

# Introduction

*"We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).*

If you're holding this book in your hands, it's probably because you see **the need for more love** in your home. We're all sinners and loving others doesn't come naturally to any of us.

1 Corinthians 13 is a great place to head for a better understanding of love. Paul's description of love shows up at weddings and in frames on the walls of our homes. We find its short phrases in the lyrics of songs and in illustrated board books for little ones. In 1 Corinthians 13 we find a concise but beautiful summary of godly love.

It's beautiful, but it's written to a group of people who *were not loving each other very well*. They were squabbling and arguing about whose God-given gifts in the church were the most important. They were trying to one-up each other and envying those who looked more important or successful than they were. When Paul wrote this letter to the members of the Corinthian church, he was addressing their *lack of love* and showing them what real love looks like.

**1 Corinthians 13 is written for non-lovers.** It's for people who need to *meet* love, not just try to *do* love.

## Love is a Person.

**Have you ever noticed that the passage isn't presented as a list of *commands*?** Paul doesn't start out by saying, "Suffer long. Be kind. Don't envy. Don't brag. Don't be arrogant..." Instead of telling us what to do, he tells us what *love* does. He *personifies* love. He speaks of it as a person.

That's because love *is* a person.

*"Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love**" (1 John 4:8).*

**Try this.** Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and replace the word *love* (or *charity*, if you're reading the King James Version) with the word *God*.

*God* is patient and kind. *God* does not envy or boast. *God* is not arrogant or rude.

Then do the same thing, this time inserting the word *Jesus* in the place of love. Jesus was God's love in human form, living among us.

*Jesus* is patient and kind. *Jesus* does not envy or boast. *Jesus* is not arrogant or rude.

Love *is* a person. **It's God.**

## God's love will change you.

Before we can love with a godly love, we need to *meet* love. We need to *experience* love. We need to understand *how deeply we are loved*.

When we really start to understand how much God loves us, the God-shaped hollow spot inside of us will finally be filled up. We won't be expecting *people* to meet a need in our soul that only God can meet. We'll be able reach out to meet *their* needs instead of looking to them to meet *our* needs.

We will be able to love without needing to be loved in return, and that's when love really becomes *love* – godly, self-sacrificial, for-the-good-of-others love – the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13.

**That's what we want to see** as we take a closer look at 1 Corinthians 13. Let's take the time to *meet* love and to understand how much we *are* loved. Let's slow down and look at how God loves us, and how He loved us through His Son.

## How to guide your family through this study

**As you go through this book, take your time.** Each short chapter is divided into several sections. *Resist the urge to skip over sections.* You may decide you only want to look at two or three verses at a time, if you have small children.

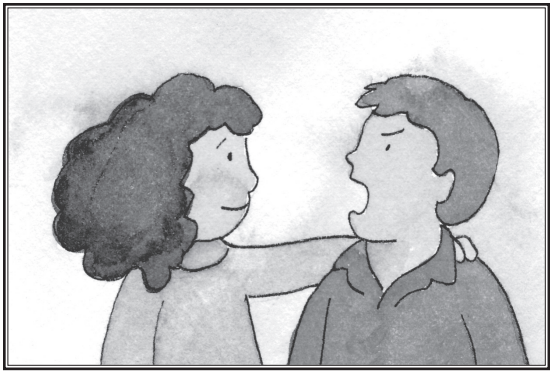
- Read and discuss the **short descriptions of love** at the beginning of each section.
- Then use several short study times, if necessary, to look up *each* of the **verses about God's love**. *Read from a translation your children can understand.* Talk about each verse or passage. Pull up an online commentary for help if you run into verses you find hard to explain. ([www.Blueletterbible.org](http://www.Blueletterbible.org) or [www.Biblestudytools.com](http://www.Biblestudytools.com) are both great sites, if you need help.)  
(**If your children can read**, this is a great opportunity to let them practice looking up verses in the Bible. You can make the process even more exciting by using these verses for Bible drills. Have all the children close their Bibles, state the Bible reference for them, then shout "Go!" and let them see who can find the verse first. When everyone has found the verse, let the "winner" read it aloud.)
- Then do the same with the **verses about Jesus's love**. Really take the time to *see* how much God loves us, and to learn from Jesus's perfect example of love.
- Then **read the other verses** that tell us more about the particular aspect of love being studied in the chapter.
- Choose *at least one* verse from each chapter to **memorize** together, and complete *at least one* of the **practical projects** at the end of each chapter.
- As you finish up each chapter, **end with a time of prayer**, thanking God for His great love for you and asking Him to help you share that love with others.

As you study and apply what you are learning together, **don't let these verses** (and especially the chart, if you're using it) **become a to-do list**. Think of it more as a **poem of praise** for love – love made flesh in the person of Jesus. Soak your children in the bath of God's love. Help them understand that God loves them so much that He gave His only Son to die a horrible death in their place.

Help them appreciate how Christ's perfect life and undeserved death paid the debt for their sins and restored their relationship with God. They don't have to earn God's love and approval. *They already have it.* If they've placed their faith in Jesus, God looks at them and sees His perfect Son. They're forgiven. They're loved.

When they really believe and rest in God's love, they will be ready – and empowered – to love others with the same kind of love.

"...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34).



## Love is Patient.

Are you being patient – or are you upset?

*“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).*

We live in an imperfect world with imperfect people. Sometimes we will be wronged by others, so we need to learn how to respond in a godly way when someone

sins against us or does something we don't like. Being patient toward those who bother us pleases God, while getting angry at others will hurt our relationships, make us unhappy, and dishonor God.

### Patience is “long-tempered”.

The Greek word in this verse is made up of two words – *long* and *temper*. It's telling us love is *long-tempered*. A short-tempered person gets angry quickly; a long-tempered person remains calm.

