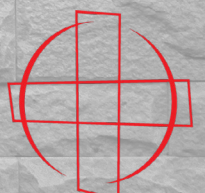


OVERCOME

FEBRUARY 2021

ADULT
CONNECT CLASS
CURRICULUM



DONALD J. WILLS
SENIOR PASTOR

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

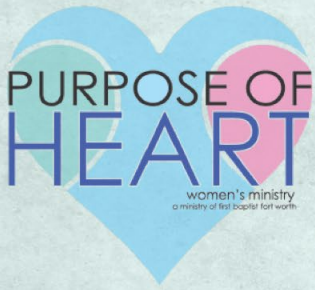
February is considered the “love” month. However, as overcomers we are called to love not just for a month, but 365 days of the year. Jesus said this about love, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” This is the starting point for overcoming by demonstrating the right kind of love. Remember love is an action!

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 13](#) that without “love” (charity) all knowledge and faith is worthless. He concludes by announcing, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Love is essential to being an overcomer.

-Blessings
Pastor Don





Women in the Word via Zoom

God is Able by Priscilla Shirer

***Wednesdays @ 1pm • Begins March 3rd
or Thursdays @ 7pm • Begins March 4th***

***For full details, go online to
women.fbcfw.org***



www.fbcfw.org

2 WAYS TO GET FIT!

**MONDAYS • 10-11AM
CHAIR EXERCISE CLASS**

**THURSDAYS • 9AM-NOON
GYM OPEN FOR WALKING**

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

**GET UP!
GET OUT!
GET FIT!**



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

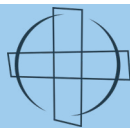
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FORT WORTH

WHY SHOULD I VOLUNTEER AT FBCFW?

As a believer, God has given you a spiritual gift to be used to serve Him and others. Many volunteers are needed each week to accomplish all God has placed before us as a church. Get involved to discover how you can be part of what God is doing at First Baptist Church of Fort Worth!

SOME OF THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS ARE:

- **SUNDAYS • PRESCHOOL PRESCHOOL MINISTRY (9:15-10:50AM)**
 - Teachers, Helpers, Secretaries, and Substitutes needed.
- **SUNDAYS • PRESCHOOL MINISTRY EXTENDED CARE SESSION (10:45AM-12:15PM)**
 - Serve only one Sunday a month, or sign-up to be on the substitute list.
- **FIRST WORSHIP TUESDAYS (10:30AM -NOON)**
 - Greeters
 - Ushers
 - Musicians
 - Media* (sound, lights, camera, or computer)
 - *Training is available, no experience is necessary.
- **WEDNESDAYS • CHILDREN'S LEADERS FOR VARIOUS AGE GROUPS (RESUME DATE TBA)**
 - Serve 6:15-8:15pm weekly (more info available soon)
- **FBCFW WORSHIP (CHOOSE TO SERVE YEAR-ROUND OR FOR SPECIAL EVENTS ONLY)**
 - Choir Members
 - Musicians for the Band or Orchestra
 - FIRSTMedia Team Members (No experience necessary, training provided)
 - Sound, lights, camera, or computer/slides



TO VIEW ALL MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES GO ONLINE TO
[OPPORTUNITIES.FBCFW.ORG](https://opportunities.fbcfw.org)

Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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February Lesson Plan

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February 7, 2021

An Overcomer
Recognizes True Love

[Deuteronomy 7:1-11](#)

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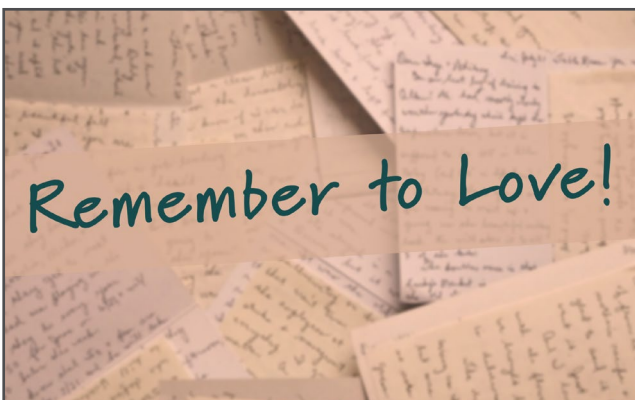


February 14, 2021

An Overcomer
Remains in Love

[John 15:9-17](#)

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February 21, 2021

An Overcomer
Remembers to Love

[Revelation 2:1-7](#)

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February 28, 2021

An Overcomer
Responds with Love

[1 Corinthians 13:1-8a](#)

February 7, 2021



*An Overcomer
Recognizes True Love
Deuteronomy 7:1-11*

Focal Verse:

“Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

Deuteronomy 7:9

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Introduce

Seven-year-old Martin ran home as quickly as he could after a long day at school filled with excitement. He had no time to waste. An important project had piqued his curiosity and captured his attention, so he needed to find the tools that would help him get started. As he ran to his room, he said hello to his mother without ever stopping. Immediately, he began tossing the clean clothes from his dresser drawer and pulling everything from his closet to find his oversized magnifying glass. As soon as he found the glass, he began his methodical search around the house for "it." He would leave no stone unturned until he found "it." He searched under his bed first. Then he began removing the pillows and looking inside the pillowcases, but nothing. He even looked inside the pockets of the fitted sheets, but still nothing. He continued to search every drawer, every shelf, and every nook and cranny--anywhere he could find an inch of space, but no luck.

He then expanded his search to other parts of the house, leaving a trail of debris as he frantically looked. He looked under all the furniture for "it," even pulling the cushions off the couch. In his haste, he never put anything back where it belonged because he was too intent in his search. It looked as if a tornado had struck the house that day, but so far the destruction had somehow escaped the attention of Martin's mother. Still having not found "it," Martin left to search his neighborhood and even re-trace his steps to school in hopes that his



classroom might still be unlocked. But, in the end, he couldn't find "it!" His magnifying glass didn't help; his thorough search proved fruitless. So, he returned home.

By this time, his mother had seen the mess, so when she heard the door close she called out to him: "Martin Adam Daniels!" Sullen and dejected, he quickly complied with his mother's instructions to come. As he approached, she didn't begin with a lecture or a command to clean the house; she wanted to first understand what led to his actions. She asked, "Why did you leave the house in disorder like this?" He responded, "I was trying to find it. But I couldn't." "Find what," she retorted? Reaching

Introduce

into his pocket, Martin pulled out a candy heart that he had received at his first-grade Valentine's party which said: "Find True Love." After putting the cushions back on the couch, they sat for a moment so his mother could explain.

"True love isn't something that we can grab with our hands or even see with our eyes. But we can recognize it and know what it is," she explained. She continued, "True love is how we treat someone. We show true love when we're willing to do anything in the world for another person and don't expect anything in return, when we make sacrifices for them, when we love them no matter what they do, when we tell them the truth when no one else will, and when we are there for them in the tough times as well as the good. True love means we want the best for them." She paused, "Jesus is the best example of that kind of love. And we should show that kind of love to Him and to others around us." Martin smiled and replied, "I get it Mom." At that point she demanded, "Now, go clean up all this mess." "But Mom . . .," Martin chirped. "True love also offers correction and punishment when needed," his mother reminded him. So, Martin agreeably stated, "Yes, ma'am. I love you."

The world is desperately searching to find true love, but without a biblical understanding and apart from Christ such love can never be found. The pages of Scripture are filled with true love because it emanates from God's character; it's the very essence of His being ([1 John 4:16](#)). Through Christ, we can see the visible expression of this type of love; He demonstrated it in the highest possible way. Even though we may focus on well-known passages in the New Testament that describe true love, the Old Testament has many great passages that both show God's love for us and teach us how we should love Him and others. Let us, therefore, recognize God's care for us which will lead us to reject compromise, remember our calling, and respect His commandments.

Key
Question

According to the Bible, how can we recognize true love when we see it?

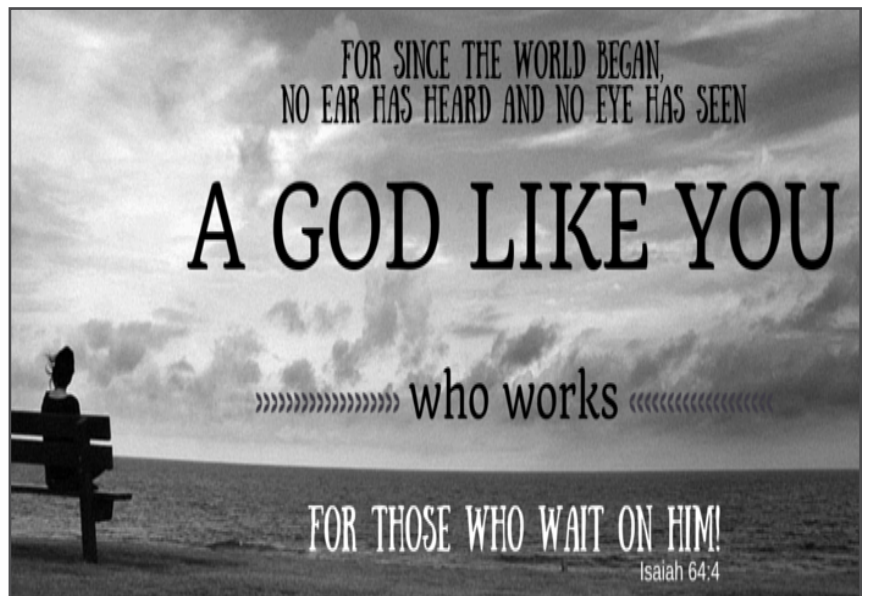
Deuteronomy 7:1-2

TRUE LOVE RECOGNIZES GOD'S CARE:

As Israel stands on the precipice of inheriting the land promised to Abraham over 400 years earlier, the Lord outlines the people's responsibilities in addition to reassuring them of the actions that He Himself will take in fulfilling His promises. God expects His people to teach future generations to know and follow His commandments ([Deut 6:1-3](#)) as well as remind them about how He freed them from slavery in Egypt and gave them this land which they now stand to inherit in full ([Deut 6:20-24](#)). But most important, Israel was to serve the Lord alone with complete devotion expressed through their faithfulness and obedience ([Deut 6:13-15, 17](#)). With this background, chapter 7 opens. Rather than focusing on more things that Israel must do, the Lord declares what He will do for Israel! In the first two verses, three verbs describe God's actions directed benevolently and graciously toward Israel: **God brings, has cast out, and delivers**. Although Israel must obediently respond and faithfully join God in His work, the Lord Himself does the work and ensures that it will succeed!

First, **the Lord God** has brought them **into the land which** they now **go to possess** (v. 11). On her own, Israel could have never achieved such an extraordinary feat. Apart from God, Israel would have remained enslaved in Egypt. Even if they could have somehow escaped from the land of Goshen, they would have not been able to cross the Red Sea and would have suffered catastrophic defeat at the hands of the world's most powerful army at the time without the Lord's supernatural intervention. In the remote wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, they would have died of thirst and starvation if God had not provided water from barren rocks and manna from heaven. The people would not have prevailed

against nations like the Amalekites who had far superior weapons and resources as well as the advantage of being on their home turf unless God stepped in to lead them into



Instruct

battle and fight for them! In fact, verse 1 notes that God was the source of their victory over **seven nations greater and mightier than** they.

Second, God will **cast out many nations before** them in **the land** which they will now **possess**. Interestingly, the NKJV translates the verb as a present perfect, **has cast out**, which emphasizes a completed action which has continuing results. Technically, the Hebrew construction envisions the future aspect of the verb whereby as Israel enters **the land** God *will* drive out the inhabitants. Nevertheless, the translation **has cast out** captures the certainty of God's promise. It's as good as done! If God has promised to drive out the inhabitants from the land, then victory is already guaranteed. Because God never fails, we can trust in Him and have confidence that we too will succeed when we follow His plan. Problems arise, however, and failure occurs when we try to do things our way and take matters into our own hands. Israel, like many of us, had to learn this the hard way. We can only overcome when we surrender our lives into His care and submit ourselves to His plan.

How have you seen the guarantee (certainty) of God's promises in your life when you submitted to His plan?

Question
1

Third, God will deliver these **seven nations over to** them, so that they **shall conquer** and **utterly destroy them** (v. 2). At this point, the Lord directly involves Israel in His plan. God works, but Israel must respond. This doesn't mean that He has turned Israel loose on her own. On the contrary, He is still leading her into battle and fighting right beside her to accomplish His promise! In fact, when Israel becomes overconfident and acts on her own as she does at the battle of Ai, she experiences a humiliating and devastating defeat ([Josh 7](#)). God had not abandoned her. The people had become prideful and abandoned Him! They acted on their own, trusting in their own strength and power. Out of His grace and mercy, God uses us and equips us to carry out His plan. He supplies everything we need to participate in His plan; He works through us. Therefore, we must fully rely upon Him, putting aside any pride or arrogance and never supposing that we have accomplished anything on our own. Rather, God has accomplished all things through us!

Now, God gives Israel explicit instructions about how she should participate in conquering **the land** which He has given them. He commands them to **make no**

covenant with these nations nor show mercy to them (v. 2). At first glance, this sounds calloused and cruel on God's part to use Israel to annihilate **nations** currently residing in **the land**. It appears that He hasn't given them a chance to repent and enjoy a relationship with Him in the same way He did Israel. Such a view, however, completely misunderstands the Old Testament and fails to read it critically to understand how God truly works. We must be ready to give a reasonable defense from Scripture when people wrongly attempt to claim that God has sanctioned genocide or try to picture Him as arbitrary in extending His love and **mercy** to some while being vindictive and unmerciful toward others.

When we read Scripture as a whole, we see that God loves all His creation and extends **mercy** to everyone who will accept it ([Psalm 145:9](#)). Because He is holy and just, He

must punish sin by death as He said He would from the moment He created the first man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden ([Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12](#)). Each person from that point until now is responsible for his or her own actions, but God has provided a way through His Son,



the Messiah, for the whole world to attain salvation and receive eternal life ([John 3:16](#)). As both Savior and Judge, God extends this salvation to all if only they would repent of their sins and turn to Him ([Joel 2:32; Rom 10:13](#)).

