

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS

"Love"

9/23/12

Verses from New Living Translation unless noted.



I am really glad you came this morning. We're in a teaching series about discipleship that is designed to equip you to participate in the world-wide mission of Jesus Christ.

Two thousand years ago Jesus commissioned those who were his true followers to go into all the world and take his message of love and forgiveness.

If you are here and you are a Christ follower, we have work to do—the most important, most significant and most rewarding job in the universe.

What would you say is the most popular verse in the Bible? John 3:16 is probably the most quoted and best known verse in all the Bible. It is the heart of the Good News that Jesus came to earth to tell us – that God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

You see, Christianity is not about religion. Christianity is about a relationship. If you ever hear someone talk about the Christian religion, it's often a telling indication that they really don't understand Christianity.

What do you think of when you hear the word "religion"?

Religions have rituals, rules, regulations, laws, do's and don't's. Now I know that people sometimes think that is what Christianity is. But it's not. Christianity is about the God of the universe that wants to have a love relationship with you; a Father/child relationship.

When you think about Islam, is the first word that comes to your mind "love"? How about Hinduism? Buddhism? Christianity is unique.

It's about a God of love who wants to restore a relationship with human beings broken by sin; to go out and find those who have lost their way, and help them find their way home.

Since the day you were born, God has been pursuing you, wooing you, chasing you; trying to convince you that he loves you and to win your affection.

I had the privilege of helping a man in this community some years ago, begin a relationship with Christ. We were driving through T.O., back from a meeting together and he asked me "I hear people talk about loving God. What's that all about?"

I think he could understand fearing God or reverencing God. But he didn't understand loving God. Why would you love God? My wife was that way as a young adult. Jackie grew up in a Christian home. She respected God but she didn't understand loving God.

What Jesus taught us about God that is so unique is that God is a loving heavenly Father. "God so loved the world that he sent his son."

Ephesians 2:4-5 "God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life."

How many of you would agree that our world is in crisis? It's in a relationship crisis. We experience crisis in our homes, between husbands and wives, between parents and children. We encounter relational crisis at work, with our boss, employees or fellow workers.

Students experience relational crisis at school with teachers, boyfriends and girlfriends, and other students. And maybe scariest of all are the crisis between nations and religions.

Our U S Ambassador and three other Americans were killed in Libya because of a film supposedly produced in America. Anti-American violence erupted in a dozen of more countries.

Of course the rioters haven't seen the film. In fact no one has. The Hollywood Reporter said, *Innocence of Muslims* is the most famous movie in the world, that no one has seen.

The Hollywood trade magazine suggests that it may not even exist beyond a "trailer" that showed up on YouTube.

The spiritual leader of radical Islam in Indonesia has urged his supporters to greater acts of violence in retribution against the producers of the film.

Of course the violence wouldn't actually be against the producers of the film but any innocent person they could find to hate.

France braced for violent backlash as a satirical weekly magazine publish cartoons some believed to be offensive.

A large group of Japan's biggest corporations (Sony, Toyota, and others) padlocked factories in China last Tuesday as violent anti-Japan protests supposedly sparked safety fears, and threatened economic ties worth more than \$300 billion a year.

The negative results of our world's relational conflicts are frightening. In spite of what is happening abroad, America itself is still one of the most violent countries in the world.

With all our education and affluence we still have more homicides than any other industrialized nation, and I believe a primary contributor is our inability to develop healthy relationships.

Teenagers with almost no home life and very few friends are shooting up their school campuses.

Serial killings as well as workplace violence is almost exclusively the work of relationally-challenged misfits, who have no one in their lives to give them balance and sanity.

Love relationships are not only necessary for happiness and success, they are critical to our own mental health and a sane society. When Jesus was asked, what is the greatest commandment, he said,

Mark 12:30-31 "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

Jesus was saying that a love relationship with God and with those around you are the most important things in life.

Have you ever wondered why God didn't just take you to heaven when he created you? Why did he put you on earth, first? You're here for sixty, eighty, maybe a hundred years.

Why didn't God just create us and take everybody to heaven? Why did he put us here on earth for eighty or so years?

