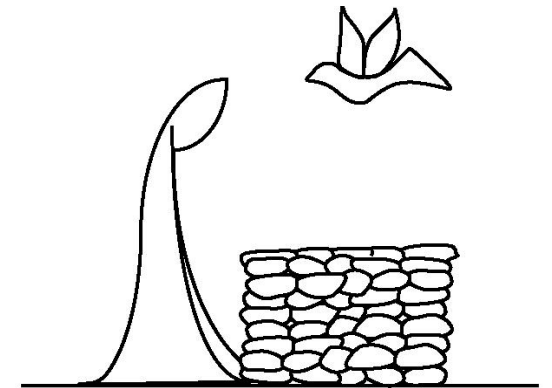


The Test of Love

How we can “continue” in Christ’s love, as we love those God has entrusted to us.

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I Corinthians 13:1-13

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”
(KJV)

Love. The very word conjures up many thoughts in our hearts and minds these days, doesn't it? In our television driven society, where we watch people “fall in love” each and every night; where a Hollywood divorce is prime fodder for the media; and where the phrase “I love you” is tossed around like “would you like fries with that?”; we've lost the true meaning of the word love.

Those of us who have a personal relationship with God, though, must come to understand a different meaning of the word love. For God Himself is love (1 John 4:8). That changes the entire meaning of the word, doesn't it? Jesus Christ left us with a very definitive commandment “That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 1:12).

This booklet, on loving those that Christ has entrusted to us, is a study on I Corinthians 13. This well - known passage is read at weddings and anniversaries and hangs on the walls of many a home, but how often do we sit down to read it as the manual of how we are to love? And how often do we sit down to think about loving those around us, not just our parents or our spouses, but each of those people that God has placed in our lives? Unfortunately for many of us, this is a rare occurrence. And yet, loving others was Christ's priority. He told us again and again that we are to love one another, that we are to continue in His love, and that love is the preeminent of all actions.

As we begin this study on 1 Corinthians 13, I'd like to take a quick look at another wonderful passage on love, 1 John 4:7-17. This passage explores the roots of love, how it can live in each of us and how God expects us to bestow it upon each other.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love,

not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world.” (1 John 4:7-17 KJV)

There are innumerable truths found in the passage regarding love and it serves as a wonderful introduction to I Corinthians 13. Let us just look for a minute at the truths we find in this passage:

- Love comes from God.
- We must know God and be born of Him to truly love well.
- God ultimately manifested His love for us by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins.
- Because God loved us, we are to love others.
- We cannot see God with our eyes, but when we love others they can see Him in us.
- We know that God is in us because we have His Holy Spirit in our hearts.
- God dwells in us, in the person of the Holy Spirit, when we come to know God and believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the payment for our sins.
- God dwells in us, giving us the ability to love as He loved.
- Given this ability, we can be God’s hands extended to a lost and dying world.

- There can be no fear in love because the perfect love that originates in God casts out all fear.
- We love God because He first loved us.
- If we love God, we must also love those around us.

Wow, what a list! It all comes down to this: God is love and because He first loved us, we are to love others. We love others when we show them God and when we take the love that God has so amazingly bestowed upon us and pour it out upon those God has placed in our lives.

My friends, as you approach I Corinthians 13 with me, please ponder the truths found in I John 4. Always remember that love has its beginnings in God and that true action-filled love is only possible when one knows God and Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. Remember also that love is not something reserved for family and spouses, or children and best friends, but that love is for all. We are to love the man in front of us in the grocery store line as much as those around our dinner table. Christ’s plan for us is that we continue in His love and pour that love out upon all. As you continue in this booklet, ask God to open your heart and reveal to you His plan for loving those He has entrusted to you.

Chapter 1 The Test of Love

Christ's greatest commandment is that we love one another as He loved us (John 15:12). *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). As Christians, we are to love those around us -- our co-workers, acquaintances, friends and family, with that same Christ-like love that is daily bestowed upon us by the God of the Universe. *"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love"* (John 15:9).

The great passage on love, 1 Corinthians 13, is a wonderful text for us to use in self-examination. This passage gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves a number of questions:

- Are I loving others well?
- Is my focus on loving others or on loving myself?
- Am I becoming more loving as I know Christ better?
- Are there parts of my life that need to become more loving?
- Do I give loving others the preeminence that Christ gives it?

