

Lent 2024—

Lent is a time of the year when we take a moment to repent and reflect on the miracle and mystery that is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Repent, in the classical sense, rather than the modern sense, that is. Repenting is more than a weak non-apology, where we say, “I’m sorry that you feel that way,” and move on as though that was enough. Repentance is much, much more than that. It is recognizing where we are wrong, admitting our culpability, and turning away from our sin, in order to follow Jesus more closely. To do this, we must be honest with ourselves, and admit our shortfalls. There is no shame in admitting our shortfalls—indeed, there is no other way to follow Jesus. Romans tells us that we have all sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God; that we have all in some way or another missed the mark, and need help. This year, as we journey through Lent, let us take the time to reflect and honor our commitments to God by turning away from our self-absorbed sinfulness to better follow God.

These next 40 days, we will take a few moments every day to look at our calling from God, and try to better understand both what we are called to, and maybe reflect what we are being called away from. This will not always be easy, because we all have blind spots where we cannot see that we have drifted from Jesus and into a more self-centered religion. And none of us are immune. Rather, it may take a concerted effort to recognize and turn away from the patterns that we have established that cause us to drift. However, to chase after Jesus, to (as the song says) “arise, and go to Jesus,” is the greatest joy we can ever have, and worth the time and effort that it will take.

40 days is not enough time to fully break the chains that bind us—indeed, a lifetime is hardly enough. But, that is not to say that it is not worth the effort—it undoubtedly is.

As we journey together these next weeks, let us open our hearts to what God is telling us about ourselves, our churches, and our calling as the people of God. We will explore themes like the Unity of the Church body, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the engine that drives it all—Love. True and proper love that finds its source in God and flows through us like a river to the sea.

For those who are unsure how to start, or how a Lenten devotional works, a few words:

Each day for the next forty days (excepting Sundays), we will have a short meditation to read, a Scripture to ponder, and a few questions that will help us to focus our thoughts and application of each day's reading. For those of you on the mailing list, you will receive each day's reading in the morning to your email. You may also find this year's devotional at the website of Faith Covenant Church (www.faithcov.net), or you can simply read the hard copy that will be available at FaithCov starting on February 11. We will start together on Ash Wednesday (February 14)—which, while St. Valentine's day, seems a good time to start a journey of love and devotion.

Let us chase Jesus together.

Be God's

Day 1 (Ash Wednesday)

Today we begin our journey. I hope that you are as excited as I am about this—to chase after Jesus and His plan for our lives is a wonderful, if somewhat daunting, proposition. We can easily find ourselves overwhelmed by the enormity of the scope. Please don't. It is normal to feel this way—after all, to examine our lives and place it against the holiness of God is an enormous undertaking. But that doesn't mean that we should look at the mountain, see its size, and turn back. Rather, we should allow it to fill us with excitement—at the top we are closer to Jesus!

The first steps of any journey are always the hardest.

But today, to ease us into our journey, we take but a small few steps. Just a warm-up if you will.

Today, we will simply take a few moments to settle our minds and ready our hearts to receive what God has for us this Lent.

Psalm 119 tells us that God's Word is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path. We cannot see the way to Jesus without it, and we are lost in the darkness. There is hope, though. God has told us that He will never leave or forsake us—He is the Light of the World, and has gone into the dark to find us like a lost lamb. He will guide and comfort us as we journey.

Today, simply take a few moments to repent and ask God to light our way.

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**Read Psalm 119. 105-112**

Ask God to show you where your blind spots are. We all have them, and they often keep us from chasing after Him as well as we could. Repent from the things that are keeping us from chasing God as we ought.

Take a few moments to write out the things you are hearing from God about where your blind spots are. Keep them in a place where you will see them often, so as to be reminded of the things you will need to be mindful of as we continue our journey.

## Day 2

Many of us have done some sort of group project in our lives; whether it be at school, or played on a team, or a music jam session—something where there was a goal and each person was needed to fulfil that goal.

Congratulations! You've just completed your training in Kingdom Building!

While that may have sounded sarcastic, it wasn't meant that way—group projects are truly the building block of Kingdom building. Each one of us, with our varied and specialized gifts are working towards one goal—to tell the Gospel to the world. And 1 Corinthians 12-14 are that blueprint for that goal. We are each integral to the fulfillment of this project, it cannot be done properly without you. But there are some guidelines to this project.

One: Each must bring their gifts to the table.

Two: Unity, not uniformity.

Three: Use headphones when listening to music in public (strongly suggested)

Four: Edification of the Body over edification of the Ego.

Five: Freedom within order.

Six: All must be driven by love, true and proper love.

We'll touch on each of these in the coming days (except No. 3—that one is self-explanatory); but today we'll simply take a moment to think about them as a whole. Paul lays out his argument over the entirety of his letter to the Corinthians, but in these three chapters the basics of Kingdom building are laid out in impeccable logic, and we would do well to pay close attention to that argument as we journey through Lent this year.

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Read 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14

This is a longish read, for sure. But it will help us to better understand how Paul's mind is working as we go through the next several weeks of looking at this section.

Please take some time to pray that God will open the eyes of our hearts to see what He has in store for us this next season.

Day 3

Over the years, we've all likely heard a sermon or two about 1 Corinthians 12. That we are all one body in Christ, and that we must need function in unity for anything to work well at all. We've likely heard it to the point where it has become wallpaper to a degree. We see it, but the pattern and texture and color don't register anymore. It's just there—a thing that we know, but don't think about much.

And fair play, really. It seems a simple and ordinary thing—we are all one body, functioning together for the Kingdom. But it can be hard to put into practice for many reasons.

One—it feels rote. It's a thing that we've heard so often that it has ceased to have any real meaning. Like mumbling our way through a common prayer, or answering the phone in a call center— the words are just a task to get through, rather than an encouragement to the church.

Two—it goes against our natural inclinations. We in the West are often at odds with the idea of communal living. We have been immersed in a culture that rewards the rugged individualist and demeans the idea of community beyond our own families. But the Bible tells us different, and asks us to turn away from our cultural bias to a better Kingdom culture, where we build God's Kingdom on Earth together; where we understand that chasing after God is a team sport.

We're not all the same! We all have different gifts and abilities that work for the common good. We each have been given gifts through the Spirit that edify and encourage the church, and build the Kingdom. The applications of Paul's metaphor can be extended to infinity, but the core idea is the same: Each of us is vital and integral to the health and wellness of the church, and by extension, the Kingdom.

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### Read 1 Corinthians 12

Take a moment to think about the things that God has put in you that can be used to build the Kingdom. List them out. Are you using your gifts (whether Spiritual or natural) to build the Kingdom? or are you hiding your light under a basket?

To use your gifts to build the Kingdom risks falling down, and that is scary for sure. But we ought to trust that what God has built into us is no accident, and is meant to be used.

Pray today that God will give you're the courage to use the gifts and abilities that he has given you to build the Kingdom.

## Day 4

Yesterday we took the time to make a list of the gifts and abilities that were put into us by God for the common good. I'm going to guess that you missed some. There's a good chance that you listed the results that came up the last time you took a Spiritual Gifts test. Things like Encouragement and Giving and Mercy and Teaching.

These are all lovely and wonderful and good and important. But did you think about administration? How about problem solving? Hospitality? The ability to lay concrete? How about willingness to vacuum the carpet over and over and over again? The drive to pick up litter in the parking lot? Willingness to change the oil in a single mother's car for her? Giving new parents a night of free babysitting?

These are all practical applications of the giftedness that was given you for the common good. You may say, I don't speak well enough to be useful in the Kingdom. Moses stuttered. You may say, I do not have the gift of interpretation of tongues? That may be true, but do you have the ability to serve a meal to those in the church who are in poor health?

The point is that all of us have the God-given gift of *something*, and we are all called to use those gifts. This is not to shame you into doing more. But to encourage you. You need not be a towering orator to tell your own story about Jesus. You need not be a teacher to help guide kids towards Jesus.

We are all gifted and important to the Kingdom. We all matter.

