



SERIES: DEEPER LIFE

The Love Challenge

Life Reference: I Corinthians 13

Focus Verse:

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).

Love. Ask a dozen people to define love, and you will probably get a dozen different responses. We talk about true love ... puppy love ... a mother's love ... sacrificial love ... love at first sight ... intense feelings ... romantic love ... flutters and butterflies in the regions of the heart or stomach ... deep attachment ... eternal or never-ending love. There just is no one "right" description. As the song lyrics say, "Love is a many splendored thing."



Life Reflection:

How would you define love?

Describe an example of love you have personally witnessed.

Where did love begin? With God! Without Him love does not exist. It is God's very nature, and He is our greatest example of love. When we love like He loves, we take on His image.

- "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (I John 4:8).

Without God's love, we would have no hope and no salvation. "God so loved the world ..." (John 3:16). His sacrifice demonstrates the true meaning of love. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (I John 3:16, NIV).

Life Reflection:

What words would you use to describe the love of God?

We could study the love of God for days, weeks, or years and yet never fully comprehend all that it encompasses. We do know that to be children of God we must have love one for another even as He loves us.

- "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (I Thessalonians 3:12).

I Corinthians 13, often referred to as the love chapter, defines love in its purest form. If we study this passage verse by verse, we discover what love is and what love is not. But the first thing we discover is that love is an essential quality in the Christian's life. The chapter just before this speaks of the spiritual gifts that God has given to the church and concludes that we should "covet earnestly the best gifts." Verses 1 through 3 of chapter 13 tell us that regardless of the gift—prophecy, understanding all mysteries, knowledge, faith—or the charitable works we do, all "profiteth me nothing" without love. Love surpasses it all and must be our motive in all we do.



The Characteristics of Love

In verses 4-7 of chapter 13, Paul lists fifteen characteristics of love. Let's look briefly at each and consider what it means to portray this attribute of the Lord in our lives.

1. Love suffers long.

Another way of expressing this is *love is patient*. The Greek word used in this passage means "to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart." It further means "to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others" (Strong's Concordance). The person who suffers long is slow to anger and does not seek to avenge the wrong done him. I Thessalonians 5:14 instructs to "be patient toward all men."

2. Love is kind.

Love is gentle and caring. It is not critical or harsh. Ephesians 4:32 sums it up quite well.

- "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

3. Love does not envy.

When we think of envy, a very common human trait, we think of desiring what another possesses. But there is another aspect to envy that is even worse. It's more than desiring what another person has; it's resentment that the person has something he does not. This is a meanness of spirit beyond coveting. Proverbs 14:30 compares envy to rottenness of the bones.

4. Love does not boast.

Braggarts are annoying to be around, proud of—and frequently exaggerating—their accomplishments. The King James Version uses the word "vaunteth," which is defined as "speech of extravagant self-praise"

⁴ Charity
suffereth long,
and is kind;
charity envieth
not; charity
vaunteth not
itself, is not
puffed up,

⁵ Doth not behave
itself unseemly,
seeketh not her
own, is not easily
provoked, thinketh
no evil;

⁶ Rejoiceth not in
iniquity, but
rejoiceth in the
truth;

⁷ Beareth all
things, believeth
all things, hopeth
all things,
endureth all
things.



(thefreedictionary.com). Love recognizes and builds up the other person, not itself. Psalm 34:2 says, "My soul shall make her boast in the LORD." If we must boast, let it be about Him!

5. Love is not puffed up.

The proud person has an inflated view of his own importance, and this will lead to his downfall. Love displays humility.

- "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

6. Love does not behave rudely.

Loves displays graciousness, tact, courtesy, and politeness. Even when words of correction are needed, they must not be spoken in a blunt, angry manner. Ephesians 4:15 says that we are to speak the truth in love.

7. Love does not insist upon its own rights.

Some go through life feeling it "owes them." They are quick to speak of their "rights" and insist upon their own way. This shows a spirit of selfishness. Love, however, focuses not on rights but responsibilities. (Read I Corinthians 10:24 and Philippians 2:4.)

*"Only a life lived for others
is worth living"*

-Albert Einstein

8. Love is not easily provoked.

Love is not easily angered or exasperated. It is patient and even-tempered. Ecclesiastes 7:9 warns, "Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools." Even when the situation is frustrating, love requires that we control our emotions.



9. Love does not think evil.

Some versions of the Bible translate this as “does not keep a record of wrongs.” We must not hold onto things that happen to us but forgive and move on. Rather than dwelling on offenses, focus on what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and a good report (Philippians 4:8).

10. Love does not rejoice in iniquity.

Other translations say that love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, rejoice about injustice, or delight in evil. One commentator takes this thought even further and states that love does not take malicious pleasure when it hears something derogatory or discrediting about another (*The Letters to the Corinthians*, William Barclay).

11. Love rejoices in truth.

Love is free of falsehood, pretense, or deceit. It is transparent. It has nothing to hide and is happy when truth prevails.

- “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (II Corinthians 4:2).

12. Love bears all things.

Love lasts. It is able to withstand the insults, injuries, and disappointments that come in life.

The meaning of the Greek word used in this verse also indicates that love “covers” or “hides.” It does not make known the faults and mistakes of others but quietly works behind the scenes to mend the situation.

- “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (I Peter 4:8).
- “For love is as strong as death . . . Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised” (Song of Solomon 8:6-7, NKJV).



13. Love believes all things.

Love is trusting. It trusts that God's promises are true and will never fail. We have complete confidence in Him. In our relationship with each other, it means that we will always believe the best about others. We accept them as trustworthy unless they prove themselves otherwise.

- "Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments" (Psalm 119:66).
- "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Ephesians 1:19).

14. Love never loses hope.

Life will bring many difficulties, but we are not without hope. Living for God gives us hope not only in our present circumstances, but also eternally. I Corinthians 15:19 says that if our hope is in this life only, we are most miserable. But our hope is eternal, a "lively [living] hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . . reserved in heaven for you" (I Peter 1:3, 4).

15. Love endures all things.

This is not passive resignation but active persevering. To persevere is "to continue in some effort, course of action, etc. in spite of difficulty, opposition, etc.; be steadfast in purpose; persist" (www.yourdictionary.com). We will face trials and hardships in our Christian walk, but we can face them with a victorious attitude. We will not give in to defeat.

- "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Timothy 2:3, NKJV).
- "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions . . ." (II Timothy 4:5).



Life Response:

Our greatest example of love is God. We do not have to earn it or prove ourselves worthy to receive it. It cannot be measured and it will not end. Our greatest challenge is to love with the same love as He does.

- “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).
- “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).
- “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:14).

Life Reflection:

How difficult is it for us as humans to love unconditionally as God loves us?

Under what circumstances would you be willing to give your life for another person?

The love chapter sums it up in the final verse. Love is supreme.

- “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13:13).



My Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for the greatest example of love that You have given us. You loved us when we were unlovable and before we loved You. You loved us enough to give Your life for us. Your love is unconditional and pure. Help me to take on those characteristics and show this same love to those I encounter each day. Reveal to me any unloving thoughts or actions and help me to overcome these tendencies. I want my love to be the pure love that You have given to me.



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