

“Five Points”

*“Love is **patient**, love is **kind**. It does not **envy**, it does not **boast**, it is not **proud**.”*

1 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 4:1-6, 15-16 ¹

When I was growing up in Atlanta, “Five Points” referred to a particular intersection in downtown Atlanta as well as to the neighborhood surrounding that intersection. My Dad worked not far from there, so I was there from time to time. *Google* reveals that there are many such “Five Points” locations across our land—you may have had one in your town, too—and my purpose in using the term this morning is to help us grapple with five things that are found in our text in 1 Corinthians 13:4.

As we continue to make our way through “The Love Chapter,” it might be good to remind ourselves that Paul didn’t pen these verses as a “hymn to love.” This chapter actually “drips with irony.” Rather than crafting these words to glorify how wonderful love is, Paul was offering a somewhat subtle commentary on what was rotten in the church in Corinth.

Paul was pointing out to the Corinthians that they themselves were impatient and unkind, filled with jealousy, vain, and puffed up. They were cantankerous and resentful, and they appeared to rejoice in evil rather than in righteousness.² We saw last week that in verses 1-3, Paul emphasized that no matter how wonderful or how amazing one’s spiritual abilities, generosity, or self-sacrifice might be, without genuine love for one another, there is no spiritual achievement at all. In fact, without love, one would do better not even to show up for the game.

Verses 4-7, which we’ll look at today and next week, fall into three sections, sort of like an *Oreo* cookie. Paul begins with two positive characteristics of love, moves to eight negative characteristics that love does not have or behaviors that love does not do, and then ends with five more positive characteristics of love.³

Many have rightly observed that “Jesus” could be substituted for “love” in these verses, and I like how that would go in the *Living Bible*: *Jesus is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Jesus does not demand His own way. He is not irritable or touchy. He does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do Him wrong. Jesus is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out.*

If Jesus loves someone, He will be loyal to them no matter what the cost. He will always believe in them, always expect the best of them, and always stand His ground in defending them. Jesus is, of course, our only perfect model of what Love looks like, and it will probably be helpful to keep Jesus in mind as we explore what love might look like in our own lives.⁴

As you can see from our text, **the “five points” we’re looking at this morning are *patience, kindness, an absence of envy, an absence of boasting, and an absence of pride.*** We’ll look at them in that order.

1. Love is patient. Patience isn’t something for which Americans are known these days. A study concluded earlier this year that Americans will wait . . .

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on September 27, 2015.

² David E. Garland, “1 Corinthians,” *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 616-617.

³ Robert S. Nash, “1 Corinthians,” *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2009), p. 369.

⁴ Craig Blomberg, “1 Corinthians,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 262.

- two seconds for a web page to load (25% abandon the site by five seconds; 50% by 10);⁵
- thirteen seconds before we honk at a car in front of us that's stopped at a green light;
- twenty-six seconds before we shush people who are talking in a movie theater;
- twenty-six seconds before we take the seat of someone who's walked away;
- thirteen minutes for a table at a restaurant;
- twenty minutes for a blind date to show up before we leave;
- and twenty minutes for the last person to show up for Thanksgiving dinner before we dig in.⁶

We speed date, eat fast food, and use the self-checkout lanes at the grocery. We pay extra for overnight shipping, and *Amazon* is now offering same-day and even one-hour shipping in our area. We look for shortcuts when driving, tweet in 140 characters or less, complain about standing in line for airport security, and watch “sound bites” on TV. We don't want to drive to get movies at *Red Box*, so we stream them instead . . . well, clips of movies, at least.⁷

Compton, California has been in the news a good bit this summer. A funeral home in Compton now offers “drive-through” funeral visitation, with the viewing and register signing all done without getting out of the car.⁸

The truth of the matter, though, is that Paul was writing about patience with people much more than about patience with situations or circumstances. The *King James Version* of the word he used is “suffers long,” and that really gets closer to his meaning than “patience” does. Another translation might be “forbearance.” Paul's idea has to do with being wronged and having the power to avenge oneself, but refusing to do it. The Bible even uses this word about God Himself and His relationship with us.⁹

Another way to say this is that love receives wounds without trying to “even the score.” Love doesn't respond to evil in kind.¹⁰ After all, the Bible tells us, more than once, “*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing*” (1 Peter 3:9¹¹).