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[Read Psalm 139](#)

Take a look at your list from yesterday again. Did you leave off the mundane things? Did you decide that "this" or "that" was too silly to use for the Kingdom? That's okay. It really is. But those things that you thought were too mundane or silly to put on that list—they aren't. They are important aspects of who you were made to be, and God will use them if you are willing to open your clenched hands and give them over.

Day 5

Using our gifts, whether they be spiritual or natural, to serve and build the Kingdom is our universal calling. No matter how we do so, we are all called to serve each other and our neighbor, which are the building blocks of the Kingdom of God. Which, admittedly, is not always easy. We sometimes (because we're human, after all) have differences with our neighbors and each other and, yes, even our own selves.

Paul says that he wars with himself, wrestling his old nature in order to do the things that God has called him to do. We are no different. We live in a fallen world. A world that has saddled us with mental blocks and physical infirmities that make it difficult to always do the right thing. The old nature—the one we were born with that has been renewed by God as we follow Him—is not yet dead. Addictions and other habits do not always die with our old selves. Nor are we immune to developing new bad habits even as we chase God.

But as we chase God, as we are renewed by the Holy Spirit's presence in our souls, we are one with each other in the Spirit. It's a mystery and miracle that defies logical explanation most of the time. That we all have the same Spirit in us that drives us towards unity is a beautiful thing—so long as we make it a priority.

By this I mean, we must remember the importance of unity when we come together. We cannot allow (and it is an act of will sometimes) ourselves to be divided in love. Differences of opinion or politics or life choices (assuming that they are non-destructive life choices) are natural, but cannot be divisive. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John that we are to love one another, and by doing so, we will show the world that we are followers of Jesus. To do otherwise is to cast doubt on who and what we follow.

This is not to say that it is easy. You, and I, and everyone we know does something or says something that does the rhumba on our last nerve. Anyone who has a family knows this. But it does not absolve us from that calling from Jesus in John's Gospel.

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Read [John 17. 20-26](#)

Take a moment to reflect on the message of Jesus' love for us, and how it is reflected to world through our actions and behaviors. Ask God to bring to mind where you fall short in loving, and ask forgiveness.

Make a list of three things that you might do differently to better reflect God's love for the world.

## Day 6

Today is Monday. It's the start of a new work week for most of us. A day that carries its own stresses and worries; a day that threatens to erase the rest that we got over the weekend. Those self-same stresses and worries often threaten to rob us of the Truth that we sought out in church yesterday. There's a song by an artist named Tom Conlon called *The God of Sunday Morning* that puts it this way:

*The God of Sunday morning*

*Is gone by Sunday noontime*

*And then falls silent through the week*

*But now and then we let him speak on Wednesday night.*

I love that line. Not just because of its poetry, which is sublime; but also the truth found in those 32 syllables.

We do often (whether on purpose or inadvertently) pack Jesus away in a box as soon as we leave the Sanctuary, like the fine china. Only to be brought out for special occasions or for company.

Jesus is not your grandmother's fancy gravy boat—He's your everyday use dishes. He's the cereal bowl you got ages ago and use every morning; the favorite spoon in the drawer (admit it, you have a favorite spoon). And like every metaphor, this will break down at some point. But the thrust remains true—God is meant to be part of the everyday. Part of the choices you make throughout your life. Your “Every Day Carry,” if you will.

When we store Him away when He's not convenient—when making business decisions and the like—He becomes a mascot rather than a Savior. And when He is merely a mascot, He is nothing. And if He is nothing, there is no point.

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### Read 1 Corinthians 15

The main thrust of Paul's argument is this: If God is not who He says He is—if He was not raised from the dead, defeating death—then nothing matters. But if Christ is indeed who He said, He deserves our whole life, not just special occasions.

Take a moment to be honest with yourself—do you treat Jesus like the fancy china, to be brought out only for certain reasons, or do you treat Him as your everyday flatware, to be used and shared all the time?

## Day 7

If, as we talked about yesterday, it is important to keep Jesus as our “everyday flatware,” it raises the question: How do we do that?

And it’s a good question to ask ourselves. In our modern Western world, it is easy to go along in life and not have to really think about the big questions of life. For most of us, our food is readily available, our shelter is stable, we have the ability to do most of the things that we would like to do. The questions and situations that the ancients wrestled with everyday, are mostly solved for us. We have it easy, comparatively. We rarely need to rely on God to get and do and experience the things that we most want in this life.

C.S. Lewis said, *“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”* And G.K. Chesterton talked about the God-shaped hole that is found in ourselves. This is not a coincidence, friends. We were made to be in union with God, to be reconciled to Him in ways that mere effort cannot achieve.

But here is the beauty and mystery of the Gospel—while we cannot achieve this reconciliation on our own, we do not need to. Jesus has provided that bridge to the “other world” that Lewis references, and fills Chesterton’s God-shaped hole. Only He can fill it. There is no other way.

And when we grasp that reality, there is nothing that we could ever want more than to make Jesus, and all that He stands for, the center of our lives and the focal point of our daily interactions with those around us.

He becomes the “everyday flatware” that we use all the time, become more and more reliant on Him, even with all the modern conveniences that surround us.

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### Read Romans 1

Most of us will say that we are not ashamed of the Gospel. In the Western world, we have little fear of retribution if we fly our Gospel flag proudly. But notice what Paul says in consequence of that unashamedness—he is eager to share the Gospel because of the transforming work of the Spirit in him. It is all the encouragement he needs.

Take a few moments to think about how you might allow the Spirit to move you in the same way that it does Paul.

## Day 8

The diversity of the church.

We can read 1 Corinthians 12. 13-31 and assume that Paul is talking about the diversity of the gifts given to us through the Holy Spirit. And that is certainly a valid reading of the text. After all, it comes right after Paul gives a condensed list of spiritual gifts.

But another valid and important reading of that section of text may have more to do with the general diversity of the Corinthian church. The makeup of the church, if you will, rather than the gifting of the people in that church.

There is very little textual evidence that the Corinthians rejected the unity of the church universal, but rather it's diversity locally. So Paul uses the example of a body, called forth by God, to illustrate the idea that diversity is a "feature" not a "bug." By appealing to the sovereignty of God, "who arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose," Paul reminds the Corinthians that uniformity and unity are not at all the same thing.

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Read 1 Corinthians 12. 13-31

Do we value and prioritize uniformity over and against unity? Is proper diversity of people, opinion, understanding, gifting, or method an important part of the church, whether ours or in general?

Do we truly value that diversity, or do we assign those different to us and ours a place in the back where we can claim that diversity and still ignore it?

## Day 9

Diversity, in any and all of its forms, is important to the Biblical writers. Whether that diversity be of gifting (which is integral to the function of the church), or of style (remember that the Biblical writers encouraged us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs—plural, not singular), or of ethnicity (see Peter’s vision in Acts chapter 10)—it is all important.

There is an argument to be made that for any individual personally to like and/or dislike any given style of worship. A traditional choir will not always ‘speak’ to someone the way it speaks to someone else. Or, likewise, a preacher’s oratorical style may not connect with a particular individual. This is natural.

But we are not called to be our natural selves. Far from it. We have been inhabited and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be more than our old nature. When we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, that includes making room at the table for other voices, and not only that, but to let those voices be heard.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, and say, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we are not merely reciting an old poem with no power or import—rather we are agreeing that God’s vision and will are more important and, indeed, take precedence over our own preferences and desires. When we look at the various ways that God has shown His vision for the Body of Christ (Acts 10, Revelation, etc.), we see a truly diverse and beautiful mosaic of believers that all bring something to the table. When all nations, tribes, and peoples are together, worshiping the Inventor of grapes and geckos, what we see is unity, not uniformity. The differences that differentiate us from one another allow us to better see and understand the vastness of who God is.

If, for example, we all were to witness an event from different places in an arena, would we not all see something slightly different? Your view of the stage and mine allow us to see different things. Your view point allows you to understand the show maybe better than mine might. Likewise, our brothers and sisters that differ from us may have a better understanding of various texts in Scripture than we might, and vice versa. It is important to listen to each voice, and not stifle them simply because we have a different background.