The Bible says there are two very important things we must learn to do while we're here. We must learn to love God and learn to love other people. LIFE is one giant lesson in love.

Life is not about acquisition – how much I get. It's not about accomplishment – how much I do. It's not about production – how much I earn. It's not about all these other things some seem to think life's about.

All of that we're going to leave behind. You won't take your career to heaven. You're not taking your car to heaven. You're not taking your imported china to heaven. You're not taking your house to heaven. What you're taking is you. You are taking your character.

God put you on earth for eighty to a hundred years so you can learn to love. Life is all about learning how to love. Jesus says here the two most important things in life are learn to love God with all your heart and learn to love everybody else as well.

He says you get that, you've got life. If you don't get that, wrong answer. You just wasted your life. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1 John 4:8 (NIV)

"God is love"-- this is the Bible's simplest description of God. Love is the clearest manifestation of the character of God.

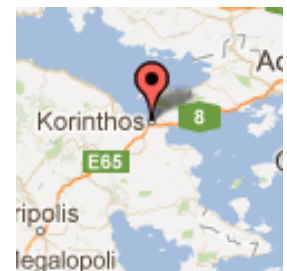
The Apostle Paul understood this. Paul, who penned nearly 1/3 of the NT, was writing to the church in Corinth explaining how they should relate to each other.

Today Corinth is a small town with little significance other than historical. But in NT times it was a thriving, prosperous, and strategically located city.



Greece is divided geographically into two parts. The southern part, the Peloponnesus, is attached to the northern by a very narrow, four-mile-wide isthmus.

At the south end of the isthmus, is Corinth, situated on a commanding plateau. In ancient times all north and south overland traffic, including that to and from Athens, had to pass through Corinth.



Paul during his 2nd missionary journey travels to Corinth and starts a church there. He stayed for a year and half, leaving it in the care of a couple named Priscilla and Aquila.

The church thrives there but not without experiencing some of the pagan influences from the culture around it. Paul, around 55 AD writes a letter to the church addressing some of the problems that have cropped up.

One of the more significant things was a lack of love. They were a gifted church, manifesting many spiritual gifts, but they were lacking in something crucial.

In chapter 13 Paul addressed the issue. The 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians may be, from a literary viewpoint, the greatest passage Paul ever penned. It has been called the hymn of love, a lyrical interpretation of the Sermon of the Mount; the Beatitudes set to music and it's all about love.

Let me read it to you.

1 Corinthians 13 "If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever."

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."

"Love will last forever, but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear. Now we know only a little, and even the gift of prophecy reveals little! But when the end comes, these special gifts will all disappear. It's like this: When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now. There are three things that will endure—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

14:1 - "Let love be your highest goal."

The Bible says – choose the "way of love"

1ST - LOVE MUST BE MY PRIORITY (vs. 1-3)

Without love:

A. ALL I SAY IS INEFFECTIVE (v.1)

One of my favorite musicals is, "My Fair Lady," with Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison. I know that pre-dates most of you but it won 8 Oscars.



At one point Eliza Doolittle is being courted by Freddy, who writes to her daily of his love for her. Eliza's response to his notes is to cry out in frustration:

*"Words! Words! I'm so sick of words!...
Don't talk of stars, burning above,
If you're in love, show me!
Don't talk of love lasting through time.
Make me no undying vow, Show me now!"*

Paul writes, v.1. "If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal."

You must understand a little of the context of Paul's statement to grasp its full meaning. A put-down I heard once said, "There are 3 kinds of people in the world. There are those who are tri-lingual, those who are by-lingual and then there are Americans."

That's supposed to be a slam because most Americans only speak one language. Truly cultured people speak more than one. The Bible here is not merely speaking of being bilingual.

In Acts 2, God did a great miracle. On the day that God's Holy Spirit was poured out on the church, minimally educated disciples went into the streets of Jerusalem speaking in languages they

had never learned. This special miraculous ability to speak in other languages was wonderful.

But, without the critical component of love, it wasn't worth a nickel. Even if you could speak the language of angels it would count for nothing, without love.

