



## Devotions Week Five

The final component of this week's lesson is a Bible study that enhances the big ideas from the video. There are five days of devotions to be completed during the week. Researchers found that couples who read the Bible and pray together daily have a nearly 100% success rate for their marriages, so we believe that developing that habit is non-negotiable.

If you already are involved in a daily study that includes reading passages from the Bible, please don't feel it is necessary to put that one on hold - these devotions are available to you as an option. The part that is not an option for a successful marriage is doing some form of daily Bible reading and study together.

### Day One

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

It doesn't matter how well you communicate, if it not in love it is nothing. The picture of this is given with the noisy gong and clanging symbol. Each of these instruments are used to accentuate - but alone they are nothing more than a way to be heard over the clatter around them. The people at the time were growing accustomed to individuals speaking in tongues, but they would all talk at the same time and this would lead to a lot of confusion during the gathering. Paul had just finished instructing them to gather in an orderly fashion and eliminate the practice of everyone speaking at once. Now he is asking them to look closely at the motives that drive their behavior.

Unless your motives are driven from love, the outward actions are merely to serve ones self. When you consider how you love others, it opens pathways to create meaningful relationships. It doesn't matter how much you know or how well you are able to entertain or woo others, all of you actions need to be based in love to have a solid basis for growing.

Love is so integral that Paul spells out for the Corinthians and for us exactly what love is supposed to look like. He gives us positive examples and also the negative counterparts

that we should avoid. Try reading that middle section one more time, from verse 4 through verse 7, but instead of reading the word love, insert your name. When you read it like this, how true are the words you are saying? Can you honestly tell yourself that you are acting in love, or do you see some areas of potential growth?

He finishes this passage by explaining that love is everlasting. Everything else, whether physical or spiritual will end, except for love. He hinges the meaning of life on three aspects: faith, hope, and love. Faith comes from the things we have experienced in the past that lead us to believe in the power of God. Hope is based on that faith and is the natural extension of how we live when we know that the promises God has made to us are absolutely true. Hope lies in our future with Him. Love is the here-and-now acting out of our faith and hope. When we act in love we are a living testament to God's promises.

### Discussion Questions

- Do you feel you communicate in love? What does your spouse say about that?
- What checkpoints can you put in place that will help you check your motives on a day-to-day basis?
- What is one area from verses 4-7 that each of you would like to grow it? How can you help each other?
- Share with each other one specific thing that has happened that helps to bolster your faith in God's goodness. How does that strengthen your hope for the future? How does that impact your present-day actions?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for wrapping us in Your love. Help us to feel so infused by Your love that we can't help but have our lives marked by it. Convict us when our actions are driven by the wrong motives. Make us into more than a noisy gong. Help us to communicate in love with the people You put in our world, especially with our spouses. In Your Son's Name we pray. Amen.

### Day Two

1 John 3:13-23

How often do we compare our actions to that of those around us? Do we want the things that others around us have or are we content with what we are given? Our actions

aren't judged by God based on a sliding scale; He doesn't compare our deeds, and more importantly our motives, to the person next to us. He judges what we do based on His expectation.

Cain killed Abel because of selfish pride. He saw that his brother's actions were acceptable and his own were not. That is because God was looking at the heart with which they offered their sacrifices. God knew that Cain's actions were done with an unloving heart; they were done simply out of duty, Abel's actions were driven by love for God and were therefore accepted.

Does God approve of our actions? When we see others in need are we generous or do we try to protect what is ours? When we do give are we doing it with a loving heart or is it done so we aren't embarrassed by others noticing that we haven't opened our wallet yet? All of the things we have in this world could be gone in an instant, including our lives. None of it actually belongs to us, we are simply stewards of those resources while we are alive; the resources belong to God and should be used for His glory.

It is never okay to react to others in an unloving manner, even if they "started" it. Our lives are a testimony to our faith, and sometimes that is the only testimony that others will see. Our lives should look different from the world; not functioning as separate and isolated factions of society, but living in the world with a distinct manner for interacting with others. Jesus was a model for us in this; He didn't hide himself away and surround himself only with like-minded people. He got out into the world and experienced all the same things that we do: ridicule, rejection, questioning of His actions, and more. The lesson He taught us was how to respond in love when the people around us are inviting us to lash out.

Our hearts will convict us of what is right and wrong. If we are following Christ and we are unable to love one another, that is a red flag for us. If we notice that happening we need to examine what is wrong within us and in our relationship with God that is causing us to be unable to love others. Love isn't a warm and fuzzy feeling with hearts and rainbows floating over us. Love is action, and those actions often times need to be bold and hard to do.

### Discussion Questions

- What is one area that affects your relationship that you need to do a heart check in?
- How can your spouse help you bring your heart into alignment with God's standard?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God I pray that you would examine our hearts today and convict us of what causes us to stumble in loving others as you have loved us. You have modeled what it is to truly love our brothers in that you did that even when we should not have been lovable in your eyes. Allow us to see how we can experience that depth of love today in our actions towards others. We ask this in your son, Jesus Christ's holy name. Amen.

### Day Three

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I just love the thought of being sheltered from anything that would hurt me! Most days I want to create a little bubble that I can live inside and only let the people in that I know are going to be like me. I want to do that, but that isn't reality. In the real world I have to go out and interact with people that I know have different views on judging right and wrong. I have to figure out how to work alongside others that have a different work ethic. Oh, how I long for that bubble of peace!

