AND we are learning to return His Love.

God embodies Love not just because He Loves us, but because He exhibits the Greatest Love:

“But God demonstrates His own Love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

His Love, this substance that is so hard to pin down, existed before Adam got off the potter’s wheel and will yet be there when the last prophecy is fulfilled and man has landed in his final place.

Using a chart type, we see the greatest Love is a 10. That’s the level of Love that will give up the Son to die to make a way. Our Love for God and others will vary within that chart.

About a 1 or 2 for criminals and strangers. We might be pushing a 4 for people we know. Co-workers, distant relatives, and so on. Our family might garnish a 5 or 6. Our spouse, maybe even a 7. Our Love for God 5-8. At best. Of course, there are many variations in the Chart of Love. There might even be a few 10s in there somewhere. But very few.

God has a 10 for us. He had a 10 when He made Adam, and He had a 10 when He made you. There is no variable. He doesn’t have off days. He doesn’t get up in the morning with a 5 until His first cup of coffee.

God is not hampered by the constraints of the life that we have. He’s not worried about keeping bosses happy, washing dishes, and cutting the grass. He is never in an “uneven keel” place in His existence. He is perfect in all His ways. And a very large part of that is unfailing, unhindered, unconditional, unstoppable, crazy, and amazing Love for mankind.

But because of His Love level, He *DOES* concern Himself with happy bosses, clean dishes, and smoothly sheared grass. He does concern Himself with us when we are trying to keep our “keel” where it should be. And that is because He *IS* perfect in all His ways. His Love drives Him to be a part of every moment we are breathing!

A 10 on the Chart of Love means we will go beyond what is normal or expected. It means we are willing to give up our life. It means we are willing to give up our child’s life. For strangers and haters.

And that’s the real kicker, isn’t it?

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Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

DAY FOUR

LOVE IS REACTIONARY

What Happens To Us, Changes Us

“Greater Love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” John 13:15

Newton said that to every action there is a reaction. This thing God created called Love may not be something we fully understand, but there is no denying its existence and the fact that we will respond to it in some way.

The joy of being truly in Love is only outdone by the knowledge that we are truly Loved ourselves. Knowing the “reaction” of Love is one of the most powerful feelings we will ever experience. It makes all the difference in the world.

We are born and immediately experience Love. Our mom, who has proven her Love from time before our birth, first. Dad gets involved by making certain we have a home and food and a warm place to sleep. Then siblings, aunts, uncles and grandpas and grandmas. All those who fall instantly in Love with us.

What happens to us changes us. We are born needy. Mama grabs us and begins to nurture us and take care of us. She Loves on us with an undying devotion that no one else can match.

So what happens to us? We wake up at all hours of the night and day, screaming because we're hungry or our behind seems to be covered in something that generally just feels wrong. We need attention.

Then one day (or middle of the night, whatever), we go into one of those fits, and the person who comes running seems to be familiar. Maybe we're only a couple weeks old. Maybe more. But there's recognition. Then we begin to return the Love we have been shown.

She has a genuine Love. And we learn to respond in kind. And what we gain from that relationship will remain with us all of our lives.

When that first boy or girl catches our eye, we are looking for the same thing. A Love response.

A boy will feel like he can climb the stars to the moon and back. Like he can take on anyone and win for that girl.

A girl feels like her dreams can come true. The guy who will always be there, her “knight in shining armor,” has arrived. The genuine mutual affection between two people is so powerful, it can alter a life's dream and desire.

Understanding the reaction to Love is exemplified in God's Love for us. Knowing His Love should cause a reaction. Something wonderful should happen. Truly seeing His Love will change us. It will cause a reaction in us. Our lives will be forever altered as we draw into the understanding that we didn't just discover Someone who cares deeply, but that Someone Loved us enough to die for us!

Jesus “climbed up” onto the cross for people who not only hated Him, but were responsible for Him being there to begin with. So that was the ultimate example of Love.

We struggle in life partly because of that simple thing; we don't know Love. It's often much easier to give Love. To prove to another that we Love them. Sometimes by our actions. Maybe by what we say to them. How we treat them. But doing all that doesn't mean we get the same in response.

And that's what happened. Jesus took the hard road and did what no one else could. Jesus gave what could only come from the greatest Love that ever existed. He gave this amazing Love for people who did not and, often, still do not return it.

Knowing what has been done to prove His Love, how do we react? What is our response? How should we act?

DAY FIVE

LOVE IS EXTRAVAGANT

When The Extra Mile Is Routine

“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with them two.” Matthew 5:41

John and Sue were married in the 1940s. He fought for his country. He came home and married his sweetheart. He started working. He worked hard, mowed the grass, changed the oil in the car, kept the gutters clean, and Loved his wife and kids.

Sue maintained the home, cooked thousands of dinners, lunches and breakfasts, sewed and mended clothes, raised the children, and remained a devoted wife. John Loved Sue as Christ Loved the church. (Ephesians 5:25)

Their life wasn't perfect, but it was good. They endured the same curve balls as anyone. They had gains and losses. But God was their God, and they kept going.

Nowadays, on Sunday mornings, John gets up and spends a couple of hours getting Sue ready for church. In her 80s, she is in the mid to late stages of Alzheimer's. She doesn't struggle too much anymore, but those who Love her do. Her children miss her. Not because they don't see her, but because she doesn't know them when they do see her.

John misses her, too. On good days, she knows who he is. But, on most days, he is a stranger to her. He must explain who he is over and over. Many times with tears in his eyes. He has help from many sources; his children, hospice care, and so on. But when it's time to call it a night, he patiently puts Sue to bed on his own. He always prays with her and asks God to perform a miracle and heal her. Each morning, nothing has changed. John's faith does not waver, but he still asks.

John's Love is called extravagant. It goes beyond any sort of Love that gets as much as it gives. He will give to Sue until either she is done or he no longer can. He will never see anything more from her than this moment has. He will only see less.

This is crazy, amazing Love. We see this beautiful, yet heartrending picture, time and again. The story, as real as it is, is not new. But it is a devotion like this that makes men and women still fight for each other. Extravagantly!

Sometimes that extravagance is shown by what one does for the other. Sometimes by what one forgives of the other.

A woman comes home from her weekend with friends and finds the husband has transformed her bedroom into the place of her dreams while she was gone.

A lady who travels a lot comes home and finds a fresh bouquet of red roses in every room of the house.

A man sits down in his Lazy Boy after a 12-hour day and sees the 60-inch TV that wasn't there when he left that morning.

A 30-year marriage survives despite a moral failure.

It is a person going beyond what “should” happen and making something greater happen.

Extravagant Love is something that endures and increases. It says, “You are beautiful even without your teeth.” It says, “Bad breath? I don't smell anything but roses.” Or telling him he needs to visit the mirror in the bathroom. “As soon as we get to church.”

It's crying with the wife or driving nails with the husband. It's walks that are filled with hand holding and mutual amazement at God's creation. It is a relationship that mutes the TV because conversation is more important than the Wheel of Fortune puzzle. Letting the kids interrupt prayers. Momentary stares at that one just because.

Extravagance isn't based on what we can get. Like John and Sue, we don't do because we might get something back. We do because of Love.

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DAY SIX

LOVE IS SUBSTANCE

Love Leaves A Mark

"Hatred stirs up strife, but Love covers all sins." Proverbs 10:12

Love is and has substance. We may not be able to see it, but we can observe it. We may not be able to touch it, but we can feel it.

Regardless of the unseen aspect of Love, it affects us. Long term. In short, it leaves a mark.

The substance of Love is that mark. We've all been bruised. Scratched. Or worse. We use that term, "Ouch. That's gonna leave a mark.". Whatever has happened, many times, leaves visible evidence.

Genuine Love will do that. That's why it has substance. It leaves something behind. Maybe it's not on the surface of the skin like a bruise or scratch would be, but a change in our hearts and mind.

That mark can be seen. It looks like a smile. It looks like joy. Like peace. When we learn to exemplify the actions Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, we begin leaving marks on people. We begin to leave substance in them. They begin to see what Love looks like. What God's Love looks like.

Have you ever met a person who was hurt by another in a relationship? That's a form of a mark, too. That mark becomes a reminder to not trust people. A reminder to not Love again. Sometimes a person's "mental body" is covered in marks. They go through life injured. The memories of the road they have traveled down keep them from healing up and moving on. The genuine substance of Love has never been the mark left on them.

Without the real Love of God in our lives, we tend to live for ourselves. We leave marks everywhere we go because Love has substance. It leaves "effects" on others. When Love is all about us, it leaves marks on people, too. Marks that are negative. Painful. Hurtful. Destructive.

The same thing often happens to people in church. The religious become so enamored with the rules and regulations of the law that they put their own "brand" of Christianity on others. Despite the fact that Jesus Himself spoke against the religious-type traditions that man had added to everything, we still live in a religious asylum.

Our verse for today is in Proverbs. "Hatred stirs up strife, but Love covers all sins." When we walk the world with an ugly mark on us that came from a "strife" filled relationship, that ugliness leaves what could be called an "anti-Love" mark on others. But those marks slip off when Love comes in and relationship builds. Our life as the person with a bad mark changes and we see God's Love takes over.

We will always leave a mark on the people we interact with. No matter how slight or how heavy our connection is, there will be a mark left on their heart and mind from us. That mark, that substance, that "impression," will look like what we choose it to look like.

We also deal with the marks that have been left by not understanding God's Love for us. If we have dealt with the "humanness" of people for any length of time, we tend to assume much of God that isn't true. But when we encounter a person who has opened up to the Love of a Great God, we will see that Love that He has for us. A Love that will mark us in a way we have never felt. Love that will begin removing the marks that the world (and the religious) have left on us.

