

BETTER TOGETHER

When We Practice Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Created by *Dale Ohmart*

Big Idea: *Until we put the right type of love to work in our lives, we will always be less than God created us to be...both as individuals and as a community.*

I am a promise, I am a possibility...I am a great big bundle of potentiality. Those phrases come from a song that was written by Bill Gaither several years ago. It is a song for and about children. What a great way to think about our kids! But when should we expect the promise and the potential to become a reality? When a person graduates from high school? Well, probably not. How about college? Maybe it's after a person has been on the job for a few years. Whenever it is, it is inevitable that we eventually stop looking at people through the lens of potential.

Well, I believe that's a mistake. The truth is no matter how old you are, you have potential. Let me put it another way...no matter how old you are, you have not yet become what you could possibly be. Do you agree with that statement?

Let's focus our attention today on what it takes to become what we can be. I believe one ingredient is relationships. As the theme for today says, we are BETTER TOGETHER. It's kind of like this story I read about a couple of horses.

Blind Horse¹
(By Alison Cotter)

Just up the road from my home is a field with two horses in it. From a distance, each looks like every other horse. But if one stops the car, or is walking by, one will notice something quite amazing.

Looking into the eyes of one horse will disclose that he is blind. His owner has chosen not to have him put down, but has made a good home for him. This alone is amazing.

Listening, one will hear the sound of a bell. Looking around for the source of the sound, one will see that it comes from the smaller horse in the field. Attached to her bridle is a small bell. It lets her blind friend know where she is, so he can follow her. As one stands and watches these two friends, one sees how she is always checking on him, and that he will listen for her bell and then slowly walk to where she is -- trusting that she will not lead him astray.

¹ From Sermon Fodder Digest Number 1331, www.sermonfodder.com.

God has woven a wondrous sense of teamwork into the fabric of nature. Even a couple of horses can develop the capacity to communicate with one another and to become a community...they learn how to become something together that they could not become by themselves. In other words, they learn how to pull together.

Look at this article, which appeared in the November 16, 2000 edition of *Nature* magazine...

... so animals could pull their weight, and more

Sir — Vaclav Smil's Millennium Essay "Horse power" presents a good overview of the important role of draught horses in agricultural production in North America during the last century¹. Some points worth adding are that mules were another key source of draught power on many farms², and that the larger draught-horse breeds are, during brief exertions, capable of developing even more than the three horsepower Smil mentions. Records of draught-horse championship pulling trials in the United States show that a team of two animals could develop 30 horsepower when pulling loads over a set distance³. Similar performances have been recorded for teams in Europe and elsewhere. Average working performance for one horse is 0.75 to 1.0 horsepower⁴.

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1. Smil, V. *Nature* **405**, 125 (2000).

2. Leaflet 225 "Quick Reference Map of Horses and Mules by States" (Horse and Mule Association of America, Chicago, 1936).

3. Collins, E. V. & Caine, A. B. *Testing Draft Horses* (Iowa Experiment Station Bulletin 240, Ames, 1926).

4. Goe, M. R. & McDowell, R. E. *Animal Traction: Guidelines for Utilization* (Cornell International Agriculture Mimeograph 81, Ithaca, NY, 1980).

The Potential When We Pull Together

What can happen when people "pull together"? According to God Himself, the potential is limitless.

A few generations after Noah and the flood, a bunch of people got together on the plains of the Middle East. They decided to build a giant tower into the heavens. And God responded with this statement...

Genesis 11:6

⁶"Look!" he said. "If they can accomplish this when they have just begun to take advantage of their common language and political unity, just think of what they will do later. Nothing will be impossible for them!" (NLT²)

Look at that again. *Nothing will be impossible for them.* God has created us with tremendous potential. But for the most part, we fail to realize it. We fail to "pull together."

Personally, I would like to find out what we have the potential to be. I want to see where we can go if we learn how to "pull together." In order to do that, it is necessary for us to develop a specific set of characteristics that will shape our relationships. **Galatians 5:22-23** call those characteristics the fruit of the Spirit. And I want to emphasize that the term is not plural...it isn't fruits, it's fruit. F – R – U – I – T – period. I'm emphasizing this because sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that this list of nine characteristics is multiple choice...as if we were free to choose three or four, and leave the rest for somebody else. I don't think that is what God intends at all. I believe what He is trying to teach us here is that these nine characteristics will bloom in our lives when He is present...ALL of them. When they do, we will begin to "pull together"...we will begin to see what we can become...we will begin to realize our God-given potential...we will be BETTER TOGETHER.

² Scriptures marked "(NLT)" are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation copyright © 1996 by [Tyndale Charitable Trust](#).
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Over the next few weeks, we will talk about each of the characteristics in this list...beginning today for the first characteristic...LOVE.

The Practice That Pulls Us Together Is Love

What is the secret to Love? It's sort of mysterious. A lot of times we don't know why it acts like it acts. Why does love in our lives go from Exciting to Exhausting to Expired -- the same love for the same person. What makes that happen?³

The definition for love may be one of the most elusive in the English language because we use the term to refer to such a wide range of emotions. You see, I love my wife and my kids. But I also love sports. And I also love Chinese food. You know what I mean now?

So, where should we look for the definition of love?

Love Defined

What about Stephen Stills? He's the guy who sang a song several years ago that said, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." Is that the definition of love you want to depend on?

What about that guy from the TV commercials a few years ago? I'm talking about the one who poured out his heart to his dad one day. "I **love** you, dad." And his dad said, "I love you, too, Johnny...but you still can't have my last can of Budweiser." Is that the definition of love you want to depend on?