That was just what the Corinthians felt. They wanted to just interact with the other Christians in their midst, but Paul sets them straight. He reminds them that isolation isn't the plan, that living as Christians in the midst of non-Christians is the expectation. He also reminds them that while they are interacting with other, they are not to judge them. Boy, do I ever struggle with that one! I tend to be very willing to sit in that role and become judge, jury, and executioner for the people around me. The problem is that they never agreed to play by the rules I am using as a standard.

We can't hold others accountable for acting in ways that God expects if they don't know God. The flip side of that is when people do know God and proclaim to be followers of His, we can expect their actions and attitudes to line up with His desires. When they say they are part of God's family they have an obligation to resemble the family. And so do you.

### Discussion Questions

- What is your typical reaction when people's actions don't fall in line with God's expectations? Do you tend to hold them responsible for behaviors to which they never

agreed?

- What is the difference between a Christian being held accountable for their actions and a non-Christian being held accountable for his or hers? Is it fair that one is expected to act differently than the other? Why?
- What is one action that each of you have been struggling with that you would like your spouse to be your accountability partner for? (This doesn't have to be something new, just something you are willing to have him or her hold you to.)

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for giving me a loving spouse to act as my accountability partner. Help us each to live in Your will and to react to others the same way Jesus modeled for us. Give us hearts to reach out to others in love, without judging their behavior. Help us to win them for you through our words and actions, rather than through intimidation and guilt. We love You, God and want to have a family resemblance. Amen.

## Day Four

1 John 4:17-19

I love how it is pointed out that we are able to love because God loved us first. Our ability to reach out to each other in a loving manner isn't contingent on our own strength; we can draw the strength to do that from God. What a relief! We can stop trying to white-knuckle through life and relax into following Him and His lead. In that sense we are able to create that bubble around us that we talked about yesterday. The bubble doesn't prevent things from affecting us in this world, but it does protect us from anything affecting our eternal world.

God opened the door for us by sending His Son to pay the price associated with our sins. Salvation is a free gift; we don't have to earn it, in fact there is nothing we can do to get it on our own. All we have to do is open up our hands and receive it. Once we have felt that awesome acceptance that is ours in Christ, the only response that makes sense is to extend that love to others. It allows us to speak and act with the security that comes from knowing that regardless of what happens in this world, for the short period of time we are here, nothing can separate us from the love God has for us.

When we are feeling overwhelmed and like we can't go on without exploding, we need to remember His promise to us in Matthew 11:28-30. It's a pretty common passage for people to reference, but I like it best in the Message version:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

We are promised here that if we are walking with Jesus and living the way that He has shown us we will be living freely and lightly. Notice, He never says, “without trouble” or “everything will be easy”, but He does say “freely and lightly”.

### Discussion Questions

- Does each of you feel that you are loved and accepted 100% by God? What does that enable you to do?
- Who is the most difficult person for you to love right now? How can you demonstrate the love God has for them to them?
- What makes it most difficult for you to react in love? How can your spouse help you work through that?
- Think back to the area from Day One, when you were thinking about which demonstration of love was most challenging for you. How can these verses help you with that?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

Jesus, thank You for loving us enough to die for us. You did that even though we were filthy with sin and completely unworthy to be called children of God. You opened that path for us. Help us to travel that road and extend that same love to each other and those around us. Be with us and guide us as we are reaching out in faith. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

## Day Five

### 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

We are going to spend our time today focusing on what Paul has to say about married couples instead of dissecting what he is saying to those who aren't yet married. He makes some very pointed comments regarding the sexual intimacy of married couples; those points are just as valid today as they were 2,000 years ago when he was writing to the Corinthians. Actually, our culture isn't all that different from the way things were in Corinth. Corinth was a young city, only about 100 years old by the time that Paul arrived on the scene. The people had been captured and taken into slavery prior to that, so were in the process of re-establishing their land. They worshipped the Greek gods - Aphrodite, Poseidon, Athena, and all the rest. Because they lived in a polytheistic (many god) society, they just kind of adopted whatever came along. That was where Paul had to stop them because they were trying to incorporate Christianity into the mix, and that just doesn't work.

In this particular section he is trying to clarify how Christians should be different sexually. You see, prostitution was commonplace in the Corinthian society. In fact, they even had temple prostitutes that served as a sort of ceremonial activity. The people of the city didn't understand the sanctity of marriage because it wasn't addressed in their culture. Kind of like in America today, fidelity to your spouse wasn't honored.

Paul tells them that they shouldn't refuse each other, but he follows that up quickly with a reminder that each body belongs to the other. This is important because no one would intentionally bring harm upon their own body; likewise, no spouse should do anything to harm the other. This includes protecting each other mentally and emotionally in addition to physically. He says the only way you should deprive each other is through mutual agreement, and then only for a little while and for a specific purpose. He says we should do those things to avoid temptation.

### Discussion Questions

- What is the biggest challenge you each face in the area of sexual purity? What contributes to that difficulty? How can your spouse help to lessen that challenge?
- When your friends and family see how you act, what are their impressions of your commitment to fidelity? What specific things do you do or not do to demonstrate your

commitment to your spouse?

- Do either of you use sex as a weapon or reward? Do you view sex as a commodity that can be traded for other favors from your spouse? If so, you should discuss how this aligns with what Paul instructs us in this passage. Does he give any indication that sex is a resource to be bartered?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for the gift of sex. Thank You for providing for all of our needs in advance of us even realizing them. Help us to treasure all the gifts You give us, especially help us treasure each other. In Your name we pray. Amen.



