

“Journey with Love”

Jeremiah 1:4-9, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, & Ephesians 3:18

Pastor James York

January 28, 2018

On our journey through life there are only three truly essential things to have; faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love. Paul urges us to love extravagantly for **1 Corinthians 13: 7-8a “love bears all things, believes all things hopes all things endures all things. Love never ends.”** Paul’s journey through life was full of twist and turns, ups and downs, and an abundance of hardships. He had an amazing mountaintop experience of God that transformed his life, totally changed everything, even his name from Saul to Paul. He also endured ridicule, constant difficult travel, beatings, shipwreck, and imprisonment for his love of Jesus.

Early in his life Paul thought he had all the answers. He was a Roman citizen; Rome was the elite superpower of that day. Paul studied under the most brilliant teachers. He was a quick study and excelled in knowledge. Then, he had this wonderful experience of God’s love and realized that love is the essence of life.

Paul tells us, **1 Corinthians 13:1 “If we can speak in any language in heaven or on earth but don’t love others then we are only making meaningless noise.”** Paul wrote the majority of the New Testament and had a gift for explaining the enormity of God’s love, the transforming power of God’s grace, and the hope and joy of faith; yet he writes, **1 Corinthians 13:2 “If we speak God’s Word with power revealing all God’s mysteries and making everything plain as day but don’t love we are nothing.”** Paul had a steadfast faith which sustained him and his ministry, yet Paul writes, **1 Corinthians 13:2 “If we have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps but don’t love we are nothing.”** Paul gave up all his possessions and a life of comfort. He spent his whole life traveling on missionary journeys. He was executed for his faith yet says, **1 Corinthians 13:3 “If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but don’t love, I’ve gotten nowhere.”** Paul sums it all up, **1 Corinthians 13:3 & 13 “So, no matter what I say, what I believe and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love. We have three things to do trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”**

On a backpacking trip you could be in optimal fitness, have all the latest hi-tech equipment, know everything about the trail; but if you do not have water, you will not survive. It is the journey, the experiences, encounters, the unexpected twists and turns and hardships that reveal the power of the weather, the enormity of the landscape, and leave one in awe of God’s creation. It is the journey that allows one to fully savor the summit.

All of us have the glory of the perfect summit before us in heaven. Our journey through life will certainly be filled with the unexpected; but as long as we love, God will get us through even the most grueling and demanding sections of life.

A few years ago, I studied several people who are considered to be the classical spiritual leaders. They all explained life as a journey. The way they undertook their journeys was unique to each of them. They all used different techniques and processes, but all of them constantly desired to grow in the ability to receive God’s love and share God’s love. Many of them went through difficult stages on their journey. St. Teresa said she went through a difficult dry spell of 18 years where she did not sense the presence of God, yet she prayed everyday. She persevered on her spiritual quest and said, “the important thing is not to think much but to love much so do whatever kindles love.” They all tried to explain journeying to a place where logic failed them as they had an experience of God’s love that was unexplainable.

God is infinite knowledge, power, and love. God is way beyond our ability to understand, comprehend, or even image; yet, it seems we often strive to define God and put God in a box. Like Job long ago we want some answers to our struggles. Paul says at best, **1 Corinthians 13:10 & 12 MSG “we see in a mirror dimly. We know only a portion of the truth and what we say about God is always incomplete. We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist.”** We cannot comprehend God, but we can love God and open ourselves to be loved by God.

For our spiritual journey we need faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love. John Calvin was adamant that faith and belief are two very different things. Belief is in the mind. Belief is knowledge and is only useful if it moves us to holy living, producing fruits, love, and faith. The church should teach us belief but for belief to be of any value it must move into our hearts and fill our hearts with faith. It is important to experience faith, to have faith, but not to understand faith. Faith is not a result of knowing all the answers but rather trusting God as you live with the questions. Take faith on your journey.

