

JANUARY One Another

More than fifty times in the New Testament we find the phrase *one another or each other*, telling us what God wants us to do for one another. The purpose of the church revolves around what we are to do for each other. In this lesson we will discover what the Bible says about **loving one another**.

More than anything else, **loving one another** reveals whether or not we are truly Christians. It's neither the church we attend nor the doctrines we believe, but how we show our love for one another. How does Jesus make this clear in John 13:35?

When Jesus made this statement, He gave the world the right to judge us by our love. In this lesson we will use the word LOVE as an acrostic to reveal **four** requirements for **loving one another** as the Bible teaches.

Listen to people

Few things reveal our love for people like really listening to them. Listening is becoming a lost art because it requires tremendous concentration. Most people speak about 120 words a minute, but we listen, or think, three times faster than that. Therefore, as we listen to someone speak, our minds have a lot of time to wander. Most problems in marriage, parenting, and other relationships are listening problems. That's why James 1:19b gives us what command?

Loving one another by listening begins in the home. One man who was having real problems with his son went to a counselor. He said to the

counselor, “I just don’t understand my son. He won’t listen to me.” The counselor said, “I thought you got to understand people by listening to them, not by talking to them.” Parents, more than anything else your kids need to know you really listen to them. Put down the newspaper, turn off the TV, and listen. One of the most common teenage complaints about parents is, “They don’t understand me.” Why? Parents don’t listen. Listening to your kids is the major way to avoid violating what command in Colossians 3:21?

The word translated *fathers* (PATĒR, pot-air’) can also be translated “parents” (as in Heb. 11:23). Parents, few things frustrate children like feeling Mom and Dad don’t really listen to them. The best time to listen is during a sit-down meal. Studies have revealed if families have a sit-down meal at least four times a week, the kids are three times less likely to get involved in drugs, premarital sex, and many other problem behaviors.

Men, one of the five basic needs of a woman is conversation, which is mostly listening. In a list of the five basic needs of a woman, marriage counselor Dr. Willard F. Harley, Jr. ranks conversation second. Conversation is more about listening than talking. Men, listen to what your wife feels and means, not just what she says. Sometimes a woman just needs someone who will lovingly listen to her express her feelings, hurts, and fears—without criticism or correction.

Never is it more important to listen than when there is conflict in a relationship. We all have the natural urge to defend, justify, or rationalize our behavior. We don’t even like to entertain the thought of being wrong. However, what does Proverbs 12:15 tell us?

Don’t be a *fool*! Some of the best advice you will ever receive will come from listening to your spouse or children.

Loving one another requires we listen to people and ...

Offer assistance

Everyone needs practical help. This also begins at home. **Men**, offer to help cook, wash dishes, clean the house, etc. Ask your wife what you can do around your home that would most show your love for her. **Wives**, offer to help your husband work on the car, play golf with him, go fishing with him, etc. Offer to help your children with their homework, or assist them in some other way. **Love is a verb—something you do, not just something you say.** In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul writes that he and his associates loved the Thessalonian believers. They loved them so much they were happy not only to share the Gospel with them, but what else as well?

Sharing our lives is lovingly giving our time to assist others. We can show our love for others by offering childcare. Senior adults, there are young couples in your church who would love for you to keep their kids so they could go out on a date.

On the other hand, some senior adults may need someone to clean their yards, repair something, help put up Christmas lights, etc.

Offering assistance is one way we obey what command in James 1:22?

Loving one another requires we **listen to people, offer assistance, and....**

Value people

We do this by expressing appreciation for them. Appreciation is shown in the form of praise, which is one of the most powerful forces in any relationship. There are at least **two** things we should value in people.

1. Value their loyalty. Some people have stuck with you through thick and thin—you can always count on them. Paul writes that he thanks God

every time he thinks of the Philippian believers (Phil. 1:3). According to Philippians 1:5, why was he so thankful for them?

Some of you have marriage partners who have stuck with you through a lot of junk. Maybe it was a mid-life crisis, an affair, a financial disaster, a health problem, etc. Maybe you're often in a bad mood and hard to live with at times. I know some people who have been in a bad mood for over 20 years, and that makes them hard to love.

2. Value their efforts. Don't take people's efforts for granted, regardless of the results. This is critically important for people with children or grandchildren. Don't forget to show appreciation for their efforts, regardless of how well they play a game or how good their grades are.

Too often we think things must be perfect or successful to be appreciated. So, we give "pokes" instead of "strokes." However, **loving one another** means we practice what truth in Proverbs 25:11?

The point of this verse shows the immense value of skillfully spoken words. We should be skilled at giving compliments for efforts made. This practice will pay valuable dividends in all our relationships.

Loving one another requires we listen to people, offer assistance, value people, and ...

Emulate Jesus

The word "emulate" means to be like, or imitate. Not only does God give us commands about **loving one another**, but He also gives us a marvelous example. Nothing helps us understand something like an example. When Jesus gives His disciples a *new commandment*, telling them to *love one another*, what example does He give them in John 13:34c?

To obey Jesus' *new commandment*, we must **emulate** His love by giving of ourselves as He did. Therefore, to *love one another* as the Bible commands, all we have to do is look at the example of Jesus. Furthermore, the great love chapter (1 Cor. 13) is a word picture of Jesus. One of the most obvious characteristics of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13:7a. What is it?

That's what Jesus did when He died on the cross. He bore our sins on the cross to protect us from the consequences of our sins and from living a life without purpose.

As Jesus went to the cross for us, we should lovingly go "to bat" for people who are objects of gossip or slander. One of the most important ways we can show our love for one another is to protect people's reputations. Therefore, we should never participate in gossip. You may be thinking, "Tommy, when are you going to quit writing against gossip?" When you stop doing it, I will stop writing about it.

One of the most frequently and harshly condemned sins in the Bible is gossip because it hurts more believers and more churches than any other kind of sin. Ephesians 4:29b tells us we are only to speak what kind of words?

This means we are not to say anything that hurts or slanders. When we corrupt someone's reputation by gossiping, we are not emulating Jesus. Rather, we are emulating the devil because the Greek word translated "devil" (DIABOLOS, de-ab'-o-los) means "slanderer." It's easy to talk about the faults, mistakes, and weaknesses of others. However, what does 1 Peter 4:8b command?

This doesn't mean love ignores or tries to hide sin. It means love is like a shock absorber that cushions and smoothes out the bumps and irritations in our relationships with other people. Love enables us to overlook hurts

or wrongs done to us, and to forgive. What does 1 Corinthians 13:5d tell us about love?

The word translated *keeps*, or “thinketh,” (LOGIZOMAI, log-id'-zomy) means to keep count. Therefore, love does not calculate the evil or wrong done to it. That’s why Jesus was willing to die on the cross for our sins.

Loving one another requires we ...

**L-isten to people,
O-ffer assistance,
V-alue people, and
E-mulate Jesus.**

You can’t love like Jesus Christ if He is not in your heart as Savior and Lord.

FEBRUARY Being United with One Another

In lesson one we began our study of the *one another* and *each other* phrases in the New Testament by looking at the most important—*love one another*. Now, we are going to see what God has to say about **being united with one another**.

One Sunday a pastor was presenting a children’s sermon about how God wants all of us to be one. A little girl interrupted him and said, “Hey Pastor, I don’t want to be one; I want to be four.” The little girl meant it in a different way, but many adult Christians don’t want to be one in the fellowship of their churches. It’s much easier for us to be in our own little cliques that are not really unified with the rest of the church.

God wants us to be **united with one another** in our homes and in our churches. However, disunity is our “default setting.” The source of all disunity is our fallen, selfish nature. James asks: *What causes fights and quarrels among you?* (Jas. 4:1a). How does he answer that question in James 4:1b–2a?

