

Fil-Am Community Church  
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**LIFE'S GREATEST AIM**  
**1 Corinthians 13-14:1**

I'd like to begin by asking you to answer a question. How would you complete this sentence: My aim in life is \_\_\_\_\_. What word, what phrase would you use. Success? Happiness? Comfort? Security? Recognition? Fun? A dry diaper? To be well known? Approval?

How you answer that questions determines your dominant life principle. Everybody's got one whether you know it or not. Your dominant life principle is what you refer to unconsciously every day when you have multiple choices and you have decisions to make. For instance: If my dominant life principle is fun then when I get two invitations to go out in the evening, I'm going to choose the one I'll have more fun at. If my dominant principle in life is security then I'm always going to make the choice that is the most safe, that's the least risky. If my dominant value in life is comfort then I'm always going to do the thing that's easiest. When I make choices I'm going to choose the things that are easy and the least effort. If my dominant life principle is to be recognized, I'll tend to choose things where people will notice me.

What does God say should be our dominant life principle? Our life aim? I Corinthians 14:1 (Living Bible) "*Let love be your greatest aim.*" The Amplified version renders this as, "*Pursue [this] love [with eagerness, make it your goal].*" In other words, it's saying, "Here's what you ought to build your life on." The question is, Why?

We're going to begin a series that will answer this question. We're going to look at the chapter on love in the Bible, I Corinthians 13. Today, I'll quickly introduce it.

So, we ought to make love our greatest aim in life because of the priority of love. Notice in the first few verses of the preceding chapter why it's the most important value.

### **1. Without love all that I say is ineffective.**

*"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."* (v. 1) Words without love are empty, just noise. The world is impressed by great communicators, charisma. But God isn't impressed. He says words without love are nothing, ineffective. The Corinthians were real caught up in this. They were proud of their spiritual eloquence. They said, "We can speak in the tongues of man and angels." God says, "You're majoring on the minors." Have you ever thought that you're not communicating because you're not speaking in a loving way? We always listen and people respond to loving words. But we resent and reject unloving words.

### **2. Without love all that I know is incomplete.**

*"If I have the gift of prophecy, and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge... but have not love, I am nothing."* You can have a Phi Beta Kappa key, be a MENSA member, have so many degrees they call you Dr. Fahrenheit, but it doesn't matter. Without love you're nothing. You can be a genius, brilliant, a walking Bible encyclopedia, memorize and quote the whole New Testament, split a theological hair sixteen different ways, answer all the Bible questions, unscruit the inscrutable but God says, "It doesn't matter." The Bible says W(1 Cor. 8:1) It's better to have a right heart than it is to have a right head. We're in a knowledge explosion. We have only 3% of the knowledge that is going to be available in the

year 2016. The world is exploding with information and knowledge. You can't keep up with it. Yet are any of man's basic problems being solved? No.

The world is not looking for more knowledge; the world is looking for love. Without love all that I say is ineffective and all that I know is incomplete.

**3. Without love all that I believe is insufficient.**

*"If I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love I am nothing."* It doesn't matter what you believe, if you don't have love it doesn't count.

There is a misconception that all being a Christian involves is believing certain truths, doctrines, holding certain beliefs. Someone says, "I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus." Big deal! So does the devil. The devil believes Jesus is the Son of God. But do you love Jesus? Do you realize He loves you? Do you love other people in Jesus' name. Christianity is a lifestyle and it is a lifestyle of love.

**4. Without love all that I give is insignificant.**

*"If I give all I possess to the poor... but have not love, I gain nothing."* This says you can give everything you've got, not just tithing, you can give everything and still not have love. Why? Because you can give for selfish motives. People often give for different motives. Some people give for prestige, to get their name on a plaque. Some people give for power, to control people -- a lot of times adults give to their adult kids in order to control them. You can give out of obligation, out of guilt. Just because you give doesn't mean you're doing it in love. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving.

You can buy your wife the biggest diamond ring in the world, but if you don't love her it doesn't count. That's why I always have second thoughts about buying my wife a diamond. Have you ever seen guilty parents trying to buy off their kids? You can't because all they need is love. Just because you give doesn't mean you're doing it in love. If you don't do it in love it doesn't matter.

**5. Without love all that I accomplish is inadequate.**

v. 3 *"If I...surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."*

I can rack up a list of impressive achievements, I can succeed in all kinds of great accomplishments, I can even sacrifice my life for the greatest cause in the world -- the kingdom of God -- but without love it won't matter! It's wasted effort.

The point in these first few verses is relationships are more important than accomplishments in life. Success without love is empty.

One day God is going to do an audit on your life and when He evaluates your life He is not going to focus on your accomplishments, or your bank account, but He's going to look at your relationships to evaluate how you lived.

I can have the eloquence of an orator, the knowledge of a genius, the faith of a miracle worker, the generosity of a philanthropist, the dedication of a martyr, but if I don't love it doesn't count. This is very, very important. There is no more important topic than the one we're talking about this morning. Because life without love is zero.