There is no room in our busy lives for the ugly marks that life tends to hand us. Are there places in your life where someone has caused long term marks on you? Bruises and injuries that still hurt? Knowing they are there is the first step to getting rid of them. Jesus will start the healing process and leave His marks of Love in their place.

DAY SEVEN

LOVE IS AN INVESTMENT

We Must Give To Get

"We Love Him because He first Loved us." 1 John 4:19

Falling for someone is a marvelous and beautiful experience to enjoy. Whether it is you in the middle of it or you are just an observer. It is part of the proof of God's Love that He set loose on the earth.

On Day Three, we discussed the varying degrees of Love that we have for different people. Most generally, our deepest and highest marks will be for our spouse.

There is an old saying that goes something like this, "You cannot truly accept Love until you learn to give it away." That saying is never so true as it is with God's Love. He has given Love away to a degree that no one on Earth can match. To fully recognize that Love isn't Love without investment, we can study what God has done as our greatest example.

Love is sacrifice. True. Love is compassionate. True. Love is give and take. Yes. And that is one of the forgotten parts of it. You see, God saw the investment. Sacrifice was involved. Compassion was involved. But He really did have an "end game" to the whole scene. He didn't send His Son to die in our place without the understanding that He was planning to have a powerful relationship with us after it was all said and done.

Despite that which seems obvious to us, the world does its best in forcing God out of their lives. Accepting something like evolution as a fact pushes God away. It ignores His existence. It denies He has anything to do with us. Whether it is full on atheism or just agnosticism. Accepting a false version of our existence takes Gods investment and puts it in the trash.

Evolution says, "There is no God; so I am, therefore, not responsible to Him. I don't have to obey or follow His commandments if He isn't real. And since I believe I evolved from a lower life form, which in turn came ultimately from a cosmic explosion of non-entity cause, there is no investment of Love in me. I can do as I please."

Evolution simply takes God out of the picture, right? No, it actually does much more than that. Much more, causing much more damage. In fact, this thinking, in great part, is one of the causes of the gender confusion that has become rampant in America and around the world.

Man is not just flesh and bones. He is not just a brain and other organs. He has something that no other animal on the planet has. He has a spirit. And, like the body that houses the spirit, it grows. It matures. And like the body that requires a parent to mature, the spirit requires a Parent to develop. A man in his fifties can be completely normal in body, make all the right choices in life, a good job, a good relationship with his wife and kids, and generally be a productive member of society. Yet hate anything to do with the church. Anything to do with God.

If a person grows up with no contact from a parent figure, he will not learn to Love because he was not Loved. He may meet a beautiful girl and fall for her, but he will struggle his entire life. Becoming a parent himself will be very hard on him. We Love because we have been Loved. The Love we get from our parents, from our family, from our friends, from those around us, and especially from God is necessary training for our future.

Recognizing the investment God has placed in us will teach us to see the investment we need to place into others. Love is like that investment, it cannot blossom until it has been made. Investing requires us to put forth before we get return. Sometimes that return is quick. Sometimes it takes years. But all investments require one thing: Risk...

DAY EIGHT

REFLECTED LOVE

Love Is More Than Looks

"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." 1 John 4:12

When Love is exuded in a life, that life has a specific look to it. It's not a perfect body, perfect hair, and the latest trends. Not modest or simple either. Or beautiful and elegant. Those might be what a person looks like, but those are not indicative of Love. You just cannot put a name, or a number, or an image on it.

Jesus, the greatest Lover of all time, came as a poor man. He was the son of a carpenter, a lowly position. His status proved many things to many people. First being that God was not impressed by "beauty" or by "things." God has had no problem being generous to people. Godly Old and New Testament people alike had great means. However, most were poor or middle class.

We asked the question, "What does Love look like?" Does it look like a Christian? Does it look like a preacher? Maybe Love looks like a generous company executive? Or the teenager handing us burgers at Micky D's? There are no specific ways that Love looks like when we look at a face. Love does indeed have a specific look; but recognizing it because of gender, wealth, or occupation will leave us lost. It cannot be defined in that way.

We are told that we should look like Jesus. Does that mean we should be poor? That we should be homeless? If so, a very large portion of Christians alive and passed on are in trouble.

Money itself will never harm us or our chances of getting in Heaven. Being rich does not mean we do not reflect Christ. The root of all evil is the **Love** of money, not money itself. In the context of what Paul taught in 1 Timothy 6:10, we understand that it is choosing the pursuit of riches in the physical over the riches of God's goodness. To make money our priority instead of God. He explains that people who choose money over God will suffer many sorrows.

What about image? Our society today has become very image driven. To be accepted and "Loved" you need to be beautiful or so talented that the need for beauty is overridden.

And talent brings up another purpose for popularity. But it's not just talent in general. It's more "What can you do for me?"

The lepers were shunned. But Jesus healed them. The Romans were evil invaders, but Jesus had compassion on them. The Pharisees were religious zealots, but He had close friends that were of that group. The demon possessed became His missionaries. The fishermen, some of the lowest positions in all Israel, became His Apostles. There were Samaritans that were sinful and lower class citizens. He gave them the Water of Life. All of these had little to nothing to offer Him.

To be a reflection of Christ, there is a simple formula. It's not our status as a wealthy person. It's not whether or not we have a home. It's not where we live or who we rub shoulders with. It's not whether or not we are loud or quiet. Whether we drive a Chevy or a Ford. Like Taco Bell or Applebee's.

It's not even whether or not we tithe regularly or use language many would find offensive.

Love is how we reflect Jesus. Like a mirror. Remember how we talked about "You don't really know Love until you give it away?" That is what it means to reflect Jesus.

Reflecting Love is not about the beard, or the robe, or the old sandals. It's not being able to preach to people or memorize the Bible. It's not being in charge of some program at the Y.M.C.A. It's not even about being a good parent. It all comes down to this simple statement:

Reflecting Christ is having the Love that Jesus is giving us, coming out of us!

DAY NINE

ACTS OF LOVE

Love Looks Busy

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James 2:26

Have you ever seen a person in dire need and felt anxious and heartbroken? Or listened to the story of someone's struggles and fought back tears? Seen a child hungry and shivering, and desired to hold them and comfort them?

Do you ever desire to do more? When the guest missionary begins to describe the call they have to people that are desperate to be fed both physically and spiritually, does it stir your heart? Does it make you want to dig deeper into your wallet? Does it make you want a “call to action?”

These are the compulsions created in us as the Love of Christ becomes a part of us. Ever correct yourself or feel bad when you holler at the driver in front of you? That's because we desire to react to the world with the Love of Jesus. The Love *He* would be reacting with.

We often feel the Love of Jesus through others. Walk into a church that is in pursuit of God, and you will feel it. Total strangers will come to you like you are some long lost relative. They will greet you and welcome you and generally make you feel all warm and fuzzy. That is what the Love of Jesus looks like.

A couple is successful in their chosen occupations. They Love the Lord. They tithe. They support the church in many ways. Involved in activities in their community. Busy lives.

They rise every morning, get their coffee and breakfast. Head off to their respective jobs with a kiss goodbye. Life is good for them.

One day, they grab the pastor and tell him they want to talk privately. They explain that God has laid it upon their hearts to do more. Specifically, for Africa. After a great deal of prayer and seeking God, they are considering becoming missionaries.

Eventually, they give up their jobs, sell their house, and walk away from their “successful” life to go into a deep and dark section of Namibia to help the kids who need food. They need medical help. They need education. And this couple? Never happier!

The idea of leaving everything behind and going to a dangerous, hot, and, generally not-so-nice place on the call of a God, is not driven by anything the world has to offer. Not even the natural Love of another person will do that. Nothing can put that into them beyond the Love of God. To give up success and go thousands of miles away and help kids you know nothing about?

But this is a story that has happened over and over. Most missionaries start young out of Bible School, but many are already successful in secular jobs. The Love that God has put into them is such they cannot ignore the call to do more.

And many of those doing this are not young, “pre-children” age. Some are actually “empty-nesters.” Even Seniors.

But the reality is that if we wish to learn of the Love of God, we must allow Him to work in our lives more than whatever duty that seems required of us. Even by scripture.

Despite all that He put in place for Adam in the Garden, disobedience and sin came about. God's Love was genuine for man, but sin gave Him every right to wipe the faulty one out. But he didn't. In fact, it was the beginning of what true Love exemplified would look like. God's Love for us was proven by His actions. In the same fashion, our Love is proven by our actions. As James pointed out, Faith without works is not really faith. If we are to prove that God's Love flows through us, then there should be some actions as a result.

DAY TEN

LOVE SMILES

Love Looks Happy

"You will show me the path of life; In your presence is fullness of joy; At you right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

Love in us from a Holy God is not static. It's not meant to sit still. If it does, we should check ourselves. God's Love inside us Loves others. And it looks like it, too!

Someone who is in Love will tend to smile a lot. In fact, they will get annoying with that smile. And what they are experiencing will become obvious to those around them.

Quite often, in church, there are some who are very "reverent." They are most concerned about "decorum" and the proper way that we should do things. They are what we call a "sour puss." They are not happy looking in the least.

Even in our toughest moments, we can have joy. And we should project that joy. We cannot show the world Jesus Christ in our life if we insist on being joyful only on the inside. "Well, my life is falling apart, but I'm happy on the inside because of the Lord." But then, we go around looking like "we swallowed a profusely sweating toad" as Ken Davis* points out.