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Read Acts 10

Notice that Peter’s first reaction is to retreat into his own tradition. He won’t eat anything that is ‘unclean.’ Even after 3ish years of being with Jesus Himself, Peter stills has work to do in understanding the universality of Jesus’ call to the His people.

Do we also retreat into tradition when presented with new ideas, forgoing the potential beauty to be found in places ‘foreign’ to us?

Day 10

We've talked at length about unity y uniformity; their differences and the importance of unity but not uniformity. Diversity of voice and style and background are not only good, but essential to a healthy and functioning church. In fact, you could make the argument from Scripture that the church cannot function *at all* without that self-same diversity. Elsewise, you would find one Gospel account, a singular literary form, and a single author for all 66 books. This is simply my opinion, but the very form of the Book reinforces the need for diversity of all types, and a unity of calling.

Because that's what the Book we give so much importance does—it is the singular story of God's reconciliation with mankind, regardless of how often we make decisions that veer off from God's perfect plan. And that plan for reconciliation is driven by Love. There is no other engine that can drive all of this—it must be love.

But if Love is the engine, how is that power put out into the world? Through the gifting of the Spirit that we find in the early part of 1 Corinthians 12, and again in chapter 14.

Natural gifting, given through common grace, is lovely. It really is. It is what allows us to move through the world in the ways that we do. You do not want me to plumb your house—I'm rubbish at that. But there are people who, through their natural gifts, are brilliant at that sort of thing. There is not one person that you have ever met that has not been gifted by God something that makes them special and important to the common good—regardless of their relationship with Jesus. Not a single person. As C.S. Lewis says, *"There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal"*

For the next few days we will take a look at the Spiritual Gifts as outlined in 1 Corinthians 14; but for today, rest in the idea that you have been given those gifts to help build the Kingdom of God.

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Read 1 Corinthians 14

Ask God to bring to mind what gifts He has given to you; whether natural or spiritual.

## Day 11

We cannot start talking about Spiritual gifting without understanding where Paul is coming from in this section of his first letter to the church in Corinth.

Like all letters, they are meant to be read as a whole, rather than in bits. Too often, we read the Epistles in small chunks, and in doing so, lose the thrust of the arguments being made therein. Paul, being a trained orator and in the Law, lays out his letters logically. Each section relies on the previous one, and expands on it. Therefore, each new topic dovetails nicely into the last topic, binding them together, and making each topic seamlessly strong.

To talk about the Spiritual gifting that Paul writes about in chapter 14, we needed to understand Paul's point about diversity; proper diversity of all types, including the Spiritual Gifts. Without understanding that argument, Paul's points about the Gifting of the Spirit are a scold, rather than an encouragement.

That said, we must need understand that these gifts are given in Love to express Love, and are prideful and useless without it. Properly useless. They puff up rather than serve if there is no Love. Mark 10. 45 tells us that "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

These gifts then are meant to edify and build the Kingdom, rather than build any given person's ego and reputation. And Paul, following in the practice and direction of Jesus, makes this point over and again throughout, not only Chapter 14, but all of his letters. Building the Kingdom, humbly, in Love.

Which begs the question: Since we, as part of the Body, have been gifted a variety of Spiritual Gifts through the Holy Spirit, how do we use them? To build up ourselves, or to build the Kingdom?

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Read Mark 10. 35-45

Being honest, how often do we metaphorically ask to sit at Jesus' right hand? Do our actions and our practice reflect to the world humility, and the grace we have received? Or do we take a position of superiority, gatekeeping our club of Christians?

Day 12

Speaking in tongues.

This can be tricky to talk about. Each one of us comes from different traditions—some that acknowledge speaking in tongues, others that say that the charismatic gifts of the Spirit ceased with the death of the Apostles, some of us do not have a church-y background so therefore do not have an opinion one way or the other about speaking in tongues. As many of us as there are, there are likely as many thoughts about the speaking in tongues, plus at least two more. Add to all of this, the fact that in English the term “speaking in tongues” means at least two different things, and it can all be a muddle.

So for clarity, let us leave aside what it means and think in broader terms today. Let’s think of the beginning of 1 Corinthians 14 as a broad idea of any spiritual gift, be it tongues or prophesy or healing or whatever.

Paul’s exhortation towards one gift or another—in the case of the text we’re specifically looking at (1 Corinthians 14)—has as much to do with the attitude of hospitality and welcome as it does the specific gift. Indeed, Paul says as much in the latter part of the chapter. So where is the line? Where do we make our stand when talking about the Gifts of the Spirit? Is there even a line at all?

If we look at Paul’s words, we can see that he does draw a line, but it is not where we might think it would be; or, in fact, what that line is. Paul’s line is this: “Does the person outside of the church see Jesus when we exercise our freedoms and giftings?” In fact, that has often been his line throughout the letter.

Does this edify the church, and does this exercise hospitality to the outsider? These are the questions that we, too, must ask ourselves when we practice our Sunday morning services; and, it could be argued, when we go about in public and spend time with those around us.

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Read 1 Corinthians 14

Let’s take a moment to breathe. Topics like the charismatic gifts are freighted with a lot of weight, and can cause confusion and irritation at the best of times. So let us simply take a moment to pray that God will open our hearts and our minds to what we can learn, both in specifics and generalities from this Scripture passage.

## Day 13

Yesterday we spent some time considering the broader implications of Paul's exhortation towards the gifts that edify and build up the church. I would like to stay here for a little while longer, since it's such a potentially controversial topic. Controversial because it gets to the heart of how we view growth within the church.

Are we looking for people to join with us that already believe exactly the way that we do? Or are we, instead, seeking to be an outpost for the Kingdom, and allowing God to grow the church while we are faithful to the call put on us by God to "go into all the world, preaching the Gospel?" Because that is the biggest question we will always face as the people of God—whether we expect carbon copies of us, or are we open to the beauty and mystery of differing traditions.

In their broadest sense, the two gifts of the Spirit that Paul is specifically referencing in 1 Corinthians 14—Speaking in tongues and Prophecy—are the two wings with which we fly, so to speak. In that one edifies the individual and the other edifies and builds the church. Both are necessary to fly—you've never seen a one-winged bird do more than flop about on the ground; but they do so by acting in differing ways.

Tongues, as Paul says, is to be prayed for and desired. But tongues can only edify the speaker unless there is an interpreter present. For example, if we were to rock up to church on Sunday and the pastor was speaking only in Mandarin, it wouldn't matter what they are saying—we wouldn't be able to understand unless there were a person in the room that also spoke Mandarin. The truth and the beauty of Tongues is that you are speaking directly to God, but it does no good to the congregation.

Likewise, when we hold our traditions and preferences so tightly that we refuse to give them up for the sake of the outsider, we are speaking a foreign language. It may be truthful and beautiful and orthodox and all the good things, but if the outsider cannot understand the 'language' it does not edify the Kingdom or present the beauty of God to them.

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### 1 Corinthians 14.13-17

Leaving aside the potential controversies associated with speaking in tongues, take a moment to reflect on how the church might open the doors a little wider by holding our traditions more loosely; seeking to better welcome the outsider and show them the mercy, grace, and love of God.

## Day 14

If then, as we read yesterday, speaking in tongues is very ‘inside baseball,’ and makes it difficult for those outside the church to properly understand and be edified, prophesy is more akin to VHI’s Pop-Up Videos from the 90’s and early 2000’s.

You may or may not remember Pop-Up Videos, it’s entirely up to your background, age, and how likely you were to be watching VHI at midday. But the metaphor still works. Pop-up Videos would show a music video, and overlay various factoids about the band, culture at the time, the song, and the creative process. It was a learning tool, really.

And while the specifics of any given video are pretty unimportant, the fact remains that it helped those outside the music and music video world to understand better what was going on, like Paul says prophesy should do in the context of building and edifying the church; though Paul likely wasn’t talking about how many cans of Aqua-net Van Halen used to get their hair to stand up like that.

Prophesy, in this context, is not fortune telling or future gazing, but accurately and gently telling the truth in love in a way (a language, if you will) that can be understood by all in attendance (a forthtelling rather than a foretelling). It is not a bludgeon to be used to beat into submission, but rather a gentle and merciful touch on the arm to steer us in the right direction.

