

Hope Church South Haven September 14th, 2025

Non-negotiable value: RELATIONAL

1st Corinthians 13

Started a new series **Rooted Connections** – discovering what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

- **ROOTS** – Christ-centered worldview. Jesus needs to be my theory of everything.
- **TRUNK** – non-negotiable values.

A VALUE is a **standard or principle** considered important and worthy of pursuit. It shapes behavior and decisions and life priorities. Today we are exploring the 1st non-negotiable value: being RELATIONAL – **it describes the context for following Jesus**.

This past week has been an emotional one for me. There have been a lot of heavy things happening in the world.

- I think about what's going on **back home in South Africa**. A young anti-corruption lawyer was gunned down in his office. There was a sudden uptake in mass shootings – 10 people were killed in a small struggling neighborhood called Kraaifontein.

- There was so much happening in the USA. The senseless killings of **IRYNA ZARUTSKA** and **Charlie Kirk**. The **mass shooting** at that school in Colorado. Online reactions to all three of these.
- The conflict and humanitarian crises in **Gaza** and **Ukraine** and **Syria** and **Burkina Faso** and **South Sudan**.

Our world is broken. And hurting. And desperate. And angry.

Today, we live in what might be called an anger and assassination culture. Violence — whether verbal, digital, or physical — has become a first resort when facing disagreement. To disagree is no longer to enter a conversation; it is to declare war. We cancel, we condemn, we caricature, and too often, we kill.

Why? Because we are losing our humanity. Civilization is dimming. Civility is crashing. Humanity itself is waning and wanting. The world needs a Jesus-shaped humanity more than ever: one that does not strike back but turns the other cheek, one that does not curse enemies but prays for them, one that does not pick up the sword but carries the cross.

Without the restoration of our humanity, we truly should “be afraid — be very afraid.” ...we are mutating into something monstrous when we abandon the image of God in ourselves and in others.

LEONARD SWEET

The noise of our world is **deafening**:

- arguments on social media.
- nations at war.
- families divided at the dinner table.
- people carrying silent wounds of rejection and betrayal and loneliness.

LOVE has been **redefined** and **cheapened** or **rejected** altogether. We try to find love in things like SUCCESS and RELATIONSHIPS or the STUFF WE OWN. But the more we chase after these things, **the emptier we end up feeling**.

You can open your Bibles at **1ST CORINTHIANS 13**.

- **CORINTH** was a busy port city. Lots of **trade** and **money** and **entertainment**. People sometimes called it the “Las Vegas of the ancient world.” What happened in Corinth stayed in Corinth.
- The **CORINTHIAN CHURCH** was made up of people from all sorts of backgrounds — different races. Different social classes. Different religious traditions.
- It caused a lot of challenges:
 - ⇒ The **church was divided** — people were ARGUING about leadership and social status and even ethnicity.

- ⇒ There was moral confusion — **serious sins were tolerated**. Even things as terrible as incest.
- ⇒ Their worship gatherings were **chaotic** — people focused on themselves instead of Christ. The more 'spirit filled' and chaotic a gathering was, the better it was.
- ⇒ And all around them, the culture tried to pull them in. **Pagan festivals** and **emperor worship** and a society obsessed with money and status and sex made it tough to live faithfully.
- Paul had to remind this young church that following Jesus meant living differently, even when the **culture pressured them to compromise**.

Verses 1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

- Paul REMINDS the church that **all the spiritual gifts** — whether it's speaking in tongues and prophesy and having deep knowledge or even giving everything away in sacrifice — means nothing if its not done in love.

- He uses the word **AGAPE** – unconditional love. Without **AGAPE** love, those gifts are just noise.
- Paul CHALLENGES us that church ministry and our relationships and even our personal sacrifices must flow out of love.

Without love, everything else falls flat.

Verses 4-7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

- Think about what Paul is saying, and ask yourself: How do I treat people who see things differently than I do — in politics and beliefs and values? How do I act toward people from other races or cultures? Are my thoughts and feelings and actions towards them shaped by love?
- This is a good moment to be honest with yourself if you love like Paul challenges us too love.

⇒ **Love means being patient.** It means waiting on people without grumbling, even when you're frustrated. In a world filled with anger, patience shows up by choosing grace instead of retaliation.

⇒ Love means being kind. Not just being polite but **doing good for others** — even if they don't deserve it. Even if they never say thank you. Kindness REFUSES to **respond with coldness or cruelty or indifference.**

⇒ **Love doesn't envy or brag or act rude.** It's not about comparing and competing and trying to one-up somebody else. Instead of resenting what others have, love celebrates their blessings.

⇒ Love doesn't demand its own way. It's not easily triggered. It doesn't take offense easily. **It doesn't keep score. It doesn't hold grudges.** REAL LOVE FORGIVES — again and again — because that's exactly how God keeps forgiving us.

⇒ **Love doesn't ignore what's wrong.** It doesn't brush aside sin or evil. Instead, it stands with the truth. EVEN WHEN THAT'S HARD. Love celebrates what's good and right. Love **refuses** to step on others or take advantage when injustice happens.

⇒ And love is tough. It bears with people. It keeps believing the best. Love keeps hoping. **Love keeps enduring even when it feels impossible.** Love doesn't give up

because it trusts that God is still working. Still redeeming. Still healing. Still bringing His redemption to completion.

- That's the kind of love Paul is describing.
- And that's the kind of love Jesus calls us to live every single day.

Verses 8-12

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child...