William Barclay tells a story about Lincoln and another lawyer named Edwin Stanton, and as best I can tell, the story is essentially true. . . . When they were both practicing law, before Lincoln became President, Stanton called Lincoln “a low, cunning clown.” Stanton even called Lincoln “the original gorilla,” but Lincoln said nothing in reply.

Later, when he was President, Lincoln made Stanton his Secretary of War, because Stanton was the best man for the job. He treated Stanton with every courtesy. Years passed. An assassin's bullet was fired, and as Stanton looked down on Lincoln's silent body, he said,

⁵ Christopher Muther, “Instant gratification is making us perpetually impatient,” *The Boston Globe*, 2.2.13.

⁶ Rick Lawrence, *Skin in the Game* (Kregel Publications, 2015), pp. 105-107.

⁷ Linton Weeks, “Impatient Nation: I Can't Wait for You to Read This,” NPR, 12.6.10.

⁸ Matt Woodley, www.PreachingToday.com

⁹ William Barclay, “Letters to the Corinthians,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), p. 133.

¹⁰ Evan May, *Love Gives Life: A Study of 1 Corinthians 13* (Lexington, KY: Golden Mouth Press, 2012), pp. 25-26.

¹¹ See also Proverbs 19:11.

“There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen.” Love is patient, and had won in the end.¹²

2. Love is kind. Brandon Cook was visiting his grandmother in the hospital in Nashua, New Hampshire when she made a request that sent him to town on a mission. He later described what happened on *Facebook*:

My grandmother is passing soon with cancer. I visited her the other day and she was telling me about how she really wanted soup, but not hospital soup because she said it tasted awful. She went on about how she would really like some clam chowder from Panera. Unfortunately Panera only sells clam chowder on Friday, and it wasn't Friday. I called the manager, Sue, and told her the situation. I wasn't looking for anything special -- just a bowl of clam chowder. Without hesitation she said absolutely she would make my grandmother some clam chowder. When I went to pick it up they gave me a box of cookies as well. It's not that big of a deal to most, but to my grandma it meant a lot. I really want to thank Sue and the rest of the staff from Panera in Nashua, NH for making my grandmother happy!¹³

That post garnered more than 800,000 “Likes” on *Facebook*, and that store's receipts went up 28% the next quarter. Here's another example.

It was November, 2012, and it was a very cold night in Times Square, when Officer Lawrence DePrimo encountered a barefooted homeless man. The man had neither socks nor shoes, and DePrimo noticed a bystander laughing at the man. “You could see the blisters on the man's feet even from a distance,” he said. “I had on two pairs of socks and I was still cold.”

DePrimo kindly asked the man if he had anything with which to cover his feet. “It's okay, Sir,” the man responded. “I've never had a pair of shoes in my life. But God bless you.” As the man began to walk away, DePrimo asked his shoe size. DePrimo then walked into a *Sketchers* store on West 42nd Street and bought the man a \$100 pair of all-weather boots. The manager later said, “We were all kind of shocked. Most of us are New Yorkers and we just kind of pass by that kind of thing. Especially in this neighborhood.”

This story would probably have never been known had it not been for Jennifer Foster, a tourist from Arizona, who saw it happen, took a photo with her phone, and posted it to *Facebook*. The post got more than 600,000 “Likes” and more than 48,000 comments. Love, my friends, is kind.¹⁴

Whereas “patience” has to do with choosing not to retaliate, “kindness” has to do with the positive, out-going response love makes to others. And while the phrase “is kind” has a passive feel in English, the Greek word—which appears only here in the New Testament—is a very active word. In fact, this word is only found in Christian writings, and scholars think that Paul may have made it up.¹⁵

We can see such love demonstrated in Paul's own kindness toward the Corinthians. His relationship with this church had been rocky. They had questioned his authority

¹² Barclay, p. 133.

¹³ Ted Coine and Mark Babbitt, “A World Gone Social,” American Management Association, 2014.

¹⁴ David Goodman, “Photo of Officer Giving Boots to Barefoot Man Warms Hearts Online,” *The New York Times*, 11.28.2012; Amanda Mickelberg, “NYPD Officer Larry DePrimo immortalized in tourist's photo,” *New York Post*, 12.18.2012.

