

Series: **OUT OF THE ORDINARY** - June 1, 2008

**LOVE WINS!**  
**1 Corinthians 13**

**I. INTRO**

- A. Anyone here willing to admit that you **occasionally** watch any of the adrenaline TV shows: Like, **Trauma Center, ER, When Animals Attack?** If you do, you're bound to see someone who's gone into cardiac arrest. In hospital lingo it's called **CODE BLUE**. One of the techniques EMTs or trauma specialists use to re-start the heart is electric shock. You've seen it. They rub the paddles together, place them on a person's chest, say, "**CLEAR!**" Then the body jumps as the shock goes through it. As cruel and violent as that seems, it many times saves a persons life.
- B. There is a place deep in the core of our lives we call our **soul**, or our **heart**. The Bible makes it clear that this part of us is the engine that runs our lives. It's where our value system lies. It's ultimately where decisions get made. This is the most important part of our lives because it's the part of us that loves. And the heart is **also** the most vulnerable part of us.

-When this part of us is healthy, we become good at loving. When our hearts is **not** healthy—well, not so good. And that is a **big** problem! According to everything the Bible says—and everything Jesus, God in human form, taught us when He showed up here—love is—hands down--the **supreme value in life**. Of course, the question is—is love the supreme value in **my** life—in yours? Is that what others would say about us?

**II. JUMP-STARTING COLD HEARTS**

- A. Sometimes our souls—our hearts go into cardiac arrest. Sometimes whole churches go into cardiac arrest. Code blue! That appears to be the **specific** problem with the church we've been studying—the ancient church in Corinth. The Apostle Paul, in the letter he's written to them, has waded through mess after mess after mess. And then, in chapter 13, he brings it around to the absolute **core** problem. It's a heart problem. A love problem. Listen to what he writes.
- If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.**
- Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless. When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a**

cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NLT)

1. A lot of times people have these words read at weddings. Well, in their context—these words were like paddles charged with high voltage electricity--intended to shock the hearts of God's people into beating again. -Paul doesn't pull any punches. You could summarize the first shock treatment as: ***Love is an even bigger deal in God's eyes than speaking in tongues—even if someone is speaking the language of angels!*** The gift of tongues is the spiritual gift of a private prayer language that God gives to some believers--where they communicate directly from their heart to God's. This can be a very meaningful and beautiful gift when it is used biblically. We'll talk more about this next week.

-Now, this was huge—because, see, in this church the gift of tongues was ***the gift*** to have. In their eyes, it was proof that you were more spiritual than anyone else.

- a. In the church at Corinth, people apparently started competing with each other—and this gift was used in a chaotic and divisive way. In short, there was nothing loving about it. The way they used it, it created pride in the ***haves***, and humiliated the ***have-nots***. And it turned their worship into a circus where everyone was competing for center stage.
- b. So Paul says these shocking words: "If I were better than anyone else at speaking in tongues, if I were the champion tongues speaker on earth. Take it up a notch--if I were the heavenly champion in tongues speaking--and I rarely demonstrated love to anyone around me--my prayers would sound like noise to God--the clanging of garbage can lids.

-If you or I can impress everyone with some supernatural gift in our lives—whatever it is—but in our homes or at work we don't show compassion, don't listen to others, don't treat people with kindness and dignity—it's just noise.

- c. The prize gift in the world of ***American Idol*** is a great voice. This is saying, "If you can wow someone—bring people to tears—with a song; if you can create worship albums that make people's hearts leap with joy or fall on the floor in adoration of God—but you don't ***love***—it's noise. God wants ***love*** to be #1--the supreme value in our lives.
2. So, these people are listening to this letter read publicly—whispering to each other, "No way!" Then it's like Paul rubs the paddles together and gives them jolt #2. What he says in vs. 2 is basically this. ***God is more impressed by small acts of kindness than He is by home-run messages.*** Paul says, " If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge...but didn't love

**others, I would be nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2 NLT)** Know who he's talking to? People like me; teachers.

- a. See, teachers were a **big deal** to these people. It got to the point where teachers had their own little fan clubs. When these guys were on deck, the fan club would gather, "Apollos! You de man!" "Paul, Paul, he's our man...!"