We will be looking at 1 Corinthians 13 in detail. As we approach this passage on love, ask God to search your heart. Pray along with Psalm 139:23-24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* Ask God to show you how well you love others and if you are placing others ahead of yourself. Ask Him to reveal those areas of your life in which you are not as loving as you should be. As He reveals those areas in your life that need work, ask Him to forgive you. Always remember the promise of 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* If you ask, He will

forgive. Finally, my friends, ask Him for strength, direction, and understanding as you seek to live a more loving life.

1 Corinthians 13:1 - 3

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

The first three verses in 1 Corinthians 13 show that charity, or love, is truly the test of how well we are living. If we do not love well, we are not truly living. Loving others is the key to living a Godly life. These three verses show us that our very words mean nothing if they are not spoken with love, that we lack a true identity in Christ if we are not living in love, and that we truly have nothing if we are not acting through love.

Loving with our words

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). 1 Corinthians 12 ends with a discussion of spiritual gifts, among which are speaking in tongues, understanding and preaching upon scripture, healing, teaching, and prophecy. Paul exhorts us as believers to *"earnestly covet"* spiritual gifts, which is an exemplary ambition (1 Corinthians 12:31). With this stage set, however, he shows us that love is preeminent above all spiritual gifts. For he tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:1, that even if we can speak with the words of an angel, but do not love, we are no better than a ringing bell, or a *"tinkling cymbal"*. Now Paul has just finished describing to us the importance of spiritual gifts that involve our speech. We cannot teach, preach, edify, or care for others without our words. With all their importance however, if we

do not speak in love, our words are no good. We are to love others with our words.

How is it that we can love others with our words?

Be Consistent. We can love others with our words, by being consistent in our speech towards them. James 3:10-11 tells us *“Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?”* If we truly love others, we cannot at one moment lavish them in kindness and then turn around and bite them with our words. We must, as we are told in James 1:9, be *“swift to hear, and slow to speak”*. In doing so, we can take the time to make sure that our words are loving and kind. If we pause and think before we speak, we are much less likely to hurt each other with our words.

Build others up. We can love others with our words by consciously choosing words that only build each other up and do not tear each other down. Ephesians 4:29 exhorts us to *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers”*. In our society of cell phones and unlimited calling plans, words have become our primary source of communication. It is rare to sit down to write a letter to someone. It is less and less common to have a face-to-face meeting with someone, when so often it is easier to just have a conference call. In a society such as this our words are of primary importance. They exist without facial expression or body language. We must again, be *“swift to hear, and slow to speak”* that we make sure that those words that come out of our mouths are constantly and consistently building each other up. Paul in Ephesians 4 implores us to speak words that edify and minister to others, that shower them in grace. Take time to think before you speak, that your words might be a blessing to those who hear them. Think before you speak that only the best of your communication comes out.

Give them Jesus. We can love others with our words, by consciously and consistently giving them Jesus in each one. Colossians 4:6 reminds us that our speech should always be *“with grace, seasoned with salt”*. Again, in 1 Peter 3:15, we are told to *“sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”*. In each and every conversation throughout the day we have the opportunity to tell others about Jesus. We can quote scripture, speak of what He has done in our lives, or pray for those around us. We love others with our words, by carefully and consistently giving them the greatest gift ever – Jesus Christ. We are to be like Peter and John in Acts 4:20 who said, *“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”* As we sanctify the Lord in our hearts, our words must reflect His sanctification. If we are truly amazed at all He has done, we shouldn't be able to keep our mouths shut!

Be ye holy. We can love others with our words by keeping our words holy and being a good example to those around us. *“But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation”* (1 Peter 1:15). *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”* (Philippians 1:27). It loves others to show them the holiness of God. We are told in Matthew 12:36 that we are responsible to God for the words that come from our mouths, *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”* My friends, strive to speak words that glorify God, speak of His gospel, and have value and meaning. In doing so, you will show others Christ and point them towards Him. *“But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness”* (2 Timothy 2:16).

