

Finishing up STAYING IN LOVE.

If you missed any of it I encourage you to go back and listen to it online or order the CD's

The question that got us started on this series was this. **Is it possible for two people to stay happy together forever?** If we look at culture it is bleak, but somehow we think it is possible for us. We desire that. That is part of God's design in us.

Quick recap...

Week 1 we discovered the trick to staying in love is to make love a verb. To actively do things and treat others like we love them. Even if the feelings are not strong to do that changes the relationship and we experience what it means to start to feel it again.

Week 2 we looked at the model we have for what active love looks like. We talked about about how God loves us and what that looks like.

Week 3 we talked about paying attention to our hearts and emotions and how we manage and deal with those things. We discovered that all of us have stuff inside and that when we get bumped what is inside comes out.

Today I want us to talk about a decision we all have to make every single time in every single relationship, but especially in this romantic kind of relationship. We have to make this decision on a daily basis! It is sort of a fill in the blank question. It is a decision that often we are not aware we are making, but hopefully talking this through we can be more intentional on making this decision. We are going to use a word picture and illustration to maybe help us catch ourselves making this decision. But every one of us makes this choice on a daily basis, and the habit that you have in making this decision, the way that you look at making this decision, will have a great impact on whether or not you "STAY IN LOVE"

As we have said through out the series this is something you did intuitively when you "fell" in love but it is something you have to

willfully and volitionally decide to do to STAY IN LOVE. Consequently when we stop doing this we begin to undermine and harm our own ability to Stay in Love.

Today I want to take you to a passage of Scripture that you have probably, at one time or another have heard this scripture. In fact, you might not have even known that it was in the Bible. It is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. And 1 Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. And 1 Corinthians 13 is called what? The Love Chapter. Some of you may have had this read in your marriage ceremony.

We are going to read a portion of 1 Cor. 13 but we are going to focus in on really just one of verse. You see most of 1 Cor. makes sense. We read it and we say, "yea that makes sense, ok yea got that, yea i need to work on that, oh yea good reminder". But there is one verse, Vs 7, that makes us scratch our heads and we might even think; "I'm not sure that is good advise". In fact I don't think that is realistic or healthy. In fact we might be tempted to encourage the exact opposite of this one phrase. I know it is in the Bible and we need to take it seriously but I don't know. It just doesn't make sense.

What we will discover is that Paul is trying to say 1 very powerful thing. In fact it is something that people who are in love do all the time. But instead of making one statement he gives us 4 statements that go together and form a sort of progression. To indicate this 1 very powerful idea. But on the surface, this looks like absolutely terrible advise. On the surface we think, He can't mean what he is saying, because it seems so unrealistic.

So, Lets read a few verses leading up to verse 7 and then we will camp out on Vs 7 and talk about this choice that everyone who is in love must make, and we can make it the right way or the wrong way.

Starting in verse 4 we see...

Love is patient, (yep, Got that) *love is kind* (check). *It does not*

envy (ok, that makes sense), *it does not boast* (ok, no arrogance), *it is not proud* (pride can be a problem relationally, Got ya Paul). **5** *It does not dishonor others* (Ok, good idea, I don't want to dishonor them), *it is not self-seeking* (yea, got ya that makes sense I need to work on that one), *it is not easily angered* (ok anger issues, we all have some of those we have to work on), (ok this is a big one) *it keeps no record of wrongs* (just a side note some of us are very good at this, File Drawer - History Lesson). **6** *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth* (good stuff, we celebrate the wins, we don't camp out on the bad stuff).

Wow Paul great stuff, Yea we need to work on some of that but that make total sense. then he gets to Verse 7.

He take this one greek phrase, and he uses it 4 times and matches it up with 4 different verbs and if you pull any of these out by themselves they might not make sense or even seem like good advise. But Paul is getting at one of the most important habits or practices you can have in a STAY IN LOVE relationship.

7 *It* (talking about Love) *always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* **8** *Love never fails.*

Bears all things, Believes all things, Hopes all thing, Endures all things (KJV)

Now if you are like me if you hear this you begin to struggle. Believes all things? Always Trusts? That kind of makes love blind and stupid. I mean what if there is evidence to the contrary? Am I supposed to just blindly accept everything? When you pull that one out we say, I don't know isn't that unhealthy, isn't that what co-dependant people do? We might say no, come on you need to face reality. You might be like me and say I don't know about that.

But what the apostle Paul is doing is communicating an invaluable principle with these 4 phrases, that if we will take ahold of will transform us and allow us to Stay in Love.

What I want to do in the next few minutes is to explain to you what Paul is getting at. And then we will go back and read this scripture through this new filter.

