

# Real Love

# Wisdom from 1 Corinthians 13



## BILL CROWDER



## *introduction*

# What Is Real Love?

**E**veryone is looking for love. But what does real love look like? How will we know when we've found it? Some think of "being in love" as an indescribable feeling that we fall in and out of. But the Bible, in its timeless wisdom, gives us a more meaningful and enduring picture.

In the following pages, pastor and Bible teacher Bill Crowder helps us take a fresh look at the inspired words of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Those who share his confidence in Scripture will find that what songwriter Bob Lind called "the bright elusive butterfly of love" isn't so elusive after all.



MART DEHAAN

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*one*

# What the World Needs Now

**W**hen Jackie DeShannon sang, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love," a generation sang with her. According to the song, the world doesn't need any more mountains to climb or rivers to cross. What we need is love, "not just for some, but for everyone."

The theme of this hit song of the '60s strikes a chord that resonates in all of us. We buy roses and candy to express our love to our spouse. We raise relief money for communities devastated by natural disasters. We applaud the actions of people like 75-year-old Russell Plaisance,

who tried to help a troubled family whose plight had been described in his local paper. Russell brought money, food, and toys to a local motel where the family was staying. Unfortunately, Russell's kindness was "repaid" a few days later when the father of the family pulled a knife on him and made off with his wallet and car.

Russell's experience helps explain why the world is in desperate need of love. If love offered was always returned, there would be enough to go around. But love is not always returned. And sometimes when love is returned, we redefine it to fit our interests. Love means different things to different people.

Even in common conversation, we use the word *love* to refer to a variety of things. For example, I might say that:

"I love to play golf."

"I love my computer."

"I love my wife and children."

"I love the Liverpool Reds."

When a word can mean so many different things, it may come to mean nothing at all!

The wisdom of the Bible is clear, however, in its definition of love. Writing to people afflicted by anger and conflict, the apostle Paul said:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 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, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 COR. 13:1-3).

These timeless words were written to people who knew the importance of personal commitment and sacrifice.

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The Corinthian readers of Paul's letter understood the value of faith, knowledge, spiritual gifts, strong leaders, and inspiring messages.

But in the process of trying to look after their own interests, the Christ-followers in Corinth lost sight of the *goal* of their faith and knowledge. They forgot that it is possible to study the Scriptures and yet miss the heart and mind of God. In their desire for fulfillment, they had forgotten what they needed most.





*two*

## A City in Need of Love

**It might seem paradoxical** that one of the most beautiful descriptions of love the world has ever known is associated with a city like Corinth.

Decadent and heartless, its inhabitants were known for their self-centered relationships. Lives were routinely used and destroyed. On closer look, however, the setting is highly appropriate. If ever a people needed the principles of real love to change their lives, it was the church in Corinth.

Even by today's standards, the Corinthian Christians had much to overcome. The city's primary religion was the



worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love whose temple employed 1,000 prostitute priestesses.

Wealth posed another challenge. The city's prime location on the Isthmus of Corinth connecting northern and southern Greece provided a commercial prosperity that fed its moral decline. This lethal combination of materialism mixed with a sexually oriented religion produced a culture based on personal pleasure.

As often happens, the church in Corinth began to reflect the condition of its environment. Paul dealt with a variety of problems in this first letter to this promising yet troubled church:

- division in the family of God (chs. 1–3)
- pride and spiritual arrogance (ch. 4)
- sexual promiscuity (ch. 5)
- lawsuits between believers (ch. 6)
- troubled marriages (ch. 7)
- abuse of spiritual liberty (chs. 8–10)
- abuse of the Lord's Table (ch. 11)
- misuse of spiritual gifts (chs. 12, 14)
- neglect of doctrinal basics (ch. 15)



Paul's readers needed to understand that there was more to following Christ than the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and power. All of their eloquent arguments, right doctrine,



**Corinth** became so well-known for its corruption that people in the Greek world who were guilty of gross immorality and drunken debauchery were said to behave like **Corinthians**.

expressions of faith, and sacrificial giving would actually drive others away if they didn't rediscover the real meaning of love. With a series of contrasts in 13:1-3, Paul showed what really happens when our actions, even good actions, are not done with love.