Love is the test

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). Our mouths are windows onto our hearts. This first verse in I Corinthians 13 illustrates just how powerful our words are in loving each other, in our witness for Christ, and in evidence of the change that Christ has made in our life. In order to speak words filled with love, we must have hearts filled with love. If we are not filled with love and loving others, even the words that come from our mouths have no meaning or value. Loving words are a litmus test of a life lived for God. God is love and a life without love is a life not lived in His presence. Seek God and you will find Him (Jeremiah 29:11). Seek His love, ask Him to fill you up with it, and then pour it out upon others with your Godly words.

Chapter 2 Who are we without love?

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Christ greatest commandment is that we love one another as He loved us (John 15:12). As we discussed, we are to love those around us with that same Christ-like love that is daily bestowed upon us by the God of the Universe. Christ loved us as the Father had loved Him; therefore we are to love in the same way that He has loved us (John 15:9).

1 Corinthians 13:1 – 3

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

As we discussed in chapter 1, the first three verses in 1 Corinthians 13 show that charity, or love, is truly the test of how well we are living. Loving others is the key to living a Godly life. These three verses show us that our very words mean nothing if they are not spoken with love, that we lack a true identity in Christ if we are not living in love, and that we truly have nothing if we are not acting through love. Here, we will be talking about how our identity in Christ hinges on how we love others.

Our identity in Christ

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2).

In this verse, the apostle Paul again sets up love as preeminent above all other gifts and characteristics of a Godly person. In this case, he is telling us that our identity in Christ hinges on the love that we show each other and he very boldly states that unless we love each other, we are nothing. The gifts of prophecy, knowledge and understanding, and faith, are meant to be used in love.

The purpose of the gifts that we are given is to use them to love others, to show them Christ, and to spread the Gospel. This is the basis of our lives as Christians. In these verses, Paul is in no way putting down spiritual gifts, but he is making the statement that unless these gifts are used with the goal of loving each other, there is no point in having them. God gives us our gifts to love each other; they are not to be squandered.

Prophecy.

The prophets were people burdened for the lives of those around them. They heard from God and loved those around them so much that they made sure they heard the message. I Peter 1: 12 tells us that though the message that the prophets were delivering was not for themselves, they still delivered it, knowing that in this way they could love those around them. *“It was revealed to them that it was not for themselves, but for you, that they were ministering the truths which have now been announced to you, by those who preached the gospel to you, through the help of the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven-- truths into which angels long to look”* (I Peter 1:12). We can love others by acting upon the burden that we have for the lost around us. There is nothing more loving than sharing Christ with a friend.

Knowledge.

Knowledge without love is nothing, because the knowledge that Paul speaks of in this verse is the knowledge of God. Knowledge of who God is, of His word, and His message of salvation is key in loving others, because with it

you can bring others to Christ. Knowledge of the world will pass away as will the world (I Corinthians 13:8), but the word of the Lord will last forever and the knowledge of it has eternal consequences (Luke 21:33). II Timothy 2:15 tells us *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”*. We are tools in His hands when we have the knowledge of His word in our hearts. *“And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?”* (I Corinthians 8:11). It cannot be that a weak brother in our lives should perish, when we have the knowledge that he needs to live eternally. We have the knowledge of salvation, therefore the loving thing to do with that knowledge is to share it with those around us. *“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen”* (II Peter 3:18). Knowledge kept to oneself is the same as a light kept under a bushel basket (Luke 11:33). Where is the love in that?

Faith.

Faith is the *“substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen”* (Hebrews 11:1). It is through faith that we know for certain who Jesus Christ is, the power of His resurrection, and the assurance of our salvation. Yet Paul tells us in the verse we are studying, that even if we have enough faith to move mountains, we are nothing unless we have love for others. Ephesians 3:17-19 tells us that we have faith because we are rooted and grounded in Christ’s love. *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”*. Christ dwells in us because of our faith. Because of His love and its power in our lives, we can comprehend who Christ is to us. Because of our faith, worked through the love of Christ, we can live the abundant life that Christ promised us (John 10:10). Faith is the key to unlocking the blessings of God. Like knowledge, faith kept to oneself does not show love

to anyone. We can love others through our faith by telling others about our faith, seeking to strengthen the faith of those around us, praying with others that their faith may increase, and seeking always to have your faith on your sleeve – shining for others to see.

Loving with the gifts He gives.