Here are a few reasons our face should reflect the Love of God in our life:

- The world has enough grumps already.
- We are called to take the Gospel (the Good News) to the world. There is nothing Good News-like about our frown.
- A nasty frown will never lead anyone to Jesus!
- We might be the only Jesus someone sees. Is that how Jesus looks?

Christ transforms us when we come to know Him. It's not that our world suddenly becomes perfect. On the contrary, we make a true enemy of the devil when we become followers of Jesus. Life can actually become more difficult. But understanding Who we have become a family member with makes all the difference.

The people who labored to do God's work in the Book of Nehemiah were instructed to keep at it because the joy of the Lord was their strength. (Nehemiah 8:10) They could rely on the joy that God put into them to be a source of power to keep building. They literally used this joy to gain strength. A wonderful thing to remember!

We may be going through the worst moment of our life. Remember the rain falls on the just and the unjust. (Matthew 5:45) Even though we have a relationship with the Creator, we will still endure painful times. But there is nothing that we may deal with that is not common to mankind. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

As Christians, we cannot go into the world and preach the Gospel as Christ instructed us to do if we have nothing to back it up. Allowing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to spill from our face through joy and happiness while we tell people about Him will do half the work.

The Gospel is not called the Good News because we are frail and cannot improve. It's called the Good News because it is just that. Good News that Someone has come to this ball of dirt and taken the penalty for us. In our place. In our stead. That truly is Good News!

So if we really need to find a reason to smile in the middle of our worst day...

If we really need a reason to break out of that "facial paralysis" issue...

If we really need to know why the Love of God should cause us to have a perpetual giggle in our hearts...

That whole "Jesus died in our place" thing? That's a really good reason.

DAY ELEVEN

GENEROUS LOVE

Love Is Giving

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God Loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Now we see that Love within us has an outward appearance. This amazing creation that cannot be seen or held (or even fully comprehended) sits inside us manipulating our every move. It controls. It decides. It commands. And it all causes an outward appearance. A vision for the world around us to see and recognize.

Usually this “Love manipulation” is done in a great way. It has the best influence on us for good. But Love can also cause us to leave old friends behind. It can cause us to build houses and monuments. Say and do things we had no intention of saying or doing. Go to such extremes that those around us run in fear.

Yet one of the most wonderful effects that Love will have on us is generosity. The Love of giving. In fact, if a person is stingy, their Love will always be called into question. Selfishness, a natural tendency of man, is not just maintaining one's self. It's not just making sure that we are healthy or taken care of. Selfishness is deciding that “I am most important. I must be happy above all else.”

Selfishness will crawl over children to exit a burning building. Will spend all their money on themselves. Will have more selfies on their Facebook and phone than anything else. Ouch, that hurts.

A person may have been born into such a home. They grow up thinking that way. Many children today are not being taught to put others before themselves. To show Love for them. And one key way to show that Love is generosity.

When Love gets a hold on us, it changes us. Especially God's Love. This incredible Love that emanates from the Presence of God has no equal or match. As we have said, Love is the most powerful thing in the Universe. That might be an understatement. But if Love between two people can do what it can do, imagine what the Love between the Creator of the Universe and mankind can do.

So establishing the power of Love, we understand how it can cause a person to change their whole way of thinking. A person once lonely is now secure and happy. Once angry and hateful, now peace-Loving and sweet-natured. And, once selfish and self-absorbed, now generous and thoughtful of others. Love changes us.

Love affects different people in different ways. But certain things are commonplace to all. Generosity is one of them. As we come to understand God's Love in our lives, we come to understand bits and pieces of what Love truly is. It gets in us and affects the way we think, and we begin to reflect it.

Our greatest example of generosity is Jesus on a cross. And while that is truly a terrible picture, it is indeed the greatest proof of Love ever displayed. And the greatest example of the generosity that comes from that Love. It's the reason that it is called the “Passion” of Christ.

Generosity comes in many, many forms. It might be in giving of our time. Taking a year off and giving it to those in need across the ocean. And, yes, it is in giving finances. But generosity is not duty bound or limited. It means to give freely, without restrictions. Not demanding payment. Not expecting something in return.

Jesus did not climb onto that cross with a plan to get rich. He did not go to the scourging post thinking He would be admired or raised up on some kind of pedestal. He did all He did because of Love. He gave generously of His life for those He had yet to even meet. That is Love-induced generosity.

DAY TWELVE

SELF-LOVE

It Takes Care Of Me

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well." Psalm 139:14

It would seem in opposition to focus on self after talking about not being selfish. But we must learn to Love ourselves to truly Love anyone else. It's a strong sign that something is out of order when a person gives constantly and never takes in. The sacrifice they think they are making for others will eventually backfire, and they will find themselves exhausted and no longer willing to work or give out for others. It's very common with pastors and church volunteers.

Jesus made a very important statement about this subject in Matthew, Chapter 22, verses 37-40.

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 greatest 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."

Jesus Himself, stated that we must Love our neighbor (all mankind) as ourselves. Well, that would be a genuine flop if we don't Love ourselves.

As we become more and more like Jesus, the understanding of Who He is becomes more and more clear. God is gracious and does not expect us to become perfect and look just like Jesus on day one of our life with Him. In fact, He is patient and merciful. Good thing, too, because we'd all be in trouble. Without exception. Even people like Billy Graham and C.S. Lewis would be the first to tell us that they were once sinners before God saved them. Even Paul the Apostle called himself the "chief of sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15)

But as we come to know Jesus deeper and deeper, we see a need to Love outside of our little space. And in order to do that, we have to Love the one we see in the mirror every morning. We may lack the perfections that we see in others. We might struggle with the things we have done in our past. Or even the things we are still fighting. But the truth is that Jesus Loves us where we are. Getting that to sink in is the first step in learning to Love God back

As we grow, we learn to do things we may have never understood or experienced before. Jesus says, "On these two commandments (Loving God, Loving mankind and as implied, Loving ourselves) hang all the Law and the Prophets." Meaning, literally, everything that has been written before, all of the Old Testament and all the New Testament (as this statement applies to now as then), all that man has written about being righteous and obeying God, all the sermons ever taught, all the devotionals, all that has been said, all the praise, all the worship, all the acts of goodness, and all that has anything to do with God, has no purpose, no use, no power, no level of strength unless God is Loved and our fellow man is Loved.

Picture it like a chain. On one end of it is the Word of God and on the other end is us. In order for us to connect and make all that the Bible teaches us effective, there must be chain links between us. Without those links, we have no connection to God. Love of others and, most of all, Love of God are the key links.

And so, we cannot please God if we cannot Love ourselves.

In order for that to happen on the level we are to go to, we have to see that God Loved us first. That will pave the way to see ourselves in His light and not the light of our own thinking or of the world's thinking. We are called to be humble, so there is a fine line we are to walk. Grasping the Love He has given to us will help us know how to Love ourselves. But we need to step into that first in order for it to happen.

DAY THIRTEEN

LOVE BUILDS RELATIONSHIP

Love Is family

*“Let Love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, Cling to what is good.”
Romans 12:9*

Stopping a man on the street and telling him he needs Jesus or he's going to hell will either get you nowhere or punched in the mouth. Depending on what city you're in. That said, if God is leading you to do that, then by all means, do it. No pattern or formula written here supersedes what God might be doing in your life.

But... God has worked within relational patterns since the beginning of time. Way back in Genesis, when He made Adam, He started it all with a relationship. Adam and God had a relationship. They were buddies. Friends. They chatted about stuff.

At some point, God recognized it was time to make a helpmate for Adam. That he was ready for a woman. God connected with Adam through relationship. He watched and knew what to expect, but it was all done through relationship.

God has worked with many people since then. And the greatest examples throughout the Bible have been in relationship.

As we follow the leadership and lives of the Hebrew people, we will find that no one worked for very long with God that did not somehow develop a relationship with Him. They connected with Him far more than just a, “Oh, God help me,” when they were in need.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel... They all worked in relationship. What many don't realize is that the greatest example of all, Jesus Christ, worked in relationship. Not only with His disciples but with the Father. There's a song that Brian Johnson wrote called “Where You Go I Go” based on John 5:19. Here are some of the lyrics:

*“Cause Jesus only did, what He saw You do
He would only say, what He heard You say
He would only move when He felt You lead
Following your heart, following your Spirit”*

Jesus worked in relationship to His Father. To God.

When He told the disciples to do something, it was planned; and they followed because of the relationship they had with Him.

Yes God can, and has often worked sovereignly, outside of relationship. But He is God, we are not. Still, His greatest examples are all done within those confines.

A minister rose in the very early hours of the morning to find his son raiding the fridge. The unusual part is that his son had been away at college and had arrived in the middle of the night. The minister had left a steak in the refrigerator that he had planned to eat with his breakfast. Of course, by the time he had found his son, the steak was gone.

He didn't care about the meat, he was so happy to see his son.

The next day, they got a visit from the cable guy. He knocked at the door, they invited him in. He did his job and left. Now, had the cable man just walked in... Or perhaps decided to raid the refrigerator... A great deal of problems would have occurred. Not the least of which the guy would probably have gotten fired before it was all over. Why? Because there was no relationship with him. See the difference?

Not only is that relationship with God how we operate, it is how He operates with and through us. As we go forward, learning to walk in the direction of God, learning to make His Love a part of our lives, we seek relationships. We become relational. It is what Love drives us to. We seek relationships with people we know.

Love will naturally build relationships. For the sake of Love...

Scribbles...

