

Do you remember learning this little spelling hint, “I before e except after c.” Most of us have probably learned it at one time or another. It’s a helpful little suggestion until you realize how many exceptions there are to this rule. If you became a good speller, it was probably because you ignored the rule and just learned to spell specific words. If not, you rely on the spell check on your computer before you print or send anything.

But what do you rely on when it comes to love. How do you spell “Love?” The Apostle Paul helps us out in 1 Corinthians 13. Paul drops this chapter right in the middle of the discussion about “Spiritual Gifts.” The people in Corinth were divided over spiritual gifts, over which gifts were the most important, over who had them and how to use them. In the middle of this discussion, Paul wrote, **“And now I will show you the most excellent way.”** (1 Corinthians 12:31) Then he goes on to write about love.

So how does Paul spell “love?” Paul gives us a number of rules for love. Paul wrote:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

These are not easy things to do. As a matter of fact, it is really hard to put this kind of love into practice because it demands that we put “U before I,” that we put the needs of others ahead of ourselves. But putting U before I, your needs before my needs, just doesn’t come naturally.

A few years ago, Nova TV wanted to broadcast a program on two groups whose members work exclusively to the good of the community. Who were these remarkable groups known for their selflessness? They weren’t people from a remote village in Africa or an isolated tribe living in the jungles of South America. It was ants and cockroaches. Nova had to look outside of the human race because people don’t naturally live selfless lives.

In 2006, the Wall Street Journal reported on the gifts some people were giving their Moms for Mother’s Day. One man spent a bundle getting a giant spider tattoo lasered off his back and said that his mother never liked the tattoo and now that he was older, neither did he. So he planned to tell his mom, “Happy Mother’s Day. I just went through 2 ½ hours of torture for you.” Others bought themselves cell phones for Mother’s Day claiming that it makes it easier for their mothers to get in touch with them. These self serving gifts sound like the adult version of the macaroni framed pictures of ourselves we gave mom when we were in grade school. They remind us of the fact that self interest is a natural part of everyone’s life.

I’ve never heard of a baby that was hungry or had a wet diaper that needed to be changed in the middle of the night that didn’t let mom and dad know about it. I never say a two year old that

desperately wanted something and was willing to wait patiently for mom or dad to respond to his or her request. Kids just don't do that. It is hard for teens and adults to put others first. That doesn't mean that we don't want to do it. The Christian faith teaches us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. But that doesn't come easily. We have to work at it and keep working at it.

We talk about a variety of loves that are not all the same. Your love for chocolate is not the same as your love for your children. Your love for a TV program is not the same as the love you have for a good friend. The love that Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 13 is a self giving, a sacrificial love. This love is more of an act of the will than a feeling of the heart. It is more of a commitment and less of an emotion.

Jesus is the ultimate example of this type of love. He described this type of love with these words, ***"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*** (John 15:13) That is exactly what Jesus did when He died in our place on the cross. He gave up His life so that we could live. It was an act of the will and in obedience to God the Father's will. In the final moments before his arrest, Jesus prayed, ***"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*** (Luke 22:42)

But we don't have to work at learning to love like this on our own. The first fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 is "love." Love is not only the best way to live; it is God's way for us to live. But love is also God's gift to us. God loves us and fills us with His love. God makes it possible for us to love others, to put apply the "U before I" rule for love.

When Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment he said, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Luke 10:27) Jesus teaches us that love is multi-dimensional. God loves us and we love Him back. Because God loves us, we can love others.

That kind of love has the power to change us, to transform our lives. The best way to lift your spirits when you're having a bad day is to Praise God and to help someone else. When we praise God, we take the focus off ourselves. And when we focus on God and offer Him our praise, He lifts our spirits. When we help others and do something good for them, that also takes the focus off ourselves. Some of the best advice I've ever heard for someone who is depressed is to find someone you can help, someone you can do something good for. It works!

A lot of the things that we do won't last. Great meals are consumed and forgotten. Great accomplishments are soon forgotten and replaced with the question, "What have you done lately?" But some things will last. Paul tells us, ***"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*** (1 Corinthians 13:13) And the great way of love is "U before I" because of the love of God in Christ. Amen.