The insight the Corinthians needed is vital for all of us. It's possible that we too have amassed mountains of information from God and about God without understanding His heart. It's possible that despite the Spirit living in us, we don't truly care for the people in our lives. It's possible that we see how and when others are

***All eloquent arguments, right doctrine, expressions of faith, and sacrificial giving will actually drive others away if done without real love.***

wrong without seeing when we ourselves are wrong.

Such insight is not to condemn us. First Corinthians 13 is not meant to knock us down. It is intended to shine a light when we lose our way. It helps us realize that we can't let failures in our relationships and attitudes ruin us. We can't let arguments over our own interests reflect poorly on the credibility of our Lord.

People won't care much about what we know until they see how much we care. Others are not likely to find our beliefs credible unless they see that we are as concerned about them as we are about ourselves. Without the love

of Christ compelling us, evangelism becomes judgmental. Doctrinal purity becomes pharisaical. Personal commitment becomes self-righteous. Worship grows routine and mindless.

God does not merely call us to higher ground. He offers to change us from the inside out. He does not simply present a higher standard of living. He wants to lift us above our own natural way and do something in us that we could never do for ourselves.



*The Pharisees were one of three significant religious groups among the Jews during Jesus' lifetime. They were known for their strict adherence to the Old Testament Law and strong commitment to ritual purity.*



*three*

## The Marks of Real Love

**W**ith a bold new look and sound, the Beatles stirred a whole generation to sing "all you need is love." In a much publicized studio reunion, the Beatles again sang of love. But the lyrics of John Lennon's song "Real Love" expressed a note of sadness. While describing real love as his goal in life, the song ends with the mournful thought that he was destined "only to be alone."

Lennon's lyrics describe the experience not only of his generation but of ours as well. We look for love, think we have found it, but grow disillusioned when the feelings evaporate.

What is love and why does it seem so elusive? If we

had lived in the days of the apostle Paul, the Greek language would have helped us clarify the kind of "love" we were looking for.

The Greek word *eros* was a term used to describe romantic love. *Storge* described a strong love that protects and makes secure. *Phileo* represented the brotherly love of family or friendship.

And then there was *agape* (most often used to speak of God's love) that described love in its most profound and pure form.

Since Paul chose the word *agape* for his description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, it appears he wanted us to see that it is the highest kind of divine love that gives lasting meaning to all other expressions of love. Using *agape* to describe this love from our Creator's point of view, the apostle wrote:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 COR. 13:4-7).

When we consider the different elements of this lofty



Only **agape** and **phileo** are used in the New Testament.

***This quality of love [suffering long] enables a person to do what others say they could never do.***

love, it becomes clear why *agape* love is real love—the love we all want and need.

## **Love “Suffers Long.”**

It is patient. The Greek word meant “long-tempered.” Vine’s *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words* says *makrothumia* describes “that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation that does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish.” Another commentator defined it as “slow to become resentful.”

Real love does not retaliate or seek to get even. It does not embrace bitterness but patiently endures. It recognizes and deals with the heartaches it faces without becoming vengeful in response. This quality of love [suffering long] enables a person to do what others say they could never do.

That was Joan’s case. Her husband had been involved in a lengthy affair, eventually abandoning their family. The marriage ended in divorce. Yet, in all the hurt and pain Joan experienced, she never forgot why she loved her husband.

After months of sorrow and rebuilding her life alone, she received word that Charles, her ex-husband, had been injured at work and had been hospitalized. God used the suffering of that accident to get the attention of a man gone astray.

One day Charles contacted Joan and asked if there was

any hope for their broken marriage to be restored. What a huge question! And what an open door for further hurt and sorrow! Another woman in a similar situation might have, understandably, declined. But in spite of Joan's concerns, she was willing to enter months of biblical counseling with Charles. Two years after Joan had been forced to deal with one of the most severe pains and losses a woman can know, she remarried Charles.

Such willingness to resist becoming resentful does not mean that past sins are easily or painlessly forgotten. But real love doesn't give way to bitter resentment. It "suffers long."



*Love that "suffers long" does not require those who have been hurt to remain or reenter harmful situations. Real love requires that our actions grow out of the right attitude.*

## Real Love "Is Kind."

According to Greek scholar A. T. Robertson, the Greek word translated "kind" can also mean "useful or gracious." If we keep in mind that the purpose of real love is to seek the welfare of the one loved, then we see why real love must not only be patient but gracious.

