

Week 29: A LOVE WORTH GIVING

Many people tell us to love. We know what God wants us to do: "This is what God commands . . . that we love each other" (1 John 3:23 ncv). But how can we? How can we be kind to the vow breakers? How can we be patient with people who have the tenderness of a porcupine? How can we forgive the moneygrubbers and backstabbers we meet, love, and marry? How can we love as God loves?

We want to. We long to. But how can we?

By following the 7:47 Principle: receive first, love second.

Let's carry this principle up the Mount Everest of love writings: 1 Corinthians 13. No words get to the heart of loving people like these verses. And no verses get to the heart of the chapter like verses 4 through 8: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Several years ago, someone challenged me to replace the word *love* in this passage with my name. I did and became a liar. "Max is patient, Max is kind. Max does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud . . ." That's enough! Those words are false. Max is not patient. Max is not kind. Ask my wife and kids. Max can be an out-and-out clod! That's my problem.

And for years, that was my problem with this paragraph. It set a standard I could not meet. No one can meet it! No one, that is, except Christ. Does this passage not describe the measureless love of God? "Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud. Jesus does not dishonor others, he is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, he keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Jesus never fails."

Jesus loves you. That's why he came. That's why he endured the distance between you. Love "always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:7). That's why he endures the resistance from you. That's why he went the final step of the Incarnation: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Why did Jesus do that? Only one answer: *love*. And the love of Christ "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7 csb).

Think about that for a moment. It's time to let his love cover all things in your life. All secrets. All hurts. All hours of evil, minutes of worry. Every promise broken, drug taken, penny stolen. Every cross word, cuss word, and harsh word. His love covers all things.

Let it. Discover, along with the psalmist, how he "loads me with love and mercy" (Psalm 103:4 ncv). Picture a giant dump truck full of love. There you are, behind it. God lifts the bed until the love starts to slide. Slowly at first, then down, down, down until you are hidden, buried, covered in his love. Let his love cover all things. Do it for his sake. To the glory of his name. Do it for your sake. For the peace of your heart. And do it for the sake of others—for the people in your life. Let his love fall on you so yours can fall on them.

Besides, the alternate is not appealing. Jesus once told a parable in which he described an unmerciful servant. Even though the servant had been forgiven a great debt by his master, he couldn't bring himself to

forgive a smaller debt owed to him by a fellow servant. When the master found out, he said, "You wicked servant. . . . Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"

Then Jesus said, "In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed" (Matthew 18:32-34).

Unforgiving servants always end up in prison. Prisons of anger, guilt, and depression. God doesn't have to put us in a jail; we create our own.

Oh, the gradual grasp of hatred. Its damage begins like a crack I once had in my windshield. Thanks to a speeding truck on a gravel road, my window was chipped. With time the nick became a crack and the crack became a winding tributary. Soon the windshield was a spiderweb of fragments.

I couldn't drive without thinking of the jerk who had driven too fast. Though I'd never seen him, I could describe him. He was a deadbeat who cheated on his wife, drove with a six-pack on the seat, and kept the television so loud the neighbors couldn't sleep. His carelessness blocked my vision. (Didn't do much for my view out the windshield either.)

Ever heard the expression "blind rage"? Hatred will sour your outlook and break your back. The load of bitterness is simply too heavy. Your knees will buckle under the strain and your heart will break beneath the weight. The mountain before you is steep enough without the heaviness of hatred on your back. The wisest choice—the *only* choice—is for you to drop the anger. You will never be called to give anyone more grace than God has already given you.

During World War I, a German soldier plunged into an out-of-the-way shell hole. There he found a wounded enemy. The fallen soldier was soaked with blood and only minutes from death. Touched by the plight of the man, the German soldier offered him water. Through this small kindness, a bond was developed. The dying man pointed to his shirt pocket; the German soldier took from it a wallet and removed some family pictures. He held them so the wounded man could gaze at his loved ones one final time. With bullets raging over them and war all around them, these two enemies were, but for a few moments, friends.

What happened in that shell hole? Did all evil suddenly cease? Were all the wrongs that had been committed made right?

No. What happened was simply this: two enemies saw each other as humans in need of help. This is forgiveness. Forgiveness begins by rising above the war, looking beyond the uniform, and choosing to see the other not as a foe or even as a friend, but simply as a fellow fighter longing to make it home safely.

So, rather than allowing 1 Corinthians 13 to remind you of a love you cannot produce, let it remind you of a love you cannot resist—God's love. Some of us are so thirsty for this type of love. Those who should have loved us didn't. Those who could have loved us didn't. We were left at the hospital. Left at the altar. Left with an empty bed. Left with a broken heart. Left with the question, "Does anybody love me?"

Listen to heaven's answer: God loves you. Personally. Powerfully. Passionately. Others have promised and failed. But God has promised and succeeded. He loves you with an unfailing love. And his love—if you will let it—can fill you and leave you with a love worth giving.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- Allow Jesus' love to cover all your secrets, hurts, hours of evil, and worries.
- Unforgiving servants end up in prisons of anger, guilt, and depression.
- Forgiveness begins by looking at the other person as a fellow fighter.
- God's love can fill you and leave you with a love worth giving.

MEMORY VERSE

Your memory verse for this unit is Ephesians 3:19. Take a few moments to review this verse, and then write it out by heart in the space below.

The Heart of Jesus



Jesus welcomed them with open arms. Sure, sometimes they clung too close to him. Sure, they often asked outlandish questions. But when the disciples tried to turn them away, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matthew 19:14). Jesus had time for children. He listened to them. He took their wonderings seriously. He gave great bear hugs. Kids couldn't understand why they had to share Jesus with their parents. They didn't care if the adults wanted to discuss other things. All they wanted was one more piggyback ride. Just one more story. Wide-eyed, energetic, trusting children—Jesus loves them, too!

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-8 AND 1 JOHN 4:19-21

1. How does Paul compare possessing love to possessing other gifts in the church such as tongues, prophecy, and service (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)?
2. What are some of the qualities of love that Paul describes (see verses 4-7)? What are some ways that you have seen these qualities of love demonstrated to you?
3. What does Paul say about the endurance of love as compared to other gifts in the church such as prophecies, tongues, and knowledge (see verse 8)?
4. Only Jesus can perfectly meet this standard of love—and he shows you how to love. What reason does John give as to why you can show love (see 1 John 4:19)?
5. Bitterness and resentment is a too-heavy load for anyone to bear through life. What else does John say about a person who “hates” others (see verse 20)?
6. God *requires* his children to let go of any unforgiveness toward others. How does John make it clear that this is not just a suggestion from the Lord (see verse 21)?
7. Is there any anger, bitterness, or resentment that you are holding against another person? If so, what steps will you take today to move toward forgiving that person?