After he hammers in this point about the priority of love he then talks about the practice of love beginning verse 4. But before we go there, let's define what love is not and what love is.

It's amazing to me that everybody uses the word 'love' but nobody can define it. There are thousands of love stories in the bookstore, movies, songs. We say, "I love my wife... I love God... I love America... I love my dog, I love the weather, I love hot dogs." We just throw this word out there. We talk about how it's the most important principle but we can't even define it.

You know why it's hard to define it? It's because love's not an emotion in the first place. Have you figured that out? Love is not an emotion. Love affects emotions. Love creates emotions. Love causes emotions. But love is not an emotion. If it was, you couldn't control it.

Now, one thing that complicates matters is that the society we live in equates love with sex. And people know far more about sex than they do about love. A lot of songs on the radio are not love songs they are lust songs. And that is why a lot of people, and even young people, get confused that results in a lot of broken marriages and unwanted pregnancies.

The fact is, you and I need some lessons on how to love. We're in a society today with so many dysfunctional families.

Most people really don't know how to love. We grow up with bad models in different places, movies, other stuff. I was going to call this series "How to Become a Great Lover" but it doesn't sound right. Then I thought, "How to Improve Your Love Life". Doesn't sound right, either. I decided on "Building Great Relationships". Much safer.

How do I practice love? The Bible is very practical. It says, and let us read together, *"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. Love never fails."* (1 Cor. 13:4-8a)

We're going to take this very seriously. In this series, we're going to take each of these words in depth. This morning I just want to make two insights on the practice of love.

### **1. Love is an action.**

It's not something you feel or something you say. Love is something you do. Love just doesn't talk, it's not just words. Love acts. Love is an action. It's a demonstration, not an inclination.

I think probably one of the greatest black preachers in America was Dr. E.V. Hill. He was the pastor of the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist church in Los Angeles for 42 years. He was a tremendous man of God and an intellectual giant. The most admirable thing I think about Dr. E. V. Hill is that he was a man of integrity. He was not afraid to call it as he saw it.

Many times in his ministry in inner city Los Angeles he has called things the way he saw them and pointed out injustice and pointed out things that were wrong and as a result many times his life had been threatened -- death threats constantly on his life.

One time, after something he has said on Sunday morning, there was a threat that he was going to be bombed during the next week. He took that very seriously.

One day coming home he noticed his car was not at home. He immediately thought either somebody has stolen it or they're tampering with it, putting a bomb in it. He sat down on his front steps very worried. About thirty minutes later, his wife drove up in his car. He said apprehensively, "What are you doing?" She was well aware of the threat. She said, "I got to thinking, this community needs you more than it needs me. If they were going to rig that car to be bombed I wanted me to be in it not you." Hill said "I always knew that my wife loved me but now I understood what love was all about." Love is an action. His wife had acted out her love for her husband.

## **2. Love is a choice.**

You choose to love. And you also choose not to love. It's not true that you can't control it. You can control it. Yes, you feel it but it's more than a feeling. Feelings are fleeting. They change based on circumstances.

Let me tell you a story. There was this Texan who asks a Harvard graduate: “Where are you from?” The Harvard Graduate says: “I come from a place where we do not end sentences with prepositions.”

The Texan then replies: "Okay— where are you from, ugly-face?"

You couldn't help but laugh at that joke because you're expressing the emotion of surprise, or delight or happiness. There's something in jokes that triggers something in us that we can't help but express it with laughter.

If you try to suppress it, you go like this. You can't control it. In fact, if right now, I tell you a sad story, you'll be moved and feel sad and maybe cry. You can't help it. But if you look at me, with my white hair, my dark skin, my short stature, you can decide right now whether you love me or not. My wife made the right decision a long time ago. Now, if I say mean things to you, you can also decide whether you love me or not. Folks, that's why love is more than a feeling. It is a choice. You don't have to feel love to love. You choose to love. You choose not to love.

So, what is love? Love is when you do the loving thing even when you don't feel like it. Love is getting up in the middle of the night and helping a sick kid when that's the last thing you want to do. Love is being patient with your husband or wife when they're acting like a jerk and they're irritable. Love is giving a person what they need not what they deserve. That's love. It's an action and it's a choice.

When you love in spite of your feelings, when you love even when you don't feel like it, that's what I call loving by faith. Acting in a loving way when you don't feel like it. It's easier to act your way into a feeling than feel your way into an action. If you act in a loving way eventually the feelings will come back. They will.

I read a story about a young mother who felt overwhelmed. She was battling depression, her schedule and demands on her life had heaped in on her. She said, "All I seemed to do was nag at my kids, bark at them and scold them incessantly.

When I looked at myself I saw a screw. In my tears I cried out to the Lord." In her quiet time of praying and reading the Bible the answer came in I Corinthians 13. She said, "Five words leaped out at me, `Without love I am nothing.'" So she wrote these words all over her house -- put them on her refrigerator door, on the dashboard of her station wagon, on her calendar -- "Without love I am nothing." She said, "I realized the single most important thing I could do was love my family. So I began to live my life by love. I began to run my home on love power. It was as transforming as when I accepted Christ into my life. It brought the happiness back into my life and in my home." She made a choice. And she took an action.