Kindness, not harshness, is more apt to encourage good in another person. Just as Proverbs says that "a soft answer turns away wrath" (15:1), so love that is practical and useful brings out the best in the one loved.

Being gentle and "full of grace" is a Christlike quality (JOHN 1:14). Look at the way Jesus described Himself to



Paul uses both **positive** and **negative** examples to present a full understanding of the nature and function of love in the life of a believer.

those in need of His help: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (MATT. 11:28-29).

Here is a description of the strongest and most loving Person the world has ever known—strong enough to create the universe and wise enough to stand against the hypocrisy and self-centeredness of the most powerful people of His day. Yet He did so while being full of both truth and grace.

Jesus reminds us that while love calls for truth, truth expressed without kindness is not loving. He reminds us that while love calls for patience, patience without kindness is not loving either.

## **Real Love "Does Not Envy."**

Continuing his description of love, Paul said that real love does not resent the blessings, successes, or well-being of another. Love does not say, "If I can't have what I want, I don't want you to have it either." Instead, real love says, "I can be happy for you, even if I never achieve the accomplishments, recognition, or comforts you are enjoying. While I might wish myself more, I could not wish you less."

This "no envy" nature of real love is perhaps its most frequently encountered aspect. How many times have



we seen other people prosper while we struggle to get by? Even Jesus' own disciples argued among themselves over who should have the most significant places of honor.



The Scriptures don't say that we should be able to lose a job without disappointment or a relationship without pain. Paul doesn't say that if we have love we won't have feelings of personal loss or sadness. But he does say that if we have real love we will not envy. Our own pain will not be an excuse to feel ill will for those who appear to be getting a better break than we are.

How can we love with such grace? Only with the enablement of the Spirit of Christ. The secret of goodwill in disappointment is a deep confidence in a provider God who is also our Shepherd and Father. Disappointments will come. Unfair circumstances will test our faith as well as our love. Yet, we can be disappointed for ourselves and still show love to others—if we have learned to trust in God.

## Real Love “Does Not Parade Itself.”

Self-improvement books tell us that to get ahead we need to assume the look of success, blow our own horn, and play up our own talents. But real love does not brag about its accomplishments. It is not given to self-display. This



**Pride** was the first of all sins committed by Satan himself when he said, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” (ISA. 14:14)

***The secret of goodwill in disappointment is a deep confidence in a provider God who is also our Shepherd and Father.***

concept finds ancient roots in the Bible. King Solomon said it well when he wrote, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth" (PROV. 27:2). Simply put, real love doesn't push itself into the spotlight.

This fourth description of love is the other side of the coin from a love that is not envious or jealous. Jealousy wants what someone else has; bragging tries to make others jealous of what we have. Jealousy puts others down; bragging builds ourselves up.

Real love, however, not only applauds the successes of another, but it knows how to handle its own wins with grace and humility.

## **Real Love "Is Not Puffed Up."**

The Greek word Paul uses here means "to puff oneself out like a bellows." In describing what real love is not, he chose a term he used earlier when he encouraged the loveless Christians in Corinth not to "be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (1 COR. 4:6).

In the earlier section, Paul described the Corinthians as being so full of themselves that they had no room to feel the pain of others. Here in chapter 13 he used the same word picture to show that the arrogance that makes us unwilling to receive the help of others also



*One place we might look to see if we have a puffed-up sense of our own importance is in our prayers. Do we pray only for ourselves and our own interests, or do we also pray for the children, spouses, and concerns of others?*

makes us insensitive to those who need us.

Puffed-up people, full of themselves with an exaggerated sense of their own importance, assume that their happiness, opinions, and feelings are the only ones that count. Puffed-up people find it easy to dismiss the needs and feelings of others.

The New Testament's view of real love does not teach us to neglect our own needs. It simply instructs us to remember that our interests are not more important than the interests of others.

## **Real Love “Does Not Behave Rudely.”**

The only other New Testament occurrence of this expression is found in 1 Corinthians 7:36, which describes the relationship between an unmarried couple. Various translations render it as “not behaving unseemly, unbecomingly, rudely, unmannerly, or indecently.” While emphasizing the highest priority of devotion to God, the apostle went on to say that if a man and a woman found themselves faced with sexual temptation, they should marry rather than “behave improperly.”

