

BELPRES CHURCH

My Way

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Speaker: Dr. Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: *This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

So good to see all of you, thank you for being here. Those of you who are in this room, those of you who are joining us online, thank you for being here on Time Change Sunday. That's the Sunday where pastors get to preach an hour or extra long, so you came on the good Sunday.

Today's scripture is from 1 Corinthians 13. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It does not insist on its own way. It's not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres. Love never fails.

So this fall, we've been doing a sermon series about how the most important characteristic of a disciple of Jesus is not outrage, it's to be marked by his love. And this passage that I just read kind of describes what Jesus' love looks like. And today, I'm just going to focus on one phrase from this passage. Love does not insist on its own way.

Love does not insist on getting what it wants, which is kind of an inspiring thought until you actually try to do it, right? Like until one spouse wants to move to a different city and the other one doesn't want to move. And then how do you not insist on what you want in something so important as that? Or at school or work where it feels like the people who get ahead are the people who insist the most on having things their way and getting what they want. Or in our church where all y'all want really, really different things and you have no problem insisting on getting what you want. Or this week, no matter who wins this election, no matter how this election turns out, some people are not going to get what they're hoping for or what they want, which includes people in this room and in this church. Because as a church, politically, we are all over the map politically. We're a little

bit like a, as a church, we're a little bit like a cheer that was used at my high school football games. Lean to the left, lean to the right.

I'm just trying to prevent the stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight part of that cheer. And this passage that we read is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in the city of Corinth and they were fighting about trying to get everything they wanted about everything. They were fighting about how worship should be conducted, fighting about what leaders they should follow, insisting on getting their own way, about a ton of stuff. And Paul reminds them that Jesus' vision of the church is a community of beautiful, unified difference. A community of different ages, races, politics, both liberals and conservatives of their day were at the church in Corinth. But also where people say to each other, don't worry about what I want in worship or in this church or at work or at school. Don't worry about what I want. I just want to make sure you get what you want. In another place, Paul puts it this way, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourself, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others. It's a you before me attitude that makes for flourishing relationships, flourishing marriages, flourishing families, flourishing churches, flourishing countries, and models to our divided culture a way better way, where everyone is looking out for other people's interests, not their own, which means everybody's interests are getting looked out for just without all of the fighting.

Now, the immediate question that gets asked when you do verses like this, right? Immediate question that gets asked around verses like this is, well, does that mean I'm just supposed to be a doormat and let everyone else get what they want and I never get what I want? Like, what about that pastor? Do you ever think about me? No, because I'm too busy thinking about me. And just that we go there so quickly, why do we go there so quickly? Just that we go there so quickly seems to indicate what we actually really are focused on, it's really me that I'm focused on.

Now, to be clear, these relationships have to be reciprocal, not one-sided, and as I said last week, verses like this do not mean we put ourselves in a position to be abused over and over again in any kind of way, absolutely not, that's not what these verses mean. It's about, it's not being doormats, it's prioritizing relationship. Relationship over getting what I want all the time. Relationship over winning an argument. Relationship over school or career or ambition or anything else, because all the happiness studies that have ever been done show that one of the things that brings lasting joy is depth of relationship, which we can't have if we're always insisting on getting our own way. And a lot of what drives this insisting on getting our own way, our self-focus, is fear. Fear of two things. First, fear of insignificance. Paul says, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Some translations will say vain glory, but a more accurate translation of the original Greek, especially combined with the word ambition, do nothing out of hunger for glory, hunger for attention. We hunger for attention and glory because deep down we have this fear that we don't matter, that we're insignificant. And so often to be ignored is even

worse than to be hated. So we seek glory and attention to feel significant. This is, I think, in all of us.

I know it's in me for sure. I like to preach because I love the Bible. I love talking about the Bible. I want people to know Jesus. But if I am honest, there's also a part of me that just likes to be up front and have all you look at me. I never met a microphone I didn't like. And my oldest daughter has fully inherited this from me. I've shared with you before that she does this video podcast for Disney, and she's really good at it. I mean, the camera loves her, and she loves that camera. And she told me a while back, she said, that I could tell any story about her that I wanted without ever asking, even asking her permission. Even if it was a story that made her look bad, I could tell it without asking her permission. And she said, Cause you know, Dad, there's no such thing as bad publicity. Not for nothing does she do marketing at Disney. Now, that's that hunger for attention, that hunger for glory. We're afraid of being insignificant and overlooked. But here's the irony. The more we insist on getting what we want, then we start to look around, and guess what? Nobody's there. Because nobody wants to be around that for a long time. And then because nobody's there, you start to feel insignificant.