Let's take a look at our verse again: *“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). In this verse, Paul makes it very clear that we are nothing if we are not loving towards each other. That is strong language and yet he clearly makes his point that love is preeminent above all spiritual gifts. We may have the gift of prophecy, the gift of amazing understanding, all the knowledge in the universe, and faith enough to move mountains, but if we do not have love, we are nothing. 1 John 4: 15 reminds us *“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”* God is love and those who know Him and dwell in Him dwell in that love. When we confess that Jesus is the Son of God, that love enters our hearts. With God in us, we are capable of loving as He loves. As Christ told us in John 15:9 *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”* He commands us to continue in His love; therefore we must be able to love as He loved. My friends, we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). Ask for the strength and wisdom to see others as Christ sees them, to love others as Christ loves us, and to grow His love in your heart. *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour”* (Ephesians 5:1-2). Walk in such a way, my friends, that you are always using the gifts that He has given you.

Chapter 3 Unprofitable Sacrifices

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). As we continue in our discussion of 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, I ask you to go back and take a look at the previous chapters on verses 1 and 2 of chapter 13. These two verses show that charity, or love, is truly the test of how well we are living. Loving others is the key to living a Godly life. Our very words mean nothing if they are not spoken with love. We lack a true identity in Christ if we are not living in love.

Let us be reminded again that we are to love those around us with that same Christ-like love that God daily bestows upon us. God's love and grace and mercy are always available to us, we must only come to Him in prayer and ask. Christ loved us as the Father had loved Him; therefore we are to love in the same way that He has loved us (John 15:9). II John 1:6 tells us, *“And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.”* To walk in His love is to daily seek Him and come before Him in such a way that you can absorb all the love that He has for you, and then to pour out that love upon those around you. We cannot love others well when we are not seeking Him. We love others with the love and strength that He pours into us. Without Christ and His love, our resources of love will quickly run dry.

I Corinthians 13:1 - 3

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

A Godly life is one motivated by love. In this chapter, we will be talking about living a sacrificial and merciful life.

Living Sacrificially

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). In the previous two verses of chapter 13, Paul makes it very clear that love must be the preeminent motivation for all that we do as Christians. He tells us that unless we are motivated by showing Christ's love to others through the gifts that He has given us, we have no true identity in Him. Our greatest possession in life is the gift of loving others with the love that Christ pours into us. In this passage, Paul is describing two aspects of the Christian life, caring for the poor and living a sacrificial life. He says that though we may give all that we have to feed the poor and give our very bodies as a sacrifice, if we do not have love, it brings us no gain. Unless we give of our resources because of our love for Christ, it means nothing. Unless we live sacrificially because we want to see Christ glorified, it means nothing. Christ is the supreme motivation here, and Paul makes it very clear, as he has in the past 2 verses, that unless our minds and hearts are centered on Christ, all that we do will not point others to Him.

Giving Sacrificially

Paul gives us the example of giving to the poor and caring for those in need. To care for the poor is of supreme importance to Christ. He told us in Matthew 25:40 that *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* When we care for the poor and needy around us, we are caring for Christ Himself. Christ, in Matthew 6, makes very clear the attitude we are to have when giving to the church and to the poor: *“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the*

hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." The attitude that we are to have when giving, whether it is to the Church, to Christian ministries or to the poor, is that we are giving directly to God from that which He gave us. Because God loves us, He provides for us *"according to His riches in glory"* (Philippians 4:19). The money and resources that we have are gifts from God. The jobs that provide our salaries are gifts from God. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). One who gives sacrificially and gives with love is one who understands that all they have is given from the One who loves them and therefore they are to respond in kind by using their resources to show His love to others. My friends, we are to love others with our gifts by giving with the motivation of giving back to the supreme giver, God Himself.