The page contains 22 evenly spaced horizontal lines for drawing or writing.

DAY FOURTEEN

LOVE & GRACE

Love Is Freedom

“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 are saved).” Ephesians 2:4-5

There are a myriad of thoughts, comments and theories on grace. It is a very big subject. Much like Love. We'll discuss two questions of thought:

1. Is grace and Love kind of the same thing?
2. How does grace and Love work together?

Grace is often thought to be Love by another name. But, though grace flows from Love, they are not the same thing. Defining grace is much like the chore of defining Love; there is much too much involved to get a clear understanding of it in one or two pages.

Down through the years, man was never able to retain a stable relationship with God. He simply sinned too much. But God epitomizes Love. He is Love. He is also omniscient. All knowing. And way back in the Garden, after Adam sinned, God, Himself, gave the first prophecy of the Christ. He said:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.” Genesis 3:15

God was speaking of Jesus. Of how the enemy would cause harm to Jesus (the Seed), but Jesus would cause “brain damage” to him. That was the beginning of grace.

Grace is getting unmerited favor. Something good we have not earned and cannot pay for.

For grace to come at the level that God has given it, it must come from a heart of pure Love. You might say, “Love is the headwaters of Grace.” So in answer to the second question, Love (God) doles it out for us to live within.

Picture grace like a bridge. We get on the bridge at Salvation, when we first come to Christ. The farther across that bridge we go, the deeper into grace we fall. The Lord beckons us to continue across. Some will run across and get it quickly. Some will take years.

So how does that look in us? Like Love, it takes a concerted effort. The Fruit of the Spirit, the attitudes that we gain as Christians, are not automatic. Love requires effort. It doesn't just come on its own. The more we seek God in our lives, the more Loving we become. Grace is much the same.

Then grace filters out from there. It begins to flow from God, through us, to the world around us. The more steps we take on that bridge, the more grace is in us, the more it becomes something we give out. As we get more, we give more. In this, we see the defined similarities to Love.

When we see that God pours more and more grace into us, we begin to pour grace into others. We become more like Him in the way we treat people. Patience, generosity, mercy, and more are signs of the grace of God working through us.

Grace also has another effect in our lives. It helps us grow in freedom. Jesus didn't come to enslave us. He didn't come and pay the enormous cost on the cross in order to make robots and clones. He did this to set us free from sin. We leave sin at the cross and walk away with grace in its place.

Learning to live in grace (demanding, in fact) will help us to see the needs of others and how to Love them. To go forth and be a true grace-filled, Loving child of God. We must reach for grace. We must push ourselves across that bridge, dig deeper into the limitless supply of grace from God until we positively glow of it!

DAY FIFTEEN

RECOGNIZING GOD'S LOVE

Holy Love

"There is no fear in Love; but perfect Love casts our fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in Love." 1 John 4:18

God's Love is Holy. It is righteous and set apart. Meaning, it is pure. In some places the Greek translation is the word "Agape." Meaning "without ulterior reasons and motivations." He doesn't Love us because we Love Him. It is unconditional Love. Holy Love is from a pure foundation. It's not looking for something or even a reply. Literally, if we never respond to God's Love, it will not become less. The funny thing is that the word "agape" in the English language means to stand in awe with your mouth open in shock. God's Agape Love does that to us sometimes.

It goes without saying that we have flaws. But God Loves the missionary the same as the dictator. The "saint" as much as the "sinner." That, in our understanding, doesn't compute too well. But it's true. And with God, it would not make sense any other way.

If we can Love each other unconditionally and we are humans full of frailties and mistakes, then we can start to realize the level of Love God has. (Matthew 7:9-11) Take, for instance, the Love we have for our child. Or the Love we have for our parent. Multiply that exponentially.

As feeble humans, we are often driven off with emotions and actions from the moment. Because of flesh and blood, our Love is not grounded in holiness like Gods. It doesn't mean we are cursed to be like that forever. On the contrary, it is one of the greatest parts of knowing God in the first place. Being made holy.

As we begin to see God's Holy Love, we see and struggle with the lack of our own Love. That struggle could be with someone we know. A co-worker. The neighbor. Someone at church. We are not alone. It is simply hard to Love some people through our own understanding. Their personality. Their habits. Their attitude. There's a whole list of other things that we individually might have issues with.

One of the shortcomings of being human is that we have our own set of core values (which can be good in itself) that determine the way we think. Learning to walk in God's Holy Love doesn't take our core values away, but teaches us to always have an abundant supply of Love for people regardless of their value system.

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah tells the widow to feed him. "I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar," she explained. Her plan was to feed herself and her son, then die of starvation. Resources were dried up. Still he insisted because God has said so. She cooked for the prophet and fed him. From then on, the jars of flour and oil were never emptied. Can it be that we are called to obedience and then to watch as God fills us with bottomless Love for others?

Sometimes a person struggles simply because they are not certain God Loves them. This lack of accepted Love causes a lack of projected Love. Someone once compared it to a cookie jar. We cannot hand out cookies if the jar is empty. There is Someone who wants to fill that jar up. And His motivation is simply that He Loves us. He delivers cookies in bulk!

Jesus has no other motivation. There is nothing we can do to earn His Love. We have nothing He wants in exchange. That's what Holy Love is. Love with a righteous purpose.

In fact, it's one of the greatest traits of Jesus. The more we understand Him, the better we become in our Love for Him and therefore, our Love for others without regard to their short comings or existence outside of our core value system.

DAY SIXTEEN

PURSUING GOD'S LOVE

Chase Him

"I Love those who Love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me." Proverbs 8:17

Our world has many forms of hatred and shame. It can take the sweetest, most gentle person, "chew them up and spit them out." The end result is someone who is negative, hateful, and cynical. That person can grow to an old, lonely soul.

We have to be out there. We have to be in the world. The Bible tells us to be "in the world, but not of it." (John 17:9-19) Sounds easy, right? Yeah, not so much. Becoming affected by the negative attitudes around us is really quite easy.

One day a week (maybe two), a scant 2-3 hours we spend with other Christians. We get a little bit of fellowship and encouragement during that time; then it's Monday, and we're back out into the thick of it all. We spend way more time around a worldly influence than we do around godly ones.

Our days are played out trying to avoid foul, dirty jokes, opportunities to cheat and lie, offers to spend TGIF at the local watering hole, and getting trashed. Guys listening to other guys sex talking women and women doing the same about men. Verbally tearing everyone from the spouse to the corporate bosses into pieces. We don't need all this "stuff" to make an already tough life even harder. So we work to avoid as much as we can. But dodging it all is impossible.

One of the greatest things we can do to stop all the garbage, all the negativity, all the bad attitudes, and trash talk from affecting us is to have a strong Love of God in us. Both for Him and from Him.

God's Love is there. It doesn't waver, and it doesn't vary. It is constant and never changes.

Surrounded by the on-going "yuck" from people who may not understand (or care) that we don't want to be in the middle of all that, can cause us to stumble. In more ways than one.

We might get sucked in and forget we are not wanting to be a part of all that. Suddenly, without planning to, we are laughing at the awful jokes, eye balling the opposite sex, and more.

Or we go in the direction of the other extreme and falter in how we begin to view those who are acting this way. We start to resent being around them. We have to remind ourselves that God Loves them as much as He does us or we grow to hate them for the complications they add to our walk.

Part of the solution to not feeling this way is to remember the way Jesus feels about us even before we were saved. Recalling what was done for us helps us to increase our Love for those around us instead of decreasing. Remember it's not "us versus them" when it comes to those who have not yet met Jesus. This will separate us from ever being effective in their life.

The world's destructive nature is overcome by Love. It is never taken down by more bad attitude. This is real life, not Hollywood. Only through Love. That is why our pursuit of God's Love is so vital.

Becoming a Christian does not suddenly fill us with Love for all of mankind. Paul taught the people at Philippi that they were to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12-13) Because, as he put it, the God they served is the same God he served. It is no different today. We must pursue the relationship with God that fills us with Love on our own. It is a conscious effort to change for the better.

To gain a greater Love in our lives that will get us through the day-to-day and take us to a higher level we need the Love of God in our lives. We should pursue it and run after it like it is oxygen!

DAY SEVENTEEN

ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE

The Gift Is Not The Gift

“But God demonstrates His own Love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:7

When our birthday rolls around, there's a party. Usually, someone gives to us in some way. Christmastime, the same thing. Someone gives to us. These are demonstrations of Love.

We know the greatest gift ever given was done entirely from the standpoint of Love. The Gift of Eternal Life. So done on the Cross where Christ died.

Thousands of years before any of us were born, God thought of us. And our Salvation. Uniquely knowing, even prior to the time that Christ walked on the Earth, all of mankind would need that Salvation. That Sacrifice. That Love! He understood we would be sinners and “as filthy rags,” (Isaiah 64:6). Even then, He proved His Love.

Look at the verse of the day. It says, “...His OWN Love...” It is absolutely vital that we see God gave of Himself for us. Yes, Jesus died on the Cross, but this level of Love did not originate with Christ. And yet it does. It was God's design and intent well before Adam said “Hello, world!”

But God made the big decision (because He Loved us so much) that His Son would go forth and pay the price. (John 3:16) In one very real sense, God was making the journey to the Cross Himself (John 14:9-11). When Paul says that “God demonstrates His own Love toward us,” he literally means that God gave from His own Love to us when Christ died on the Cross.

When gifts come our way, we always accept them. At least, most people do. We accept them and enjoy them. Love them and Love the one who gave them to us. Even if it's not a practical gift or something we even remotely want. We recognize the Love. We have no doubt of it.

