

THE SEASON OF LIVING LOVINGLY
1 Corinthians 13

Growing in the Seasons of Life Series
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This weekend we conclude the sermon series, “Growing in the Seasons Of Life,” by focusing on the “The Season of Living Lovingly.” Love, of course, is without a doubt the most important value in life. In fact, the Bible says that without love nothing else really matters. Without love it says we can’t really know God.

1 Corinthians 13:13 says, *“And now these three remain faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* What is love? It is, I believe, one of the most misunderstood words in English our language. We use “love” for everything from tacos, to football, to God, to our spouse, to our parents, to our friends.

Yet one misconception that many have is that love is a feeling; that it simply means a sentimental knot in my stomach. Yet it may mean you just had some bad pizza. Love creates feelings yet it is not a feeling; we don’t always “feel” loving to those we love.

A second misconception is that love is uncontrollable. People say things like, “I fell in love,” as if they kind of stumbled into it by accident; the idea that a person just can’t help their actions because they are in love; or that a person just “fell out” of love.

The Bible says that love is rather a choice. Colossians says to “put on love.” It’s kind of like getting dressed. You have a choice of what you put on; you have a choice about the attitude you have. The Bible says put on love because love is a choice.

The Bible also says that love is an action. 1 John 3:18 says, *“Little children, let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”* It is something you do. It is not something you simply talk about. Love is more than just a feeling and more than just some sweet thoughts.

Sixteen times in the New Testament the Bible says, *“Love one another.”* Someone asked Jesus one time to give a summary of what the message of the whole Bible is all about. He said, *“Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.”*

How do you love your neighbor as yourself? How can your season of life be filled with love? Today we’re going to lift up six ways to become a better lover and a more loving person. Six practical ways to develop a loving lifestyle that will help every season your life is in.

The first way to become a more loving person is to accept others unconditionally. Every person needs acceptance because no one is perfect. We all have our faults, our failures, our weaknesses, our foibles, our hang-ups. As a result we all need acceptance.

Our basis for acceptance of course is Jesus who accepted people in spite of their problems. He was called a friend of sinners; that means he hung around with prostitutes, pimps, dishonest tax collectors, social outcasts. The Bible says he was a friend of sinners. Jesus didn't necessarily approve of what they did, but he accepted them unconditionally. So should we.

The second way to become a more loving person is to commit yourself personally. There is no such thing as love without commitment. Yet commitment is in many ways a lost value in our society. We're afraid of commitment—to people, programs, a career, even to a church. Yet true love is becoming personally committed to the people you love.

Some ask why is it so important to commit to and get involved in a church? The truth is that when you commit your life to Christ and proclaim to be a Christian, Jesus calls you to commit your life to others. There is no such thing as a "lone-ranger" Christian. Love means committing yourself personally to Christ and his body; his family; his people.

The third way to become a more loving person is to encourage others continually. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "*Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*" Everyone my friends needs a lift. Everyone is having a tough time in some area. When others in the world are gossiping and tearing people down, believers in Christ ought to be encouraging one another in the Lord.

Do you want to know how to change your mate, your children, a friend? Treat them the way you want them to become. That's what love is all about. Expect the best. If people don't expect much of you, you won't perform. You need to reinforce good behavior. Love encourages.

The fourth way to become a more loving person is to serve people cheerfully. God has given you, my friend, certain gifts, talents and abilities. The Bible says that God gave you those gifts and talents not for your own benefit, but for the benefit of other people. Jesus said if you want to be great, learn to be a servant of all.

Serve others cheerfully. Yet some people today focus more on their own rights, on what they feel they deserve or can get from others. God says, however, to serve those in need. If you see a need, fill it. That's what it means to give and love cheerfully. Share with one another.

The fifth way to become a more loving person is to forgive others freely. Colossians 3:13 says, "*Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*" In other words a genuine Christian is giving and forgiving.

Why is this important? It is important because it is very difficult to love one person while being filled with resentment for another person. It is almost impossible to love someone fully if you have resentment for someone else in your heart. Bitterness divides the heart, it chokes love.

There are certain women and men who say they can no longer love their husband, wife, family member or friend, and yet the real problem is that they have a divided heart. They are still

resentful against someone in their past; there is some hurt they have never been able to let go of; never been able to forgive, find peace or put this behind them.

The result is that if their husband, wife, children, friend or relative act in a way that reminds them of this other person and the hurt they carry, they go ballistic. They have all this anger and resentment built up in their heart and soul. You cannot fully love one person when you're still fighting someone else—it is virtually impossible.

The sixth way to become a more loving person is to share Christ verbally—to tell others about him. If you want to develop a loving lifestyle share Christ verbally with others. Talk it out; spell it out; tell it to people; witness. Tell people the good news of Jesus.

1 Peter 3:15-16 says, *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* When you talk to people about Jesus and your faith do it with gentleness and respect. Remember, the most loving thing you can ever do for a person is tell them about Jesus.

Have you ever heard someone says, “My witness is just living a good life,” or “I have a Christian symbol on the back of my car.” Yet have you ever thought about how this can actually be a cop-out from telling people. How many people do you know have dropped to their knees in repentance, or have confessed their need for Jesus because of a t-shirt, a sticker or a fish on the back of a car.

Even Jesus had to tell people. Even Jesus had to verbally say, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”* How are people going to know that it was Jesus who changed and transformed your life unless you tell them? Jesus needs people who both walk the walk, and talk the talk.

Why do we do all that we do at Messiah? Why do we keep reaching out? 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, *“Christ’s love compels us.”* This is the motivation behind everything that we do in our church. God loves people and he wants everyone to know about him. Every person needs Jesus. Love leaves no choice. 1 Peter says, *“God is not willing that one person should perish.”*

Just how important is outreach to God? Jesus you may remember told the story of the Good Shepherd. He said the Good Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to go find the one; that’s the priority he places on evangelism. He says we need to go and reach out to the lost sheep. As long as there are lost and searching people in this area Messiah is called to reach out to them.

Friends, my dream is that people all over this area will say, “You know that church over there, Messiah Lutheran Church in Hoffman? It’s a place where they all accept unconditionally, they commit personally, they encourage continually, they give cheerfully, they forgive freely, and they are committed to sharing Jesus’ love and saving message with others. In other words, Messiah is truly a loving church.

If you my dear friend, want to be a great loving person in your seasons of life open your heart to Jesus; open your life to his love this day.