

Retreat based on 1 Corinthians 13

Leader's opening remarks:

Welcome:

Arrange in small groups:

Logistics of day:

We will be hearing some short talks and have some discussion and prayer time in your small group about what you hear.

The talks will be witness talks given by the speaker and based on experience from their own life. They won't be theological teachings. None of the speakers knew whether they would speak at this retreat until our team meeting last night. They "volunteered," to speak, because they have a story to share with you -- their struggle to walk with Christ in their environment as it applies to their topic and where they are in their own journey.

When they have finished speaking, there will be time for discussion in small groups. I ask that the discussions be very subjective.... share with the others in your group how you feel about what they said. How does it hit you in your attempt to walk with Jesus in prison? Then you will have about 10 minutes to talk and pray with your prayer partner. I know this freaks some of you out... but I asked that you do this and see what happens even if it makes you uncomfortable. This is the safest place to be inside the fence. These are the safest people to be with... I hope!

We'll give you ample opportunities for breaks, so please wait for the time that is planned into the schedule to go to the bathroom. Thanks...

The focus of today's retreat is 1 Corinthians 13. First Corinthians is a book in the new testament of the Bible written by the apostle Paul. It was written to the church at Corinth and is often called the "love chapter" because it talks about the attributes of love.

Loving people is not always. How do you love someone who is hard to love? I am sure we can all think of someone that we have had difficulty loving. Often when people are hard to love we must simply make up our mind to love those people because God tells us to, and because God loves us – even we are hard to love.

God's love for us is not based on his feelings about us, it is based on a convenient or promise he made with our ancestors and with us, and we must understand that the first step in loving someone else is accepting God's love for us....

So, let's pray and then we will have the first talk about love, and how we show other they are loved by God and us.

**Talk #1 - God is love and love is the evidence that God is in our life
(10-15 minutes)**

Read the scripture: John 3:16

“For God so loved the world,^[a] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Read the scripture: 1 John 4:16

So, we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Have you ever tried to define love? It is very hard to define love in a few words or even 2 or 3 sentences – every definition of love that we come up with always seems to be lacking something. And truthfully, until you really understand who God is, you can't really give a good definition of love, because God is love.

John 3:16 is one of the best-known verses in the Bible, but often when we are so familiar with the words the truth may be overlooked. What would it mean for *you* if you believed this verse enough to live like someone who is loved by God? Reflect for a minute or two on what living like you are loved by God look like? How would this reality affect the way you pray, the way you interact with other people, the way you carry and feel about yourself.

God does not demand some moral or religious preparation from us- we do not have to be interesting or acceptable to him. On the contrary, his mission is to enter the darkness and find us right where we are, and to bring us into the light. He does by introducing each of us to his transforming love -forgiveness, and grace. God love us so much that he sent his only son Jesus to die for us – so that we could live in relationship with God forever. And we all need to remember God loves everyone, and he desires to be in relationship with everyone regardless of what you have done in the past.... God loves us unconditionally!

And we come to know and to believe the love that God has for us – it changes us. When we live loved – and share God's love, and the attributes of that with others we are abiding with God, and God is abiding in us.

Speaker should give an example or examples of ways in which he/she has experienced love because of your walk with Christ, and how it has enriched their life. Or give an example or examples of how God has expressed his great love for you in your life in very tangible ways. Talk about what it means to live a life abiding in God's love.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you were asked to describe how God feels about you, what one word would you use?
2. Do you feel loved by God and do you live like you are loved by God?
3. Think about how your life this week. Would others say you are “living in love?”

Prayer focus: Pray and ask God to reveal his great love for you in very real ways, ask God to help you share his love with others, and ask God to let you live loved every day.

**Talk #2 - Love is patient
(10-15 minutes)**

Read the scripture 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

In the next several talks we are going to talk about the attributes of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. But specifically, in this talk we are going to talk about love being patient.

When you think of patience what comes to mind? I don't know about you, but when I think about patience – I tend to think of it in terms of suffering. But, really patience is not about suffering.... it is really learning to wait on God – patience is a God given restraint. It is something that is developed when we begin trusting that God is going to provide what we need in every circumstance, situation, or difficulty.

Patience is listed as one of the fruits of the spirit in the Bible, meaning that when we accept Christ as our savior, and the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us, patience is one of the attributes we develop.

Speaker should give an example of how God has worked with them to develop patience, how patience has played a role in their relationships with others, and in their relationship with God? They can also talk about how patience and waiting upon God in a situation or certain circumstance has increased their faith and patience.