A young lady prepares for college. Her mom and dad give her a car a few days before she leaves for school half way across the country. It's a pink VW Bug! There's excitement and laughter and jumping and screaming. Maybe it's not brand new, but it's close. Mom and dad couldn't be more proud of their little girl who is leaving the nest for bigger and better places. The car is not the gift. Their Love is. Twenty years they have taken care of her.

The gift here is proof of a Love that has been going on for a long time. Could you imagine her refusing it? Of course not. Yet there's a greater gift, one that transcends the car. It goes beyond all of this. It is the foundation of the gift and raising her to this point. It is the Love they have for her.

The gifts we receive from God are all amazing and fabulous as well. Both spiritual and physical. But so much of what He has for us in the spiritual realm we ignore. We seem to think that the gift He has for us of Salvation is where those areas end.

The Gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 are a vital part of the church body. They are freely given, like a gift should be, but mostly ignored. These Gifts are meant to help guide us and lead us into all righteousness.

If our young lady that is preparing to head off to college decided to take the bus instead, it wouldn't make any sense at all. And yet, these Gifts that God has given us are often treated just like that. God has something incredible for us and we want to take the bus instead.

His gifts only begin with Salvation. Study the Gifts of the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) They are only as foreign to us as Salvation was before we began to walk in it. Anything new will be strange at first, but in time you will walk in it like it's a comfortable pair of Crocs.

DAY EIGHTEEN

LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE

Our Dwelling Place

*"As the Father Loved me. I also Loved you; abide in My Love."
John 15:9*

So we begin to understand God's Love. And as Christians, we should. Although we do have as much trouble "getting it" as non-Christians do sometimes. But we work (a labor of Love) to understand it. We pursue it and recognize it. We move to accept it. But we also need to learn to "Live in His Love." And that's not as easy as it sounds. But it *is* as rewarding as it sounds.

We live in a constant state of "something." We have a dwelling place. An "existence." Maybe it's a struggle to get moving because of depression. Maybe a person fights the failures they have had. A divorce will often take the most positive person and turn them into a full-blown cynic, finding all that is wrong with everything they see, do, and hear in life. These places affect many people whether they believe in God or not.

Sometimes, these places a person lives in will defy explanation or even a clinical name. But it can lead a person to the ultimate end, taking their own life. The pain and mental anguish cannot be told to just go away. And, sometimes, even knowing God and His goodness, the struggle can rage on.

People will use all sorts of external sources to make the hardship livable. Alcohol, drugs, sex, money, jobs, and more. "Stuff." Grasping the fact that God Loves us, alone, is not enough. We must act upon that knowledge for it to change us and the place we live in.

Yesterday we talked about a young lady leaving for college. She has been presented with a beautiful, pink VW Bug. Convertible, no less. Imagine as she got ready to go, she did, indeed, call a cab to take her to the bus station.

"What are you doing, sweetheart?" Her father asks.

She has it in her head to take the bus to college. She has been given a wonderful gift. For which she has no realization that gift is hers to do with as she pleases.

A ridiculous example, sure. But that is what we often struggle with. God has given us this beautiful gift of life under the blood and we struggle to live it.

The nice, pink VW Bug (our life of forgiveness and grace) sits right next to where the taxi is parked. Shiny, beautiful, insurance and payments taken care of. She has no idea what she has. WE have no idea what we have.

The Love of God is often treated the same way by those of us who have experienced it. The young lady got into the convertible the day she got it and drove it all over town. She took her friends for a ride. Even went by her boyfriend's house, and pointed out that it was much newer than his big ol' 4x4.

She drove it back to her parents' house and simply parked it. Hasn't touched it since. We do this all the time with God's Love.

This Love extends to all of our circumstances. Not just the bad ones or the in-betweeners, but to our daily walk. Our moment-to-moment. We must learn to live in the Love we have from a Merciful, Amazing Father.

We are born to sin, but say no to it when we accept God's Love. When we decide to follow Christ. During this time, sin becomes a bad smell we avoid. We live in the Love of God and nothing but more of that Presence pleases us. Living in God's Love is existing in God's Love. It is meant to be a place of perpetual habitation. In God's eyes, we are never out of His Love. But we humans, we tend to lose that understanding from time to time. Often because we view His Love for us in the same way that we Love others. His Love has no such failures. Remember, His is perfect Love.

Scribbles...

NINETEEN

MANAGING GOD'S LOVE

Keeping The Cookie Jar Full

"But those that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

By now, we have learned a few particulars about how to go after God's Love. To see it, to chase it, to get it, and to live in it. To truly learn it is to be able to give it out. Which would seem the next step. After all, we already discussed that to fully have Love in our lives, we must be giving it away. We talked about the cookie jar. How it must have cookies in it before cookies can be given from it. Living in God's Love is a choice that must be made consciously. It doesn't just come to us. Managing God's Love inside of us is learning to keep the cookie jar filled. Or at least, always having a supply at hand.

Our actions in life will forever have consequences. They will always have some kind of results. Those results are what we have to live with in the end. They may not always be what we had planned. That's just life.

As Christians, we build a relationship with a Supernatural God. One who doesn't always force us to live with the results of our own mistakes. That's because of His Love. Sometimes, we *do* have to live with our own mistakes. That's because of His wisdom. And Love.

Recall the saying, "Life happens?" And indeed it does. The cookie jar analogy is perfect. As we trot through our time here on Earth, even the richest person will have trouble. Even the wisest will make mistakes. Even the most educated will appear foolish sometimes. And even the most righteous will stumble. The trick is to be ready.

Management (being ready) means to understand what we are dealing with and to use our experience to keep it going. As we come to understand God's Love via the previous reading, we learn to use that information to manage it. Not control it or try to run it but to manage it. Or keep "cookies" in the jar.

Being in charge of supplies is a big job. Dee is at the restaurant as early as four in the morning every Sunday. That's when supplies come in.

The truck driver and a couple of helpers are there to assist her in getting everything unloaded. It's a long process, sometimes lasting until 9 or 10 a.m. It's not just unloading them but getting them put where they belong.

A few hours' work, super early on Sunday, become a vital link to successfully managing one of the busiest restaurants in town.

What is so important about those early morning hours? Say you arrive Monday morning at 6:45 at the drive thru, get up to the menu to order your usual morning fare.

The voice on the other end crackles. "Sorry, we're out of that." Now, this is no way to start your Monday.

We, as Christians, can run into the same "logistical" problem when that cookie jar runs out. We need management. We need to be ready.

A man came to Jesus with a demon-possessed son. He explained that the disciples had tried to cast the demon out with no success. Jesus, being wise and merciful, cast the demon out. Afterwards He made a point to the disciples that belief and faith were a vital part of doing anything supernatural in the Kingdom of God. Then He added something. He said. "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:14-21)

Okay, so let's say for a moment the boys knew that this kind was stronger than what they had experienced before. Prior to attempting to cast it out. Were they prepared? Would they have known days before that they were going to face this?

In other words, the prayer and fasting part is something that should already be going on. That was Christ's point. We never know when we are going to face that situation, so it is necessary to be ready.

TWENTY

FAMILY IN GOD'S LOVE

Let's Be Friends

"A friend Loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity." Proverbs 17:17

We have talked about Family and Relationship and how important it is. Building relationships in God's Love is important enough to talk about it twice.

We build relationship with the people in the world so that we might show God's Love to them, thereby being a true agent of God. The side affect is that we may be given the chance to teach them about Jesus, and they may come to know Him.

As Christians, we also build relationship within the Kingdom. With others of like-mindedness. So we can grow from their teaching, leading, and Loving. So *they* can grow from *our* teaching, leading, and Loving.

The greatest example of God's Love was, is, and will always be what His Son did for us outside of Jerusalem that day, 2,000 years ago. That demonstration will never be topped. But think about the process that led up to that day.

God has spent every day since Creation building relationships. And that's how we known Him. Through relationship. It's one of the things that separates Christianity from other religions. We don't just worship God, we know Him personally.

We often forget this when we are in the world. And we've talked about how the world can negatively affect us. But we are commanded to take the Good News of His Love to the world. It makes sense that in order to be a Christian, which means "little Christ," that we should work in the same fashion as He did.

In Luke, Chapter 19, we read about Jesus' encounter with the man named Zacchaeus. The story goes along that as Jesus wandered and taught people, a short, wealthy man climbed a tree to see what all the hubbub was about.

Jesus took note of him up there and decided to go to the man's home for lunch. As they sat chatting around Zacchaeus' table, a relationship was built. The results were a man, who had used his position as a tax collector to rob from people, changed forever. So much so that he was willing to give all he had back to those he'd stolen from.

Regardless of how God works sovereignly (by His own power), we are to follow however He leads. To gain, manage, and use the Love of God, we must cooperate with God. Working based upon the choices we make outside of what He is calling us to can only result in a negative conclusion. Do as the disciples did, follow the Master.

Kris Valloton, tells of a trip on a plane he took. The Spirit nudged him concerning the man across the aisle. He was quite large. Muscular. He wore biker-type leather, his arms covered in tattoos.

He hesitate. God nudged him again. "Tell him he is a mama's boy." Realizing what God wanted him to say to the man, Kris refused. He reasoned with the Lord. "The man will split me in half."

Finally, Kris relented. He leaned a little bit towards him and began a conversation, quickly building rapport and a friendship.

Kris eventually explained. "God told me to tell you that you are a mama's boy." He looked at the big man and saw a tear slip from his eye.