Paul says you need to make love -- loving other people -- the number one objective of your life. Why? First, because of its priority; Second, because of the practice -- what it does in your life, the happiness it brings to yourself and others; Third, because of the permanence.

### **Permanence of Love**

Paul says you need to make it your number one aim because it's the only thing that's going to last. Let me read to you v. 7-8 in another version (Phillips) "*Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. Love never fails.*"

It says, "*Love knows no limit to its endurance.*" It's durable. It's going to last longer than an Energizer battery. It's eternal. It stays with you. Every other life principle is temporary except love. "I live for fun" -- how long does fun last? "I live for money" -- how long is your money going to last? "I live for pleasure" -- how long does that last? "I live for security", "I live for approval of others" ... No other life principle that you choose to base your life on will last. Nothing lasts except one thing. Love. It's permanent. Love is going to last for eternity.

v. 13 says, “*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*”

Why? Why is love greater than faith and hope? There is only going to be love in heaven. It's the only one that lasts for eternity. You don't need faith in heaven. The Bible says you'll see God as He is. Everything will be reality. You're not going to need hope in heaven. Everything will be there.

Everything you've ever needed and wanted. You're not going to need hope. But heaven is going to be full of love.

You will feel completely, 100% loved in heaven. It's going to be a love extravaganza. Why? Because God is love. It doesn't say "Love is God" -- "*God is love*". It doesn't say He has it; it says He is it. In His presence you will feel loved. It's the only thing that's going to last. It's the only life principle that's going to take you from this life into the next one and still keep going.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus says, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” He says "a new command". He doesn't say a new suggestion. It's commanded. The point I want to make: If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, *for you*, love is a lifestyle, it is not optional. You don't get to choose whether you're going to be loving or not. If you're a believer it's a command.

How are we to love? Jesus says "*As I have loved you.*" Jesus is our model. "I can't love people the way Jesus did! He was perfect! I can't love them the way Jesus did!" You're right. That's why you need Jesus Christ in your life. Only He can love through you. You can't do it on your own. That's why you need God's power in your life. Only Jesus Christ can be that way and live that kind of love through you.

Love is the main thing in life. The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing! The main thing is love. Life minus love equals zero. Zilch! Nada!

He says, *"All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another."*

The sign of a Christian, the distinguishing mark of a Christian, is not a cross, not a crucifix, a dove, a fish on your bumper sticker, a crown. The sign of a Christian is love. How many people know you're a Christian because of your loving lifestyle?

We sing about love, talk about love, pray about love, study about love, but do we do it? To develop love as your life principle, making it your greatest aim, means you're going to have to take some action as soon as you walk out this door! You drive out of here and you drive behind a very slow vehicle. Your first impulse is to swear under your breath or get around the car and as soon as you pass by give the other driver a mean look.

If you're serious about making love your lifestyle, it may require some radical changes. You're going to act in love.

First, start acting loving in the relationships you already have. Think through all the relationships you already have and see if you need to seek some reconciliation to some people you've been unloving to. Kids, husbands, wife, parents, someone at school, at work. Start trying to make things right with the relationships you do have. But that's not all.

If you make love your lifestyle, you'll start enhancing and enlarging the number of relationships you do have. Do it to share God's love with other people because that's the most important thing. That's what God is going to look at when He evaluates your life. You start expanding your relationships. You cannot live the loving lifestyle as a hermit. You spell love T-I-M-E. It takes time. You love your kids, you've got to spend time with them. You love your husband/wife you've got to spend time with them. You love Jesus, you've got to spend time with Him. It takes time, involvement, effort, energy. But it's worth it.

I am excited about this series. It really can make the difference in your family and marriage if you learn how to love, and in your work, and in your relationships with other adults, and in your church. People are attracted to the church that loves. People are attracted to Christ, they're not persuaded to Christ. They're not argued into the kingdom. They're attracted by the love of God. The more our family here loves, the greater this church will be.

People don't care what we know until first they know that we care. They want to know we care. What people need is not more theology, not more oratory. They need the love of Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that our church will be known not for the Panera Bread or great music or great IMPACT teaching but I pray people will say "That's the church where they love people. You go there and they don't know any better than to love you. Everybody is so friendly and loving." That's the kind of church that pleases God. We're known we're Christians by our love.

I challenge you to join me in a love movement. I confess that I myself am lacking in this area. I need to put love in action. I need to love more. Perhaps, that's what each of us needs to do, needs to be. Please keep coming in the next nine weeks as we explore more in detail this great passage of Scripture on love. If you can bring a friend next Sunday, that's better. Bring somebody with you that needs to hear about the love of Jesus. Gallup did a poll and found that 50% of the people in America said, "I'd go to church. I'm just waiting for somebody to ask me." Don't come by yourself next Sunday. Do something loving, bring a friend. It's loving when we give them a chance to hear and experience the love of God and I think it makes God smile.