Every person and every nation had this same opportunity to repent in the Old Testament—just like in the New. In fact, we have clear examples of God's **mercy** being extended to all people! At times, we see people outside of Israel repent and turn to the Lord, such as Rahab and her family who resided in Jericho ([Josh 2; Matt 1:5](#)) and the Ninevites to whom Jonah preached a message of destruction ([Jonah 3:5-10](#)). In addition, the entire book of Obadiah condemns the people of Edom for their sin and calls them to repentance. Others, however, heard this same message and chose to continue in their sin which ushered in God's wrath and judgment. Consequently, we see this same message preached to both the generation of the flood as well as to the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, but they refused and chose to endure God's judgment ([2 Peter 2:5](#)). We also see Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, repeatedly warned to cease in his arrogance and submit to the Lord lest judgment fall upon him—

and it did indeed because he continued to defy the Lord ([Dan 4:28-37](#)).

We can rest assured that God called these **seven nations** here in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 to repentance and gave them repeated chances to respond like He had all the other nations throughout the Old Testament. But ultimately, like the other examples listed above, they refused and chose to reject the Lord. At some point, people will harden



their hearts against the Lord, He will withdraw His mercy from them, and judgment will come ([Rom 1:24-26](#); [Heb 9:27](#)). God determines that time, but always gives us ample time to respond ([2 Peter 3:9](#))! As Israel entered this land, the time of judgment had come for these **seven nations**—not because God didn't love or care for them, not because God is fickle or arbitrary, and not

because God didn't give them repeated chances, but because the people of these **nations** chose not to receive the love, grace, and **mercy** He had extended to them. When we truly search the pages of Scripture, we will discover how much the Lord loves and cares for His creation. In His love, God provides a way for His people to participate in His plan and experience victory through the promises that He has actively sought to bring to fruition. He has given all creation this chance to join together as His people and become part of His family. But this requires that all acknowledge their sin, turn from it, and surrender to Him. Love doesn't ignore and overlook the problem of sin. That's not loving in the least since it leads directly to death! Love, however, extends forgiveness and makes a way for reconciliation to occur. It has compelled God to act on our behalf and provide a way for us to overcome death, attain life, and enjoy the benefits of His mercy through the death and resurrection of His Son. But this requires us to choose to follow His plan and participate in the way that He has outlined in His Word!

How has God equipped and involved you in His plan? How faithful are you in participating in the plan He has given us through Scripture?

Question
2

Deuteronomy 7:3-5

TRUE LOVE REJECTS COMPROMISE:

In verse 3, the Lord continues His specific directives about how Israel must keep themselves pure in their service to him and reject compromise. He commands them **not to make marriages with** the citizens of these nations by giving their **daughter to their son** or taking **their daughter for their son**. God explains that such arrangements will lead to compromise whereby the godless children of these nations will turn their sons away from following Him to serve other gods (v. 4). The New Testament shares this same warning: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness” ([2 Cor 6:14](#))?

Through this directive, God warns us that having a close, intimate relationship with unbelievers can lead us to compromise our values and corrupt our morals. The world blurs God’s clear holy standards by proposing alternatives they use to justify their actions to make them seem less sinful. They do this by comparing themselves to other people. Imperfection always leads to more imperfection and never produces goodness. We can only comprehend how imperfect we are when we examine ourselves in light of a perfect standard! When we have intimate relationships with unbelievers, we can very easily lose sight of that perfect standard—Christ and His Word—because we have surrounded ourselves with people who don’t seek His perfection at all.

Certainly, this passage concentrates on the danger of marrying an unbeliever because this relationship is the most intimate that God has created. However, this principle extends to other areas beside marriage. Friendships and business partnerships can lead to compromise as well when we link ourselves closely with the world! This is why the Lord instructs Israel to make no covenant with these nations. This doesn’t mean that we must isolate ourselves or that we can’t and shouldn’t have meaningful and impactful



relationships with unbelievers because we need to point them to Christ. How else will they hear and know about Christ unless we tell them and live a transformed life before them? However, we shouldn't have an intimate relationship with them which will lead to compromise in the end!

This principle is particularly important to understand in marriage where two individuals become one flesh and share everything in common in the most intimate way. For those who are single and looking for a spouse to share life with, we should never date an unbeliever let alone contemplate marriage. Don't even waste your time! The first question we should ask before considering dating someone or even going on a date is to hear their testimony and observe if and how they serve the Lord. Sharing common interests and getting to know a person is important, but this is trivial and even useless if they don't have a relationship with Christ. If there is no evidence that they have a relationship with Christ, use it as an opportunity to witness and point them to Him. But don't date or marry them! Never at any time should we enter a relationship thinking that we can change the other person or that God wants you to marry them to lead them to Christ. It doesn't work that way! In some cases, a believer who marries an unbeliever may happen to lead his or her spouse to Christ. But it's not God's plan or will for a believer and unbeliever to marry. It contradicts His Word and we shouldn't do it!

If it offends a potential date to be asked upfront about their relationship with Christ, how should you respond? Why is it not a good idea to continue pursuing an intimate relationship with them?

Question
3

In any relationship, the more we associate and hang out with unbelievers the easier it becomes for us to adopt their perspective, share their outlook on life, and participate in the same activities. If we're honest, even on our own we have difficulty in overcoming temptation let alone when we link our lives with people constantly living in sin. For those who have children, you undoubtedly talk to them about the dangers of peer pressure, the importance of selecting the right friends, and how even associating with the wrong crowd can give the appearance of participating in the same things. If you don't talk about these things with your children, you should. And you should know their friends and their families! Nonetheless, this same principle applies to us as adults. When we surround ourselves and link ourselves with individuals in sin, it will have a

negative impact on our lives!

How can linking our lives with unbelievers in close relationships lead to compromise?

Question
4

Moreover, God commands Israel to rid the land of anything that could distract them in their worship of Him. They must **destroy their altars, break down their sacred pillars, cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire** (v. 5). We should never place ourselves intentionally in tempting situations. We should remove anything that could cause us to stumble. It is unwise to believe that we can surround ourselves with things that can tempt us and maintain our focus on the Lord. God can deliver us from any source of temptation, but we should never intentionally and repeatedly place ourselves in those situations because our chances of failure increase astronomically.

As a diabetic, I exercise caution in what I purchase at the grocery store. If I filled my cabinets with sodas, sugary treats, and other unhealthy items, I know that they would distract me from the diet which would help me to control my glucose level. For example, if I had a freezer full of ice cream, I would eat it with impunity. I would eat it after a big meal and I still wouldn't be able to control the portion size. At first, I got rid of everything in my house that I knew I shouldn't eat and now I don't purchase the things that will tempt me and keep them on hand!

Yet, why do we think that we can surround ourselves with items that can lead to idolatry and remain faithful and focused on Christ? Commonsense tells us that these things will distract us in our worship and service, so we need to get rid of them. Whatever supersedes the priority and value of our relationship with the Lord has become an idol. If we can, we need to remove it from our lives. If we can't—like intangible objects and ideas such as our families and careers—we must set boundaries



Instruct

and seek relationships with people who will help us remain accountable!

What distracts you or has the potential to distract you in your relationship with the Lord? How should you rid yourself or set boundaries so this doesn't happen?

Question
5

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

TRUE LOVE REMEMBERS THEIR CALLING:

These next three verses show what true **love** looks like on God's part and on Israel's part—and by extension how it should look on our part. God remembers His commitment to them because His holiness and **love** motivate Him to **keep** His promises (v. 8). **Because the Lord loves** Israel, He has kept **the oath which He swore** to their **fathers** and has **redeemed** them **from bondage** at **the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt**. God's **love** is faithful and pure. He never becomes distracted in His care for us and nothing can ever cause Him to stop loving us ([Rom 8:38-39](#)). In an even greater way than Israel with **Egypt**, God remembered His promise to redeem us from sin through Christ. Even when we were unfaithful to Him, God remained faithful to us and to His promises ([2 Tim 2:13](#)).

Just as God's **love** has motivated Him to remember His commitment to us, our **love** for Him should motivate us to remember our calling and commitment in Him. The reason



Israel should separate themselves from the world and nations around them is that God **has chosen them as a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth** (v. 6). The emphasis here resides on how He has chosen them to be **holy** which receives priority by being placed at the first of the verse! As in the New Testament, God's choice is not

an arbitrary selection to salvation. He hasn't chosen some to salvation and eternal life while sentencing others to condemnation and death. On the contrary, God has chosen

those who have a relationship with Him to be **holy**! By their own volition, the people must choose to align themselves with this calling of the Lord to represent Him as His people.

How do you live out your calling to be holy in the Lord? How is it visible to the world around you?

Question
6

God's call is always one of mercy and grace and never based on merit ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). Thus, the text makes it clear that God did not choose Israel based on their merits. For this reason, it reiterates that **the Lord did not set His love on them or choose them because they were more in number than any other people** (v. 7). They **were**, in fact, **the least of all peoples!** Most of us have probably been in a position in which we were to be selected for something. In childhood games, for instance, selections typically center on size, strength, and ability. None of those outward qualities matter most to God. He examines the heart! What matters most is our obedience and **love** directed toward Him which compels us to be **holy** and follow His commandments ([John 14:15](#)).

How do you remind yourself each day of God's calling on your life?

Question
7

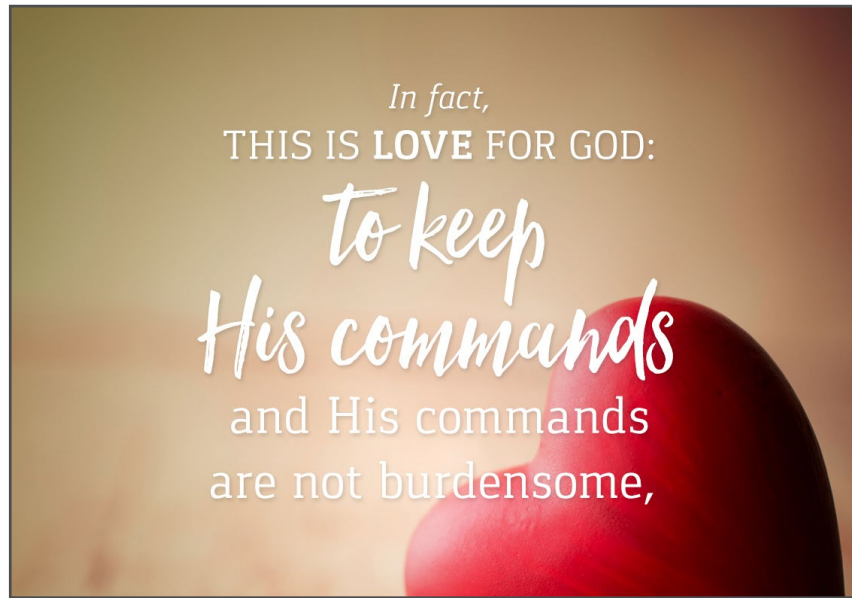
Deuteronomy 7:9-11

TRUE LOVE RESPECTS GOD'S COMMANDMENTS:

All the instruction to this point in these verses points to one thing: to **know the Lord God** (v. 9). The verb **know** doesn't focus on cognitive knowledge alone; it points to a personal relationship. Through a personal relationship with God the Father through Christ, we can **know** two things about Him: 1) **He is** the only **God** and 2) He is **faithful** as evidenced by how He **keeps** His **covenant** and extends **mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commands**. We can only truly **know** these things about God and His character when we have a relationship with Him. Today, we often say that we **know** someone when we only **know about** them. However, knowing a few facts about a person doesn't constitute the intimate knowledge described in this passage.

Our relationship with the Lord and our personal knowledge of His **love** for us should motivate us to respond in faithful obedience to His commands (v. 11). However, we don't **observe** His **commandment** because we get something in return or because

it merely helps us to escape wrath and judgment for sin. We **observe** or follow them



because we **love** Him and want to honor Him. For this reason, His commands are not burdensome, overwhelming, unfair, or a hinderance ([1 John 5:3](#)). They are a joy! Consequently, we take delight in following His commands because we **love** Him and know that His plan is the best for us; He always desires the best possible life for us, so it behooves us to follow

that plan. The boundaries He has established for us lead to life and never detract from our joy in life. They are not imposed upon us unjustly or harshly, rather they are given benevolently and graciously so we can live life to the fullest when we observe them!

How are God's commandments a gift of grace? Why should we view them neither legalistically or as a burden, but strive to observe them faithfully?

Question
8

As we conclude this lesson, let us reflect upon all the ways God has demonstrated His care for us. He loves us so much that He provided a way to have a relationship with us through His only Son. Because of the love He has lavished upon us, we must remember how He has chosen us to be holy and represent Him to the world. As His holy people, we must reject compromise and observe all that He has commanded us. True love compelled God to become flesh to save us; true love ought to compel us to serve Him faithfully in every area of our lives.

Maybe we're like seven-year-old Martin and still searching for what true love is. The world, however, cannot give us that picture of love because it doesn't truly understand it. Like Martin, people search everywhere and cannot find true love because they have overlooked the only source that actually demonstrates this type of love visibly: the Word of God! The written Word, or Scripture, describes true love on every page. We can know what it means to love because we have a God who is love and first loved us unconditionally. Love also came alive, so to speak, in the Word who made Himself flesh—Jesus. Jesus, as God who became man, visibly demonstrates love in a tangible way through His death upon the cross for every one of us! No greater evidence of His love and care can exist than this sacrifice!

I pray that you have come to know this love through a personal relationship with Him. This relationship transforms us from a sinful people into a holy people who worship and serve the Lord alone. As His holy people, let us overcome the world through this radical love practiced in a way that fulfills Scripture. To do so, we must remember that being friends with the world makes us enemies with the Lord (Jas 4:4). Because we love the Lord, let us rid ourselves of worldly influences and practice righteousness in everything we do.

Incorporate

How has God shown His care to you? How has He shown His care through this church?

In what ways does the world pressure us to compromise? How can we effectively resist those calls to compromise? As a church, how can we equip and encourage each other to avoid such compromise?

Why should we not view God's commands as merely a set of rules, but a measure of our love? How will love motivate us to move beyond legalism to Spirit-led obedience and faithfulness to God's whole Word?

Journal: Document God's Work

February 14, 2021



*An Overcomer
Remains in Love*
John 15:9-17

Focal Verse:

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love."

