

REFLECTION GUIDE

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 - WHAT IS LOVE?

KEY TERMS

Love (agape) - Unlike English, Greek has several different words for love and the word used throughout 1 Corinthians 13 is *agape*. This word for love is distinct from romantic love (*eros*) or friendship love (*philia*). *Agape* love has its source in God (1 Jn 3:16, 4:7-8).

Tongues, prophetic powers, and faith - All three terms are listed as gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor 12; Paul's point in 1 Cor 13 is that these good gifts given by the Spirit are useless without God-centered love.

Noisy gong or clanging symbol - Paul uses musical instruments as illustrations in verse 1 and again later in chapter 14 in similar ways. He wants his audience to make the connection that there is usefulness and beauty in people using their gifts in ways that reflect the Giver of those gifts instead of solely the humans employing them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Paul helped start the church in Corinth, a prominent 1st century city in Greece, around the year 50 AD. Acts 18 tells us that Paul initially faced strong opposition from Jews in the city before preaching to the Gentiles and seeing many people turn to Jesus. He stayed in Corinth for 18 months.

BACKGROUND

1 Corinthians 13 is a remarkable piece of literature that is regularly quoted during weddings, printed on home decor and coffee mugs, and quoted in film, books, and other media. But what's even more remarkable about 1 Corinthians 13 is that it was written by a man who just a few years earlier was arresting and murdering innocent people for simply believing that Jesus was the Messiah. What most people who quote 1 Corinthians 13 fail to realize is that these words would not exist if Paul hadn't had his life completely transformed by God on the road to Damascus. Saul's life did not reflect the love he so eloquently describes in 1 Corinthians 12 in any way; and then he met Jesus and everything changed. Now Paul, who had a stellar Jewish resume before meeting Jesus (Phil 3:3-6) and who now has a stellar Christian resume (2 Cor 11:21-23), says that he is *nothing* (v. 2) without love.

Love is patient and kind; (it) does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (vv. 4-8a). Love comes from God, is displayed by God in sending Jesus for us, and God's love should be on display by his people (1 Jn 4:7-12). Jesus himself commanded his followers to *love one another* (Jn 13:34) and Paul describes what that kind of love looks like here in 1 Corinthians 13.

GOING DEEPER

Read Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 36:5-9, and Romans 5:6-11. What do these verses teach you about God's love? Read Matthew 22:37-40. What does Jesus' teaching say about the importance of love in the Christian life?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-8 - WHAT IS LOVE?

LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What is the big idea?
2. What specific characteristic of love that Paul mentions (vv. 4-7) stands out to you most and why?
3. Verse 8 says "love never ends." What do you think Paul means by that?
4. Read 1 John 4:16-21. How do these verses help us understand 1 Corinthians 13?

LIVING THE WORD

5. How do you think most people would define love? Where do you think their definition comes from?
6. What does it mean that love rejoices with the truth? How is this different than what the world often thinks of as love?
7. How does knowing that God is love change how we view ourselves?
8. What is one specific way you want to live differently this week in light of these verses?