-Knowing God's secrets and mysteries was **also** a huge deal. I mean, who do you let in on **your** secrets? Only your closest friends, right? So, if you had knowledge of God's secrets—man, you were on God's inner circle!

- b. And Paul blew them away. Shocked them into spiritual reality. He says, "If you can preach messages that make the **pews** repent--preach grand slam messages every time you get up. Amaze people with all your Bible knowledge and spiritual wisdom—write books--get your own TV show--but you **lack the skills in really loving people**, you're **NOTHING!**

-Please understand this; it's not like lovelessness is a little bump in your spiritual journey. Nope. It reduces teaching to a big "O" in God's sight. When I hear this, I think of the times when I have upset everyone in the house.

Or left Lori feeling very unloved—and go off to work on a message about Jesus!

- c. And this applies to you too. Churches attract some very gifted people—and this church has **way** more than its share of people like that! The Spirit of God is saying that it is far more important to Him that we keep growing in our capacity to express love and kindness than to stockpile Bible knowledge or amaze others with what we're gifted and talented to do.

-See, when people come into a church that talks about the love of Jesus—and they are either ignored or treated rudely or unkindly--it is **very** disillusioning. Talk to people who've walked away from God, from faith, from the church—and it almost **always** has to do with a lack of love.

3. You think **that's** shocking, listen to this one. The heart of this church still isn't beating, so Paul rubs the paddles, says, **Stand clear!** and gives another jolt. **BAM! If I have a faith that can move mountains--but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2 NLT)** These people were into impression management! Power was a big deal. Get your head around this; Paul says that having a genuinely loving heart is preferable to demonstrating mountain moving spiritual power.

- a. At this juncture, people listening to this letter must have thought, "Come on, Paul. Stop exaggerating. **Surely** if we had a miracle worker right here—healing people.

Making supernatural things happen. Raising people from the dead. This would do way more good than love. Think of all the stuff that could happen; the people who could be healed, the people in the community who would be amazed, the injustices that could be turned around. We **need** more power!"

- b. But think about it. What does history teach us about power **without** love? People do unbelievably destructive things when power gets disconnected from love! Like the church in the Middle Ages—and beyond. Like Auschwitz. Like the purging that took place in Khmer Rouge.
- c. In our culture we **way** underestimate the power of love and turn it into some weak, powerless, mushy emotion. **Much** less impressive than troops, marketplace whallop, hostile take-overs, and pressure tactics.

-But the cross is the eternal reminder of the power of love. What would it do for our world if every child simply grew up absolutely certain of the love of his or her parents? That alone would **rock** the statistics of our society!

-Paul says to this group of miracle-working wannabes, "There is far more power in the accumulation of everyday acts of loving than you would ever dream. You don't have to be a superstar; you don't have to be younger, richer, slimmer **whatever** to make a **huge** impact on this world! Everyday, garden-variety acts of love, sacrifice, kindness and compassion have massive power behind them. God's power!

- 4. The final jolt is the biggest. **If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:3 NLT)**
  - Most people would think, "Paul, you're crazy! Why would **anyone** make that kind of sacrifice if they don't love people?" Why? Impression management. People are **incessant** in their need for the respect and esteem of others. Think about the world we live in. What other people think is **extremely** important to us. People will mortgage their homes to buy an impressive car; people will risk their lives to impress a carload of friends.
    - a. Sometimes, in religious circles—to fit in, to gain the esteem of a reputation as an exceptional follower of Jesus, people will do all **kinds** of things to themselves. Even give their lives. We see this on the news every week. Someone straps explosives to themselves and walks into a place crowded with people they hate. Why? Because then they become legendary. Honored.
    - b. See, people do extraordinary things all the time—and it **may** be for others—but at the core, it's about them, not really about love. Paul says that love is **more important** than vows of poverty--leaving all your stuff, all your relatives behind, and placing your life in danger in another land to serve God.
    - c. There's something I think Paul's getting at here that is **very** important. We sometimes tend to think of love for God and others as this big,

splashy thing we're going to do someday in some inner city, or in some poverty stricken country to prove to ourselves—and let everyone else know-- how extravagant our love really is. And the **truth** is—sometimes it's more about us becoming the hero we've always wanted to be.

