HOW WE WALK IN RELATIONSHIP MOUTEONS

Starla Smith

STUDY

How we walk in Relationship Matters

Writings compiled from the social media and Sunday2Monday.blog of Starla Smith



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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the NKJV Bible. All quotations from other writers are marked as such.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

The scriptures are rich and full of truth and understanding for how God has set his people in the body of Christ. This 7 day devotional, if you will heed the truths within it, will walk you through the process of entering the deeper life of real relationship. Now, don't get me wrong, I am not presumptuous enough to think that if you just read this devotional over 7 days that you will have all the relationship things figured out in your life. But you could be walking in them in a whole new way when you are done! Based on what I know in my own experience, if God has said, and He has brought you to it, there is grace package in it that works in and through us.

I wrote this little series during a prayer initiative in my church. We were simply praying at 7:14 everyday for 40 days about particular topics. But I went an extra step as the Lord led and found myself writing little teachings along the way. These are some of those teachings. I believe that knowledge is power. Not just because knowing things makes you smarter but because knowing things, understanding what they mean, how they work, and applying the truth of God's word to our lives changes every day in real world ways. It's easy to stay the way that we are and just coast along. It takes fortitude and endurance to keep walking the paths God gives, trusting that as He is teaching us along the way that He is also changing us with the truth from the inside out.

I hope you find deeper and more meaningful relationships in the body of Christ.

DAY 1 WALK TOGETHER

Ephesians 4:1-3 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The hardest thing to do is walk together. In our day everyone is going here and there on their own agendas. But it is especially hard even in the connecting places for God's people if there is no unity.

Unity is the state or property of being one.

The word unity is actually written very few times in the Bible, but the term being one or oneness, Jesus spoke at length about. He said that this was the way He lived His life with the Father, as one.

John 17:21-23 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

There is something that displays the love of God when we walk in oneness, in unity. When we walk this way, we will make great effort "to keep the unity of the Spirit." This means we are mindful of knowing that it is not our unity. We are not to make other's keep unity with us. But rather

it's the Spirit of God's unity that we ourselves must keep. It is a holy endeavor. To keep in step with Him is how we stay together in oneness. And this is a worthy calling, it is to become people of peace because peace is the outcome, and it is one of the titles of our King. He, Jesus, is the Prince of Peace. So, when we walk this way, we walk like Him. We represent Him, our King.

The reason this is difficult to do is because it requires us to be first, all about Jesus, and second loving our neighbor, before we think of ourselves. It is very counter-cultural in a day that prizes and parades and glorifies self over everything else, and it requires 4 hard things that yield great love if we will walk with Him.

- -Lowliness
- -Gentleness
- -Longsuffering
- -Bearing with one another in love

Lowliness is humility. A willingness to be less, last, and least. It rubs our entitlement wrong to be lowly. Gentleness is a gift of the tongue, to refrain from speaking that creates harm, or that displays harshness toward another. Again, hard to do when we feel slighted, or that things are being done in a way that is unfair toward us. Or if we have anger, hurt, or bitterness lodged in our hearts. Longsuffering is patience, but specifically it is a patience that does not retaliate in return to offense. I know... it's a tall order. But remember this is not your ability to hold unity. It is yielding to the Spirit's unity, living in the oneness. It is a supernatural effect He does in us as we yield to the will of the Father. And lastly, bearing with one another in love. To endure one another without resistance to love each other.

Unity is something God created. May we walk in it simply because He has called us to it.

PRAY:

Father, make us one as You are one with Jesus. Let your people choose Your will over their own and to walk in unity. Help us Lord not to fight for our own way but to seek what You are doing in the middle of all we do. Help us to see each other as You see us. Show us why we need each other. Help us to be humble toward each other, to be gentle in our speech to one another, to be patient when we inevitably hurt each other like brothers and sisters sometimes do. Help us to bear with each other and not to hit back even if we want too. Help us to be people of peace, people like Jesus. Amen.

If this brought up specific places and people where disunity is running rampant or trying to raise its icky head, pray directly into those places and ask the Spirit to help you see how you contribute to it.

BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS FOR BRETHREN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY!

