

There's an App for That: 3. Trust
1 Corinthians 13:4-7
February 19, 2017
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Have you ever had a health club membership or purchased a treadmill or read a diet book? When I first moved to Plymouth, I remember touring a health club and I sat down with the sales person and selected the package that was going to make me healthy again. And when I left the health club with my brand new membership card, I felt healthier. And then I bought new workout clothes and a new pair of athletic shoes – and when I got on the scale, I thought I'd lost a few couple just having a plan. And about a year later, I canceled my membership when I realized the monthly contribution wasn't really making me healthier. Application is everything. Just thinking about it, just getting the membership, just buying the exercise equipment doesn't do it. Or maybe it's a home repair project. I've done this. I got excited and I did the research, went to Home Depot with my list of tools and materials and by the time I got everything home it was late in the day and I decided to take a nap and two years later the supplies are still in the garage. A bucket of paint doesn't make a room look better. You've got to take the paint out of the bucket and apply it to the walls. Application is everything.

The same thing happens right here. You go to church – some weeks just getting here is a major accomplishment. And you sit in worship and feel inspired or you get answers to questions and you feel like your life is making progress – but it's not! You don't get extra credit just for showing up. Like the health club and the do-it-yourself project, application is everything. When we apply certain principles to our lives, that's when change happens. That's when it's real. As we've heard the past two weeks, James, the brother of Jesus, said: **Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

This month, we are looking at four specific apps and then after Easter, we'll look at a fifth app. Two weeks ago, it was Confession; last week, Encouragement; and today it's TRUST – trust in our relationships at work, at school, in the neighborhood, in the family and even here at church. Trust is the bedrock of a relationship. If we can't trust, there will always be something missing in the relationship. A lot of the time it seems easier not to trust – or maybe your experience has shown that when you trusted you got hurt – but as Christians, we are expected to lean into trust. And that's what the Apostle Paul was saying in his letter to the small group of Christian believers in the city of Corinth. It's not all love and kindness in the community. There is stress and tension and conflict which if we're honest is found in every human relationship. So, Paul lays out a way of relating that is defined by the most Jesus-like characteristic imaginable – Love. He says, let me tell you what love is. And in his description of love, he also addresses this bedrock principle of trust.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, (and we know all that) it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (Whoa! Say what? Some of you have a whole file cabinet on somebody and you're ready. When things get heated, you go to the file cabinet. 'It was March 8, 1998 and you said but then you didn't do... But Paul says, real love keeps no record! **Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.** (Love isn't trying to catch somebody doing something wrong – that's not love. Love is being ready to catch people doing the right thing. And then Paul says,) **It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.** Always? Really? Paul, it's that extreme? And Paul says, yup – that's love. Love is always looking to give the benefit of the doubt, always tries to protect the integrity of the relationship. Love never gives up. It perseveres – leans into the relationship.

If you've ever been to London, you might be familiar with this. Mind the gap. The subway system in London is called the Tube and whenever the doors open and close, you will hear these words. A woman's voice says, "Mind the gap." Because there is a gap between the platform and the train. It was a design flaw. It wasn't supposed to be that way. But if you don't mind the gap, you might step in the gap and get your foot stuck – and I suppose if the train started moving you could lose your foot or your life or at least trip and fall – so you had better mind the gap.

There's a gap when it comes to relationships whether at home or with the government, your neighborhood, at work, your family or your team. In every relationship there are Expectations and then there is what you actually Experience. Here's what you said you would do, and here's what I experienced. Here's the time you said you would be home, and here's the time you actually got home. Here's what you agreed to do on that project, and here's what you actually did. And sometimes there's a gap. And here's the part that is hugely important (don't miss this): we decide what goes in the gap. They don't! They said it and either did it or didn't do it, and we fill the gap. Mind the gap! And what we do is Assume the Worst: he said he'd be home by 8, and you hear the garage door open and it's actually 10 pm and we choose. We assume the worst. But Paul says, that's not love. Love leans into the best. Love protects the relationship. Love believes the best. Mind the gap! If you're a parent – how many times have we talked about cleaning your room? If you're married – how many times have we talked about how we're going to spend money? If you're at work – you agreed to do the project together and the next thing you know, she's taking credit for your idea – or you agreed to certain amount of commission and it turns out you got less than that. There's a gap. Love always Believes the Best. Love always chooses the most loving, the most generous explanation.