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### Read Romans 12

Note that Paul’s words to the Corinthian church are not unique to them. Indeed, Paul’s teachings are repeated throughout many of his letters to various churches, which leads us to understand that he touches on universal issues. That being true, we can then see that to be insular is a human trait that crops up wherever human beings are. But his exhortation towards being more than our human nature—to be supernaturally driven by the Spirit is abundant throughout his letters as well.

Take a moment to pray that we would see where and how we are too ‘inside baseball’ and not enough ‘Pop-up Video.’ And pray that we would be guided by the Spirit to change the things that give outsiders that cold shoulder.

## Day 15

It occurs that perhaps we too often associate the term prophesy in chapter 12 with “foretelling,” and that’s a little off from Paul’s meaning here. It might be better to translate it as preaching—forthtelling rather than foretelling. The Prophet—or those operating in the Spirit using the gift of prophesy—live so close to God that they know His heart, mind, and will. And not only that, but have the ability to make that known to those around them. Therefore, the gift’s function is twofold: To bring rebuke and warning, telling folks that their way of action is not in accordance with the will of God; and Two: they bring advice and guidance to those who wish to chase after God with all their heart, soul, and mind.

This is not an easy gift to wield—it can (and often does) go to the head of the person that has been gifted this particular Spiritual Gift. Too often we rubber stamp God’s name on our own will. It’s easy to do—especially when we find ourselves in a position of influence.

Too easily we can find ourselves speaking in the name of God things that, while well-meaning, are not in lock step with the Word or the heart of Jesus. And as a result, we can find that we have strayed into territory that is no longer properly Godly.

Our traditions and preferences and likes and dislikes are driving the car, and not the heart of God. We can read stories throughout the Bible of people who justified their actions *ex post facto* forgetting their first love, and chasing their baser desires. David and Bathsheba comes to mind. Or the brother who didn’t leave in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

This is why the Spiritual Gifts are meant to work together—we cannot properly operate in one without the others (whether in our own selves, or in concert with others in the Body) acting together. Tongues must work with interpretation, Prophesy and the ability to distinguish between spirits, and so on.

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Read 1 Corinthians 12 4-11

Take a moment to pray that God will present to you the wisdom to be able to see the Truth before and above our own preferences.

Day 16

The interplay between speaking in tongues and prophesy is an interesting one. On the one hand, Paul tells us through his letter that we should all desire to speak in tongues. Who wouldn't want to talk directly to God in the language of heaven, honestly? But Paul's admonition to *even more* desire to prophesy is telling.

The logic is so subtle, but specific, that we can perhaps miss it. He is not telling us that we shouldn't seek to deepen our relationship with Jesus—far from it. Indeed, Paul lets us know that we should definitely want to speak in tongues, just not 'willy-nilly.' There must be an interpreter present for tongues as a gift to edify and build up the Kingdom. The act of speaking in tongues builds up the individual, not the church. It's not either/or, it's both/ and.

As we read before, speaking in tongues without an interpreter is like speaking in Mandarin without an interpreter—the truth and beauty is lost on those around.

One could think of this as a matter of proper hospitality. You would never invite someone over to your house for a meal or to stay and proudly spend time doing things that leave out your guests. That would be unthinkable, to proudly and self-importantly talk only to your spouse/ children. You would want your guests to be able to understand and be involved with all that is happening around them. The same applies with tongues as a Spiritual Gift.

Paul tells us that without an interpreter—a way of involving others in the conversation—as good and right and truthful and proper your words may be, they are confusing and should be kept to yourself.

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Read 1 Corinthians 14. 1-6

Give some thought to the idea of tongues as an issue of hospitality. Think about how you would feel if you were left out of the conversation—how long would you stick around knowing that you were being purposefully left out. Extend that thought to how we practice other aspects of hospitality in the church—do we have our own 'language' that leaves others out in the cold?

Make a list of a few ways that we can be better at being not only friendly but properly welcoming in our various churches.

Day 17

Our calling, throughout history, even before the advent of the New Covenant, even before our forefathers and mothers, even before Jesus came to fulfill the Law to set us free from the bondage of sin, has been to bring glory to God.

We can do this in many differing ways.

When we live a life of worship, we reflect God's glory both back to Him, and to those around us. But to do that we need to take the King's position seriously. If we don't take God's position seriously, we will fail in this calling. Jesus is more than just a good gent. He is more than just an excellent teacher, and more (by far) than just a guy who was born and died on a cross.

He is the living embodiment of the Law and its fulfillment. There has been only one person in the history of history that could have done what He did. Only one.

Therefore, our allegiance and our focus should be found in, and on, Him.

A life of worship; a life that reflects God's wonder and love and Truth, is our highest calling as a people.

Whether it is using our gifts and talents to point to God, or by living in such a way that people are naturally attracted to the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, or even reflecting God's passion for people in your everyday activities—this is what we were made to do.

The Westminster Catechism says this about our greatest purpose:

“Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever”

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Read over [1 Corinthians 10.31](#) and [Romans 11.36](#)

Reflect on how this plays out in your life. Do we use our lives to glorify God and enjoy Him? Or, is God like the furniture in your basement: existent, but mostly unused?

## Day 18

Yesterday we read about the Westminster Catechism, and its insistence that our chief purpose is to “Glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

In light of Luke 19. 11-27, we need to ask ourselves this question: How does this fall into line with the Catechism?

The answer is simple to give, and much harder to live out.

The simple answer is that by investing what we have been given in the Kingdom, we are, by default, glorifying God.

It's that simple. By living in such a way as to build the Kingdom we are glorifying God. And by glorifying God we meet our ultimate need as people, and therefore enjoy Him in ways that we could not if we were to merely use Him as a prop in the play of our lives.

The New Living Translation says this: Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. (2 Corinthians 2.15)

Our lives being lived out in a way that glorifies God is pleasing to Him who sits on the throne of Heaven. Just like a life preserver is a godsend to those who are drowning, our lives are an investment in the salvation of those around us who need to hear the Gospel.

And, while not everyone who hears will listen, this does not excuse us from our responsibility to share it.

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**Read Luke 19. 11-27**

Reading Jesus' parable of the ten minas, how can we best utilize the gifts that we have been given to build the Kingdom? Are we allowing our fear to quash our calling to use the gifts given through the Spirit to bring fame to the name of Jesus?

## Day 19

“The culture of death is a notion of freedom that denies freedom’s essential link to Truth”

-Pope John Paul II

Throughout his papacy, John Paul II never failed to point out the link between Truth, Freedom, God and mankind. Perhaps this was because of his childhood in Poland where life did not mean too much if you were not one of the favored elite, or maybe it was because of the Polish churches non-stand against the Nazi occupiers followed by the Russian occupation.

Whatever his reason, John Paul believed devoutly in the link between God and freedom: between Truth and freedom. True freedom is in knowing that God created you and that you are His child. Without this knowledge, it is not surprising that people have become numb to the atrocities that we see on the news every day; and even the ones that are no longer news to us.

That people are killed every day in random acts of violence, “surgical procedures,” and “dignified death” serves to show that John Paul II was right. We, as a culture, (all cultures) have tried to separate God and freedom, and found that it is a perverted freedom that has come out to play. Only in God, only in Truth, can we experience freedom and experience it fully.

The link between our freedom in Christ and how we work out that freedom in our lives requires serious thought to how we will inevitably influence our brothers and sisters. St. Paul exhorts us to think of others and where they are in their journeys with Jesus as we also journey along; putting limits on our expressions of freedom in order to better serve our neighbor.

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Read 1 Corinthians 8. 7-13

Have we neglected to think about our brothers and sisters in Christ that aren’t as far along in their journey with Jesus? Have we exercised our freedoms in such a way as to cause them to stumble and fall away; potentially even exercised a perverted freedom divorced from God and Truth?

What is something I can do today that will help another better exercise their freedom in Christ?

## Day 20

We are, of course, taking the chapters of our focus a little out of order. First chapter 12, then 14, and we will conclude this Lenten season in Chapter 13, with some other bits thrown in for good measure. This is on purpose; but we mustn't forget that when Paul was writing, he was laying out his prose and arguments in a logical and precise way. Therefore, we must keep in mind the driving force of all of Paul's words and exhortations and encouragements in this letter—Love.

