

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Building Faith at Home

## The Loving Home

13)

Study #3 (1 Corinthians

### Introduction: Your home - a well-oiled machine?

An internal combustion engine must be well oiled if it is going to run long and strong. A few years ago, you may have seen a certain **Castrol Motor Oil** commercial on television that emphasized this point.

In this commercial the oil plugs were removed and the oil was allowed to drain out of a dozen or so engines on engine stands in a shop.

These perfectly good motors (!) were then started up and allowed to run with no oil. There was nothing wrong with any of the engines when they were fired up. Predictably, though, without oil, problems developed.

There is always friction in an engine. Absent lubrication, the friction created lots of heat. The commercial actually showed a heat-sensitive time-lapse picture of the inside of the engine running through the colors of the light spectrum from yellow to red to blue.

It didn't take long before valves stuck. Piston rings scraped against cylinder walls. The heads warped. Finally, the main bearings seized, and the engines stopped. All because of the absence of oil.

This morning we are wrapping up our Building Faith at Home series, and I'm inviting you to join me in looking at a very well known passage from the Bible.

Over the past couple of Sundays, Jeff Harrison has brought two really fine messages centering around God's wonderful gift of sex. Jeff urged us to embrace God's design for sex and to avoid the temptations to alter that design.

Today, Scripture will help us zero in on the oil that will allow our Christ-centered homes to flourish. Today, in our homes - homes in which the Lord Jesus reigns - we are seeking to create a culture that honors God and that blesses those with whom we live and those who visit. The Apostle Paul points us to the oil we need to nurture that life-giving culture.

Our passage occurs in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth.

### Introduction: The Great Hymn to Love

This letter is what many Bible students call "an occasional letter" meaning that this letter was "occasioned" by things that were going on in church.

Paul had met the Corinthians and established the church during his second missionary journey (as recorded in Acts 18). This most immoral of ancient cities *heard* the Gospel through Paul's preaching and *saw* the Gospel through his power and love.

A number of Corinthians believed in Jesus and a church was established there around AD 52.

A couple of years later, while in the city of Ephesus (see 1 Cor. 16:8), Paul heard that there were problems in the Corinthian church.

Having a deep concern for their welfare, he sat down to write the letter before us - 1 Corinthians.

The church at Corinth was Paul's "special" church. There were factions and misuse of spiritual gifts and theological heresies and immoralities and worship improprieties and lawsuits and legalisms.

The chapter we are looking at today is one of the few chapters in the book that isn't dedicated to helping the church work through a specific problem of behavior or doctrine.

1 Corinthians 13 didn't tell the Corinthians how to order a worship service or what to believe about the resurrection or how to discipline a sinning church member.

Instead, beginning with the words, **[12:31] And I show you a still more excellent way...**, Paul described the *atmosphere*, the *environment*, the *culture* in which those very practical issues could be resolved in a way that honored God and blessed people.

Paul's message to the church at Corinth was that all the particulars could be worked out as long as *love* was in place; that *love* is "**the more excellent way**"; that without *love* oiling the particulars, the engine of the church would seize up.

Today, I want to take 1 Corinthians 13 and apply it to our homes.

This chapter doesn't tell us how to discipline our children, how to entertain with class, how to deal with cranky neighbors, how to set a budget, or how to manage chores.

It does tell us how to create a culture in which all of that can be carried out to God's glory and to the blessing of all who enter your home.

Jesus once said that love is the mark of the Christian. **[John 13:34] By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Just so, the distinguishing mark of the Christian home isn't a well-manicured lawn or attendance at church functions. Today, I'm making the case that love is to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian home.

And it is my hope and prayer that as each of us leave here this morning we are leaving with a determination before God that we will do all we can do, by His grace, to have a home marked by love.

Some view 1 Corinthians 13 as the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote. Most everyone who reads it places it among the finest passages in all of literature - and it is a beautiful chapter.

The chapter divides into three sections. We are going to focus mainly on the middle section. But I do want us to see the beginning and the end to start out with.

Chapter 12 has included a key treatment of spiritual gifts. Paul will pick up that theme again at 14:1. But he interrupts himself at the end of chapter 12 with those intriguing words, **[31b] And I show you a still more excellent way.**

That more excellent way is the way of love.

### **The Transcendent Superiority of Love (vv. 1-3)**

**[1] If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, and have not love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. [3] And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.**

### **Love vs. Speech**

Love is better than the most exalted speech, towering oratory, or the gift of tongues. Nothing spoken or written compares to love. And without love, the most gifted speech is course and crude.

A man or a woman gifted with an ability in tongues or with the grace of eloquence but who doesn't love, is percussion with no rhythm.

