

WHAT DOES LOVE LOOK LIKE?

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
WE ARE TO LOVE OTHERS AS GOD LOVES US.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

¹If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

.....
⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, ⁵ is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶ Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

.....
⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. ¹³ **Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love — but the greatest of these is love.**

+
+
+

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Give over my body (v. 3)—This sacrifice of one’s life can be the ultimate gift of love.

Endures (v.7)—Love endures in this age with a sure expectation of better things to come in the next.

Love never ends (v. 8)—Many aspects of church life will end at the end of this current age, but not love. This permanence signals love’s priority within the church.

The perfect (v. 10)—The perfect refers to the next age, the eternal age when Messiah reigns.

HOW CAN WE LIVE OUT TRUE LOVE IN OUR LIVES?

Bank tellers have a rather thankless job. All that monotonous counting, handling germier dollar bills, and dealing all day with people who are likely in a hurry. But of all the skills they need to have, one is eminently important: the ability to identify a counterfeit dollar bill. Bank tellers must look at a bill and, in a matter of seconds, observe minute details that signal whether it's real or a forgery.

To gain this skill, bank tellers don't study forgeries; they study the real thing. By thoroughly knowing the details of the original, they can readily pick up on anything that doesn't match it.

If we are to be people who live in the love of God, we must know what His love truly is. And since God Himself is love, we must know His character. But counterfeits abound: people who may look and sound genuine, but they neither come from nor represent God. A genuine believer is one who has been transformed by the love of God and loves as He loves. God takes the real thing seriously—and so should we.

Make Love Foundational //

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

To fully grasp Paul's teaching on the nature of love, look at the verse right before chapter 13 begins. Keep in mind, Paul was writing a letter that originally contained no chapters or verses. Inspired by God's Spirit, he was connecting one point to the next. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul wrote about the spiritual gifts and ministries God gives us for the sake of building up the church. He explained how the Holy Spirit gives us diverse gifts and just as we don't have a physical body with multiple noses, we don't all have the same gifts in the body of Christ.

Then Paul directed the Corinthian Christians toward what he called "an even better way" (1 Cor. 12:31). Paul was about to point to something better than focusing on our spiritual gifts. He was connecting his teaching on spiritual gifts with the need for love in all we do.

We often hear 1 Corinthians 13 quoted at weddings and see it framed in romantic artwork,



THE POINT: WE ARE TO LOVE OTHERS AS GOD LOVES US.

especially verses 4-7. But verses 1-3 introduce this beloved passage with a sobering reality. Paul said it's possible to be theologically right, spiritually gifted, morally immovable, and impressively sacrificial, yet completely miss the point. Look at the actions and spiritual gifts he described.

- **Speaking in tongues.** This was a supernatural spiritual gift God gave only to some. Those who spoke in tongues (an unknown language) weren't infallible, and the gift was to be used in specific ways. Talking in an unknown language is only empty noise without a spirit of love.
- **Prophecy.** Paul wrote, "The person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets" (1 Cor. 14:5). Prophecy, which is always in total conformity to the Word, influences others to action. Yet even this meant nothing if the one speaking lacked love.
- **Knowledge and understanding the deep things of God.** To have such knowledge and understanding requires the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christians with this gift have deep understanding of God's Word, continually plumbing its depths in study and drawing out insights and application for others in the church. Yet, apart from love, their intellect is irrelevant.
- **Faith.** The one who has faith has a spiritual power from God that is greater than even the laws of nature. He is certain of God's Word and His promises. Those with the gift of faith are bold in action and mighty in Spirit. But they too, are nothing without love.
- **Sacrifice.** Paul's last example is the person who gives away everything he owns, even giving up his life for the sake of Christ. Yet, if even this person only acted in order to boast of his deeds and lacked a spirit of love, he is none the better for his sacrifice. Without love, he might as well have kept everything he owned and his life along with it.

WHICH OF THESE COMPARISONS TO LOVE DO YOU FIND MOST FASCINATING?

Love is essential to every other aspect of the Christian life. Without it, everything else is empty. The only way your life and mine will truly matter is choosing the way of God's love.



