

New Hope sermon Love overview Love A.C.T.S.

“A counselor was helping his kids put their stuff away on their first morning in summer camp. He was surprised to see one of the youngsters had an umbrella. The counselor asked, “Why did you bring an umbrella to camp?” The kid answered, “Did you ever have a mother?” GCFN 1/22/18

Ah. The love and protection of a mother! How many of you can relate to that – when it seems a bit over the top of what’s necessary?☺

I thought this would be a fun way to introduce our overview of love as the basis of healthy relationships. Actually, everything we do in the next months on building healthy relationships will go back in some form to how love is expressed appropriately and wisely. But I want to give a warning as we start. Hebrews 4:12 says “*The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword; it penetrates...judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*” I’ve found that convicting power of God true as I go deeper with each of the Bible passages on love in this series. So we are embarking on a transformative journey in biblical relationships together, beloved.



Today we are doing a summary overview of love from God’s perspective. To help us remember love’s essentials in the relationships, I thought of this acrostic. It will provide a framework throughout spring semester. Love A.C.T.S - **A**ccepts, **C**reates, **T**reasures and **S**erves.

First, Love Accepts.

I remember an incident from my upbringing:

“Louisa!” - (the name my parents used for me when they were angry or scolding me☺) – “do not bring your black friend – what is her name?”

“Alicia.”

“Do not bring Alicia to our house. Is that clear?”

Both Alicia and I were in college in Baltimore at the time. We had both become new Christians our freshmen year and through regular regional InterVarsity meetings, we HAD become friends. Special friends.

Now my parents were moral, upstanding people in society. They had been raised in wealthy circles in New England. Though they didn’t have slaves like on the southern plantations during the early history of the United States, they had African American servants. I particularly remember one, whose name was Lottie. She came to our house very day when I was a teenager and beyond. She was our cook. I wasn’t allowed to be in the kitchen with her and not allowed to be her friend. My parents were outwardly kind to her but basically thought of her as a member of an inferior race and did not accept her as an equal. A more genteel prejudice? Hmmm.

So it was one of the miracles of my conversion that when I became a Christian, God turned that traditional value of my upbringing upside down and set me on a course where almost all my good and best friends were from non-Caucasian cultures – black, Chinese, Hispanic, Asian Indian, etc. In God’s transforming grace He was teaching me from my conversion that love accepts.

Paul describes accepting love in I Corinthians 13: *Love which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. It is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs.* (I cor.13: 7,5). This is so hard. We will go deeper into this kind of acceptance next week in the sermon.

Another aspect of acceptance is to provide hope for and with another when they feel things are hopeless. “Just being there for someone can sometimes bring hope when all seems hopeless.” From this perspective a person doesn’t judge or condemn or lecture a person who feels hopeless. There is instead a willingness to engage a person in their hopelessness. And even bring healing to them.

That’s what Jesus did for the leper who approached him. The gospel writer Luke describes the story: ¹² *While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.^[a] When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”*

¹³ *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. Luke 5:12-13*

Now we don’t normally interact with lepers today in the west but if you know Biblical culture, you know that lepers were ostracized from normal society. They had to live outside the gates of the city. No one could or would touch them. But Jesus interacted with this leper in love. Notice that Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. That’s the first radical sign of acceptance – not repulsion or distance because of his disease. Then Jesus said, “I am willing.” He addressed the emotional need of the man to be accepted and cared for. And then He cleansed the man on the spot. “*Immediately, the leprosy left him.*” Love accepts a person where that person is physically, emotionally, and spiritually and can go beyond mere acceptance. Through Jesus one can often bring hope or healing to people in their distress.

Second, Love Creates.

I love this quote from Albert Einstein: “Creativity is intelligence having fun.”



That’s terrific. So how can you have fun in healthy relationships? Well, if you are aware of what is called a person’s love languages, then you can intentionally work to express your caring and support in the love language that means the most to another – whether it’s through time spent, or words of affirmation, or giving gifts, or serving practically or physical touch. It takes creativity to work at an expression that is important to another, but not so important to you!