¹⁵ James Renihan, *True Love: 1 Corinthians 13 - Understanding the Real Meaning of Christian Love* (Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2010), p. 60.

(1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:4, 4:18-20), dismissed his speech as unimpressive (1 Corinthians 2:1-5), and challenged his apostleship (2 Corinthians 11). And yet Paul began this letter by telling them “*I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus*” (1 Corinthians 1:4), and he concluded the letter with, “*My love to all of you in Christ Jesus*” (1 Corinthians 16:24). Paul loved these people.¹⁶

Even as a spark falling into the water does not injure the water but is itself quenched, so unpleasant and hostile actions, when they fall on patient and kind souls, vanish as they are transformed by love.¹⁷ Love is patient, and love is kind.

3. Love does not envy. If you’ve ever heard of Henry Varley, it’s probably because he was the man who said to the great evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, “The world has yet to see what God will do with a man who is fully committed to him.” Moody tried to be that man, and as he did, he became the “Billy Graham” of his day.

What is not so well known about Varley is that he was himself a powerful evangelist. But he faced a hidden battle with envy when another preacher in his neighborhood began having great success and started drawing away some of Varley’s members. Varley felt deep resentment toward the other minister and later noted that “I shall never forget the sense of guilt and sin that possessed me over that business. I was miserable. I was practically saying to the Lord Jesus, ‘Unless the prosperity of your church and people comes in this neighborhood through me, success had better not come.’”¹⁸

As Varley’s experience demonstrated, envy is the opposite of contentment. Envy begrudges to others what it does not possess itself, rather than celebrating with others in their success; and envy was behind much of the ugliness going on in Corinth. Indeed, envy is strongly correlated with depression, and it can actually make us sick physically as well as sick mentally and spiritually.¹⁹

Many of you know the names of LeBron James and Dwayne Wade, two basketball superstars who played together for the *Miami Heat*. Strong competitors on the court and off, ESPN interviewed Wade after he had made some changes in that relationship: “My decision to step back was one of the hardest things I’ve had to do in sports, but I don’t regret it.

“LeBron is probably the most talented player we’ve seen in a while, but how good can we be? Are we going to be good if he and I are both scoring 27 a night? Yeah, we’re going to be good, but it would be too much; so I told him, ‘Okay, it’s your turn. Now it’s your turn.’ I wanted to give him the opportunity where he didn’t have to think about that. It’s kind of like I told him, ‘Listen, I’ll find my way. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be there. But you go out and be the player that we want you to be.’”²⁰ Love doesn’t envy.

4. Love doesn’t boast. The word Paul used for “boasting” appears in the Bible only in Paul’s writings,²¹ and scholars think Paul may have invented this word, too. The idea has to do with being arrogant, “puffed up,” or a “windbag.” The word causes us to think of politicians who trumpet themselves and their accomplishments, erecting statues and monuments to themselves,

¹⁶ May, pp. 30-31.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter: The Meaning of First Corinthians 13* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2010), p. 32.

¹⁸ Vance Christie, “Addressing the Cancer of Envy – Henry Varley,” Vance Christie’s Blog, 8.8.14.

¹⁹ Arthur Brooks, “The Downside of Inciting Envy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 3.1.14.

²⁰ www.preachingtoday.com

²¹ 1 Corinthians 4:6, 18, 19, 5:2, 8:1; Colossians 2:18.

as if to say, “I am great! Look at me! Look at what I’ve done! I am important! Pay attention to me!” And Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “This is not how love behaves.”²²

In an interview last year, former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg noted that he has been sobered by how many of his college classmates have recently died, and mortality is beginning to get his attention. But he told the interviewer, “I am telling you that if there is a God, when I get to heaven I’m not stopping to be interviewed. I’m heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It’s not even close.”²³ I’m afraid Mr. Bloomberg is in for a surprise.

William Carey was one of the greatest missionaries and one of the greatest linguists that the world has ever known, translating portions of the Bible into no fewer than thirty-four Indian languages. Carey began his adult life in England as a cobbler, a repairer of shoes, and when he arrived in India he was treated with contempt by the British already there.