Second fear that drives our self-seeking is fear of not getting what I want. Just simple as that. I'm just afraid I won't get what I want. And again, we see this in little daily ways all the time. American Airlines has this new thing where if someone tries to board the plane before their group number has been called, when they scan their boarding pass, an alarm goes off and a voice says, your group has not been called. And so everyone can see that that person is trying to cut the line. Man, it was so embarrassing when that happened to me. Like, I didn't even know they were doing this, right? Humiliating. It didn't happen to me. I read about it. What drives that behavior is fear of not getting what I want. Even just little things like, I got to get on that plane and get that overhead compartment space because I don't want to have to check my bag, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Now, some of our fears are not trivial, like overhead space in a plane. Some of our fears of not getting what we hope for at work or school or in a relationship or marriage or fears around the elections. A lot of them are really serious things. There's serious stuff at stake. And there is fear mongering all around this election, isn't there? And some of it exaggerated, some of it just plain isn't true. Fear of insignificance and fear of not getting what I want drives our insistence on self and self-focus. But the Bible says, perfect love casts out fear.

Perfect love casts out fear. So the first way we become people who are marked by a love that does not insist on getting its own way all the time. And this will not surprise you. It's the whole point of this sermon series: the way we don't insist anymore is experience Jesus' love ourselves. And that text I read from 1st Corinthians, love is patient, love is kind. It's not so much a list of behaviors we're supposed to do. What it is is a description

of how Jesus loves us. So put yourself in that passage. Jesus is patient with you. Jesus never dishonors you. Jesus never seeks his own interests above yours. He keeps absolutely no record of your wrongs, none whatsoever. Jesus' love for you never fails, and he will not stop sacrificing himself so that you can be everything that he created you to be.

This passage is a description of how Jesus loves us, and it's also a description of who we become the more we experience Jesus' love. The more we experience his love is patient, the more patient we are. The more we experience his love is kind, the more kind we are. And this perfect love drives out our fears and insignificance. The creator of trillions of galaxies became one of us, and the person of Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for your sins, and mine was raised from the dead so we could be with him forever. And he did all of that because he does not want to face an eternity without you in it. He does not want to face an eternity that doesn't include you. That's how significant you are to him. And the more we experience that, the more it drives out that fear of insignificance that fuels our self-focus and insistence on getting our own way. I don't always have to fight for what I want. If I'm that significant to Jesus, then he's going to take care of me. And yeah, bad things may happen to me. Yeah, I won't always get what I want, but that can't derail his plans for my life or his love for me.

And then the second way, second way to be marked by Jesus' love that does not insist on its own way, is to prioritize Jesus' kingdom way. Not my way, not your way. Seek Jesus' way and his kingdom. And his kingdom is simply wherever and whenever things are being done here on earth as they are in heaven. And if what I care about most is Jesus and his kingdom, then the things I care about most will never be taken away from me. Because Jesus and his kingdom are eternal, and they cannot be taken away from me by not getting what I want at school, or work, or anywhere else. Cannot be taken away from me by any election outcome or anything else, because Jesus and his kingdom are eternal.

I have a friend who used to be a financial advisor, but then he switched to being a pastor and loves being a pastor. He feels called to it, says, for the first time, I feel like I'm doing what I was meant to do. Loves it. But over the last year, his wife has asked him to quit being a pastor because she just doesn't like the lifestyle of being a pastor's wife. And they've discussed it over the last year or so, and he's prayed about it, and now he feels that God is telling him to put her first, love her by not insisting on getting what he wants, and quit the ministry, and do something else. And it hurts. It's deeply painful. And it's really hard. But he said, but I have peace. I know this is what God wants me to do. And I'm trusting Jesus that he's still gonna use me in his kingdom, just not as a pastor. And maybe I'll go back to financial planning, and I'll show people who Jesus is there, or maybe years down the road, maybe it'll be okay for me to be a pastor again, but I'm just gonna trust him. Now, I can imagine the situation, a situation where that might be reversed, right?