PSALM 133:1

DAY 2 COMMITTED IN LOVE

Romans 12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Yesterday we talked about a love that is born out of the unity that we have with the Holy Spirit. It is a picture of the love that is between Jesus and His Father that He asked for us to have just as He has. Today we look at what this kind of love between brothers and sisters looks like. It is the kind of love that carries the meaning of being committed to one another.

Committed: means entrusted - to be in trust.

This is a contractual term - a trust is when two parties come into agreement, and they form a trust. A binding agreement. I find this to be intriguing because essentially God is saying, "I will if you will." Jesus loved the Father, and the Father loved the Son. When we enter into a contract. Each party holds up to their end of the contract. Matthew gives us an example of this within the context of forgiveness.

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

I am not a legal authority but let me try to explain how I see a binding agreement. (in my understanding) A binding agreement has: Offer and acceptance - one party makes an offer and the other agrees.

Mutual obligation - each party accepts the terms and enters into a contract.

Consideration - each party puts in the necessary agreed upon things.

Capacity - each party agrees that they are of sound mind and not under duress or coercion at the time of accepting the contract.

Legality - The contract cannot be broken or used for illegal purposes.

In the natural world a binding agreement is used to enforce the law of the land or whatever is the enforcing power of the contract but in the spirit, a binding agreement of commitment to one another in the Spirit, is a contract to express the law of love to one another.

The Bible has a lot to say about the law of love, but I want to look at the passage here in Romans 12.

Let love be without hypocrisy: this is simply to let our love for one another be without the sin of pretending or just playing a part. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 tells us what this kind of love looks like. 4 Love suffers long (patient) and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity (wrongdoing), but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails.

Abhor what is evil: This is to have a great distaste for all things evil. At first glance, this seems like a strange thing to add into a list of things that "Let Love" be alive in us through a mutual trust. And yet, to abhor evil is to be so shocked and

distressed by it that we would not be willing to be silent when those we love are in danger of walking in it or becoming party to it. So, we will risk the uncomfortable feelings based on the binding agreement of commitment to one another in the Spirit and speak the truth in love to each other.

Cling to what is good: I was going to say all kinds of things that are good, but Jesus sums it up best. Mark 10:18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. Cling to God! Cling to the King.

What I find so amazing in just these first 3 things is the display the fact that we need God. We must stop pretending that we do love the way God loves, turn away from evil, and turn toward God. It's beautiful. It's encountering truth, repentance, and salvation.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love: This is a love and affection that treats others like family. There is the contract of love we are talking about. We are a family in the Spirit. This encompasses everything from care and respect, to support and the responsibility to pass down faith, values, and heritage, ensuring continuity and spiritual growth for generations.

In honor giving preference to one another: this I think is best summed up in the terminology of "I choose you." I choose to love you. I choose to help you. I choose to hold you up. I choose to care for you. I choose you over my own preferences because God chose me.

Not lagging in diligence: I really liked the way the etymology dictionary gave a sense of the word diligence. It said to "love" through "attentiveness" to "carefulness" to "steady

effort." It is an exhortation to not fall behind in the actions needed to keep on loving each other.

Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord: I put these two together because this is how we keep on keeping on together in the work of the Lord. We stoke the fire to keep on burning hot for Jesus and doing the work we are called to together. When I am burning hot - I share my coals with you. And when I wane, you share yours with me. And we keep walking and following the Lord as He leads.

Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer: These three go together as well. How else can we make it but to continually remind each other of the hope that is in us, Jesus Christ! Then as we patiently walk through all that we inevitably will walk through in this life, we are holding each other up in prayer, individually, and in groups.

Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality: And this is where the rubber really meets the road. When we start helping each other when life is lacking, and we offer spaces of solace to each other even in our own homes.

Now back to the binding agreement for a moment - if the Lord asks of us to love each other this way. How much more do you think He will do for those who are willing?

PRAY:

Father, help us love as you love. To be committed to one another that way that Jesus is committed to You and You are committed to Him. Let the Spirit in us dwell in us mightily as we align ourselves with Your kind of love. In Jesus name Amen.

DAY 3 WE ARE FAMILY

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Yesterday we talked about the contract of love that we walk in as we walk together in love as a family. Today we are going to dig into how that kind of love grows.

Everything that we do must be based on something solid and for the Christian that something solid is the Word of God, Christ our Lord. How we strengthen our communities in love is through gathering together, learning from the Word, and then speaking what we learn out loud to each other. Encouraging one another as we go.