Desiring Mercy

In the second part of verse 3, Paul gives us an example of sacrificing even our very bodies to God. He says that though he may *"give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"*. Paul is saying here that though he might sacrifice even his very life, but doesn't have love, the sacrifice would bring him nothing (i.e. return to him nothing from God). Paul knew his God very well and he knew what God desired in terms of sacrifice. David knew, too, when he said *"For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise"* (Psalm 51:16-17). The sacrifice that God asks for is not that of burning our bodies, but broken hearts that are fully yielded to Him. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice and the death of His body paid the penalty for our debt of sin. God delights in

hearts that are yielded to Him, hearts that love Him, and hearts that break when they see the needs of others. *"For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings"* (Hosea 6:6). We are to pour mercy out upon others. For it is truly a greater gift to love someone, to show them mercy and to show them Christ, than to sacrifice our bodies. The greatest gift you can ever give someone is Jesus Christ. Jesus himself speaks to us of this in Matthew 9:13 where He says, *"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* God wants us to love others and display His mercy to all that all might come to know Him. Just as *"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 6:23), *"the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men"* (Titus 2:11). We are Christ's hands extended in this world and we can show Him to all. *"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"* (Micah 6:8). Walk as Christ asks us to walk, showing mercy to all as He has shown mercy to you, that all might come to know Him.

Walking in His love

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). Christ asks us to live a sacrificial life. The Bible gives us the example of the poor widow, who *"of her penury have cast in all the living that she had"* (Luke 21:4). He reminds us of the early church, where *"neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or of houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold"* (Acts 4:34). Jesus said unto the rich young man, *"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me"* (Matthew 19:21). This third verse in 1 Corinthians 13, reminds us our commandment to feed and care for the poor, and to give our lives and hearts as a sacrifice to Christ. And yet love, again, is preeminent and without it,

we cannot profit from those sacrifices we make to Christ. Just as God requires mercy over sacrifices (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13), Christ requires us to love. We can easily give all of our money to the poor and still not love others as Christ loves us. This cannot be. My friends, loving others, caring for others, and placing their needs, wants and desires ahead of your own is much more difficult than writing a check. Seek God's strength and direction as you ask Him to search your heart, show you how to love, and put that love into action.

Chapter 4 Loving Well

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

A Godly life is one motivated by love, or charity. Paul established this fact well in the first three verses of I Corinthians 13, where he tells us: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”* He makes it clear that our words mean nothing if they are not spoken with love, that we lack a true identity in Christ if we are not living in love, and that we possess nothing if we are not acting through love. These three verses show us that if we lack love, or charity, we lack life. Love is the preeminent motivation and the key to life in Christ.

In I Corinthians 13:4-7, however, Paul moves to a wonderful concrete list of just how we can show others love. A how-to manual, of sorts, these verses reveal qualities of one who loves well, by defining just what love is and what it is not. Let us look at these qualities, one by one, to see how we stack up, in God's eyes, in terms of how well we love others.

Longsuffering.

Someone who is longsuffering is someone who has the ability to wait patiently for a long time. The perfect example of

longsuffering is found in God Himself who *“is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). The Lord is not willing that any should perish; therefore He patiently waits for us to come to Him. He is a gentleman and does not force Himself upon us. He shows us His Son, puts forth the promise of salvation, and waits for us to understand and believe. On the other hand, longsuffering also denotes a constancy in work. II Timothy 4:2 tells us to *“be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”* In this verse, we are taught that we must always be at work, showing others Christ. Galatians 6:9 exhorts us not to be *“weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”* One who loves in a longsuffering manner is one who keeps on loving regardless of rejection and one who displays Christ’s love at all times. Christ shows us His love all the time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of whether or not we return it.

Kindness.

To be kind is to be caring, compassionate, thoughtful and sympathetic. This is an aspect of loving others that should come pretty naturally to us. We all enjoy it when others are kind to us; therefore we recognize the value of being kind to others. It is easy to be kind to those who are kind to us, but what does God’s word tell us about being kind? First of all, again, our model for kindness is the Lord Himself, whose *“merciful kindness is great toward us”* (Psalm 117:2). Luke 6:35 shows us the unselfish requirement of kindness: *“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.”* God is kind to us when we are unthankful and even when we do wrong, how much more should we be kind and loving to those around us who don’t thank us? Again, Ephesians 4:32 encourages us: *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted,*

forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.” Just as we are to love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19), we are to be kind to all because the Lord is *“marvelously kind”* (Psalm 31:21) to us.

Not Envious.