In every relationship, there is come a point where there is a GAP (say that with me) that occurs between Our Expectations and Others Behavior.

You Said you would But, You

4:00pm - 4:30

do these chores ... but now...

You promised me you would call them... you still haven't

You said you would never do that again... but here you are doing it again.

There is always a gap! And these gaps can be most significant and difficult in a romantic relationship issue.

These generally arise out of a promise or word spoken but, many times arise out of our past dealings or family of origin.

Illustration: Story of Gas tank.

Here is the choice we make all of the time. In every one of these Gaps we fill it with something. We Put something in the Gap.

We either choose to BELIEVE THE BEST or we ASSUME THE WORST. That is what we do every single time. In fact, I don't have to go much further for you to identify what your loved one does. It is harder for you to see what you do... but they know ask them after the service. (NOT NOW PLEASE)

We BELIEVE THE BEST or we ASSUME THE WORST. Let me explain something here... This thing we place in the gap begins in your mind. Now I am not talking about what we say, to them or not say to them. I am talking about what happens up here (point to head). As soon as there is a perceived Gap in what we expect and what we receive, We fill that gap with something.

If we believe the best we go to... Well, I know she has been really

busy, I am sure something has come up, I am sure he will be here soon, I sure there is a good reason why they are late, it is not a problem.

Assume the worst ... You know what... She doesn't pay attention to the time. She is probably talking to her sister again.... He probably just Got distracted again. Blah blah Blah. It begins in your mind... We begin to develop an attitude when there is a gap.

When it come to money... He has given me this to manage, but he has gone over the budget again.

Believe the best... There has been a lot going on. I know there is a bunch of stress at work. He just probably lost track of it, and he is just unaware of the issue.

Assume the worst... He is no good with money, he has never been good with money, His daddy wasn't good with money, His grand daddy wasn't good with money. I have to do EVERYTHING around here. And when He gets home.

The point is we all put something in that gap, and what we put in the gap begins right here, in our minds. And eventually it comes out of our mouths or our behavior.

Now let me give you a secret... there are 2 things that will determine what you will put in the gap. 1. What you see. 2. Who you are.

1. What you see I see he has not shown up yet!
2. Who you are ... Now this is the harder part (we don't factor this in at all) Remember, we all came into this love relationship with some beads... You had a mom and a dad, and they were great or they weren't so great. and what they did or didn't do, and the relationships you have had in the past have affected and in some cases infected your heart. And you know this if you have been married for anytime, It doesn't take long for your spouses response to you, to trigger something you have experienced with some other relationship in your life. It just happens.

What determines what you put in the gap is 1. What you see. But, that is not the only thing, the other thing that drives what you

place in the gap is, 2. Who you are. What you have experienced, your hurt your pain, your joys, what you saw growing up, what you have experienced in previous relationships, your fear of being abandoned, your fear of being on your own, Whatever it might be, we bring all that with us. All of that is what determines what sign we hold up.

Let me ask you a question. Do you go to the best or do you go the worst, in your mind? As soon as you get the txt which way do you go? Gonna be late.... Can you pick up the kids... Things are crazy, can you pick up dinner.... Where do you go?

Now I know some of you are saying... Pastor, can I come up and talk about my spouse for a minute, And you'll put your dumb signs away, and we'll have like a real sermon, you know. --- Cause you need to hear my sad story.

Listen in my position as a pastor I have heard all the sad stories before. In fact, I bet I could top your bad story with someone else's bad story. I am not making light of your situation, and I know the world you are living in. But I am not being insensitive, and i am not naive. I just want you to track with me for a minute.

Just put that to the side, And I know you are already going well I told him he needed to be here, because he said he would be here and then he had some excuse....

I understand the real world, but I just want you to track with me till the end of the sermon, and then you can tell me what to do with my little signs.

So here is the question, Where do you go? I am not saying it is not justified, I am just asking Where do you go mentally when there is a gap between expectation and behavior. Where do you go?

Now here is what I want you to hear... People who STAY IN LOVE, learn to Believe the Best! They do it either intuitively or by force of habit, learn and regardless of circumstances, believe the best about the person they love.

When you find couples that are crazy in love you will not find NO GAP. There will ALWAYS be a gap. They just choose to fill that gap with believing the best. Which means they are GENEROUS in their explanation. In their mind they come up with an explanation why there is a gap, and they are generous in their explanation.

Now there is a great book called "THE ONE THING YOU NEED TO KNOW" by Marcus Buckingham. And this is not a Christian book per se, it is not a marriage, or relationship book even, it is a business leadership book. But I have read portions of this book because it is a highly recommended book. The basic principle of the book is this, there is one crucial thing that you must know in any given discipline, field or realm in life. If you know that one principle, you will be successful. To support his theory, he gives an illustration from marriage.

