

Hook: Living a life of adventure

We all dream of having an adventuresome life. Even Abbi, our granddaughter, responds to the idea of “we’re going to have an adventure”. She is so sharp, though, she seems to be always able to guess what the surprise activity is.

I remember one occasion that occurred years ago (with a person I once traveled around with much more frequently than now) where we had to transport a roll of carpet across town. Not having a truck, I simply placed it on the top of my car. My study of gravity and such assured me that the carpet would ride just fine. When my companion expressed worry about the cargo as we traveled down highway 55, I simply said, “Come on, now! Where is your spirit of adventure?”

Within 10 seconds, the carpet had fallen off and dumped itself in the middle of the highway. We had to jump out and reclaim it in the midst of the flow of traffic. This could be part of the reason that we no longer ride together. Perhaps I should have spent more time studying aerodynamics! A rope would have been a good idea, too. At least I was smart enough not to say that the carpet would not fall off! And it was indeed an adventure!

Most of us think that we would love a “life of adventure”. We enjoy watching adventure movies and grow up wanting to be like Superman or Indiana Jones [picture of him with his whip]. We seek adventures, taking time to plan them, experience them, document them, and share them with our friends. This summer I really enjoyed planning our Wild West trip, and trying to find something exciting to do each day.

Introduction: Living a life of _____

Think about the life we live in these terms: we are living a life of [blank]. How would you fill in the blank? [list only – mention a couple]

- ease (like the “Life of Riley”)
- faith
- holiness
- learning
- promise
- service

There are a lot of ways to think about this. The NIV only gives two cases. One is in John 8:11 where Jesus is talking to the woman who by herself was caught in adultery. He told her to “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

The other case is the opposite one that I want to talk about today. Paul in Ephesians 5:1,2 writes, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and **live a life of love**, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Recently when I read these verses the phrase “Live a Life of Love” just jumped out at me, and I thought that it deserved more thought.

Definition:

We know all about Love, or at least we think we do. And we are all fairly capable of having a **burst** of it every now and then. But can we make it our Life? Perhaps we need a deeper definition of what love really means.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16

God is love (1 John 4:8,16), and he wants us to live a life of Love. This is more than just an act of love (even a supreme one) every once in a while, but a day-to-day outpouring of love to all those around us. If we live a life of love, then everything we do stems from the perspective of love for others.

It keeps growing, too, and when we anticipate our adventure trip, we anticipate every day from the perspective of the adventure ahead. And when we have finally enjoyed the trip, then we start preparing for the next and even greater adventure. It should be similar with the Life of Love.

How do you manage a long-term relationship? I of course am not an expert, as you may well know... But I have learned a few things along the way, and I want to discuss one this morning.

Foundation:

It has occurred to me that long lasting love, True Love, must have a good, solid foundation. This foundation must enable you to look over small differences as you walk along the path or "Way", and your common beliefs endure when looks and physical ability go. You face things together, and you support each other, and you enjoy being together.

It reminds me of the parable that Jesus told about the houses built on the rock or sand (Matthew 7:24-27). We all know the song where the foolish man's house went "Splat!". There is a similar passage in Proverbs 10:25, "When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more, But the righteous has an everlasting foundation." Here, the foolish man's house is blown apart by a tornado; but as in the earlier story, the righteous one remains on solid ground. This has to do with the structure of our faith, and our understanding of love; also their intertwining relationship.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:18-20

Bottom:

You have to have a solid foundation for other reasons as well. Recently, our family suffered a great tragedy, and it made us all think about what we believe about God. When you suffer such loss it is easy to question the existence and/or the Goodness of God. It took us all of the way to the bottom, and put us on our knees. But so many came to share their love.

I had to remind myself that no matter what happens, there is always Love. In the crater left by the worst disaster what we care about most is ejected, and the love from those around us flows in. There is an inexhaustible supply from God as well. The Psalmist says that "the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him (Psalm 32:10).

It's like when you dig far enough into the many layers of soil, you eventually hit bedrock. As I burrow deeper and deeper into the meaning of Love, I know more and more that this is the life for me and this is what I believe with all of my heart. Love cuts through, or rises above, the general trend of decay (like the Second Law), and human failings. Young couples that start out with financial limitations are sometimes thought to "live on love". If we really had nothing else would be enough for you?

So when I think about what I do know, I realize that there is always Love. No matter how bad the situation. Even in concentration camps in during the Holocaust, you could still find love. Somehow I made a connection to the time that Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego are thrown into the furious fiery furnace (Daniel 3). The way the story is told, we are all spectators looking along with king Nebuchadnezzar into the unstoppable death scene. But suddenly through the blinding glare we see that there is suddenly someone Holy present with the condemned trio. Even the king recognizes it. It's like seeing Love through the holocaust that sometimes surrounds us.

Hell is where there is no God, and no love. You don't want to go there.

And whenever we believe in Love, we believe to some extent in God. To put it another way: "To the degree you love, you believe in God." This reminds me of Leo Tolstoy's story, "Where Love is, God is", but perhaps I could change the title to "Because Love is, God is." In the final analysis, Love is all there is that shows the character of God. Love is always shining – there is never absolute darkness. We might say that there is always "light at the end of the tunnel (not a train coming)". (God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5)

When bad things happen to good people, it only means that there is another power, another personality involved. And some day God has promised that that personality will be forever chained and rendered powerless. That is what I hold on to in the worst of times. Living a Life of Love means that you have to keep on holding on no matter what. And God will some day and in some way make things new – fixed – put right again (no tears, etc.; CSL quote)

When we suffer loss, we have to realize that life is not about getting everything you want (from God) or being perfect (as a man), but knowing that you stand fully for Goodness and Love. And I know that there is no greater life than a Life of Love.