DIGGING DEEPER LOVE

The concept of the love of God is deeply rooted in the Bible. Paul provides a definitive statement on love in 1 Corinthians 13. He promoted that rhetorical ability, preaching, knowledge, mountain-moving faith, charity towards the poor, or even martyrdom are nothing without unconditional love. To the apostle John, love is the test of authentic discipleship. For him, love is not just a requirement for fellowship, but a test of salvation. "This is how God's children—and the Devil's children—are made evident. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). Jesus taught that believers are to love even their enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). Although believers are permitted, even commanded, to hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13), we are not to hate the sinner.

Why is this type of love so difficult to attain?



Make Love Essential //

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Paul’s definition of love is about what we give to others as we see and interact with them, not what we expect to receive. It shifts the center of our focus from ourselves to others.

Consider patience. Our impatience often comes from anger at not getting what we want when we want it. We demand a result, but someone or something is in the way.

Kindness is a predictor of marital longevity. A study found that spouses who respond positively to relational invitations to interact were far more likely stay married.

Walking in patience and kindness—two character traits included in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)—reflects a heart of humility. A humble heart doesn’t see people as inconveniences or competition; instead, a humble heart is faithful to forgive and not hold onto an offense.

Paul went even deeper. He defined love as a commitment to what is good and in the best interest of the other person. Seeing someone else get off track, go the wrong direction, or

stumble into sin isn’t an occasion to boastfully compare or condemn. Love is faithful to believe the best about others and to stick with them no matter what the conflict, challenge, or struggle. This definition of love is a choice, one that is all about our character.

How can you and I live in love? The truth is we can’t—at least not on our own. To possess the love of God, we must first be possessed by the love of God.

“God is love” (1 John 4:8), and because Jesus “is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), when we see Jesus, we see God. Consequently, when we see Jesus, we see love. Read verses 4-7 again, but as you read, replace the word love with the name Jesus.

The love of God is genuine, not like counterfeits of the world. God chose you, and He chooses to love you. And if we are going to be people who walk in His love, we must make a choice, too. At this point, you might expect that choice to be to love others as God has loved you (John 15:13). But we’re not there yet. We have a choice to make even before that one.

We must choose to believe God loves us. We must first believe the love that God has for us. “And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us” (1 John 4:16). Knowing God loves us with the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 will change everything.

WHICH ASPECT OF LOVE IN THIS PASSAGE DO YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGING TO LIVE OUT?

Make Love Eternal //

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul circled back to where he began this teaching on love and brought up spiritual gifts again. The spiritual gifts we hold in high esteem will go away, but “love never ends.” Paul isn’t being schmaltzy here. This is not some ancient

THE POINT: WE ARE TO LOVE OTHERS AS GOD LOVES US.

version of a Hallmark® movie script. Paul was referring to our future as members of the body of Christ.

The spiritual gifts are useful for the church because we are still living in the age between Christ's resurrection and His return. But when Jesus comes back, we will be with Him and be like Him. "When the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end." When Jesus Christ, the perfect One, returns, He will inaugurate the restoration of God's perfect creation. The word "perfect" carries the idea not only of flawless quality, but also of completion. Right now, we don't fully see God, but we will then. Right now, we do not know and experience Him fully, but we will then.

Even when everything else in this world fades, love will remain. Love is the character of Christ, the holy and perfect One, and love will be a part of His perfect kingdom. This means that whatever we do in a spirit of Christlike love—that which has the character of His love—will endure.

WHY IS LOVE MORE POWERFUL THAN OUR MINISTRY OR OUR SERVICE TO OTHERS?

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the biggest questions about slavery is, "what helped slaves to survive captivity?" The uniqueness about this question is that the answer is found in the same Bible that slave masters used to justify slavery. The irony is that what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 13 is what the slaves learned to live out. The Bible taught slaves to love despite their situation. Most slaves could not read or write, but they heard and felt God and believed He was real. Whereas their owners were educated, but most of the time their hearts were not in tune with God. Therefore, they could not express true love. Many Negro spirituals were created by slaves to tell the story of their faith and hope in God as well as to send messages of ways to escape. Just think, it was not education like their captors had, but faith in God that delivered them. They may not have been physically freed from slavery, but they were spiritually and mentally freed through Christ.

