

EXTREME SPIRITUAL MAKEOVER:  
FROM LUST TO LOVE  
I Corinthians 13

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How can a person express their love of basketball, chocolate, their children, God, and their spouse with a single four-letter word — love? That's what I would like us to consider today.

In the early part of the 20th century a Jewish philosopher by the name of Martin Buber tried to distinguish between human connections that are mainly "I-It" relationships and those interactions which are primarily "I-Thou" relationships. In "I-It" relationships we seek to acquire and possess. In "I-Thou" relationships we seek to connect with the mystery of another's being. Therein lies the primary difference between love and lust, a problem according to Jesus as serious as adultery. Let's take a closer look. How do we move from lust to love?

LUST: According to the dictionary lust is an intense, self-indulgent, unrestrained sexual craving. Yes, we can lust for money, lust for power, even lust for life, but today I want to think specifically about sexual lusting.

The Church Fathers called it a deadly sin. Jesus said it's worth an eye and a hand to get rid of it. In the 21st century lust has become a multi-billion dollar business.

Is lust a joke or a jolt? In 1976, Jimmy Carter was running for president of the United States. While Mr. Carter denied ever committing adultery, he did admit to Playboy Magazine that he had lusted for women in his heart from time to time. Born-again Jimmy Carter has never been able to live that statement down.

Jay Leno and David Letterman continue to use the sexual games of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinski as fodder for late night comedy shows. It just won't go away.

Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger is not likely to apologize anytime soon for a long-standing reputation of groping women. We make a joke out of it. It is just the American way, we say.

Nashvillians have been enamored by the latest Bachelor episode on television starring a Vanderbilt emergency room doctor and a Davidson County school teacher. It's called reality television. Really? What man has 25 beautiful women wanting to fulfill his every fantasy and what normal courtships take place in front of television cameras by being jetted here and there, to some exotic spot where he might develop a meaningful relationship with another person? Call it fantasy. Call it voyeurism. Call it hot television. But I can tell you it's not reality, not in any stretch of the imagination. As this couple from Nashville seemed to discover, it's hardly a place where true love develops.

Meanwhile, we've got an interesting thing going on in the world right now. We have developed a world where lust is lucrative business.

Pornography is a 57 billion dollar business world-wide, and a 12 billion dollar business in the United States. Porn revenue is larger than the combined revenues of all professional football, basketball, and baseball franchises combined, and exceeds the annual income of ABC, CBS, and NBC combined. Child pornography, which is illegal by the way, produces 3 billion dollars. There are 4.2 million porn web sites, which receive 12% of all daily search engine requests, their largest consumers being ages 12 and 17. Forty-seven percent of Christians say pornography is a major problem in their homes.

If you read The Tennessean business section this last Friday, you saw a report of a CEO in St. Louis who racked up a \$241,000 bill at a New York strip club which he paid with his corporate American Express Card. Is it a joke, or do we have something serious here, something really serious?

Is lust a freedom or an addiction? Which is it? For my entire adult life, our society has been engaged in a sexual revolution designed to set us free from the bondage of Puritanism. I agree my mother could have used a lighter view of sex, but has this effort set us free to love and be loved?

Mark Laaser is a minister and pastoral counselor. On NBC Dateline two years ago, Mark said his normal 11-year-old curiosity about nudity became for him a compulsion that led him to stealing magazines at the local drug store, which he used for a sexual high to numb the loneliness and emptiness he felt inside. When he got married, Mark thought the compulsion would stop. It got worse. It led to the secret life of massage parlors and strip joints and cyber-sex. Eventually he crossed the line with a client and all of his life fell apart. He lost his job; he had to deal with his wife. With his life shattered and his marriage in shambles, Mark sought help and healing. He had a family that dared to stick with him. Today, though still tempted, he is winning the war with his addiction.

Living with lust is like being shackled to a lunatic. Lust is the craving for salt by a person who is dying of thirst. Lust confuses intensity with intimacy. Lust does not call for condemnation. Persons sitting in this Sanctuary today struggling already feel enough shame. I'm not coming to shame anybody but I've come to say to you, there is a better way. I've come to say to you there is a way of liberation; there is a way of freedom; there is a way of meaning. It's called Love.

Isn't it interesting, that St. Paul in the first century would write a statement that says "And now I want to show you a more excellent way"? I want to talk to you now about "I – Thou" relationships.

Now the problem in the English language is that we only have one word for love. The Greeks were better than that and thanks to C.S. Lewis and his book on The Four Loves, in which he tried to define the different natures of our love lives with one another and with God.

Love Is Affection — the Greek word for it is *storgé* — a natural affection, like between a parent and a child, and a child and a parent.

Parents don't love their children every now and then; they share a love without end. They see beauty that others fail to behold. They spot potential that competitors cannot see. They bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. That's what parents do. It just comes with being a parent, because that's the nature of your love for your children. You're born that way. Even the animal kingdom has an instinct to take care of their of own and watch after their offspring.