To be **united with one another**, we must do **two** things.

Be unifiers of the faith

The key verse in this lesson is 1 Corinthians 1:10, in which Paul exhorts the believers at Corinth: ... *that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought*.

The phrase *that all of you agree* is translated literally in the King James Version: that you “all speak the same thing.” Nothing is more confusing to children and new or prospective church members than hearing supposedly mature Christians give conflicting views about the Bible, salvation, baptism, etc. Nothing causes more conflict and division in a church than differing views on the basic teachings of the Bible.

Some newlyweds make the huge mistake of saying, “I will go to my church each Sunday, and you can go to yours. When we have children, we will let them take turns going with each of us to our different churches, and when they get old enough, we will let them make up their own minds.” Under those circumstances, do you know what decision most kids make when they grow up? They decide not to go to church at all because they are confused by conflicting teachings about the Gospel. In the last phrase of Matthew 19:5, what does Jesus say should happen when a man and woman marry?

If you as a couple are not *one* in your Christian faith, your kids will probably be turned off completely toward Christianity. Therefore, if you cannot agree about your faith, don’t get married. It will be a source of conflict for the rest of your married life and be devastating to your children. **Being united with one another** requires we be **unifiers of the faith** and ...

Be unifiers of the fellowship

The Bible teaches there should *be no divisions among* believers in Christ, and we should be *perfectly united in mind and thought* (1 Cor. 1:10). The word translated *divisions* (SCHISMA, skis-mah) means to split or tear. It is the word from which we get our word “schism,” which means “a split or division in an organized group.”

A schism often occurs when we take up offenses for someone else. Suppose a family member or a friend is in a disagreement or conflict with someone. We then take up the offense and try to get everyone on our side, while the other person does the same. These actions only increase the disagreement or division. How is the principle of not taking sides expressed in Proverbs 17:9a?

When we cover an *offense*, we don't go around talking about the *offense* and thereby encouraging people to take sides. The more people who know about an *offense*, the more serious it becomes. Many small disagreements or hurts have split families, and even churches, because an *offense* was not covered. The result of not covering an *offense* is found in Proverbs 17:9b. What is it?

This means it is a sin to take up an *offense* and repeat it to other people, thus causing more disunity and conflict. Therefore, we should not take up someone's offense at church, school, work, or any other place. If there is a problem or an injustice, we should go through the proper channels, or procedures, to resolve it. We should never gossip about it or try to get people to choose sides.

Here are **three** great ways we can **be unifiers of the fellowship**:

1. Say "no" to gossip. Nothing destroys the unity of a church like gossip. Gossip is talking about people behind their backs in a negative way that is not intended to help or protect. The Bible teaches gossip is a horrible sin. For more than twenty-five years, the per capita attendance at our church has been one of the largest in the state of Oklahoma. Most of those years we have been number one. Do you know why? We haven't had a church split, or big church fight, because we don't allow gossip in our church. More than once I have told the people who attend our church, "If you are a gossip and don't want to stop, please leave and don't come back." The reason we should say "no" to gossip is Proverbs 26:20. What is it?

Nothing causes divisions and quarrels in a church like *gossip*. Just **say "no" to gossip!** Don't even listen to it because that only encourages gossiping.

2. Support church leaders. One of the best ways to **be unifiers of the fellowship** is to follow church leaders. The only reasons church leaders should not be followed are if they are guilty of teaching false doctrine,

having a moral failure, or being incompetent. That's why we find what command in Hebrews 13:17a?

Pastors are also called overseers (Acts 20:28 & 1 Pet. 5:2), which means they are to oversee everything that goes on in the church. They are also responsible to oversee the spiritual health of the flock by preaching and teaching the Word of God. Pastors should take this responsibility very seriously, and so should church members. This is because of what fact found in Hebrews 13:17b?

This means all church leaders, all pastors, *must give an account* of their leadership before God. One day, I will stand before the Lord and give an *account* of how I have led my church, both by word and deed. Being a pastor or teacher in a church is a solemn responsibility because the spiritual condition of a church or Bible class is at stake. That's why what truth found in James 3:1b should always be on the mind of a pastor or teacher?

3. Start the unity process. This means we should be proactive and take the first step. There is one reason people are unwilling to take the first step, and that is pride. It is *pride* that *breeds quarrels*, or contention, in the first place (Prov. 13:10a), and it is *pride* that prevents unity from being restored. To **start the unity process**, we must first let go of our *pride*. Then, we must obey what command in Ephesians 4:3?

So, if you have a problem or a complaint about something or someone in your church, what do you do? If it is a problem with a person, go directly to that person. Don't start complaining to your friends and gossiping. However, don't go to that person in a spirit of bitterness or with the intention to condemn or correct. Rather than doing that, we should obey what command in Ephesians 4:15a?

When we obey that command, we open the channels of communication in a spirit that is conducive to reestablishing unity. When we speak *the truth in love*, even if we can't agree with the other person, we can agree to disagree. In my experience, most conflicts in a church, or anywhere else, stem from miscommunication or misunderstanding. The only way to resolve the problem is to communicate in Christian love. This means when there is disunity in any of our relationships, we must obey what command in Romans 12:18?

In other words, God says if we are not *at peace* with someone, it should not be our fault.

If we have a complaint about something at church, we should call the person or pastor responsible for that area. We should not confront them at a worship service or Bible study. Instead, we should call the church office and set up an appointment. A church service is not the time or place to voice a complaint to anyone about anything. When we have a complaint, what principle does 1 Corinthians 14:40 give us to follow?

Jesus prayed that we as believers would *be one* as He and the Father *are one*. He also prayed that believers *be brought to complete unity* as a witness to the world that He is the Son of God (Jn 17:22–23).

As a member or attendee of your church, would you commit to **be a unifier of the faith and a unifier of the fellowship**? If so, please fill out the commitment card on page 18.

BELIEVER BUILDING COMMITMENT

As a member of , I commit to do the following:

1. Say “no” to gossip to protect the unity of my church.
2. Support my church leaders.

3. Start the unity process by being proactive, taking the first step, to do my part in trying to live at peace with everyone.

Signed

Date

MARCH Being Patient with One Another

I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is everyone who has received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is going to heaven to live for all eternity. The bad news is we are going to live together with all believers for eternity. Therefore, we must learn to be **patient with one another**.

A little boy was sitting on the front steps of his home. His face was cradled in his hands, and he looked very upset. His father came home and asked him what was wrong. The sad son looked up and said, “Well, just between us, Dad, I’m having trouble getting along with that wife of yours.” We all have people in our lives with whom we have trouble getting along; thus, we need to be **patient with one another**. That’s why we have what command in Ephesians 4:2b–c?

That’s a command—not a suggestion. To obey it, we must do **three** things ...

Cut people some slack

We are commanded to *be patient* with one another. The word translated *patient*, or “longsuffering,” means “longtempered” or “taking a long time to boil.” This Greek word always means to have patience with people, not things or situations. There is a Greek word that means patience toward things or circumstances; it is usually translated *perseveres* (Jas. 1:12).

We often refer to lack of patience as having a “short fuse.” In other words, we get upset with people quickly. When we are *patient*, we have a long fuse, so we **cut people some slack**. Ephesians 4:2 gives us **three** ways we can cut others some slack.

1. Be humble (Eph. 4:2a). The Greek word literally means “lowliness of mind,” which is the opposite of being high-minded and arrogant. In other words, we should have modest opinions of ourselves. So, we must

deal with our pride, which causes us to think we are always right and everyone else is wrong. Being *humble* is listed first in Ephesians 4:2 because it is the most important virtue required to **cut people some slack**. That's also why we have what command in 1 Peter 5:5b?