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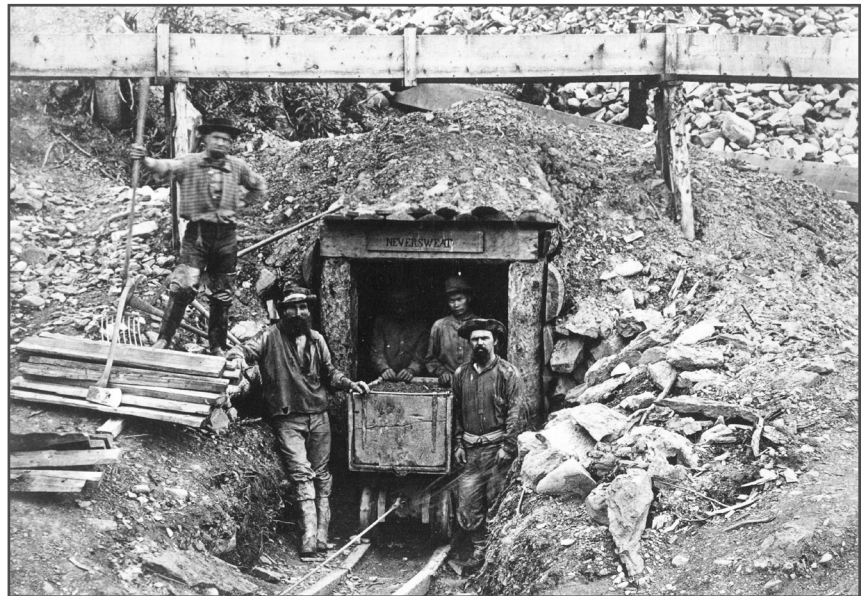
John 15:9

Introduce

In 1858, many hopeful prospectors and novice miners raced to the east-facing slopes of the Virginia Mountain Range in what would eventually become the state of Nevada. A group of four close friends had left their families and homes in the east to stake their claim in these remote and isolated mountains in hopes of discovering a rich deposit of silver ore. Upon arriving, they established a camp which would keep them safe from the mountain's predators and provide a place to sleep out of the harsh and ever-changing weather when they weren't working. Once established, they immediately got to work on constructing the mine. Two years quickly passed and the four friends had made quite a bit of progress burrowing deep into the earth with pick axes and hand carts since dynamite had not yet been invented. Nonetheless, they had cleared a tunnel of approximately 900 yards.

One day, one of the friends had to travel to the newly founded Virginia City to pick up supplies for the rest. Upon returning to the claim, the ground began to shake—an

earthquake! From the entrance to the mine, the friend saw a large plume of dust emerge, so he sprang into action getting the supplies he needed to aid his possibly trapped friends. In the heat of the moment, he had no idea if the tunnel had collapsed and whether his friends were hurt or even worse—killed. He lit the candle on his miner's hat and



entered the shaft of the mine. But as he progressed, he began coughing and could barely breathe and eventually his lamp went out because the tunnel had become filled with noxious gas. Yet, he had to somehow find a way to rescue his friends more than half-a-mile back in the mine.

Since the friend couldn't see because there wasn't enough oxygen to sustain a light, he had to find a way to return to the mine's entrance no matter how far he had to go inside. So, after returning to the camp, he began tearing strips of any type of fabric he could find and linking it like a rope which he would tie to the main beam at the entrance and then connect to his leg so he could follow it back to safety. But then there

Introduce

was the even greater difficulty of the lack of oxygen. How could he overcome that challenge? He couldn't simply hold his breath the whole time! He returned to Virginia City to get advice and gather the supplies that he might need. One shop had a small reed-like tube that he could link together through which he could breathe by leaving one end exposed to the good air outside the mine.

People in Virginia City became curious and gathered at the claim to learn of the outcome. They watched this friend risk his own life to save those of his friends in the mine, but they themselves never offered to help. Within hours, the friend had traveled 200 yards into the mine where he discovered the collapse. He didn't know how big it was or how long it would take him to clear it. But he persisted. For five days, he cleared the debris to make a hole large enough to crawl through. By that time, all the town had lost interest and returned to their normal routines. Only a journalist from the local newspaper stopped by occasionally to check on the progress. He was no encouragement, however; he often quipped how hopeless the situation was and how the friend should stop risking his own life. Still, the friend continued.

Finally, he had broken through the rock! All three of his friends were huddled in a corner of the shaft—alive. The collapse had forced the bad air forward and kept a pocket of clean air around them so they could breathe. Slowly, they crawled through the tunnel, stopping briefly so they could share the breathing apparatus and get the oxygen they needed. With the news of the rescue, the town once again gathered and the journalist promptly began an interview. "Why did you continue to risk your life in what seemed a hopeless situation in which you were not assured of a happy ending," the journalist began? The friend answered, "Because I love my friends and I'm devoted to them. You see, many years ago I made a commitment to give everything, even to the point of my very own life, for the sake of my friends no matter the situation."

The town had never known such heroism displayed through such great commitment and consistency. They marveled because the depth of such love is so rare to find even among friends and family. In fact, the world has only seen this type of extraordinary love once nearly 2000 years ago. Jesus made a commitment to the world even before He created it. He would lay down His own life so that we might have life despite our sinfulness. He came to earth ignoring the cost to rescue us. What an extraordinary love this is! Yet, Jesus didn't just die for His "friends." He died for the whole world—those who despise Him, those who mock Him, those who reject Him, and those who

deny Him. He died for everyone and He extends His love and forgiveness to all! If we have a relationship with Christ, we need to remain connected, contented, committed, and consistent in His love. If we don't have a relationship with Christ, we need to be connected to His love today through repentance and forgiveness so we can experience the vitality and joy of life!

Key
Question

What does it mean to abide in the love of Christ?

Instruct

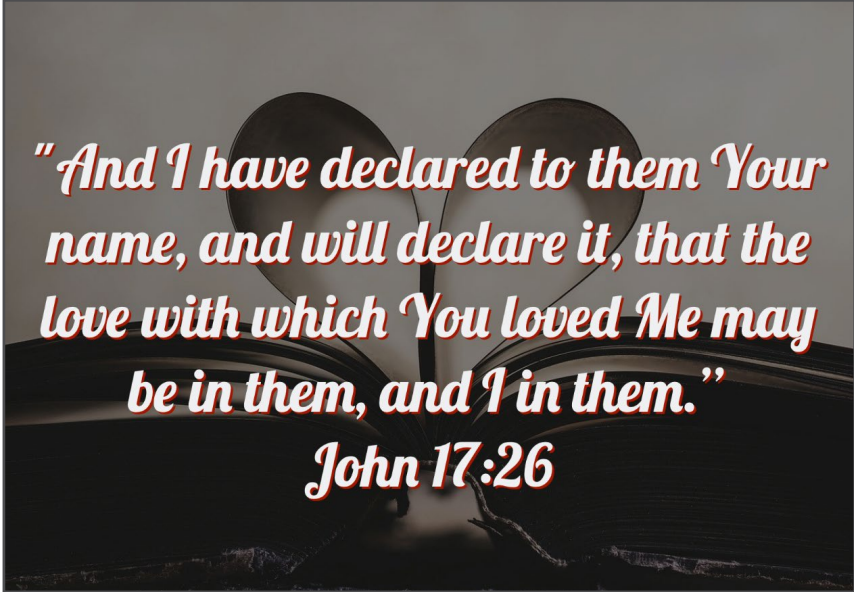
John 15:9-10

REMAIN CONNECTED:

Addressing His disciples the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prepares them for the challenges that lie ahead by cautioning them to remain connected to Him no matter what may happen. He uses a familiar illustration of how "the branch" must be connected to "the vine" at all times in order to have life and bear fruit ([John 15:1-8](#)).

From our own experience, we all know that a branch severed from the main vine or trunk cannot obtain life-sustaining nutrients and it will eventually wither and die ([John 15:6](#)). The same is true with Jesus who presents Himself as that "true vine" and His disciples as "the branches" ([John 15:5](#)). Apart from Christ, we have no life and we can bear no fruit. Through Christ, we have a fruitful and productive life which produces good works in accordance with His holy character that glorify the Father (v. 8).

We also experience the **love** of **the Father** and the Son through this connection with Him. This leads Jesus to declare to His disciples that He has **loved** them just as **the Father** has **loved** Him (v. 9). So, He reminds them to remain connected or **abide in His love**. An abiding **love** motivates everything we do! God Himself provides the supreme



"And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17:26

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example of that kind of **love**. For this reason, John can assert, “And we have known and believed the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in Him” (1 John 4:16). Therefore, the **love** that binds Jesus and the Father is the pattern for the **love** that binds us with Him.

In the Gospel of John, we see Jesus describe the **love** that **the Father** has for Him in two specific ways. First, such an abiding **love** trusts and gives responsibility. Jesus, therefore, points out that “the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35). Before we continue with our discussion, we need to stress two cautions in our analysis. First, Jesus has a unique relationship to the Father. He Himself is God. His submission to the Father and dependance upon Him doesn’t make Him any less God. Rather, it serves as a pattern for us to follow by describing how we should walk with Him in obedience and rely upon Him in total dependence. Second, we do not have the same authority or ability as Jesus unless He has specifically granted it to us through His Word. In other words, we’re not Jesus, but His followers who must recognize both our responsibilities and limitations as outlined in Scripture.

Because Jesus loves us, He has entrusted us with tremendous responsibility as His followers. We can identify three principles which He has designated for us to practice. Again, He serves as the model and pattern for us to follow. Just as He represented the Father and bore His character to the world, we are to represent Him by imitating His character in front of others ([John 14:7](#); [Col 1:15](#); [Matt 5:48](#)). Jesus also came to serve rather than be served, so He has equipped us to serve and minister to others on His behalf ([Mark 10:45](#); [John 14:12](#)). Finally, He preached repentance for sin and showed the world how to have life through His sacrificial death and resurrection ([Matt 4:17](#); [John 14:6](#)). We too must preach and proclaim the gospel by pointing others to a relationship with Christ ([Matt 28:18-20](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). Because He loves us, Jesus desires to incorporate us into His plan to accomplish His will.

How do you show the love the Father and Son have for you to those around you?

Question
1

The second way that we can observe this abiding **love** manifested in the relationship between the Father and the Son is through the revelation that He gives. The Father invests in the Son, spends quality time with Him, and reveals or shows His plan to Him. In John 5:20, Jesus acknowledges, “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him

all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel." In this same way, Jesus wants to invest in us! He has communicated His plan with us and clearly showed us the pattern we must follow, so that we can join together with Him in His work!

One of the greatest ways we can show **love** to someone is by spending time with them and investing in them by including them in what we are doing. If we don't do this with our children or grandchildren, we should because we're missing a valuable opportunity. Although I am not a parent, several years ago my friends asked me to watch their eight-year-old son for a few days since he was finishing basic training at Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma and only his wife could visit him the few days prior to graduation. Many of you who have known me for years are probably thinking this ended in disaster. But it didn't! I had the opportunity to invest in this young boy and, in the process, learn something myself.

Rather than babysit by turning on the television or putting on a video game to keep him occupied and out of my hair, I actually limited the time he could do those things.

When it came time for dinner, for example, we didn't order out and I didn't cook *for* him; we cooked together. I taught him how to peel potatoes, cut them, cook them, and mash them. I gave him reasonable chores which didn't endanger him and he could do once I had shown him how. For years, he talked about this time which I invested in him because



it made a lasting impression. Jesus wants to spend this same time investing in us and showing us how to fulfill the Father's will! But, if we're not careful, we can find ourselves too busy and preoccupied, missing this opportunity.

Many of you may dismiss this because I don't have any children for whom I am responsible on a daily basis, other than the Legacy Adults. You may argue that I don't understand how much time and attention that it requires. You may be right to some degree. However, don't discount the knowledge and desire God has given me from Scripture to understand His plan. Think about how much better the world would be if we made spending time with Christ a priority and allowed Him to invest in and train

Instruct

us. In addition, think about how much deeper and more impactful our relationships—whether in our families, at work, or in society in general—would be if we took this same time and had Christ’s same desire to invest in others! This would show a great **love** that nothing else could ever replicate!

How have you made time to spend with Christ and allow Him to invest in you? How can you make time to spend with and invest in others?

Question
2

We must be careful not to focus on the aspect of connecting so much that we overlook the fact that we must demonstrate **love** in tangible ways. Through their intimate connection, the Father demonstrated His **love** for the Son in the two ways we just listed. Similarly, the Son, in turn, demonstrated His **love** for the Father through His obedience. He perfectly **kept** and fulfilled all the **Father’s commandments** (v. 10). In verse 9, Jesus stated that He also loves us in a tangible way! As we will learn in verse 13, Jesus demonstrated His **love** by laying down His life; He died for us (Rom 5:8)! If we are connected with Christ, therefore, we also ought to demonstrate our **love** for Him in a visible way. Jesus explains that **if we love Him, then we will keep His commandments** just as He has obediently done unto the Father.

To apply this teaching properly, we must understand two critical principles about our obedience. First, we don’t **keep** God’s **commandments** in order to get Him to **love** us. Jesus’ statement here in no way implies that God’s **love** is dependent upon our obedience. He already loves us even before we had a relationship with Him



([John 3:16](#)). In other words, He loved us first and pursued us ([1 John 4:19](#))! Through this reference to keeping God’s **commandments**, Jesus is explaining how we should show our **love** to God. Thus, we **keep** His **commandments** because we **love** Him.

To illustrate, let’s look at our obedience to traffic laws, including the speed limit. We could view these laws in one of three ways. We could ignore them because we have no

regard for the law and don't feel any personal responsibility to obey them. We could obey them because we fear getting caught and receiving a ticket. Or we could obey them because we **love** our passengers and the others sharing the road with us, so we drive responsibly rather than recklessly. For the most part, we tend to obey when we have a personal connection to those around us and are devoted to them. Sometimes the fear of getting caught spurs us to obedience, but obedience based on a personal relationship is much stronger than that of fear. If we have a relationship with Christ, we should desire to honor Him by acting responsibly which shows our **love** for Him.

How and why do you express your love to the Lord?