At one dinner party, an arrogant Briton intended to humiliate Carey with the loud comment, “And I suppose, Mr. Carey, that you once worked as a shoemaker.” “No, your lordship,” Carey quietly responded, “not a shoemaker, only a cobbler.”²⁴ Carey’s humble response defused the situation and achieved the opposite of what his tormenter had intended. Which of these two vignettes would you rather have told about you? Love doesn’t boast.

5. Love is not proud. Pride and boasting are two sides of the same coin, so let me just tell more stories to expand the point

Denzel Washington is one of my favorite actors. He reports that when he was a young man and just starting to “make it big,” he asked his Mom, “Mom, did you think this was going to happen? That I’d be so big and be able to do this and that and take care of everybody?”

And she responded, “Oh, you did it all by yourself, did you? I’ll tell you what you can do all by yourself. Go outside and get a mop and a bucket and clean these windows. You can do that all by yourself, superstar.”

She continued, “Boy, you stop it right there. Stop it right there! If you only knew how many people been praying for you! Get your gratitude on and go get your bucket.”²⁵

Abby Wambach is a two-time Olympic gold medalist, a six-time U.S. Soccer Athlete of the Year, and the 2012 FIFA World Player of the Year. She has scored the most international goals by an individual in footballing history, and she led the U.S. Women’s Team to the World Cup Title earlier this year. But Wambach doesn’t try to take the spotlight or claim the credit for her success, “I’ve never scored a goal without getting a pass from someone else,” she says.²⁶

Nik Wallenda is perhaps the best daredevil high-wire artist the world has ever seen. In 2012, he walked a tightrope across Niagara Falls. In 2013, he was the first person to walk a wire across the Grand Canyon. And in 2014, he walked a high wire between three skyscrapers in Chicago . . . blindfolded . . . without a net.

²² Renihan, pp. 70-71.

²³ Jeremy Peters, “Bloomberg Plans a \$50 Million Challenge to the N.R.A.,” *The New York Times*, 4.15.14.

²⁴ Barclay, pp. 134-135.

²⁵ Michael Chapman, “Denzel Washington to College Grads: ‘Put God First,’ www.cnsnews.com, 5.11.15.

²⁶ “2015: The Year Ahead – Watch the Women’s World Cup,” *Hemispheres*, January 2015; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abby_Wambach

Nik Wallenda is also a follower of Jesus, and he knows that pride is a continual temptation; so after the crowds and the media fade away after one of these stunts, he engages in a simple spiritual discipline: he goes to where the crowds stood to watch him and quietly picks up trash. Here's what he says about that:

“My purpose is simply to help clean up after myself. The huge crowds leave a great deal of trash behind, and I feel compelled to pitch in. Besides, after the inordinate amount of attention I sought and received, I need to keep myself grounded. Three hours of cleaning up debris is good for my soul. Humility does not come naturally to me. So if I have to force myself into situations that are humbling, so be it

“I know that I need to get down on my hands and knees like everyone else. I do it because it's a way to keep from tripping. As a follower of Jesus, I see Him washing the feet of others. I do it because if I don't serve others, I'll be serving nothing but my ego.”²⁷

Well, that's a lot of stories about “Five Points.” Here are a few questions to round out our morning:

1. **Love is Patient and Longsuffering:** How do you respond when someone offends you? It may be the grocery clerk, a coworker, a friend, your spouse, your parent, or a fellow church member. The question is, what do you do? If you've faced such a situation this week or this month, what *did* you do?
2. **Love is Kind:** How do you respond when someone decides to be your enemy, when they don't like you and try to injure or harass you? The most natural thing to do is to take offense and to strike back, but that's not what love does. What did *you* do?
3. **Love does not Envy:** Is there anyone, living or dead, against whom you harbor feelings of envy or jealousy today? What do you need to do about that?
 - How do you respond when your coworker gets a larger raise than you do? When someone else is asked to do something that you think you could do better? When recognition goes to someone else who is stealing the credit that you earned yourself?
4. **Love does not Boast and is not Proud:** How do you respond when you get a larger raise than your coworker does? When you are given the credit for something that someone else contributed to or worked for? What would love do?

I'm just asking

²⁷ Nik Wallenda with David Ritz, *Balance* (Faith Words, 2013, p. 207); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nik_Wallenda