Outreach Center Network News Letter

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In this issue:

Love in the month of February - A Devotion

A new Network For The New Year

VALENTINE TRIVIA

VALENTINE Joke

A Dog's Letters to God

Final Thoughts

Each article will begin with ###. You may move to the next article by searching for this.

### Love in the month of February

Bob Mates, outreach center director at Grand Rapids, MI, Gave the following devotion at the American Council of the Blind Convention in 2003 in Pittsburgh. You might not use all of this at a center gathering, but the picture of a dog’s faithfulness is good.

1 Corinthians 13

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 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 have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 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.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

11 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 childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor 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.

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

Sermon: Love

 TEXT: First Corinthians: Chapter 13;

In the 1960's, a song was released, which had, as its first line, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love. Those were good sentiments then, and they still are today. I've chosen the above texts and this subject, for a couple reasons: (1) We live in an increasingly angry society. It's a society, in which people feel alienated; powerless; isolated. It's a society in which everyone is looking over his shoulder, to make sure his neighbor doesn't get something that he doesn't have. It's a society in which everyone feels victimized. It's a society in which people are ready to fight, and even come to violence, at the drop of a hat, and carry a hat with them, so they'll be ready to drop it at a second's notice. In other words, it's a place in which love and kindness have been pushed to the side.

Now this is not only true in society as a whole, but, unfortunately, it is very true in the blind community. Many of us, who have computers, and are on email lists, have been shocked to read the harshly critical comments made about people, by their fellow listers. When a blind person achieves a little success, people mumble and grumble about it, and say that the person probably pulled strings or something. Sadly, we Christians fall into the same modes of behavior.

Now, this isn't good. After all, aren’t we supposed to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world? As salt, we add a good flavor to a world which has, in its mouth, the rotten taste of sin. As light, we are a beacon to a world, ruled by the Prince of darkness. Therefore, it's important that we show love to each other, to our friends and neighbors, and to everyone we meet.

In English, one word, l-o-v-e, covers every type of love. The Greeks had at least three different words, which described the different types of love. (I think that's why God picked Greek, as the language for the new Testament; because of the language's preciseness, He could say exactly what He meant.) Incidentally, I tried to read the New Testament in the original language, but it was Greek to me!

There is eros, which is romantic love, or love between a man and a woman. There is philos, or the love for a friend. Then, there is agape, which means God's un-conditional love. That's what we want to discuss.

 Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is really the second of a two-chapter discussion of spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul has previously stated, in Chapter 12, that God, in His wisdom, gives different gifts to each of us. He points out that, while each person possesses different gifts, we're all members of the same body. As such, when one part suffers, the whole body suffers, and when one part rejoices, the whole body should rejoice. At the end of Chapter 12, he tells us to seek after the best gifts; but then, he says, in effect, "I know something better than all of those gifts--love.

 What is the agape type of love? Allan Turner, a terrific theological writer, has defined it as a warm, kind, caring concern for another's welfare. That's exactly what God's love for us is, isn't it? He is concerned about us, only wants good for us.

 In the first 3 verses of Chapter 13, Paul says that no matter what wonderful gifts he might possess, they're not worth a thing without love. It really doesn't matter very much how well you preach or pray, or how much money you give to the church, or if you prayed the "sinner's prayer" with 400 people in one afternoon! What matters to people, especially to non-Christians, is the love you show. That's the best evangelism you'll ever do.

In verse 4 through 7, we see the attributes of un-conditional love. Love is patient and kind. We also see that this kind of love is not envious. In other words, you're not resentful, because someone got a new note taker, or a job, or is in a good relationship. You're happy for that person. Also, agape love is not self-aggrandizing or conceited. In other words we don't have to go around, saying, “Look, what a loving person I am!" If you really are, it will show!

In 5-6, we see that agape love neither behaves badly, nor does it enjoy evil. It is honest, giving honestly, and hoping to receive the same type of honesty.

Verse 7 says that agape love is up-beat and optimistic. It always looks for the good in the other person. Do you want an example of un-conditional love? Well, those of you who use dog guides need look no farther than that sweet dog, at your feet. That dog has nothing in its heart but love for you, even if you aren't always showing him or her love. Just think: If dog guides gave us justice, instead of mercy, there'd be some pretty bruised-up blind folks walking around!

Verses 8-13 point out that, whereas everything else fails--knowledge, tongues, prophecies, Etc., love never does. It is, indeed, the greatest gift of all.

So, where do we get this gift? Well, since we know, as James says, that "every good and perfect gift comes from above," we can certainly know that agape love, the ability to love un-conditionally, comes from God. After all, what person, of his or her own accord, could love someone un-conditionally? And yet, that's exactly what God did. We find His love for us, right at the foot of the cross! God loved us so much, that He sent His only Son to die for us! And, it wasn't because we were such wonderful people, either. In fact, it was precisely because we were such terrible sinners, that He did it. Because, he knows our frailties, He knew we could never escape death, the punishment for sin. So He sent Jesus, who became our sin. It was His blood which was the sacrifice for our sin. Because He rose from the dead, we, too, have overcome sin, death and the devil!

So, what do we do? We try, as best we can, to take that same love that God has for us, and pass it on to others. It isn't easy" either. It makes us a little vulnerable; it means opening up ourselves, and our lives. Sometimes, we might get hurt, but the good news is that God is right there with us.