### **Love vs. Prophecy and Knowledge and Faith**

Or consider the guy who knows a lot. He knows all mysteries. He gets and can explain Christian doctrine and theology.

In addition, this guy has the capacity to trust God in remarkable ways. He regularly prays prayers that would make others blush - for the salvation of individuals or the repentance of cities - and sees God do it!

Paul says that if this guy doesn't love, despite all that he has going for him, he has missed the mark by a mile.

Paul even personalizes this by putting it in the first person singular: “Prophecy, knowledge and faith may be there in abundance, but if I have not love, I am nothing.”

Lovelessness is impossible to get around. Paul says that without love, the most gifted, knowledgeable, faithful person in the world is worth exactly zero!

### **Prophecy + Knowledge + Faith - Love = 0**

And what about the person who is generous?

### **Love vs. Generosity and Sacrifice**

There is an undeniable beauty to philanthropy and benevolence. Paul pictures himself giving it all away. And then he suggests that he might be generous, he might be sacrificial, he might be a giver - and still not be loving. And if he is all these things AND doesn't love, all of his generosity profits him nothing.

Love is a choice to bring God's blessings to another person. But it is not a grudging choice. When love is present, there is a certain eagerness to our generosity.

It's possible that even when I am sacrificing myself for another by giving away all my possessions, even when I am making decisions to promote another's best interests, I may STILL not be loving. That is, my heart may still not be full of concern and compassion for that person.

Here at the very beginning, we see the transcendent superiority of love. It is better than the best speech, encyclopedic knowledge, mountain moving faith, and supreme sacrifice. Without love, nothing else matters.

That's how this chapter begins. Toward the close of the chapter Paul speaks of love's lasting value.

### **The Lasting Value of Love (vv. 8-13)**

*[8] but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.*

*[9] for we know in part and we prophesy in part; [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. [11] When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. [13] But now faith, hope, love abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

In short, marching toward maturity in Christ means learning to love.

LOVE is what God does. God doesn't walk by faith, but He does love. God doesn't hope for anything, but He does love.

And if we would be like God - in the sense of being conformed to the image of Jesus! - we will learn to love as He does.

Learning to LOVE - to love God and to love those around us - is the highest goal of the Christian. To love is to live the life of Jesus. Love is what makes a man **a man of God**; love is what makes a woman **a woman of God**.

Now, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13 to convince his readers that no church was healthy that was not loving. There might be great teaching, great miracles, and great giving, but if there isn't love, it's not a great church. A church where Jesus reigns is going to be a loving church.

The immediate application of 1 Corinthians 13 is to the church. But I think Paul would smile and nod his head if we applied what he says about the church today to our homes.

So, for the next few minutes, let's listen to a description of a home where Jesus reigns, which is also, always, a home where love reigns.

Whether your home is inhabited by you, by you + one, or by you + many, Jesus wants your home to be awash in love. And in the loving home, you'll find patience in abundance.

## Love, Applied to Our Homes (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

### **The Patient Home**

#### *[4] Love is patient*

It's a good thing when I don't blow my stack due to stop-and-go traffic on Bandera Road. It's a better thing when I don't blow my cool at my wife.

When your mind, body, and soul all scream for quiet AND you live with a two-year old, patience. In the original Greek the word literally reads, "*long-suffering.*"

You're tired. Of course you are. It's been a long day. Yes. Breathe deep. Pray. Smile. Love.

By God's grace, nurture that capacity to take the long view, to not fly off the handle.

And allow your quiet patience to morph into something active and powerful. Let your patience become kindness.

### **The Kind Home**

#### *[4] love is kind*

As you know, I recently returned from a quick trip to Africa and was gone from February 11-21. Yep. I was away from San Antonio on February 14, marking the umpteenth time I've been away from Kathy on Valentine's Day.

Well, being the "kind" man I am, I hid some chocolate-covered strawberries in the house before I left. It would have been "kinder" if I had hid them in the refrigerator, 'cuz by the time she found them, they looked like a fuzzy, moldy Middle School science experiment.

Now, I guess that if it's the thought that counts, I scored some long-distance points. And the sweet notes Kathy sent in my luggage were GREATLY appreciated - and they didn't get fuzzy.

But I don't want you to think that I've always been the kind of husband who practices kindness. I so regret the times that I've neglected kindness. I've forgotten to carry out those little random acts of kindness that would have communicated love.

Paul would advise us that practicing kindness protects against your spouse feeling taken for granted. If you are married, maybe you can think of a kindness that your spouse would especially appreciate today. If you aren't married, could you plan a special kindness for the guests who come to your home this week?

Love flourishes when kindness flows.

So, patience and kindness are indispensable elements in a loving home. Another important couplet is acceptance and appreciation.