Envy is a destructive trait and one that hurts the one who is envious and rarely hurts the person they envy. Envy denotes discontent and a desire for things or circumstances of another. Proverbs 14:30 is very clear on just how destructive envy can be: *“A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.”* Envy hurts to the bone. *“Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?”* (Proverbs 27:4). Envy has more destructive power than wrath or anger. There is no place for envy in loving others because it says that you want what is best for you over what is best for others. In Romans 1, envy is a characteristic of those who did not glorify God nor were thankful towards Him. It is a characteristic of a *“reprobate mind”* (Romans 1:28). My friends, as believers we have all that we need, for we have a God who provides for all of our needs (Philippians 4:19). Because we have Christ, we have it all, *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). As you are seeking to love others, spend your time thinking how you can give them more of Him. He is your greatest possession and in Him, you lack nothing.

Vaunteth not, is not puffed up.

To vaunt is to boast. As Christians, we cannot glory in ourselves, but we must glory in God. As Christians, when we love others, we glory in them and in their achievements, not in our own. *“My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad”* (Psalm 34:2). *“In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever”* (Psalm 44:8). Boast in the Lord and in what He has done. Boast in the accomplishments of others, for all that we have is from God –

our talents, our gifts, and our possessions. Every good and perfect gift is from God (James 1:17). Our greatest gift, our salvation, is a *“gift from God, not of works, lest any man should boast”*. Boast in Him and glory in those you love as Paul did in Philippians 4:1; *“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”* His beloved friends were his joy and his crown and he boasted in their faith and accomplishments.

Not behaving unseemly.

Unseemly behavior is indecent and improper and in no way can be pulling others towards Christ, which is the most loving thing we can do for those around us. Indecent behavior is of the flesh and has no place in the Christian life. Christians are to strive for holiness and righteousness. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1-2). A good question that we can ask ourselves regarding our behavior is this: Is my behavior pulling people towards or away from God? The loving thing to do is to always pull people towards Him.

Seeking our own.

True love is putting the needs, wants and desires of those God has entrusted to our care before our own. True love is seeking the best for others and trusting God and others to be seeking the best for you. It has eyes that are always looking out for others and not for ourselves. *“Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth”* (I Corinthians 10:24). *“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2:4-5). We can love others with this kind of love because we have this type of love poured into us each and every day by Christ Jesus. We can look out for the needs of

others because we know that we have a God who is looking out for our every need. *“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:26a). If we strive to love others with such a self-sacrificing love under our own strength, we will fail. But if we daily draw upon the love and strength that God pours into us, *“all things are possible”* and we can truly love others as Christ loves us (John 15:9).

Not Easily Provoked.

Just as we are to be longsuffering (I Corinthians 13:4) towards those around us, we also cannot be easily provoked by the actions of others. We are to be patient towards those God has entrusted to us, and not let their actions provoke us to anger. *“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will”* (II Timothy 2:24-26). When one we love begins to try our nerves, we must follow Timothy's advice. First of all, we must use each and every situation to teach them something about Christ. Secondly, we must approach the situation in meekness. Instead of looking solely at them, we need to look at ourselves and ask ourselves why we are getting so angry and what we can do to diffuse the situation. The devil wants nothing more than to bring discord into relationships, especially those relationships set up by God. As Timothy states, we must seek out what is true in each situation, remove ourselves and our desires from the situation, and see just how we can show the other person Jesus. We love, in spite of their actions, because it is the person that we love, not their actions.

Thinketh no evil.

One of the ways that Paul says we are to love each other is by keeping our thoughts holy. Philippians 4:8 instructs us, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever*

things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things". When we are protecting the thoughts and images that go into our head, we are protecting those around us. Just as the devil will use evil images that we see in today's world to make us think thoughts we should not, he will try to use those thoughts to bring discord into the relationships and friendships that God has created. Protect your thoughts, knowing that all that goes into your head is fodder for the devil to use against you.

Rejoice in truth.

In John 8:32, Jesus, in talking to His disciples, tells us that as His disciples we can know the truth, *"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* As Christians, we know the truth of Christ's death and resurrection, we know the truth of eternal life, and we know the truth of God's amazing love. As we love others and show them Jesus, we must continually show them these truths. As believers, we must hold on to our profession of faith and the truths that we know, as we are told in Hebrews 4:14, *"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."* In loving others, we must seek to show them Jesus, to do all that we can to bring them to a place where they, too, are holding fast to their profession of faith and rejoicing in His truth.

Bearing all things.

