

5/14/23

**Wise Living from Love's Point of View**  
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**1 Corinthians 13**

Good morning! Happy Mother's Day. If you are a mother or if you have ever had a mother then I pray you will be blessed this morning.

I have the privilege of starting us off on a new 6-week sermon series called "Wise Living." As I prayed about what God would have me share with you this morning, in light of the fact that it is Mother's Day, I asked myself, "What might be the first word that comes to God's mind when God thinks of the words "mother" and "wise living"? What do you think would be God's first thought?

For me, knowing God is wise, and God is love, and knowing that God intends motherhood to be an expression of his own image, the first word that comes to me, is "love." That launched a thousand other thoughts about the wisdom of loving well. Certainly, mothers are the first people who teach us about love.

But the wisdom of living in love is important for every single one of us, right moms! So, moms, let's invite everyone to learn about wise living from love's point of view this morning. Ok?

There are countless ways we could explore the wisdom of love this morning. But I want to bring together two aspects of love that have helped me better understand God, myself, and every other human being. I believe it will help you too.

I want to look at how scripture describes loving wisely, and then I want to show you how our ancient Christian scriptures match up perfectly with an enormous body of recent research on how our brains and our bodies are wired by God to thrive when we are giving love, and receiving love.

No matter what practices we engage in as we seek to live wisely, the Bible makes it very clear that all of our thoughts, decisions, and actions must be born out of a fundamental, underlying core of loving one another—that is to be our "default mode" for every decision we make.

The Bible speaks of love 787 times from Genesis to Revelation. At least 34 times in the New Testament we are commanded to love one another. For example, *Romans 12:10*, "Love one another with mutual affection"; *1 John 3:14*, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death." Ouch!

I DO NOT want to abide in death, I want to abide in love! But that begs the question...how? How do we love one another (especially the “one anothers” we really don't want to love!) How do we love “THEM” so that we abide in love and not in death?

I think it's fair to say that, when we are living wisely...and lovingly, we have a far greater ability to live in unity with anyone and everyone. Wouldn't you say that is true? Living together “as one” is something Jesus treasures and prayed for when he was on earth. (*John 17:20-23*)

But as we all know our world is deeply divided. It tears me up inside. Does it tear you up inside too?

Do you think there is any possibility that learning to live wisely, from love's point of view, can help us become agents-of-unity? I think so. Because being agents-of-unity is what Christians are called to be! (“Christ's ambassadors” *2 Corinthians 5:14-21*)

Did you know that Paul wrote *1 Corinthians 13*, the famous Love Chapter, as an argument against disunity, and as a “prescription” for how to create unity through love?

In other parts of *1 Corinthians*, Paul addresses the divisions in the church (chapter 1 and following). People with the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy were promoting themselves as being more spiritual than others (chapter 14). The wealthier members were impatient and wanted to eat the Lord's supper before their poorer field-working members and slaves had a chance to get off work. By the time they got to church, the best food was gone (*1 Corinthians 11:17-23*).

Some people were holding grudges and counting up wrongs. They provoked each other to anger, and gloated when someone got called out for being unjust (*1 Corinthians 6:1-11*). Paul chides them for being childish and immature (*1 Corinthians 3:1-2; 14:20*), and in chapter 13, he re-addresses those issues by giving them the antidote.

He shows them a more excellent way—the way of LOVE.

In this beautiful passage Paul addresses three different aspects of love. In verses 1-3, he speaks of “the necessity of love”; in verses 4-6 he addresses “the character of love”; and in his longest section, verses 7-13, Paul describes “the permanence of love.”

Now, I know as well as anyone that Paul's writing cannot be improved upon! That being said, I wanted to understand the fullest meaning of this passage that I could discover. So, I looked up the meaning of every term in the original Koine Greek, and wrote a paraphrased version that I hope will give a fuller picture of what Paul had in mind with his concise language.

Paul's words are inspired by God, *my translation is not*. But because this passage is so familiar, it can sometimes be recited from memorization, without really thinking about the meaning of the words. My hope is that this paraphrase will shake up our thinking about this well-known and beloved passage. And also, that it will help us understand Paul's meaning more deeply so that we will want more of the love Paul describes and says is ours...if we truly have the Holy Spirit and we choose to seek it.

### LOVE– 1 Corinthians 13

My (filled out) translation of the original Greek texts.

