

Life Verses: Love

I Corinthians 14:1

Make Love Your Aim

The Book of I Corinthians is full of instruction to a church that had all sorts of problems. In a word, those who were a part of the church there in Corinth had a tough time relating to one another. It was not a pretty picture.

Paul does his very best to pull them together. *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it,”* he says in I Corinthians 12:27.

No sooner does he say that than he calls them to *“a more excellent way.”* What follows is what we have come to know as “The Love Chapter” or I Corinthians 13.

I Corinthians 13 is almost poetic. It captivates our attention. It inspires our souls, warms our hearts, and challenges us to no end.

It’s wonderful conclusion, *“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love”* helps us focus on the very things that are most important in this life.

To name love as *“the greatest of these,”* puts us at the very place we need to be. In fact, we are never far off from what God wants us to consider, if not live out, than when we talk about love.

On the heels of the great declaration that *“the greatest of these is love,”* is the supreme encouragement in I Corinthians 14:1 to *“make love your aim.”*

Paul’s words are so simple at this point, yet as deep as deep can be. *“Make love your aim,”* he says.

I repeat that short verse over and over again. I recall it when challenged by people and circumstances that are to be anything less than loving. I repeat it when the currents of my heart aren’t so disposed to love. I keep it front and center when challenged to live out the great commandment of *“loving God and loving neighbor.”*

“Make love your aim” has been a life verse for a long time.

What’s Your Aim in Life?

What’s the aim of your life?

Is it success? Recognition? Popularity? Happiness? Comfort? Security? The list is about as long as there are people in this room?

What’s the aim of your life?

How you answer that question, determines what you value the most. It goes a long way toward defining how you're living life.

If your aim is to succeed, you'll lay everything aside for the sake of getting ahead. If it is recognition, you'll do what ever it takes to be the center of attention. If popularity is your thing, you'll do just about anything to gain the approval of others.

You get the idea. What we deem most important is the very thing we aim for.

So what does scripture say about such things?

Quite simply, I Corinthians 14:1 reminds us to *"make love our aim."* It's the very thing upon which we need to build our lives.

Of course, Christ is just as explicit. For him loving God and loving neighbor was the clearest expression of the law there was. Nothing trumps loving God and loving neighbor.

Let me encourage you to pause today and contemplate what is, in fact, the real aim of your life.

How Is Love Defined in Your Life?

Let me offer another question. It's just as important.

So, if love is to be the aim of our lives, how is that being defined in your life?

It comes to us to seek the interests of others above ourselves. As Rick Warren writes with the first words of his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, *"It's not all about you."*

What's needed is a Copernican Revolution of sorts. You know Copernicus. He said that the earth was not the center of things, but the earth revolved around the sun. We'd do well to remember that we are not the center of the universe.

We'd do well to have *"the same mind that was Christ's."* Paul talks about such things in Philippians 2:6ff. Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and was obedient even to death on the cross.

John 15:13 states, *"Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."* Jesus in his infinite love did just that. What he did on the cross is the very definition of love.

The scripture teaches that *"love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."*

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

How is that playing out in your life?

Love—One of the Toughest Things of All

What we're talking about today is one of the toughest things of all.

The thing about love these days is that it plays out in the minds of some like a sappy Hallmark movie.

We're talking about today is a love that won't wilt in the face of hardship that stands ready to take a risk and is ever-willing to sacrifice when called upon.

Jesus puts it quite clearly. *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* And we're thinking, "You've got to be kidding me. Surely you are not serious."

In a word, love is the fundamental way God wants us to relate to one another, no matter how tough it may be to do that, no matter how challenging it might get.

Love is a Kingdom requirement.

I have always been challenged by the words of Frederick Buechner at this point.

"The love for equals is a human thing of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely.

The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing—the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.

The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing—to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints.

And then there is love for the enemy, love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. This is God's love and it conquers the world."

We Love Because He First Loved Us

Making love your aim is not for the faint of heart. If left to ourselves we will come up short every time.

Those seeking ordination in the United Methodist Church are asked, *"Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?"*

That's asked after you have gone through seminary and the rigors of the Board of Ordained Ministry, so no fool is going to answer no on that one.

The question does give you pause though.

Being “*perfected in love*” has very little to do with us and everything to do with God.

It is a fact that we love only as we are loved. A little baby is loved and nurtured and, among other things, begins to form the capacity to love.

It is a fact that those children who have been love starved are more apt to be maladjusted and tend to act out.

We love because we have first been loved.

When you think about the high calling to love, particularly when you factor in Christ’s call to “love your enemies” and to “pray for those who persecute you,” you wonder how in the world you’ll ever do that.

And then it dawns on us. The sort of love Christ talks about is not so much our own, but the very love of God working in and through us.

I John 4:7 puts it this way, “*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.*”

Even more succinctly I John 4:19 puts it this way, “*We love because he first loved us.*”

God’s great love, particularly as displayed in Jesus Christ, is the very thing that enables us to love in ways we never thought possible. He empowers us to love in ways that are clearly beyond us.

In attempting to “make love my aim,” I have come to know that such efforts depend solely upon God. There are way too many people, way too many circumstances where it is only with God’s help and empowerment that I am able to love as I should.

His love has so overwhelmed me, has so changed my life that I can’t help but share that love with others.

I am thankful for his good work. That’s no boast. It’s all him.

We are never nearer to God than when we love and never more like him when we do.

Without Love It’s All for Naught

Paul is clear about the fact that without love it’s all for naught.

In his great love chapter, I Corinthians 13, Paul talks about the importance of love.

He figures that even if he spoke in *“the tongues of men and of angels,”* and love wasn't a part of it, he'd be nothing more than a *“resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.”*

He figures that even if he had *“the gift of prophecy, or could fathom all mysteries, or had all knowledge, or even had faith to move mountains,”* and didn't have love, all of it would be for naught.

He figures that even if he *“gave everything he had to the poor or presented himself to be martyred”* and love wasn't in the mix, he'd gain nothing.

A couple of weeks ago, in talking about worry we presented a short equation that leads to peace.

We said, **Prayer + Thanks = Peace.**

This week we share another equation. It has everything to do with what we just talked about. If love is not a part of what we do, we'll fall woefully short every time.

I borrow this from Pastor Tevai Matapo who writes about such things.

He says, **Life – Love = Zero.**

You can be an eloquent speaker, have the knowledge of a genius, the faith of a miracle worker, the generosity of a philanthropist, the dedication of a martyr, but if you don't love, it matters little.

Love Never Fails

After all, when it comes right down to it, *“Love never fails.”*

It is, hands down, the most powerful force in the world.

More good is done, more relationships struck, more hurts healed, and more progress made, all in the name of love.

In a word, love makes the world go round.

It cements relationships, holds families together, and provides a foundation for extraordinary acts of kindness.

It is the very thing that expresses the heart of God.

“So then, three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

“Make love your aim.”