To love is to put the needs, wants and desires of others ahead of our own, trusting God that as we love others, all we need will be taken care of. To love is to bear the burdens of those we are called to love. Galatians 6:2 exhorts us to *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"*. Christ's greatest commandment is *"That ye love one another, as I have loved you"* (John 15:12). Christ loved us by coming to this earth as a humble man, spending His time on earth meeting the

needs, wants and desires of those around Him as a servant, and then in His sacrificial death, giving us the gift of eternal life. In the same manner, we are to continue in His love by loving those around us in humility, and as we are told in John 15:13, laying down our very lives for the lives of our friends. We bear the burdens of others by listening to them with a heart that is tuned to see and hear their needs and then doing whatever is within our power to lift some of their burden. Christ promises to take our burdens and to lighten our loads as we *"cast our cares"* upon Him (I Peter 5:8), for His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). When we give Him our struggles, He takes our heavy burden and gives us His, which is light. In the same way, we can be His hand extended to those He has placed in our lives, by taking their burdens as our own and giving them the lightened load. In doing so, we fulfill Christ's command to *"continue ye in my love"* (John 15:19).

Believeth all things.

Believing is a key to living and loving because through our belief in Christ and His resurrection we are saved (Romans 10:9). The most loving thing we can do is share this belief with those that He has entrusted to us. To believe all things is to believe in all situations and all the time. God is always faithful (I Corinthians 1:9), therefore we can always believe. God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), therefore we can always believe. God never changes (Malachi 3:6), therefore we can always believe. God will never fail us (Deuteronomy 31:6), therefore we can always believe. Love others by sharing your belief with them. Use the strength of your beliefs to give strength to theirs. Continually show them the confidence that they can have in Christ, take every opportunity to show them Jesus, and you will love them well.

Hopefulness.

Another gift that we can give our neighbor is to give them the gift of hope. One of the greatest traps of the devil is

to rob us of our hope. *"Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD"* (Psalm 31:24). Our hope in the risen Saviour, our hope in the promise of eternity, and our hope in forgiveness and salvation, give us the courage and strength each and every day to live for Christ. Hope is the *"anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast"* (Hebrews 6:19). We can love others by encouraging their hopefulness; reiterating God's promises to them; continually showing them that God is *"sure and stedfast"* and that with Him they have all that they need (Philippians 4:19). Seek to give those God has entrusted to you hope in each and every situation. *"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is"* (Jeremiah 17:7).

Endurance.

True love never fails. True love never quits. When we truly love those entrusted to us by God, we stick in with them until the end. Again, taking Christ as our model of love, we see that true love overlooks convenience, pain, suffering, and time and does all that is needed, regardless of the cost. Christ gave His own life because He loved us. Isaiah 53:3 shows us what Christ went through before His death on the cross. *"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."* And yet He went further, even to death, because He loved us so much that He wanted us to be saved from our sins. Isaiah 53:5 says, *"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."* Christ shows us, by His example, what it means to *"lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). He took the sins of the whole world upon His shoulders, though He Himself was sinless. He gave and gave, though it hurt (Philippians 2:8), and He put aside all that was best for Him that we might be saved from our sins (Romans 8:2). Now God will likely never call any of us to physically die for the welfare of our friends, but He does call us to put aside what is best for ourselves and

what we want, that we might do what is best for them. *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:1-2). We are called to love with endurance, pressing *"toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14). God's highest calling is *"That ye love one another, as I have loved you"* (John 15:12).

My friends, as you pray about these qualities of one who loves well, ask God to search your heart. Ask Him to reveal to your heart the answers to the following questions. Pray along with Psalm 139:23-24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

- Am I longsuffering and patient with those around me?
- Am I kind and compassionate?
- Am I envious of others?
- Do I set myself above others?
- Am I prideful?
- Do I behave in a manner befitting the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Am I seeking my own success or gain?
- Am I easily provoked?
- Do I think things I ought not think?
- Do I rejoice when I see the truth displayed?
- Am I strong in Christ and bearing the needs of others?
- Is my faith so strong that I always believe?
- Am I always hopeful?
- Do I endure in my relationships, or give up when the going gets tough?

As He reveals those areas in your life that need work, ask Him to forgive you. Always remember 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* If you ask, He will forgive. Finally, my friends, ask Him for strength, direction, and understanding as you seek to live a more loving life.