Without the Love that is detailed in chapter 13, we lose both focus and the plot.

So when, at the beginning of chapter 14 we read, "Pursue this love" we know that it must be the engine that drives the argument. So, let us not forget to pursue the love that undergirds and supports and shapes the Spiritual Gifts outlined in chapter 14—tongues, prophesy, teaching, etc.

*How* we worship is the sign to those outside the church of *what* we worship. Jesus, if nothing else, turned the world on its head—upending the established order and ushering in a new and everlasting Kingdom. So for the next few days we will take a look at the three basic elements of the teaching that inevitably comes out of how we worship and how we teach the outsider about Jesus.

Those three basic elements are these:

We must build up

We must encourage

We must comfort.

In these three things we will find that we can build the Kingdom.

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### Read 1 Corinthians 14

Use a *Lectio Divina* approach to this chapter. Read through the whole chapter and make note of what stands out to you. Then re-read the chapter each twice more—each time asking God to bring out to you new aspects of the chapter that you didn't notice before. Make note of the things that God draws your attention to each time. Pray that God will enlighten and enrich your understanding of His Word.

## Day 21

As we continue our journey through Lent, it is important to keep in mind the three elements of Kingdom building that we mentioned yesterday: Build Up, Encourage, Comfort.

Each of these three are integral parts of how Paul envisions that Spiritual Gifts working together in concert. Each gift, given through the Spirit, does one or more of each of these three things. In fact, if they do not do any of one of these three things, we can make the assumption that they are not of the Spirit—or at least not for the Body at this time. So, let's take them in reverse order.

Comfort. Paul tells the Roman church that it is the “kindness of God that leads to repentance.” In other words, no one has ever been shouted into heaven. To merely shout out our apologetics lessons at the people we are meant to be in relationship with has no effect, other than to turn them off from the lovingkindness of God. Who wants to be shouted at? And more, who wants to be shouted at in a situation where lovingkindness would be better?

Obviously, there are things that are True (note the capital T), that others in our lives may be afoul of. But that doesn't mean that we have unlocked the time and place for shouty-ness. Rather, this is the time for sympathy and kindness—we are meant to be followers of Jesus, after all. Jesus' counter-cultural approach to people was not just meant for His time and place—we live in similar times, philosophy-wise. An age where any and all things are permissible; but like Paul says, “not all things are beneficial.”

Taking a sympathetic and empathetic tack in our relationships with others will lead to further conversations, which in turn will continue to reflect and echo the kindness of God that leads to repentance. It is not a one shot deal—it is relationship built over time, in love, that builds trust and willingness to listen. We must comfort those who need comforting because that is the way of Jesus.

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Read Romans 2. 1-16

Take a moment to reflect. Do I try to echo the lovingkindness of Jesus, acting counter-culturally and counter-naturally, in my relationships with folks outside the Body? Or, do I revert to shouty accusations meant to shame a person into repentance?

Pray that God will do the necessary work in our hearts to be a clear reflection of Him in our witnessing, and our relationships.

Day 22

Encourage. Most of us probably think of encouragement as an ‘Atta boy.’ And that’s not wrong, but it is only a partial definition. Letting people know that they are on the right path, moving in the right direction, doing the thing—these are all part of encouragement, and we should do them.

But encouragement is also aspirational. Which may be a difficult thing to unpack, but we’ll try.

Aspirational encouragement is an exhortation to do, and be, better. Imagine if you will, a coach standing on the sidelines after you miss a play, regardless of the sport. That coach is going to spend some time encouraging you to not miss the play the next time, right? In order to help you get better, that coach will make sure that you know what you did right, but also make sure you know where you could *be* better—how you could do things differently in order to get a better outcome.

Most of Paul’s letters (and for that matter, Jesus’ sermons) do just that. They tell the recipient how they are doing well, and also how they could be better. The words that we see all these years later are meant to build, encourage, and comfort—they do not cover every possible aspect of life, they were meant for specific situations.

Just like the coach won’t always tell you about how you missed the pick and roll unless you *do* miss it, Paul is addressing specific issues. His aspirational encouragement is meant for specific instances. How can the church in Corinth be better? How can they more closely chase after Jesus’ way? How can they better echo the way of Jesus? These are the things that Paul is concerned about in his letters, and are reflective of how we ought to speak to and act around those we love, and seek to encourage.

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### Read Matthew 5

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is a great example of aspirational encouragement. Note how He tells people how things are, but follows each saying with this is how it ought to be. “You have heard... But I tell you,” is preaching through encouragement.

Take a few moments to think about a time when you were ‘encouraged,’ hearing only the thing that you did wrong, without any direction about how you might do better? How did that make you feel? Do you do the same, either in your parenting or teaching or at work? How might we be better at expressing encouragement through love? Giving correction when needed, but also pointing to something better and more God-honoring?

## Day 23

Friday and Saturday we spent time looking at what it means to comfort and encourage, learning from 1 Corinthians 14:3. This leaves building up; something that we might call edification of the Body.

It is true that comfort and encouragement do edify the Body—they can't help but do so, really. But to build up the Body is more than merely coming alongside and gently guiding and succoring and aspirationally encouraging folks as they journey closer to Jesus. We must also model and echo the Gospel.

Which seems simultaneously easy and hard to do. It's not actually possible to do—in our own strength. Paul even tells us in chapter 12 of his first letter to Corinth that it is impossible to do any of this outside of the Spirit of God. You can't even profess that Jesus is Lord without the Spirit inside you, let alone properly edify the Body of Christ.

Building up the Body, or strengthening the Body, must be done in concert with the Spirit living inside you, leaking out all over wherever you go, like a cup too full. It is impossible to do otherwise.

Imagine the most cheerful and optimistic person that you know. How do they make you feel to be around them? My guess is that you often feel buoyed by their presence. On the days where you've "run out of spoons," or the glass is half-empty, their presence is strengthening to you. Their overflowing cheer and optimism give you a second wind.

As they say, from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks—let your heart be overflowing with the Spirit, and the mouth will automatically strengthen and build up the Body, and by extension the Kingdom.

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Read [Luke 6:43-49](#)

Jesus' words here are echoed in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. A good tree (a person healthily following Jesus) cannot help but bear good fruit which will strengthen and edify the Body of Christ. Likewise, an unhealthy tree cannot help but produce bad fruit.

Pray today that God will show you your blind spots in regard to how your mouth speaks.

Day 24

If the goals of prophesying (i.e. forthtelling, whether by word or in silence via a witnessing life) are to build up, encourage, and comfort; then the way that we worship must also employ these three aspects. In doing this (which is not as easy as it may sound, due to human nature), we must keep in mind two things:

Worship must never be selfish

Worship must be intelligible.

Either or both of these things out of balance from the other is a roadmap to a worship service that ceases to build the Kingdom. So, let's take these two things in order.

Worship must never be selfish.

Some of this, we have already talked about over the course of the last several days. Our preferences are not the benchmark against which we measure our success or failure in building the Kingdom of God. Style and preference are entirely too superficial and subjective a yardstick. What I like and what you like are rarely going to match so neatly that we will always agree. In fact, in all likelihood, what you and I like will only occasionally match at the edges, but will never tessellate into each other completely. So we need to properly ask ourselves:

Am I being selfish in this mode of worship?

Given that each of us is sufficiently different from one another that our patterns don't match, we must think of the 'other' more often than we think of ourselves. This is not a new idea to Paul. It a foundational aspect of the Christian life. "Love your neighbors" encompasses more than just a vague and general love that makes ourselves feel good about our choices; but rather, forces us into situations that are uncomfortable for us in order to better serve those around us.

Being unselfish in worship, and in the spaces that we create for worship, requires us to think about the comfort and preferences of the 'other' more often than we think of our own.

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Read Matthew 5. 38-48

The greatest test of any worship setting (which, honestly, includes everything that we do as Christians) is, "Will this help everyone?" Not, "Does this please me and underscore my own preferences?"

Take a moment to reflect: how can I best serve the 'other' in my worship of God?

