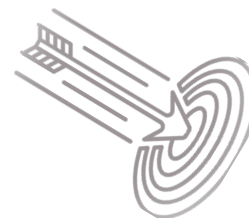


DAY 9

LOVE FIRST / INTENTIONAL GROWTH [IG]



PONDER

"We love each other because he loved us first."

-1 John 4:19 [NLT]

Write down God's thoughts to you from the verse above.

PLUNGE

Most people get emotionally hurt not out on the streets but inside their own homes. And inner wounds tend to stick. They travel through time. A child who has been hurt at home will most likely hurt those in his own household down the road. This is because we are inclined to give what we receive. If we receive respect, we'll be more apt to give respect back. If we receive kindness, we will most likely give kindness back. The opposite is also true and that is why families can end up hurting each other so deeply.

It's not like people are intentionally looking to ruin their lives, but things happen... Mom and dad start arguing about money and how to raise the children. Siblings get jealous of each other and get mean. Kids lie and rebel against their parents. Parents get irritated with their children and react with indignation. It's as if love gets put in prison and discord is released to wreak havoc.

NOBODY IS PERFECT

The first step to repair broken relationships at home is to realize that families are made up of imperfect people full of faults and flaws. You may not see the kinks on the first years of marriage, parenting efforts, or growing like a child, but soon enough these imperfections will rise up and assault the expression of love. Imperfections are bound to show up. So you must decide if you will live to advance frustration by censuring defects or promote affection by celebrating assets. Whatever you reinforce will establish the culture of your family. A culture of hospitality or a culture of hostility.

THE LOVE FIRST PRINCIPLE

In second place, you must yield your heart completely to the principle embedded in 1 John 4:19, where God chose to *love you first* despite your defects. He did not wait for you to love Him. He took the first step and gave you kindness when you were unkind. He gave you compassion when you were combative. He gave you mercy when you deserved punishment.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

-Romans 5:8 [CSB]

His gentleness softened your hardened heart and led you to a total change of behavior.

"Do you not know that God's kindness

is meant to lead you to repentance?"

–Romans 2:2 [RSV]

If God would have given you the same belligerent attitude you gave Him, your heart would have never turned. You would have never recovered and been forever separated from Him. But God's persistent kindness demolished the rebellion in your heart and brought you to Himself with chords of love.

"I drew them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them as those who ease the yoke on their neck, and I bent down and fed them."

–Hosea 11:4 [MEV]

Once you turn to Him in repentance, He moves beyond your skin and inaugurates your heart with His love.

"God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

–Romans 5:8 [CSB]

God literally comes to live inside of you and with Him the fullness of His love. He won you over with kindness not harshness and grafted you into His family.

WE CAN GIVE OTHERS WHAT WE RECEIVED FROM HIM

The Bible says God is love. God does not produce love, He does not point us to love, He is love. So in order to give love, we must receive it first from God, for He is the only source of it. Had He not lavished His love over through the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, there would be no place on planet earth where love could be found. We would all be in darkness and bound to our ugly selves. But when God

takes the first step to love us, we are able to do what we couldn't do before: Love others. Yet even better, love others first.

To live by the *love first* principle means we don't wait for others to love us, but we take the initiative to love them first, even when they don't deserve to be loved. If we only love others when they are treating us well, we're not truly loving them with God's love, for God loved us when we were not so loving to Him.

'But what if my father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, nephew, niece, etc. is not loving me but demeaning me, belittling me, disrespecting me, ignoring me, using me, discrediting me?' The answer is simple but savagely potent against evil:

Love them first.

Resist the temptation to get offended and sulk in self-pity. Don't wait till they come to apologize to you. This leaves a gap that soon gets filled in with negative thoughts about each other. Just love them back and win back their hearts like God won yours. Don't wait for them to do it first. Dismantle darkness and break the power of dissension by loving them first, period. Give back a loving remark, a kind word, a patient demeanor, a humble gaze, a sacrificial act, a faithful prayer, a hopeful vision, an encouraging note, a calmed and truthful spirit.

DON'T JUST SAY IT...

The first love principle goes beyond saying '*I love you*,' which has become a routine phrase people use on Valentine's day or a tag term at the end of a casual good-bye. Maybe even a slick way to get something you want from someone else. Saying '*I love you*' should be accompanied by the behavior that reflects who God is, because God and love are equal.

When in question as to how to live out the *love first* principle, review

the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, which is actually a description of God Himself.

"Love [God] is patient and kind. Love [God] is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love [God] never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."

-1 Corinthians 13:1-7 [NLT]

Loving this way will absolutely corrode the foundations of stubborn demonic strongholds and liberate the family from the chains of generational dysfunction.

Caution. The love first principle does not mean you throw away discipline and correcting when children are rude and disrespectful.

"A refusal to correct is a refusal to love;
love your children by disciplining them."

-Proverbs 13:24 [MSG]

Discipline is an expression of your love but should never be administered with rage, degrading words, or physical abuse.

"Let everything you do be done in love."

-1 Corinthians 16:14 [EHV]

EASIER SAID THAN DONE

It is so much easier though to pay back evil for evil, to put people in their place when they are out of line. This is why the world is in such disrepair. No one wants to hold back and make room for love when

tension rises. It takes a humble soul that yields to the power of God in the heat of the moment; a heart that has learned to crucify the flesh daily in the altar of prayer, relinquishing control to allow the Holy Spirit to take over.

To strengthen your ability to love others first in your household, practice these simple steps consistently:

- **Sustain a daily walk with Jesus.** Separated from Him you can do nothing. The fruit of love needs time to grow and get strong. You will need it in full bloom when tempted to react in the flesh against your loved ones.
- **Pause and take a moment to think about God's love for you.** When you feel your blood is boiling, cool it off by pouring a bucket of fresh living water over your soul. Wash yourself with the truth that God loved you first when you did not deserve it.
- **Pledge to practice 'love first' principle.** Simply trust God and do it. Then watch and see what happens. Remember that Jesus is your shield not you. Let Him take the hits and extinguish the fire coming against you. What comes out of you will control what grows in your family tree and what will feed your future generations.

PLAN

It is easier to love others when your focus is on their favorable qualities. Be intentional to complete the exercises below and begin to strengthen your motivation to love first.

- Identify three positive traits in each member of your family. Write them down and include why these attributes are important to you.

Spouse: _____
Child 1: _____
Child 2: _____
Child 3: _____
Child 4: _____
Child 5: _____

Why are these traits important?

Spouse: _____
Child 1: _____
Child 2: _____
Child 3: _____
Child 4: _____
Child 5: _____

- Based on the list above, think of tangible ways you can consistently express more appreciation for each member of you family.

- Prayerfully ponder three good reasons why you believe God has placed you together as a family. Keep a hold of God's vision and adjust your love posture to help this vision happen.

PRAYER

Lord, help me take the first step in loving those in my family who are

not so loving to me, and use that to create a new unity in my home. Help me not be overcome by hatred and disappointment when those within my family offend me in word or action. In those moments remind me of the great love you gave me when I did not deserve it. Overtake my flesh and overrun me with your Spirit so I can plant the seed of your love in the field of their hearts. Use me to eradicate the dysfunction of generations before me and lead a charge of freedom that promotes love in my family, including those not yet born. In Jesus name, amen!