

The Best Way to Live Your Life

"But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all. 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. 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. 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."

1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:1-3 (NLT)

Happy Valentine's Day! Well, it's still two days away but, of course, we don't want our men to forget that. Men, do you already have a Valentine's gift for your wife or your wife-to-be? I read the story of this young wife who told her husband over breakfast, "Last night, I dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Valentine's Day. What do you think it means?"

"You'll know tonight," he said.

That evening, the man came home with a small package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it--only to find a book entitled "The Meaning of Dreams".

This morning I'm going to talk about real stuff not just dreams. I'm going to talk about the best way to live your life. It is a way of life that is based on the most important word that every person, especially a Christian, should not miss on his or her vocabulary.

Have you heard the story about the actor who was playing the part of Christ in the Passion Play in the Ozarks? As he carried the cross up the hill a tourist began heckling, making fun of him, and shouting insults at him. Finally, the actor had taken all of it he could take. So he threw down his cross, walked over to the tourist, and punched him out.

After the play was over, the director told him, "I know he was a pest, but I can't condone what you did. Besides, you're playing the part of Jesus, and Jesus never retaliated. So don't do anything like that again." Well, the man promised he wouldn't. But the next day the heckler was back worse than before, and finally the actor exploded and punched him out again.

The director said, "That's it. I have to fire you. We just can't have you behaving this way while playing the part of Jesus." The actor begged, "Please give me one more chance. I really need this job, and I can handle it if it happens again." So the director decided to give him another chance.

The next day he was carrying his cross up the street. Sure enough, the heckler was there again. You could tell that the actor was really trying to control himself, but it was about to get the best of him. He was clenching his fists and grinding his teeth. Finally, he looked at the heckler and said, "I'll meet you after the resurrection!"

You know, sometimes it is hard for those who profess to be Christians to behave like Christians should. We try to carry our crosses, but if someone crosses us, we tend to lose our composure and behave in much the same way the rest of the world behaves.

But the Bible teaches us that we are to be people who exercise love in all of our relationships with one another.

Listen to these words, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* [Romans 12:18]. And again, *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love"* [Ephesians 4:2]. And still again, *"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy..."* [Hebrews 12:14].

Now all of those Scriptures say the same thing. It may be difficult sometimes, and not everybody will be easy to love, but if it is possible, we are to live in peace and harmony with everyone.

So I'm going to talk about a way of life that is based on love. Because it is only through this that we'll discover that our relationships will improve whether at home, at work, in school, even in church. This morning we'll look at the text we read this morning and glean certain principles to help us adopt the best way to live our lives.

First, let us look at

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE IN OUR LIVES

In the last verse of Chapter 12, Paul says, *"But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all."* He says this because the Corinthian Christians have become gifts-fixated. In the verses leading to this verse, he talks about the importance of unity in the body of Christ. But it seems that the Corinthians were more interested in boasting about their spiritual gifts than in maintaining and improving their relations with one another. So, Paul is saying, "It's good to be having all these gifts and in fact, desire some more. But life is more than possessing these gifts and using them. I want to show you the best way to take care of virtually every situation, and that is the way of love."

Then he points out that love is more important than 5 other things that Christians consider very important.

In vs. 1, Paul says that love is more important than spiritual gifts. *"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."*

On the day of Pentecost, when the very first gospel sermon was ever preached, God gave the apostles the special gift of being able to speak in languages

that they had never learned so that the people hearing them could understand what was being said.

But here in 1 Corinthians, Paul is saying that if God gave him the gift of speaking every human language, and even the heavenly language of the angels, but he didn't have love, then he would be nothing more than a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. Now what did he mean by that?

Back in the 1st Century, there was a big gong or cymbal hanging at the entrance of most pagan temples. When people came to worship, they hit them to awaken the pagan gods so they would listen to their prayers.

Here, Paul is saying that even if he were so blessed that he could speak with the greatest of eloquence in every language, but didn't have love, then his life was as useless as this ridiculous act of pounding on a gong to awaken non-existent gods.

You see, love is more important than any spiritual gift.

Then in vs. 2 Paul says that love is more important than knowledge. *"If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge... but didn't love others, I would be nothing."*

Paul says that even if you know it all - if you know everything there is to know about nuclear science; if you know everything there is to know about medicine; if you know everything there is to know about philosophy and psychology and theology and every other kind of "ology" - if you know it all, but have no love, then you are nothing at all.

It has always amazed me that when people look at society and try to analyze what is wrong with us, why we're killing and abusing one another, that those experts always seem to come back with the same answer,

"We need more education. We need to get everybody educated, and then we won't have these problems anymore."

But I don't think education is the answer. I'm certainly not opposed to education. But listen to what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 8:1**, "*Knowledge puffs you up with pride, but love builds up.*" I don't think we need more knowledge near as much as we need more love. We need a whole lot more love and the hearts of people need to change before society will ever change.