How does “behaving improperly” relate to the principle of real love referred to in 1 Corinthians 13? It reminds us that the honorable nature of real love will never make inappropriate

demands of others. Real love will never prompt an unmarried person to say, "If you love me, you'll prove it by giving yourself to me." Those who love will never ask others to prove their loyalty by lying, cheating, or stealing for them.

Real love does not use a friendship to pressure anyone to do something contrary to the principles of conscience or faith, or the moral principles of God. The worst acts of sexual indulgence, the most hideous acts of cover-up, the most depraved secrets of family, gang, group, or friendship have been held under the misused name of love. Love is never a tool of coercion.

## **Real Love "Does Not Seek Its Own."**

This is a favorite expression of Paul to describe selflessness. It speaks of the person whose focus is outward. In Philippians 2, Paul expressed the principle of real love this way: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (vv.3-4).

Paul's great passion for those who have taken the name of Christ is that they be unified, of one mind. Yet this oneness will never be a reality in a church, a marriage, or any other relationship until we look out for the interests of others with as much care and effort as we look out for our own. Paul even said that real love puts the needs of others ahead of our own.

This self-sacrifice flies in the face of our human nature, yet it expresses the mind of Christ (PHIL. 2:5). He humbled Himself to leave His heavenly Father, to live in the

limitations of a physical body, to walk the earth in poverty, to be a servant to people who would reject Him, to wash the feet of disciples who would abandon Him, to die on the cross for the sins of people who did not deserve Him. Jesus' entire life was an example of putting others ahead of self.

## **Real Love "Is Not Provoked."**

The next word Paul used in his definition of real love describes a heart not easily driven to irritation or "sharpness of spirit" (A. T. Robertson). In other words, real love does not have a short fuse. It is not touchy or irritable. This is the flip side of the first characteristic of love—a negative way of saying that love suffers for a long time.

How easily we forget this vital quality of real love. After years of mutual disappointment, husbands and wives become easily provoked with each other. Exasperated parents shout unkind words at their children. Workers show a quick temper when an employer or fellow worker fails to give basic consideration.

Why do we get provoked? Sometimes we simmer and boil inside because we want what we want, when we want it—and nothing can convince us that we shouldn't have it. Sometimes our temper provides evidence of our own selfishness.

There is, however, another side to the picture. While love is not easily provoked for selfish reasons, there is a time to be emotionally upset and agitated. In Acts 17:16 we read: "While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit



was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols."

In this instance, Paul's provocation was warranted but it was loving. As he waited, he did a slow burn. The more he saw and thought about the idolatry of the city, the more concerned and upset he became in behalf of those who were being hurt and misled by false religion.

Jesus also was deeply provoked when He turned over the tables of the temple moneychangers. He loved enough to be angered by the commercialism disrupting the Court of the Gentiles in His Father's House of Prayer. He cared for those who had lost a quiet place to pray (MATT. 21:12-13).

Jesus was not expressing the kind of sensitivity and

***While love is not easily provoked for selfish reasons, there is a time to be emotionally upset and agitated.***

irritability that signals a lack of love. When circumstances provoked Him, He thoughtfully and lovingly took action against the practices hurting the people He loved.

Paul's experience in Athens and Jesus' actions in the temple remind us that there is a time to be angry. But this anger must be expressed in love and without sin (EPH. 4:26).

## **Real Love "Thinks No Evil."**

Paul is not writing in the spirit of the three mythical monkeys who "see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil." The Greek word translated "thinks no evil" is an accounting

term. It means "to count up, to take account of as in a ledger or notebook." The "evils" referred to are the wrongs or hurts received at the hand of others.



A love that "thinks no evil" won't keep records of unkindness with the intent of getting even. Real love will not hold bitter grudges or allow longstanding resentments against others.

When we keep track of wrongs with the intent of making others pay, we ourselves may end up paying more than we can afford. "Keeping score" with an opponent is great for sports, but it doesn't belong in the work of love. Real love doesn't keep a record of wrongs, because it finds its security in the presence and provision of God. We don't need to keep a record of wrongs when we know that God Himself is in control of the outcome. He is looking after our needs.

