



# 1 CORINTHIANS 13

## DISCUSSION GUIDES

May 7- June 2, 2017

## INTRO TO THE SERIES

We've all heard it before: 1 Corinthians 13. It's on embroidered pillows at Lifeway and framed on our grandmother's wall. Guaranteed there's a card on the rack at Hallmark stores right now with 1 Corinthians 13 printed alongside a dove in flight. Most often it's obligatorily recited at weddings, where it flows in one ear and right out the other.

This passage, alongside other verses like John 3:16 and Psalm 23, can feel terribly overused. It's like eating the same meal day in and day out; it gets more and more bland and unsurprising. Because 1 Corinthians 13 is so well known it can easily be used incorrectly, or just slapped on products marketed to Christians. But God's word is rich and vibrant; it's alive and active. (Hebrews 4:12) Tucked inside this bland meal are decadent morsels of truth. When we read this chapter, particularly verses 4-7, we're not getting some prescribed example for how we're supposed to love one another. Read it one time through and you'll know you have no hope of loving like that. No, this chapter is all about the love that defines all love: the love of Jesus. His is the fullest expression of love under which all our humble attempts at love have to bow and pay homage.

Yet his is a love freely given to us. One of the most remarkable comments in this chapter comes out of nowhere in 1 Corinthians 13:12, ". . . even as I have been fully known." Paul says it like an add-on to his thought, but it's amazing all on its own. Jesus doesn't just love you with the fullest love, he also knows you fully. No one else knows you to this extent, and some one else knowing everything about you, your past, your deepest thoughts, and your desires, can be terrifying. But this chapter holds a soul-nourishing truth: the One who knows you best loves you most.

## MORE ON 1 CORINTHIANS 13

The context of this passage is a much broader conversation from chapter 12 to chapter 14 on spiritual gifts, and a broader one still on how the Corinthians were misusing their spiritual gifts. Paul elaborates on spiritual gifts for several chapters throughout the letter to properly define spiritual gifts, then arrives at the end of chapter 12 and into 13 to explain how to use these gifts in love. The Corinthians had been holding gifting over each other's heads; the ones with "better" gifts were lording it over those with "lesser" gifts. Really it was just a spiritualized form of pride that was sowing disunity among the church.

However, when we read this passage it's most often isolated and read out of context. Similarly, we tend to read this as proscriptive, using it as instructions for how we're supposed to love one another. But in reading this chapter we see a love only demonstrated by one person: Jesus Christ. In other passages, which we'll study through this month in our groups, we are told to imitate the love of Jesus. We do this first by meditating on the astounding, unsurpassed love that Jesus has for us. This chapter helps us do that, and our prayer for groups this month is that we would be left in awe by how deeply God cares for us through Jesus.



# 1. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

May 7, 2017

## Discussion

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

- Why is Paul saying love is so crucial to being a Christian?

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

- How does this section help us understand why Paul is talking about love?
- Why is love so important for the church to operate out of unity?

### Read John 13:31-35.

- How does Jesus embody love?
- What makes it difficult for us to be characterized by love?
- What does it mean to love others with the love Jesus has shown us?
- How does 1 Corinthians 13 explain the relationship between love and evangelism?



## 2. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

May 14, 2017

### Discussion

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.**

- How does this section define love for us?
- How do common cultural assumptions about love compare with the love Paul talks about here?

#### **Read 1 John 4:7-12.**

- How does this passage in 1 John describe God's character?

#### **Read Romans 5:6-8.**

- How does this section in Romans help us understand the nature of God's love for us?
- How does Jesus embody the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13?
- How do the three passages we've read lead you to worship God and be thankful?
- How do these passages help you talk about the love of God with others?



# 3. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12

May 21, 2017

## Discussion

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.

- What do you think Paul is getting at when talking about partial knowledge vs. full knowledge in verses 9-12?

### Read Ephesians 5:1-2.

- How do we go about imitating the love God has for us?
- How is Jesus the perfect example of God's love for us?
- **Look back at 1 Corinthians 13:12.** What does it mean that we are "fully known"?
- What fears do you have about being fully known by others?
- How does God's knowledge of you and love for you lead you to respond to him?

### Read Ephesians 2:4-7.

- How does this explain what perfect love will be like in eternity?



# 4. 1 Corinthians 13:13

May 28, 2017

*This is the final week in our series. Next week we'll start a 9-week series on Jesus and community.*

## Discussion

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:13.

- Why would Paul say love is more important than hope or faith?
- What does it mean to abide in love?

### Read 1 John 4:13-21.

- How does this explain what it means to abide in love?
- **Look at verse 20.** Why do you think John relates abiding in God to loving your brother?
- How is Jesus the perfect example of loving others?
- How does Jesus' love convict or compel you to love others?
- How can we apply what we've learned from this sermon series in our lives?