The deep voice spoke with a crackle in it. "Yeah, I am. I miss my mama really bad." The results were that he was able to communicate the Love of God to the man who desperately needed it.

Build up relationships. Make friends. Become family. Both within the Body of Christ and outside of it. To become an effective agent of God's Love, we must become relational to both.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

DISTRIBUTING GOD'S LOVE

Love In Action

"Owe no man anything except to Love one another, for he who Loves has fulfilled the law." Romans 13:8

As we've read. "Love isn't Love until you give it away." This process of God's Love is a vital part of living in God's Love. Distributing God's Love is evidence. It is proof of who we are. It is proof of Who He is because of how we, His Children, show Him off.

A small town church began a ministry to homeless people and the general public. Anyone who was hungry. Once a week, they prepared a hot meal for anyone who would walk through the door. Slowly, they began to build a reputation of Love and openness. They fed many, many people over the course of years.

When they had completed serving meals, they had given out over 30,000 plates of food. It was quite an accomplishment for a church of less than 25 people. When asked how they managed to do it, "God provided." Not just the food and the funds, but the necessary Love to give and give.

God's Love is enough for us. In fact, it can be more than enough. The profile is simple: God's Love gets inside of us, and it begins to flow and ebb. It begins to bubble. To foam up. It fills us and causes us to want to tell the world. To show the world we have a relationship with Someone Who Loves the people unconditionally! That Love *should* begin to rise up inside of us. James said, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17) There should be something happening.

But Paul taught this basic principle in Ephesians 2:8-10, that we are saved by faith and that it is a gift from God. How do these verses reconcile?

While Paul points out that we are not saved by works in verse 9, he adds in verse 10 that we are created to do good works. So the message is to our wisdom and common sense. We cannot be saved by the things that we do for God or the Kingdom. But our actions are proof that we have been saved.

A teenager goes through the process and classes to get his driver's license. He becomes, by all standards, a licensed driver. But driving his car is the public proof of that fact.

We beg God to save us. The things we do from there, in His name, are the outward proof that He lives in us. Proven by the distribution of His Love. Because just being nice and sweet and kind is not the full measure of showing this Love.

"Love begins at home. And it is not how much we do... But how much Love we put into that action." -Anjeze Gonxhe Bojaxhiu (AKA, Mother Teresa)

One thing that truly spoke of Jesus this woman's life was not how she talked about Him. It wasn't how sweet and kind she was. It was not the famous and moving quotes that circulate the world over. It was the action she took to care for people. The action! The works. The way she distributed God's Love.

The actions put to God's Love as we learn to distribute it can change the world. The thousands and thousands that Mother Teresa touched because she desired to "show" God's Love more than just talk about it will be forever changed as the thought of what it looks like to receive from God through a person.

We can do this. We can learn to distribute God's Love. And the more we do for others in His name, the greater we will feel and understand the Love He has for us.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

THE LOVE CHAPTER

1 Corinthians 13

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not Love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” 1 Corinthians 13:1

1 Corinthians Chapter 13 is known as “The Love Chapter” because the author, Paul the Apostle, focuses on that particular subject. It is, as previously mentioned, likely the best description of what true Love is. And not just Love between people, but Love that is exuded through us, sourced from God.

In Chapter 12, Paul is talking about the different positions in the church. He talks about how there are great positions that many are called to. Then he says, “Now, eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet, I show you the most excellent way” as he closes out the chapter. Of all the most important parts a person can play in the church that he speaks of in chapter 12, he points to something even greater. That greater, “more excellent way” that is more important than being an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher, isn’t as mysterious as we might think. It’s just simply Love.

The degrees of gifting in God’s Kingdom are different for different people. But, regardless of whether we are standing behind the pulpit or sitting in the pew, God has a way of leveling the playing field. And Paul brings this out in Chapter 13. Love is the great equalizer. The “more excellent way.” He is saying that regardless of whatever position we maintain in the Body of Christ, we must Love. This teaching is for one and all. It’s not meant just for the congregant, but also for the leaders and the workers and the writers and the deacons... All of us!

Verse 1 says:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not Love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”

So, first, I may have the talent to persuade the world around me to do whatever I want them to do. Whether I want them to become a Christian or go the opposite direction and do evil.

In human history there have been a multitude of people that have used their ways of speech to create both wonderful moments and terrible atrocities. Adolf Hitler, who was responsible for the murder of millions, talked a nation into following him into the history books as a nation filled with hatred.

On the opposite end we see someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. who brought the greatest civil rights movement to life. He spoke words that are quoted by people around the world today, evoking strength, peace, and a will to not allow racism and hatred to live.

What’s the difference? One spoke life and one spoke death. And yet Paul reminds us that it doesn’t matter what we can achieve with what we say.

Outside of Love, what we say is just noise. Why did King have a lasting voice in the world? Because what he did, he did in Love. And while we know about the horrors committed by Hitler, no one quotes him. His words mean nothing except fear and anxiety. Proving the things we say mean nothing good unless they are said from a place of Love.

“I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional Love will have the final word in reality.” -Martin Luther King, Jr.

A mumbling statement that comes from Love can have more lasting, positive change than a great long, powerful speech that has hate at its roots. You cannot change the world for good unless you do so with the grand purpose of Love. And the great Source is always the One who created Love to begin with.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

LOVE VS. GIFTS

1 Corinthians 13

“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.” 1 Corinthians 13:2

It's hard to believe that someone can work in the realm of the Spirit and not have a foundation in Love. But Paul shows us that it's quite possible. That's because, in part, the Gifts given to us are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). Meaning that God gives a gift to a person and that person can use that gift (prophecy, healings, words of knowledge, etc) however they see fit and God does not take them away.

So even if we have a gift of understanding to such a degree that we grasp the true meaning of life and all that God has created, it means nothing. Even if our education and experiences go beyond any other person around us.

Even if we have enough faith to command mountains to get up and go somewhere else. Or can answer every question about the Bible. Can read the hearts and minds of any man. Doesn't matter.

Be the greatest preacher on the planet, doing things that the world simply stands in awe of? But the motivation is not Love...

Today men and women are still getting gifts. The prophetic and apostleship are both alive and well. God still heals bodies. Still raises the dead. These positions and gifts are very important and should never be glossed over. But without Love, then what?

In our world, much is said and pointed to concerning others that is entirely based upon what they can do. Nothing is more evident in this area than those in the professional athletics arena. Baseball, football, basketball, soccer, and so on. But Jesus died for athletes, too!

Hollywood is also 90% based upon ability and beauty. No one cares if there is real Love. And few ever truly Love those they are just trying to get something from. But God is changing that! He Loves Hollywood!

But that kind of thinking permeates all of our society. Business, education, jobs, etc. And, yes, the Church. No one pays attention to the person who cannot sing or produce something great that the world is waiting for. Much can be said about the Love of “what they can do or have”, but few words come in Love for those who fail. In fact, a whole industry has sprung up based upon the “comedy of failure”. True Love is when fame has rejected someone and another hugs, smiles and walks beside that rejected one. Long term.

While talent and ability is to be admired, it is nothing compared to true Love. Love that lifts the burdens and embraces the lepers. As Jesus did. It's easy to speak of Love, but true Love is seldom the inspiration behind much of our thoughts and plans.

When the publicity and adoration from the fan base disappears and nothing is left, Love sustains and nurtures. Whether it's someone who has dust covered Oscars on the mantle or worn-out knees from thousands of hours praying, everyone needs Love. In the end, that Love will always be a consistency with God. But the real question is will it be one from us, His creation? Can we see the Love that doesn't put someone of great talent, beauty or riches at the top of our list? Or charismatic preaching?

The Love of God for others inside of us will be something that effects eternity. Anything less will fade and become forgotten.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

SACRIFICE & LOVE

1 Corinthians 13

*“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 13:3*

The greatest sacrifice ever done was when Jesus gave His life on the cross. In fact, as we understand the Person of Jesus, He made the greatest sacrifice in history by choosing to come to Earth as a man. He then topped that sacrifice by going through with the plan and dying for people who choose to ignore and turn away from Him.

That example is what often drives us to do things for others. Often without being given the credit or being thanked. And, to be sure, that act is beautiful and part of who we are as Christians. Even as a human being.

Here’s a very difficult issue, however. Knowing what we are supposed to do (that sacrifice part) can drive us to do the act for the sake of doing the act. “I know this is how I am supposed to act.” Remember the saying that was very popular a few years ago, “What would Jesus do?”? We even learn from pop culture that there are actions we are supposed to do in order to present ourselves a “productive” member of society.

Actions like “paying it forward”. Maybe “taking one for the team”. Even “making the ultimate sacrifice” in dying for another. The struggle we might have is seeing how these are all great things to do for our fellow man. These acts of sacrifice are not really bad things.

However, we ask the same question as we have several times in our study: What is the motivation?

The above examples are likely to have pure reasons for their actions. But Paul points to actions that have seemingly great motivations behind them, but lack one true purpose: Love. Without Love we will always be spinning our wheels.

It’s like a person that builds a house with the purpose of gaining income. A defined difference between someone who builds houses to pay his bills and someone who is building their own home is one takes credit and pay for the work while the other has a passion for the achievement and takes “ownership”.

In fact, a keyword to all of this is ownership. When what we do is investment in something bigger or more important than the act alone, the whole picture changes. In fact, the affect of it all shifts to such a degree that we are often as affected by the results as much as those we are sacrificing for.

One of the key reasons that a football team reaches and wins the championship is because the players each begin to take ownership of theirs and each others’ actions on and off the field. The goal of a championship becomes a focus and each member of the team begins to have a central motive that push them.

