

Where is your group's love?

February is a month thought of as the "love" month. More flowers and candy will be sent this month more than any other month, all in the name of "love". It is a month centered on Valentine's Day, seen as a holiday about "love". I proposed to Lisa 24 years ago on Valentine's Day. We were young and in "love". The problem with "love" is that for most people it is based on our emotion instead of our character. For our wedding that happened 16 months after I proposed in 1988, we had 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 read at our wedding. It is known as the "love" chapter in the Bible. In order to understand "love" for individuals and for groups, 1 Corinthians 13 is the right place to start.

When Paul wrote that chapter it had nothing to do with weddings or people falling in love. He wrote that chapter to show us the bi-products of what our love should be—to those close to us, those in community, people in the church and those we bump into in the crowd. Take a look with me from the standpoint of community—your small group. Where is your group "love" needing a boost?

Love is patience. Patience has so many facets that can happen in group life. There are the interpersonal interactions where patience needs to be drawn on. There is also the patience you need to have with other members, knowing God is working on them. When you are patient, it allows the Holy Spirit the time to do the work intended. Of course, you would like to do the work sooner, but you aren't God! ☺ There is patience when your group might be stuck or going through some tough times. When you have patience, God can work through and in you! ***Does your group or you need a bit more patience?***

Love is kind. What does kindness look like in a group? Caring, sympathetic, nice, gentle, compassionate, benevolent and much more! I know, this list is crazy for us Type A's that like to drive the group to "task". Kindness is acknowledging the weak, and who wants weakness? Kindness can seem so simple, till you start to see all its facets. Most groups get the caring and being "nice" to each other. However, kindness takes love to a deeper level. ***Where do your members need to see kindness exercised more?***

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Okay, someone in the group got a new toy, promotion, raise or something you didn't get—where does love take you? You got something you are so proud about that you work it into the conversation at group, even when it really doesn't fit—where was love in that? Pity and pride are not found in love, but not kept in "check," they can show their ugly head. ***You or your group need a tune up here?***

It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking. A cousin to the last phase of love we looked at with envy and pride, but yet very different in group life, dishonoring others can be a slow and slight erosion that happens over time. It can be a form of positioning or humor, so that ***you*** are the one the group looks to. It could be someone that bugs you from time to time with their idiosyncrasies, and you find that your actions dishonor them. It could be a time where you don't

show up their “truth” in love. No matter the form, the desire is to promote self—you. Love never does that at the expense of someone else, even in the slightest of ways.

It is not easily angered. In its most obvious form, anger is easy to spot. In community it could take on the form of being annoyed, irritated or frustrated. These emotions start ever so slightly, but when buried and not opening up communication, they can lead to an anger of the heart, which eventually can break a group apart. It doesn't mean you can't discuss an issue...it just means that you just can't ignore it. Keep short accounts, so anger doesn't build.

It keeps no record of wrongs. Just as in close relationships you have, bringing up the past to throw an issue in someone's face when it has already been dealt with is wrong. In community, that is a party foul. Help your group to keep moving forward. When someone brings up the past, whether you are the group leader or not, help love to happen.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. This has two forms. 1) Not letting evil go unnoticed because you don't want to deal with it and 2) realizing truth happens best in love. No one enjoys dealing with evil when it can show up in a person at group. This is where life is messy. You ignoring a situation shows you don't love. You going after a situation without love is just as bad as ignoring evil. Matthew 18:15-17 are great verses to keep in mind whenever you are dealing with issues in group.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (verses 7 and 8). The **fruit** of love are verses 7 and 8. Security is felt, trust is built, hope is present and your group lasts. Why? Because love never fails!