The other day, I read a poem by Emily Dickinson which, I think, sums up agape love, and how we can apply it. It goes:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,

 I shall not live in vain;

 If I can ease one life the aching,

 Or cool one pain,

 Or help one fainting robin

 Unto his nest again,

 I shall not live in vain.

 Today, Jesus Christ is reaching out to you, offering His love, His peace, and His rest. He knows who you are, and he knows what you've done, and He loves you anyway. There's nothing you have to do to receive it; everything was done for you, two thousand years ago. Receive His love; after all, it has your name on it.

 Amen.

### A new Network for the New Year

When someone comes to me with a new idea, I am always interested. I listen and pray with them and about it. When two people suggest a similar idea, I sit up and pay attention. It’s an answer to the first prayer and the Holy Spirit moving God’s people. Martha and Trish brought an idea and an opportunity.

An outreach center gives people who are blind the chance to gather, encourage, support and share with one another. But what does a person do between the gatherings? What does a person do when they are not near one of the 53 outreach centers? Sadly, they are often left without support—until now.

Certainly there are support groups for people with sight loss all over the country. Certainly there are chat lines full of people who are blind. Martha and Trish however have proposed that it be Christian, with encouragement from God, along with the tips, suggestions and general encouragement.

What is needed? What are we looking for?

We are looking for two things. First we are looking for people who are blind who:

1 Are at peace with who they are and who want to help other people

2 Are willing to listen and receive some training

3 Are able to phone a person once a week for a six month period

We are also looking for those people who are blind and not connected or doing well with adjusting to blindness. These are the people who would benefit from a phone friend. We all probably know such a person. These contacts will be important once we have trained the “Phone Friend listeners.”

Please contact me, Pastor Dave, if you are willing to be a “Phone Friend Listener.”

### VALENTINE TRIVIA

True or False: The majority of countries around the world celebrate Valentine's Day.

Only the USA, Canada, Mexico, France, Australia and the UK, celebrate Valentine's Day on February 14th.

True or False: Sweethearts, husbands and wives, receive the most Valentine’s cards.

Teachers will receive the most Valentine's Day cards, followed by children, mothers, wives, and then, sweethearts.

Children ages 6 to 10 exchange more than 650 million Valentine's cards with teachers, classmates, and family members.

True or false: Valentine's Day is the largest card-sending holiday of the year.

According to the Greeting Card Association, an estimated one billion valentine cards are sent each year, making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. An estimated 2.6 billion cards are sent for Christmas.

Interesting fact: Hallmark has over 1,330 different cards specifically for Valentine's Day.

True or false: The red rose is the most given flower on Valentine’s Day.

110 million roses, the majority color red, will be sold and delivered within a three-day time period.

Interesting fact: The red rose was the favorite flower of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. Red stands for strong feelings.

True or false: Most American roses are grown in Texas.

California produces 60% of American roses, but the vast number sold in the United States on Valentine's Day are imported, mostly from South America.

Interesting fact: 15% of U.S. women send themselves flowers on Valentine's Day.

True or false: 90% of people who buy flowers for Valentine's Day are men

73% of people who buy flowers for Valentine's Day are men, while only 27 percent are women.

True or false: 90% of people who buy chocolate for Valentine's Day are men

While 75% of chocolate purchases are made by women all year long, during the days and minutes before Valentine's Day, 75% of the chocolate purchases are made by men.

Interesting fact: More than 35 million heart-shaped boxes of chocolate will be sold for Valentine's Day.

True or false: 60% of Valentine's Day cards are humorous.

An estimated 25% of Valentine's Day cards are humorous.

True or false: Two places in the USA have the name Valentine.

Two places in the USA have the name Valentine: Valentine, Nebraska, with a population of 2,842; and Valentine, Texas, with a mere 185 residents.

Interesting fact: Love is a much more popular town name as nine places claim:

Loveland, Colorado; Lovejoy, Georgia; Loves Park, Illinois; Lovelock, Nevada; Love Valley, North Carolina; Loveland, Ohio; Loveland Park, Ohio; Loveland, Oklahoma; and Lovelady, Texas.

### Valentine joke.

Q: What did the elephant say to his Valentine?

A: "I love you a ton!"

### A Dog's Letters to God

Last month we shared some of the letters written by dogs to God. We share another batch of those letters.

Dear God,

 When we get to the Pearly Gates, do we have to shake hands to get in?

Dear God,

 We dogs can understand human verbal instructions, hand signals, whistles, horns, clickers, beepers, scent IDs, electromagnetic energy fields, and

Frisbee flight paths. What do humans understand?

Dear God,

 Are there dogs on other planets, or are we alone? I have been howling at the moon and stars for a long time, but all I ever hear back is the beagle

across the street!

Dear God,

 Are there mailmen in Heaven? If there are, will I have to apologize?

Dear God,

 Is it true that dogs are not allowed in restaurants because we can't make up our minds what NOT to order? Or is it the carpets again?

Dear God,

 When my family eats dinner they always bless their food. But, they never bless mine. So, I've been wagging my tail extra fast when they fill my

bowl. Have you noticed MY blessing?

### Final Thoughts

In upcoming issues we can and will look at many of the same topics as well as others. If you have questions, thoughts or suggestions, please send them to me or post them on the blind ministry email list.

Pastor Dave