Question
3

Second, disobedience to God's **commandments** doesn't mean that He will stop loving us. Quite the contrary, He will continue to demonstrate His **love** by correcting us and steering us back to the right path. Jesus' **love** for us is not dependent upon circumstances nor is it conditioned or tied to what we do. His **love** indeed is unconditional and everlasting. But in His holiness, He must punish sin. It would be very unloving if God allowed us to ruin and wreck our lives which would end in death from sin and never correct us or tell us the right way to go! He demonstrated His great **love** for us not only when He came to die for us, but also when He corrects us when we err.

What Scriptures point to God's everlasting and unconditional love for us?

Question
4

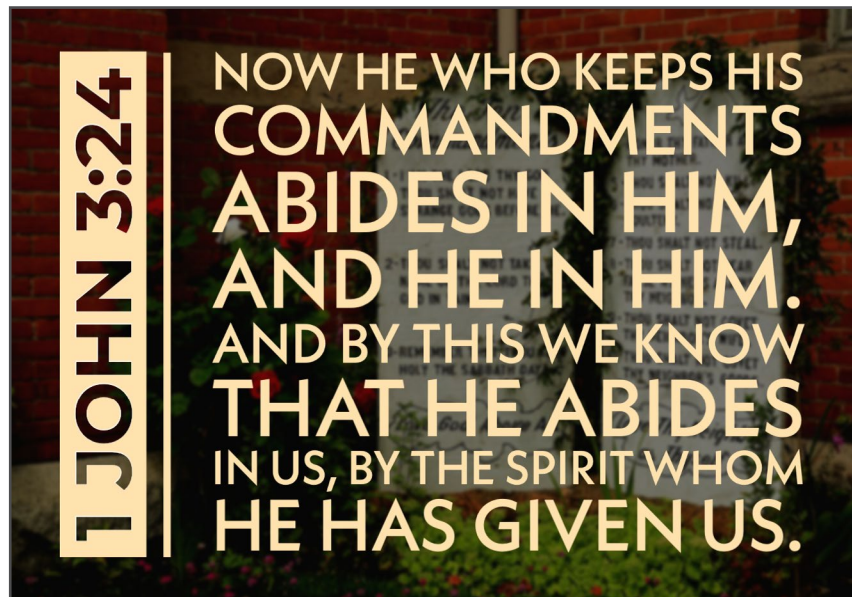
John 15:11

REMAIN CONTENTED:

Our connection to Christ demonstrated through our loving obedience produces **joy** and contentment. Consequently, the things of which Jesus has just spoken are designed to produce **joy** in our lives (v. 11). When we are connected to Him, His **joy will remain in** us and our **joy will be full** or complete. In this passage, our **joy** stems from three primary things. First, our **joy** stems from our **love** for Christ and the Father. Those connected to Christ through the practice of obedience will always bear fruit consistent with His character. In fact, Jesus has already said that the "Father is glorified" when we "bear much fruit" ([John 15:8](#)). Our **love** for Christ, therefore, will produce **joy** in our lives because it brings delight to the One who loves us most when we bear much

fruit in His name.

Second, our **joy** stems from our obedience. We will have **joy** when we follow God's **commandments**. The world can rarely understand such a concept because it is



blinded by sin and selfishness which make His **commandments** seem unfair and restrictive.

They are far from restrictive; they actually free us! We often hear Jesus' teaching about truth repeated: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Yet, we sometimes overlook the very important principle that precedes

it: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" ([John 8:31](#)). To "abide" means to study, memorize, and practice. We can't "abide" in the Word if we don't apply it in our lives!

Obedience, therefore, produces **joy** because it frees us from worry. Briefly, we can identify four ways obedience frees us from worry. First, we don't have to worry about getting caught or hiding our actions if we're doing what is right. Second, we will never have internal conflict or turmoil if we practice righteousness. The Spirit will always propel us to righteousness without question; debate about our actions only enters the picture when we don't engage in righteousness. Since Scripture has made clear what constitutes right practice and truth, it becomes a struggle and debate when we don't follow those principles.

Third, we don't have to worry about what others think or say; only what God declares truly matters. We need only base our choices in life upon Scripture and what God has said rather than the opinions and preferences of man which shift with an ever-changing culture. Finally, we don't have to worry about legalistically fulfilling the law because practicing the tenets of the law will come naturally to us! This doesn't mean that we are lawless and have the freedom to do whatsoever we please. On the contrary, we must still fulfill the righteous principles of the law through the guidance of the Holy Spirit ([Rom 8:1-11](#)). Consequently, it will never be about how little we can do

to fulfill the requirements of the law legalistically, but rather about how we can extend the practice of these principles into every area of our lives.

How has practicing righteousness as defined by Scripture given you freedom in your life? How does that compare to the enslavement that sin brings?

Question
5

Fourth, we will have **joy** when we are connected to Christ because we will be productive or bear fruit. God has created within us an innate desire to be productive and find success through the work of our hands. Work, before the curse of sin, was an enjoyable service performed unto the Lord. Sin caused hardship and toil to enter the picture ([Gen 2:15; 3:17-19](#)). Laziness and inactivity, on one hand, produce a sense of regret about the things that we should have done, but never did. On the other hand, being productive and seeing a project to completion brings a sense of satisfaction and **joy** because we know that we have given our best and have seen the project to the end. Because Christ measures success and productivity differently than the world, we may never achieve “success” by their standard. If we are obedient in following God’s **commandments**, bear fruit according to His character, and submit to the Holy Spirit, we will always find success in Him!

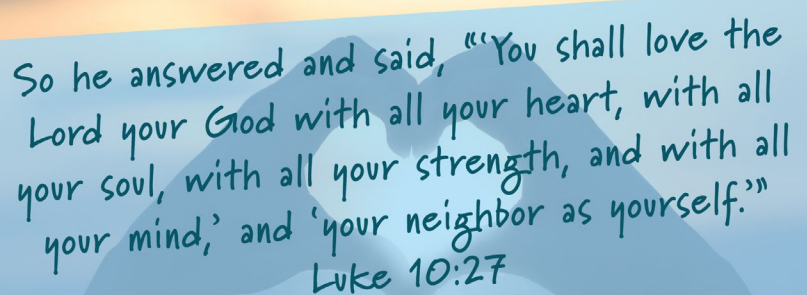
How has being fruitful in Christ brought you joy?

Question
6

John 15:12-15

REMAIN COMMITTED:

Jesus now reminds the disciples of one specific **commandment** that they ought to follow. They should **love one another** just as He has **loved** them (v. 12). Such **love** for others is the hallmark of Jesus’ teaching and life. In fact, He summarized the entire Old Testament through two principles of **love**. We are to **love** God above



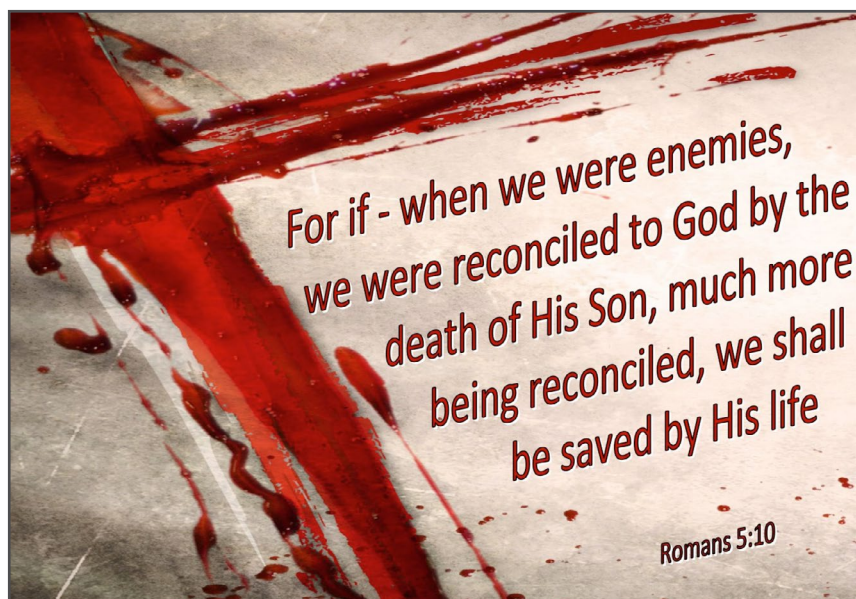
So he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”
Luke 10:27

Instruct

everything else which leads us to **love** everyone, literally our neighbors, as ourselves ([Luke 10:27](#)). Jesus had already underscored this point with His disciples when He declared that the world will know that they, and we, are His disciples if we **love** one another ([John 13:34-35](#)). Yet, this **love** we have for Christ radically differs from the world's concept of **love**. We don't just **love** those who are like us or who **love** us in return. We should even **love** our enemies—those who persecute and mistreat us ([Matt 5:43-47](#)).

This type of radical **love** requires commitment. If we're not committed and connected to Christ, chances increase greatly that we will follow the corrupted pattern of how the world views **love**. The world sees **love** as conditional, predicated upon whether it is returned. Although the world may at times engage in selfless acts in the name of **love**, largely it regards **love** through self-centered lenses based upon what they perceive they need or what they can get from a relationship. Such self-centeredness is why we see numerous broken relationships—whether in marriage, in families, or in friendships. When we truly evaluate much of the dysfunction in our relationships, self-centeredness stands as the primary culprit. Self-centeredness supersedes commitment in such cases where differences cannot be resolved, forgiveness offered, or preferences laid aside. Moreover, if we don't **love** Christ enough to make Him the priority of our lives, such self-centeredness of the world will creep into our relationships and cause great dysfunction.

Fortunately, Christ provides the highest example of the **love** and commitment which we ought to display. Foreshadowing what would happen to Him that very next day,



Jesus describes the greatest commitment ever shown in an act of **love**. He asserts that **no greater love** has anyone **than this to lay down his life for his friends** (v. 13). Here, Jesus is speaking about His death upon the cross. Yet, Jesus died not only for His friends—that is these disciples to whom He spoke here at this last meal—but He died

for the whole world including His enemies and those who would reject Him! Jesus' commitment speaks volumes for the type of **love** that we too ought to show. His **love** and commitment to the Father and His plan compelled Him to die in obedience as the sacrifice which would take away the sin of the world. His **love** for His creation also allowed Him to die selflessly without condition for all.

How can we show this same type of sacrificial love in our relationships with others, but also to the world around us?

Question
7

Because He is addressing His disciples who already have a relationship with Him, Jesus qualifies His remarks by defining what a friend does. Thus, Jesus says that they **are** His **friends** if they **do whatever** He commands them (v. 14). To understand rightly, we must see the whole picture. Jesus selected or chose these men by grace and called them to join Him in a relationship—which we will see in [verse 16](#). They each responded in faith to that call by leaving everything to follow Him. Hence, their obedience and the works they do in His name do not earn them salvation or status as Jesus' **friends**. On the contrary, their obedience and fruitful works display their salvation and status as His **friends**. We must understand two important points about this statement. First, we do not earn salvation from good works or obedience. These things show we already have salvation—just as the disciples. Second, if we don't bear fruit and consistently follow Him in obedience, we must evaluate if we truly have a relationship with Him in the first place. When we **love** Him and have a relationship with Him, it will show in our actions and it will be evident to everyone around us to whom we belong!

For this reason, Jesus reminds them that He **no longer** calls them **servants**, but **friends** (v. 15). He explains that a servant **does not know what his master is doing** whereas a friend will be intimately informed. In this way, Jesus has **made known all things** that the **Father** has shown Him. This statement highlights the intimacy of our relationship to Him. This doesn't mean that God isn't our **Master** or we His **servants**, but as we learned earlier in [verse 10](#), He has intimately involved us in His work. He has not only taken time to explain and show us the direction we ought to go, but He is always working on our behalf and alongside us!

An earthly **master** tends to bark orders from a distance and has no compunction to involve his **servants** in his affairs other than the specific tasks which he has given them. Moreover, such a **master** sits in a position of authority where others do all the work for him and he never lifts a finger. Jesus, however, is not such a **Master**; He treats us

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like **friends**. In fact, He made Himself an obedient servant to the Father on our behalf ([Phil 2:7](#)). With respect to salvation, therefore, He did all the work for us and graciously invited us to join Him freely as a gift in this eternal life. As a servant Himself, Jesus doesn't sit at a distance even though He has sovereign authority over us; He works alongside us. Consequently, Jesus will never ask us to do anything that He Himself is not already working to accomplish and has equipped us specifically to join Him!

How has Christ involved you in His work daily?
If you don't join Him daily in that work, what prevents or hinders you?

Question
8

John 15:16-17

REMAIN CONSISTENT:

Jesus concludes this portion of His teaching by reminding His disciple why He has chosen them. He **chose** and **appointed** them to **go and bear fruit** (v. 16). For those



of us who have a relationship with Christ, we too have been **chosen and appointed** to **bear** much **fruit**. Two things can sidetrack us in these verses if we're not careful to understand the context. First, the choosing clearly refers to bearing **fruit** and not salvation. We cannot **bear fruit** if we're not connected to Christ, so salvation must come first. Second, Jesus' assertion that **whatever** we **ask the Father in His name** He will **give** us isn't a *carte blanche* license to **ask** our selfish and fleshly desires. Conversely, to **ask** in Jesus' **name** means to pray according to His will and seek His

desires for the ministry to which He has called us. When we seek His desires as Jesus teaches us in the model prayer ([Matt 6:10](#)), then He will **give** us **whatever** we **ask in His name!**

For us, the most important part of the verse centers upon the type of **fruit** that we will produce in Him—a **fruit** that will **remain**. In Christ, the works that we do will withstand

the test of time. They will not spoil or rot; they will not rust or decay. They will **remain** forever! Therefore, we must **remain** consistent in allowing Christ to continue to work through us to **bear fruit**. If we have ever planted a garden here in North Texas, we may have noticed that some plants become dormant as the temperatures rise in late June into July. I've particularly noticed that tomato vines will **bear fruit** until early summer and then cease. If I continued to water and care for the plants, they once again would bloom and produce **fruit** as the temperatures began to cool in mid-September. As believers, we must **remain** consistent in bearing **fruit** even when the heat gets turned up so to speak. Immediately after these verses, Jesus explains to His disciples about the troubles and persecution they would face in this life—some even to the point of death. Regardless of what happens to us in life, we need to **remain** connected to Christ and allow Him to produce **fruit** through us consistently as a testimony to His majesty and grace. When Christ overcomes these obstacles through us to produce **fruit**, then the world will be pointed to Him because this is not something we can do on our own, but what He has clearly done through us! Let's show our love to Christ by remaining connected to Him, committed to His call upon our lives, and consistent in allowing Him to **bear fruit** in our lives.