Basically, this verse tells us not to be know-it-alls or to act holier-than-thou. If we are *humble*, we put the desires, needs, and opinions of others ahead of our own.

2. Be gentle (Eph. 4:2a). Humility always produces gentleness, or meekness. The word translated **gentle** (PRAIOTĒS, prah-o-tace) means “power under control” and refers to a domesticated animal, such as a horse, that still has its strength but is under control. A gentle, or meek, person is very well-mannered. Have you ever heard someone say, “He is a real gentleman”? That means he is respectful, courteous, and considerate, not harsh, self-assertive, or rude.

Being *gentle* requires we understand we are all different; we are each unique, or one of a kind. Even people in the same family are different. My wife Virginia is different from me, and our three kids are all very different from us. We like different kinds of music and foods. We have different hobbies and like different kinds of clothes. If we are not *gentle*, our differences will create conflict in our relationships.

Being patient requires being *humble* and *gentle*. Simply put, it is being like Jesus, who made what statement in Matthew 11:29b?

3. Be forbearing (Eph. 4:2b). This means *bearing with one another*. The word translated *bearing*, or “forbearing,” (ANECHŌ, an-ek'-o) means “to bear with” or “endure.” This is the active part of patience because the word *bearing*, or “forbearing,” is a verb, which means it is something we do. The word is also present tense, which means continuous action—something we are to do everyday. If we are forbearing, we will obey what command in Colossians 3:13a–b?

Bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:2b) also means we put up with annoying traits in other people; we make allowances for their differences and faults. This presupposes that some people, even people we love, will at times be burdens rather than blessings. No matter who you love, he or she will sometimes be a burden you have to bear. None of us are perfect, and we all have weird personality traits that must be overlooked. If you are forbearing, you will not let people irritate you. If you are not forbearing, you are a fool. Why, according to Proverbs 12:16?

When someone annoys us, it is only natural to dislike or resent that person. But we need to remember that most of the time crude and rude people are people who have been hurt. There's a saying: "Hurt people hurt people." We never know a person's past or hurts. When people's words or actions upset us, we should not be judgmental. This is because of what truth found in the last sentence of 1 Samuel 16:7b?

When people "rub you the wrong way," remember only God knows their hearts and hurts. Therefore, be **humble, gentle, and forbearing**.

Being patient with one another requires **you cut people some slack** and ...

Contemplate God's patience with you.

God has been very patient with us all. Patience puts up with many things. Before becoming a Christian, the apostle Paul was a zealous Pharisee, determined to stamp out Christianity. By holding the coats of the men who stoned the first Christian martyr, Stephen, to death, Paul consented to this evil act. He also had Christians arrested and put in prison. If I were God, I would have zapped him with a bolt of lightning. But as Paul journeyed to Damascus to arrest more Christians, the Lord spoke to him and changed him. Paul became the greatest of all the apostles. Later, Paul wrote he was *shown mercy* even though he was *the worst*, or "chief," *of sinners*. How does Paul explain why in 1 Timothy 1:16c?

When someone is really annoying you, remember God puts up with a lot in you. If you want God to continue being patient with you, remember what truth Jesus spoke in Luke 6:38c?

That means if you want God to continue being patient with you, you must be patient with others. Be generous with patience toward others, and God will give you the same *measure* of patience. We need all of God's patience we can get! Lack of patience is just a sign of immaturity and foolishness. How does Proverbs 14:29 verify this?

The Hebrew word translated *displays*, or “exalteth,” means “to lift up for show.” This means if you don't have patience, you just show people how foolish you are.

Being patient with one another requires you **cut people some slack, contemplate God's patience with you, and ...**

Concentrate on the steps to patience

If you want to become more patient with people, here are **three** things you should do:

1. Prepare a list of people who irritate you. Look carefully at the list to see if there is a common denominator. Is there a consistent personality trait that irritates you? Is it arrogant people, scatterbrained people, pushy people, people who talk too much, etc.? To increase our patience, we must isolate the characteristics in people who irritate us. Because our hearts are *deceitful* (Jer. 17:9), we need to pray what prayer found in Psalm 26:2?

2. Pray for each person on the list every day for a week. We always need to pray in God's will, and the best way to do that is to pray verses in the Bible. A great prayer to pray for people who annoy you is 3 John 2a.

In the space below, personalize this verse by inserting the name of a person who irritates you:

This is a wonderful, powerful prayer. I hope you will pray this prayer for me if you find something in my writing that irritates or offends you. So, pray for each person on your list by name that they may *enjoy good health* and everything will *go well* with them.

3. Petition God to change your attitude toward them. Nothing can change your attitude toward a person like praying for them. Prayer may not change the person, but it will certainly change your attitude toward him or her. As I said, the only sure way to pray in the will of God is to pray the Word of God. A great prayer to pray for yourself is Psalm 139:24. Write it below:

Over the years, I have discovered my prayers usually don't change other people, but they do change me.

Being patient with one another requires that you cut people some slack, contemplate God's patience with you, and concentrate on the steps to patience.

APRIL Being Kind to One Another

In 1969 country singer Glen Campbell sang the hit song “Try a Little Kindness.” As Christians, we are to do more than “**try** a little kindness” because of what command in Ephesians 4:32?

The verb translated *be* is present tense, which means continuous action. Therefore, we are to be *kind* to one another every day.

The word translated *kind* (CHRĒSTOS, krase-tos') means easy, good, pleasant, or gracious. The same Greek word is translated *easy* when Jesus said: “*For my yoke is easy*” (Mt 11:30a). What does 1 Corinthians 13:4b tell us about love?

Being kind is love in action. The only way we can obey the second greatest commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22:39) is by being kind. To be kind to one another, we must be at least **three** things:

Be concerned

We show our concern by asking questions. Smart people ask questions. Have you ever heard someone say, “Better to be thought of as a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt”? That’s ridiculous! Smart people ask questions because we learn by asking questions. The more questions we ask, the more we learn. When we don’t understand something in a class, Bible study, etc., we should ask questions and we will learn.

Showing concern begins by asking questions because that’s how we learn about other people. It’s also how we get great advice. How does Proverbs 20:5 express this principle?

A person's problems, fears, hurts, etc., are like *deep waters*, but a wise person *draws them out*. We do this by asking questions that bring them to the surface.

Because good people don't want to be burdens, they don't whine to everyone about their problems. We can often tell by looking at someone's face if they are hurting in some way. In the 1960's and 70's, a song entitled "The Tracks of My Tears" was a hit several times, being recorded by different artists. The song describes a man who is the "life of the party" because he is always laughing, but inside he is "blue." However, the song says if we take a "good look" at his face, we can "trace the tracks" of his tears.

When you see the "tracks" of someone's tears, go over to them and just be cordial. You can say something like, "It's so nice to see you." Then, talk for a few minutes about things such as sports, the weather, etc., to break the ice. After the person is comfortable with you, ask, "Is everything ok? You look like something may be wrong. Is there anything I can do?" The person may not want to share anything right then. So say, "That's ok. Would it be ok if I call you in a couple of days to check on you?" That's kindness! To be kind, we must remember what fact found in Proverbs 12:25?

There are no better words spoken than words of concern. Just our kindness in being interested will help cheer them up. We should always be on the look out for the "tracks" of tears.

Being kind to one another requires we **be concerned** and ...

Be nice

Be nice everywhere. We are living in a world where being nice and well-mannered are becoming more and more rare. However, in this crude, rude world, Christians are to shine the light of kindness by being nice. It

actually pays to be kind by being nice. This is because of what principle found in Proverbs 11:17?

I heard the story of a man who went into a cafe and told the waitress, “I want a cup of coffee and a donut, and step on it.” The waitress returned with a cup of coffee and a flat donut. The customer asked, “What happened to my donut?” The waitress replied, “You told me to step on it.” That’s a wonderful example of the truth that a *cruel man brings trouble on himself*.