Because when you assume the worst, even if you're right, you have taken a step to close down the relationship – not protecting, not persevering, not trusting. To be suspicious is to reject – to shut down. Think about how powerful it is to say to someone – "I want to trust you", instead of "wa-wa-wa-wa" (Assume the worst.) And you may even be right, but this is not about being right, this is building up the relationship. "I want to trust you." But Pastor Steve, you don't know my story and what I've been through... Mind the gap. You get to choose what goes there. And your best chance at healing the relationship is Believe the Best. Assume the Worst will never do that. Paul says, "always... always..."

What happens when we can't do that? When the gap keeps getting wider and wider and wider – you said you would but you never do – and I can't trust you anymore... Jesus actually has an answer for that. He says, **Confront**. Don't ignore. Don't avoid. Don't tell somebody else. Jesus says, Go to the person with whom you have the issue and confront. It's in Matthew 18 and will be in this week's GPS readings – a three step process. But the problem is we don't want to confront. "I told him if he comes home late one more time..." And then he does and he asks what's wrong and you say – "nothing". But you already Assumed the Worst, didn't you? I'm not saying he's right. I'm talking about trust. And what Jesus taught is the moment there's a gap – have a conversation. Confront. Ask for an explanation and Believe the Best – because what you are communicating is protect, persevere, trust – love.

Most people don't want confrontation. But if you don't, the issue never goes away. You can try. You can try to hide it but it doesn't stay hidden. It just gets bigger – like a pressure cooker. Kaboom – and you open the file drawer – March 8, 1998 – "you say and you didn't". Jesus says, Go. Confront. Talk about it – and if you can't do that, then bring somebody with you.

Mind the gap. When your expectations do not match your experience, there's a gap. And when there's a gap, you choose

One of the things that we ask our employees to sign is a covenant, because our relationship is important. We want to lean into love – and so we ask our employees to make a commitment to each other. The bedrock of our relationship is trust. And periodically, we review the covenant and these five principles about communication. I think these same principles fit every relationship. 1. **Maintain confidentiality.** If someone shares personal information with me, it doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the person who shared it, and unless I've been given permission or I asked for permission to share it, it remains personal. 2. **Be truthful in communications by addressing the person directly.** I will trust you. I will lean into the relationship and tell you what I'm thinking or feeling. 3. **Encourage others to meet directly with the appropriate person.** Because it is so easy to triangulate. Instead of telling you, I tell somebody else hoping that person will tell you – and be sure you don't tell them you heard this from me. Huh? That's not love. That's not protecting, persevering, trusting. What's Jesus say? Go to the person and tell him directly – confront. 4. **Support each other, always speaking respectfully.** There's that word – Always. Lean into the relationship. Believe the best. 5. **Learn from mistakes, practice forgiveness, and treat each other with grace.**

Most people want to be trusted. The best way to learn whether a person is trustworthy is to trust them. The best way to make someone untrustworthy is not to trust them. There is power when we look at someone and we look at the relationship and we lean into love – so every thought, every word, every act is the most loving thing. And when there's a gap, what can you do to bridge the gap? Go and talk to the person. Confront. Open the door. Let's do what Jesus says, **Do to others as you would have them do to you.** (Luke 6:31) When there's a gap, trust. Imagine if we lived this way. Imagine if every Christian lived this way. Imagine if you lived this way. Imagine if I lived this way. Imagine.. Just imagine relationships like that.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of February 19, 2017

Weekly Prayer: God of us all, you are faithful and worthy of trust. Your love never fails. Confront us in the ways we have chosen not to love. Move us toward genuine patience, kindness and humility. Let us be moved to trust even when it is inconvenient and difficult. Teach us today what it means to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

Monday, February 20

Scripture: Psalm 119:33-40

LORD, teach me what your statutes are about, and I will guard every part of them. Help me understand so I can guard your Instruction and keep it with all my heart. Lead me on the trail of your commandments because that is what I want. Turn my heart to your laws, not to greedy gain. Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things. Make me live by your way. Confirm your promise to your servant— the promise that is for all those who honor you. Remove the insults that I dread because your rules are good. Look how I desire your precepts! Make me live by your righteousness.

Observation: The writer of this psalm wants to learn God's statutes, laws and commandments - not because there's value in memorizing a list of rules and regulations, but because these guidelines contain the way to life and peace. Think of the Ten Commandments, every one of which is designed to help us, not hurt us. Although they are challenging to follow, these

commandments are intended to be life-enhancing and to give us a positive framework for our words and actions.

Application: Knowing and understanding is not the end in itself. Twice in these verses, the writer says “Make me live...” It is in doing that he finds life (i.e. application is everything). What are you currently doing that is life affirming? What could you do today that would affirm life for you or for others?

