

A Verse to Live by

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV)

February Prayer Focus

Pray that your love will increase for those God has put in your life. Pray also that the love in our church will increase and overflow for each other and everyone that visits us. May we be a church known for being loving!

Life Application Challenge

Look up 10 Bible verses on love. Commit to memorizing 3 of those verses.

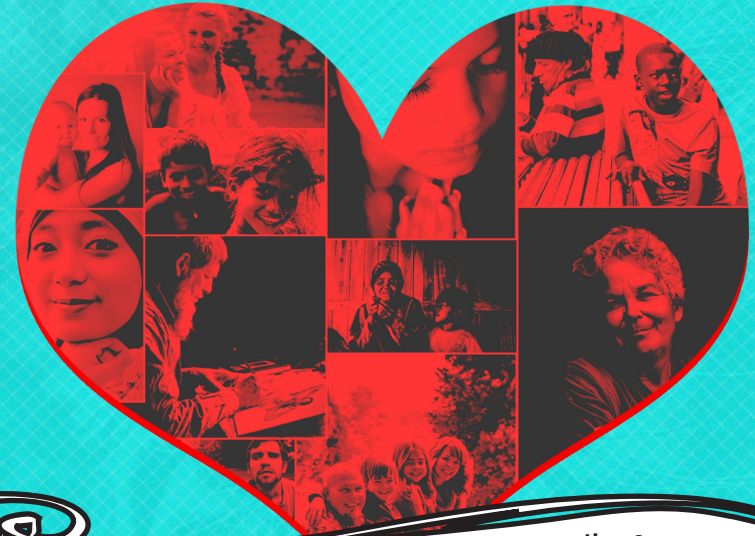
Recommended Scripture Reading

John 15 - Here Jesus explains the importance of remaining in Him, living and loving like He did while on earth.

1 Corinthians 13 - Called the "love chapter" - Paul teaches us what love looks like put into action and deeds.

1 John 3-4 - These two chapters explain God's love for us, and how we should love and live as Jesus did.

Church On Fire!



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LOVE GOD
LOVE PEOPLE

Obeying the Greatest Commandments

— MATTHEW 22:37-39 —

What's Love Got to Do With It?

Valentine's Day is just around the corner; a whole day we devote to celebrating love. Love is a powerful force in our world - not bound by borders, race, gender, or political affiliations, it can change the course of whole nations. Love can motivate a person to go far beyond what they normally would for another. The loss of it can utterly crush a person. It's sung about, written about, talked about, and professed more times than we can count. We hear the phrase "I love you" daily, used both casually and meaningfully. Catchy phrases such as love changes the world, all we need is love, and love is love are plastered on cards, clothing and posters. To say love is important to people - is an understatement.

We all have an idea what love is supposed to be like. But apart from God, our love falls so short of what He intended, that it often leads to broken hearts, broken lives and broken relationships. One of the more popular sayings right now, love is love, is not only a very misleading belief, it is not Biblical, "... because God is love." (1 Jn. 4:8 ESV). The love so often displayed in this world is not the kind of love God intended for us. It is absolutely not the kind of "...great love the Father has lavished on us,..." (1 Jn. 3:1 NIV) And it is not the kind of love Jesus instructed His disciples to show one another, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 15:12 ESV)

Loving others is one of the most important things we do. God takes love seriously, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." If we are Christians, being unloving is not an option. When people visit our church they should experience a place full of love. The number one thing people should say about you, about our church, is how loving we are to each other. We should be known more for our love of one another: not for the sermons, not the singing, not the nice building, not the fun activities we have, but by our love for each other, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn. 13:35 NIV)

What does being a loving person or church look like? The best place to find that answer is from our Creator, "...because God is love." (1 Jn. 4:8 ESV) He is the creator and source of love, "...for love is from God,..." (1 Jn. 4:7 ESV) If the essence of our Creator is love, then we need to have a good grasp on what love is and what that should look like in our daily lives. First, and foremost, love is a decision. It is a decision to responsibly and purposefully care about and help another person, for their betterment, regardless of how you feel about them or if you get anything back in return. Paul spells out what our love should look like in the well known verses in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy,

it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (NIV)

I want to take a moment to address those who have walls up, too afraid to love again. I get it. You've been hurt, rejected, judged, and now jaded, the wounds are deep. Abused by those who were supposed to love and protect you - you have trust issues. Some of your deepest hurts may have come from other believers. Favoritism may have left you on the outskirts, you felt marginalized, misunderstood, unimportant. Church hurt is a real thing, and it can leave an already tender heart shattered. You may be mad at God and Christians in general, too guarded to trust any church again. First let me say my friend, I am sorry if that happened to you. I want to encourage you to take your broken heart to the great Healer, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." (Psalm 147:3 ESV) I promise, you can trust Jesus with your tender heart, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30 ESV)

Jesus knows all about rejection and being judged unfairly, and He still chose to love. He loved Judas. He loved Peter. He loved Paul. He loves me. He loves you. There is healing for your broken heart. You were not created to live defeated, broken and unloving. We don't love others because we feel they deserve it, "We love because he first loved us." (1 Jn. 4:19 NIV) We will all experience hurt. Dear friend, let yourself love again. An unloving Christian is still living like an unbeliever, "If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead." (1 Jn. 3:14 NLT) The absence of love is what first broke your heart. The absence of love is what splits churches apart, causing people to be cruel, argumentative, bitter - hurting more people. The valley of the shadow of death was meant to pass through, not to stay there indefinitely!

The only way to truly be a loving person that touches the lives of the broken and lost is to live like Jesus. If we do that, at the end of our lives, when we face our Creator, we can do so confidently. "This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus." (1 Jn. 4:17 NIV)

Let all that you do be done in love, (1 Cor. 16:14 ESV)

Carolyn Abel