-Paul says, "Instead of fantasizing about going out in a blaze of glory—why not accept the place where God has put you **right now** and love the people in **your world!** The person in your high school class—who needs someone to care; the person at the desk next to yours in cubicleland; the cashier at the convenience store who struggles with their English.

-It's sounds glamorous to just **give it all up**--die for Jesus in another neighborhood or another land—why not die **daily** to self-centeredness, greed, unforgiveness, the need for recognition and esteem—and the things that hold you back from loving? You have no right to export something you're not currently living!

- B. It's clear throughout the entire Bible—God is a relational God. God's plan is to restore a loving relationship between Himself and every human being—and to restore loving relationships between all humans. In fact, the primary word describing God is...**love**. God **is** love.

And the single quality that makes us spiritual people is not information, or gifts, or performance—or even sacrifice. It's love.

-Here's our problem. We use the word *love* a **lot!** We love hamburgers. We love music. We love weekends. We love our cars, our space, our dogs, our cats...nah! We even talk about **making** love. We also love our families—and God.

-I want you to think about a picture. Jesus on the cross. He was stripped of **everything**. Power. Justice. Eternity. Knowing everything. Being present everywhere. Clothes, teaching, opportunities? All gone. What was left—when God the Son was stripped of **everything**. Love. And that's what the Bible says, **God is LOVE!** And Paul defines how it gets lived out.

**Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a NLT)**

1. Let's take a look at a few of these qualities to get a handle on what Paul is saying here. The first quality he mentions is **patience**. How many of you admire patient people? How many of you **are** patient people? How many of you **know** someone who could **use** a little more patience!

-Patience is a quality that doesn't necessarily come naturally. It is a **Spirit-produced** quality that grows in us as we cooperate with God. Patient, loving people have learned the skill of **self-restraint**.

It's not like patient people don't feel the stress and frustration of moments that aren't going their way—they just make a different choice. And it **is** a choice. They choose self-restraint instead of acting out their frustration.

-See, that's something we have to learn from infancy on. We're not real good at patience as newborns. When we don't get *what* we want—*when* we want it and *how* we want it—we scream! We are quite capable of making a whole **crowd** of people miserable! The point of growing up is learning self-restraint. And people who are growing in love learn this too.

-This is the way I've thought of it. Anyone ever been carrying around a cup of hot coffee or tea—and someone bumps you? What spills out? It's quite predictable. What's inside the cup. Life is like that—you get bumped; and what slops over the top is a pretty good indication of what's inside!

-If you want to grow in patience, you'll have to ask God for help to develop this quality. And practice it. When you feel the stress and frustration going up, practice stopping and saying, "Right now, I have the choice—with God's help—to stop this! I'm not going to live in reaction mode! I'm going to let the Spirit give me power of self-restraint; to stop, think—and speak as a mature Follower!

2. The second quality—an **extremely** important one—is kindness. Love is **always** kind. And kindness is not just an interior thought pattern that thinks nice thoughts. We're talking kind **words**; **deeds** of kindness; **action** on other's behalf. And—guess what? **Kindness starts at home; it starts in the circle of people who are around you most.** And kindness requires **thought**. Maybe some creativity.

-Now, if you're going to stretch in this area of life—what could you do for someone else that would show **active** kindness? What could you do for a sibling? Or for a spouse—or a parent?

3. There are some things that love does **not** do. It doesn't envy. There is no way you can love someone deeply—when every time you're around them you either wish you had what they have—or, at the very least, that **they** didn't have it! Resentment kills love.

-The corresponding skill we have to learn is contentment. Because, see, you and I **will** regularly find ourselves with people who have more skill, better opportunities and nicer stuff than we have. So we will have to find ways to see and identify with those who have **way** less—and cultivate gratitude for all God has given us—which would include eternal life!

4. Paul talks about a cluster of things that kill love. Boasting—strutting your stuff. Pride—people can't stand pride! Rudeness—saying rude, hurtful things—living with a **me-first** ethic—all this stuff kills love. Trying to get your own way is a form of selfishness—and it, too, kills love. The corresponding skills are learning to be honest about who you are and what you're like; learning to be tactful and courteous with others—no matter how they treat you. Learning the spiritual discipline of being other-centered.