How consistent are you in bearing fruit through Christ?

Question
9

In the introduction, we read a fictional account of a miner who demonstrated his love and commitment to his friends by risking his life to rescue them. Even though he was willing to die and faced peril at every turn, he didn't enter that mine shaft *knowing* he would die. He merely faced the potential of death. In Scripture, however, we find the true account of One who came *knowing* that He must die to save the world from sin. And He still came for our sake! No one took His life from Him, but He willingly laid it down as an obedient sacrifice. The perfect Lamb who knew no sin died to give us His righteousness and life when we surrender to Him. This greatest gift of all can never be replicated. Jesus is the only way to salvation.

Yet, He desires that we demonstrate our love for Him in tangible ways as well. Jesus has provided everything we need for life and has involved us intimately in His plan. Therefore, we need to remain connected to Him. Our connection to Him will provide unparalleled joy in our lives because it gives us an opportunity to express our love through our obedient commitment to His commands as well as consistency in bearing fruit with the help of the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to indwell us. Because Christ's love for us never wanes and has remained constant since before He created the world, let us remain in love with Him by making Him the priority in our lives.

Incorporate

As a church, how can we connect others to Christ? Ultimately, how is it the responsibility of the individual to remain connected to Him?

How does our service and obedience to the Lord bring joy? How should we express our joy in Christ through the local church?

Given the challenges we have faced over the last year, how consistent have you been in bearing fruit? What new ways has God led you to minister to others and share the gospel during these times?

February 21, 2021



Remember to Love!

*An Overcomer
Remembers to Love
Revelation 2:1-7*

Focal Verse:

"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

Revelation 2:4

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Introduce

Herbert looked like the consummate gentleman as he dashed around his hometown doing errands. He was always dressed stylishly, taking time to detail his appearance so he never looked sloppy. He never knew who he might meet and always wanted to look his best. One day, a bank teller by the name of Martha caught his eye, so he glanced down to see if she had a ring on her finger. And to his delight, she didn't. He made it a routine to do business at the bank when she was there and always waited in her line no matter how long it was. Each time, he asked a few questions to find out a little more about her and her interests as she worked on his account.

After a few weeks, he came to the bank with a single rose and a note addressed to Martha. In the note it said, "To the woman who makes the most 'cents': Would you accompany me to dinner this Friday after work?" Inside the note, it had his phone number so she could call at her convenience.

Later that night, the phone rang and it was Martha! She thanked him for the rose and note and accepted his invitation to dinner. The dinner went well. He treated Martha like royalty, making sure to open any door, pull out her chair,



and escort her whenever they walked together. The whole evening focused on getting to know her. Herbert was attentive and charming.

Although they began to see each other regularly, Herbert still made it a point to pass by the bank and occasionally do nice gestures that showed how much he cared for Martha. As they began to spend more time together, they would talk for hours and do things that they both found enjoyable. Even when they weren't together, Herbert would simply call to see how Martha was doing and see if there was anything that he could do that she might need. Eventually, the couple was married! The first year of marriage continued much like the dating period where Herbert paid particular attention to his wife's needs. They still spent much time together going out on date nights and enjoying one another's company.

Slowly, however, Herbert no longer visited the bank as much. And, when he did, he

Introduce

used the drive-thru instead of going inside because he didn't want to get out of his car. As the years progressed, their time together became less frequent and almost non-existent at times. They often saw each other only briefly before bed—if one of them hadn't already gone to sleep. Neither Herbert or Martha did anything to pursue or cultivate their relationship. They did their own thing! They watched their own television programs and practiced their own hobbies. When they were in the same room, they were primarily on their phones texting others, surfing the internet, or playing on their wide selection of Apps. Vacations weren't much different! While in the car, she had her EarPods in while he drove. If they were shopping, he found a central location to sit and nod off rather than accompany her. If they were on a cruise, they hardly ever saw each other because they were in different parts of the ship participating in the activities they wanted. They were lucky to even eat dinner together some nights!

Still, they were still married. Neither Herbert nor Martha had ever been unfaithful to the other in an immoral sense. Yet, they had become distracted by their own pursuits. They put their own desires and interests ahead of their relationship—which in the long run could have devastating consequences. Thus, in a sense, they had become unfaithful in forsaking their first love for the pursuit of their own individual happiness and contentment. Unfortunately, many relationships, whether marriage or friendship, at the very least become dysfunctional if not completely dissolved because an individual chooses to focus on him or herself.

Certainly, any human relationship requires a balance in which a person has time alone to reflect and relax. A healthy relationship, however, requires a tremendous amount of effort and work. It doesn't just happen naturally. And when we're in a relationship, we still must seek to maintain it! We can never put it on cruise control and expect it to function in the way God intended. From even before our conception, God has pursued a relationship with each one of us. He continues to pursue that connection with us throughout our lives into eternity. He doesn't make us His children through Christ and then relax. He pursues us daily!

The problem, however, is that we don't always return that same eagerness to pursue Him. We allow our individual interests to distract us and we don't make him the priority of our lives, thereby becoming unfaithful to Him. The Ephesian church discovered this when Jesus reminded them that they had "left [their] first love" (Rev 2:4). They needed

to repent and re-engage in their loving pursuit of Christ—not through mere works alone, but through a meaningful relationship. Despite our unfaithfulness at times to Him, God always remains faithful and continues to seek and pursue us. Therefore, let us remember what it means to love Christ and pursue Him daily. Let us return to our first love if we have become distracted from Him!

Key
Question

What are the signs that we have left our first love?

Instruct

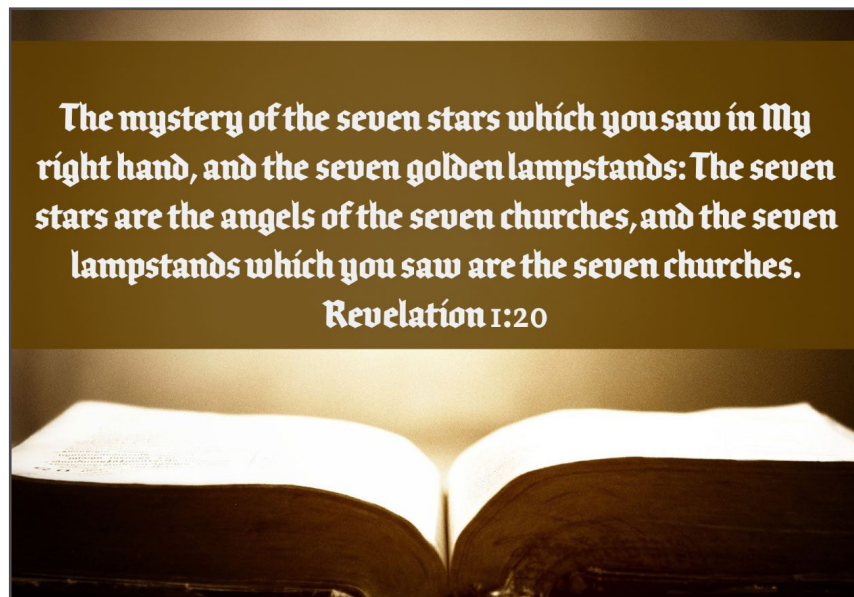
Revelation 2:1-3

A LOVE THAT LABORS:

Too often, we allow the symbolism of the book of Revelation to overwhelm us and distract us from understanding the main tenets that the Lord wishes to communicate. Rather than getting lost in these symbols and relating their interpretation to specific modern events to which people may *think* they refer, let us hear God speak in context so that we may apply the broader principles of Revelation to our lives today. Likewise, we shouldn't view Revelation merely as a book describing distant, future events at Christ's return. Rather, God designed it as a book to be understood and practiced today as we await His second coming! Every part of the book has relevance to us when we hear the Lord speak. Chapter 2 begins a series of letters to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). At the head of this list stands **the church of Ephesus** which was the most important city for trade and the provincial capital of the region. Although this address takes the form of a letter written **to the angel of the church**, it comes directly from Christ. Thus, the focus rests on Christ and His authoritative word rather than the identity of **the angel** who simply represents the messenger through whom Christ chose to communicate this message to **the church**. In both the Old and New Testaments, the Lord at times employed angels to announce His divine and authoritative message to His servants. Our focus, consequently, should not be on the messenger, but the message and the One from whom it comes! Even John had to refocus at times when he errantly worshiped **the angel** who was imparting God's Word unto him (Rev 19:10). When we rightly focus on the description of Jesus in this verse, however, we will learn three things about His nature and the nature of this message.

Instruct

First, we see Jesus' authority through the phrase **these things says He** which is patterned after a similar declaration by the Old Testament prophets whose divine



word from the Lord was confirmed through the unfolding of events just as God had said. Second, we see His sovereignty over the churches and the course of history as He **holds the seven stars in His right hand**. No matter what happens, He's in complete control. Finally, we see Jesus' presence among the churches and in history as it unfolds as He **walks in the**

midst of the seven golden lampstands. Jesus isn't somewhere peering down on the events of history from a distance; He's intimately involved in every detail. He knows specifically what's going on!

With this description of His intimate involvement with these churches, Jesus declares that He knows the **works** of the Ephesians (v. 2). As He does with all the churches except Laodicea, Jesus begins with a note of praise concerning what **the church** has done well. He commends them for their **labor**. The Greek term doesn't just mean "work" in the sense we use it today, but toil or hard work. They struggled to do this work! It required maximum effort on their part. Specifically, they labored in two ways: they endured and they relentlessly rejected false teaching. First, the word translated **patience** by the NKJV more aptly means endurance or perseverance. As a church, they withstood fierce persecution over the years, particularly from a cult based in the city who worshiped the Roman emperor—Domitian at the time of this letter—and demanded all bow in allegiance to him. Christ was clear in His teaching that when we follow Him we will experience persecution by the world ([John 15:18-25](#)).

How would Jesus describe and evaluate your works? What would He find commendable?

Question
1

Not only did they endure persecution, but they also rejected false teaching both from outside and from within the church. Jesus commends them for **not bearing those who**

are evil and testing those **who say they are apostles** and **are not** by proving **them liars**. As a cosmopolitan city, many beliefs and ideas circulated through Ephesus from people of various backgrounds requiring the church to exercise special care in avoiding the corruption of the truth found in Scripture and fulfilled in Christ. Even in the New Testament, we see the church in Ephesus battling false teachers. Paul dispatched Timothy to confront those trying to teach the law when they themselves neither understood or practiced it ([1 Tim 1:5-7](#)). He also led the charge to correct false teaching about the resurrection and to expel Alexander and Hymenaeus from the church if they refused to repent of their errant theology ([1 Tim 1:18-20](#); [2 Tim 2:16-17](#); [4:15](#)).

To reinforce His praise for their refusal as a church to compromise, Jesus acknowledges that they **have persevered** and **have patience**; they **have labored for His name's sake** without growing **weary** (v. 3). Sometimes we equate **patience** and even endurance with tolerance. We put up with false teaching and errant beliefs in the name of love. We may not agree with them ourselves, but we never speak against them by pointing others to the truth in Scripture.

We choose to justify this by casually asserting, "Let them have their own beliefs. They don't harm or affect me." This is an unbiblical approach! It does not reflect the attitudes and actions of the Ephesian church. They tested the teaching of all against Scripture and the eyewitness accounts of those who saw the events of the



*But even if we, or an angel from
heaven, preach any other gospel to
you than what we have preached
to you, let him be accursed.
Galatians 1:8*

gospel. They didn't remain silent. They corrected them in love by pointing them to Scripture and expelled them from the church when they didn't repent.

Tolerance of false teaching and errant doctrines which clearly defy the core beliefs of Scripture isn't love in any sense. In fact, the Ephesians' **labor** of love was their intolerance and rejection of such doctrines in favor of the truth found in Christ and His Word. Tolerating and ignoring false teaching will generally lead to two problems in the church. First, over time members of the church will become desensitized to the message of truth found in Scripture; hence, they will compromise their beliefs oftentimes in the end. Second, it always causes divisions and schisms in the church where personal beliefs are elevated over the concrete truthfulness of Scripture. Let's

Instruct

follow the practice of the Ephesian church by enduring persecution, testing all teaching according to Scripture, rejecting corrupt beliefs, and correcting any errors for the glory of Christ and the preservation of unity within His body. In our battle against false teachers, let us follow the clear principles given in Scripture for correcting others and speaking the truth in love ([Matt 18:15-20](#); [Gal 6:1-4](#); [Eph 4:15](#)).

What are the core beliefs of Scripture on which there can be absolutely no compromise?

Question
2

Revelation 2:4-6

A LOVE THAT LEFT:

Jesus now exposes a major flaw in the Ephesian church despite their hard work and all that they had indeed done well. They **have left** their **first love** (v. 4). This phrase doesn't indicate that they had abandoned their worship of Jesus for worldly practices or that they renounced their faith in Him. It means that they don't have the same **love** for Him which they had at **first**. Consequently, they failed to make Jesus the priority in their lives. Interestingly, sometimes I catch myself while writing curriculum or even speaking referring to making Jesus "a priority" in our lives. For those of us seasoned in our study of Scripture, we know the intent behind this statement: Jesus should be placed above everything in our lives and receive our full attention and devotion. Yet, there is a huge difference between making Jesus "a" priority and "the" priority in our lives. Jesus should never be shuffled in our lives amongst many other things. On the contrary, He should be our sole focus! Herein lies the heart of the Ephesians' problem. Jesus had become just "a" priority among the circumstances, events, and activities of their lives rather than "the" priority and the recipient of their intense focus.

Based on your actions, where does Jesus rank on your list of priorities in terms of your personal relationship with Him, your participation in corporate worship and Bible study, and your personal service to Him?

