

Date: September 27, 2009

Title: Live Like You Were Dying #3

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NLT) ¹ If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. ⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! ⁹ Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! ¹⁰ But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. ¹² Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. ¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

Show the "What is Love" video

We are at the half-waypoint in our series now. We have been looking at how our lives might look if we knew that we only had a short time to live. We are considering how we might reprioritize our time and resources if we were living more conscious of our own mortality.

Last week we looked at what it would be like to “speak sweeter.” This week we are looking at the phrase, “Love Deeper.” In our scripture for this morning, we hear the apostle Paul telling us that of the three things that will last forever, Faith, Hope, and Love, love is the greatest. I know that many of you have probably heard or read this scripture before. Either you have read it yourself or heard it at church or it is pretty popular at weddings. The only problem I have with this scripture is that it uses the word love, and just like the lady in the video says, that word is so over used and misused in our culture that we can easily miss the point of it. I think that the point of this scripture is that “Love is the point of everything.” Love is what we seek from this life and love is what we seek to give. Love is central to the Christian faith. When you stop and think about it, Jesus’ death and resurrection was the defining act of love that allowed us to recognize God’s love for us. And just like Jesus’ first disciples, when we understand and really take it in, the love that Jesus displayed for each one of us is enough to make us all want to spread that love to as many others as we possibly can.

Now, we talk this way about Jesus’ love because we are in church and as Christians we understand that Jesus the Christ, the Son of God is the author of all love. 1 John 4:19 says, “*We love because He first loved us.*” And I believe this is expressing the on-going nature of love. Someone loved you and that allowed; maybe even compelled you to either give love back or to pass that love on to someone else. If you think of your own experience of love you will most likely remember that it was virtually impossible to hold on to it and not share it. I mean if someone shows you an act of kindness and you understand it to be love and receive it as such, it changes how you act toward everything and everybody around you.

When you read through the New Testament you see that Jesus' first disciples were transformed. They started out like normal Jewish men of the time. They wanted to know more about God, but their primary concern was pretty self-serving. They were looking for a messiah to make their own lives and the lives of their families better. And within a few years they became world changing Apostles preaching and teaching the life changing message of Jesus all over the world.

What happened to these men and women? What got hold of their lives and changed them from Christ followers to Christian leaders? How were they able to move across the world with a life saving message that would change the world forever?

I believe that the thing that changed these men and women was the Love they received from Jesus. It is a love that started 2000 years ago and has spread down through the generations and throughout the world because other people received the love and passed it on. Last week I spoke about how encouraging words spoken to one person echo throughout the world. The words are what we hear and speak, but beneath them it is **love** that gives those words power. I am not at all surprised to read Paul's assessment that faith, hope, and love are important things that will live on throughout eternity, but the most important thing; "*The greatest of these... is love.*" Love is at the center of what makes life worth living. Not the romantic love we see in the media, but genuine deep and abiding love that 1 John says, is the essence of God.

And so, for Christians, by definition, we are meant to grow more loving. The way I think it is supposed to work is that we come to church and connect with God and each other. We give and receive love directly from God and from each other and then we in turn share that love with others. All of this is happening against the backdrop of a world that can be cold, uncaring, and

at times cruel. The love we receive from Christ is like a light shining in the darkness of life. The love that we share in the name of Christ is a light shining in the darkness of others' lives.

But, you have probably noticed that some of us don't shine very brightly at times. Paul says, love is patient and kind. Do you know any impatient or unkind Christians? Paul says love is not boastful, prideful, jealous, or rude. Ever see a Christian be prideful or rude? Of course you have. I have been all of these things at times in my Christian life. If we are honest, we all have.

But here's the thing. When we let the stress of the moment dictate how we react, we are not living into the instructions Jesus gave to us: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*" (Luke 10:27) We let all kinds of things distract us from what is truly important: to deeply love our God and to love our neighbor.

