

Warm-up

It seems like life ultimately boils down to relationships. How do you determine and maintain a healthy balance with people in your life? *What is the #1 challenge you face in doing this?*

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Inside & Outside Love (vs. 1-2)

¹*Let love of the brethren continue.* ²*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by some have entertained angels without knowing it.* (vs. 1-2)

We know that God shines His light on all men; there is no darkness in Him (1 John 1:5). His primary instruction to believers is to love others. *“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”* (1 John 4:8). Clearly we are to love other believers. We are to be patient with them and forgive them and to pursue peace. Let’s call this “inside love”.

¹³*bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.* ¹⁴*Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.* ¹⁵*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”* (Col. 3:13-15)

But what about those who may be outside of Christ? We are to treat them with respect and to love them as God does. Romans 12:14 even says to *“bless those who persecute you”*. Be hospitable to everyone; you might be surprised who God sends your way! I’m referring to this as “outside love”. It should be a hallmark of a believer.

► We are to *“maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.”* (1 Tim. 5:21)

Inseparable Spirit (v. 3)

“Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.”

Something interesting happened to me during the course of my trauma experiences. I can now relate to and better understand those who suffer physically. I feel a deep bond with them that was not possible prior to my ordeals. It is the physical counterpart of *“united in spirit, intent on one purpose”* (Phil. 2:2). I understand seasons of pain along with times when no doctor can accelerate the healing process, or restore damaged nerves, and when others do not understand. I’m learning to trust God and experience His comfort, and therefore want to offer hope to others.

Our bond in Christ (see Col. 3:14 above) means we all have the same Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:4). We are all “sons of God”, being led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14). It is God’s Spirit that seals us to form this bond (Eph. 1:13). We are inseparable, in Christ, from one another. God said in Malachi 2:10, *“Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?”* We are all a part of God’s family.

So, when a brother or sister in Christ is suffering we should feel their pain and pray for them. Sometimes God will call us to physically help them in some way. 1 John 3:17 makes a good point: *“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*

► *Our bond in Christ compels us to respond to fellow believers who are in need. We must live with an open heart to others.*

Pure Commitment (v. 4)

“Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Do you agree that God takes marriage seriously? A common marriage vow states, “What God has joined together let no man separate”. On June 13th Trisha and I celebrated our 44th anniversary. We have striven to place Christ first in our marriage, with no exceptions. We stubbornly defend the sanctity of marriage, and cringe when we see others hold it loosely. Our unrelenting commitment to Christ has established an unrelenting commitment to each other.

We talked about God’s priority of moral excellence in Hebrew 12:16-17 (lesson 12). Truly, immoral behavior in marriage can easily become the “hole in the damn” that leads to other ungodly choices and behavior. Your commitment to your spouse must, of first order, be for moral excellence in mind and deed.

► *A close daily walk with God and time in His word lays a solid foundation of pure commitment to your spouse.*

Sustained Wealth (vs. 5-6)

"Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," (v. 5)

I think that it comes down to trust. Do I trust in myself and my efforts more than in God and His abilities? Do I really believe that God will provide for my every need, just as He promised (Phil. 3:19)? Do I really believe that as I put Him first He will provide "all these things" (Matt. 6:33)? Do I believe that as God does what He deems is best for me that I will be content? *"If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."* (1 Tim. 6:8)

Notice that God is concerned about what is *imbedded in our character*, deep within our heart. What do I truly love, that I'm willing to sacrifice for to attain? If it is material wealth I'm in trouble! *"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love."* (Rev. 2:4). Paul lamented in 2 Tim. 4:10 that *"Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me"*. Will I allow material things to steal my allegiance from the Lord?

► *Who is your first love? Loving God and others is essential for healthy spiritual growth and prosperity.*

Leadership Impact (v. 7)

"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you, and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Can you bring to mind a person who God used to draw you closer to Him? Someone who has taught you God's word clearly and practically? Someone who, by how they live their life, has inspired you to be fully devoted to Jesus Christ? As much as I appreciate our pastors and others who are engaged full time in ministry, the people whose lives have the greatest impact on mine are right next to me. They live life with its ups and downs just like I do. They laugh with me and cry with me (Rom. 12:15). And they consistently point me to the Father. They demonstrate unwavering faith to me (Rom. 4:20).

I also think of some special godly men and women who God is using on a more visible stage to impact many lives. Billy Graham had a big impact on my life as well as on millions of others. God sees the heart of the leader, such as David and Moses, and determines how He wishes to use them. So, whether it is your next door neighbor, a business associate or coworker, or someone you spend time with in lay ministry, honor them! Encourage them! Support them! And when their faith inspires yours, imitate them!

Write the names of two or three people whose walks with God inspire you. Make it a point to encourage them.

► *We need the support and encouragement of other believers to overcome the daily challenges of serving God.*

Dependable Forever (v. 8)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

What anchors your life? What truth will support you 50 years from now, and also those who follow you? So much in our world is continually changing, including our society's values! Every one of us needs stability and dependability. We need absolutes that we can depend on every day, without exception. There is only one answer, one source, one Person; Jesus Christ! He will never disappoint us; His love endures forever!

► *Jesus Christ NEVER changes! Stability is found only via a personal relationship with Him. Trust Him!*

Group Discussion

1. Talk about how you can extend "outside love" to someone this week. What is the key? (vs. 1-2)
2. How can you nurture a "common bond" or "inseparable spirit" with a believer whose temperament and outlook differs from yours? (v. 3)
3. Why do you think that God places moral excellence in such a high position? (v. 4)
4. How has God proven Himself dependable to you? (v. 8)

NEXT TIME: Lesson 15: LIVED OUT / Equipped – Hebrews 13:9-25