The point is, instead of seeking his way or her way, he sought Jesus' way and his

kingdom. And here's how he did that. Here's how you discern that, because it can be kind of tricky, right? How did he discern that? Well, prayer, scripture, talking to trusted Christian friends who would not always tell him what he wanted to hear, but sometimes what he needed to hear, and then listening for those thoughts that come from God and saying to God, help me hear what you're telling me, even if it's not what I want to hear. That's a brave prayer, isn't it? Tell me what you want to tell me, even if it's not what I want to hear, and then I'll do it. I'll do it. And it's hard. But because what he cares about the most isn't a particular career, it's Jesus and his kingdom, he still has those things. He hasn't lost those things, because those things are eternal.

As we head into an election, where lots of folks are fighting about getting their own way in this country. And yes, the issues at stake are super important, and they matter, and I do not want to minimize them. But no matter who gets elected as disciples, our call stays the same. Our call is still to not seek your way or my way, but Jesus' kingdom way. And Jesus' kingdom will not come because we elect the right, quote, right person. It'll come when Jesus is bigger to us than our opinions. His kingdom will come when we can have discussions and love with people that we disagree with and get out of this either-or scorched-earth politics that we're in and discover that maybe each of us has a little piece of the solution to some of our problems, and if we put them together, we might get better outcomes.

Jesus' kingdom will not come through politics; it never has and it never will. It'll come by his disciples participating with him in bringing his kingdom, building his kingdom, by loving people we find it hard to love, by, in Jesus' words, bringing good news to the poor, and recovery of sight to the blind, and setting at liberty those who are oppressed, and doing those things in his name and with his love. And as you have heard me say 8,400,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 times, the early Christians transformed the Roman Empire not by taking over the Roman Senate or getting their candidate elected to be emperor, but by putting Jews and Gentiles together in community, which was racial reconciliation, and that never happened before. They cared for the poor and the sick. They had courage in the face of martyrdom, and the world wanted to know the Jesus that was behind it all. And it grew faster than any movement ever has in history. And then gradually the Roman culture started to change, and people stopped going to gladiator games, and hospitals started, and relief for the poor, because more and more people were choosing the Jesus way.

Jesus didn't say, elect me, I'm a better Caesar. He said, I'm a different kind of thing altogether. Jesus proclaims this radical upside-down kingdom and says, the pinnacle of my career is not when I get elected, but when I get executed. And that's going to change the world. And it did, and it still does today. As I said last week, places like South Africa and Rwanda, torn apart by ethnic hatred and violence, being healed largely through prayer and Christian reconciliation. If my ultimate hope is in this or any election, or in getting my way at school or at work, or in this certain relationship, if that's where my ultimate hope is, then I will not be marked by love. I will constantly demand what I want over and over and over again out of fear. And in the end, even if I get what I want, it'll

disappoint because everything disappoints except for Jesus and his kingdom. But if the thing that matters most to me is Jesus and his kingdom, then I am assured I will always have what matters most to me because Jesus' love never dies, and his kingdom goes on and on.

Not my way, not your way, Jesus' way. So, two action steps for this week. As we've said all fall, we cannot love this way unless we first experience it. So this week, experience Jesus' love for you through 1 Corinthians 13. At least three times this week, read through 1 Corinthians 13, and with each line, ask Jesus to show you how he has loved you in that way. So for instance, love is patient. Pray, Jesus, show me how you've been patient with me. Love is kind. Pray, Jesus, show me how you've been kind to me, and so on and so on. Do that at least three times this week, at least for a portion of that passage, to experience Jesus' love, because we can't give what we don't have. And then second action step, we have a sticker for you, because you love stickers, right?

So at the beginning of this sermon series in September, we all gave you a sticker to remind you how much Jesus loves you. We have a new sticker, a second sticker that looks like the first, but we have a new one, a second one that's available today in the lobby, kind of where you got the name tags, that references a Bible verse that says we love, because God first loves us. And then there's a space for you to write the name of someone Jesus is calling you to love. Someone you know personally, okay? Don't be like writing down, you know, Jesus is calling me to love, you know, Meryl Streep or something like that, right? Like just, like someone you know personally who is difficult for you to love, who is difficult for you to love, all right? Write their name, and then today, put that sticker on the windows outside the sanctuary there, in the lobby you'll see where they are. Put that sticker on those windows so that we can all see over the next few weeks how many of us are, through the power of Jesus, loving people that we find difficult to love. And because it's people that are difficult to love, okay, just put their first name, okay? Like, don't be writing Scott Dudley, he's hard to love. Dr. Scott will do, okay? Or if they have a super unique name, maybe just initials of people that we're going to love in the same kind of Corinthians 13 love with which Jesus has loved us.

