

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 “Unlimited Love” Rev. Janet Chapman 2/10/19

“Installing Love” Script by Rick Anderson (Adapted by N. Lougee)

Ann: Customer Service. How may I help you today?

Norm: Well, I want to install LOVE. Can you guide me through the process?

Ann: Yes, I can. Are you ready to proceed?

Norm: Well, I'm not very technical, but yes, let's do it. What do I do first?

Ann: OK. The first step is Open Your HEART. Have you located your HEART program?

Norm: Yes, I have, but there are several other programs running. Is it okay to install LOVE while they are running?

Ann: What programs are running?

Norm: Let's see, I have PAST-HURT, LOW-ESTEEM, GRUDGE and RESENTMENT.COM running right now.

Ann: OK. No problem. LOVE will gradually erase PAST-HURT from your current operating system. It may remain in your permanent memory, but it will no longer disrupt other programs. LOVE will also eventually overwrite LOW-ESTEEM. with a module of its own called HIGH-ESTEEM. However, you have to completely turn off GRUDGE and RESENTMENT.COM. That program prevents LOVE from being installed properly. Can you turn that off?

Norm: I don't know how to do that. Can you tell me how?

Ann: My pleasure. Go to your Start menu and bring up FORGIVENESS.EXE. You may need to repeat that several times, but keep going until GRUDGE and RESENTMENT.COM has been completely erased.

Norm: Okay, I did it. Now LOVE is installing itself automatically. Is that normal?

Ann: Yes. You should receive a message that says it will reinstall for the life of your HEART. Do you see that message?

Norm: Yes, I do. Is LOVE completely installed now?

Ann: Yes, but remember that you have only the basic program. You'll need to begin connecting to other HEARTs in order to get the upgrades.

Norm: Oh! Oh! I'm getting an error message already.

Ann: What does the message say?

Norm: It says, 'ERROR 412 - PROGRAM NOT RUN ON INTERNAL COMPONENTS.' What does that mean?

Ann: Oh! Don't worry, that's a common problem. It means that the LOVE program is set up but has not yet been run on your HEART. It is one of those complicated programming things, but it means you have to 'LOVE' your own unit before it can 'LOVE' others.

Norm: Oh! So, what should I do?

Ann: Can you pull down the directory called 'SELF-ACCEPTANCE'?

Norm: Let's see. Yes, I have it.

Ann: Excellent. You're getting good at this.

Norm: Thank you.

Ann: You're welcome. Click on the following files and then copy them to the 'MYHEART' directory: The files are FORGIVE-SELF, REALIZE-WORTH, and ACKNOWLEDGE-LIMITATIONS. The system will overwrite any conflicting files and begin patching any faulty programming. Now, you need to delete VERBOSE-SELF-CRITIC.EXE from all directories, and then empty your recycle bin to make sure it is completely gone and can never come back.

Norm: Got it. Hey! My HEART is filling up with new files. SMILE is playing on my monitor right now and it shows that PEACE, and CONTENTMENT are copying themselves all over my HEART. Is this normal?

Ann: Yes. LOVE is installed and running. You should be able to handle it from here. But before I go, there is one more thing.

Norm: Yes?

Ann: LOVE is freeware. Be sure to give it and its various modules to everybody you meet. They will in turn share it with other people and they will share some of their own cool modules with you.

Norm: Oh! That's wonderful. Thanks for your help. By the way, what's your name?

Ann: I go by a lot of names, but you can call me God. Thanks for asking. Most people feel all they need is an occasional check-up, but to get the most out of LOVE, I suggest a schedule of daily maintenance. I've really enjoyed our time together. You can call on me anytime.

Love is freeware. If Paul were a 21st century author, he might have said the same. Instead, he gives us one of the most well-known passages in Scripture. It also makes it one of the hardest texts to share a new thought on because we have heard it all. Those who have never even opened a Bible have most likely heard these words, probably at some wedding somewhere. In more weddings than I can count, couples have asked for this text to be read but often have a hard time naming where it comes from. I try to explain to them this poem was not written for a wedding. In fact, it was written to a church that was having a hard time getting along. It has nothing to do with romantic love. It focuses on a group of people who cared about each other but had a funny way of showing it. Some of them thought they had better ideas than others, and some had voices that got a great deal louder than others, and then it got to be a competition as to who could yell the loudest. The community was boiling over with divisions, people were taking sides left and right, and having a difficult time staying together. So Paul admonishes them to behave better and act out of love. It is at this point, the couple proclaims, "Yes! That is exactly what we need read at our wedding."

Maybe they are right after all, if they understand what they are saying, but I am doubtful they do. The reality is that love is hard and keeping a relationship going is very difficult. There is a scene in the movie "Jerry McGuire" where Tom Cruise's character is bemoaning the loss of his long-time girlfriend to a restaurant waitress. The waitress, Dorothy, shrugs and says, "Maybe love shouldn't be that hard," to which he says, "Yeah, maybe so." Wrong, Jerry – even at its best, love is hard, it can be frustrating, demanding, and overwhelming. Any of us who have ever dealt with computer problems probably identified with the earlier skit, yet we recognize that rarely are our problems resolved with such ease.

There is a lot of baggage entrenched on our hard drives that makes love, especially love without limits, a fragile program. Yet it is a program worth everything we have and are, in order to both embrace and enact. In verses 4-8, “love” is the subject of 16 verbs, not adjectives, in a row; it happens in every phrase. That may not come through clearly in English translations when we read “love is patient, love is kind” but in the original Greek it is more accurately “love shows patience, love acts with kindness.” Here, love is an active thing that never ceases to work. It is always finding ways to express itself for the good of others. The point of the poem is not some “flowery description” of what love “is” in some abstract and theoretical sense, but of what love “does” without limits or conditions. This is a grown-up kind of love – when I was a child, I understood as a child, but when I grew up, love took on a whole new understanding.

Lonni Collins Pratt is co-author of “Radical Hospitality” where she talks about the time she and her husband lived across the road from a small, log cabin. It was empty for much of the time until a man moved in and started renovating it. Her husband went to meet him and hit it off with him right away but Lonni, being an introvert, stayed to herself. She didn’t like the intrusiveness and misunderstandings people brought into relationships. Until one night she heard a scream from across the road. It startled her awake because it was the kind of scream that made you want to hide under the covers. She went to the window and listened until the screaming began to fade. She went to bed but could hardly sleep. The next night, the same thing happened again. So the following day, a cool February day, she made some chili, a thermos of coffee, and brought a couple slices of pie all over to the man across the street. She met Les, who looked a bit like Willie Nelson. He was gracious and let her in and they sat down together to share in the chili, pie and coffee. Les talked about his life, how he liked to fix up

homes and then sell them to families who couldn't have afforded a home otherwise. He never stayed in one place very long, had very little family or friends. He had served in Vietnam, a place he said was pretty hard to get away from, in fact, most of the time he felt like he was still living there. Lonni heard the story between the lines and now understood the nightly screams. She reached over and touched his hand saying, "Now, you have a friend. And I promise I'll help in any way to keep Vietnam far, far away." It was a big step for an introvert, but she figured it was the right thing to do. To share some chili and pie, to be present in a season of suffering, and to move beyond that wall of comfort – her heart was filling up with new life. Love was installed and running. So what about you, dear friends? How's the installation going and are you ready for some upgrades? God is ready and waiting for your call.