As you journey, develop your hope. Hope flows out of Jesus' glorious eternal resurrection. Hope is trusting God to redeem and renew our lives and the entire world. John Calvin viewed our life as a journey to discover the image of God within ourselves. This is a two-part process of mortification and vivification. In mortification, we take out of our life whatever is in the way of our relationship with God. We filter out all the distractions. In vivification, we allow God to recreate us and our ability to love. The best way to succeed at this is to immediately replace the distraction with something renewing. For example, you might decide that a certain 30-minute television show is a distraction to your relationship with God so you replace that same 30 minutes with prayer, gratitude, journaling, or serving another. Calvin illustrated this point by explaining the pruning of a fruit plant. You prune the plant so that resources are diverted resulting in more fruit. Examine your life, get rid of anything that does not give glory to God, divert your energy to things that do give glory to God. This is our hope for ourselves and the world realizing that God is working within us to redeem and restore us and the world revealing our beauty.

Most importantly on our spiritual journey we need love. The apostle Paul prayed this prayer for us and all people, **Ephesians 3:18 MSG "I ask God that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God."** Open yourself to experience God's renewing, endless love and then share love. God's love can do far more than you can ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! The greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love everyone. For every option in your life, for every road you must choose, pick the one that produces the most love. On your journey, do everything with love.

Sharon Jaynes rewrote our scripture today for the perspective of a lady preparing for Christmas. "If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator. If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook. If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing. If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point. Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband. Love is kind, though harried and tired. Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens. Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way but is thankful they are there to be in the way. Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of love will endure."

If the Apostle Paul were writing the scripture today it might go something like this. If I speak with the elegance of Oprah Winfrey and sing with the ease of Celine Dion but don't have love, my words are like scraping fingernails on a frozen windshield. If I can program NASA's mainframe computer and outsmart my chemistry professor, if I can memorize the Psalms and read Leviticus without dozing, if my investing yields abundant returns but have not love, my value is utterly useless. If I give my wardrobe to Goodwill, share my tools with my neighbors, give abundantly to church and charity, even donating blood six times a year, but don't have love, my offerings are useless. Love is Patient – even if it means skipping a trip to Caribou in order to tutor an immigrant. Love is Kind – it doesn't stoop to cutting jokes, naming calling or avoidance. Love does not envy a sport's champion, a National Merit finalist, a six-figure salary, a stately house, a dream car, a peaceful lakeside cabin or a person with great health, a fine body, and stunning appearance. Love doesn't get a swelled head over straight As, a promotion, a scholarship to Harvard, a championship or a compliment. Love isn't snooty about a new possession or award. Love never jeers another. Love smiles when getting cut off on the

interstate thanking God for one's safety and the privilege of driving and prays for the other driver to arrive safe and on time. Love submits an honest tax return. Love doesn't whine about the referee's bad call. Love believes that God always provides the best stuff in life. Love is the glue of the cosmos holding all together. Love hangs on to hope when the family is splitting apart. Love brings people together in harmony. Love does not change like opinions and fashion. Love is always the right choice. Choosing to love makes a person wise. Love is like the Energizer Bunny. It lasts and lasts and keeps on going. Three things make a person wonderful: faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love.

We are all on a journey that will only be complete when we are at home in heaven, where we will fully understand everything, know the complete truth, and experience perfect love. Regardless of the twist and turns, ups and downs, and grueling sections of life you encounter make sure you love.

Here is a love check up for you. Love is patient. Do you take out your frustrations on others? Are you calm under pressure and careful with your tongue? Love is kind. Do you go out of your way to say nice words and do thoughtful things for others? Love does not envy. Are you envious of someone's gifts, abilities or stuff? Are you jealous with your time toward those who need you? Love does not boast. Do you consider yourself more important than anyone else or talk as if you know more or think that you know how another should behave or do? Love is not rude. Do you make cutting remarks when you don't get your way or become silent and withdrawn? Love is not self-seeking. Do you put yourself first or do you strive to love and support others? Love is not easily angered. Do you let little things bother you? Do you have control of your speech when things do not go your way? Love keeps no records of wrongs. Do you remember the times people have said or done something that upset you or do you forgive, forget and live in the present? Love always protects. Are you there for the people who need you, even if they upset you? Do you love and comfort as Christ did? Love always hopes. Do you always give people the benefit of the doubt? Do you see the best in all people and wish the very best for them? Love always perseveres. Are you committed to loving God and others and determined to love always all the way to the end?

“There are three things that will endure forever—faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love.”

Amen