Question
3

In our English translations, Jesus uses three words beginning with the letter R to describe what the Ephesians must do in response to reverse the course before He is required to act. First, they must **remember** (v. 5). They must **remember** the

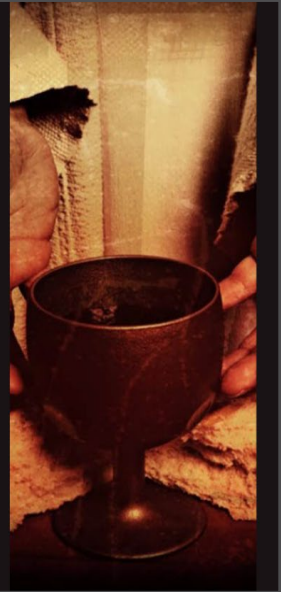
height **from where** they **have fallen**. We must recognize a delicate balance in our remembrances. There is not only a danger of living in the past and resting upon our previous achievements, but there is also a danger of forgetting the past and failing to recall what the Lord has done for us and how He has worked through us!

In Exodus, for example, God instituted the Passover as a reminder to every generation about how He delivered Israel from enslavement to Egypt ([Exod 12:26-27](#)). As they

entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, God commanded them to carry stones from the Jordan River to build a memorial that would remind them of His faithful fulfillment of His promises and His provision. In the New Testament, the Lord's Supper also serves to remind us of the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf as well as our responsibility

1 CORINTHIANS 11:25

IN THE SAME MANNER HE ALSO TOOK THE CUP AFTER SUPPER, SAYING, "THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD. THIS DO, AS OFTEN AS YOU DRINK IT, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME."



to pattern our lives after Him through the new life He has given us ([1 Cor 11:23-34](#)). It is imperative that we **remember** and reflect upon our relationship with Christ.

The Ephesian church had a long, illustrious history of effective service to the Lord as well as an association with leaders through whom He accomplished extraordinary things. On his second missionary journey, Paul visited the city to find a handful of believers whom he taught and disciplined. He then returned on his third missionary journey to spend two-and-a-half years—the longest of any tenure on his circuit—helping the church to mature together and spread the gospel. Several years later, Paul sent his young protégé, Timothy, to strengthen the church, combat heresy, and promote unity by stamping out immorality. Aside from Scripture, church history also reports that the Apostle John, the writer of Revelation, spent a quarter century there leading the church. If any church had the pedigree to serve the Lord faithfully by following the example of their leaders, it would have been Ephesus!

Yet, they forgot! They forgot how they had once served the Lord with passion, vigor, complete devotion, and **love**. They forgot the example and pattern set by their forefathers and these men whom God had called to lead the church through both times of tumult and prosperity. Our faith expressed through our **love** is not just something that happened in the past. It's something that continues in the present and

will last for an eternity. Quite often, however, we relate our testimony as a completed past event. We speak of how Christ saved us from our sin. Thus, we focus on the moment we repented and surrendered our lives to Him. Jesus does indeed command us and the Ephesians to **remember** that aspect of our testimony. But He also challenges us to notice and testify about how He is currently at work in our lives as we serve Him. If we can't identify how God

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

is at work daily in our lives, perhaps we are like the Ephesians and **have left** the **love** we had at **first**. Salvation is both what God did for us in the past and what He is doing through us now! Let's serve Him with an awareness of how He is working so that we may faithfully join Him.

What is your testimony? When did God deliver you from sin and how is He at work today in your life?

Question
4

Second, the Ephesians must repent and once again **do the works** they did at **first**. At the time of Jesus' communication to them, the Ephesians were still hard at work battling heresy and rejecting false teaching. In verse 6, Jesus emphasizes that they have done well to **hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which** He **also** hates. Historically, we know very little about this group other than their teaching and practices conflicted with the Word of Christ. So, any speculation only proves a distraction. Jesus' main point in noting their fidelity to the truth of the gospel is to contrast it with their own attitudes and practices. The Ephesians are ritualistically going through the motions of worship and service. They don't have the same zeal and enthusiasm they once did when they **first** commenced their relationship with Christ.

Their focus had become misplaced on ritual and tradition rather than their relationship with Christ. Worship and service became something they did out of habit. Although they practiced the right beliefs, their works and practices had little, if any, impact on

their lives. Just as there is nothing wrong with tradition if it aligns with Scripture, habits are good when they produce healthy, impactful change in conformity to Christ. Prayer, reading Scripture, giving, and serving are all good habits to develop and even commanded in Scripture. But they aren't things that we should do mindlessly as if to mark a checklist. Our thoughts, actions, and practices should draw us closer to Christ and stem from our **love** and devotion from Him.

What healthy habits or practices do you have based on Scripture? How do they help you mature and draw you closer to Christ?

Question
5

Culturally, our society has grossly misconstrued the concept of **love**. We generally use it far too casually as an emotion to describe an activity, object, or person that brings us momentary pleasure. In this sense, we tie **love** to our circumstances and preferences which makes it conditional. Hence, we can fall in and out of **love** for the most petty reasons: we become bored, we find something better or more exciting, we have selfish disagreements, and the list could continue indefinitely. **Love**, however, is not an emotion that changes upon a whim based upon our circumstances and preferences. Biblically, **love** is a character trait that should remain constant and unphased by whatever life may throw at us. **Love**, therefore, represents who we are in Christ manifested by what we do.

In fact, the very core of God's character is described as **love**. God's **love** motivates everything He does ([1 John 4:8](#)). God is not fickle in declaring His **love** for us one moment and then becoming disinterested in us the next or even wishing He had nothing to do with us. This

violates His very being! Through His constant and unconditional **love** for us, He has established the very pattern by which we should exist. We should **love** Him above everything which then motivates us to **love** others as ourselves.

This type of **love** should never wane nor should it ever change.

Although we can't fall in and out

of **love** in the biblical sense, we can drift away from our **first love** because we become



lazy, self-centered, and inattentive. The Ephesians had done this very thing! They still loved Christ in the sense that they obediently followed the principles in His Word, but they had become inattentive and lost the zeal in their relationship with Him in which they no longer displayed their **love** with the same vigor and passion they did at **first**. Thus, their **love** for Him was no longer the basis for everything they did which kept Him from being the priority in their lives!

How is God's love constant in your life? How do you manifest God's love through your character and actions particularly directed toward Him?

Question
6

Third, Jesus will **remove their lampstand from its place** if they don't **repent**. From [Revelation 1:20](#), **lampstand** clearly refers to the church. A church motivated by anything other than **love** ceases to function in the way God has designed it and intended it. This doesn't mean that they have lost their salvation or completely forsaken Christ. But it does mean that they do not represent God's character by loving Him above all which motivates them to **love** others. **Love** is the very foundation of the church! Years earlier, Paul expressed this same sentiment in a prayer for the Ephesian church. He prayed, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded *in love*, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" ([Eph 3:17-19](#)). This is to what Christ urges them to return. He wants them to return to that intimate relationship with Him which should be the basis for their **labor**.

Unfortunately, today many churches and individual believers have ceased to function in the way that God intended. They still **love** Christ and have a relationship with Him, but they merely go through the motions where **love** is not their primary motivation. They have become distracted in their pursuits. Busyness isn't a true indication of **love**. People can fill their schedules with all kinds of good activities which have value—just as the Ephesians did. But they can be devoid of **love**. Let us slow down and take time to know Christ intimately so we can imitate His character. **Love** begins with an intimate relationship where we seek to spend quality time and invest in the other person. Christ did this with us and still desires to express His **love** to us in that way. Therefore, let us follow that same pattern and express our **love** to Him which will become manifest in

everything we do.

In what ways as a church should we express our love for Christ?

Question
7

Revelation 2:7

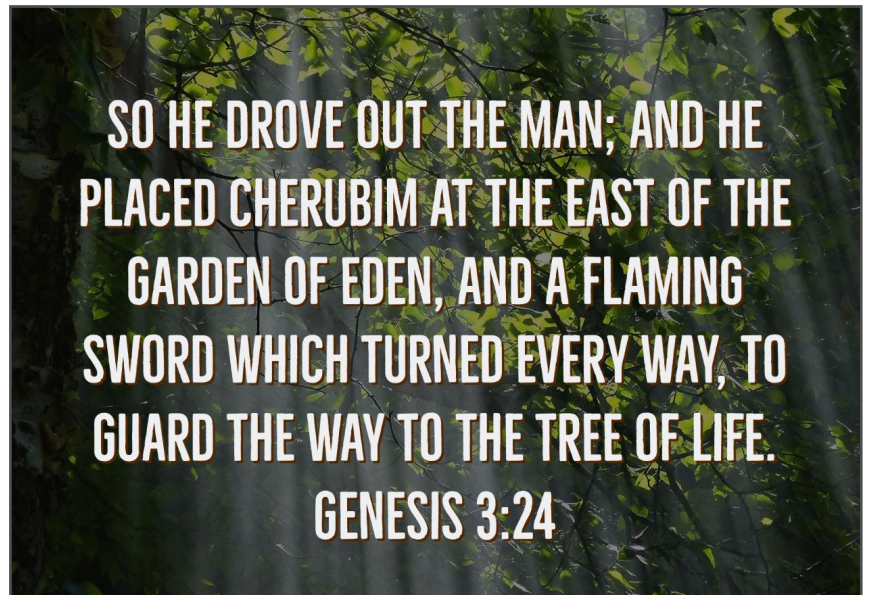
A LOVE THAT LEADS TO LIFE:

As He does for all the churches, Jesus concludes His letter with a call to **hear** or obey His message (v. 7). He asserts that the one **who has an ear let him hear what the**

Spirit says to the churches. This reference to **the Spirit** serves as a reminder that He will convict and correct those in Christ, helping them return to the right course by keeping us focused on Him and guiding us in obedient adherence to His Word. When we fully submit to His leadership, we will overcome sin and death which has plagued the world. Through our

relationship with Christ displayed through our obedience to His call in the Spirit, we will have **life**. Thus, Jesus ends His letter with a call to hope for the one who overcomes in Him rather than a stern warning and condemnation.

In reference to Genesis and the sinful disobedience of man, Jesus reveals that He **will give** the one **who overcomes** in Him **from the tree of life to eat** (v. 7). With the only exception of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, man could **eat** freely from any other **tree** in the Garden of Eden, including the **tree of life** ([Gen 2:9, 16-17](#)). The moment that he disobeyed and ate from the forbidden fruit sin and death entered the world separating him from the Lord ([Gen 3:1-19](#)). As a result, part of the curse sin brought about was his expulsion from the garden; so, God sent cherubim to guard the entrance to **the tree of life** so that man couldn't **eat** from it and live ([Gen 3:22-24](#)). In His **love** for man, however, God made provision for restoration and salvation which would lead to eternal life for all who would accept it. That salvation came through the Messiah who alone could overcome the curse of sin and give life to all who would receive it!



Instruct

Here, in Revelation, Jesus presents a poignant picture of how He has overcome sin and death to **give life**. Consequently, He emphasizes His role in giving that **life**. Man cannot reach out and take it on his own. There is nothing we can do to earn it or justify receiving it. Jesus freely **gives it!** Just as Adam and Eve once walked in fellowship with the Lord in the garden before sin, Jesus restores that same intimate fellowship whereby we can reside forever with Him in the **Paradise of God**. With this grand picture of God's love on display through Jesus, let us remind ourselves of the **love** we ought to have for Him—not only for what He has done for us but also for who He is! When we remember these things, the **love** we **first** have for Jesus will always motivate us in everything we do and never depart from us.

How should Jesus' giving from the tree of life for us to eat remind us of the love that we ought to display in everything we do?

Question
8

Probably, most of us can relate to Herbert and Martha from the introduction even if we've never been married. Every one of us has a love for someone or something in our life. At times, that love has become tempered by the drudgery of life. Things become routine and we take it for granted. We don't cease to love those people, but we don't display the same vigor and enthusiasm in our love for them. We go through the motions in our relationship. Relationships, especially intimate ones like marriage which also pictures the relationship between us and Christ, should be a life-long pursuit. Nothing should ever become routine even in the midst of the mundane times in life! We must constantly labor to show our love with the same passion that we had at first when we entered into the relationship! As a church, we must show that same love toward Christ. Life, at times, can make it difficult, but we must make it the priority of our lives to display our love for Christ. Let us, therefore, be committed in our daily pursuit of Christ to maintain the same love that we had for Him at first by actively cultivating our relationship with Him. Let us not merely go through the motions, but let us meditate and respond with the same type of love that He has shown us through His sacrificial death on the cross which gives life!

Incorporate

What is the biblical process for dealing with heresy and false teaching in the church? Why should this process always be guided by the Spirit?

How can we as a church remain consistent in our love for Christ and others? What are the signs that we have drifted from the way that we first loved Christ? If, or when, we drift from the love that we once had, how should we respond to Christ?

How should the world see the love of Christ displayed in us?

Journal: Document God's Work

February 28, 2021

LOVE NEVER FAILS

1 CORINTHIANS 13



An Overcomer Responds with Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

Focal Verse:

"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

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Introduce

Our world doesn't truly grasp the concept of love and this lack of knowledge has led to a perversion of what it actually means to love. We need to only look at some of the popular music over the years to see this cultural misunderstanding. In 1984, for instance, Tina Turner released a song by the title "What's Love Got to Do with It?" In this hit song, which we sometimes hear repeated today, Turner wrongly describes love as purely "physical" and "only logical" in the context of an intimate physical relationship. The end of the first verse then emphatically urges us that we "must ignore that it means more than that." The chorus then beckons us to question, "What's love got to do . . . with it? What's love but a second-hand emotion?" Even if the song was written to be nothing more than a parody of what true love means, it captures the essence of the cultural mindset about love—especially today.

Although the song may have a catchy tune and Tina Turner a good musical voice, the message it portrays about love leaves much to be desired. Biblically, such a message is fraught with many problems. First, love should never be portrayed as something merely physical. Even though the song doesn't explicitly say this, it very clearly implies that one can have a no-strings-attached physical relationship to satisfy his or her carnal desires. Thus, people can have such a relationship which caters to their physical "needs" apart from any love and commitment so that their hearts will never be broken. We see this practice abounding in our culture today! Scripture, however, clearly demonstrates that this kind of love should only occur in marriage between one man and one woman for life when they love one another unconditionally and have forsaken all others. Godly love will respect the boundaries He has established and practice them in a way that brings honor and glory to Him and fruitfulness to our lives in the midst of a broken world.