Discussion questions:

1. Have you seen an example of patience leading to a better understanding of God's love?
2. When have you been patient in a recent relationship?
3. When have you been impatient?

Prayer focus: Pray that God will help you understand the real meaning of patience, and that he will help you develop patience and display patience in your life and in your relationships with others so that they may see God's love expressed.

**Talk # 3 – Love is kind
(10-15 minutes)**

Read the scripture 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

This talk is about kindness, and how love is kind.

It is not always easy to completely understand what kindness is because it can refer to many things. God's is kind to all his creatures, even when they are ungrateful, or wicked, and his loving kindness is spoken about throughout scripture.

Kindness is the sincere desire to make sure that others are happy – to be truly sensitive to the needs of others, and we express kindness to others by our words and our actions. Kindness, like patience, is a fruit of the spirit, and when the Holy Spirit lives within us we can put other's needs above our own and be kind. Acts of kindness to others are an expression of God's love.

Speaker should talk about how acts of kindness or kind words expressed God's love to them, give examples of way in which you have been kind, and how it impacted you and your faith, and the faith of others.

Discussion questions:

1. What are some specific acts of kindness waiting to become examples of God's love?
2. Do you know somebody with a need that could be met with a little Christian kindness?
3. How can you express kindness to each other, to the staff, to your family etc.?

Prayer focus: Pray that God will increase your desire to be kind and to show kindness to others. Pray that God will guide you to those people in your life who need to be treated with kindness so that they will see your actions as examples of God's love for them.

**Talk #4 - Love does not envy, Love does not boast
(10-15 minutes)**

Read the following scriptures:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

2nd Corinthians 11:30

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Galatians 6:14

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which^[a] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

When we feel discontent because of another's advantages – perhaps they have something we want or desire – possessions, position etc. it is said that we envy them. Envy is resentful dislike of another who has something you want or desire to have. When we boast we puff ourselves up – make things seem better than they are. Love does not envy others – we only what is best for them. We should wish others well when they succeed. Love does not boast – we are never supposed to build ourselves up or to boast about our accomplishments. Everything we have comes from God – we can do nothing without him, and the only thing that we should boast about is God attributes, and about what God has done for us.

Speaker should give an example of how they have dealt with envy and boasting in their own life. If possible, give an example of envy destroying a loving relationship or preventing a relationship from developing. Recall a situation where you were boastful and injured yourself or a relationship or relationships.

Discussion questions:

1. How do you recognize envy when it appears in your life?
2. How does envy prevent us from experiencing the love of Christ?
3. Is there, or has there ever been a relationship in your life that is poisoned by envy? Do you ever boast, and if so, what do you boast about?
4. Has someone been boastful to you? If so, how did you react? Was your reaction loving?

Prayer focus: Pray and ask God to help you identify anything feelings of envy you have in your life or any desires you may have to boast about anything other than him. Ask God to help you to see that He is the only thing we need to boast about.

**Talk #5 - Love is not proud - It is not selfish
(10-15 minutes)**

Read the following scriptures:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8: Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Galatians 2:20:

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

When we are full of pride or act selfishly we are thinking only of ourselves. People who are full of pride have high opinions of themselves and their importance. When we are selfish we put our needs before the needs of others. When we truly love someone, and exhibit love as described in the scriptures we just read, we put others needs before our own, and we lay down our desires and our agenda for Christ's agenda, and we desire to follow his will and his desires for life.

Speaker should give examples of how pride and selfishness have affected their life, and their relationships.

Discuss questions:

1. Are you ever free of "self" in your life?
2. How does pride hurt love?
3. Should we not love ourselves as God loves us?

Prayer focus: Pray that God will help you to see areas where pride or selfishness impact or affect your life and your relationships. Ask God to help you restore those relationships are areas of your life that have been impacted by pride or selfishness.

**Talk #6 - Love is not easily angered
(10-15 Minutes)**

Read the following scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Ephesians 4:26, 31-32:

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger
³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

We all get angry sometimes, and often we get angriest with those we love. Anger can be a positive emotion if it is felt and released in ways that allow us to grow through it. God is with us when we are angry – and he understands that we may get angry with others, and that we may even get angry with him. Acknowledging anger is the first step to dealing with it. How we behave when we are angry or channel our anger makes all the difference. The Bible says that as Christians we are not to let the sun go down on our anger, and that we are to put anger, bitterness, wrath, and slander away from us – we are not to be malicious. But, instead we are to be kind to one another, and we are to forgive others as God, in Christ, forgave us. Often dealing with our anger can be the first step towards forgiving those we are angry with.

