

LEARNING TO LOVE GOD'S WAY

Love Has A Secret Energy Source

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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WATCH/LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/love-has-a-secret-energy-source/>

One time during our Sunday morning greeting, as I was moving about the sanctuary, a little boy, fairly new to our church, came up to me and gave me this wonderful bear hug. After, he looked up at me and said, "Do I know you?" I love it! Isn't that the call for all of us? To hug first and ask questions later? But to really take the time, to have the courage, to get to know each other, warts and all.

Today's text is the most practical in all of 1 Cor. 13. You can tell Paul really knows the church, knows human nature. He is dealing with what Brian McLaren calls the pressure points of relationships: loving neighbor, family member, enemy, stranger, self, the earth or God. Which one is your pressure point? [*The Great Spiritual Migration*, p. 63].

To address these pressure points, Paul uses 15 verbs in vv. 4-7, in a very simple approach: what love is, what it is not, what it does and what it does not do. First, "Love is..." (v. 4) patient and kind. Patience shows strength, not weakness. Musicians know it takes as much or more wind to sustain a note softly as it does loudly (and stay on pitch). "Love is the action of patient, costly service to others," [Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation—A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, First Corinthians*, p. 222]. And Kindness. Raymond Brown points out that patience is self-restraint while kindness is self-expression [*The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, p. 372]. A woman once asked her husband, "In so many years of marriage, why haven't you told me you love me?" He replied, "I told you once. If I change my mind, I'll let you know!"

Next, what love is not. It is not puffed up or rude (shameful). It does not insist on its own way. We are by nature selfish, so we need God's kind of love to counter that. M. Scott Peck and others have pointed out how unhelpful it is for couples to talk about falling in love, because that implies it is effortless. Real love requires work! Love is not resentful. I wish the NRSV had used a stronger word than "resentful," because it is about keeping a ledger book, keeping score. The NIV nails it: "love keeps no record of wrongs..."

I recently reviewed my personal spiritual journal which I keep. Way back when, I was dealing with some hurt. And the realization I had been holding on to it. I expected someone who had slighted me to act that way in a new setting, a new situation. But this person was warm and wonderful. Perhaps I had imagined the slight? I wrote in my journal: "A reminder that people are not frozen in time, fixed in my worst perception of them. They are more than their past choices, I need to move on and not expect the worst from people." Remember? Love bears all things, believes all things and endures all things.

Yes, love is what we do to people who irritate us, hurt us or disappoint us. But it's even more than that. It's what we do when we would rather strike back in revenge. You remember the story of Corrie Ten Boom, who with her sister Betsy was arrested by Nazis during WWII, because they hid Jews in their Dutch home. In her famous book, *The Hiding Place* [p.215], she describes the horrible conditions of prison camp, and her father and sister Betsy's deaths. Miraculously, Corrie survived.

After the war, she was speaking at a church service in Munich and saw the SS officer who had stood guard in the shower room at Ravensbruck, standing there mocking the women. As the church was emptying, the former guard came up to Corrie, smiling and telling her he was so glad his sins had been washed away. He thrust out his hand for Corrie to shake it. Her hand wouldn't move. Anger and vengeful thoughts bubbled up. Corrie thought about how Jesus had died for this man's sin, too. She prayed for God to forgive her hate and to help her forgive him. She tried to smile. She tried to move her hand. It wouldn't move. She felt nothing. She breathed another prayer, "Jesus, I can't forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."

As she took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From her shoulder along her arm, it was as if an electrical current passed through her to him. Into her heart sprang a love that overwhelmed her. And so she discovered that when God gives us the command to love, God also gives the love itself. Amen.