Thirdly, Paul says that love is more important than faith. Can you believe that? Now he doesn't say that faith is not important. He just says that love is more important than faith. He says, "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Faith, we are told in the Scriptures, is so important that it is impossible to please God without faith. And I trust that all of you here this morning have faith. But what is your faith? What do you believe for sure this morning?

Do you believe that God is the creator of the world? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son, and that He came into our world and lived a sinless life, and that He died and was buried and on the third day rose again? Do you believe that He is now at the right hand of the Father, and is preparing a place for us, and that one day He will come again? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is our guide and counselor and comforter?

If you believe all those things, then that is well and good and I commend you for it. But the Bible teaches that if you believe all the right stuff, but you do not have love, then you are nothing. Because even faith is of no value unless it is backed up by love.

The priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan had faith. The problem was they had no love. So they walked by on the other side and just left the man lying there to die.

In **Galatians 5:6** Paul says, "*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*"

Fourthly, love is more important than generosity. Paul says, *“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.”*

Now notice that he doesn’t say, "If I give 10%." He says, "If I give everything, if I empty my checking account, if I give all my retirement funds, if I sell my house, if I cash in my insurance policies, if I sit on the corner with nothing left but what I’m wearing, and I’ve given it all away to help the poor, but I don’t have love then I am nothing at all."

You see, generosity is not enough. Are you a generous person? I get calls and emails all the time, and I’m sure you do, too, from people appealing for funds for worthwhile causes.

But why do you give? Do you give because the preacher just preached a sermon on stewardship? Do you give because you feel guilty if you don’t? Do you give because you want to impress others sitting around you? Do you give because you’re afraid that God will get you if you don’t? Do you give because you think you will get more than you give?

You see, all those are wrong reasons. If the only reason that I give is to receive or to benefit myself, then love is absent, and giving is empty. The motive for giving should be love, love for God and love for God’s people.

Then he says that love is more important than accomplishments. He says, *“If I ...even sacrificed my body... but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.”* (v. 3)

He is talking about martyrdom. He is talking about being so faithful and so committed to God that you end up dying because of your faith.

How deep is your faith? How deep is your commitment? Are you willing to lay down your life for Jesus, if it came to that?

But Paul is saying that even if you go to church every time the church doors are open, if you read your Bible faithfully, if you pray, and do all the things that a Christian person ought to do, but if there is no love behind all that then it is nothing in God's sight.

So he is saying that love is more important than spiritual gifts, more important than knowledge, more important than faith, more important than generosity, and more important than all the things that you might accomplish for the kingdom of God.

Which brings us to the second point of this message.

II. THE PRACTICE OF LOVE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

So obviously, love is very important, much more maybe, than we ever realized before. Listen to what Jesus says in **John 13:34, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."**

Now notice that Jesus says that this is a commandment, not a suggestion. And God never commands us to do anything that we cannot do.

We tend to think that love is something that just happens to us because that is what the world teaches. You fall in love like you fall into a ditch, or you fall out of love like you fall out of a tree. You can't help it. It is something that just happens to you.

Someone sings, "I can't help falling in love with you." Someone else sings, "You've lost that loving feeling." Someone else sings, "I love you. Please tell me your name." That's really deep stuff, you know. But the Bible teaches that love is something we can control. God commands us to love each other. Which means, I can will to love you, and you in turn can will to love me. So this is not a hopeless situation at all.

Now, what kind of love is being talked about here? In Philippians 2:4 Paul says that he wants us to behave as Jesus Christ behaved. In other words to love in the same way that Jesus loved.

And here is the way Jesus loved. He says, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." In other words, love becomes unselfish. You begin to think about other people and their interests just like you think about yourself and your interests. You become unselfish. Now I want to apply that in several different areas.

First of all, see how that would work in the family. Let's suppose that someone in every family represented here this morning would say, "I'm going to go home and put this into practice."

Start with your spouse. You ought to love your husband or your wife first and most. You ought to be kinder, more tender, more gentle to them even if they're feeling grumpy. You heard this joke before. One man says to another, "Sometimes I wake up grumpy, sometimes I just let her sleep." So, begin first in your marriage relationship.

Can you see how that would affect the atmosphere of the home? There wouldn't be any arguing or bickering, no sharp words between each other because their interests are just as important as yours. And pretty soon it filters down to the relationship you share with your children, maybe even your in-laws and your out-laws and everybody else in the family. Just because you love them.

It begins in the family, and it spills over into the church family. In fact, Jesus says, "*By this they shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" That's the way the world will find out that the message of Jesus Christ is valid. And if we're really going to love each other the way Jesus loved us then we have to develop in our own lives the same kind of compassion for people that Jesus had.

I read the story of an old man who told about renting "Free Willy" and watching it with his grandchildren. He said that they were enthralled with the movie, especially one grandson who was almost 5 years old. His grandson sat his little chair in front of the TV set and didn't move for two hours as he watched that movie. His eyes were fixed to the screen. He was mesmerized. He watched everything. You could see little tears in his eyes. You could see him laugh when he was supposed to. He was totally caught up in the movie.