### **The Non-Comparing Home**

#### *[4] [Love] is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant*

Comparison is lethal. It results in either jealousy and envy or bragging and arrogance. Love refuses to play the comparison game.

In your home, everyone will bring talents and abilities to the table. You and your spouse have different gifts.

One is an organizer; the other, not so much. One is creative and impulsive, the other loves routine. One is strong on budgeting, the other is an extravagant gift-giver.

That is your marriage team. There is to be no jealousy of her gifts. There is to be no bragging about yours.

If you have more than one child living at home, one will excel at academics, one will excel at athletics.

When Paul was writing he was thinking about the damage done when people in the church don't appreciate each other's spiritual gifts. Just as relevant is people in a home not appreciating each other's temperament, personalities, abilities, and perspectives.

Parents, do what you can to nurture appreciation for the strengths of each of your children. On some days you'll marvel that these very diverse kids all came from the same gene pool. Treasure the creative one's creativity, the relational one's ability to collect friends, and the academic's scholarship.

In our homes we are to nurture a culture where each one is valued for their uniqueness, where there is no competition for affection, where affirmation is generously given.

Let our homes be places where, *"Well done!"* and *"You've got a real talent for that"* and *"I could see you excelling at that"* and *"Your hard work has really paid off and I'm amazed at how much you've improved at that"* are heard over and over again.

Model appreciation and acceptance and watch love grow.

And beware of selfishness. Paul knew well the relational damage done by selfishness and that's why he pointed it out in 1 Corinthians 13.

### **The Unselfish Home**

***[5] [Love] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own***

Love is driven by a certain *selflessness*. The loving person is more concerned with the needs of the one they love than they are with their own interests.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing like life in a home - living with roommates or with family - that will provide opportunities for us to grow in selflessness.<sup>2</sup>

There are all kinds of arenas of home life where selfishness can rear its ugly head. Everything from chores to picking up after yourself to sharing electronic devices can combat selfishness and can develop love.

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<sup>1</sup> Here is our thinking when we want to enthrone love in our homes: *"Since all of my most crucial needs have been met in full by Jesus, I am free to zero in on the needs of others. Rather than defraud someone of that which is rightfully theirs, I will instead deny myself what may be rightfully mine. My life, and all that I enjoy or hope to enjoy - is in God's hands."*

<sup>2</sup> See Philippians 2:3-4

Here's another one.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Pastor Jeff just finished giving two excellent messages on the topic of sex. I would encourage you to check them out on the church website if you missed either of them. ([www.nwchurch.org](http://www.nwchurch.org))

What if we read, ***"love does not seek its own"***, and sought to apply THAT to the realm of married sexual expression?

In any marriage, there will be times when one spouse will need to forego a desire for sexual satisfaction for the sake of their partner who is too distracted or too tired. There will be other times when a partner will give the gift of sex to their partner even though they themselves are distracted or tired.

In either case, a husband or wife will selflessly forego pleasure or they will give the precious gift because of love.<sup>3</sup> Love doesn't seek its own. Love gives.

And, piled on top of a spirit of giving, a loving home will be forgiving.

### **The Forgiving Home**

***[5] [Love] is not provoked; does not take into account a wrong suffered.***

One of my more scholarly commentaries renders, ***"is not provoked"*** with *"isn't touchy."* I like that. I can't say that I always apply that wisdom. I can get pretty "touchy." I can be provoked. But I like the thought.

And if there is a grace that would be really, really useful in the setting of a home that aspires to love, it is to not be *"touchy"*, even when a wrong has been suffered.

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<sup>3</sup> Bible scholar Gordon Fee has said of this phrase, *"In some ways, this is the fullest expression of what Christian love is all about."*

In fact, of all the facets of the gem of love we are examining this morning, none of them looks quite as unreasonable as this: forgiveness.

Paul pictures an accountant with a ledger sheet in front of him, adding up wrongs he has suffered at the hands of someone else.

The accountant is keeping score. He's keeping score because he intends to even the score.

Paul says that love doesn't keep score. Love forgives.

Now, permit me a brief, throat-clearing "ahem" on this one.

All of us have been wronged in life. So all of us have something to forgive. But some have been wronged more cruelly than others.

And for me (actually, God) to urge you to **"not take into account a wrong suffered"** if the wrong you have suffered is **grave** might appear more than you can bear, even irrational.

So, I'm not telling someone to forget the damage that has been done and re-enter an abusive relationship in the name of love without evidence of change on the part of the abuser.

Paul's not counseling that children be put back in a home where they have been ritually abused as a show of love for the perpetrator.

BUT, the call to forgive IS the most radical call in the New Testament. It IS counter-cultural, counter-intuitive. It DOES go against the grain of our reason, whether we are responding to a grave indignity or to something less monstrous.