While back, I heard a woman named Carolyn talk about how her husband Mark is a public high school teacher, and he signed up to take a group of high school students on a humanitarian trip to Mexico to build a playground in an impoverished area. And he asked Carolyn, his wife, to come with him. She didn't want to do it, but as she prayed about it, she just felt Jesus nudging her to go. So, she did, right? And Mark had found a Christian organization that had agreed to help facilitate the trip, but this was a public high school trip, so Mark told him, hey, man, if this is public high school, if there's even a whiff of talking about Jesus, parents and teachers are going to be mad, so just don't do that, okay? Well, when they got there, the accommodations they'd arranged for had fallen through, so they had to sleep in the basement of a church in a really rough part of town, which made Carolyn really uncomfortable. And she was like, see, this is why I didn't want to do this, this is why I didn't want to go, right? She was not getting her way

at all. Next day, they worked really hard to build the playground, which she hated, it was hot, it was dusty, it was sweaty, and again, she's like, this is why I didn't want to come, I don't like this. And then that night, a bunch of the students got super sick. And in the morning, two women from this Christian organization came and they saw the carnage of these students, super sick, and so one of the women asked if they could pray for the students. I'll pick it up in Carolyn's words. She said, as soon as this woman began to pray, I knew we were in trouble. My hopes for a low-impact, non-specific prayer faded quickly as this woman became very emotional and loud. She prayed for 20 minutes and kept saying the word Jesus over and over again. I was so uncomfortable, so I began a prayer of my own. Jesus, I don't want Mark to get fired or have angry parents on his case. So Jesus, make her stop praying and make her stop saying your name. And then she was like, should I? Wait, that doesn't sound quite right. Well, when this woman kind of finally got done praying, Carolyn said, I looked up, dreading people's reactions. But things weren't what I expected. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. Students were visibly moved. One of the teachers who was not a Christian said that was beautiful. To them, the prayer had not been an unwelcome proselytizing, but an utterly authentic heart cry. And I noticed something else. Joy. Everybody was smiling and I felt a rush of joy myself.

The Holy Spirit had been moving and I, a supposedly mature Christian, had missed it because I had an agenda. I had things I wanted, and I was insisting on those things. So these days, I'm learning to pray yes and thank you, and rather than insisting on getting my own way, I'm asking to see Jesus' way and what he's doing so I can be a part of it. She wanted to stay home. She wanted to play it safe and not talk about Jesus, but Jesus knew what she wanted even more than she did. She did not get her own way. She got something better. Jesus and his kingdom. And I know that things like school and work and relationships and election outcomes are sometimes more serious than someone praying too long on a high school trip. But the principle is still the same.

When we seek Jesus' way, we may not get our own way, but we get something better. His presence and his kingdom. And those things can never be taken away, even when we don't get what we want at school or church or work, even if this election does not turn out the way that you're hoping for. These things will still be true. Jesus will still be king. The tomb will still be empty. God will still be our only and our best hope. The Holy Spirit will still be with us. There will still be room at the cross for everyone. He will still love you more than you can ask or even imagine, and His kingdom will continue to come here on earth as it is in heaven. And He says that not even the gates of hell can prevail against it, so certainly no election can either. Or not getting what you want in some other venue or place. Those things, those things will be true no matter what happens.

Psalms 62 puts it this way, only in God is my soul at rest. In Him is my salvation. He only is my rock, my strength, and my consolation. My stronghold, my savior, I will not be afraid at all. My stronghold, my savior, I cannot be moved. So Jesus, help us to seek you more than anything else. Not my way, not someone else's way, your way, Jesus. Help us to hear what we don't want to hear when you call us to surrender something, knowing

that you've got something better in store for us. Knowing that you know better what we want than even we know what we want. Lord, as we pray this week, as we read through 1 Corinthians 13 this week, help us to experience your love that makes us strong and makes us brave and makes us more willing to surrender to you and do things your way rather than our way. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Where and in what situations do you find yourself insisting on your way the most (work, family, friendships, politics, etc)?
- When was a time you did not insist on having things your way? What was the result?
- Have you tried this week's action step yet – reading through 1 Cor 13 and asking Jesus to help you remember how he has loved you? What memories has he brought to your attention? With this in mind, how are you prompted to love others this week, even those who might be hard to love?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the

November 3, 2024

conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.