Another way to **be nice** is by never raising our voices. The first sign we are losing control is when we begin to yell. People often don’t even realize they are yelling. If we say, “You don’t have to yell,” they will loudly say, “I’M NOT YELLING!” When we lose control of the volume of our voices, we quickly lose control of the words we speak and can say some very hurtful things. What is the fourth thing Ephesians 4:31 commands us to get rid of?

This means yelling, or a vehement expression of feelings. In our home it has always been forbidden for anyone to do two things: yell or gossip. When we begin to yell, we start down a slippery slope toward hurting someone. That’s why we need to remember what truth in Proverbs 12:18?

Reckless, or rash, *words* can cut deeply like a sword and hurt worse than any physical blow. Examples of sharp, *reckless words* sometimes spoken to a child are “Can’t you do anything right?” or “You’ll never amount to anything.” The pain caused by such statements can last a lifetime. Furthermore, sharp words can ruin any relationship. Kind people don’t use *reckless*, or sharp, *words*.

Being kind to one another requires that we **be concerned, be nice**, and ...

Be determined

Being kind doesn't come naturally because we are all flawed, selfish, and sinful. We must **be determined** to be kind. We must have this determination because the Bible commands us to *be kind* (Eph. 4:32a). Being **determined** to *be kind* requires us to focus on the results of kindness. What does the last phrase of Romans 2:4 tell us? (The word translated "goodness" [CHRĒSTOS, krase-tos'] in the KJV, is translated *kind* in Eph. 4:32.)

God's kindness leads us to repentance. God knows the way to change us is through *kindness*. It is amazing how a little *kindness* can change people. If there is a difficult person in your life, just try being kind and you will be amazed at the improvement you see.

Kindness is always part of the wardrobe of properly dressed Christians. Would you go out in public wearing nothing but your underwear? That would be horrifying, and that's why most people at some time in their lives dream about being in public and realizing they have on nothing but their underwear.

In God's sight it is just as horrifying for us not to be dressed in *kindness*. According to Colossians 3:12b, as God's people we are to put on, or clothe, ourselves with what five basic things?

Kindness is part of the basic clothing of a Christian. If we are not kind, we are not properly dressed in God's sight.

To be kind to one another, you must **be determined** to be kind in **two** places:

1. Be kind in private. There is no place where *kindness* will pay greater dividends than at home. It's amazing how some people can be so kind in public but be so mean at home. However, "believer building" begins in our homes. That's why God gives what warning to those who don't work to support their families (1 Timothy 5:8b)?

One thing we should provide for our families is a kind environment in our homes. Some Christians are *worse than an unbeliever* because there is more kindness in some unbelievers' homes than in their "Christian" homes. This is such a disgrace to God!

How does Proverbs 31:26 (KJV, NKJV, NASB, or ESV) describe the model wife and mother?

This means *kindness* is always part of her instructions or comments. Of course, this should also be true of both husbands and fathers. It is what the New Testament calls *speaking the truth in love* (Eph. 4:15).

Not only do we need to **be determined to be kind in private**, but also to ...

2. Be kind in public. This means when a lane is closed on the highway, we shouldn't pass everyone and then try to cut in front of them just before the lane ends. I must admit that often I'm not kind enough to let people who do that cut in front of me. Also, at the grocery store, if you are in line with a full basket of groceries and someone behind you has only one or two items, let them check out before you. Another example: be kind by leaving a generous tip when you have been courteously and promptly served in a restaurant. We need to **be determined** to sow seeds of *kindness* generously. Why, according to what principle found in 2 Corinthians 9:6?

Being kind to one another requires that we **be concerned, be nice, and be determined**.

MAY **Being Kind to One Another**

In 1969 country singer Glen Campbell sang the hit song “Try a Little Kindness.” As Christians, we are to do more than “**try** a little kindness” because of what command in Ephesians 4:32?

The verb translated *be* is present tense, which means continuous action. Therefore, we are to be *kind* to one another every day.

The word translated *kind* (CHRĒSTOS, krase-tos') means easy, good, pleasant, or gracious. The same Greek word is translated *easy* when Jesus said: “*For my yoke is easy*” (Mt 11:30a). What does 1 Corinthians 13:4b tell us about love?

Being kind is love in action. The only way we can obey the second greatest commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22:39) is by being kind. To be kind to one another, we must be at least **three** things:

Be concerned

We show our concern by asking questions. Smart people ask questions. Have you ever heard someone say, “Better to be thought of as a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt”? That’s ridiculous! Smart people ask questions because we learn by asking questions. The more questions we ask, the more we learn. When we don’t understand something in a class, Bible study, etc., we should ask questions and we will learn.

Showing concern begins by asking questions because that’s how we learn about other people. It’s also how we get great advice. How does Proverbs 20:5 express this principle?

A person's problems, fears, hurts, etc., are like *deep waters*, but a wise person *draws them out*. We do this by asking questions that bring them to the surface.

Because good people don't want to be burdens, they don't whine to everyone about their problems. We can often tell by looking at someone's face if they are hurting in some way. In the 1960's and 70's, a song entitled "The Tracks of My Tears" was a hit several times, being recorded by different artists. The song describes a man who is the "life of the party" because he is always laughing, but inside he is "blue." However, the song says if we take a "good look" at his face, we can "trace the tracks" of his tears.

When you see the "tracks" of someone's tears, go over to them and just be cordial. You can say something like, "It's so nice to see you." Then, talk for a few minutes about things such as sports, the weather, etc., to break the ice. After the person is comfortable with you, ask, "Is everything ok? You look like something may be wrong. Is there anything I can do?" The person may not want to share anything right then. So say, "That's ok. Would it be ok if I call you in a couple of days to check on you?" That's kindness! To be kind, we must remember what fact found in Proverbs 12:25?

There are no better words spoken than words of concern. Just our kindness in being interested will help cheer them up. We should always be on the look out for the "tracks" of tears.

Being kind to one another requires we **be concerned** and ...

Be nice

Be nice everywhere. We are living in a world where being nice and well-mannered are becoming more and more rare. However, in this crude, rude world, Christians are to shine the light of kindness by being nice. It

actually pays to be kind by being nice. This is because of what principle found in Proverbs 11:17?

I heard the story of a man who went into a cafe and told the waitress, “I want a cup of coffee and a donut, and step on it.” The waitress returned with a cup of coffee and a flat donut. The customer asked, “What happened to my donut?” The waitress replied, “You told me to step on it.” That’s a wonderful example of the truth that a *cruel man brings trouble on himself*.

Another way to **be nice** is by never raising our voices. The first sign we are losing control is when we begin to yell. People often don’t even realize they are yelling. If we say, “You don’t have to yell,” they will loudly say, “I’M NOT YELLING!” When we lose control of the volume of our voices, we quickly lose control of the words we speak and can say some very hurtful things. What is the fourth thing Ephesians 4:31 commands us to get rid of?

This means yelling, or a vehement expression of feelings. In our home it has always been forbidden for anyone to do two things: yell or gossip. When we begin to yell, we start down a slippery slope toward hurting someone. That’s why we need to remember what truth in Proverbs 12:18?

Reckless, or rash, *words* can cut deeply like a sword and hurt worse than any physical blow. Examples of sharp, *reckless words* sometimes spoken to a child are “Can’t you do anything right?” or “You’ll never amount to anything.” The pain caused by such statements can last a lifetime. Furthermore, sharp words can ruin any relationship. Kind people don’t use *reckless*, or sharp, *words*.

Being kind to one another requires that we **be concerned, be nice**, and ...