And we will not live long with others without collecting a laundry list of grievances. Roommates don't do their share of dishes. Children forget to do chores and are disrespectful. Husbands and wives offend and hurt each other deeply because of their intimate bond.

If we would have a loving home we will extend grace to those who have messed up, just like we have been shown grace by a perfect God.

When you offer grace (i.e. - forgiveness) to those in your home, intending to bless them even after they have hurt you, you give them a picture of the forgiveness Christ gave you when He died for you on the cross.

There is power in performing such acts of forgiveness. God uses your willingness to forgive redemptively. One act of forgiveness is like yeast in a lump of dough, gradually working its way through the whole lump, transforming a home into a grace-filled, loving home.

The one who loves well doesn't try to even the score. But it's not as if the loving home is a soft, mushy home. There is a hard and holy side to love and we see that, too, in 1 Corinthians 13.

***[6] [Love] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth***

The home where love reigns is also the home where husbands and wives call each other to truth. It is one in which siblings urge each other to respect. A loving home finds roommates calling each other to follow Jesus.

Finally, Paul describes a loving home in glowing superlatives that speak of risk-taking and a "never-say-die" tenacity.

### **The Risk-Taking Home**

***[7] [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never fails.***

*Believing and hoping...*

To **"believe"** and **"hope"** all things is not to fall into the silliness of gullibility.

It is a challenge to refuse to take another person's failure or sin as the last word on the subject. It is to say that if we are going to love, then we will open ourselves up to the possibility of being disappointed and let down.

Picture failure. Personal failure. Shouldn't be too hard. Most of us have known failure at one thing or another, at one time or another.

In your home, when your loved one falls on his (or her) face, you choose to lovingly **“believe all things”** and you courageously **“hope all things.”**

In that spirit you lovingly walk over to him, extend a hand, and tell him, *“This is not the end. Don’t throw in the towel. The game’s not over yet. I believe in you. Get up and walk! Your failure isn’t fatal.”*

It takes courage to hope, time after time. It can be hard to keep believing the best after repeated disappointment. But while love won’t be gullible, it also refuses to be a cynic. Love will risk further disappointment rather than label someone in their home a lost cause.

Is there someone in your home who needs to know that you believe in them? Is there someone who is often in your home, who visits your home who would love to know that you still have high hopes for them?

Give them the gift of your high hopes and never, never, never, never, never quit hoping. After all, love **“bears all things”** and **“endures all things. Love never fails.”**

*Bears all things...endures all things. Love never fails.*

No. It’s not that practicing love is like rubbing Aladdin’s lamp. It is not that when we love in just the right way, the “love genie” makes sure that we get the results we seek.

Faithful and loving witnesses to Christ get martyred for Christ. And loving wives and husbands sometimes get ignored and taken for granted.

No. Love doesn’t offer us a guarantee that things will turn out the way we want them to. But, yes! Love is able to withstand all assaults.

It is not crushed by the shortcomings of friends and it is not overthrown by the violence of enemies. Love stands firm and unshaken.

Love didn’t fail the Lord Jesus. He kept on loving even as the nails held Him to the cross and His life slipped away.

Love is the most powerful weapon in our arsenal against sin and hopelessness. It can resist an attack from any enemy force.

Throughout his letters, Paul assumes that the Christian will suffer hardship.<sup>4</sup> But, through it all, we need not be derailed from the path of love. Love can continue no matter what comes our way.

There is nothing (not marriage difficulties, not child-rearing challenges, not roommate disputes, not financial worries) that we cannot face lovingly as we walk with Jesus.

If we would love, we will practice the grace of stick-to-it-ive-ness. Buoyed up by a confidence in Jesus’ perfect, never-failing love, we are equipped to offer never-failing love to others, the first step toward a loving home.

### **Conclusion:**

If the mark of the disciple of Jesus Christ is love (John 13:34-35), then so should love be the mark of the home where Christians live, be they singles living singly, roommates sharing an apartment, a married couple with or without kids, or a single parent raising children.

So. What is your ultimate dream for your home? I don’t think that any of us would say that we want more than anything else for our home to be efficient places where things get done. No!

We want our homes to oases of love. There is no loftier goal than that our homes - the homes where Jesus reigns - be LOVING homes.

Imagine your home this kind of a home. Pray that God would start construction on this kind of a home.

By God’s grace, let us all do all that we can to nurture a culture in our homes where patience and kindness reign, where jealousy and envy and arrogance don’t reign, where forgiveness is freely offered and where holiness is sought passionately. And in all of this we won’t stop hoping for the best and we will impose no expiration date.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Thess. 1:6; 3:3, 7; 2 Thess. 1:4, 6; Rom. 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; 2 Tim 3:12