...When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

- Love lasts longer than any spiritual gift because **love is who God is**. And God will hold the church together forever.
- Paul explains that spiritual maturity isn't about showing off your special gifts — it's about growing in love. It's like moving from looking at a blurry reflection in a mirror to finally seeing someone face to face.

- To GROW IN CHRIST means moving away from self-centeredness and **learning to see and love people the way God does**. That's the real mark of maturity.

Verse 13

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

- Paul makes it clear – faith and hope and love – will **last forever**.
- Love is the greatest gift. Love is the greatest strategy. Love is our highest calling.
- Love is the best context to follow Jesus in this messy broken world.

1ST CORINTHIANS 13 reminds us that relationships matter. That we need to love like

Jesus does. No matter how messy or beautiful or corrupt or broken this world is.

- It's a love that changes relationships, even in the middle of conflict and hatred.
- It's a love that **shows up with patience and kindness and forgiveness and hope**.
- It's a love that chooses love — even when the world chooses anger and division.

When the church loves like this, **it makes people stop and see Jesus in us**.

- LOVING LIKE JESUS is hard at the best of times. LOVING LIKE JESUS is really hard when **people are angry** or when there's **so much hate and division around us**.

- But if we follow Jesus, **loving others** isn't just something we can choose to do when it's easy.
- Being relational isn't just something we can **choose to do only when people treat us well**.
- IT'S WHO WE'RE CALLED TO BE — no matter how tough it gets. Even when we feel like pulling away.
- The **world doesn't need** more shouting or more anger or more division.
- What it really needs is followers of Jesus who make **loving others** — living a relational life — a non-negotiable part of who they are.

How do we embody **1ST CORINTHIANS 13** in the middle of this crazy world we're in? I want to remind you of Leonard Sweet's four E's that I shared in my email to you.

#1 Empathy.

- TRUTH MOMENT: I worry deeply if the **brokenness** and **pain** and **suffering** and **violence** in our world dont move your heart. If all you think about is **how it affects your comfort and your own safety and your financial security** - then something is off.

- You're missing something in your faith. The hurt around us should stir us. It should matter more to us than just what it means for me.
- We're called to feel what others are feeling. To go through **hard times with them**. To listen carefully before we jump in and try to fix things.
- I have learned that if I really want to embody empathy, **I need to really know myself**.

Self-awareness is, at its core, the ability to see ourselves clearly – to understand who we are, how others see us, and how we fit into the world around us.

TASHA EURICH

- Jesus wants me to understand myself. Aware of all my blind spots and my beliefs and my preferences — **so that I can love people better**.
- Jesus wants me to know myself — so my friendships and relationships can be healthier.
- And He wants me to know myself — **so I can love God more fully**.

#2 Engagement.

- We're called to move toward people, not run away from them. God wants us to **break down the walls between ourselves and others**, not build them high.

- We need to engage people who are different than us. Who we disagree with. Who we don't understand. Who we struggle to see the good in them.
- I've learned how important it is to have tough, honest conversations — what some people call “**crucial conversations**.”
 - ⇒ These happen when we don't agree.
 - ⇒ When what we're talking about **really matters** / important.
 - ⇒ And when emotions are running high.
- This can be tough in a world where **people get offended** so easily. But God calls us to lean in — and not to back down.
- God calls us to try and understand each other and live in true community.

#3 Encouragement.

- When we open our mouths, we have a choice: we can either speak words that bring life, or we can **speak words that tear down**.
- LIFE-GIVING WORDS ARE POWERFUL.
- God calls us to *speak life* — to bless instead of curse, to **build up instead of destroying**. To forgive instead of holding onto grudges.

In the shadow of my hurt, forgiveness feels like a decision to reward my enemy. But in the shadow of the cross, forgiveness is merely a gift from one undeserving soul to another.

ANDY STANLEY

- I need to LIVE WITH THE AWARENESS that my words could be exactly what someone needs today. Words that keep them going. *Words that help them believe again.*

Words that make them feel seen and valued.

- To know that just one conversation can be the turning point for someone's heart.
- Let's be people who – like Jesus – USE OUR LIPS to breathe hope. USE OUR LIPS to **forgive freely**. USE OUR LIPS to cheer each other on. USE OUR LIPS to *remind one another of the goodness of God*.

#4 Emmanuel — God with us.

- God is not absent. He's not watching us from a distance, and He's not locked away in some far-off holy place.
- **He is right here**. He hears your cries, He **sees your pain**, your **struggles**, and even your **doubts**. He feels the weight of your hurt. He **understands your desperation**.
- Jesus shows us that God chooses — on purpose — to meet us right where we are. In every emotion. In every moment. In every relationship.

⇒ When your thoughts and feelings feel like they're swallowing you up: HE IS EMMANUEL — **God with us.**

⇒ No matter what your **relationships look like** — whether you're single or a widow or divorced or feeling estranged: HE IS EMMANUEL — God with us.

⇒ When you've lost your job. When your marriage feels broken. When your dreams have collapsed. When sickness weighs you down. When death knocks at your door. **When your beliefs and values and political ideologies are challenged.**

When you're overcome with fear: HE IS EMMANUEL — **God with us.**

Jesus is the Word made flesh, humanity in its fullest bloom, divinity embodied in solidarity with the broken and the enemy alike. Only Emmanuel restores what we have lost. Only Emmanuel re-humanizes the dehumanized. Only Emmanuel makes it possible to live fearlessly, even in an age of anger and assassination. If we live in Emmanuel, the culture of death is displaced by a culture of life. Fear gives way to faith. Enmity gives way to embrace. Humanity, once lost, is found again in Him.

LEONARD SWEET