## **Real Love "Does Not Rejoice in Iniquity."**

Paul says in summary, "Love does not find delight in anything God says is wrong." Neither does love take secret satisfaction in the moral failures of others. Love does not pass along a "juicy morsel" of someone else's failure simply because it tastes good. Love doesn't gossip to appear knowledgeable, or to feel better about itself by publishing news of someone else's shame.

Real love does care about the long-term damages of sin, however. When love compels us to expose sin, it must only be for the good of others, any other reason cannot claim motivation by love.

Real love knows that the evil planted in thoughtless

***Good doctrine is right thinking about God, ourselves, and others. Right thinking, in turn, allows us to truly and deeply love one another.***

moments of pleasure will harvest a profound consciousness of regret. Love knows that sins planted as seeds of foolishness will one day produce the bitter fruit of separation, isolation, and loneliness.

Real love cannot rejoice in sin because it cares not only about today but also about tomorrow. Love can't treat evil as an option without consequences.

## **Real Love "Rejoices in the Truth."**

Paul has just said that love does not rejoice in iniquity. Now we read what love does rejoice with—the truth. Why did he say "truth"? Why didn't he say, "Love rejoices with righteousness"?

One reason for Paul's choice of words is probably the inherent relationship between righteousness and truth. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul spoke of those who will be judged because they "did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 THESS. 2:12).

Paul's words to the Thessalonians give us a clue why he said "love rejoices with the truth." He wants us to think about the profound relationship between what we *believe* and what we *do*. On one hand, what we believe determines what we do. On the other hand, what we want to do determines what we are willing to believe.





*The Scriptures generally assume that actions follow beliefs. People who have a deep confidence and conviction that truth telling is preferable to deception are more apt to speak the truth than a person who is not convinced that truth is superior to lies.*

This is why the Bible puts such an emphasis on right beliefs. Good doctrine is right thinking about God, ourselves, and others. Right thinking, in turn, allows us to truly and deeply love one another.

Unrighteousness denies the truth. Wrong behavior is rooted in misbelief about reality. Immorality is rooted in a process of self-deception that says, "I know better than God how to further my own interests and the interests of others."

Paul had good reason for saying that love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." The opposite of iniquity (unrighteousness) is not only righteousness, it is truth. It is believing the truth about God and others and ourselves that can enable us to enjoy life the way it is meant to be. We learn to love each other in grace and truth rather than loving the discovery of their faults. Putting away our self-destructive misbeliefs can enable us to rejoice when we find moral courage, integrity, patience, and faithfulness wherever we find it. That is real love.



On this foundation of righteousness and truth, Paul prepares to put the finishing touches on his portrait of love.

## Real Love “Bears All Things.”

The word *bears* comes from a Greek word that means “roof.” The picture is grand in its simplicity. Love covers and protects like a roof covers a house and protects it from storms. Love continues to work for the good of others regardless of the circumstances.

Love bears the storms of disappointment, the rains of failure, and the winds of time and circumstance. Love shields from the extremes of cold winters and hot summers. Love provides a place of shelter that can withstand the worst situations imaginable.

Love does not insulate others from the harsh realities of living in a broken world. Neither can it protect others from the consequences of their own choices. But love does give broken, hurting people a place to find someone who cares for their well-being. Love gives even

***Love bears the storms of disappointment, the rains of failure, and the winds of time and circumstance. Love provides a place of shelter that can withstand the worst situations imaginable.***

unrepentant people an advocate and intercessor who prays for their ultimate well-being. Love offers the worst sinners a place to bring their repentant hearts.

“Bearing all things” does not mean that love passively

accepts sin in the way that a doormat takes the feet of its users. It means that love never stops caring and never stops offering a place of forgiveness. Love doesn't get to the point where it begins hating, despising, or condemning another. Love cares enough to keep praying, to patiently endure the sins of others, to confront when necessary, and to forgive.

This is where the image of a roof is limited. Such unconditional love is not a passive protector, but a dynamic love that responds in ways appropriate to the choices of the other person. While love's character never changes, its strategies and tactics constantly adapt to seek the well-being of the other person "in all things."