Soozie asked me if it is wrong to love too much. But you don't lose things because you loved them too much. You can't love too much if you love in the right way. No, it just hurts more when you lose what you love. The Life of Love is not necessarily a "happy ever after" fantasy. Leo Buscaglia wrote that "A life of love is one of continual growth, where the doors and windows of experience are always open to the wonder and magic that life offers. **To love is to risk living fully.**" You can't Live a Life of Love without risking your heart. You must believe that the benefits are much greater than that risk! And Jesus stated in John 10:10 that He came that they may have life to the full.

Examples:

When I think about Living a Life of Love, I wonder how many real examples we have in the Bible. We are all familiar with those that were full of faith from the list in Hebrews 11. We see the main characters in the Bible typically leading lives of faith, or seeking for truth, or on a mission from God, or battling God's enemies. And though love is evident in many situations, I can't see many that live what I would call a "life of love." There are cases in the Bible, as I hope to show.

Job lost everything, including almost everyone he loved, but he knew that he still had the love of God and that of his "comforting" friends. In answering attacks that he was suffering for his own sin, he claimed in Job 29:15-17, Job 30:25, and 31:32 (among other verses):

"I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth. Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor? ...no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler..."

Here was a man who was always thinking of how he could help others, and to me surely fits the model we are talking about.

Remember the woman who had a room built for Elisha (2 Kings 4:8ff)? She wasn't out to get anything for herself; she did it just because she wanted to do something truly Good for a man of God. But she was afraid to receive a most treasured gift, when Elisha offered her a son. She was afraid to take the risk; she was afraid to love. As we have said, Love means taking risks with your heart, so this woman could not really be Living a Life of Love.

Dorcas is a great candidate for this (Acts 9:36ff). She was known for always doing good and helping the poor, and when she died those that new her begged Peter to come and heal her. They cried and showed him all of the things that Dorcas had made. So Peter healed her. She really seemed to Live the Life of Love.

There was a centurion, who strangely enough in this time was loved by the Jews (Luke 7:1ff). They praised him and pleaded earnestly with Jesus to heal him, saying, "'This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.'" I think that this Roman soldier fits the characteristics of the Life of Love.

Cornelius (Acts 10) was another centurion who was also known by his life of giving generously to those in need. Because of this, he became the man who initiated the official crossover of the gospel to the Gentiles. It seems he also Lived the Life of Love.

So we have some examples, but I've saved the most critical one for last: Jesus. We have studied His character at length for all of our lives, and I don't think that there is anyone else that even comes close to this idea of Living a Life of Love in comparison to Him. I mean that He lived a Life of Love every day and to every person He met.

The three mighty men of David performed one of the greatest acts of love recorded in the Bible. But showing great love is not the same as a living a life of love. Jesus did something just as heroic, dying for us so that we could live eternally with Him, but He also lived among men in gentleness and offered love at every day at every level.

So how do we stack up in all of this? Who do you know personally that you think lives a life of love? I know several people that I would fit this category; I'm married to one.

I've already mentioned that I'm not doing all that well. I must look further than just my family. This is one of my problems: I am more of a local than a global love person. I try to expand my sphere of Love (Cheer?), but I can't seem to see the forest for the trees closest to me.

But lately, when I get aggravated at someone, I think to myself, "Am I Living a Life of Love?" And it settles me down in a very short time. We all need to keep asking ourselves that question.

The Power of Love: (Occupational Look)

I have tried to emphasize the power of love in this lesson, and how should be an integral part of our lives. For a fun game, let's think about it using the types of occupations that you know. Here's what I have so far (you can play it further on your own):

Physicist: Love is the most powerful force in the universe. (Look how it draws people in during times of crisis.)

Artist: Love gives the most beautiful view of the universe.

Mathematician: There is no upper limit to Love.

Chemist: Love creates the strongest bonds... (Chemistry is a subset of physics)

Biologist: True love just keeps growing.

Lawyer: There is no law greater than the law of Love. (Yet mercy triumphs over judgment, James 2:13)

Doctor: Love is the universal antidote that aids our healing.

Conclusion:

Of course, the Biblical statement says it best when Jesus states the Great Commands [on slide only]:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)

But we tend to think of this too much as commandments, rather than a commitment to a way of life with which we agree with all of our heart and soul. It is not about just keeping commandments, but always doing Good to others. It is more than a command: it is a long-term choice that we must make. It is more than a concept: it must result in actions that are consistent with a Life of Love.

We are all functioning at a small fraction of our capacity to live fully in its total meaning of loving, caring, creating, and adventuring. Consequently, the actualizing of our potential can become the most exciting adventure of our lifetime.
Herbert Otto

Leo Buscaglia writes that "To live a life of love is life's greatest challenge." We began this morning talking about living a life of adventure. What the Bible doesn't say, but I think is none-the-less-true, is that Love is the greatest adventure of all. Some people are afraid of adventure, and even love. Some people can't even leave their homes. But it is the only way to live, and we have to get out of our shells and embrace the Life of Love. Love is the only thing of value that endures – so we must chose to live a life of it. And we must live lives of love so that no one is blind to the fact that love is the vital essence that is always left when all else that we think is important is gone.

To do this, we all need the power of the one who showed the greatest measure of Love: Jesus Christ. If you need to call on Him this morning in any way, we invite you...