

Love Never Fails

Elesha grabbed the toddler and looked frantically about for his mother.

“I’ll take him, Sister Elesha,” said a teen, quickly rescuing the child.

“We’re almost ready to start. I need everyone in their places,” said Elesha. “We are expecting our gospel radio station host to arrive any minute to do a live commercial.”

Elesha had agreed to be chairperson of the fellowship hall renovation for her church. It included a sizable up-to-date kitchen, a cozy dining area, a coffee bar, and a TV/video/game area. At times, some of the committee members had been less than loving in discussing the project details, arguing and exchanging cutting words. However, Elesha had been patient, loving, and self-sacrificing, even volunteering to step down as chairperson if everyone wanted her to. That had helped calm the situation. Now she saw some of her once-contentious committee members smiling and laughing with each other. Elesha knew the Lord was in this work.

The dedication service was held in the newly renovated space. “We are delighted with our new fellowship area, and are obliged to Sister Elesha and her committee for this great undertaking,” said Pastor Mitchell.

“It was important to renovate the fellowship hall because we want to better accommodate those souls we seek to reach,” he continued, “and the only way we will reach them is through love.”

1. *How is the world’s concept of love different from God’s love?*

2. *Why are we commanded to love others as we love ourselves?*

3. *Do people show you they love you more by what they do or what they don’t do? Explain your answer.*

Without Love, Nothing

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, KJV

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NIV

¹If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul defined God's love by using the Greek word *agape* and describing *agape* as love that is not dependent upon reciprocation but is humble and selfless. It is the motivation and underlying reason for exercising the spiritual gifts in chapter 12. For example, "speaking in the tongues of men or of angels" (vs. 1) means verbally communicating powerful truths, even biblical principles, in incredible ways. But if this is done without love, it is just noise; someone might as well be banging trash can lids together.

Likewise, if someone with "the gift of prophecy" (vs. 2) is able to exhort Christians to action and to expound upon the mysteries of the universe, and yet does that without love, that person is "nothing."

Or, if someone gave up all their earthly possessions to the poor, yet did it without love, they would only end up empty and poor themselves. Even if believers willingly give themselves as martyrs, but do so without love, they're sacrificing themselves for nothing. Doing spectacular things in the name of God, even using the spiritual gifts He has provided,

without love produces no eternal reward—no matter what.

4. *Why must spiritual gifts be exercised with love?*

5. *What is the result of doing things for God without love?*

What Love Is

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, KJV

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.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NIV

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Paul described God’s love with a series of characteristics that have something in common—namely, all of them are expressed voluntarily, without coercion or compulsion. It is the voluntary nature of love that makes it meaningful.

The first characteristic of godly love is that it is “patient” (vs. 4). Sometimes people have quirks and idiosyncrasies that call upon significant amounts of patience. This leads to the second characteristic of love: kindness. You simply cannot go wrong in exercising compassion toward others.

Paul also told three things love is not. Love is not jealous when God blesses other people, but provokes us to rejoice in God’s generosity with them. Love also does not boast when God is generous with us. Everything we have comes from the hand of God, so there’s nothing to brag about! Love pushes us toward humility and away from pride.

These characteristics are followed by four more just like them: love will not dishonor others, seek after itself, become

angry easily, or keep track of the ways people have slighted us. Love compels us to show everyone respect as human beings made in the image of God and treasured by the Lord. Love is ready to put self-interest aside in order to work and live effectively with others. Love has a long, long fuse, and is not easily set off by the indifference or negligence of others. Finally, love does not hold past offenses against others, especially when there has been genuine restoration and reconciliation in the relationship. Love is not happy when the wicked succeed in their plans, but rejoices when the truth wins out.

Paul gave four “always” characteristics of godly love: it always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. Love stands up for those whose vulnerability is being exploited. Love trusts people at face value. While we are not required to trust those who have proven themselves untrustworthy (as a pattern of behavior), we still treat them in a loving manner, with grace and compassion. In all these things, love does not give up. It never assumes that a situation or person is beyond redemption but hangs in there waiting to see God at work.