He said there was a group of researchers who wanted to study successful relationships, so they got a focus group of people who were considered successful in marriage. They did all these interviews and asked all kinds of questions and found these people who were very happy in their relationships, who had been together for 10 years or more. And they decided to ask the question what is the common denominator to their success and happiness. What is the ONE THING.

Now they assumed, that they knew what that one thing was, based on previous research. They thought they had this nailed down. Based on previous research where they had studied a lot of unhappy couples, they discovered that there were huge misunderstandings between the two parties as to what the other person was like. They had a complete disconnect with the other person and didn't understand one another at all. So they assumed that what they would find with these very happy couples is that there would be a very deep understanding and a very realistic view of who the other person was and what they expected from the other person. That they would totally understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. And they would not have high expectations because there would be this full understanding of who the other person

is. They assumed they would find very realistic expectations in a happy relationship. What they discovered was the complete opposite.

They discovered that they actually had a very unrealistic view of each other. For example they would give the man a test and he would rate himself in certain areas, and then they would give his partner the very same test and she would rate him in every single category, consistently higher than he would rate himself. And vice versa. They rated each other consistently higher in every single category, over and over and over again.

They concluded that "Love really is a bit blind" That these happy couples did not have a realistic view of their partner. I want to read you 3 statements from their findings.

A spouses positive allusion created an upward spiral of love. Now before you think this is weird, this is exactly what you did when you were first in love. You thought he was the greatest person in the world and you saw no fault with him. In fact when some would confront you about him, you would cover that all over, and say "yea, but..." You had this allusion, your love was blind.

A spouses positive allusion created an upward spiral of love. The allusion created a conviction, the conviction led to security, security fostered intimacy, and intimacy fostered love.

A husband or wife that assumes that their partner possesses strengths (that they do not think they themselves posses) will have a strong marriage.

So a sign of a healthy marriage is when I think my wife has strengths that she does not think she has.

So here is their advise from the study. **Find the most generous explanation for each others behavior, and then believe it.**

Here are a few examples that they give. **She's not impatient, she's just intense. He's not insensitive, he's just focused.**

Here is what they are saying at some point in the relationship, there will be a gap. No matter what your experience has been, Every

single time you CHOOSE what to fill that gap with. That is your decision, and it begins in your mind. Happily married couples choose, they discipline themselves, to be generous in their explanations for their spouses behavior. Oh she's just... Oh He's just.... They are generous!

So where do you go with this naturally? Do you quickly go negative or do you assume the best? That is your decision. Now I know you have a story, and I am not discounting that, but I am just asking you where do you go with this? Now with that in mind listen to 1 Corinthians 13:7 again. This is so extraordinarily powerful, It is close to 2000 years old, and it may be the key for some of you who have grown so far away from each other, and you think it is hopeless and you will never have the relationship you have always wanted. You are against divorce, and your going to gut it out but it is not fun or satisfying or enjoyable. And you don't like it when the phone rings and it is him, and you don't like it when the garage door opens and it is her. And it has just become a cycle of negativity.

When both of you are assuming the worst it is a cycle that just feeds on itself over and over again. And the thing about this is you get to be right almost every single time. See I told you... in fact, ok I am going to dig a little bit here... Some you you secretly like it when your spouse messes up, because it gives you an excuse to be right. See I told you he was going to be late... See I told you you couldn't manage money...

You get into a cycle, and you start looking for it. And you even Celebrate it. You think you are winning, winning the argument but you are losing; Losing the most important relationship in your life. And it is your choice every single time as to what you put in the gap.

7 It (Love) always protects,

What does it protect? It protects the integrity of the relationship. I'm not looking to put something into the negative column I am looking to protect the relationship.

always trusts,

It looks for a generous explanation.

always hopes,

Hopefully there is a good explanation, Hopefully there was not a serious problem. I am not going to give up hope.

always perseveres.

Always looks for the good.

8 Love never fails.

How are you doing on this? Where are you at? May your good at this and your spouse is bad at this; OR maybe it is the other way around. Maybe they cuts you slack all the time, and you say, well of course they do, I'm nearly perfect you know. And then every once in a while you might mess up. So you use the "Well nobody's perfect." But man if they mess up, wow, IT's on. "well there you go!" and you go negative.

Here is the truth: Every single time you choose to go negative, whether or not you have an excuse to, You are contributing to the demise of the relationship! You are a participant.

Wait a minute pastor... You don't understand...

I know you have a story, and I am not minimizing that; but you are still a participant. Even when it seems justified, even when there is a history. Every time you go here mentally and it gets expressed in your attitude, tone, body language, words, response, txt, email, passive aggressive behavior; Every time you go here you contribute to the demise of the relationship. Even when it is justified you become a participant.