Second, culture regards physical love as depending upon mere outward attraction and satisfaction. Such love is shallow and lacks integrity. As a result, love then becomes a selfish conquest. In a sense, purely physical love is all about



Introduce

what attracts me, what pleases me, what I seek to get from the relationship, and what I desire most. The Bible rejects any kind of action which promotes the sin of selfishness! Biblical love seeks to follow the pattern established by the Lord. Such love values other people who are also created in His image, it seeks ways to contribute rather than merely receive, it looks out for the interests of the other person, it makes sacrifices, and it is unconditional regardless of what a person may do or say. God has established a high bar for what it means to love, but we must still seek to follow that pattern which will ultimately give us contentment and joy in life that the world can never know. Finally, love is not “a second-hand emotion” as this song claims. In fact, it’s not even an emotion at all! It is a character trait and a state of being. Consequently, we don’t fall in and out of love as some people are given to saying. Rather, love is constant and consistent. To fall out of love means that we were never really practicing love in the first place. We were only seeking some external benefit for ourselves—whether attention, companionship, or physical pleasure. When a better opportunity arises that we perceive can bring us more happiness, we seize it. We haven’t fallen out of love, but we’ve actually continued in our selfishness and sinfulness! As Paul proclaims, true “love never fails” (1 Cor 13:8).

To understand what love entails, we must turn to Scripture. [1 Corinthians 13](#) is probably the most familiar passage about love to most of us. Certainly, the principles about love in this passage are broad enough to apply to many situations, including marriage, family relationships, and friendships. But in context, the love described here refers to how we should serve together in the church to exercise our spiritual gifts in love to the glory of Christ so that together we can fulfill His purpose and calling! With that in mind, we will focus on how our love for one another in the church should be displayed. In the body of Christ, we must manifest His love toward one another and work together in Him to overcome the sinfulness and challenges of this world. Therefore, let us understand what it means to love so that we can more effectively serve Christ, minister to each other, and reach the world for His glory!

Key
Question

Why is it important to practice love in the church in the way that we serve together in Christ?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

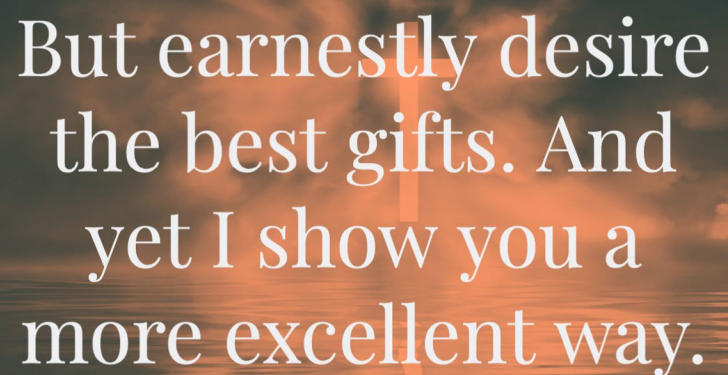
THE CAPACITY TO LOVE:

In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul addressed several major issues that were severing relationships in the community, marring their testimony, and hindering the spread of the gospel. Over the course of this letter, he rebuked the church for its division, disunity, depravity, and dysfunctional relationships. As he winds down his remarks, he focuses on their dysfunctional corporate service and worship ([chapters 12-14](#)) which led to competition, criticism, and chaos in their services which distracted from Christ. Paul desires to “show” them “a more excellent way” to use their spiritual giftedness in love to serve the Lord with integrity and honor, so that He might be glorified ([1 Cor 12:31](#)). The Corinthians, however, failed to use their giftedness in love. Instead, they used it to draw attention to themselves, exclude others, and practice sin in the name of liberation and freedom.

With this background, Paul begins his description of love. We often hear 1 Corinthians 13 read at weddings or used in sermons to critique any type of relationship from marriage to friendship. Certainly, Paul’s description of love can apply to many different areas of our lives, but we shouldn’t overlook the original context. Paul instructs us with

precision about how we should function together in the church in corporate worship and service. We need to remind ourselves of this context so that we too can serve together effectively in the body of Christ the way the Lord intends.

Paul commences by showing the hypocrisy of acting in the name of the Lord, but having no **love** (v. 1). In themselves, these actions may be noble and good; apart from **love**, however, they amount to **nothing**. They’re useless token gestures which fail to bear the character of Christ. Thus, Paul can say that even **though** he may **speak with the tongues of men and angels, but** does **not have love**, he becomes **a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal**. As we learned in our study of Revelation, God often used



But earnestly desire
the best gifts. And
yet I show you a
more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 12:31

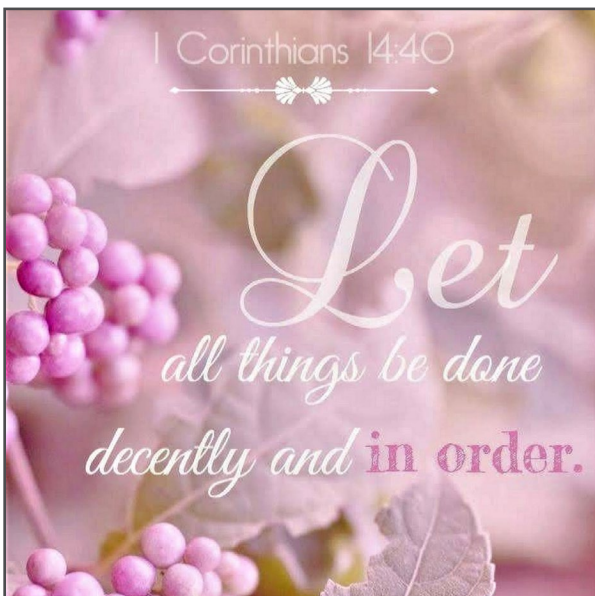
Instruct

angels to impart His divine message. The word angel actually means messenger when translated from either Hebrew or Greek. In that sense, Paul indicates that whether he has a common, ordinary conversation among **men** or declares a divine message from the Lord, **but does not have love**, he accomplishes **nothing**.

The Corinthians had pridefully elevated three particular spiritual gifts—speaking in tongues, prophecy, and knowledge or wisdom—above all others to bring greater honor to those who “possessed” them while disparaging those who did not. In doing so, however, they brought chaos and confusion into the church which was no better than a pagan ritual! In fact, Paul’s reference to **a sounding brass** and **a clanging cymbal** depicts the very instruments most often used in pagan worship. In reality, pagan worship was meaningless, nothing more than noise, because they worshiped non-existent gods and goddesses who couldn’t hear, speak, or respond. Any sermon, service, or spiritual act that elevates the one who does these things over Christ is devoid of such **love** and is as meaningless as the worship of the one who serves a false god.

In what ways should our understanding and practice of love differ from the world’s view of love?

Question
1



Many miss the main point that Paul makes here because they become consumed with what **tongues of men and angels** mean. Some brief comments about “speaking in tongues” will help us to know what Scripture says. In detailed references to the practice, the Lord uses His human messenger to proclaim the gospel where the recipients hear the message in their native dialects ([Acts 2:5-12](#)). Nowhere does Scripture present the practice of speaking in tongues as nonsensical babble repeated mindlessly. Yet, it does appear

that the Corinthians had wrongly adopted some type of similar practice where the uninitiated didn’t understand the message presented to the church. Paul rebukes them and corrects their practice. God, he reminds them, is not one of chaos and confusion ([1 Cor 14:33](#)). He is a God of order and comprehension! Therefore, their worship should

reflect that order. If one speaks, he must speak in turn and there must be an interpreter present if he uses his native dialect or language ([1 Cor 14:27-28, 40](#)). It profits no one and hinders the gospel if the message cannot be understood and applied!

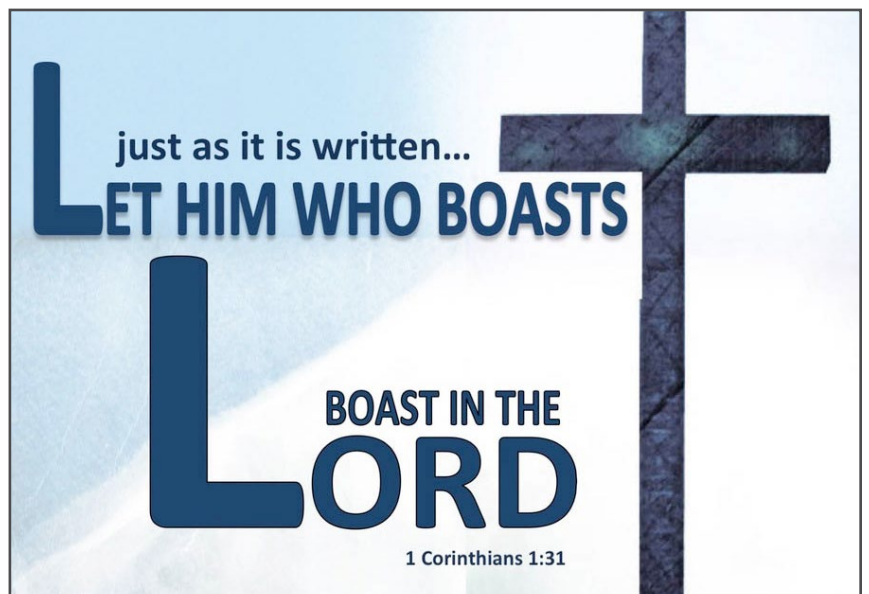
If we truly **love** someone, we will want them to understand the message of the gospel. God wanted us to understand so that we could know how to have life through His Son. This is why the gospel is so simple that even a child can comprehend it! Christ spoke plainly and used parables or stories that people would understand so that they could relate to the principles He taught. We ought to follow this same pattern. When we communicate God's Word, we must do so in **love** in a way that helps people comprehend it and apply it to their lives. This is Paul's main point in this verse. Let's not convolute it and make it harder than it should be.

How do you help people to understand the gospel through Scripture?

Question
2

In verse 2, Paul uses the other two spiritual gifts that they have wrongly emphasized to show their futility without **love**. He argues that if he has **the gift of prophecy** and the ability to **understand all mysteries and knowledge**, he is **nothing** without **love**. Even if he practices these things with the **faith** about which Jesus spoke that **could remove mountains** ([Matt 17:20](#)), it is meaningless without **love**. As we learned last week, **love** should motivate us in everything we do. But **love** is not something that's an action only; it should be our character. It's who we have become in Christ. If we remain unstained by the sinfulness of the world and connected to Christ, **love** should naturally flow from our lives in all we do!

Apart from **love**, generous and kind acts have no value either. Paul bluntly states that it would profit him **nothing** even **though** he might **bestow all** his possessions **to feed the poor** or **give his body to be burned** (v. 3). The Greek word behind the NKJV's translation **burned** more likely means boasting. Again, Paul is criticizing the Corinthians' penchant to boast in themselves and their superior "spiritual" position and wisdom. Paul has



Instruct

twice warned them about the sinfulness of boasting in themselves to the exclusion of the Lord. Boasting, therefore, always ought to be directed toward the Lord and never sought for ourselves ([1 Cor 1:29-30; 9:15](#)).

The capacity to **love** comes from the Lord. If we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our lives, guard our hearts, and give us instruction, **love** will become a natural part of our lives and truly define who we are. If we don't seek the Spirit daily, however, **love** will become a struggle because it's not who we are, but merely something we do as we relate to ever-changing conditions in our environment. Such **love** will always be conditional and self-serving because it's tied directly to our circumstances rather than rooted in the Lord. The Corinthians had this errant second view of **love**. Although they claimed to be "spiritual" and acted in the name of the Lord, they did not have love which caused tremendous problems in the church as well as their personal relationships. Let us truly evaluate our capacity to **love**. Is it rooted in the Spirit or tied to our circumstances? **Love** rooted in the Spirit is constant, consistent, and unshakable no matter what may happen around us.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

THE CHARACTER OF LOVE:

Having characterized the Corinthians' lack of **love**, Paul now turns to describe the character that **love** should display. In this list, he describes both what **love** *does* and what it *does not do* in order to draw a sharp distinction between the world's practice of **love** with the practice of Christ-centered, biblical **love**. In all, he identifies sixteen traits that **love** should exhibit: nine refer to what **love** *does* and seven to what it *does not do*. Perhaps, unbeknownst to the English reader every phrase that describes **love** in these next few verses is a verb (action) in Greek and not an adjective (mere description). **Love** is a state of existence for us as believers. It is not a static or theoretical concept, but meant to be practiced! It is a way of life—not just a description. As a way of life, these verbs which define **love** should be practiced consistently no matter the situation or the recipient! Consequently, we should live them every day!

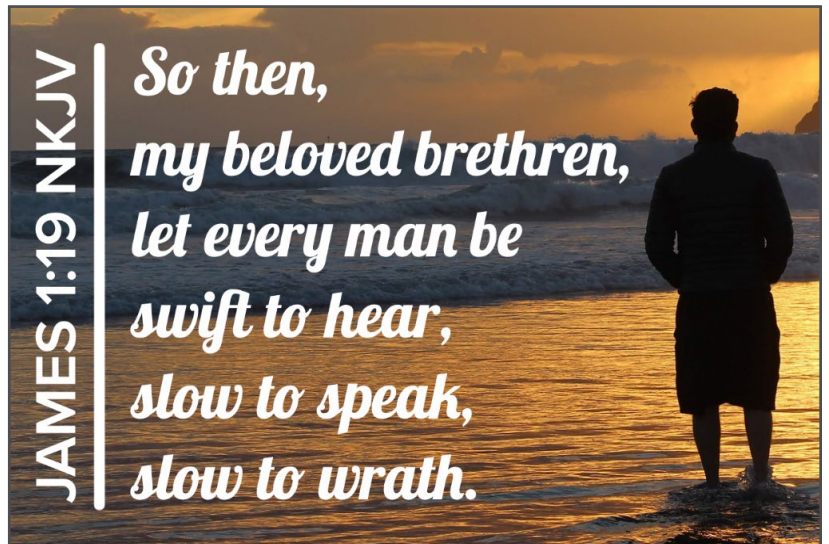
How consistent are you in practicing the biblical concept of love?

Question
3

With sixteen actions related to **love** in this text, we cannot cover them sufficiently in

one lesson. This would take weeks, and really a lifetime, of study. So, I will attempt to provide a brief overview of each concept here. However, the applications are far too numerous and wide-ranging for us to discuss in an overview. But this will allow for more practical discussion in your Connect Class on Sunday. When we seek to apply these principles, however, we must remind ourselves that their application must coincide with the rest of Scripture. I give this caution to remind us that the world has twisted the concept of **love**. This misunderstanding has crept into many churches today. Some, like the church in Corinth, have allowed this corrupt understanding to shape their views and guide their practices. We can't afford to follow this same pattern! Let's measure our understanding and practice of **love** against the selfless **love** Christ presented clearly in Scripture without filtering it through the lenses of culture. We need to make sure our actions truly match His character and not our own self-perceived idea of what **love** is and what it does.