In the same way, Love can become a driving force behind the way we think. Both for God and for those around us that He Loves so much!

When Love becomes the foundation for our effort, the investment/sacrifice becomes much easier. Not necessarily “effortless”, but the drain that it would normally be upon us becomes bearable. Much as Jesus experienced in the garden as the weight of what was ahead lay upon Him. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was coming.

When we “do” for the sake of the “do”, it is done outside of Love and the effort is in vain. To those that it is done for as much as for ourselves.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

LOVE'S DOES

1 Corinthians 13

"Love suffers long and is kind; Love does not envy; Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;" 1 Corinthians 13:4

Suffers Long

As a human being, we "deal" with stuff. And sometimes that stuff can be more than we can take. But there's a fine line between how we should and should not answer the stuff.

Someone steals your car. Do you smile and say, "Bless them, Jesus"? Nope. You call the police and get them arrested. You can bless them if you like.

Someone calls us a name for Loving and reflecting Jesus. How do we respond to that one? We may want to tell them something like, "Repent or you're going to hell." Even if that was true, it's certainly not the answer Jesus would give. In fact He told us to "turn the other cheek". (Matthew 5:39)

Notice it doesn't say "Love suffers long", then adds "and is kind" in the next sentence. That's because we are being taught to suffer long and remain kind. It's easy to be kind before the suffering long part happens.

"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'"
Luke 23:34

It's not a coincidence that we are taught to have compassion before and after. Jesus portrayed this action best of any person to have ever lived.

Not Envy

Many traits that are in great conflict with Christ are related to envy. Of these the worst is hate. When we covet others (neighbors, co-workers, family, friends...rich and famous) we develop a place in our hearts that disqualifies them for having something that we do not. Cars, money, houses, boyfriends/girlfriends, possessions of all sorts. Even worse, we can find ourselves in jealousy of better or happier lives.

In time the way we feel about these things changes. We see them as being less "qualified" to have these things. Maybe less deserving. It's not obvious, it creeps up on us. Then when life doesn't change, we begin to slowly hate them for having what we think we deserve.

Not Parade Itself

The word used in the original Greek that means to parade is "perpereuomai". It means to "boast or brag about". To "put oneself on display". Even "using lies to extol about one's self excessively". Or perhaps even a little bit? Essentially, telling others that we are big and important.

Nothing tells someone else they are un-Loved like pushing our own goodness upon them. As we seek to be more Loving and more like Christ, we must watch that we are not too boastful of ourselves and our accomplishments.

Not Puff Up

"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18

To be "puffed up" means to be prideful. Pride and arrogance go hand in hand. Many of the teachings of scripture explain the various things that keep us from a true relationship with God. And pride is a big one.

- James 4:6 – God opposes the proud

- Romans 1:28-32 – The proud are counted among the most ungodly sinners
- Proverbs 8:13 – The fear of God is to hate pride and arrogance
- 1 John 2:16 – The pride of life is not from the Father
- Mark 7:17-23 – Jesus lists pride among the evils that defile a man

Scribbles...

DAY TWENTY-SIX

LOVE DOES NOT

1 Corinthians 13

“does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;” 1 Corinthians 13:5-6

Behave Rudely

Rude behavior stems from a person who has gained a distorted image of themselves. Often this kind of person has never been faced with truth about how we should treat one another. It can be attributed to how a person was brought up. Until they are confronted with their actions, it can be a trait that carries well into adulthood and even old age.

Rudeness is a result of not realizing the value of someone. After all, the rudest person in the world may be very gentle and compassionate with those they are close with. That is why we are called to Love everyone. Which is truly the opposite of rude behavior.

Seek Its Own

A selfish person sees the world as an opportunity to gain. Every moment they live, they are garnering information on how they can get more money, more power, and greater position. Always looking for a way to advance.

As Christians, our call is to promote others. Like rudeness, selfish behavior is the complete opposite of who we are in Christ. Learning to do this (as Jesus did for us) will require genuine Love. And we know that that kind of Love is always found and grown at the Source.

Get Provoked

As we mentioned earlier, Jesus told us to turn the other cheek when someone attacks us. Which, we all know, can be pretty hard to do. A person that lives in God’s Love does not respond to the attack. We are inundated with the idea to respond to the ones that come after us. The theme of “revenge” has been the subject matter of a thousand hit movies.

Those who spend much time on social media will have someone say something that is wrong. Maybe it’s a direct attack on ourselves. Maybe on another. Or, God forbid, on our favorite politician! Love passes it by. Love recognizes that right or wrong, that person is the image of God and He Loves them as much as ourselves. Don’t allow the world to prove our Love is false.

Think Evil

This is not just in reference to thinking evil of someone. That is clearly not a Love attribute, but that of a person who is willing to let these things become part of who they are. Often when we think of evil thoughts, we imagine the schemes of a massive monster. We picture the Hitlers, the Stalins, the Khomeinis, and so on. These guys are true evil. Right?

In truth, yes these guys certainly epitomize evil. But we are taught to shun these evil *thoughts*, not just the acts of evil. If we think evil of another, we do not have the Love of God in us. How sad it would be if we excuse ourselves from thinking terrible things of others just because we do not act upon those ideas.

Rejoice In Iniquity

“They’ll get their own. Wait until they find themselves in hell.” Ever thought that? It’s not okay to just seek righteousness in our own lives. We are called to Love those who choose not to. And in the process, the loss that may happen to someone because they choose not to seek a righteous life should break our hearts. No matter how much “wrong” they have done.

We must recognize the characteristic of God in 2 Peter 3:9 that He desires all of man to come to Him. Without exception! There is never a place for Christians to be gleeful of the sin in others or the results there of.

However...

Of the “does not” list, Paul drops a short consideration at the end of this. Truth sets us free, truth changes everything, truth is the answer everyone is looking for, and the fundamental article that the world (Satan) seeks most to twist. A Christian always

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

LOVE

1 Corinthians 13

*“bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
1 Corinthians 13:7*

Bears All Things

Love will tolerate much. Jesus hung on a cross, bearing the sin of the world. A soldier may have to bear torture. A singer must bear criticism. An athlete, sore, painful muscles. It is the requirements of life. As Christians, we often must bear ridicule, alienation, disrespect, and sometimes, martyrdom. Jesus told us to take up the cross and bear it daily. (Luke 9:23) Meaning that our connection to God is a daily act. That the trials of life will require us to deal with both troubles and Christ on a day-to-day basis. Toughing out both good and bad as we mature.

He also told us in John 16:33 that we will have trials. No way around them. We will have to learn to bear the difficulties of life, or we will be destroyed. In Love, we fight to bear all things. This is who we are as the Children of the King.

Believes All Things

Love believes all things of God. The Love that resides in us from God causes us to believe His Word without doubt even when it doesn't fit into what we think it should.

It is hard for us to fathom someone living a literal 969 years, but it happened. (Genesis 5:27) Or a boat being filled with 2 of each animal. (Genesis 7:15-16) The feeding of the 5,000? (Matthew 14:13-21) Love that fills us as we pursue, accept, and live in God's Love will open our eyes to the truth and fully believe that His Word is true, cover to cover.

Hopes All Things

Hope is one of the greatest motivators that God has ever created. Much like Love, hope is something God made and set loose on Earth. And also like Love, it is spread by people.

But God's Love in us takes it just a bit further. We can find ourselves hoping for our enemies to fail. Love will do the opposite. It doesn't hope for them to do bad, but it hopes for them to succeed.

Endures All Things

What is the difference between “bearing all things” and “enduring all things?” Honestly, they are related. To bear all things is to put up with the circumstances we are in. To endure all things means to bear all things until the very end.

Love is enduring. Love lasts until the very last second. In Acts, Chapter 7, Stephen, a disciple, had gathered a large crowd of people. He began to tell them, from the beginning in the Old Testament, the story that led to Jesus as the Messiah. Onto how He was crucified and rose from the dead. This did not set well with many of the people listening, and they became angry.

The crowd began to pick up stones and to throw them at him until he fell, too weak and injured to stand. Eventually, he was stoned to death. But as the chapter closes out, the last words that Stephen, the first Christian martyr, uttered were, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Stephen understood this kind of Love. He endured to the end. He not only stayed true to Jesus and did not recount his faith, but he held to God's Love for those who were in the process of murdering him. That is Love.

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DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

LOVE NEVER FAILS

1 Corinthians 13

“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.”

1 Corinthians 13:8

One of the most difficult parts of life is to be without mistakes. In fact only One did that. Jesus never made a mistake. Hard to believe, but it is one of His greatest characteristics. Fortunately for us, we are not judged by our “perfection” but by His. Our goodness is not our own, but it is His.

Love is much the same way. We, as humans, cannot Love perfectly. Even though it is something we are called to grow into, we will not walk in perfection until we stand in Heaven. In the mean time, we are still told to have Love that never fails.

But what if this Love in this passage isn’t just about what we should have in our lives? What if this is a truth of the kind of Love that is Holy Spirit breathed and a part of what it means for Christ to be Christ and God to be God?

Jesus epitomizes Love, right? By now, we should understand that part.

So prophecies (even those that come from the Old Testament prophets) may not happen. Certainly as we might expect them to.

Languages often outlive the people who speak them. Historically speaking, anyway.

Knowledge is fleeting. We spend the first half of our lives learning things and the second half trying to remember what we learned in the first half. All that knowledge and wisdom gets us nowhere in the end.