Warning: We must be careful that we do not ignore this. Sometimes we see someone speaking the Bible to us as just correction or even as judgment. It isn't judgment that is the basis of our correction (although if we don't watch our hearts, it could be) but rather the correcting of each other's perspectives or understanding, is based in love and a nudge to course correct to align with the Word of God, which is our solid foundation.

It is really easy in this world to be tossed to and fro by this world. Just surf the web for any amount of time and you will come across all manner of perspectives and viewpoints on life and how to live it. I came across a quote the other day

that said something like, "Christianity is about helping people and controlling yourself not helping yourself and controlling others." And while that sounds catchy, and it is good to help others and deal with your own self. It isn't in the slightest what Christianity is about. First of all, without the Holy Spirit, we can't even control ourselves because He is the one who gives us the fruit of the Spirit and within that fruit is self-control. But I digress. I hope you get my point.

It's easy to slide into all manner of thinking and understanding that is just a little off from the truth but sounds so darn close. Gathering together, learning, and truly knowing the Word of God is how we defend against being carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. Truth is a weapon of warfare against deceit and lying spirits.

As we gather and learn, as we love like family, we begin to speak the truth of love to each other as we are going along. So that we can grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ. We literally will grow through what we go through if we will allow it. When we spend time together in smaller, more vulnerable places, the people we spend time with get to know us deeper and deeper. Because we allow the connection, they are granted a unique view and position to love that is able to help sharpen us as the Holy Spirit leads through them revealing when our walk doesn't match our talk and when our hearts are angry, bitter, or sad. These deeper, more vulnerable places are often avoided for fear of being judged, being seen, or uncovered. But they are precisely where the Bible says growth resided.

I wonder how much of a detrimental risk we run if just settling for a shallow Christianity when we choose to go it alone and "be too busy" to join these groups. When actually these spaces are the exact places where God blessed us to find and build brotherly love there. Where we gain the affection for one other that treats each other like family.

The scripture says that the whole body, when it is joined and knit together by what every joint supplies (those joints are you and me, as we share, love, sharpen, and supply to one another), when we join in an effective working by which every part does its share, this causes the body to grow and the body to be edifying in love. This is how growing people change. All of us, growing up together in one house of God's family.

Take some time to look at if you are eager to join or if you keep your distance from the smaller, more vulnerable places our church offers. What is the Holy Spirit saying about that?

PRAY:

Father, thank you for my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family and like a family that is healthy and whole, I pray that we would all walk with each other, in love, in the small and vulnerable places. Where we say the real things and are willing to have our church family come alongside us and help us see what you are doing in the middle of hard things, and to help us see when we are following good sounding things but maybe not biblical things. And find help for our hurting, angry, and sad places. Lord, we need each other. Help us to be willing to receive the truth, because you are the author of truth. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY 4 THE MYSTERY OF DEEP

Ephesians 3:17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Yesterday we talked about the importance of joining groups and being in the smaller, more vulnerable places. Today let's dig into that just a little deeper. We often think that if we have Christ in our hearts, we've got our ticket to heaven, and so, we just go about our business. We try to be good and what not. But the intentionality of what Christ came to do in our hearts is somewhat lacking. We tend to miss it in our busy, run-a-round lives. Paul is in prison and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the church in Ephesus. In chapter 3, he is unpacking a mystery that God gave him by revelation. This mystery, as he says, in chapter 3 verse 6: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. He is telling of how the Gentile people and the Jewish people in Christ are brothers and sisters, they are fellow heirs. They are one body. The purpose of this mystery is given in verse 10: to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. He is declaring God's wisdom to principalities and powers in heavenly places that all the people are God's and belong to Him. Not just the Jews. I like to think that God was putting Satan and his minions on notice that they can't have the people of the earth. They all belong to the Lord and He's made a way for them. Then here in our verses that we are looking at today Paul is declaring great appreciation for this, that the whole family of heaven and earth can rejoice that we are named as God's BELOVED. And His Spirit has come to dwell in us. It's amazing.