Let me tell you a secret about your loved one. The last thing they want to do is disappoint you. I don't care how bad the relationship is, I don't care what the history is. The last thing they want is for you to be disappointed and disapprove of them. No one wants to disappoint someone they are in a relationship with.

When you go negative, here is what it communicates. No matter what you do, no matter how hard you try you will never measure up, you will never hit the standard, you will never be who I want you to be. And every time you go negative, be it overtly or covertly, You push them further and further away.

And we say look if you want to quit disappointing me, here is what you need to do, just make the gap smaller. So come on, perform, Jump higher, work harder, be more careful, get here earlier, come on boy (click) here boy. If you don't want me to feel disappointed, you just need to stop having a gap. That is not how you decrease disappointment in a relationship.

One of the most powerful things you can do to communicate that you have not disappointed me in the relationship, is to fill the gap with believe the best. When you choose to believe the best, even when there is a pattern in the relationship of distrust and disappointment, When you choose the best and COMMUNICATE the best, it creates MARGIN in the relationship.

A healthy person will respond to that margin and move in your direction. If you have consistently assumed the worst in your relationship, they are afraid of you; they dread the email or the response. They shut down and stop talking, they put off making the phone call when they are going to be late, because they don't want the fight or the attitude. We all do this. We don't like confrontation so we avoid it! They don't want to disappoint you; They don't want to feel like they can't measure up. No one wants to feel that way.

So thats why when you choose to believe the best you create margin; You communicate this... I Trust You, I Trust You, I Trust You, Even before I here the explanation I trust you; Even before I hear the circumstances I trust you. Trust in a relationship means I accept you, Acceptance means you have not disappointed me.

Here is how it sounds in real life. Honey, I am running late.... That's ok, you just take your time, I will have dinner warm and ready or when you can make it home. Do you have any idea when that might be? (who stole my husband/Wife) Honey I forgot to pay this bill... Hey thats alright, no problem, we will figure it out, I know you have been really busy. (Margin, margin, margin)

You know what that is ... come my way, come my way - instead of

using the gap to prove a point and drive you further from me, I am going to use the gap to draw you closer to me. The cool part of this is the more gaps there are the more opportunities you have to draw them closer and communicate you have not disappointed me. I am not giving up hope; I endure all things, I bear all things, I hope all things, I believe all things.

I am not saying you don't have difficult conversations, I am not suggesting you don't confront the realities, that a gap exists. After those conversations, when everyone has had a chance to talk it all out and say how they are feeling (last week). There is clear communication that you trust them, not to get rid of the gap but to try and work on it. And then, the next time there is gap (and there will be) You still have a choice what are you going to fill it with?

Let me tell you about your loved ones heart... It is just like your heart. It is just like my heart. It is drawn to environments of acceptance and forgiveness. This is an opportunity to draw their heart to you. They may come home, but if it is not an environment of acceptance, their heart will not come home with them. No matter how much they may want it to. If they come home and they know that they are not going to receive this kind of environment, They may be there physically but their heart will not be there. Because all of our hearts are drawn to an environment of acceptance.

I am going to choose to trust you until we discover that there is really no excuse, then we might have a tough conversation, but then after that, I will continue to believe the best. How are you doing on this?

Jesus says it this way.... Luke 6:31 - *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

What if you were to do for him or do for her, what you would like to be done for you?

This could be revolutionary for you. But let me warn you, it will not be easy. As soon as you get home you will be tested on this. It begins in the mind, but it is your choice.

Some of you are going to have to make this choice on the way home today, or as soon as you arrive home, or maybe tomorrow morning when you wake up. Am I going to come up with a generous explanation and believe the best, or am I going to assume the worst and communicate you disappoint me.

Happy couples learn to fill the gap with trust.

Let me tell you why this is important, Yes it is because we want to have happy relationships, that is part of it. The other reason this is so important is there are people watching us, they are looking for a way to grow up and have healthy relationships. But there is another reason there is no greater evangelism tool in our Christian walk than our marriage. There is no more powerful image of God's love for this world than to see 2 Christians who model Christ love for us. Not because we are better, but because we are not any different from them, but we believe and practice what God did for us on the cross. That is the power of the Gospel!

Invitation:

Christian: The power of the gospel is not found in point of salvation. The power of the gospel is found in daily living this out and continuing to treat those around us the way Christ loves us. Our greatest impact on our culture can be found in learning to STAY IN LOVE and show the world what that means.

Connection Card

- I have asked Jesus to be my forgiver and leader this week.
- I will choose to fill the gap with trust
- I will share this series with someone this week
- I would like a CD set of this series