I've had married couples come in for counseling and tell me they're not communicating in their home. It's not for lack of words - there are plenty of words. They're yelling and fussing and spewing out lots of words.

No, the problem is not lack of words but lack of love. Love opens hearts and ears so words to be willingly received. Good communication requires love.

"My kids never do what I say. They don't mind. It's as if they're deaf!" Again - not a lack of words - but often, a lack of love.

"People respect and respond to loving words, but resent and reject unloving words."

Without love all that I say is ineffective, and

B. ALL THAT I KNOW IS INCOMPLETE (v.2)

Have you ever known someone who was really smart but no one ever wanted to be around them - they had few friends??

v.2 "If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything..." It would be nothing without love.

Prophecy is not just future telling, it's telling others about God's truth. In other words if I were a great preacher, if I were the Billy Graham of my day, it would be no good without love.

I've seen people who batter others with truth about God and get no response. They speak truth in a way that totally obscures God's love.

V.2 (cont.) "If I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything..."

You can be brilliant, a genius, memorize the encyclopedia - never get a wrong answer on Jeopardy, you'd still be a zero, worth nothing without love.

I can't tell you how many times I've had to learn the lesson when my wife is sharing some personal pain or difficulty that she's experiencing, I've tried to give her some wise answer.

She didn't want my solution. She wanted my love, just for me to listen empathetically.

Howard Hughes was one of the wealthiest men to ever live, undeniable brilliant, but died alone, friendless, a virtual hermit. He didn't even have anyone to leave his vast wealth to.

1 Corinthians 8:1 "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

I have a certain amount of Bible knowledge. Maybe a little more than the average; after all I have a master's degree in Biblical studies - I've studied Greek and Hebrew.

But I'm sure you've heard it said, "*People don't really care how much you know, till they know how much you care.*" Isn't that the truth??

On occasion I visit patients in the hospital. They don't seem to care how much Greek and Hebrew I know - they just appreciate that I came. The issue is not how much we know, but how much we love.

Without love - all that I say is ineffective - all that I know is incomplete and...

C. ALL THAT I BELIEVE IS INSUFFICIENT (v.2b)

v.2b "And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody."

Faith to move mountains? Wow! But let me clarify something. Some think that all it takes to be a Christian is to believe. That's not true. James 2:19 tells us, "Even the demons believe."

Satan knows that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he doesn't question that. What's important is, do you love Jesus? Do you love other people in Jesus' name? Christianity is a lifestyle of love.

So you can recite the books of the Bible. So you know hundreds of verses by heart. It doesn't even matter if you've been to seminary or pastor a church.

It's not a bunch of rituals. It's not memorized rote prayers. It's not empty religious observances. The Jewish religion in Jesus' day already had all that. What Jesus introduced was a new way to live life; a lifestyle of love.

(read with me) Galatians 5:6 "What is important, is faith expressing itself in love."

This is too important to let slide by you, people. Hopefully before we finished, this truth about love is going to begin to blink on and off in your mind like a neon sign.

Hopefully, for many of you love is going to become your D.L.P. - dominant life path = the way of love. All that I believe is insufficient if I don't have love.

D. ALL THAT I GIVE IS INSIGNIFICANT (v.3)

v.3a "If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body....but didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever."

You mean if I give a full tenth of everything I earn, that wouldn't be enough? What if I gave away everything I possessed? That still wouldn't be enough? That's right, if you give with the wrong motives, it doesn't count. And, the only right motive is love.

Some people give to get their name on a plaque, or to salve their guilty conscience. Parents give to their adult children to control them.

I knew a man that bought his wife everything she's ever wanted but she left him - he gave her things but not love. Some parents try to buy off their kids. They give them stuff but not love.

Love is spelled T-I-M-E. The most valuable thing that you have is not your money—it's YOU.

In this verse there is a reference to Christian martyrdom through burning at the stake which many early Christians experienced.

You can preach, sing in the choir, work in AWANA, teach Sunday School, volunteer in the nursery, become a missionary and die for your faith - but if it is done without love, it's worthless, zip, wasted.