## Real Love "Believes All Things."

At first glance, this next characteristic of love might leave the impression that those who care about others must become gullible or naive. That was not Paul's point. Neither was he saying that love *always* gives others the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes a loving friend must be disbelieving in order to get to the heart of a matter.

Here Paul celebrates the foundational relationship between faith and love. First Corinthians 13 reminds us that real love is fueled by our faith in God. Real love grows and is sustained by faith as we believe "all things" God tells us



*Jesus spoke of the need for **endurance** when He said, "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (MATT. 10:22)*

about Himself, about ourselves, and about one another.

If we doubt what God says about His love for us, we will lose a strong motivation for loving one another. If we doubt God's assurance that He is patient and kind to us, we will not show patience and kindness with each other. If we doubt that God is able to provide for our needs, we will not be inclined toward generosity.

The truth that "love believes all things" is central to our understanding of Christlike love. Real love is rooted and grounded in faith. Faith, in turn, is rooted and grounded in what God has said in His Word.

Unless we continue to "believe all things" God has said, our love will not survive the disappointments, rejections, and insults of life. Unless we build our love firmly on the Word of God, love will throw in the towel. Only by faith in God can love remain strong.

## **Real Love "Hopes All Things."**

This flows out of the previous statement. If we are living with a confident trust in the words and sovereign plan of God, we will also have reason to "hope all things." Our faith in God's grace means we can believe that human failures aren't final. Real love can hope because of what God can do in a person's life.

It wouldn't make sense to think that Paul was asking us to hope indiscriminately, any more than he could be asking us to believe without discernment. But of all people, only those who trust in the God of the Bible have a sound basis to be loving and hopeful in this present world.

The psalmist said of God, "My hope is in You" (PSALM

39:7). Paul wrote, "Hope does not disappoint" (ROM. 5:5). And Peter added, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 PET. 1:3).

This is the power of love. It is fueled and sustained not by an ever-changing emotional or physical state, but by deep beliefs and hopes given by God to those who trust Him. Real love has a capacity to view life—and live it—with a refreshing optimism because of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (COL. 1:27).

## **Real Love "Endures All Things."**

Paul concluded his description of love where it began in verse 4: "Love suffers long." The difference between that first usage and this one is found in the words Paul chose to describe this wonderful element of real love. With the insight that the secret of real love lies in right beliefs and hopes, Paul has given us a basis for saying love "endures all things."

In verse 4, the Greek word focused on "suffering long" in the face of mistreatment at the hands of other people without becoming resentful. Here the emphasis is on how we respond to life in general. Love doesn't give up. It doesn't quit. It doesn't walk away. It perseveres in the face of pain, knowing that the goal is worth it.



*four*

# The Love That Never Fails

**L**ionel Richie and Diana Ross sang wistfully of what every young couple uniting in marriage hopes for: "Endless Love."

That just isn't possible apart from the love Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13. All these thoughts were reinforced in verse 8 when he drew his argument to a close: "Love never fails." Because it finds its source and life in God, real love can endure anything.

Paul made it clear that other things are temporary, incomplete, and unreliable. But not love. By the strength and grace of God, it can survive anything. Real love can survive betrayal and distrust. It can survive disappointment and moral failure. It can rise above the

insults and envy of people who consider us their enemy. It can survive criminal trial and imprisonment.

Even when the nature of our relationships change due to unfortunate human choices, the love of God can cause us to pray and, where possible, to act in behalf of another person.

It is the love that reflects the heart of Christ and reveals the wonderful change that only He can make in a life—real love.



*five*

## Where Can I Find Love?

**If the question of your heart is,** "Where can I find this real love?" let me share with you some good news. You already are loved. In the most familiar verse in the Bible we are told: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (JOHN 3:16).

To those who believe, Jesus described the scope of God's love. To His disciples Jesus said, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you



need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (MATT. 6:31-33).

It is only when we believe we are loved in this way that we have the security we need to take the risk of loving others.

Have you taken the first step of finding love in the Person and actions of Christ? Have you trusted Him? Have you believed the Bible when it says Christ died for your sins?

That is the starting point.

Acknowledge your sin and your need of Christ, who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (LUKE 19:10). It is in Christ that we find the love of God, and it is in Him that we see what it means to live in the kind of love Paul described.

He is the One who calls us not merely to a higher standard but to let Him live His life through us.



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