Be determined

Being kind doesn't come naturally because we are all flawed, selfish, and sinful. We must **be determined** to be kind. We must have this determination because the Bible commands us to *be kind* (Eph. 4:32a). Being **determined** to *be kind* requires us to focus on the results of kindness. What does the last phrase of Romans 2:4 tell us? (The word translated "goodness" [CHRĒSTOS, krase-tos'] in the KJV, is translated *kind* in Eph. 4:32.)

God's kindness leads us to repentance. God knows the way to change us is through *kindness*. It is amazing how a little *kindness* can change people. If there is a difficult person in your life, just try being kind and you will be amazed at the improvement you see.

Kindness is always part of the wardrobe of properly dressed Christians. Would you go out in public wearing nothing but your underwear? That would be horrifying, and that's why most people at some time in their lives dream about being in public and realizing they have on nothing but their underwear.

In God's sight it is just as horrifying for us not to be dressed in *kindness*. According to Colossians 3:12b, as God's people we are to put on, or clothe, ourselves with what five basic things?

Kindness is part of the basic clothing of a Christian. If we are not kind, we are not properly dressed in God's sight.

To be kind to one another, you must **be determined** to be kind in **two** places:

1. Be kind in private. There is no place where *kindness* will pay greater dividends than at home. It's amazing how some people can be so kind in public but be so mean at home. However, "believer building" begins in our homes. That's why God gives what warning to those who don't work to support their families (1 Timothy 5:8b)?

One thing we should provide for our families is a kind environment in our homes. Some Christians are *worse than an unbeliever* because there is more kindness in some unbelievers' homes than in their "Christian" homes. This is such a disgrace to God!

How does Proverbs 31:26 (KJV, NKJV, NASB, or ESV) describe the model wife and mother?

This means *kindness* is always part of her instructions or comments. Of course, this should also be true of both husbands and fathers. It is what the New Testament calls *speaking the truth in love* (Eph. 4:15).

Not only do we need to **be determined to be kind in private**, but also to ...

2. Be kind in public. This means when a lane is closed on the highway, we shouldn't pass everyone and then try to cut in front of them just before the lane ends. I must admit that often I'm not kind enough to let people who do that cut in front of me. Also, at the grocery store, if you are in line with a full basket of groceries and someone behind you has only one or two items, let them check out before you. Another example: be kind by leaving a generous tip when you have been courteously and promptly served in a restaurant. We need to **be determined** to sow seeds of *kindness* generously. Why, according to what principle found in 2 Corinthians 9:6?

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JUNE

Forgiving One Another

As mentioned previously, the phrases *one another* and *each other* occur more than fifty times in the New Testament to tell us what God wants us to do for *one another*. In this lesson we are going to talk about **forgiving one another**. Our text is Colossians 3:13b–c. Personalize this verse and write it below:

All of us have been deeply hurt by someone. If we don't know what to do when people hurt us, the memory of the hurt darkens our past, clouds the present, and shackles us in the future. To discover how we can forgive one another, we must do **three** things, beginning with ...

Investigate the command

The command is: *forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you* (Col. 3:13b–c). That is a command, not a suggestion. We must **investigate** and analyze this command to be sure we understand what it means. The word translated *forgive* (CHARIZOMAI, kar-id'-zo-my) literally means to pardon or forgive unconditionally.

When we *forgive* as the Bible teaches, we graciously let go of our *grievances*. The word translated *forgive*, or “forgiving,” is a present tense verb. Therefore, we must daily and continually forgive those who offend or hurt us.

Have you noticed that people who irritate or hurt us often do so more than once? Peter must have had a person like that in his life. That's why he asks Jesus what question in Matthew 18:21b?

Jewish rabbis taught that a person had to forgive only three times, but Peter doubles that number and adds one for good measure. He obviously thinks seven is a very generous number. However, Jesus tells Peter he must forgive how many times (Matthew 18:22)?

Though the NIV reads *seventy-seven*, almost all other translations translate it “seventy times seven” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, NLT), which is also in the margin of the NIV translation. The Greek can be translated either way, but I think “seventy times seven” is best. Jesus is saying we don’t keep track, or count, because there should be no limit to the number of times we forgive someone. What does 1 Corinthians 13:5d tell us about love?

The phrase translated *keeps no record*, or “thinketh” (LOGIZOMAI, log-id’-zo-my), is a bookkeeping term that means “to account or calculate,” as in putting figures in a ledger or on a spreadsheet.

It is actually impossible for us to forgive and forget because while we can forgive the act, we can’t forget the hurt. As someone has said, “Love does not forgive and forget; it remembers and still forgives.” Love lets go of the hurt.

To learn how to forgive one another, we must first **investigate the command** and then ...

Meditate on the consequences

We should indeed **meditate on the consequences** of not obeying this command. A command that does not involve consequences is just a suggestion. When we disobey God’s command to forgive, there are always at least **three** consequences:

1. It terminates God’s forgiveness. How does Jesus warn us of this fact in Matthew 6:15?

When we refuse to *forgive*, we are in essence refusing God’s forgiveness of our future sins. Being unwilling to forgive those who wrong us prevents God from being able to forgive us. We cannot receive from God what we

refuse to give to others. Our willingness to forgive proves we are genuinely sorry for our own sins and we appreciate God's forgiveness.

2. It germinates other sins. The word "germinates" means "to start developing or growing." When we refuse to forgive, other sins start growing in our hearts. In Ephesians 4:31 we are commanded to get rid of the sins that start to germinate when we refuse to forgive. List those sins below:

All the sins listed above can be traced to a refusal to forgive. When we refuse to forgive, we plant the seeds of other horrible sins.

3. It escalates our judgment. Refusing to be merciful and forgiving makes our judgment before God much more serious. Why, according to James 2:13a?

We receive God's forgiveness because of His *mercy*. We must extend His forgiveness and *mercy* to others or suffer the consequences at the judgment. Whether or not we are merciful reveals how we see ourselves before God. When we humbly recognize our need for God's *mercy*, we will show *mercy* to others by forgiving them. When we are not motivated to forgive, we need to remember what eternal principle in Galatians 6:7?

There are very serious consequences for refusing to forgive.

Learning to forgive one another requires that we **investigate the command, meditate on the consequences**, and ...

Replicate God's forgiveness

We are to *forgive as the Lord forgave us in Christ* (Col. 3:13 & Eph. 4:32b). How does God forgive us *in Christ*?

1. God forgives eternally. He doesn't *forgive* like the man who said, "I have buried the hatchet but marked the spot." What does Romans 4:8 tell us about our confessed sin?

The word translated *count* (LOGIZOMAI), or “impute,” is the same word found in 1 Corinthians 13:5, where we are told love *keeps no record of wrongs*. When we confess and forsake our sins, God doesn’t *count* our sins against us, which means He *keeps no record* of our sins and will never bring them up again. God convicts, or reminds, us of our sins for only one reason: to cause us to repent and become usable in His kingdom.

If we have sins we have confessed and forsaken that keep coming to our minds, it is not God harassing us. It’s Satan trying to make us feel guilty and unusable in God’s kingdom. When that happens, we need to say to Satan what Jesus said to Peter. After Jesus begins to tell His disciples about how He will die, Peter rebukes Jesus and tells Him he will never let Him die. This would have circumvented God’s plan of salvation. Therefore, what does Jesus say to Peter in Matthew 16:23b?

Jesus isn’t calling Peter “Satan,” but instead, Jesus is telling Peter he is playing the role of Satan because Satan always tries to circumvent God’s plan. Satan does that by trying to make us feel guilty and useless because of confessed past sins. When he does this, we must say, “*Get behind me, Satan!*” God has eternally forgiven me of that sin.” Not only does God forgive **eternally**, but also ...