How does the love of 1 Corinthians 13 empower us through adversity?

LIVE IT

How can we love others the way that God loves us?

Love has its origin in God; consequently, the love we're to display is grounded in the character of God. If we're to be people who live in the love of God, we must know what His love truly is. Since God Himself is love, we must know His character. A genuine believer is one who has been transformed by the love of God and loves as He loves. How will you grow in the genuine love of God this week?

+ + +

- **Consider.** Think about genuine versus counterfeit love. Write down ways you may have been influenced by definitions of love that aren't true. Focus on love as described in 1 Corinthians 13.
- **Connect.** Whom do you know who exhibits and expresses the genuine love of God? Take two minutes this week to tell that person how you see God's love in his or her life.
- **Care.** Determine to love others as Christ loves you. Who needs to know of God's love? Ask God to show you ways to live out the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 before that person.

DAILY READINGS

1. SUPREME LOVE // I CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Supreme pizza is delicious. Although delightful, it can also be expensive or costly. This is a reminder of God's supreme love. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul noted that everything pales in comparison to true love. He gave examples of spiritual gifts that mean nothing without love. Providing the blended ingredients of what love is and is not, Paul described the recipe for the supreme love of God in all relationships. God's love for creation cost Him dearly. He sacrificed His one and only Son so that we could be restored to a rightful relationship with Him.

The supreme love of Christ is for all and it will never fail.

2. THE MEANING OF LOVE // I CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

The late queen of soul, Aretha Franklin, spelled out the word R-E-S-P-E-C-T in her hit song and challenged listeners to find out what it means to her. In the same way, we can spell out the word L-O-V-E and encourage others to find out what it means to God. The apostle Paul detailed what love means and looks like in practice. He commented that love means being patient and kind to others. Love means having a humble attitude and seeking the highest good of another. God's love is essential for flourishing and peaceful connections. Paul's explanation of love aids in the understanding of the meaning of love.

Seek to define your love the same way that Paul defined it.

3. COVERED BY LOVE // I PETER 4:8

I have a perfectionist personality which is positive and negative. The positive side is aiming for excellence in life pursuits, but the negative aspect is striving for an unachievable goal. Embracing my flaws, faults, and failures, I realize that not being perfect has led to a need for forgiveness. These passages indicate that love and forgiveness

are related. While Peter wrote that love covers a multitude of sins, Paul emphasized that love remembers no wrong. God's love hides sin by extending forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Because God's character is quick and ready to forgive, the outcome for your life is covered by love. **Consider how God has loved and forgiven you that you may do the same for others.**

4. PERSIST AND PERSEVERE // LUKE 18:1-8

People struggle with prayer for different reasons. Some say they do not know how to pray, while others do not have time to pray. Still, many think their prayers get no further than the ceiling and become discouraged because they do not see results. Jesus told a story about a widow and an unjust judge. The widow kept going to the judge seeking justice. Eventually, the judge realized that the widow's persistence and perseverance, petitioning the courts might wear him out. This widow demonstrated an essential element to prayer—persistence. In like manner God grants the requests of those who persists in prayer. This is a demonstrates of faith.

Persist and persevere in prayer because this method speaks to the heart of God.

5. REMEMBER OTHERS // EPHESIANS 6:18

As part of a small group of believers, each Sunday morning we meet to pray. During this time, we make known our requests to God. Ephesians 6:18 encourages the work of the prayer ministry. This verse informs us to pray with the help of the Holy Spirit. It reassures us to be watchful and remain constant in prayer. Paul's message also encouraged us to pray for others. We should remember others in prayer because someone somewhere might be heavily overwhelmed. Praying for others allows you to help them to carry their burdens and simultaneously fulfill the law of Christ's love.

Remember others in your prayers so they can be blessed and delivered.