

Small Group Guide: Love is Not... (Part One)

Series: Love Never Fails

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:4b-5a

Speaker: Milissa Ewing

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: Share a time when you misdiagnosed a problem in your life (like the coffee story from the sermon). What was the real issue versus what you thought it was?

Sermon Summary

This message explores how the Corinthian church's behavioral problems were symptoms of a deeper issue: loveless self-seeking. Just as treating symptoms without addressing the root cause doesn't bring healing, we can't fix our relational and spiritual problems without addressing the lack of God's love at the center. Paul's description of what love is NOT reveals four key symptoms of self-seeking: envy, boasting, arrogance, and dishonoring others.

Key Scripture Review

Read together: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Focus verses: 1 Corinthians 13:4b-5a *"It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking..."*

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Diagnosis

1. The Diagnosis of Self-Seeking

- Milissa explained that all the problems in the Corinthian church stemmed from "loveless self-seeking." How does this diagnosis differ from how we typically view problems in our relationships or church community?

- Why is it important to address the root cause (lack of love) rather than just the symptoms (bad behavior)?

2. Cultural Definition vs. Biblical Definition of Love

- How does our culture define love? How does that differ from the biblical definition presented in this sermon?
- Read 1 John 3:16, 18. What does it mean that "love is not just words but actions and truth"?

Examining the Symptoms

3. Symptom One: Envy

- Who have you been envious of recently? What does that envy reveal about where you might be seeking fulfillment or validation?
- How does envy reveal "ego-centric insecurity"? Can you think of an example from your own life?

4. Symptom Two: Boasting

- What's the difference between healthy confidence and boasting? Where is the line?
- The sermon mentioned that boasting can come from both low self-esteem AND thinking too highly of ourselves. How can the same behavior have two different roots?

5. Symptom Three: Arrogance

- The sermon listed several ways arrogance shows up (harsh critique, snap judgments, "if I were the leader" comments, etc.). Which of these do you struggle with most?
- How does arrogance destroy community? Can you think of an example you've witnessed or experienced?
- What does it mean that we are all "equal before the cross"? How should this truth combat arrogance?

6. Symptom Four: Dishonoring Others (Rudeness)

- What behaviors do you find most rude or dishonoring? Why do those particular things bother you?
- How is rudeness a form of "loveless self-seeking"?
- In what areas of your life might you be dishonoring others without realizing it?

The Cure: Jesus' Love

7. Experiencing Jesus' Love

- Read the section where Milissa applies 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 to Jesus. How does it feel to hear those words directed at you personally from Jesus?
- The sermon says, "We are healed when we lift our eyes up—off ourselves, off others—and we gaze at Jesus looking down on us from the cross." What does this practically look like in daily life?

8. The Story of James, John, and Their Mother

- What was wrong with the mother's request for her sons to sit at Jesus' right and left hand?
- Jesus said, "You don't know what you're asking for" and "Not so with you." What was Jesus teaching about power and love in His kingdom?
- How does this story challenge our own ambitions and desires?

Key Takeaways

1. The real problem behind relational and spiritual issues is often loveless self-seeking, not just bad behavior.
2. Envy, boasting, arrogance, and rudeness are all symptoms of a heart turned inward rather than toward God and others.
3. True love, as demonstrated by Jesus, is laying down our lives—our power, privilege, preferences, and selfish desires—for others.
4. We can only love authentically when we first experience and remember Jesus' perfect love for us.
5. Healing comes from gazing at Jesus on the cross, where we see both our sin and His overwhelming love for us.

Practical Application

Personal Reflection (5-10 minutes of silence)

Take time to honestly examine your heart:

- Which symptom (envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness) do you struggle with most?
- Who in your life have you been self-seeking toward rather than loving?
- Where do you need to experience Jesus' love more deeply?

This Week's Challenge

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week:

Instead of Envy: When you notice yourself envying someone, stop and pray for that person, asking God to bless them even more. Journal about what your envy reveals about your own heart.

Instead of Boasting: Practice deflecting compliments by either giving credit to God or others, or by asking the other person a question about themselves (like Shaila did).

Instead of Arrogance: Identify one person you've judged harshly or looked down on. Pray for them daily and look for one way to honor or serve them this week.

Instead of Rudeness: Be intentionally considerate in one area where you tend to be rude (traffic, waiting in line, family interactions, etc.). Consider others' needs before your own.

Accountability

- Share with one other person in your group which challenge you're choosing and why.
- Exchange contact information and commit to checking in with each other mid-week.

Closing Prayer

Pray through the Prayer of Confession from the sermon:

- Confess specific ways you've shown envy, boasting, arrogance, and rude behavior
- Thank Jesus for the cross and His perfect love
- Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with God's love so you can become more loving

Pray for one another: Have each person share one specific way they want to grow in love this week, then pray for the person on your right.

For Further Study

- Read 1 Corinthians chapters 1-12 to understand the context of the "Love Chapter"
- Study other passages on love: John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-21; 1 John 4:7-21
- Reflect on how Jesus demonstrated each aspect of love in the Gospels

Leader Notes

- Be prepared to share your own struggles with these symptoms—vulnerability from the leader creates safety for others to be honest
- If the group gets stuck on cultural complaints about rudeness, gently redirect to personal application
- Emphasize that conviction is not condemnation—the Holy Spirit convicts to heal us, not shame us
- Celebrate any growth or breakthroughs group members share from previous weeks