1. If I speak the languages of humans and angels but I do not have LOVE, I'm just making noise, like a brassy bell or a clanging cymbal.
2. And if I can interpret God's will and all his purposes, and if I grasp every single mystery, and have all the wisdom in the universe; and if my faith is so huge I can say to a mountain, "Move," and it moves just because of my great faith, but I don't have LOVE, I am nothing.
3. Even if I give absolutely all I own to feed the poor, and turn my body over to be used and abused by others (*uh...so I can boast about it*), but I don't have LOVE, It doesn't count for anything.
4. LOVE would rather wait patiently than give up. LOVE doesn't talk about doing kind things, it actually does them. LOVE doesn't jealously crave, possess, manipulate, or dominate. LOVE doesn't need to brag because it isn't conceited.
5. LOVE doesn't dishonor or embarrass *anyone*. It doesn't seek its own way, or get irritated or angry when it can't have what it wants. It doesn't keep score of wrongs or hurtful things people do.
6. LOVE doesn't take pleasure when injustice wins, rather it makes sure everyone celebrates when Truth wins.
7. LOVE always bears up and builds up. It never folds or tears down, LOVE always believes it has the power to transcend natural limits, LOVE always looks forward with HOPE instead of fear, LOVE...always...remains...with...you...to...the...very...end, No...Matter...What!
8. LOVE will never fall to pieces so that it can't get up again because love can never end! Prophecies will disappear, spiritual languages will cease, even human knowledge will become obsolete.

9. For we know only fragments of what is; and even what we can reveal about God is incomplete.
10. But when the Completion of God's goal comes, the incomplete things will be replaced by Perfect Wholeness.
11. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I grew up, I got rid of all my childish ways.
12. Right now, it's like we are looking at things through a fuzzy mirror, and it's puzzling. But then, I will see everything face-to-face, and I will know everything perfectly, just as God knows me perfectly!
13. But for now, we remain with these three things: Faith, Hope, and LOVE.  
And the GREATEST of these is LOVE!

That's what *1 Corinthians* says about the power of love. It's pretty inspiring isn't it! But...it still seems pretty hard. Until I learned what I'm about to share with you next, passages like *1 Corinthians 13* sometimes seemed to me like impossible tasks.

When there was someone who seemed to have a heart of stone, it often felt useless to try to love that person. I felt like all my efforts would just roll off the stone without penetrating anything.

Have you ever struggled to love someone like I have? Or have you ever found yourself thinking about a whole group of people and you become filled with negative thoughts, even anger? If you are like me, you might have the courage to try once or maybe even twice to get through to the person. But if our efforts don't quickly melt the other person's cold, cold heart, if we don't find the time to sit down and talk with people from "that group" we might find ourselves thinking of ways to make excuses...about THEM (*as if THEY are the only ones whose cold, cold hearts need to be penetrated*). So, we decide we don't *have to* try again.

But this is where science meets scripture and changes everything!

God has already given us a huge amount of help when it comes to reaching out in love to people we think are impossible! God would not give us the command to "love one another" and not give us help to do it.

How? God has biologically wired all of us to *thrive* in loving relationships. In other words, you can be encouraged by knowing that your attempts to show love are landing on someone who is already predisposed biologically to need love, even if **they** don't know it. So, when we are willing to try, God has already done *half the work for us*, even though **we** didn't know it. But

now you do! I hope that encourages you to try again, and again, and again, because love never ends.

Let me explain a little more, according to science, “**belonging** and connection are essential for humans to thrive. Recent research argues that **belonging** and connection are as important as FOOD, WATER, and SHELTER.”<sup>1</sup> (Did you know that??)

That means, no matter how irritating or how impossible it may seem for you to love a person or a group of people, every one of them is wired to need a sense of belonging. (By the way, that includes me and you!)

So...**Why not invite them to belong to you?** Your love is what can create the sense of belonging every person needs—even that thorny person you’d rather avoid (or even vilify).

Here’s an example of how you might reach out:

- Think about a person or group who really annoys you or who you have a really hard time with for any reason. (Got that person/group in mind?)
- Now, think about one teeny tiny thing you have in common. (If you can’t think of one little thing, you’re not really trying—ask God for help!)
- And now, ask God how he might want you to use that one thing to invite the person to belong to you...at least in that one area of commonality.
- Do you think God might help you see other things about that person you didn’t know were there...good things? (Yep, he sure will!) And, if you ask God, he will help the other person/group see good things about you they never noticed before?
- If it doesn’t happen on the first try, remember this: you will likely get 15 “No’s” before you finally get a “Yes”!<sup>2</sup>

### **There’s even more exciting science on loving wisely.**

Love has the power to heal—and not just heal broken hearts! Did you know that there is an enormous body of research showing that genuine love has the power to keep people healthy and make them heal more quickly, and even live longer? That’s because living in relationships of authentic love causes the loved ones to release “the bonding hormone” oxytocin in each other.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amrtherapy.com/the-importance-of-connection-and-belonging/#:~:text=According%20to%20Abraham%20Maslow's%20hierarchy,food%2C%20water%2C%20and%20shelter.>

<sup>2</sup> This is what my dad learned in a sales training seminar when I was a teenager. I never forgot that lesson and it has encouraged me to try, and try again!