2. God forgives totally. God never does anything partially or halfway, including forgiveness of our sin. What does God say about our confessed sin in Hebrews 8:12b?

This means when we confess our sin, God wipes out every heavenly memory and every trace, making it, as far as His eternal records are concerned, as if our sin never happened. That’s great news because we don’t have to feel guilty about something that never happened. In legal terms, this means our sins have been expunged—they have been erased, or removed, completely.

This is wonderful news because when our sins are forgiven, there is no longer any barrier in our relationship with God. Therefore, we can take advantage of what fantastic promise in Hebrews 4:16?

3. God forgives freely. Years ago, someone who had been deeply hurt asked me, “Do I have to forgive someone who does not ask for forgiveness? I don’t think I do because the Bible says God doesn’t forgive us unless we ask.” As a young pastor, I did not have a very good answer, but I have learned a lot since then.

There is one basic problem with that question. The Bible does teach that God doesn’t forgive us unless we ask. However, the Bible also says we are just wasting our time when we ask His forgiveness if we refuse to forgive everyone who sins against us. What does 1 Corinthians 2:12 tell us?

Anyone who refuses to forgive doesn’t understand the forgiveness *God has freely given us*. Our forgiveness is free, but it is not cheap because it cost God His only Son. Not only did Jesus die on the cross so we can have our sins forgiven, but so we can forgive those who sin against us.

God commands us to be like Him and forgive **eternally, totally, and freely**. Who do you need to forgive? A spouse, child, father, mother, sibling, church member, employer, or employee? Whoever it is, you know what God wants you to do. You may say, “You don’t know how they have hurt me!” No, I don’t know how much they have hurt you, but I know you can forgive them if you are a Christian. This is because of what spiritual truth in Philippians 2:13?

This means God will give you the desire and power to *act according to his good purpose* of forgiving those who hurt you.

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AUGUST
Encouraging One Another
When You Are Discouraged (Psalm 11:1–7)

Have you been discouraged—at least to some degree—in the past year? The past month? This week? Are you discouraged right now? On a regular basis, we all become discouraged because we all have problems. Life is really made up of three stages that continually repeat themselves. We are either in a problem, coming out of a problem, or going into a problem.

The Evil One has two very effective weapons in his spiritual arsenal: fear and discouragement. If he can't use fear to stop you from fulfilling God's purpose for your life, he will attack with discouragement. The Lord is quite aware of the Evil One's tactics. Therefore, several times in the Bible, as in the last phrase of Deuteronomy 31:8, what does God say through Moses after He tells us not to be afraid?

Right now you may *be discouraged*, or “dismayed,” and in desperate need of an encouraging word. If not, you will be. Therefore, let’s look at Psalm 11 and find **three** things to remember **when you are discouraged**.

First, remember God’s protection (11:1–4a)

This wonderful psalm begins: *In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me: “Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart”* (Psa. 11:1–2). When David writes this psalm, his problem is so serious his advisers suggest he *flee like a bird*. Even his friends think his problem is hopeless.

We, too, sometimes have problems that seem so hopeless we want to pack our bags and run. But most of the time, that’s not possible. Instead of looking for a place to run, we should look for a place of refuge. That’s why David’s friends ask: *“When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* (11:3). When it feels like your world is *being destroyed*, or falling apart, what does David say you should remember in Psalm 11:4a?

God is in His *holy temple*—not in the White House, the state house, or the court house. Because He is in heaven, He is not affected by what happens here on earth. Not only is the Lord in His *temple*, but also *the Lord is on his heavenly throne*—His place of power and authority. We forget this sometimes when we become discouraged.

Has God ever spoken to you during prayer, saying something like, “I know things are bad on earth, but things are bad here in heaven, too. I just can’t help people like I used to. Why, just last month I had to mortgage the Pearly Gates. This month it looks like I will have to lay off at least 50,000 angels.” Have you ever heard God say something like that? Certainly not, but you may act like, or feel like, that is the case. When we are discouraged, we must remember the Lord’s protection. How does Proverbs 2:8b describe His protection?

This doesn't mean God always delivers us out of our trials or problems, but He will protect, or preserve, us in our problems so we can learn from them. Usually we pray, "Lord, help me out of this mess," when we should be praying, "Lord, what are you trying to teach me through this mess?"

Remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace? Did God keep them out of the fiery furnace? No! But how does Daniel 3:27b describe their condition after going through the furnace?

These three young men were keenly aware of God's protection. They trusted God enough to know if He didn't help them **out**, He would protect them **through** their trials and problems.

In the Bible God never promises us a problem-free life. If we never came to a point in life where we felt overwhelmed, we would never sense our need for God and be drawn to Him. In the midst of our discouragement, we need to remember what truth in James 4:8a?

When discouraged, **remember God's protection** and ...

Second, remember God's purpose (11:4b–5a)

God's purpose for allowing problems is: *He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The Lord examines the righteous* (11:4b–5a). Problems are a test. During our problems God observes us and *examines* us to see if our problems are fulfilling the purpose for which He allowed them. If we fail the exam, God will test us again and again until we pass.

One purpose for our problems is to teach us how to have compassion for others. Our heavenly Father is *the God of all comfort* (2 Cor. 1:3c). What is the purpose of His *comfort* according to 2 Corinthians 1:4?

My mother and father divorced when I was two years old. From growing up with a divorcee-mom, I have learned how much divorce hurts and that the hurt never goes away. My oldest daughter has had two heart surgeries, one at three months old and another at five years old. I have learned from those experiences how terrified you can be and how much it hurts to see your children suffer.

When I was 27 years old, I saw my loving mother, at age 53, die a horrible, agonizing death from tetanus, or “lock jaw.” This was all so unfair because she had made tremendous, loving sacrifices for me. I have learned how it feels to have a confused and hurting heart when life seems unfair. In times of deep depression, I have learned how lonely and helpless you can feel.

Through those times God has taught me to be more compassionate toward others who have similar experiences because I know, at least to some degree, how they feel. Through the most discouraging times of life, we must learn how to obey what command in Romans 12:15b?

Any good characteristics I have, few as they may be, were not acquired during the good times of life, but from the trials and crises of my life. Knowing this helps us better understand why God allows us to have problems. What does Deuteronomy 32:11 tell us God is like?

A mother eagle stirs her nest by flapping her wings to force the baby eaglet out so it can learn to fly. When the eaglet tries to fly

and fails, the mother eagle swoops down and catches it on her wings, or pinions (the outer rear edges of the wings containing the primary feathers). She then brings the eaglet back safely to the nest.

Our problems are often God's stirring of the "nest" to get us to step out in faith and trust Him more. Sometimes God, like the mother eagle, stirs our lives to move us a, or whatever. When we are discouraged, we must remember **God's protection** and **God's purpose**, but also ...

Third, remember God's promise (11:7)

In this life we will have problems, sometimes very serious ones.

Problems are just a natural part of life. How does 1 Peter 4:12 remind us of this fact?

Problems aren't *strange* or unusual; they are a regular part of life and of God's purpose. In the midst of our problems, we need to remember *the Lord is righteous, he loves justice* (Psa. 11:7a). God is *righteous*, which means He always does what is right. Because He loves *justice*, in the end everyone will receive justice. God knows life sometimes isn't fair, and that's why He created heaven and hell. Since God is *righteous* and *loves justice*, we have the promise that the *upright* (those who do what is right) *will see his face* (11:7b). This means we will be justly rewarded for faithfully enduring our problems.

Our *righteous* and just God has equipped us to deal with all our problems. He has done this by giving us a perfectly matched Bible promise for every problem we will ever have. What does Proverbs 18:10 say we can do when we face an overwhelming problem?

