



GOSPEL DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE CHAPEL

For Individuals

LOVE: THE GREATEST OF ALL

Start with prayer and then read...

***“We remember before our God and Father . . .
your labor prompted by love” – 1 Thessalonians 1:3***

 **READ:** 1 Corinthians 13:1–8

 **REFLECTION QUESTION:**
When you read this passage again today, what stands out to you the most?

Paul says love is the greatest of the three things that remain. Faith gives us the strength to follow Jesus through trials. Hope gives us the confidence to endure to the end. But love undergirds it all. When Paul told the Corinthians to stop arguing about which spiritual gift was more important, he ended that chapter with, “I will show you the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). Then he proceeded to write a whole chapter about love. Paul said none of the religious stuff or the good works we do matters if we don’t have love. For believers, love must undergird everything we do, because our God is love.

DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus said the two most important commandments were to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:37–40). These two commands are connected because God is love (1 John 4:8). You can’t say you love God if you don’t love others (1 John 4:20), and you can’t really love others the way God does if you don’t love Him, because love comes from God (1 John 4:7).

Of course, people who don’t know Jesus can love other people on a human level. Because we are made in the image of God, all human beings love. But the kind of love the Bible calls us to is a unique God-level love that is only possible through the Holy Spirit. There are lots of words for different kinds of love in Greek, but the two used in the Bible are “phileo” and “agape.” Phileo is the natural love you have for friends or family. Agape is a selfless, generous love without any expectation of repayment. It is used for the love of God (whom you could never repay) and love for the poor (who could never repay you).

The Bible does not hold phileo up as an ideal. It is a natural love you don't really have to try to have, you just do. But agape love is supernatural. It only comes from God. Agape love is when you love someone who drives you crazy, someone who's hurt you, someone you would otherwise hate. Agape is what you need to love someone when things get hard, when you disagree, when there is brokenness. Agape is when you forgive someone who has wronged you even if they aren't sorry, when you serve someone without getting anything out of it for yourself. Agape is a completely other-focused love, a voluntary giving of yourself to others. A love that doesn't demand anything but only seeks the welfare of others. The love of an innocent man who dies for the guilty, even His enemies (Romans 5:8).

This description of agape in 1 Corinthians 13 isn't meant to be exhaustive. This particular list speaks directly to some of the particular things that were going on in Corinth. They were being impatient and provoking each other to anger. They were being arrogant and boasting and seeking their own way. This list is intentional and specific, but each of these things describe a love that puts others first—agape love. These are just some of the ways in which the Corinthians were not putting other people first. There may be other ways we struggle with agape love for others.

APPLYING IT TO LIFE

The list in 1 Corinthians 13 does not describe how love feels about another person but what love does. Like Paul told the Thessalonians, their labor was prompted by love. Because love isn't a feeling, it's a choice you make to love someone even when they aren't being lovable. But realize, too, that love is a fruit of the Spirit, something the Spirit grows in us over time. It's not something we just try harder to do better. Agape only comes from God through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is how we should be loving others, because we know God, because His Spirit dwells in us.



REFLECTION QUESTION:

Try putting your name in that verse and see if it works:

_____ is patient, _____ is kind, _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast,
_____ is not self-seeking, _____ is not rude. _____ does not insist in his/her own way.

If it doesn't fit so well, don't beat yourself up about not being "good enough" at loving other people. Ask the Spirit to grow His fruit of love in you. Like fruit, love is something that grows in us over time. An apple tree can take two to ten years to bear fruit. Be patient with yourself and keep praying for God's Spirit to work in you.

The version of love Paul describes was such a stark contrast to the world around the Corinthians, it had to speak volumes to them. It is truly "the most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). Because agape love is so unusual, so unnatural, so different from the phileo love we see in the world, Jesus said when we love this way, people will take notice and give glory to God (Matthew 5:43–48). They will see something different about us.

This is how the world will know we are followers of Jesus, by our radical, selfless love for others (John 13:35). This is ultimately what it means to be a follower of Jesus—to love others the way He did (John 13:34). Agape love is central to all we do as believers. Everything we do must be done out of self-sacrificing, agape love for our family, our friends, our neighbors, and even our enemies. May we be known for our love in our workplaces, our schools, our families, our city, on the internet, and throughout

the world—so much so that people take notice and ask us about it. May people look at us and say, “Those are the people who love with radical selflessness. I want to be loved that way too.”



REFLECTION QUESTION:

Which of these qualities of love is more of a struggle for you than others? What spiritual disciplines can you practice to help develop those qualities in you, besides just asking God for those qualities?



REFLECTION QUESTION:

How can you show selfless agape love to someone today, even if you are sheltering in place? How can you love someone the way Jesus loves you?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: SHOW SACRIFICIAL LOVE

When we feel like the world is falling apart all around us, and the things we have put our hope in have failed us, we have to turn to Scripture to find real hope. One of the best ways to do that is to immerse ourselves in what the Bible has to say about the hope we have in heaven and the spiritual promises of love, peace, and abundant life God gives us for this life.

Using an online concordance or search, find passages about hope, heaven, and our inheritance. Search for “spiritual riches” or “spiritual blessings.” Search for fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Look up what Jesus says about “abundant life” in John 10:10 and see if there are cross references to any other passages (pro tip: New American Standard Bible has the best cross-references). Pray for the Spirit to guide your study and let the cross-references lead you into a deeper, richer understanding of the hope we have in Christ. Look at what the Bible has to say throughout the whole witness of Scripture, Genesis to Revelation, and pray for God to fill you with hope.