Day 25

In asking ourselves, “Will this serve everyone?” we must then ask ourselves, “Is this intelligible to those outside our circle?”

Paul is talking specifically about tongues v. prophesy here, but we can easily (and within orthodoxy) expand that to include the terminology that we use, even when that tongue is shared with those around us. In other words, does the lingo that we use exclude the outsider, even when they are speaking the same language as we are?

This is a difficult question, to be sure. After all, some of the foundational language that we use will hit the ears oddly to those who don’t share our beliefs. Words like *sacrament* and *justice* and *justification* and *ecclesiology*, and even *Messiah* can form barriers to those who don’t share the same beliefs. It can be frustrating when you don’t understand what is being said, isn’t it? You recognize the words, but don’t know the specific shades of meaning that are being given to the terms. It’s a little like hearing younger folks talk in slang—you recognize all the words, just not their meaning.

Sometimes there’s no apparent way around the use of ‘insider’ language. After all, the church is meant for twofold ministry—both to those inside and outside—but that doesn’t mean that we should embrace terms and language that ostracizes people. Therefore, we ought to eliminate specialist language whenever possible to make sure that all in attendance can understand as much as possible.

This extends farther than just words we use, but also customs that we employ, which we will talk about tomorrow. But for now, let’s contemplate our use of language.

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Read 1 Corinthians 14. 18-25

Are there some terms that you are aware of that cause consternation within the church (not just your local congregation, but in general)? Terms that you yourself may not fully understand, and definitely are unintelligible to those outside?

Think about how you might reconsider your approach to how you speak about Jesus to better be understood by those around you.

Day 26

All churches have specific traditions and customs that they employ. This is not a bad thing—it gives flavor and creates space for more than one type of person. If every church was exactly the same, it'd be boring; and more, it would leave many people outside.

Things like, when to stand and when to sit, when to respond and when to silently nod your head in appreciation, when to clap and when to stare into the middle distance—these all fold into one another as ways that make worship intelligible or not. Imagine you were to go to an event (whether church or not) where you were new, and on the outside of the circle. These sorts of issues would make you feel either welcomed or not, wouldn't they? At the very least, you might be on edge the entire time you were there, wondering if you were doing the right thing, and whether or not you stuck out like a sore thumb for not knowing the script.

Like Paul's example of tongues needing an interpreter for it to be a useful part of a worship service, might we employ a few people who know the ins and outs of a particular service to help 'interpret' what is happening? Wouldn't that help make things more intelligible for those on the outside?

We cannot expect to fulfil the Great Commission while simultaneously creating a club with secret handshakes and passwords that unlock what we're really talking about. Church should not require a decoder ring to understand what's going on. It should be a reflection of God, and His love for all.

The Truth that we express in church worship services ought, and must, be evident, else those outside the church will (and do, if we're honest) walk away from us as confused and hurting as they were before they met us.

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Today, simply pray. Pray that God will bring to mind customs and language and traditions that we employ that may cause those on the outside to walk away shaking their heads, wondering why they bothered.

Are there things that we can do (or change) that will help us to better fulfil the Great Commission?

## Day 27

So then, if we seek to be intelligible (through plain language and easy to follow, explainable traditions), we need to be flexible in our worship. And by doing these things, we will find ourselves not only fulfilling the Great Commission, but also building the Kingdom in ways that we might not have thought possible.

But another aspect of plain, contextualized, language is that it speaks plainly to those who need to hear—whether they be insiders *or* outsiders. Intelligibility in worship produces four fruits: It convicts a person of their sin, it brings a person under judgement, it shows a person the secrets of their own heart, and it brings a person to their knees before God.

This is how the Kingdom is built and strengthened.

Think of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. After her encounter with Jesus, she ran back to her people saying, “Come see a man who told me all that I ever did.”

As we read the story, we can notice that Jesus never once got shouty, He never used archaic and/ or fancy speech, and He used gentle words and tone to talk about hard things. His words to the woman at the well could have been cross and belligerent—it was His right after all, both culturally and as the Son of God. Yet He didn’t do so. Instead He used language that edified and illuminated, and limited His rightful position so that she could better use her freedom.

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Read John 4.1-42

Jesus’ words and actions illuminated the darkness of the Samaritan people in the village, allowing them to see truly for the first time—that the Savior of the world had come, and was among them.

How can we apply Jesus’ contextualization of the Gospel to the Samaritan woman in our own lives? How can we speak plainly, gently, and in love to those around us in a way that they can hear the Gospel, and have it penetrate their souls?

Day 28

It's always good at some point in a journey to take stock of where you are. We've talked a lot about how we can be and do better, about how we can hold more closely to the Book that we hold dear. There are certainly confusing passages to be found within its pages, and cultural issues that must need be illuminated and thought through given the changes since the Bible was written. Different types of writing call for different types of understanding. Poetry and History and letters are not understood in the same way.

But we can say this: Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 12-14 can and does help us to better know how to build and the Kingdom through walking in the Spirit and using the gifts and abilities (both natural and spiritual) to make Jesus famous in the world.

It is easy to be comfortable in our ways. After all, they're *our* ways. That divot in your couch where you always sit? It was made by you being comfortable—but it may not be comfortable for the next person to sit there. So it is with our worship and how we approach the business of living in the Spirit and building the Kingdom.

As humans, we like the divot in the couch. It fits us. It is to our exact dimensions, and cradles us supportively in all the ways that we like and need. But what about the people that visit us? Does that divot cradle and support them? *Or* does it make them slightly uncomfortable and unable to fully experience their time with us?

That is the question that is put before us as we walk through these chapters. The Corinthian church had a divot in their couch that they needed to steam out in order to better be hospitable to those around them.

While not necessarily speaking about FaithCov, but more personally, do we also need to steam out the divots in the couch to better be hospitable to those who we would tell about Jesus? It's likely, for sure—that's human nature to get comfortable and ask those around us to conform. But is that the way of Jesus?

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Read Luke 10. 25-37

Thinking about the cultural, political, and religious issues that surrounded the difference between the Jewish and Samaritan people and how Jesus' parable subverted the expectations—how can we 'steam out our divots' to better love our neighbors?

## Day 29

This final week before we enter Holy Week, which is to say, we're two weeks away from Easter and the end of Lent, we finally get to chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. I hope that you will see why we left it until last, even though it is out of order.

It's the Love chapter! For many the most beautiful section of the entire Bible, and the perennial reading at weddings. And it's good for that, certainly. But it doesn't really fit that context. Not really.

Given its placement in between two chapters on Spiritual Gifts and worship service order, you may think it odd to place it there. But in reality, in Paul's carefully structured education for the church in Corinth, it makes perfect sense to put it here. It's the engine that powers the whole section, and indeed the Gospel itself. Without love, this all-encompassing and driving love, none of the rest of any of it matters one whit.

Over the next few days, we will take a look at this well known, but possibly misunderstood chapter, from a few different viewpoints. Hopefully we will enter into Holy Week with a better, fuller understanding of the events that happened during that last week of Jesus' life after we do so.

But for today, let's simply take the time to read 1 Corinthians 13 at least 3 times. It's not long, it shouldn't take you too much time to read it 3 times. But each time you read it, take the time to pray that God will illuminate something you had never seen before in its words. Pray that you will come away with a deeper understanding of the engine that drives all our chasing after God, and His calling on our lives and how we are called to serve and worship.

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**Read 1 Corinthians 13 three times.**

Take the time to write down something that jumped out at you, or confused you, or encouraged you in each reading. Pray that God will give you understanding of the kind of Love that drives not only this letter to the church in Corinth, but also the Gospel.

## Day 30

Right out of the gate (so to speak) Paul tells his audience that everything that preceded this section in his letter is utterly meaningless if the root and engine is not love. Proper love, agape love; not the saccharine ersatz love that sells greeting cards, or the brotherly, *philia* love that for some reason gets associated with Philly. But real, unconditional, Godly love—the kind that would lead us to give up all that we have to better serve those around us.

It's not a love that we easily, or readily, express. Perhaps for our children or parents, but even then, it's not pure; there's a self-motivation that sneaks in. It's a love that is only, only possible when given by God through the Spirit. Without that love, everything else in this letter is rendered useless.