Can you remember getting caught up in something and so identifying with what's going on that you actually became a part of a story? Well, that's compassion, and it will cause us to ask ourselves some tough questions.

"What's it like to hurt deep inside and no one knows you're hurting and you don't feel free to tell them that you're hurting? What's it like being sick and knowing you're not going to get well, and wanting more than anything else to live? What's it like to be handicapped? What's it like to be a minority? What's it like to be dealing with marital problems or domestic problems? What's it like?"

What kind of burdens are people carrying, and do we care enough to help them bear those burdens? That's what it means when Jesus talks about loving one another as He has loved us.

Finally, we are to let that love flow into the workplace, too. We do it when we show those people who work next to us that Jesus Christ is our Lord, not just with words, but by the example we set. You may have a hard boss that you don't like very much. Or you may work with someone who makes life difficult for you. But Jesus said that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. In fact, Paul writes in **Romans 12:20–21, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

There is a story about **Doug Nichols** I want to share with you because I think it illustrates what I have been trying to say this morning. Doug Nichols is a missionary who has worked in the Philippines for 20 years. But I'm not going to talk about his experience in the Philippines. I'm going to talk about his experience in India where he did mission work in 1967. While he was just starting to study the language he became infected with tuberculosis and had to be put in a sanitarium. In his blog entitled "Witnessing in a TB Sanitarium" this is what he says, and I quote,

"While serving with Operation Mobilization in India in 1967, tuberculosis forced me into a sanitarium for several months. I did not yet speak the language, but I tried to give Christian literature written in their language to the patients, doctors and nurses. Everyone politely refused.

"I sensed many weren't happy about a rich American (to them all Americans are rich) being in a free, government-run sanitarium. (They didn't know I was just as broke as they were!)

"The first few nights I woke around 2:00 a.m. coughing. One morning during my coughing spell, I noticed one of the older and sicker patients across the aisle trying to get out of bed. He would sit up on the edge of the bed and try to stand, but in weakness would fall back into bed. I didn't understand what he was trying to do. He finally fell back into bed, exhausted. I heard him crying softly.

"The next morning I realized that the man had been trying to get up and walk to the bathroom! The stench in the ward was awful. Other patients yelled insults at the man. Angry nurses moved him roughly from side to side as they cleaned up the mess. One nurse even slapped him. The old man curled into a ball and wept.

"The next night I again woke up coughing. I noticed the man across the aisle sit up and again try to stand. Like the night before, he fell back whimpering.

I don't like bad smells, and I didn't want to become involved, but I got out of bed and went over to him. When I touched his shoulder, His eyes opened wide with fear. I smiled, put my arms under him, and picked him up.

“He was very light, due to old age and advanced TB. I carried him to the washroom, which was just a small filthy room with a hole in the floor. I stood behind him with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. After he finished, I picked him up and carried him back to his bed. As I laid him down, he kissed me on the cheek, smiled, and said something I couldn't understand.

“The next morning another patient woke me and handed me a steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hands that he wanted a tract. As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted the booklets I had tried to distribute before. Throughout the day nurses, interns and doctors also asked for literature.

“Weeks later an evangelist who spoke the language visited me, and as he talked to others in the sanitarium he discovered that several had put their trust in Christ as Savior as a result of reading the literature!

“What did it take to reach these people with the Gospel? It wasn't health, the ability to speak their language, or a persuasive talk. I simply took a trip to the bathroom.

“Anyone could have done that!”

Folks, that's the power of sharing your love with others. That's what happens when you care about others. It is the best way to live your life. Someone has said, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

The best way to live your life is the way that Jesus Christ lived his life. In fact, it was his love for you that drove him to sacrifice his life for you. Do you know that the Bible says we're all sinners and are condemned to go to hell because of our sins? We cannot save ourselves, our good works cannot save us, your religion cannot save you. No one or nothing on earth can ever take away your sins. And let's face it. You know what sin is like. If you do something bad and your conscience makes you feel guilty, that is sin. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's the bad news. The good news is, you can be saved from your sins. You can be cleansed and purified. How? By believing that Jesus died for your sins. He is the Son of God who the Father sent to die in our place. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The Bible also says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus". Friend, if you put your faith in Jesus, in what he has done for you, your sins are forgiven. He died on the cross for the purpose of delivering you from your sins. And news gets better. Because, if you put your trust in Jesus, you'll receive the gift of eternal life. It begins right at the moment you believe in Jesus. You will be stamped "saved" by the Holy Spirit and that is your passport to heaven. You'll go straight to heaven when you leave this world. That is Christ's promise in John 5:14. "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

And the really good thing is, now that you're saved and on your way to heaven, you can live the best life you can ever live based on the love of Jesus.

Let us bow our heads and close our eyes.