Speaker should give examples of personal experiences of anger poisoning your life or of your struggle with anger. Talk about your effort to find healing for anger. Talk about God's role in helping you to deal with your anger.

Discussion questions:

1. What kinds of things make you angry?
2. How do you respond when someone makes you angry?
3. How do you get over your anger?

Prayer focus: Ask God to help you identify any anger that exists in you, ask him to help you deal with the anger. Ask him to help you deal with your anger more positively.

**Talk #7 - The greatest of these is love.
(10-15 minutes)**

Read the following scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:13

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Each of these aspects of Love that we have talked about earlier in the other talks are not just a call for us to know and do, they represent God's character. We can substitute each of those characteristics of love with the name, *Jesus*, for they make up His essence, and virtue. They are the things most people are missing and what we all need more of. They are what others need, and what we cannot only demonstrate but also impart. When God tells us that love is the greatest thing, He means that real love points to Jesus. He is the Greatest! Because God loves us so much, He will allow His great love to move in and through us with hope to further our faith. God is love and He loves you and accepts you; you are forgiven and secure in Him when you accept Him as your Lord and savior! He created you for a reason and has given you a purpose greater than you could ever imagine. He wants you to pursue Him and His principles, so He can empower you even more. Because you are of deep value to God, He sent Jesus to die for you, to give you salvation so you are unique and complete in Him! When you have faith in Christ, you are pleasing and glorying Him, which is the main mission for your life. With faith, you will be able to move forward and share His great love and all its dimensions with others to impact the Kingdom!

Speaker should give examples of how love is worth more than anything else in life, and how sharing God's love impacts the world around you.

Discussion questions:

1. How does love rank as a priority in your life?
2. Is it more important than possessions? Than rights? Than pride?
3. What will do with all that you have learned about love today?

Prayer focus: Ask God to help you make love a priority in your life, ask him to help you share his love with others, and to model the true attributes of Christian love.

Talk # 1 - Discussion questions and prayer focus:

1. If you were asked to describe how God feels about you, what one word would you use?
2. Do you feel loved by God and do you live like you are loved by God?
3. Think about how your life this week. Would others say you are “living in love?”

Prayer focus: Pray and ask God to reveal his great love for you in very real ways, ask God to help you share his love with others, and ask God to let you live loved every day.

Talk # 2 – Discussion questions and prayer focus:

1. Have you seen an example of patience leading to a better understanding of God’s love?
2. When have you been patient in a recent relationship?
3. When have you been impatient?

Prayer focus: Pray that God will help you understand the real meaning of patience, and that he will help you develop patience and display patience in your life and in your relationships with others so that they may see God’s love expressed.

Talk # 3 – Discussions and prayer focus:

1. What are some specific acts of kindness waiting to become examples of God’s love?
2. Do you know somebody with a need that could be met with a little Christian kindness?
3. How can you express kindness to each other, to the staff, to your family etc.?

Prayer focus: Pray that God will increase your desire to be kind and to show kindness to others. Pray that God will guide you to those people in your life who need to be treated with kindness so that they will see your actions as examples of God’s love for them.

Talk # 4 – Discussion questions and prayer focus:

1. How do you recognize envy when it appears in your life?
2. How does envy prevent us from experiencing the love of Christ?
3. Is there, or has there ever been a relationship in your life that is poisoned by envy? Do you ever boast, and if so, what do you boast about?
4. Has someone been boastful to you? If so, how did you react? Was your reaction loving?

Prayer focus: Pray and ask God to help you identify any feelings of envy you have in your life or any desires you have to boast about anything other than him. Ask God to help you to see that He is the only thing we need to boast about.

Talk # 5 – Discussion questions and prayer focus:

1. Are you ever free of “self” in your life?
2. How does pride hurt love?
3. Should we not love ourselves as God loves us?

Prayer focus: Pray that God will help you to see areas where pride or selfishness impact or affect your life and your relationships. Ask God to help you restore those relationships are areas of your life that have been impacted by pride or selfishness.

Talk # 6 – Discussion questions and prayer focus:

1. What kinds of things make you angry?
2. How do you respond when someone makes you angry?
3. How do you get over your anger?

Prayer focus: Ask God to help you identify any anger that exists in you, ask him to help you deal with the anger. Ask him to help you deal with you anger more positively.

Talk # 7 – Discussion questions and prayer focus:

1. How does love rank as a priority in your life?
2. Is it more important than possessions? Than rights? Than pride?
3. What will do with all that you have learned about love today?

Prayer focus: Ask God to help you make love a priority in your life, ask him to help you share his love with others, and to model the true attributes of Christian love.