We *run to the name of the Lord* by running to His holy Word, which contains His perfect promises for each of our problems. So, when you are discouraged and feel like quitting your job, leaving your spouse, selling your kids, dropping out of school, or running away from your problems, don't! Stop and ask yourself, "Am I discouraged because I have

forgotten **God's protection, God's purpose, or God's promise?"**

SEPTEMBER Encouraging One Another

Satan's most effective weapon for defeating Christians is not some sin; it is discouragement. That's why God gives us what command in 1 Thessalonians 5:11?

The word translated *encourage*, or "comfort" (PARAKALEŌ, parah-kah-leh'-oh), means to come to one's side to invoke comfort, encouragement, or consolation. To obey this command, we must do at least **two** things ...

Comfort one another

In John 14:16 Jesus uses a form of the same Greek word translated *encourage*, or "comfort." In that verse what promise does Jesus make to His disciples?

Later, Jesus says the *Counselor*, or "Comforter," is *the Holy Spirit* (Jn 14:26). The Greek word Jesus used has a broad meaning, but its basic meaning is to "comfort." One of the most difficult times to know how to comfort someone is when he or she is grieving over the loss of a loved one. The best way to comfort a grieving person is simply to obey what command in Romans 12:15b?

This requires we do **three** things:

1. Avoid trying to be an “expert” on grief. Don’t try to explain why God let the situation happen. Never say, “I know exactly how you feel,” because you don’t. Every experience is different, and every person is emotionally different, at least to some degree. If they ask, “Why did God let this happen,” say, “I don’t know and I can’t imagine how you must hurt.” Keep your opinions to yourself. Proverbs 18:2a tells us a fool has no delight in gaining understanding. What does the last part of that verse say is a fool’s delight?

In his book, *The Last Thing We Talk About: Help and Hope for Those Who Grieve*, Joseph Bayly shares an enlightening experience. One of his children died, which is the most traumatic type of grief. He writes: “I was sitting tom by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God’s dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly; he said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except to wish he would go away. He finally did.”

“Another came and sat beside me. He didn’t talk. He didn’t ask leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour or more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, and left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.”

My favorite illustration of how to comfort a grieving person is the story of a little girl who came home from visiting a neighbor whose young daughter had recently died. “Why did you go?” questioned the father. “To comfort the mother,” replied the little girl. “What could you do to comfort her?” asked the father. “I climbed in her lap and cried with her,” said the child.

Grieving people don’t need theologians, philosophers, or “experts” on grief. They just need friends who come to grieve with them. So, **avoid trying to be an “expert” on grief.**

2. Affirm with a compassionate touch. If a hurting person breaks down and weeps, give him or her a reassuring touch of some kind. The skin is the largest organ of the body and contains millions of sensory cells and nerves. A compassionate touch assures them it's ok to grieve and cry. They need to grieve, as the title of one book reveals, "Don't Take My Grief Away from Me." Grief is part of the healing process, and a compassionate touch helps people grieve freely. When people are hurting and grieving, they need some sort of reassuring, loving touch that conveys a message of love and compassion.

This is why throughout the gospels we find Jesus touching people. For example, when Jesus healed two blind men, what do we read in Matthew 20:34a?

When He *touched* them, they instantly received their sight. But why did Jesus touch them? He could have just spoken the words, and they would have been healed. However, touching is a great way to express *compassion*! Mark tells us of a leper who falls on his knees before Jesus and begs for healing. When this happens, what does Jesus do, according to Mark 1:41a?

In the gospels we read about many instances of Jesus touching people because He knew the power of **a compassionate touch**.

To comfort a grieving person, **avoid trying to be an "expert" on grief, affirm with a compassionate touch, and ...**

3. Allow them to vent their feelings. When someone is grieving, they are not really looking for brilliant advice or words of infinite wisdom. They are looking for someone to listen compassionately as they vent their feelings.

More than anything, a grieving person needs to vent his or her hurt, frustration, and sometimes anger. He or she needs someone who will listen without criticism or correction. At this time it is critically important to obey what command in James 1:19b-c?

Hurting people need to **vent their feelings freely**. When people verbalize their feelings, they are better able to analyze them and evaluate them. If what they say sounds foolish to us, it probably will to them too, after they think about what they have said. Have you ever thought you had a really good idea, but when you expressed it to someone else, you realized it wasn't as good as you thought? That's why we need to let people express their feelings without correcting them. As a person verbalizes his or her thoughts and feelings, things usually take care of themselves.

To encourage one another, we must **comfort one another** and ...

Build up one another

At times all of us need to be built up both emotionally and spiritually because our fallen world continually tries to drag us down. So, God gives us what command in 1 Thessalonians 5:11b?

We are to build up each other emotionally and spiritually. The best place to do this is at church in Bible study and worship services. The church is the original support group. Many Christians get very little encouragement at church services because they go for selfish reasons. God tells us not to forsake *meeting together* (going to church), as some are doing (Heb. 10:25a–b). Instead, we are to attend church services for what purpose, according to Hebrews 10:25c?

There are at least **three** ways we can encourage and build up each other at church services and Bible study. It is as easy as ABC:

1. Arrive early. One of the best ways to encourage another person is to arrive early for Bible study or worship so we have time to talk to people. God has an unbelievable ability to arrange meetings, if we give Him the opportunity. What does Colossians 4:5b tell us?

A great way to obey this command is arrive early for and leave late from Bible study and worship services. If you habitually arrive late and leave early, you are saying, “I’m only interested in me.” An excellent way to encourage other believers is arrive early and let God take care of getting people there whom He wants you to encourage.

2. Be friendly. It is impossible to encourage others if you are unfriendly. Don’t sit in an empty section of pews or chairs. The best way to be friendly is to sit next to people and visit with them before and after the service. If you see a visitor sitting all alone, go sit by them and welcome them. One of the most important “one another’s” in the Bible is found in 2 Corinthians 13:12.

What does this verse tell us?

In biblical times, and in some cultures today, this was the common way to greet people warmly. The equivalent greeting in our culture is a warm handshake or “holy hug.”

Sitting by and visiting with the same people every Sunday is not being friendly; that’s having a clique. Being friendly means we try to make friends with new people at every opportunity.

To build up one another, **arrive early**, **be friendly**, and ...

3. Compliment appropriately. When you see people at church who do something that requires a lot of preparation, or you see people who are growing and improving in their spiritual lives, give them genuine compliments. To build up people, you must always be looking for something to compliment. It may be a new Bible study teacher, a new member, a youth, a young minister, etc. To build up others, remember what truth in Proverbs 15:23?

Meeting together for Bible study or worship isn't the only time we are to build up each other with encouragement. God continually sends across our paths people who need encouragement. That's why Hebrews 3:13a tells us how often we are to *encourage*, or "exhort," *one another*. According to this verse, what should be the frequency of our encouraging others?

Every day we should be looking for someone to encourage; they are there, if we are paying attention. Every day we should try to encourage at least one person with a phone call, a handwritten note, or a kind word.

On a regular basis, everyone needs a cheerleader—someone to encourage them. My best encourager is my wife Virginia. She knows when to blow up my balloon, as well as when to pop it! God wants us to encourage one another because it makes us like Him. What does the last phrase of 2 Corinthians 1:3 tell us about God?

The word translated *comfort* (PARAKLĒSIS, par-ok'-lay-sis) means God is the God of all consolation and encouragement. Therefore, to be like God by **encouraging one another**, we must **comfort one another** and **build up one another**. God wanted you to study this lesson because He wants you to be an encourager like He is. The ministry of encouragement should be a part of every believer's life.

OCTOBER **Bearing One Another's Burdens**

We all have burdens that are sometimes very heavy to bear. Some burdens are emotional, some physical, some relational, and some financial. Believers must bear all kinds of burdens. That's why Galatians 6:2a gives us what command?