First, Paul notes that **love suffers long** which is usually translated as patient in most other modern translations (v. 1). The translation patient, however, somewhat misses the point. The origin of the word actually conveys the idea of being even tempered. In other words, people will take time to assess a situation and weigh the evidence before they respond or make a decision. They don't merely react and allow their emotions to guide them. In our society, this seems to be largely ignored today. Many people react immediately and base their reactions almost entirely on the emotion of the moment. Truly, this word captures James' advice to "be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" ([Jas 1:19](#)). Second, **love** shows kindness. To practice kindness in the biblical sense, we must follow three principles: 1) we should show kindness to everyone ([Rom 12:9-21](#)), 2) our kind deeds must point to Christ and be a means to propagate the gospel ([Mark 9:41](#)), and 3) showing kindness doesn't mean that we overlook sin, but that we respond with gentle correction when needed ([Zech 7:8-10](#)).



In what ways does love lead us to exercise an even temperament?

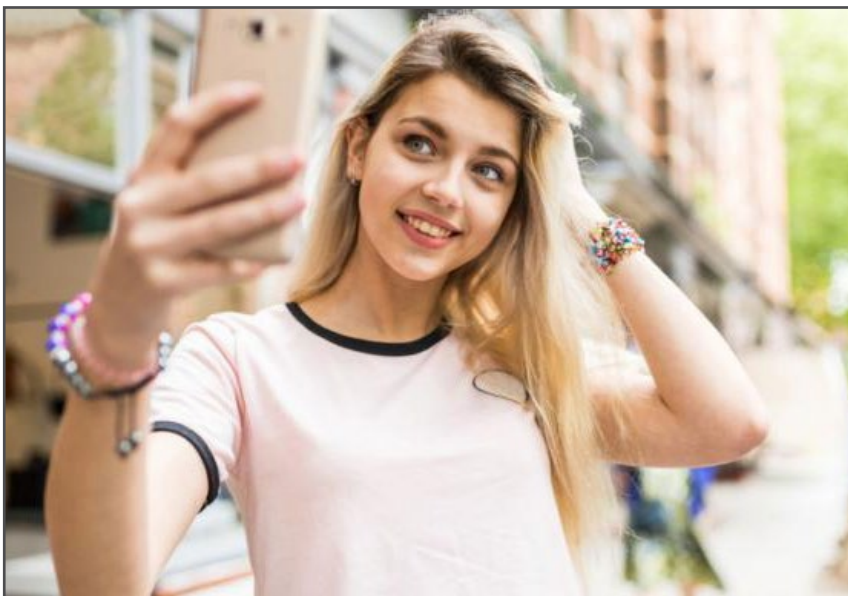
Question
4

Instruct

Third, **love does not envy**. This description introduces a series of three concepts that focus on self-promotion. The word translated **envy** is from where we get our word zealous. In this sense, people are zealous to obtain things that they think will make them look good in the eyes of the world. Such people are not truly interested in serving others, but their service and deeds become a competition whereby they seek to outdo others for their own glory. This idea then leads to the fourth and fifth actions that **love** should never do: it should **not parade itself** nor should it puff itself up. To **parade itself** means to boast or brag in one's accomplishments, abilities, or successes. Whereas **puffed up** literally means not to overstate one's importance or self-worth. Hence, most of the modern translations will interpret the latter phrase as **love** is not proud or arrogant.

The Corinthians had trouble practicing these three characteristics of **love** as evidenced by the problems in their community. Everything became a competition to see who was the best and most gifted which brought glory to themselves through their position ([chapters 1-3](#)). Thus, they misused both knowledge and spiritual gifts as a means of self-promotion which elevated their own agenda, causing chaos in the church ([chapters 12-14](#)). They bragged not only about their spiritual abilities ([chapter 4](#)), but they boasted in their ability to commit heinous acts of sin in the name of freedom in Christ ([chapters 5-7](#))!

Unfortunately, our society shares these flaws in common with the Corinthians. We live in a society in which self-promotion has become engrained within us. People



draw attention to themselves at times by falsely promoting their abilities and experiences or at other times by playing the victim of their circumstances. Aside from these extremes, however, we see daily how people focus on and promote themselves. Our society also emphasizes self-worth and self-esteem often at the expense of practicing righteousness. Society

promotes the idea that we should be accepted, affirmed, and tolerated regardless of

whether our actions constitute sin or not! Yet, to practice **love** in the biblical sense, we must remember that it's not about us or how we view the world; it's about Christ and His Word. This will help us maintain the right focus.

How does our world engage in self-promotion specifically? How has this crept into the church and what must we do to battle it?

Question
5

Sixth, **love does not behave rudely** (v. 5). This means that we should act with integrity and respect toward others by treating them with honor and dignity at all times.

We must remain civil toward one another, not talking over each other, calling each other names, or disparaging each other's character. Seventh, **love does not seek its own**. The idea of being self-seeking or self-centered naturally ties into our previous comments on self-promotion. Self-centeredness stands at the heart of all sin and the primary cause of dysfunction in relationships! Eighth, **love is not provoked**. In colloquial terms, this means that **love** doesn't have a short fuse, so modern translations will sometimes say that **love** is not easily angered. We have an epidemic of anger in our culture which centers around our own self-centeredness when we don't get our way or the self-centeredness of others who seek to get their way at any cost. Road rage, customer service incompetence, and telemarketers as well as the quirks and practices of others that don't meet with our expectations and wants can easily become a source of frustration which provokes us to anger if we're not focused on Christ.

We will take the next three characteristics of **love** together since they form a cohesive group focused on the practice of righteousness and **truth**. **Love**, therefore, **thinks no evil** and **does not rejoice in iniquity** (vv. 5-6). Instead, it practices righteousness and **rejoices in the truth**. Many modern translations interpret the phrase **thinks no evil** as it "keeps no record of wrongs." This translation, however, unnecessarily limits the scope of the Greek and narrows the idea primarily to that of forgiveness and not harboring bitterness or resentment. It entails much more than forgiveness which will become a focus in verse 7. Rather, the phrase means that we don't suspect others of having evil intentions or being out to get us nor do we have evil thoughts or intentions ourselves. Thus, we will not devise evil plans or have evil thoughts when we perceive someone has wronged us.

When we take Paul's admonition to think **no evil** along with the next prohibition that **love** should never rejoice **in iniquity**, we understand that we must also guard our hearts and minds from thinking about participating in evil at all. Remember that Paul



is talking about the church as a whole rather than individual, nuclear relationships in this context. Earlier in this very letter, Paul had chastised the Corinthians not only for practicing sin, but celebrating it! In reference to a grievous sexual sin between a man and his stepmother, he warns, “And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you” ([1 Cor 5:2](#)). **Love** rejects sin and unrighteousness in any form. Our **love** for Christ compels us to abide by His Word, live righteously, and practice **truth**. Therefore, let us never seek to justify evil or celebrate sin, but let us live in accordance to

the Word of God which clearly defines the righteous path that we ought to follow.

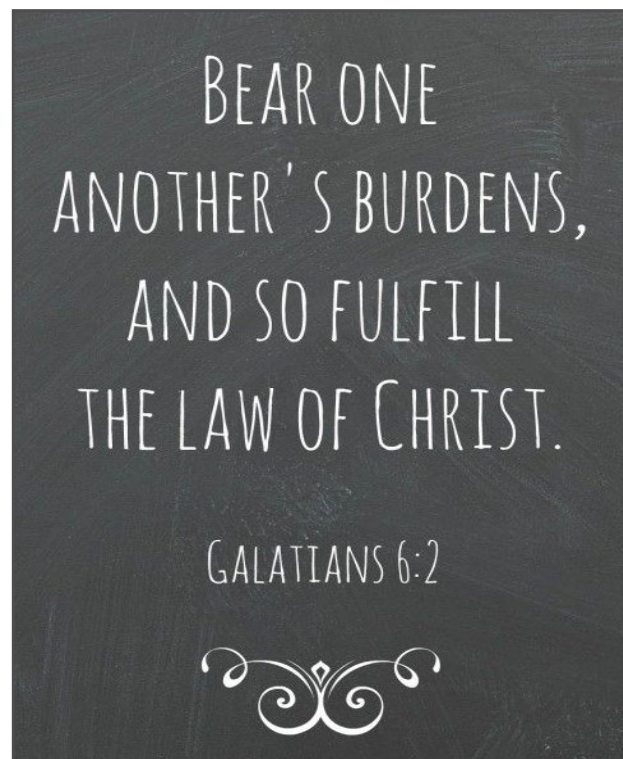
In what way does the world celebrate sin at times? How has this mentality seeped into the church? What can we do to combat it?

Question
6

Finally, Paul rounds out this list with five things that **love** always does. We will focus on the first four in this section and conclude with the fifth as we talk about the certainty of **love**. Paul explains that **love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things** (v. 7). We must read these in light of the immediate context in which Paul points out that **love** does not tolerate or stand evil, but practices the **truth**. Thus, to bear, believe, and endure **all things** does not mean to put up with sin. Such actions will, and in Corinth’s case, have already derailed the church. The word translated **bears** in Greek is very rare and the meaning is somewhat uncertain. In this context, it means something akin to support one another rather than put up with. Hence, we should always be there to support one another no matter what happens. We can see this contrast in a true friend who walks through the difficult times in life bearing one another’s burdens with those who will abandon them when the going gets tough ([Gal 6:2](#)).

Enduring **all things** also carries with it a similar idea. It doesn’t mean that we subject

ourselves to abuse, especially physical abuse, but it pictures walking through life together hand-in-hand even when we disagree. We must also realize that our particular pet peeves and preferences don't matter and we should put them aside for the sake of the relationship. We never should enter a relationship thinking that we'll conform a person to our expectations. Instead, we must realize that we too have quirks and idiosyncrasies in the way that we do things. In the end, none of these things truly matter! As in a nuclear family, we have intimate knowledge of one another's pet peeves and preferences. Brothers and sisters, in particular, like to pick at one another. Yet, for love's sake, they overlook these things in the end and express **love** when it truly matters. As a church, we ought to do the same. We should love others more than our preferences and idiosyncrasies so that we can serve together as the Lord intended.



The phrases **believes all things** and **hopes all things** are somewhat more difficult to categorize, especially since sin frequently causes dysfunction in our relationships. **Believes** perhaps is better translated as trusts in this context. In this sense, we trust that others have our best interests at heart and we don't view their motives or actions with suspicion. This isn't a naïve trust that lacks wisdom and discernment, however. At all times, we must trust in God's Word to guide us and the Spirit to help us be discerning, but this particularly applies to situations in which sin has caused hurt and mistrust in a relationship. People will inevitably act selfishly and irresponsibly at times which will require us to respond with Christ-like forgiveness ([Eph 4:32](#)). Still, we must trust that God is at work in their lives to restore them and help them mature in their relationship with Him. Thus, even when sin does enter the picture, we must hope the best for them. In fact, we should always hope the best for others in every situation which is to follow God's plan and abide by His Word!

In what ways can we support one another through the church? How does this require us to endure at times in the same way that we live in our nuclear families?

Question
7

1 Corinthians 13:8a

THE CERTAINTY OF LOVE:

Paul concludes this list with the encouragement that **love never fails**. The word translated fails actually comes from the Greek word which means to fall or collapse. With this understanding, we can begin to understand how we can have security in true **love**. When a relationship is rooted and grounded in Christ, it will never implode or collapse; it will never fail structurally. In this way, **love** provides the foundation for any relationship. If a relationship is built upon any other foundation than Christ ([1 Cor 3:10](#)), it will collapse under its own weight—the weight of selfishness and sinful desires. The Corinthian church was experiencing this firsthand! However, those relationships which are built upon Christ will withstand the test of time and persevere no matter what may happen in the world around us.

Simply translating the phrase as **love never fails** can cause us to miss this picture of **love** centered upon the Rock who is Christ. Although we must make an effort to cultivate our relationships and demonstrate our **love** through service, Paul's admonition doesn't mean that if we try hard enough or long enough that we can make a relationship work on our own and that it is guaranteed not to fail. Apart from Christ there is a high chance sin will enter into the picture and cause dysfunction at some point. We need Christ to make any relationship work! The only guarantee that any relationship will succeed is if we are both focused on Christ. If **love** is to be certain and realized in its full potential, we need Christ as our foundation. Though all else be shaken around us, His **love** for us will remain forever and when we abide in Him our love for Him and others will remain forever as well.

How does Christ provide us with the foundation and the certainty that love will never collapse or fail?

Question
8

The world has a grave misconception of what it means to love. As in Tina Turner's song, love becomes characterized as something physical which placates our emotions to bring us satisfaction. Such an understanding of love is doomed to fail! Moreover, this lack of understanding of what it means to love is causing our society to collapse inwardly through its own selfish desires and immorality. A foundation which regards love as mere pleasure to be expressed freely with no-strings-attached, commitment, or moral responsibility toward the Lord has led to the complete decay of our society as displayed by the rampant self-centeredness and self-promotion we see today! Scripture, however, gives us the foundation on which we should build our sense of love directed toward God first and then others as a testament to our love for Him. In Christ, this foundation will never fail or falter. Biblical love is not merely physical, although it does establish boundaries for that expression, and it is certainly not a mere emotion. Biblical love is who we are in Christ which is expressed by what we do. Regardless of what may happen in our lives, the persecution we may face, the unexpected trials that may come, or even the joys and victories of life, an overcomer always responds with a selfless love that reflects the character of Christ. Therefore, let us have the right perspective of love and live according to the supreme example of love set by Christ!

Incorporate

How do you show love in the way you exercise your spiritual gifts in the church?

Why should all these characteristics of love be visible in our lives daily? Why is this list not like a buffet which we can pick and choose the ones we want to practice?

Evaluate how you express the love of Christ in your life. Which of these characteristics of love are most evident in your activities? Which ones do you need to improve upon?

FEBRUARY 2021

WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED BY
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FORT WORTH

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