How about looking at what the Bible says about love? According to the Bible...

- Love is a choice.

Sometimes, you get the idea that love is an accident. We say, "She fell in love." Like, she was walking along one day, but then...oops...she tripped...and fell in love. That type of language suggests that we have no control over the situation. But that isn't the picture you get from the Bible.

Colossians 3:14

¹⁴*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.* (NIV⁴)

There is nothing accidental about this statement. It is a command. **Put on love**. God wouldn't *command* us to do something if we didn't have control over it. Of course it isn't easy sometimes. But we still have a choice. No matter what we are *feeling*, we still have a choice.

That relates to the second thing the Bible tells us about love...

- Love is a matter of conduct.

³ Tom Holladay, "The Secret of Love," from the sermon series *9 Secrets of Healthy Relationships*. Available at www.Pastors.com.

⁴ Scripture marked as "(NIV)" are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

How can you know when a person really does love you? Is it just because of what they say? You've probably lived long enough by now to realize that you can't always believe everything you hear. It's easy to say the words. But just saying it doesn't make it a reality. So the Bible says...

1 John 3:18

¹⁸*Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.* (NLT)

Like the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." So let's talk about some actions that communicate love.

Love Deeds

A regularly requested scripture reading in the weddings I have performed over the past few years is the following verses from the chapter in the Bible known as "the Love chapter."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴*Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. ⁶It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.* (NLT)

That is the best description ever created of love in action. Here are five specific actions...and a brief comment about each one.

- Love Waits – *Love is patient...*

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of that phrase is the campaign that was created to teach teenagers about place God designed for sex to have in their lives. The idea, as the term suggests, is that true love (as opposed to *lust*) waits and honors the institution of marriage. It doesn't rush the agenda. When a young man truly loves a young woman, he is more concerned about developing a lasting relationship with her rather than doing *relations* with her.

That applies to more than sex. It's very easy to get frustrated when the people around us don't cooperate with the agenda we have in mind. That frustration suggests that the plans we have are more important than anyone else around us. To put it another way, it suggests that we are more important than the people around us.

God wants us to practice the type of regard for people that honors them and grants them preference. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Wait for one another. In fact, let others go ahead...let others have their way...let others take the lead.

- Love Cares – *Love is...kind...*

Have you ever noticed that Americans have a hard time being truly kind to one another? Like, for instance, the simple task of saying something kind and caring to someone. How else can you explain the existence of *Hallmark*? How else can you explain the fact that we buy the kind words of an anonymous stranger and give them to the people we care about most because the words of that anonymous stranger expresses how we truly feel for that other person? Isn't there something wrong with that?

Kindness and caring may cause some of us (me, for instance) to be a bit squeamish. But there are a lot of people in our world who desperately need us to care. LifeSpring is thankful to have the opportunity to support a ministry that is built to show loving kindness and care to a very specific demographic in our society. *Show Me Christian Youth Home* was born to care for children whose families have broken down in one way or another. Right now, I would like to have Joe & Sherri Eldred, our special guests from *Show Me* this morning, to come and share about the ways their ministry is working today.

- Presentation about *Show Me Christian Youth Home* – Joe & Sherri Eldred
 - Love Secures – *Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude.*

Mom would always remind us when we were growing up, “The empty wagon makes the most noise.” You can apply that thought in lots of ways. Right now, I’m thinking about the fact that there are a lot of animals in nature who use intimidation as a way to avoid a fight. They get bigger or make a lot of noise, but it is nothing more than the proverbial dog-bark being worse than the bite.

What is it that causes me to get jealous or boastful? Usually, you can trace it to some insecurity I’m feeling.

But I don’t need to be jealous when I’m secure. I don’t need to be boastful or proud or rude. And I can promote an environment for you to feel secure, too.

- Love Gives – *Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. ⁶It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.*

Jesus Christ is the supreme example of this. He gave His life out of love. He said that He didn’t come to be served, but to serve. He taught His followers to practice forgiveness over and over and over and over and... well, you get the idea.

Do you think you might have any opportunities to give this coming week? Of course, you will. Maybe it will be something big, like picking up the check for the group when you have lunch once this week. Maybe it will be something even bigger...like giving your spouse the remote control for the evening! But every day brings an opportunity to express love through giving something to someone. Are you willing to make those types of sacrifices?

- Love Endures – *Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*

The song has been recorded by a couple of different artists...

Love hurts, love scars
Love wounds and mars
Any heart not tough
Or strong enough
Take a lot of pain
Take a lot of pain
Love is like a cloud
And it holds a lot of rain
Love hurts...love hurts⁵

⁵ *Love Hurts* by Cher. Copied from <http://lyrics.astraweb.com>.

Why does love hang in there for such abuse? Because true love never loses faith and is always hopeful. True love believes the ultimately the person who is loved will be transformed. In fact, true love transforms.

That's the type of love God wants us to practice toward one another. It's risky...it makes us vulnerable. You probably have a relationship that you are tempted to walk away from because of the pain you've suffered. That means you have the opportunity to put this specific love-deed into action right now. Would it help to remind you that Jesus has already loved you that way? When I think of the second chances He has given me during the course of my life, I am far better prepared to "never give up" on the people I love.

Look back over the five Love-Deeds we've pulled out of God's word. Love waits...Love cares...Love secures...Love gives...Love endures. Imagine what our world would look like if we all practiced those five habits with each other. Is the world too big for that to happen? What about your neighborhood...your workplace...your family? What might happen if just YOU loved people that way?

In the end, that IS the first step, isn't it.