-Let's be honest. **This stuff doesn't come naturally.** You have to practice. Can I just be a little transparent here? The place where **I'm** working on this in my driving. If there's a place where rudeness and the me-first attitude comes

out in me—maybe in most of us—is in how we treat other drivers. How many of you, with me, would be willing to **practice**? Like today—in the parking lot!

5. In an age of anger and frustration and crunched schedules, like ours, the Bible says, ...**Love is not irritable and keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. (1 Corinthians 13:5b NLT)** It's not **easily angered**. It doesn't have a short fuse; doesn't fly off the handle. It isn't touchy. People who are truly loving don't carry around a 30 year list of all the wrongs that have been done to them and nurse and play with and feed grudges until they're big smelly monsters.

-Any of you ever carried around, in your heart, a scorecard of what someone has done to you—and you thought, “I will never, **ever** release them until they admit and pay!” That, friends, is a destructive way to live. Jesus said that when we live like that—refusing to show grace, refusing to let stuff go—and we keep rehearsing in our hearts the comments people have made and the things they have done—we yank ourselves away from the grace and forgiveness of God.

-See, here's the deal. The Bible identifies Satan as the **accuser of other believers**. Paul wrote to another church:

**Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out. (1 Thessalonians 5:15 MSG)**

-See, you and I always have a choice to make. Are we going to believe a known liar and accuser, Satan—and then have to defend what we've chosen to believe about someone? Or, will we choose to believe the best about others. Give them the benefit of the doubt? That's what love does, and if you want love to be the primary adjective that describes your life, that's what you'll **have** to do. Will you get hurt? Sure. But you'll also prevent a lot of unnecessary trainwrecks!

-The skill you and I have to learn is the skill of **forgetfulness**. Not where we don't remember what's happened—but where we don't remember it against someone.

6. The final part of Paul's love song is beautiful. **Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Corinthians 13:7-8a NLT)**. Love never gives up on people. Real love doesn't consider anyone a write-off. Jesus talked about this quite a bit. Why do you think He told us to never return evil for evil? Why do you think He told us to love our enemies—not just our friends?

-It's because this takes love out of the **ordinary** realm—and into the supernatural realm. It's only **God's** love that can offer forgiveness to those who are pounding spikes through our wrists and feet.

True love wins. Hatred and violence seems big and scary and frightening—worthy of a feature film. But ultimately, love is more powerful than evil. When you choose **love**—no matter what—you're signing up for the winning team. You grow, God smiles, and lives are changed.

-But love is not the easy path. At times, it may seem impossible. And *that's* where it moves out of the ordinary stuff that flows even between crooks—and moves into the supernatural. Is that where *you* want to live?

### III. IS LOVE THE SUPREME VALUE IN MY LIFE?

- A. It's quite easy to sing songs like, *What The World Needs Now...is Love, Sweet Love*; or, *All Ya Need is Love...da, da-da-da-da...!* Real love—love that includes people who are not at *all* like you, vote for different candidates, support different causes, throw trash on your lawn—is hard. And that's why, as Scott Peck said in his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, “Love is a choice; make no mistake about it, love is a choice.” You and I will have to **decide**, “love will be **the supreme value in my life!**”

-Sometimes people think, “Well, if I don't **feel** like loving someone— isn't it hypocritical of me to act that way? If you let feelings drive your bus instead of your convictions, you'll end up in the ditch. Love is always, **always, ALWAYS** a choice we make.

1. See, it's quite clear that love is the primary indicator when it comes to spiritual maturity.

**When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror,**

**but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:11-13 NLT)**

2. See, learning to love like this is not just for those who want to score extra points with God. Love *is* the point. Because I am a follow of Jesus and have His Spirit living in me, people have the right to expect love from me, not excuses. -Friends, when we stand before God in eternity, Jesus made it clear that the final exam is not about church attendance, Bible knowledge or committee work. It's about **love**. Did I **love**—like, was love obvious as **the defining characteristic of my life?** And was it obvious, not just from my words—but in my actions?

