

# The Greatest Gift

*Bible Study on  
1 Corinthians 12-13*

A Bible Study reflecting on  
1 Corinthians 12-13 by  
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**<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

– 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 NIV

Many of us know this passage as “the wedding passage” as it seems just about every wedding we attend has it as a reading. And it’s easy to see why, given the focus on love, patience, kindness and endurance. Yet on closer inspection, Paul here is continuing his discussion from 1 Corinthians 12 on spiritual gifts, and names the greatest gift of all:

In context. To really understand what Paul is trying to say in 1 Corinthians 13 about love, we need to understand it in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 and his teaching on spiritual gifts and the nature of the church as the body.



## Flick

Through 1 Corinthians 12.

What words, ideas is Paul trying to emphasise?



## Discuss

When you think about “gifts” or attributes that are celebrated and held in high regard in your workplace, family or simply in society at large, what comes to mind?

- How have you sought to explore your own gifts as you have grown and matured?
- What have you learnt about yourself or what has been helpful for you in this journey?
- How has your growing understanding of your own gifts conflicted with what you feel the world celebrates? How have you gone navigating that tension?



## Discuss

Any words or aspects of this passage that stand out to you or that you haven’t noticed before.

**Below are some that stand out for me.**

v1-3 If I ... x 5

v1-3 But do not have love x 3

v2-3 nothing x 2

v6 - truth

v13 the greatest of these is love

v1-13 love x 8



## Read

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Do we really believe this?



Above my desk I have a small card, given to me by a friend, simply titled Faith to move mountains. It has a picture of a mountain sitting underneath the words. Over the years, I've often looked up from my work and reflected on these words, finding it at once encouraging, whilst at the same time deeply humbling and challenging.

In 1 Corinthians 13: 2-3, Paul repeatedly claims that despite our gifts and outward achievements, including "to move mountains", that if we operate "without love ... I/we are nothing".

## Discuss

We don't really believe this do we? If we take time to think through what is being proposed here, it really is scandalous.

Paul is calling into question much of what our society, and at times the church, holds up as most important. What are the implications of this for us?

Do you think Paul is exaggerating in these verses when he says "without love.. nothing"?

## Activity

Let's explore this in a creative way. Take some time to rewrite Paul's statements on love for our own context. Here are a few examples to start you off:

- If I am the best leader, and have the sharpest mind ...but do not have love...
- If I have the best worship band...
- If I have the best social media profile...

## Love one another

Of course we all fall short of this love. Whether it is in our friendships, our marriages, our workplaces ... what we need to remember in reading this passage is that it wasn't written for a wedding ceremony, it was written to be shared with a newly forming Christian community. A community who were seeking to live out Jesus' invitation to "love one another" in first century Rome - the centre of the Roman empire. What this reminds us of is that ultimately it is acts of love and grace that witness and transform our world. As Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr famously said:

**“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”**

– Martin Luther King Jr

## Discuss

How does reading this passage in the context of its message to the group change or help draw out its meaning today?

What have you learnt about loving others from groups you have been part of?

Share an example of where you have seen love transform the lives of others around you.

*For me, the challenge to operate "in love" in all I do is expressed as I seek to live out Jesus' great commandment:*

**'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments'**

– Matthew 22:36-40

What this commandment reminds us of is that to know God (who is love), we are required to love with all we have. And that inherently tied to this is the extension of that love with those around us, including our neighbours, both near and far. These two commandments are inextricably linked; we cannot do one without the other ... which is of course both the great comfort and the great challenge.



At [Tearfund](#), these two commandments have been at the centre of our understanding of our work and calling for more than five decades as we work to end extreme poverty. The understanding that God has loved us freely, and that we are called to extend this love to neighbours near and far. Of course the challenges are immense, often overwhelming, yet this is “relentless love” as we read in 1 Corinthians 13:7 (NLT):

**Love never gives up,  
Never loses faith,  
Is always hopeful,  
And endures through  
every circumstance.**

## A still more excellent way

The genius of God is that love is a gift that all have access to. This “gift” isn’t limited to the privileged or the powerful. It isn’t a gift that is only available to the educated or those with the right colour skin. Instead, the poor, the uneducated, the disadvantaged ... in fact everyone has the opportunity to embrace and practise what Paul calls the greatest of gifts ... love.

*This is both our privilege and our mission ... to love unconditionally and relentlessly.*



## Pray

### Spend some time praying

- Pray for Tearfund’s partners, as they seek to live out the love of God with communities experiencing extreme poverty around the world.
- Pray that God would continue to transform each of us in love. That we might continue to grow and become individuals and groups that reflect the love of God in everyday ways in our own lives, households and communities.
- Ask God to continue to lead you to live out your calling and demonstrate your gifts to meet the needs of the world. What is the unique role you have to play as part of the body?

## Closing prayer

invite members of the group to pray this together

**Dear God,**

**Please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbour, to love our enemy as our friend. Love and ever more love is the only solution to every problem that comes up. If we love each other enough, we will bear with each other's faults and burdens. If we love enough, we are going to light a fire in the hearts of others. And it is love that will burn out the sins and hatreds that sadden us. It is love that will make us want to do great things for each other.**

**Amen**

**-Dorothy Day**



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### **Tearfund Australia**

We are Tearfund. We're working in partnership to end poverty, challenge inequality and build sustainable communities. Following Jesus, we go where the need is greatest, acting with courage to tackle injustice so that all may experience fullness of life.

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