This faith is to be rooted in our hearts, it is to be grounded in love for a specific purpose, so that we "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" This is what we are to be rooted and grounded in. So, I have a question then, how do we do that? That answer comes from our text. It says that we, "may be able to comprehend with all the saints" We have to do this thing together. There are no lone rangers in the Kingdom. There are lone messengers but not rangers. Lone rangers wander and police an area. (are you policing your heart and life as you walk along, wandering through life alone?) and lone messengers are those who bear a message like an ambassador. This we are all called too. We have one message, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And my second question is, how can we know the width, length, depth, height of the love of Christ if we won't explore it deeply in the scriptures, if we don't gather together to examine it? Not just on Sunday's but in the smaller, more vulnerable places.

Deeper relationships with God, with the Word, and with each other will always come from taking time for it. There is no other way. This is how they did it in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear (awe and wow that makes you stand still in wonder) came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45

and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

And there was an explosion of Christianity that swept across the land because of this way of living in the deep with one another. And when I read how they lived I sense the peace and joy of it. Just as with anything that God asks of us, there is promise. So, back to our main verse. It ends with this: that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. That kind of living sure feels full. Anyone hungry for the real "deeper life"?

PRAY:

Father, thank you for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Lord, help us to love each other, to walk alongside each other in the small, more vulnerable places, and to dig into the deep with you in the Word and in knowing the Love of Christ that has been given to us.

THAT HAVING BEEN
JUSTIFIED BY HIS
GRACE WE SHOULD
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ACCORDING TO
THE HOPE OF
ETERNAL LIFE.
TITUS 3:7

DAY 5 THE GATHERING BODY

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

So far this week we have covered the importance of unity, being committed to one another in love, loving like a family by being available for the smaller, more vulnerable places, and digging deep into the love of Christ through gathering and reading and sharing the Word. Today we keep walking into the deep life. See, the deep life isn't a feeling, rather it is a way of being. It's the way we walk in hope, even in the face of adversity. It is knowing God is faithful, and we will make it, if we do this thing together. It's how we know each other, so well that we are able to stir each other up to love and good works, when life is hard, and we want to quit. But this way of being has to be walked out intentionally because it's pretty easy to keep doing the same thing when it's become a routine, a habit of life.

What happens when life gets good, and you are distracted with the fun life or when life gets hard, and you're overwhelmed with the pain and frustration life can bring? What do you do? How do you handle changes in the circumstances of your life? Here in the verse it says, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another" There is "something" when we assemble that is a gift to us, that if we will not forsake it, (Forsake meaning object to, oppose, refuse, deny; give up, renounce) if we will not just allow ourselves to decide we don't need church, if we choose not to take it or leave it as

if it is inconsequential. This haphazard way we sometimes treat gathering, by forsaking, it may very well be more detrimental to our souls than we know.

The gathering of God's people is a gift that certain things "can't be" without it. God dwells among His people, in a different way, when 2 or 3 (or more) are gathered, when we assemble, than if we are alone. (I am not saying God doesn't dwell with us when we are alone, I am saying there is a specialness to the dwell that He has given to His people when they gather together.) Don't forsake the gathering, not just on Sunday's but in the small places, where the slow work of God is happening. Because it is precisely in these places that God is doing things we cannot even fathom. We are the church. Yet, we are also a body. How well does the body work if it is disjointed and separated? Not so well. How much weakness and pain comes to your body when one part of it isn't functioning properly. If one muscle is out of whack and another has to compensate, like if you pull a muscle playing softball, then the other muscles have to do the work, pull the load of your body, until the weakened muscle is healed or made whole.

Here's what we do sometimes, when hard things come, bad things happen, we mess up, and fight against, we sit down, bow out, or run the other way. We forsake. The writer of Hebrews says, "as is the manner of some" people. This word "manner" means this is the customary practice. This is some people's way of doing things; a personal habit or way of conducting oneself toward others. Their way is against, down, out, or away. But the Lord says, "Draw near." Why? This is where we can be exhorted. Exhort means thorough encouragement. It is to make strong, give courage, to take heart completely. We need encouragement on the road of life. We are running a race to The Day when we will see the

Lord. As we see that day approaching. We need more and more encouragement. Just go out into the world. You may find sympathy for your situation. You may even find those who will understand your plight because they've been there too. You will also find a lot of complaining, and anger, and despair and loss of hope. But it is in the house of God and among His people that we are to find encouragement, where people pray the Word of God and in the power of God for you and me in our time of need. The church will always be where you bring your load to find the help and hope you actually need. (but when if the church isn't being like that?) No, that's not it. You have to be like that by being what God has called you to be in His house. So that you can encourage others to be that too. So that we can be that together as a body. Mutually Encouraged!