Love also creates space in the relationship – space that is marked by tenderheartedness and forgiveness. Space that works through confession and repentance. Space that does not hold resentment and bitterness because the relationship is continually cleansed by forgiveness. In a marriage relationship this means space to create the new identity of 2 out of 1 in marriage. As the Leo Buscaglia says “Love creates an US without destroying the Me.” Any healthy relationship must be providing space for both people to grow and develop equally, with the gifts and life purposes for each. This is important. If God has given a life-time commitment to another, then we continue to work at the US despite the times we hurt and fail each other. However, if you are in a dating relationship of abuse and suffering that is crushing or shaming or slandering you – basically destroying the ME - do not move ahead into marriage with such a person. God’s intent in marriage is that each partner grow closer to Him and to each other in that process. It is the work of creating an US that does not obliterate the ME in either partner so that both partners gifts and calling are flourishing.

Third, Love Treasures.

As Dodinsky says, “People who uplift you are the best kind of people. You don’t simply keep them [as friends]. You have to treasure them.” Are you and I treasuring the special people in our lives? How do we show that?

You trust and respect them. You don’t demean them in public nor second guess their motives all the time. You really trust them and “esteem them highly in love”(I thes.5:13).

Treasuring someone means cherishing the person and your time together, making the person a priority and helping them see how valuable they are to you, to God and to others. It means you treat them with special kindness and consideration, affirming their strengths and upholding them in their struggles. You protect them and look out for their best interests.

And that leads us to the S in A.C.T.S. **Love Serves.**

First, I believe we serve each other most profoundly as we commit to pray for one another. Samuel said to his people Israel *“God forbid that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you”* (1Sam.12:23). How often are we praying, beloved, for those dear to us? Really praying? Holding up their dreams and emotions and mind and body to the Lord? So much happens when we pray. It is the highest form of service.

Paul told the Galatians: *You have been called in freedom. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*”(Gal.5:13) Serving out of our sinful nature is doing things to manipulate another, to build up our own credibility and reputation. Instead, we serve using our spiritual gifts – whether of encouragement or mercy or leadership or prayer or admonition or prophecy or helps. We reach out a hand so another doesn’t fall and is not alone in his or her struggle.. We share our drinks or take person for a walk.



an elderly

We serve sacrificially. Jesus

has laid down the standard for us: I John 5:16: *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”*

A remarkable example of this is in the book I just reviewed *“I’ll Push You.”* The subtitle is: *A Journey of 500 miles, Two Best Friends and One Wheelchair.* The coauthors, Patrick Gray and Justin Skeesuck, are the two friends who have maintained an extraordinary friendship of care and commitment through childhood and young adult life. Both are married with young children but Justin has contracted a rare disease that may soon claim his life. What’s extraordinary about Justin is that he has chosen to live life as an adventure to the fullest all the way to the end. This includes his desire to complete the five hundred mile journey across northern Spain called “the Camino,” though he is totally wheelchair-bound. When he mentioned that goal to his best friend, Patrick, Patrick’s response was “I’ll push you.” Five hundred miles over 3 mountains, boulders, mud and incredible obstacles. The journey that seemed impossible to most people who considered it, but the story tells how it happened.

Here are two excerpts:

Justin says: “While six people carry me in my chair, others carry the extra backpacks and walking sticks. Pilgrims continue to rotate in and out as we gradually make progress... [up] a steep incline littered with stair-step stones and large rocks... and I find myself at the center of a remarkable human symphony... Each of these people are soon drenched in sweat, have sore muscles, and suffer from blistered feet. Hands, arms, and calves are cramping as the team lifts, pushes, pulls, and carries me with every ounce of energy they possess. I can’t help, but I can definitely encourage. ‘You guys have got this!’ I yell, ‘You are all amazing!’ The trail gets steeper. ‘Keep moving, keep moving’” (Patrick Gray and Justin Skeesuck, *I’ll Push You*, Tyndale, 2017, pp. 244, 243).

Patrick says: “The unexpected is just that - unexpected! We can’t plan for it...we can’t predict it... Often the unforeseen events in life come with few answers or no clear way out. Deborah’s MS [Deborah was another pilgrim on part of the Camino – with her husband pushing her wheelchair] offers no way out, and Justin’s disease will eventually take his life. But just like the [Camino] Highway, these unexpected challenges can be faced and life can be lived despite the darkness. We just have to make sure we don’t face them alone. [This is] what the church is supposed to mean...where all are welcomed, all are loved, and the unexpected challenges of life are faced with others at our side” (Ibid, pp. 132-133).

Amen. That is love that serves, facing all the obstacles of life with others at our side.

From that perspective, let's sing the song of response as a prayer:

"Make me a servant, humble and meek, Lord help me lift up those who are weak. And may the prayer of my life always be: Make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant today." Amen.

Let us pray.

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