The word translated *carry*, or “bear” (BASTAZŌ, bas-tod'-zo), conveys the idea of giving a helping hand to someone carrying a heavy load. **Bearing one another's burdens** includes doing **four** things ...

1. Help up (Gal. 6:1)

The command to *carry*, or “bear,” one another's burdens follows a verse describing what it means to bear other's burdens when they fall into sin. What does Galatians 6:1a tell us?

The word *caught*, or “overtaken” (PROLAMBANŌ, pro-lam-bon'-oh), doesn't refer to catching someone in the act of sinning. It is the idea of someone running from sin, but the sin is faster, so it overtakes the person. Therefore, this is someone who is trying to live the Christian life but lets his or her guard down and is overtaken by sin. None of us, no matter how

spiritual we may seem, are above being *caught*, or “overtaken,” by some sin. That’s why 1 Corinthians 10:12 gives us what warning?

Therefore, we must never secretly rejoice when a brother or sister is *caught* by some sin. We all run from some kind of sin every day because we are all targets of the Evil One. Sometimes a brother or sister lets his or her guard down and is overtaken by a sin. When that happens, we must remember what words of Jesus in Luke 6:31?

This means you should ask yourself, “How would I like to be treated if I were overtaken by some sin?” Then, treat the brother or sister overtaken by sin in the same way.

The word translated *restore* (KATARTIZŌ, kat-ar-tid'-zo) means to repair or mend (Gal. 6:1a). It refers to setting a broken bone or mending a fishing net. In my Greek class at seminary I was taught that to find the clear meaning of a verse, I must parse the verbs. “Parse” means to break down into its grammatical parts. So, let’s parse the verb translated *restore*. It is **imperative mood**, which means it is a command. It is **present tense**, which means continuous action and indicates the need for patience and perseverance in the process. Finally, it is **active voice**, meaning the subject, *you who are spiritual*, performs the action expressed in the verb. Therefore, we are to be active in restoring the fallen brother or sister and not just praying and sitting around waiting for God to do the restoration.

This action of restoration is not to be taken on by the weak Christian, or a novice in the faith, but by those *who are spiritual*. How do you know if you are *spiritual* and mature? How does Hebrews 5:14 answer that question?

Solid food, or “meat,” refers to deep Bible truths. The phrase *constant use*, or “by reason of use,” means a mature believer is very familiar with the Bible and knows how to apply it to life.

Mature believers are those who know how to use the Bible to *restore* someone who is overtaken by some sin. But, they are to *restore* them *gently*, or “in the spirit of meekness,” (Gal. 6:1). This means we are not to have a condescending attitude or a spirit of superiority. As we try to **help up** the person and get him or her back on track spiritually, we must obey what command in Ephesians 4:2a?

As we **help up** those who have fallen, we must remember the warning to mature believers: *But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted* (Gal. 6:1b). This could refer to falling into the same temptation as the one we are trying to help, or to being *tempted* to have spiritual pride or be harsh and judgmental. When dealing with a brother or sister overtaken in some sin, we should have the attitude Jesus has when He deals with the woman caught in the very act of adultery. When all her accusers leave, what does Jesus say to her in John 8:11b?

To bear one another’s burdens, we must **help up** and ...

2. Take up (Gal. 6:2)

The context of **bearing one another’s burdens** refers to spiritual burdens, such as the burden of guilt and shame because of some sin. However, it goes far beyond that. As already mentioned, the word *carry*, or “bear,” in Galatians 6:2 carries the idea of lending a helping hand with someone’s heavy load. Many of life’s burdens are not spiritual but still require a helping hand.

Often our burdens are emotional, such as stress, fear, anxiety, worry, or depression. Sometimes they are physical burdens, such as illness, overwork, or overwhelming problems. Therefore, instead of needing us to **help up**, sometimes people need us to **take up** some of the burden.

Carrying one another’s burdens applies especially to fellow believers, but it also extends to people who don’t like us and who may not be believers.

This principle permeates the New Testament (Mt 22:39) but is also found in the Old Testament. For example, in the laws about justice and mercy, what do we read in Exodus 23:5?

Bearing each other's burdens is the way we *fulfill the law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2b). What is *the law of Christ*? Paul explains in the previous chapter of Galatians: *The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself"* (5:14). Carrying each other's burdens is simply love in action and the fulfillment of Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Bearing one another's burdens means we **help up, take up**, and ...

3. Check up (Gal. 6:3–4)

This means we check our attitudes to see if we have a condescending spirit or an attitude of superiority as we bear someone's burden. God knows we will not be effective in carrying each other's burdens if we have too high an opinion of ourselves. When we have a superiority complex, we become intolerant of the failures and weaknesses of others.

We all need a regular attitude check-up. Otherwise, we will add to the burden of others by acting like we are better than they are. When we do that, we are being like the egotistical scribes, or lawyers, whom Jesus so harshly condemns. Even though they were experts, or scholars, on the Old Testament Law, Jesus says "woe" to them, which is a word of denunciation (Lk 11:46a). Why does He denounce them (Lk 11:46b–c)?

Don't be a scribe! Never be guilty of acting in such a way as to leave a hurting person more burdened than you found them. Be a lifter, not a loader.

Rather than being judgmental, we should **check up**, or examine, our own actions to see if there are any feelings of pride or superiority. Such feelings reveal a lack of love for our burdened brother or sister. That's a very serious sin. The Bible says I can have *the gift of prophecy*, understand *all*

mysteries and have all knowledge, and have the *faith to move mountains* (1 Cor. 13:2). However, what does that verse say about me if I can do all that and not have *love*?

Attaining all the *knowledge* and understanding in the Bible, as well as having the ability to explain spiritual *mysteries*, means *nothing* if we don't have *love*. Actually, the more we know, the more of a problem we can have with pride. That's because of what fact found in the last sentence of 1 Corinthians 8:1?

Bearing one another's burdens requires that we **help up, take up, check up**, and ...

4. Load up (Gal. 6:5)

This means we don't dump on other people the loads we should carry ourselves. There are times we need to **load up** and bear our own burdens. How does Galatians 6:5 express this truth?

This doesn't contradict Galatians 6:2: *carry each other's burdens* where the word translated burdens (BAROS, bar-os) refers to heavy, crushing loads that are more than one person can carry. The word translated *load* (PHORTION, for-tee'-on) in verse 5 refers to a backpack every foot soldier was to carry on his own. It denotes a light load one person can, and should, carry. It is the word Jesus used when He said, "*For my yoke is easy and my burden (PHORTION) is light*" (Mt 11:30).

Jesus would never overburden us. Carrying our *own load* means we are not to be freeloaders, or moochers, always asking people to help us with things we can take care of ourselves. Also, as Christians, we need to know we are not to carry the burdens of freeloaders. How does 2 Thessalonians 3:10b remind us of this?

This means we are not to help a person who refuses to carry his or her *own load*. Because Christians are known to be loving, generous, and kind, there are people who will take advantage of us. Therefore, the Bible teaches there are times we need to stand back and let other people take responsibility for themselves.

Also, there are times when we need to rely on the Lord, rather than a person. This is because sometimes God allows us to have a problem no one can help us carry but Him. In this situation we have a great opportunity to rejuvenate our prayer life. The psalmist writes he *waited patiently for the LORD* who heard his cry (Ps 40:1). Then, what does he write in Psalm 40:2?

Bearing one another's burdens requires we **help up, take up, check up, and load up**. The greatest example of carrying one another's burdens is when Jesus carried the burden of our sins to Calvary (Isa. 53:5). How does 1 Peter 3:18a declare this fact?

Christ lives through us when we continue His life by **bearing one another's burdens**.

NOVEMBER

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