Even the gift of tongues, which Paul says over and over again is to be yearned for, is totally and utterly meaningless without love. He likens it to the pagan worship of the Roman gods Dionysus and Cybele whose worship was characterized by loud cymbals and braying trumpets. Loud, discordant, and without merit. Paul is quite serious about how love is the root and engine of the whole shebang.

He then goes on to say that the gift of prophesy (forthtelling, or preaching) without love is freighted with danger. It can too often lead to egoism and shouty-ness—a loveless and mean kind of preaching that aims to scare people away from hell, and never seems to work. Remember, Paul tells us in Romans 2 that it is the 'lovingkindness' of God that leads to repentance, not the volume and frequency of our angry shouting.

Words of faith and acts of charity without love hurt rather than heal and restore, and even a willingness towards martyrdom without love is selfish and prideful. It is not untrue to say that many deeds of seeming devotion and sacrifice are motivated not by love, but by pride.

There is not a Scripture passage to be found that might cause a person to examine themselves more deeply and fervently than 1 Corinthians 13, if read properly and in context.

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Read 1 Corinthians 13.1-3

Think about this passage. Meditate on it for 15 minutes, re-reading it as you do.

How does this love, this engine, differ from what we thought this passage was about?

Day 31

“Love is patient; love is kind; it knows no envy; love is no braggart; it is not inflated with its own importance; it does not behave gracelessly; it does not insist upon its rights; it never flies into a temper; it does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received; it finds no pleasure in evil-doing; it rejoices with the truth; it can endure anything; it is completely trusting; it never ceases to hope; it bears everything with triumphant fortitude.” (1 Corinthians 13. 4-7)

Love is all of these things, and more. But do we properly understand what this means? After all, the translations that we read in English don’t necessarily convey the nuances found in the original language. Which often trips us up—there’s multiple words for love even. So how do we know what is being said here?

We could take these words at face value with our common everyday version of love, and the passage would be no less true. Romantic love should do all of these things, as should brotherly love. So in the context of our everyday, natural understanding these words ring true and firm.

But when we shift our thoughts to the supernatural *agape* love that is only possible from God through the Spirit, new aspects of what love’s definition is shine through. Which is not unsurprising, really. Natural definitions—the ways that even those outside of Christ would understand love—are rooted in God’s *agape* love, after all. There is no love (of any kind) without its source being only in God.

With 15 aspects of definition being described in these 3 short verses, it is difficult to talk about each one individually. However, we can infer that without all 15, we are practicing an ersatz love, a love that is less than perfect, a love that is not quite as holistic as it should be. Elsewise, there would be no reason to include all 15.

And when we look at this passage holistically, and in context, we can see that what is being described is Jesus, and the calling that we have been given by and through Him for the sake of the world.

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Read 1 Corinthians 13. 4-7

Compare the natural definitions and examples of love that you know with the supernatural examples of love that we are given through the Scriptures. A shadow is a degraded reproduction of an image, whereas a reflection is a more pristine reproduction of the same image. How can we better be a reflection rather than a shadow of the Love of God?

## Day 32

While it is true to say that the 15-fold definition of love given in verses 4-7 of chapter 13 is too detailed and too dense to truly unpack properly, there are a few aspects of that definition that are different enough from our natural conceptions that we must look at them more closely.

For example, “*Love does not behave gracelessly*”, or as the NIV puts it, “*it does not dishonor others.*”

It is a significant idea that the Greek words for grace and charm are the same word. There is a kind of Christianity that delights in being blunt and almost brutal in its bearing. There is strength in it, but no winsomeness, forgetting that it is the *lovingkindness* of God that leads to repentance. There is a graciousness in Christian love, proper *agape* love, that never forgets that courtesy, tact, and politeness are lovely things that will, and do, speak of the Love of God in volumes that are unreachable when blunt and brutal.

No one has ever been shouted into heaven, and God’s love is gentle and kind. We must remember that we are meant to be a reflection, rather than a shadow, of the one we claim as Lord. To present the Gospel in any other way than graciously and gently is to pour dishonor on the One whom we serve.

When read in light of the idea that we are reflections of God’s grace, mercy, and love (or at least that is what we strive for), the idea that love does not dishonor others should drive us to think about how we interact with those around us. Many of the aspects of love that are in Paul’s definition of true and proper love are focused on people rather than circumstances; but this aspect—not being dishonoring—puts that into sharp relief, causing us to perhaps rethink our attitude towards those we are called to love.

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Read Matthew 22. 37-39

How do we react when we feel slighted? Disregarded? Dishonored?

The natural reaction is to give as good as you get—to swing back as hard as you can. Yet, as Paul tells us, love does not dishonor others.

Pray that God will be so much in the forefront of our minds that we will turn the other cheek, and seek to recognize the *imago dei* in others, and honor them as ones made in the image of God.

Day 33

“Love does not insist upon its rights”

This is an aspect of love that Paul has touched on in other parts of his letter to the church in Corinth. For example, we can read the same sentiment in chapters 8 and 9. *“Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall”* (8. 13) and *“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”* (9. 19).

This part of the 15-fold definition of proper Love can maybe be translated thusly: “Love limits its freedoms to help others find theirs.” A phrase that we have heard many times in our study of this letter.

Love is not self-centered, and seeks to build up, encourage, and comfort others; it is like water—it will flow wherever it is allowed to flow. It will fill the container, as Tom Conlon puts it so nicely. And this, like everything else that is part of this definition of Love, is supernatural. We cannot djinn it up, we are not capable of this on our own—not sustainably, anyway. Even in our relationships with our families, we will revert to a self-centered kind of love that places conditions and caveats on all things when we feel cornered.

But when the love that drives us is truly the love given to us by God, and powered by the Spirit? Brother, that love is powerful and others-serving. It does not matter that I have a right to anything. If by giving up that right, giving up that tradition, giving up that preference I can better reflect the Love of God and draw others to Him, I will do it.

To display that kind of love is to reflect Jesus so brightly that others cannot help but to see it and be drawn closer to Him.

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Read 1 Corinthians 9. 19-23

Is there something that I hold onto so tightly that it diminishes the shine on Jesus' love for others? Something, some tradition, or preference, or right that I can voluntarily let go of that would allow Jesus to shine more brightly off of me?

Take a moment to prayerfully consider that question, and ask God to give you the will to let it go.

## Day 34

*“Love can endure anything”*

Next week we will journey into Holy Week, the week before Easter, where we take the time to walk alongside Jesus as he walked towards the cross. And we are reminded of this section of Paul’s definition of love as we do so.

It is possible that Paul means that love can cover anything—we say that all the time, “Love covers a multitude of sins.” And that’s not entirely wrong, although, perhaps, misleading. We mean that love will never drag into the cold light of day the faults and mistakes of others. Love would much rather set about quietly mending those fences than publically displaying and rebuking their state.

But more likely it means that love can bear any insult, any injury, and disappointment that it receives in the service of our Lord. It describes the very heart of Jesus himself. As it says in the hymn, *What Grace, O Lord, and Beauty Shone*:

*Thy foes did hate, despise, revile,  
Thy friends unfaithful prove;  
Unwearied in forgiveness still,  
Thy heart could only love!*

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Read Matthew 18. 21-22

Likely we’ve heard that Peter, when he asked Jesus how often he should forgive threw out a number that seemed preposterously high to him, and Jesus replied with an even higher number of times; illustrating that love is patient with people, and never gives up hope, forgiving for as long as forever—or longer. Whatever the figurative meaning in the numbers, we know that it is not prescriptive—you are not absolved of the responsibility to forgive on the 78th occurrence.

Is the love that we hold for the people of the world long-suffering? Do we have the patience called for in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians?

Ask God for a love that reflects Him like a mirror rather than a shadow.

Day 35

In the Christian calendar, today is known as Holy Monday. It's the first day of Holy Week, the week leading up to Jesus' death on the cross, and ultimately, His resurrection from the grave in holy triumph.

1 Corinthians chapter 13, in its description and definition of true and proper, Spirit given and infused love, helps us to better see how and why Jesus was motivated to make that journey, a journey that was punctuated and permeated with trial and sorrow, alongside joy and triumph.