6. *What does love not do?*

7. *What are the positive traits of love?*

Love Never Fails

1 Corinthians 13:8-13, KJV

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake

1 Corinthians 13:8-13, NIV

⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a

KJV

as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

NIV

man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹²For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Paul concluded with reminders about the eternal nature of love. Some gifts of God are only needed temporarily as we await the redemption of our souls. Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are not only temporal but incomplete in their current manifestations. When Christ comes in the fullness of time, these gifts will have served their purpose, and the Lord will set them aside. But love will remain.

Prior to being reunited with Christ, our lives are akin to the transition from childhood to adulthood. When we are children, we are heavily dependent upon others for our survival needs (food, shelter, clothing). As we develop emotionally and spiritually, we set aside childish things and move forward as a believing adult. But when the perfect comes—that is, when Jesus returns—what we are experiencing now in Christ will be like looking into an unpolished mirror that only gives us a taste of what’s in store for us. We need the temporal gifts now to effectively function in His kingdom before He returns and reveals Himself to us. We understand a little now; when He comes, we “shall know fully” (vs. 12).

But love never goes away. It is the one thing in our lives that never changes or disappears. For that reason, it takes first place in the triad of faith, hope, and love. We need all three to make it as we wait for Jesus. But when faith becomes sight, and our hopes are fulfilled, love will still remain.

8. *What will eventually go away?*

9. *What will happen when completeness comes?*

The Greatest of These Is Love

Loving others is the greatest commandment and the most sacrificial. We are commanded to love even those we consider unlovable in the same manner that God loved us. The more tests and trials that I endure, the more in awe I am of the love that Christ demonstrated on the Cross. He told His disciples, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, KJV). After He told them, He demonstrated for them what true love is.

Too often, our own love is self-centered and less than sacrificial. Love must forgive, or no relationships or marriages would ever survive. We've all been hurt, but we've also hurt others, so in love we don't hold grudges or seek revenge. Jesus' death on the Cross for us reminds us that love is not prideful or self-righteous. Self-righteousness is unrighteousness. Pride is inflated self-perception, an unrealistic perspective of our own supposed goodness. Our love should be hopeful, trusting, and respectful of others. It does not demean others or make them think they are "lucky" to be loved by us. Jesus contrasted that kind of "love" with godly love: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:25-26, KJV). Serving, not commanding or badgering, is the watchword of love.

We will never love perfectly; Paul confirmed that in this chapter. But we are commanded to love as God loves us so others will see His love through us.

10. *Why is loving others both the greatest commandment and the most difficult to do?*

11. *How do we handle people who say they love us, but their love is not like God's love?*

12. *How does pride keep us from loving others as we should?*

What Love Does

There are countless circumstances throughout life when love isn't our first response—especially when others deliberately hurt, offend, or disrespect us. The great news is that God has given us the grace and faith to walk in love even in the face of pain. If we walk in love, others will see God's love and generosity, mercy and compassion. We've received the greatest love in the universe, and now we must freely give it to others.

► *Think about the love relationships you are now in. Are you showing godly love in all of them? How could you show godly love to someone who may have been hurt by unloving relationships in the past?*

KEY VERSE

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. —1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

October 26 through November 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 24:24-33—Laban Arranges to Wash Servant's Feet.
- Tues.** Genesis 43:20-25—Brothers Provided Water to Wash Feet.
- Wed.** Ephesians 4:6-9—Servants and Masters, but Same Lord.
- Thurs.** John 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27—Peter Denies Jesus Three Times.
- Fri.** Psalm 41:8-10; John 13:21-30—Jesus Betrayed by a Trusted Disciple.
- Sat.** John 12:1-7—Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet with Perfume.
- Sun.** John 13:1-15, 34-35—Jesus Loves His Disciples and Washes Their Feet.