

Title: "Love Is Patient and Kind"

I Corinthians 13 (NT p. 175)

Introduction – The importance of love

A group of students was asked what they thought were the "7 Wonders of the World." The following received the most votes: #1 Egypt's Great Pyramids, #2 Taj mahal, #3 Grand Canyon, #4 Panama Canal, #5 Empire State Building, #6 St. Peter's Basilica, #7 China's Great Wall.

While gathering the votes, the teacher noticed that one student hadn't finished her paper yet, so she asked if she was having trouble with her list. The girl replied, "Yes, a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many."

The teacher said, "Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help."

The girl hesitated, then read: to see ...to hear, ...to touch, ...to taste, ...to feel, ...to laugh ...and, to love.

In this morning's text, we are told that faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is LOVE. So, this morning the sermon is about love. We all know that love is important, but how do we ACTUALLY love? How does one go about loving someone? What are the nuts and bolts that hold a love relationship together?

1. The languages of love

In his book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman says that "...people speak different love languages" and that we must learn the love language of the one we love to effectively communicate love. Chapman lists the five primary love languages as: words of AFFIRMATION, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch.

Love is like a car's gas tank. If the tank has gas, and everything else is functioning properly, the car will run smoothly. But if the tank is allowed to go dry, the car will not move. Chapman says that within each of us there is an invisible "emotional love TANK." If we do not receive love in our own love language, we are deprived of the love that each of us needs to lead a happy and fulfilled life.

Chapman relates the time he counseled Ashley (p. 21):

...who at thirteen years of age was [found to be sexually active]. Her parents were crushed. They were angry with Ashley. They were upset with the school, which they blamed for teaching her about sex. "Why should she do this?" they asked.

In my conversation with Ashley [Chapman says], she told me about her parents' divorce when she was six years old. "I thought my father left because he didn't love me," she said. "When my mother remarried when I was ten, I felt she now had someone to love her, but I still had no one to love me. I wanted so much to be loved. I met this boy at school. He was older than me, but he liked me. I couldn't believe it. He was kind to me, and in a while I really felt he loved me."

Ashley's "love tank" had been empty for many years. Her mother and stepfather had provided for her physical needs but had not realized the deep emotional struggle raging inside her. They certainly loved Ashley, and they thought that she felt their love. Not until it was almost too late did they discover that they were not speaking Ashley's primary love language.

What WAS Ashley's primary love language? Chapman doesn't say, but it may have been words of affirmation. Her parents may have been speaking in their OWN love languages of gifts, giving what she needed and wanted, but since this was not Ashley's love language, it didn't fill her emotional love tank and she searched for love elsewhere.

2. Words of Affirmation

This morning, I want to preach about Chapman's first love language: "Words of affirmation. ...Mark Twain once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." If someone you love has a primary love language of affirmation, you will need to give words of affirmation more regularly than that.

There are many ways to do so. Chapman writes that "Verbal compliments, or words of APPRECIATION, are powerful statements of affirmation. They are best expressed in simple, straight-forward statements of affirmation, such as: "You look sharp in that suit." ..."Do you ever look nice in that dress! Wow!" ..."You must be the greatest potato cook in the world. I love these potatoes." ..."I really appreciate your washing the dishes."

These are words most people want to hear even if words of affirmation are not their primary love language.

...Another way to affirm someone we love is by words of ENCOURAGEMENT. We all live with a certain amount of self doubt and so we lack the courage to be all we can possibly be. Words of encouragement can inspire one we love to do something that he or she is capable of doing but lacks the motivation to attempt.

Years ago, I was counseling a young man who was working in a minimum wage job and had no plans for the future. He was pretty depressed. I asked if he had considered going to college. He said, "My parents keep telling I would fail out in my first semester."

I asked what we would LIKE to be, and he said, "A computer programmer!" So I said, "I've known you since you were a little kid and I know that that you can DO this. Go sign up for classes at TC3. If you have faith in God, and yourself, you will do great!"

I met him a few months later and he was like a different person. He was working part time, doing great in his college classes and was looking forward with excitement to his future in computer programming. ...Words of encouragement can open up new vistas of possibilities to those we love.

If you do not need words of affirmation yourself, it may be difficult for you to give them. However, words of affirmation can have the beneficial side effect of motivating the person to RECIPROCATE. ...Chapman tells of a woman who came to him because, after nine months of nagging, her husband still had not painted their bedroom.

Chapman advised her never to mention painting the bedroom again. Instead, every time he did something good, Chapman told her to give him a verbal compliment. By this, he did not mean resorting to flattery. The guy DID do a lot around the house, like taking care of the cars, paying the bills and cleaning up. So, she started thanking him for each of these things.

This changed BOTH of their attitudes. She became less shrewish and more appreciative and he felt more appreciated and less harassed. Anyway, he finally painted the bedroom.

I'm NOT saying that we should use words of affirmation so that we get what WE want. I AM saying that compliments, words of appreciation, encouragement, said in kindness, can improve a relationship to the point where the other person is motivated to do something nice in return.....

3. Words of affirmation to and from God

Now I want to talk about words of affirmation and God. We all need to receive words of affirmation from God. God wants each of us to hear those words of affirmation. God wants to say to each of us, "You are my daughter, and I love you" and "You are my son, and I love you." Spend time alone with God and absorb these heart-felt words of affirmation from God for you.

We also need to give God words of affirmation. Part of worship is expressing our LOVE for God and our GRATITUDE to God. ...This is why the Bible simply ASSUMES that each person who loves God will belong to a Church. Church is the group of people who have faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and who meet together to worship God and to have FELLOWSHIP with one another.

Some say they like to worship God while fishing, walking in the woods, golfing or whatever. That is fine. God says that we are to gather to worship. That doesn't mean that you have to FEEL like it. Worship, like love, is a decision. True love loves even at times when it doesn't feel like it. True faith worships even at times when it doesn't FEEL like it.

Conclusion – Joining the peeper chorus

In case some of you haven't noticed, and if you haven't had your coffee yet you may not be fully conscious, it IS still winter. In fact it will be chronologically winter for nineteen more days. Weather-wise, it may feel like winter even after that.

But if you are having a tough time with winter, be glad that you are not a spring peeper. Spring peepers are in the mud at the bottom of a frozen swamp in a state of hibernation. Even when they start to wake up, the old saying goes that they have to be frozen three times before spring comes.

There is a whole herd of little peepers who, at this very moment, lie stiffly in various froggy positions under the mud of the swamp between here and Willowbrook Manor. On the first warmer nights of spring, they will begin to emerge and ...peep.

Early on, there is often only one that peeps: "peep.....peep.....peep." Although I do enjoy hearing the first peeper, I really enjoy it when I hear the whole peeper congregation.

I think that that is how God feels about us. God is happy to hear from each of us anytime, day or night, but God DELIGHTS to hear us worshipping together, for that is God's intention for humankind.

So, from this moment on, let us commit to giving words of affirmation to those we love and let us commit ourselves, right now, to words of affirmation to God by singing Hymn number 4, "How Great Thou art." ...AMEN.