So, the question then is - what is your manner? Do you press in when life gets hard? Or do you fight, sit down, or run? Do you have a group of believing church "family" who know you, know your life, your ways, and manner that they are able to exhort you, who are able to speak the truth in love and pray for you? If not, it's time to dig in, get close, and ask for community.

PRAY:

Father, this is a tough word. It rubs against my lone ranger tendencies and my regular manner, but I want to align with your word and love like you've called me to love and be what you've called me to be. Help me to see my manner, my ways, my habits, and my level of interest in your body. Help me to be willing to engage in a deeper, more vulnerable way, in this deeper life. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY 6 BEAR WITH THEM

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

As we have seen this week, relationships matter to God. God calls this band of people who are called to walk together in love, in the deep and united way, the elect of God. We are the chosen, who make up the body of Christ. We are called (as wild and crazy as we are) holy and beloved.

In this chapter of Colossians, Paul is exhorting them. He is saying things like, "if then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above" and to put to death the things which bring "the wrath of God." We are a new creation. Stop going the way and the manner you use too. You are raised with Christ! It's time to throw off all that old, unhelpful, unhealthy stuff and put on new things.

So, what are these things we are to put on? He gives us a list. Each one of them is exemplified best in the context of relationship because how we treat each other matters greatly to God.

Tender mercies - this is a sensitive care for where others are. Do you care about how people feel and what they are walking in, and dealing with? Would you not care if your own foot hurt, or your back was in pain?

Kindness - this is looking out for "how" to be deliberately good to each other. It is helpful and holy, and without harshness or sarcasm. (Ps, sarcasm is a terrible way to

communicate your needs and feelings. I recently heard someone say, sarcasm is hostility disguised as humor. It's not funny.)

Humility - bears out in the way I interact and react to others. Am I actually quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger? Am I willing to allow others to be first, seen, heard, or ahead of me?

Meekness - Is expressed in the way I don't dominate a conversation, in the way I don't use what power I do have, to turn things to my own favor. Am I willing to let God have control and handle people without my intervention, while I am simply called to love them? Maybe He uses me, maybe He doesn't but I choose to trust His process, not mine.

Longsuffering - Is expressed in the way I don't get upset with people when they don't meet my standards, in the way I am willing to wait, defer to, and pause for others. Am I patient with them in their process and with God's timing?

All of these qualities can only be "shaped" in the smaller, more vulnerable places. In the deep places of relationship where people really see each other and choose God's way and not our own. These qualities, sharpened and polished like stones in the water of life, as we do actual life together, are being matured for a reason and a purpose. That purpose is given to us in our text, so that we are able to "bear with one another, and forgive one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." WOW!

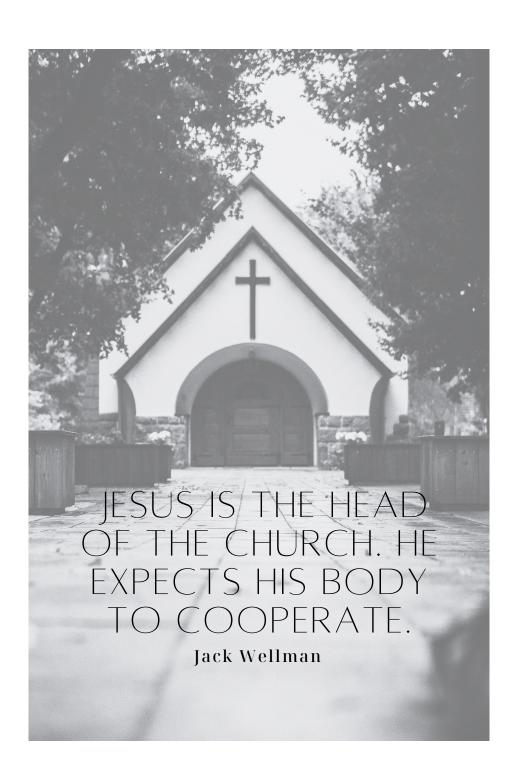
From living for 46 years of life, I can tell you that without those qualities above, being worked in by the Spirit of God and worked out of me, through the Spirit of God, I would not be able, nor would I want to bear with others when they hurt me - let alone, forgive them. Will people hurt me? Yes. Will I hurt people? Yes. We still live in a broken world. Plus,

have you ever lived in a family? If you have, you know that we sometimes hurt each other, and we have to learn to live together in the same house. This is exactly what the Father in Heaven is teaching us. He is teaching us how to be a family! A family that cares for each other, that is good to each other, that is willing to lift up one another, that is willing to wait for one another, that will be patient with each other, bear with each other even when we are having a hard or a bad day. And forgive one another, because Christ forgave us. That's Family! Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