We are given the privilege to see so much. To hear so much. To touch and smell and taste so much. To hold our babies and Love them as they grow into a child. Then teenager. Then an adult. Then a parent themselves. Life.

We have jobs and friends. We own homes and cars. Seeing the birds fly and the snow fall. God gives so much to us, He is a generous and thoughtful Creator.

What is the one underlying thing that holds this all so dear to us? It’s not a house or a car. It’s not the job. for sure. No, it’s the Love of God.

It’s possible that in our short life, for we are but a flower that grows and is withered by the heat of the sun, we will experience the greatest relationships with people. A perfect job. Great children and grandchildren. A life lived to the fullest and longest.

Less rain and more sunshine. Great joy and an incredible relationship with God. But in the end, what is it that truly held us together and made all that happened so wonderfully to happen?

You see, the attribute of Love that exists in God is not just a part of Who He is. John reminded us that God “IS LOVE”. Twice! Regardless of what powerful moment might happen to us or what great life we live; regardless of what is promised (in God’s Word or otherwise) to us; regardless of all that may or may not be; Love will outlive it all. Love will never fail because God is Love...and God never fails!

TWENTY-NINE

LOVE IS PERFECT

1 Corinthians 13

“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.” 1 Corinthians 13:9-10

As mentioned yesterday, Love is eternal. Like God (for it is God) it doesn't fade away. In the same way many aspects of our life WITH God have strong ripples of eternal consequences and concerns.

Jesus told us that whatever we bind here on Earth will be bound in Heaven, so part of our life now will have connections in the life to come. The prophetic giftings are far more important to the Church than we realize. Even so much more to us personally. The prophetic is the result of powerful connections to the supernatural of God.

If what God had in mind for us was what He had built in the Garden, then He fully intended us to have a great understanding of His presence. His will. Ultimately His Love. The prophetic is a branching out of that Love. No one who truly Loves another person will ever fail to have conversation with them and tell them things. It is no different with God. If He Loves us, why would He not speak to us?

In truth, He speaks to us always through His Word, the Holy Bible. It will always be the greatest voice of God. And anything from Him outside of scripture will never be in contrary to scripture. But it is not the only voice. He speaks to us in many, many ways.

In this amazing passage, Paul is teaching us that God is revealing through knowledge and through prophecy (supernatural communication from God) the understanding of God's Love. However, because of our fallen state of humanity, we are limited to just bits and pieces. Those bits and pieces grow in frequency and magnitude as we grow to know Him better. But if Paul himself said that we know only in part, then we will truly be limited.

Still our relationship with God here on Earth is much like walking into a pizza parlor and being overwhelmed by the smell that the baking creates. It makes us begin to immediately salivate and our hunger only grows in strength.

So regardless of our status in our connection to God, we are only going to be able to understand a small amount of who He really is.

But then, the waitress arrives with our dinner and the most unimaginable pizza is set before us. A perfect one.

God's Word tells us of a time coming that will change everything. The world as we know it will pass and we (those who have made Jesus their Savior) will be taken and shown the great grace and Love of God on a level we could not even truly imagine now. The imperfect will be done away and the perfect will come. Our sinful, frail bodies will be replaced by one that has no flaws.

Paul's description shows us that all the great understanding that we might have as a human being is still limited and short-sighted. We can have all the education (secular, Christian, or both) possible and it will not even compare to what we will instantly see and grasp the moment that Jesus takes us and puts us in those perfect states.

All the mysteries and questions we might have now will be resolved. Whether we will even care at the point is unknown.

Simply put, the true understanding of all who God is and all of what the consequences of His Love is, are filtered through the dim eyes of a feeble human spirit. One that may be growing, but still lacks the ability to remove that filter. Perfection that is forthcoming is the place where there are no longer any filters. We will see God for who He really is and, likely, fall upon our faces in worship for a few thousand years at the least.

THIRTY

LOVE MATURES

1 Corinthians 13

“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.”

1 Corinthians 13:11-12

As children there are certain ways that we interact with the world. If we sit and think, we can imagine the differences between someone growing up and that same person when they were a kid.

For instance, we played with toys and pretended as a child. As an adult, we grow out of the use of games and make believe. We learn to think and speak with maturity. The parts of being a child that hold us back from being older in thought we put aside and they lose their attraction to us. That is the normal part of growing up.

The same is demanded of us in our walk with God. However, growth in the spirit and growth in the body are not always parallel. The physical body and mind grow whether we like it or not. But growth in the spirit requires us to *choose*.

As we spoke about yesterday, prophecy is a part of the Kingdom and something that is supernatural. Many who do not grow in the spirit will not accept things like prophecy and other gifts that God gives us. It's because the spiritual “mind” is not ready for it. Like the mind of a child is not ready to grasp the intricacies of driving a car.

Paul is explaining that to understand God on greater levels, one must be able to reach those levels. We can spend our entire life seeking God in earnest and still be learning truths of His wonders on the day we take our last breath as much as the day we took our first. But in the process, we take steps forward. Many times the reason that a person hasn't grown in their relationship with God is because they have become comfortable where they are.

If you follow the life of an Olympic athlete, one of the most important characteristics of their life will be to imagine that they can do anything if they put their mind and body into action. As Christians, we cannot be complacent where we are with God. Pray without ceasing (seek Him always, be open to Him always), read the Bible every day, live in expectation that God Loves us and desires to take us farther.

Mirrors

When we get up in the morning, one of the first things most will see is the reflections of themselves in the bathroom mirror. What do you see? The flesh. We don't see our brain, but we know it's there. We don't see our beating hearts, but we know it's there. Blood vessels, lungs, liver, kidneys, and so on. We don't see them, but they are all there.

We don't see the spirit inside of us, but we know it's there, too! Our spirit is the supernatural part of us that God speaks to when He is leading and Loving us. We are limited by the flesh, but not by the spirit. In our communion with God, our spirit feels Him. Listens to Him. Knows Him.

As we grow in our relationship with God, as we mature in our understanding, as we grow in our spirit, we understand more about what the supernatural is and has for us. But as long as we are stuck in this fleshly body, we get to see only a little. Like when we look in the mirror, we know there is a brain there even if we cannot see it. In our spirit, we know there is more. But for now, we hear and feel more of the supernatural than we see. Growth slowly changes that so we do actually see more of Him physically.

When it is all done, when the time of our lives come to an end and our bodies are changed into perfection, we will see it all. Indeed, when we are changed to perfection, we will see God face to face as we could never imagine.

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DAY THIRTY-ONE

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

1 Corinthians 13

“And now abide faith, hope, Love, these three; but the greatest of these is Love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Love cannot be defined by simple words in a devotional. That is why there are so many books and films and studies on the subject. Love is the greatest subject and most powerful “thing” in the universe. Especially when we realize that God is Love.

Here’s a few reasons why Love is so powerful and important:

- We cannot live without it. One of the reasons there is such a thing as suicide.
- 90% of all stories have some form of Love as a central part of the story-line (just a guess).
- Every act of grace, mercy, joy, peace, etc., has Love as a motivating purpose.
- Love is used to describe more emotion than any single word.
- Love can be between people and other people, people and animals, people and any form of beauty, people and cars/trucks. Anything! People and pizza!
- Love isn’t just a characteristic of God. It is God. And we’re made in His image. Makes you think, huh?
- The Bible’s main purpose is to introduce mankind to Love.
- Love can be built between people over years. Or at first sight.
- Love can heal wounds that time has scarred so deep in the heart nothing outside of that life can be understood.
- Love can take the most addicted person from the gutters and put them in a place where they are the instrument of Love changing the lives of those who are worse off than they themselves.
- Love can take a people who have been taught their entire lives of the enemy and hatred upon such to a place where they become family.
- Love can bring a peace that has never existed into the hearts of the greatest criminal mind.
- Love can heal a neighborhood or a nation.
- Use the journal space to add more reasons. There must be a million!

Faith

Another invention of God. It has the power to change the most hardened heart and to create the greatest of inanimate objects. It cannot exist without Love and pales in comparison.

Hope

This gives strength to a person that is dying to fight through it and live a long, beautiful life. It can bring a kid raised on the streets into the CEO penthouse. It stands on the foundation of Love and is worthless without it.

The Bible is full of emotions and attitudes. They come in all sorts of explanations and descriptions. The word Love is in scripture around 600 times depending on the translation you use. Sometimes it’s translated “charity” or “peace”. Sometimes it doesn’t come in one single word.

Why is Love “the greatest of these”?

Thousands of years ago, God made two people. They were His close friends. He gave them everything they needed and Loved them immensely. They turned on Him and that set a precedence for all the following generations.

For years to come, He fought to take care of His people. They always turned against Him. The process of His relationship was complicated because of this great rebellion He constantly received from them. He had many champions that tried to bring His people to Him righteously. But the ending was always the same.

There was one way to permanently change this dynamic. Grace. But grace required something from Him that would cost Him on a scale no one would ever comprehend. However, it was foundational to the relationship with His people. So He did it.

Giving up the glory of Heaven, He walked on Earth. He put off His magnificence and stepped purposely into the flesh of a Man. His perfection and unscarred presence never failing, He lived among those He created.

Then, the “one way” came to Him. He faced death. He looked about Him at the faces of the people who scorned Him and hated Him once again. With every right to walk away, He chose to accept the fate set before Him and took the curse of the cross. He died.

Why is Love the greatest of these? Because Love is the only thing that could put the Creator of the Universe on a cross for mankind. Not faith. Not hope. Not any other reason. Just Love. Absolute, unstoppable, earth-shattering, mind-blowing, original Love.

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