Over this last week of our devotional, we will continue to look at the 13th chapter of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, highlighting the love described there, and place it into the context of Holy Week. So, we must look at this aspect of Holy Love: *"Love rejoices with the truth."*

On Holy Monday, tradition, and the Bible, tell us that Jesus entered into the Temple and threw out the moneylenders and those seeking to take advantage of the poor. In light of the Sermon on the Mount, we know that Jesus has a special affinity for the poor and vulnerable, as does God. And while Jesus did express righteous anger, He was acting in Truth as he flipped tables in the outer courts.

There is no likelihood that Jesus took pleasure in His actions, excepting to say that it was truthful, and done in love for all of mankind.

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Read Matthew 5

There are times when we do not wish the truth to prevail, and more times it is the last thing that we hope to hear. The truth can be painful at times, but it is always right. Christian love has no wish to veil the truth; it has nothing to conceal, and so is glad when the truth prevails.

Take a moment to prepare your heart for this week. Pray that God will bring to mind the Truth as we journey through this important week in the Christian calendar. Even if that truth makes us feel awkward or uncomfortable.

Day 36

“Love is patient”

We often think of patience in relation to situations. We wait patiently at the garage when our car is being fitted with new tires, we wait patiently as the chef makes our meal in the restaurant, etc. But the wording and nuance of the word “patient” has more to do with patience with people, rather than things.

As Jesus talked to the Jewish leaders on that Tuesday, we note that while His words were confrontational, He did not lose patience with those with whom He spoke. His demeanor and tone were patient and truthful, laying out the sins of the leadership of Israel plainly, but with love.

And later on, as Jesus talked to His disciples, he remained patient, re-explaining things that He had already told them countless times before. The Disciples did not get it—they likely still expected a political and military solution to their problems; and yet, Jesus was patient and longsuffering with them.

I don’t know about you, but G.K. Chesterton’s image of the patient God who delights in holy monotony is inspiring.

“Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.”

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**Read Matthew 24**

The patience exhibited by Jesus toward His disciples is the same patience that He graces upon us, and gives us as a gift of pure and holy love through the Spirit that lives in us.

Reflect today: Do I have a patience with others that is congruent with our calling and the Spirit inside me? Do I allow God’s patience to flow through me when I deal with others, or do I become exasperated with others, thereby casting a cloud over my reflection of Jesus?

## Day 37

*“Love does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received”*

Attention language and grammar nerds! This is our moment.

The word translated “store up” (*longizeshtai*) is an accountant’s word. It’s the word used entering into a ledger an item so that it will not be forgotten. But love does the opposite.

As humans, we too often do enter items into the ledger so that things will not be forgotten. For things like your child’s first word, or the moment you saw your spouse for the first time at your wedding—please enter those into the ledger; they must not be forgotten. But, obviously, Paul is not talking about the lovely and good things. He’s talking about wrongs and slights, whether real or perceived.

There’s a writer that talked about a tribe of folks in the jungle where, “the natives spend much of their time in fighting and feasting, it is customary for each man to keep some reminders of his hatred... to keep alive the memory of their wrongs...”

There is great benefit in learning how to forget, and indeed, Christian love has learned that great lesson of forgetting. Christian love, pure and holy love given to us by God through the Spirit, is a forgetful love in that it refuses to enter the bad into the ledger.

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Read [Matthew 26. 1-16](#)

Through the benefit of hindsight, we might look upon this as an item that ought to go in the ledger of slights and wrongs. After several years of sitting at Jesus’ feet, Judas is still capable, and willing, to betray Jesus for something as simple as money. A lot of money (in the day) to be sure, but just money. You wonder if Judas had actually listened at all in the years he was with Jesus. But there’s no indication that Jesus did as we would do—hold Judas’ betrayal against him.

Pull out your metaphorical ledger. How many entries do you find there? Are we working through the Spirit to keep the ledger free of entries?

Pray that God will give you the supernatural love that will make it possible to wipe those items clean off.

Day 38

“Love is completely trusting”

This characteristic of the love defined in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians has a two-fold aspect. *In relation to God*, it means that love takes God at His word, and can read every promise that says “whosoever,” and say “that means me!” And *in relation to our fellow man*, it means that love always believes the best in people.

It is often true that we make people into who we believe them to be. If we believe a person a liar, we never seem to hear the truth escape their lips, regardless of the veracity of the actual words. Like Chicken Little or the Boy who cried Wolf!, we set their words against the rubric of what we think of them, and always find them wanting.

In addition, if we then treat them as untrustworthy, they may, in fact, become untrustworthy. ‘Why bother with the truth and goodness,’ they’ll say, ‘if I’m never to be believed?’ But if we believe them trustworthy, they may become trustworthy, regardless of their natural inclination.

Today is Maundy Thursday, the day we commemorate the Last Supper, and Jesus’ time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. You’ll remember that during this time of prayer, Jesus asked several times to be spared the pain and agony and humiliation that His death would bring upon Him.

And yet, Jesus ultimately trusted the Father, even though that trust was painful and humiliating to Himself.

Love, even against the odds, is completely trusting.

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**Read Matthew 26. 17-46**

Compare the completely trusting nature of Jesus’ love for us and the Father against the shadow of love that we too often shower on those around us?

Is our love completely trusting, or do confer on others an ersatz love, shaded with mistrust, guarding ourselves against an inevitable betrayal?

## Day 39

*“Love never flies into a temper”*

The real and proper meaning of this aspect of Paul’s definition of love, is that Christian love never becomes exasperated with people. Exasperation is always a sign of defeat. When we lose our tempers, we lose everything. The person who can master their temper, can master anything.

It is Good Friday. A day of contradictions, perhaps, but ultimately a day upon which the history and future of the universe revolves.

As Jesus was being beaten and spit upon, mocked and ridiculed, hanged on a cross and stabbed in the side; He never lost His temper and said, “Right. Enough of this. I’m the Son of God, I don’t have to put up with this.”

When the Satan tempted Jesus in the desert preceding Jesus’ ministry on Earth, he pointed out that Jesus was all powerful, and could do anything that He liked. Now, he might have been the devil, but he wasn’t wrong. Jesus could do anything that He liked, and therefore, could have put a stop to His own humiliation and death. A little slip of the temper, and everything would have been different.

But He didn’t. His God-driven love was at the forefront of His being; and as a result, He died a criminal’s death—humiliating, brutal, painful. And it was driven by love for humanity, past, present, and future.

Love. Never. Flies. Into. A. Temper.

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Read Matthew 27. 11-61

Today as we read, do not sanitize the text. Do not skip the uncomfortable parts. Don’t remove yourself from the narrative. Let it wash over you. Let it move you. Imagine yourself there—in Pilate’s court, on the road up to Golgotha, at the foot of the cross. Marvel at Jesus’ serenity and resolve to trust the Father and keep His temper.

Pray that God will speak to you of His great love for you.

Day 40

Black Saturday.

A day of grief and despair for the disciples, certainly. They, despite hearing Jesus tell them time and again that He would return after 3 days, didn't ever quite twig to its truth.

With the benefit of time, we know the outcome of the events of Holy Week. We know that the prophecies were fulfilled, that Jesus' death was the fulfillment of God's covenant with mankind, and that a bridge of restoration and reconciliation was built because of these events. And this brings us to our last official day of Lent.

"Love never ceases to hope."

At its center, hope is love writ large on the future; resting in the promises that God has made to us and for us, believing in things we cannot yet see.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul says this: *And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.* (Romans 5.5)

As silly or uncomfortable as we may be made to feel for exercising hope in the face of grief and despair—hope does not put us to shame. It has been given to us through the Holy Spirit, and is full and present when we love a holy love.

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Read Matthew 27. 57-66, Lamentations 3. 25, Psalm 71. 14

Today sit for a time in silence. Turn off all distractions—put your phone on silent, turn off the TV, find a quiet space.

Sit in silence, but not without hope. Lean into the hope of the nations, lean into the hope that comes with pure and holy love.

Hope.

Day 41

Easter Sunday!

He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!