## Oxytocin:

- Nicknamed the “love molecule,” oxytocin is the chemical foundation for trusting others. Activated by positive social interactions, it makes us care about others in tangible ways, and it motivates us to work together for a common purpose.<sup>3</sup>
- For men, women, and children oxytocin improves communication and helps promote long-term attachments of love.
- Oxytocin produces empathy and enhances meaningful connections.
- Oxytocin makes people act more generously and communicate with more empathy than they would without the oxytocin flowing. **(We certainly need more empathy in the world, and you can supply it!)**
- It reduces the experience of pain and makes wounds heal faster. **(When a child falls down and gets hurt, they cry. When you pick them up, cuddle, kiss and comfort them, they stop crying because you have released oxytocin in them. Oxytocin actually reduces their experience of feeling pain and they begin to heal faster. This works for adults too.)**
- It lowers blood pressure and helps induce sleep.
- Oxytocin enhances the ability of the immune system to fight off disease, including heart disease and cancer.
- Oxytocin increases mental health.

Do you see why loving interactions with your spouse, children, friends, and even strangers are so important?

OK, you know what oxytocin does, but how do we stimulate the release of oxytocin in each other? Positive social interaction and loving gestures release oxytocin in one another:

- Hold hands
- Look into each other’s eyes
- Comfort one another with invited physical touch (hug, caress)
- Do meaningful things you both enjoy
- Kiss
- Invited pleasurable intimacy

### Children

- Looking in babies' and children's eyes produces oxytocin in both parent and child, wiring each one’s brain for love. And for kids, when you release oxytocin in them, it creates OT receptors in the brain, wiring their brains for successful relationships later in life!
- Skin to skin touch stimulates oxytocin
- Comfort them, pick them up and cuddle

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-moral-molecule/201311/the-top-10-ways-boost-good-feelings>

- Hugging, kissing, saying kind words, smiling at your children while looking in their eyes, listening intently to them all produce oxytocin in them, as well as in you, bonding you both together.

Can you see God's wisdom in making these loving, gentle, tender behaviors create oxytocin? And can you see how these loving actions naturally create a bond of love?

God made our bodies to help us bond together in love so that we become free, open, and vulnerable with each other. See how our biology backs up the Bible and vice versa!

God has given us a biological advantage when it comes to his command to love one another. Remember that every person you see is already wired by God to be loved! Let that wise knowledge give you the courage to reach out to the thorniest folks you meet. God has already wired them to biologically meet you half-way...IF you'll let the Holy Spirit muster up your love.

Thinking in terms of Paul's description of love in *1 Corinthians 13*, who knows, maybe your smile of patience; your act of kindness; your humble "Hello" ☺; your willingness to let a slight go; your understanding of someone's injustice; your celebration of someone finding the truth; your trust that builds someone up; your sacrificial act of love that transcends someone's expectations; your voice of hope in the face of someone's fear; your gentle words when harshness was anticipated; your warm touch instead of a cold shoulder; your tender look of care when indifference was predicted; your knowing glance and gentle laugh to help make the most of a rotten situation; your acknowledgment that the issue is fuzzy, rather than demanding your way—who knows, maybe your practice of biblical love will turn a person formerly known as "that evil one" into "a loved one"!

(Who knows? I know! I have seen it happen, and it's glorious beyond words!)

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. *First Corinthians 13* is part of Paul's argument against the disunity in the church caused by some people believing their gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues made them superior to other Christians. Their boasting about their superior spirituality was causing division, pain, anger, and hurt. What was Paul's argument for bringing unity back into the church?
2. How might Paul's argument for living a life of love help us with the disunity among American Christians, and in our community and country, and throughout the world?
3. In the first three verses of *1 Corinthians 13*, Paul addresses "the necessity of love," explaining that unless we are motivated by love for our fellow human being, nothing we do or say has any value. How does that statement make you feel? How might you use it to encourage and challenge yourself towards greater love going forward?

4. In verses 4-6, Paul speaks of “the character of love,” meaning behaviors that show whether or not we are loving people. How do you think these behaviors can dissolve disunity and create oneness? Give some concrete examples where you have seen these behaviors (or other behaviors) melt away hurt, heal pain or resolve disunity.
5. In addition to the spiritual wisdom of behaving in loving ways, what have you learned about the biological wisdom of loving others in demonstrative ways?
6. In verses 7-13, Paul talks about the “permanence of love.” Look at verses 7 and 8a. Now, replace the words “it” and “love” with the words, “My love...” (“My love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. My love never fails.”) Who are the people, or groups of people, who challenge the truth of those statements for you? Remembering that love is not a suggestion but a command for every Christ follower, and remembering that every person in the world is made in the image of God just as you are, how do you feel about asking the Holy Spirit to help you make those statements true in your life, even towards the people or groups who challenge you the most?
7. What do you think would happen in our world if every Christian committed himself and herself to always love the way the Holy Spirit wants to empower each one of us to love? Would such a commitment lead you to live more wisely and more lovingly?