



June 19 & 20: Expressing Love

Overview

Everyday life is filled with the challenges of relationships, kids, finances and job stress. Sometimes we may feel like giving up and quitting. But the Bible encourages us to never quit in the Christian life. As we continue our journey through *2 Corinthians*, we will learn how we can move beyond just surviving to really thriving!

Goals of the study guide:

- To see that each of us is called to express love in ways that positively reflect the love God has for us.
- To recognize that loving others really is about *others* and not only about us.
- To learn that faithfulness, thoughtfulness and joyfulness are all part of expressing love.

Key points:

- It takes a humble spirit to make yourself vulnerable enough to say that you love and need love in return.
- Loving God and loving other people means we don't want to do anything that could damage our testimony.
- A self-centered perspective on life does not leave a lot of room for loving others.



Take a second look ... Sermon Summary

Most of the time we envision Paul as a tough "troubleshooter." We see him as a person who boldly testified and confronted those who disagreed, but he was also a tender-hearted Christian who knew how to communicate affection.

He says in *2 Corinthians 6:12-13*, ¹²*We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.* ¹³*As a fair exchange ... open wide your hearts also.*

It takes a humble spirit to make yourself vulnerable like that, to say, "I'm loving you, and I need you to love me in return." But that's what Paul did. Let's learn from him by looking at how he expressed his love for them. Then we'll apply the principles to our love for others.

1. **Avoid those things which offend.**

2 Corinthians 6:3, *We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.*

Paul was concerned how other people would interpret his actions. Since he loved God and he loved people, he didn't want to do anything that could damage his testimony for Christ.

2. **Be faithful in times of adversity.**

In *2 Corinthians 6:4-5*, Paul lists nine different types of adversities that he endured for the sake of the gospel. The first three are general trials that come to all of us.

2 Corinthians 6:4, *...troubles, hardships and distresses.* They have to do with all that we experience. The word "distress" means "to narrow a place." We all have times when we feel shut in, suffocating from responsibilities and pressures.

The next three adversities are afflicted by others. *2 Corinthians 6:5*, *...beatings, imprisonments and riots...* Today you probably won't be beaten or imprisoned for being a Christian, but you may be ridiculed or isolated.

The last three are self-inflicted. *2 Corinthians 6:5*, *...hard work, sleepless nights and hunger.* Through all these adversities, Paul endured because he loved people.

3. **Be thoughtful of the needs of the other.**

One of the reasons there are so many breakdowns in relationships today is that we are a selfish people. This is the "me" generation. *2 Corinthians 6:6* contains three words that involve thoughtfulness and unselfishness:

- *Understanding*

We're not going to understand if we don't take the time to listen and think, unselfishly, about the feelings of others.

- *Patience*

If you're self-centered, you will be impatient. You'll retaliate, lash back and be defensive. But the unselfish person learns to be patient, because the goal is not self-defense, but harmony in the relationship.

- *Kindness*

Kindness is the opposite of severity. It is a quality that thinks far more of others than itself.

4. Be joyful regardless of the *circumstances*.

In 2 Corinthians 6:8-10, Paul mentions a series of paradoxes of life: ⁸through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and possessing everything.

Life is a series of ups and downs. Just about the the time you think everything is coming together, something bad happens. Life is simply a rollercoaster. And if your happiness is dictated by circumstances, you are going to be very difficult to live with.

5. Be vocal about your *affection*.

2 Corinthians 6:11-12, ¹¹We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. ¹²We are not withholding our affection from you...

Has God put any love in your heart? Find a way to express it and you'll find a new fulfillment in life.



Take it to the source ... Bible Study

Introductory question: What is the most outrageous way you have ever told or shown somebody that you love them? What was the response?

Opening thought:

Love can be expressed in all kinds of ways. Some of them are verbal, but many times we express love through our actions and attitudes. Use this opportunity to tell some outlandish, comical or romantic personal stories and get your group thinking about what it means to express love and the results that can come from that.

Read Romans 14:1-23.

1. Why is a judgmental and critical attitude so damaging to Christian relationships?
2. What are some things that might be considered disputable matters (verse 1) in our society?
3. What are some practical ways that you can cultivate a sensitivity to the consciences of others?
4. How would you define a "stumbling block"?
5. How can you avoid being pressured into certain actions that may become a stumbling block to you? How can you avoid being a stumbling block to others?

Key points:

- Love is about building relationships with people based on acceptance of who they are. If you are always finding their faults and looking for reasons not to love others, you will always find some excuse. But love is about removing obstacles to relationships, not finding new obstacles.
- Love means we are sensitive to others and how they see things. It means we are aware that there are more perspectives than just ours out there.
- A stumbling block is anything or anyone that causes someone to sin. The way we avoid stumbling blocks and avoid being a stumbling block is know the Bible and understand the difference between what are truly God's principles and what are merely rules or regulations that other people have come up with.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:4-5.

1. What is your initial reaction as you read the list of difficulties Paul had encountered?
2. Which of these can you most relate to? Why?
3. What situation in your life has been the hardest for you to endure? How did this affect your faith in God and your relationship with Him?
4. What are some things you can do to stay faithful in the midst of adversities? How can your small group help each other to stay faithful in difficult times?

Key points:

- The list of barriers Paul had to overcome as he ministered to the churches is pretty incredible. We will probably not face all that he had to, but we should have an attitude that says we are willing to endure hardships so that others may have a chance to hear the message of Jesus Christ.
- We stay strong in the midst of adversity by remembering the promises of God's Word and the fact that He is with us in every situation. As a small group, we can help remind each other of all that God has for each of us, even in the most difficult times.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:6-7.

1. Would you call yourself an understanding person? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the primary ways we learn to understand others?
3. Why is there a connection between selfishness and impatience? What can you do to learn that everything is not about you and to develop a patience for others and their circumstances?
4. When was the last time you showed somebody a random act of kindness? What did you do and how did they react?
5. Why is simple thoughtfulness such a positive way of displaying the life of Christ in our present society?

Key points:

- Selfishness and impatience are closely related because if we are self-centered, then we believe everything and everybody should revolve around us. Anything that doesn't fit into our agenda or schedule is cause for impatience and frustration. Without an understanding of the value of others, we will only alienate others and lose valuable relationships.
- Understanding others takes time and a willingness to get outside of ourselves and look at things from somebody else's perspective. It means that we realize that the world is bigger than just what we want or need.



Take it home ... Practical Applications

This week take some time to look back at the different ways Paul served others in 2 *Corinthians* 6:4-7.

- Reflect on ways that God has used you to serve others. Are there new opportunities to show love that God is setting before you now?
- Ask God for the insight and humility to become full of purity, understanding, patience, kindness, sincere love and an attitude of thoughtfulness toward anyone that God may bring into your life this week.

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All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

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