John 15:9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

PRAY:

Father, thank you for the bond of perfection that is given to us in love. When we walk like you and live in you. We live a life of love that is far greater and deeper than we can even understand. Teach up Holy Spirit. Help us to learn to be caring, looking to do good to each other, having words of uplifting encouragement on our lips, help us to make room for each other and to be patient. And above all that to forgive and love each other like Christ loves the Father. In Jesus name Amen.



DAY 7 LOVE & FORGIVENESS

2 Corinthians 2: 8-11 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end, I also wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Wow. This has been a wonderful study on understanding what God desires for the relationships between His children. But I am sure that you, like me, have wondered, "what about accountability?" It is good and great to be loving, to care, and encourage, and do life together. But what about the part of love that is kind of messy, where you have to share real things that matter, like when we've been hurt by others and they care about that, just as much as I care about loving them well.

Here in 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses. He had to correct and deal with some uncomfortable things happening in that church at Corinth. He confronted them, with tears, about the things that were happening. It takes maturity on our part to hear the hurt of another and be willing to accept responsibility for what we've done that hurt another. When others cause us grief, we must be willing to come to them with honesty, not forgetting gentleness. We must be willing to share the hurt but also to give the other person every opportunity to acknowledge the hurt they have done and offer the ability to cure, or a way make it right. We must be willing to do this, because the truth is that we are just as guilty of wrong if we withhold forgiveness, as they are for the hurt, they have caused. Also, we must have discernment to stand in the weight of the hurt, without making it too

heavy to bear and walk out of it (*if possible*) together because that is always the goal. To be reconciled. To walk forward together. As we said on the first day of this week's reading: UNITY! Both the one who was hurt and the one who offended must be willing to do the hard work of real relationship reconciliation.

Otherwise, if we are not careful, Satan will use these moments to heap guilt on the one who hurt or to puff up the one who brings the correction. Or he will use these moments to cause the one who offended to grow cold in love, and they choose an arrogant "whatever, get over it" attitude. Or he will use these moments to cause the one who was hurt to say nothing to the offender, but they become gossips, backbiters, and bitter.

We must be watchful and mindful. And this is where we come back to our text again. Paul says to "reaffirm your love." Make sure that this is solid! Love is the essential thing. Paul is giving them an example of what he will do. This is what we are to do. If a hurt is forgiven - everyone else who saw, heard, or was a part of knowing anything - if the offense was forgiven. It is to be forgiven by all. Paul said that this was the test of our obedience. Forgiveness is one of the hardest things to do because our sense of justice has been assaulted and it feels so wrong to let go of a wrong done. So, we hold on to that and defend it. But it also is killing us slowly from the inside out.

The test: Would we, will we, forgive? Forgive when others hurt us and forgive when others hurt the ones we love, when they forgive. And why is this of utmost importance, he said, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." We are not ignorant. We know that unforgiveness breeds the darkness of Satan in our souls

and poisons all our relationships. It spreads like a disease, taking down anyone and everything around it. That is not the way of the church.

Love also spreads like a flourishing forest. What kind of relationships will you grow?

PRAY:

Father, thank you for the beautiful way you have created for us to live in unity and relationships with each other. We are a family, a body of people, who love, care, work, help, and enjoy each other. Help us to move one step closer to living the biblical way of relationships that you have created for us. Help us to forgive, help us to share and not hold hurts any longer. Help us to hear and care about when we hurt others. Help us Lord to love like you love and forgive as you have forgiven.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Thank you for reading and studying along with me. - Starla

OUR LOVE TO GOD IS MEASUREDBY OUR EVERYDAY FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS AND THE LOVE IT DISPLAYS. ~ANDREW MURRAY~ Writings from
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