Relationships are more important than rules; people more important than production. Opposite of secular world - there people don't count. It doesn't matter who gets hurt - it's production, measured by the bottom line - profit/dollars!

When God does an audit on your life He's not going to look at your accomplishments, He's going to evaluate your relationships. He going to test your love. Here's the equation: **LIFE - LOVE = ZERO**

2ND - LOVE MUST BE WHAT I PRACTICE (vs.4-7)

"And now I will show you the most excellent way... Let love be your highest goal." (1Cor. 12:31, 14:1)

Definition of love - We use the word all the time, in many different ways.

- Book stores full of love stories.
- Theaters full of movies about love.
- CD's and tapes are full of songs about love.

These verses give us 16 descriptive characteristics:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8: "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever..."

TWO REMINIDERS:

A. LOVE IS ACTION, NOT EMOTION.

It's something you do or don't do out of concern or consideration of another person.

Our food pantry every week is feeding approximately 100 families. Some of you work every week in our pantry and many of you contribute to our benevolent offering monthly – that's love in action. That's more than words. That's more than emotion – that's true Biblical love.

Last year our meals ministry provided 122 cooked meals for 43 different families. There are 60+ volunteers that stand ready to cook and deliver meals for families during times of hospitalization and tragedy. (if you want to be on the team, see Matt)

This is what counts!!! ACTION!!!

B. LOVE IS A DECISION AND A CHOICE- Gary Smalley has a film series and a book by that title.

It counters a contemporary myth about love, that you don't choose it, it chooses you. Love mystically zaps people when they

least expect it. "I couldn't help it. I just fell in love." Like falling in a ditch.

Feelings come and go - but that's not love. A greater expression of love is loving action toward someone when you don't feel like it. -Love is giving someone what they need, not what they deserve. Jesus said love your enemies.

Romans 5:8 "But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

Did we deserve it? No! That's why it so clearly expressed His love. -Wives, when you act lovingly toward your husband when he's been acting like a jerk - that's love. Fathers, when you act lovingly toward your children when your emotions tell you to be angry - that's love. It's a decision.

Do you know how I know that Jackie, my wife really loves me? I know by the loving way she responds to me when I'm irritating and irritable; when I'm inconsiderate and selfish; when I don't deserve to be loved. Of course, that's almost never. But when it does happen, she still responds in love.

I'm convinced that response by the husband and wife, is essential if any marriage is to survive. My encouragement for each of you today is this - Follow the most excellent way - the *way of love*. Make love your highest goal.

Because love must be our priority, love must be our practice - and finally because

3RD - LOVE MUST BE PERMANENT

vs. 7-8a "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever..."

Everybody knows those Energizer battery commercials they use to have - two underwater divers; you think it's a promo for a Jacques Cousteau nature documentary; suddenly the pink bunny

with his drum and snorkel comes marching into the picture. Love outlasts a Energizer battery.

Every other search for happiness will fail! Is your search for money? power? fame? influence? position? possessions? An Oscar? They will all fail. The *way of love* - that's eternal.

In heaven we won't need faith or hope. You won't need money, cars, houses, jobs. What we'll have is love.

Jesus said, "I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." John 13:34-35

The distinguishing mark of a Christian is not a fish on your car, a bumper sticker, a cross around your neck. It's loving relationships, with God and with others.

Many years ago I was a guy set up an appointment with me to sell me diamonds. He tried to convince me that diamond were the most valuable commodity on earth. I've seen ads in magazines and on television soliciting investment in gold coins, particularly now, when the economy is in the tank. What do you consider to be the most valuable commodity on earth?

PRAYER: As we close in prayer, you need to realize how much God loves you. Not because you're so wonderful; not because you're so lovable. No, God knows every bad thing about you, but he has chosen to love you anyway. He offers you forgiveness and eternal life. Do you want it? Then receive it.

The second most important thing in life is loving those around you. Not because they are so wonderful or so lovable, but simply because you choose to love them, like God has chosen to love you. Ask God to enable you to love like He does.