A poll-taker at a shopping mall stopped a mother and began asking her questions. "How many children do you have?" inquired the poll-taker. "Well," replied the mother, "There is Billy, Bobby, Mary..." "I don't need their names, just the number," said the poll-taker. "My children don't have numbers, they have names!" retorted the mother. Do you understand that? Your children don't have numbers, they have names. There is an attachment that you only know as a parent.

Did you all get this call like I got when our grandchildren were born? You get this phone call from your kids and they say, "I never really understood that parent stuff and loving your children until now. Now I know." That's affection. That's *storgé* love. It's vital, it's important, it's needed in our world.

The second kind of love is what we call *phileo*, it's friendship love. Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. Lovers stand face to face. Friends stand side by side.

The most fascinating friendship in the Bible is between Jonathan and David, David the son of Jesse, and Jonathan the son of Saul. Both were brave, adventuresome, smart. They knew how to conquer an enemy and win a battle. They had that in common. As Forrest Gump would say, "They were like peas and carrots." They just fit together.

As young adults they swore friendship with each other in the eyes of the Lord. (I Samuel 20:4) That friendship stood the test of time when Jonathan's father, Saul, swore that he would kill David. David goes in exile trying to save his life. The friendship between David and Jonathan stuck and stayed true.

When Jonathan died, David said:

I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;  
you were very dear to me.  
Your love for me was wonderful,  
more wonderful than that of women.

(II Samuel 1:26)

We need a friend or two like that.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "I didn't find my friends; the good Lord gave

them to me.” You can use a friend like that, you know. You don’t need a hundred of them, you don’t need ten, but you need one or two, a friend who sticks with you closer than a brother or a sister, a friend who is steady. We need friends like that. Do you have a friend you can count on?

Love—it is the affection of a parent for a child—*storgé*. It’s the friendship that runs deep; when you get together you just immediately understand one another—*phileo*. You know what that is.

Love is romantic, physical, erotic — the word is *eros*. Christians ought to retrieve that wonderful word from the world. *Eros* love is of God; it’s physical in nature and affectionate in expression. It’s our word; the rest of the world doesn’t deserve it.

A shy seminary student, who wanted a biblical text for everything he did, fell in love with a co-ed across the street. The attraction was instant. The connection was intense, so the student started searching the scriptures for authority to kiss her. He found that Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss but that did not seem to apply. He found that Paul instructed Christians to greet each other with a holy kiss, but his feelings for his new-found girlfriend were certainly different than the feelings he had for the elderly ladies at church.

After a date or two, the girl, tired of waiting, just grabbed the shy student and locked him into a passionate embrace. When he finally came up for air all he could say was “Scripture, scripture, what’s the scripture?” That’s when the girl came onto him a second time saying, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Love knows how to get physical, affectionate. The Church ought to claim it for what it is.

I remember standing beside a friend of mine as he said goodbye to his wife of 60 years. As he viewed her body in the casket, he turned to me and said, “She’s beautiful, isn’t she? I just wish I could hold her in my arms one more time.” That’s *eros* and that’s good.

Love Is of God — *agape*. It’s gift-giving rather than self-seeking. It’s charity in the original sense of that word. Such love is *agape* love, it is godly love. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.* Not because he had to, but because he wanted to. Not because he should, he did it because he could.

Then Paul in this old poem says, “*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*”

I read this week after week at weddings standing right there looking a bride and groom in the eye. You ought to see weddings from my perspective once in a while. You ought to see the fear in a groom’s eyes when I read those words as if it has dawned on them for the first time “My Lord, I can’t do all that.” It’s scary

when you think about it.

This is a true story, I'm not just preaching. I was in the middle of reading I Corinthians 13 at a wedding one day right here, right in this passage I'm reading for you, and the groom went out cold and hit the floor. Fainted! We got smelling salts and a cloth and got him conscious again and got him on his feet. How in the world do you pick up a wedding service after that? I didn't know what to say except that "sometimes love is overwhelming."

I went to a conference one time and someone said you ought to put your name in this place. So I went home and got Sandy and said I want to read you something. "Howard is patient, Howard is kind, Howard does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud." She didn't even let me finish. She said, "Who are you trying to kid?"

There is only one way to read this passage. Listen to it. Such love is of God. God is patient. God is kind. God is not easily angered. God keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.

So, I read this poem with a prayer on my lips "God help me."

Only you can help me put my childish ways behind me.  
Only you can teach me the real difference between lust and love.  
Only you can keep me from failing.  
Only you can love me enough that I will have plenty left over for others.  
Oh Lord, show me this more excellent way.

So, my Christian friends, as God has loved us in Christ Jesus, let us learn to love one another. For life is not about grabbing, getting, and lusting. Life is about sharing, giving, and loving as Christ has loved us.

Let us pray. Gracious Lord our hearts are hungry for you and nothing else will ever fill the void except a deep abiding relationship with you. O Holy Spirit, you do not see us as a great crowd of people gathered in a beautiful sanctuary, you see us person by person. You know our innermost thoughts, the pains, the troubles, and temptations of our lives. So, O Holy Spirit, love us now. Love us now and set us free to become what you have created us to be. Amen.