- B. The big question is—**how?** Well, if God is love—if He pours love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit—then we have the Spirit full access. The key to every room in my heart. There's this thing the Bible talks about—a choice we make every day—will I go **my** way—the way of the flesh, or the way of Jesus--the **way of the Spirit**.

-The Bible always describes change in terms of repentance—meta-noia. A change of mind. I get it. My way is stupid; destructive. God's way is perfect. I choose that way—then ask for **His** help.

1. What needs to change? Well, our mouths, for one thing. Jesus said, “All the garbage inside just comes rolling out—jealousy, anger, hatred, bitterness—all **kinds** of stuff. -A comedian once said, “I had the **right** to remain silent—I just didn't have the **power.**” We blow off at the mouth, and instead of confessing it as sin and cleaning up the mess—we excuse, justify, blame—**anything** but confess it as wrong and sinful. Why? Because we're proud.

-If we're going to deal with this stuff, repent of it—**own** it. Mop up the blood. Clean up the mess. Own when we're **wrong!** Change comes when we get sick of cleaning up the messes our mouths have made!

2. But loving others isn't just a matter of biting your lip when you want to cut loose. It's saying loving, kind things—and it's **especially** an action thing. Showing active love and active mercy and active kindness. And I'll tell you what I think is the biggest problem for us. We **want** to show the compassion we feel—and express mercy and thoughtfulness. But we're **too busy**.

- a. Let me bring this into the real world. This jar is your life--and this rice is all the have-tos you face every week.  
 -We all have have-tos. Like work at the office or in the home.  
 - You've got personal stuff; you've got to shower, brush your teeth, floss them. And exercise.  
 -There's the everyday stuff—buying, preparing and eating food. Home repairs maintenance. Pulling weeds, mowing lawns.  
 And you've got to balance the checkbook, vacuum rugs, clean bathrooms.  
 -Then there are relationships to care for, social obligations, phone calls. Richard Swenson in **Margin** says we spend 2 years of our life on the phone with people who aren't even home.

-If you have kids—that's a **whole** other ball game! And there's the unexpected. Stuff happens. Kids get sick. In USA Today, experts from different fields--nutritional, fitness, cleaning, sleep--all gave estimates on what it would take to just do the **minimum** basic stuff to just get by--and it added up to **35 hours a day**. And when we try to stuff love in on top, there's no room.

- b. Some people think, "Ahh, that's it! If I only had a bigger jar." Know what? Won't happen. Everyone has the same size of jar. 24 hours. That's what Paul had. That's what Jesus had. That's what you have.  
 c. It's possible to get your life **so jammed** that there's no room for love; no time for compassion. Wouldn't it be tragic if you and I didn't find the time to do the one main thing by which our life will be evaluated one day? The one thing Paul said is way more important, ultimately, than **everything else!**

3. Know how to get the acts of love, the small acts of servanthood--**and** all this stuff in the jar? First, you have to realize--you can't get it **all** in. So. Put the big chunks in first--and pour in the stuff around it.  
 And the stuff that doesn't fit isn't God's **will** for you--so you don't do it.

-My point? If you're going to do the one thing God wants and expects most from your life—love—you will **never** drift into it. You will have to build it into your life. You'll have to make time—and space for it—set aside money for it. So—**will** you? Love, remember, is a choice.

#### IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. As most of you know, I lost my Dad about a year and a half ago—a week before Christmas. When I got the news, I cried. And then I was just filled with gratitude for

his life—especially the way he loved. His love for me changed my life. I spoke about my memories of him at his funeral—and there were a **lot** of them. I closed with these words:

-“And **now** He knows. The love chapter tells us that in this life we see things very unclearly—like in a bad mirror. **Now** Dad sees—what is so unclear to us. We can write books, we can run corporations, we can accumulate money, we can impress people with our accomplishments and all the stuff we stack around our lives, but **love** is what really matters. Because, see, **love** wins. Love **always** wins. And love keeps on winning, even when **we** die.”

- B. I hope you believe me when I tell you—love—loving God, loving others—will be the most important thing you do in life. So. Love well. Love consistently. Love sacrificially. You’ll be glad through eternity that you did!