Chapter 5 Love Remains

1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

As we come to the end of this study, the last verses of I Corinthians 13 bring us to a point of decision. Will we love with a love that never fails? Will we love those around us as Christ loves? Will we “continue” in His love (John 15:9)?

This passage starts with the bold truth that charity, or love, never fails. Love never fails because love comes from God and God is love (I John 4:8). Just as God’s Word will never pass away (Mark 13:31), God’s love will never pass away. Just as God never changes (Malachi 3:6), God’s love never changes. We can love others with this kind of everlasting love because we have this type of love poured into us each and every day by Christ Jesus. *“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:26a). If we strive to love others with such a self-sacrificing love under our own strength, we will fail. But if we daily draw upon the love and strength that God pours into us, *“all things are possible”* and we can truly continue in Christ’s love (John 15:9).

“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be

knowledge, it shall vanish away" (I Corinthians 13:8). To show us just how everlasting love is, Paul compares it to some amazing spiritual gifts. Verse 8 hearkens back to the beginning of chapter 13 where we see that our very words mean nothing if they are not spoken with love, that we lack a true identity if we are not living in love, and that we have nothing if we are not acting through love. *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing* (I Corinthians 13:1-3)." Prophecy will fail; speaking in tongues will cease; and knowledge will vanish away (I Corinthians 13:8). True love, though, will never fail, cease, or vanish away.

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (I Corinthians 13:9-10). Love never fails and true love is complete. That which is perfect has come in the perfect love of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection displayed love in a way the world had never seen, nor has seen to this day. The love that we have from God is full and complete. *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love"* (Jeremiah 31:3). *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). We are loved with an everlasting love and are given everlasting life by the God of the Universe whose love will never fail. We can only have knowledge in part and we can only have prophecy in part. But when God loves, He loves completely, and we as His children can do the same. *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13).

God now brings us to a point of decision. Will we love with a love that never fails? *"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things"* (I Corinthians 13:11). Just as we put away childish things when we grow up, once we come face to face with the God of the Universe and His love, will we ever be the same? Will any other love satisfy us? *"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"* (I Corinthians 13:12). Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10) and He knows us. He loves us in spite of who we are. He loves us unconditionally. His love knows no boundaries. He gave us His very life. *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (I John 3:16). Friends, we can perceive and know God's love because it is displayed for us each day. We can know God and we can be certain that He knows us - *"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine"* (John 10:14). God brings us face to face with Himself and His love is so personal that we each can see it clearly. So will we love with the love He gives? *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:34-35).

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (I Corinthians 13:13). As we come to the end of this chapter, three things remain - faith, hope, and love.

Faith. *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). Our faith pleases God. By our faith we can seek and know God.

Hope. *"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil"* (Hebrews

6:19). *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (I Peter 1:3-5). Our hope is in God and in the salvation and life eternal, which He promises us. But love is still supreme.

Love. *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”* (Ephesians 3:17 - 19). Christ lives in our hearts because of our faith and it is God’s love that grounds us and holds us to Him. It was Christ’s love for us that held Him to the cross that we might know Him.

Can we but help overflow with His love?

“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Friends, we have *everything* because we have salvation through Jesus Christ. We have *everything* because we have God’s love. God will never leave us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). We can love as He loved because we love through Him. *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). Friends, the very God of the Universe lives in your heart. Share Him with others. Love others with the love He bestows upon you. We can never pay back God for all that He has given us in life eternal, but we can give all that we have to others. Just overflow and let His love out!

Dear friends, my prayer for you is that as you come to the end of this study on love, God has revealed to you truths

that you can apply to your life. Remember, God’s intention for His Word is that as we study it we both write it upon our hearts and apply it to our very lives. I pray that you have learned lessons in reading, as I have in writing, that show you how you can love those around you with the love of Christ. I pray that in all those relationships God has entrusted you with, you love better. Remember, He will equip you and guide you in all that you do. Seek to love better and ask God for His guidance and help. If you follow Him, you cannot fail. Follow your heart and let out all that love that God pours in! *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* (I Corinthians 15:58)

May God richly bless you in all that you do for Him.
“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25: 40).

Blessings,

Erika, Kim and Beth, the Staff of Woman at the Well Ministries

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