Prayer: Thank you, God, that you invite me to follow in the way that leads to life. Help me to hear and more importantly, help me to do what will enrich my life and those around me today. Amen.

Tuesday, February 21

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind, it isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, it isn't rude, it doesn't seek its own advantage, it isn't irritable, it doesn't keep a record of complaints, it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things.

Observation: The church of Corinth is characterized by conflict and not love. Even their understanding of love is influenced more by the Temple to Aphrodite that towers over the city than it is by the way of Christ. Paul tells them that true love (Greek word is “agape,” unconditional) is an action. It is patience, kindness, humility and consideration of others. It is not jealous, envious, proud, ill-tempered or bitter. Love weeps over evil and celebrates goodness. It is “always.”

Application: How you respond in each and every situation is a choice. It is hard to trust some people, but even then you have a choice. Will I assume the worst or will I assume the best? Before responding in word or thought or action, consider asking yourself this question: What is the most loving thing I can do?

Prayer: God, thank you for your love. Confront me in the ways I have chosen not to love. Move me toward patience, kindness and humility. Help me to love especially when it is inconvenient and difficult. Amen.

Wednesday, February 22

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-20

"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."

Observation: To trust is to rely on or to believe that another person will do what they say they are going to do. But there are often gaps between what is expected and what is experienced.

What happens when you can't trust? Jesus provides three steps to bridge the gap. The first step is to confront. The goal is reconciliation – to retain the relationship.

Application: What Jesus teaches is not easy for us. Almost no one likes confrontation, but how can facing conflict and misunderstanding be life-affirming? When have you addressed the “gap” directly or when has someone confronted you?

Prayer: Loving God, help me walk with others toward trust and reconciliation. Thank you for the beauty you will bring to my relationships when I have leaned into your healing. Amen.

Thursday, February 23

Scripture: Luke 6:27-36

“But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don't withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don't demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you. “If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that. If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, why should you be commended? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be paid back in full. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.

Observation: The reason crowds gathered around Jesus was the power that came forth from his life. His whole life was one of abundant generosity, giving all he had to give to everyone who needed it. He was speaking of the extravagant love of his Father, and the call to live a generous life in response. In the end, people struck him on the cheek and ripped the coat and shirt off his back, but he went on loving and forgiving. He didn't show love only to his friends, but to his enemies. That's who God is.

Application: How many people do you know who really live like this? We know the Golden Rule (verse 31), but knowing the rule is not the same as living that way. How would your community change if that's how people lived? What if every Christian lived that rule... for just one month? What would change?

Prayer: Dear God, help me to live more lovingly toward others, to think of others first, and to set aside my own self-centeredness. Help me to understand more clearly the amazing example of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday, February 24

Scripture: Ruth 1:15-18

Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her gods. Turn back after your sister-in-law." But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD do this to me and more so if even death separates me from you." When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her about it.

Observation: Elimelech and his wife Naomi traveled to Moab with their two sons. Unfortunately, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi as a widow. For a while she managed to survive because her sons took Moabite wives, two young women named Orpah and Ruth. But then both of the sons of Naomi died. Now, instead of there being one widow, there were three. Naomi felt that she needed to return to her home in Bethlehem, and she had every expectation that her daughters-in-law would stay in Moab. But that's not what Ruth had in mind.

Application: Ruth's words remind us of the life-affirming power of loyalty, trust, and love. Ruth discloses her true character. Her commitment to Naomi is complete. This story provides an example of coming alongside another person and remaining faithful to that relationship. Ruth had a different religion and a different ethnicity from Naomi, and yet one day King David will count Ruth as his ancestor. What do Ruth's words teach you about being trustworthy?

Prayer: Help me, God, to live the acceptance found in the words of Ruth: "Wherever you go, I will go ... your people will be my people, and your God my God." So may it be for me. Amen.

Saturday, February 25

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-30

"Therefore, I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are? Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith?"

Observation: Who or what will you trust? Jesus suggests we learn from the birds that do not sow or harvest the fields but are fed by the heavenly Father nonetheless. He pointed to the flowers that do not work or spin but are clothed in beauty by the heavenly Father anyway. He was calling his followers to trust God.

Application: Of course, it is much easier to hear the invitation to trust God and to say that you trust God than it is to truly trust. Trust means leaning into someone other than me. It means giving up absolute control and the effort to take control. Jesus was not asking his listeners to stop working but to recognize life is more than working. Who will you trust? How will others know where you put your trust?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, strengthen my faith. Help me to follow you. Grant me forgiveness when I wander from your path. As I open my heart to you, show me the way to open my hearts to others. Amen.