- Love remembers how patient God is with us, and tries to patiently love others in the same way.
- Love doesn't speak or behave in an unkind, angry, or violent manner.
- Love puts up with many slights, hurts, and wrongs without getting angry.
- Love doesn't try to get even.
- A loving person doesn't stop loving someone who has hurt him. He continues to show him love, just as God chooses to love us, even when we sin.
- Love keeps calm, choosing to trust God to know what is best and to take care of the situation.
- Love goes to a person who is seriously sinning against him and discusses the problem with a humble and loving attitude. If he won't listen, he brings in others who want to help the wrongdoer be delivered from his sin.
- Love patiently gives a person time to become the person God has designed him to be.

### God is patient with us.

**Ps. 86:15.** How is God described?

**Neh. 9:17.** How did the Israelites respond to the miracles God performed for them when they left Egypt? What was God's response? How is God described?

**2 Pet. 3:9.** Why is God patient with us?

**Rom. 2:3-4.** Why is God kind and patient with us?

**Ps. 103:10.** Has God treated us the way we deserve to be treated?

**Isa. 48:9.** Why does God say He holds back His anger?

**Neh. 9:30-31.** What did God do after warning His people for forty years? Does He just overlook sin and never discipline us for it? What is true of God even when He is disciplining His children?

Reread the verses listed above and note the other attributes of God that are listed along with patience or longsuffering in each verse. Are these qualities that we should also seek to imitate?

**Additional verses to read and discuss:** Acts 13:18; Isa. 53:3; Ps. 78:38; Ps. 103:8; Ps. 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; James 5:10



If God is patient with us, who have sinned against Him over and over, how should we respond to the much smaller slights and sins of others toward us?

## **Jesus's love is patient.**

**Isa. 53:3.** How did man treat Jesus? What did He do for man in return?

**Luke 22:47-51.** How did Jesus respond to Judas's betrayal of Him? What could He have done if He had chosen to? What did Jesus say and do when Peter cut off the soldier's ear? What can we learn from His example?

**1 Pet. 2:21-25.** What kind of example did Jesus leave for us? Was He guilty of sin? How did He respond to the scornful speech of others? What did He not do when He was suffering? What did He do instead? Why did He die on the cross?

What did His suffering accomplish for us? What can we learn from His example?

**Heb. 4:15-16.** Why is Jesus compassionate toward us in our weakness? How did He respond to temptation? Because of this, what can we do with confidence? How should we treat people who are weak and imperfect like us?

**Additional passages to read and discuss.** Note each of the weaknesses and wrongs Jesus was willing to patiently bear. Mark. 1:35-38; Matt. 9:2-7; Matt. 12:24; Matt. 26:36-75; Matt. 27:13-14; John 8:59



Jesus was patient and willing to suffer wrongs for our sake because of His great love for us. Because He loves us, shouldn't we be willing to suffer the much smaller wrongs that others commit against us?

## **The Bible teaches us about patience.**

**Eccles. 7:8.** What two kinds of attitudes are being compared? What do we usually think of as the opposite of pride? Why would being humble – thinking less about our selves – make it easier to be patient with others? How could someone who is patient be better than someone who is proud?

**Prov. 16:32.** How could a patient person be better than a mighty soldier who conquers a city? What does it mean to rule our spirit?

**Prov. 14:29.** What might the patient person understand about other people and their weaknesses? How would this help him remain patient when slighted or wronged? What might he understand about God that helps him control his anger? What does the quick-tempered person reveal about himself? What is he allowing to rule him?

**James 1:19-20.** What should we be quick to do? What should we be slow to do? How could being quick to listen help us be slow to anger?

**Rom. 8:28.** How will this truth help us be patient with difficult people and circumstances?

**Gal. 5:14.** How will loving others like we love ourselves help us be patient with them?

**Col. 3:12.** When we take off impatience and anger, what should we put on in their place?

**Additional passages to read and discuss:** Eccles. 7:9; Prov. 20:3; Eph. 4:1-2; Rom. 12:18-19

## **Love patiently.**

- **Act out these situations** with the family. How would you show longsuffering in each case?
  - Your brother breaks a vase in the living room, then blames you for doing it.
  - Someone makes fun of the clothes you are wearing.
  - Your brother cries and takes away the toy you are playing with.
  - Your sister doesn't clean up her side of the bedroom.
  - A friend who is visiting your home doesn't want to play anything you want to play.
  - Someone is pointing and whispering about you across the room.
- **Stop and pray** before you speak or react to someone who has wronged you. Pray for God's blessing on this person, and ask for His help to be a picture of His love and patience.
- **Ask yourself** if this issue is really worth the energy you're investing in it. Are you making yourself and your feelings more important than loving others the way Jesus loves you?
- **Choose to "take off"** complaining, anger, and the desire for revenge, and to put on longsuffering and patience.
- Channel your frustration and anger into **attacking the problem**, not the person. What can you do to make the situation better? What can you change? What do you need to patiently endure, trusting God to know what is best?
- When you are tempted to be impatient and angry, **recite one of the verses** you have memorized, and pray for God's help. Jesus has been tempted in the same way.
- **Remember** how much God loves you. Think of Jesus suffering in order to save you. Can you be patient with these small injuries from others, when He suffered so much more for you?

## **Give thanks.**

- Thank God for sending Jesus to die for you, and for giving you the free gift of salvation, even though you've done nothing to deserve it. If you haven't yet put your faith in Christ's saving work on the cross, thank God for His patience and for drawing you to Him, and repent.
- Thank Him for His patient love as He helps you to become more like His Son.
- Thank Jesus for being born as a man, and for living a life without sin in the midst of people who hurt Him and sinned against Him.
- Thank Him for the strength His love gives you to love others, no matter how they treat you.