

# Series: Together Toward Maturity

Inductive Bible Study Guide: 1 Corinthians 13



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## Step 1: Observation – What does the passage say?

Read **1 Corinthians 13** slowly and carefully. Though often read at weddings, Paul originally wrote this to a divided church in the middle of a discussion about spiritual gifts.

### Observation Prompts:

- What examples does Paul give of impressive spiritual activity?
- What does Paul say happens if love is absent?
- How does Paul describe love?
- What does Paul say about the permanence of love?
- What contrasts does Paul make between the present and the future?

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### Read the passage and note what you see:

What spiritual gifts or actions does Paul mention in verses 1–3?

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What repeated phrase does Paul use to describe what happens without love?

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How is love described in verses 4–7?

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What does Paul say will pass away in verses 8–10?

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What illustrations does Paul use in verses 11–12?

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What three things remain according to verse 13?

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## Step 2: Interpretation – What does the passage mean?

Paul places chapter 13 directly between chapters 12 and 14 to show that **love is the necessary foundation for spiritual gifts**. Without love, even the most impressive ministry is empty. Love is not merely emotion — it is a Christlike posture of patience, humility, truthfulness, endurance, and selflessness. Spiritual gifts are temporary tools for this age; love is eternal.

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### Questions to Explore:

Why does Paul use such dramatic examples (tongues, prophecy, knowledge, sacrifice) in verses 1–3?

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What does it mean that impressive ministry can still be “nothing” without love?

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How does Paul’s definition of love challenge cultural definitions of love?

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Which descriptions of love in verses 4–7 are most convicting?

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Why does Paul say love never ends, while other gifts will pass away?

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What does it mean that we now see “in a mirror dimly” but then “face to face”?

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Why is love called the greatest in verse 13?

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## Word Study Suggestions:

- **Love (v.1):** *Agapē* — sacrificial, covenantal love that seeks another’s good
  - **Patient (v.4):** long-suffering, slow to anger
  - **Kind (v.4):** actively benevolent, generous in action
  - **Rejoices with the truth (v.6):** delights in what reflects God’s character
  - **Never ends (v.8):** never falls, collapses, or becomes obsolete
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## Step 3: Application – How should I respond?

**Paul is not asking whether we admire love — he is asking whether we practice it.** This chapter calls believers to examine motives, attitudes, and relationships within the body of Christ.

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### Personal Reflection:

Do I value being right or being loving?

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Are my acts of service motivated by love or recognition?

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Which description of love do I most need to grow in right now?

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How does this passage reshape how I view spiritual maturity

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What would it look like for our church to be marked first and foremost by love?

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**Replace the word love in verses 4-8a and honestly ask God to reveal any area you are not acting in Love.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ is patient
- \_\_\_\_\_ is kind
- \_\_\_\_\_ is doesn't envy
- \_\_\_\_\_ is doesn't boast
- **Continue with the rest of the verse and write down struggles below.**

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## Summary Truths:

- Spiritual gifts without love are empty.
  - Love is patient, humble, truthful, and enduring.
  - Ministry success does not equal spiritual maturity.
  - Gifts are temporary; love is eternal.
  - The greatest mark of maturity is Christlike love.
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## Optional Memory Verse:

*“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*  
— *1 Corinthians 13:13 (ESV)*

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## Prayer Prompt:

“Lord, teach me to love as You love. Guard my heart from pride and self-seeking. Let my service flow from genuine love for You and for others. Shape our church into a community marked by patience, kindness, and truth.”

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## For Further Study:

- John 13:34–35 — Love as the mark of discipleship
- Galatians 5:22–23 — The fruit of the Spirit
- Colossians 3:12–14 — Love binds everything together
- 1 John 4:7–12 — God is love