Let me ask you this question: In light of the fact that you may not be here tomorrow or next week or next month, can you really afford not to love deeper? There are many reasons you may have for not loving. You might have been abused as a child. You might be trapped in a job or family situation that taxes all your patience. You may have never really experienced genuine love from another person, but can you really afford to let this stop you from receiving the love and grace God offers so you can then pass that love on to others no matter how undeserving they might seem to be?

Folks, time is running out. How can we pretend it isn't? How can we live our lives as if we are on an island and all that really matters is what time the

supply ship arrives to give us our daily rations? More than anything else, we need each other. It's the way God designed us.

So let me give you just few practical ways to develop your love sharing capacity.

One, do the unexpected.

In the New Testament there is a story of how one of Jesus' women disciples came to him when he was at someone's house for dinner. She took a very expensive jar of anointing oil and poured it all over Jesus and then began rubbing it over his feet with her hair. This oil was perhaps the most valuable thing she owned. Many people thought it was a waste and said so, but undeterred she literally showered Jesus with the most valuable thing she could think of.

I imagine that even Jesus was surprised by this show of love, but he understood it and he accepted it. These days, a jar of oil poured over a loved one would definitely be unexpected, but maybe not too effective. But something unexpected can be as simple as purchasing the gas for the people at the pump next to you or paying for the meal of someone behind you at a drive through. Or it might be surprising someone with a display of generosity that is very personal. If you are not in the habit of expressing your love to the people in your household, a simple "I love you," might be an unexpected expression of love.

The second suggestion is ***do the Unaffordable.***

Here, you might be saying, Ok this is where we have to draw the line. I can't afford to do what I can't afford to do. And I would agree with that, but what can you afford? I suppose that depends upon how you define "afford."

By all reasonable standards, the woman who poured the expensive oil over Jesus' head could likely not afford the gesture. That is, she would probably never save enough money to replace it. But the oil was hers and she could use it as she saw fit.

The New Testament is full of stories about how the early Christians were generous beyond belief. Acts 4:32 (NIV) says, *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."* They held loosely all of their possessions. And they so loved Jesus and their fellow believers, they did the unexpected and unaffordable. Their love was "over the top."

Then, later on in the New Testament, Paul is writing to the church at Corinth about the example of believers in Macedonia. These were very poor Christians going through many difficult problems. Paul was collecting an offering to take to the saints down in Jerusalem.

Listen to Paul's description of their love. In 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 (NLT) he says, *"For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but, far more. And they did it of their own free will. [4] They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem."* Talk about "extreme" Christianity. They begged Paul to take up an offering from them. When is the last time you saw that in a church?

This week I want to challenge you to consider an extravagant gift to someone who will be completely surprised by it. What precious, valuable thing do you own that you could lavish upon someone this week?

The last thing I want to suggest this morning is to ***Do it now!***

We don't know if we can do this tomorrow. We can plan to be more loving when we can afford it, but by then it might just be too late. This is not about

how much you can afford, it is about letting your love flow and sometimes sharing your material stuff is a way of sharing love. Sometimes as we said, last week, encouraging words convey your love. Sometimes it might be an act of kindness or simply just being with a person. You can't meet every need, but as Christians we are called to do what we can wherever we can.

Who knows the impact your love could have? Can you imagine what could happen if just the people gathered in this room today took this seriously. What if our primary objective this week wasn't a paycheck, or our to-do list, or getting a new gadget but THIS WEEK we lived to love. What if THIS WEEK we broke opens the perfume?

As I wrap this up today, I have to tell you that I am so happy to be serving such a loving church. Three years ago when I was praying to God to put me in the church he wanted me to serve, I had no idea it would be a church that was capable of such loving acts. You folks have been amazing. And with what I know of God and with what I have seen of your amazing capacity to love, folks we are just beginning to seeing the tip of what is possible.

My greatest dream for our church; what I hope will be our legacy? When people are proudly telling their children and grandchildren and their neighbors and friends about the church they have been a part of, the legacy of this church will be a legacy of extravagant love for Jesus. That's what it's all about: extravagant love for Jesus! Amen.