

DAY 1 - (week beginning 2 Sept 2019)**Read - 1 Corinthians 13:1-8**

“Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail” vs 7

In order to understand God a little better, although, of course, we will never truly understand Him, we need to understand the characteristics of love. God IS love. So, when reading verses 4-8 in 1 Corinthians 13, it is a good exercise to replace the word ‘love’ with the word ‘God’ to give ourselves a small insight into the amazing nature and character of our loving God.

God’s love is practical: God’s love is not empty words, it is practical. In John 3:16, Jesus does not say that God loved the world so much that He felt warm and fuzzy inside - No, He loved so much that He gave His only Son. It was practical. When Jesus showed the world God’s love as He walked on earth, His love was entirely practical and active. Luke tells us in Acts 10:38 that Jesus “went about doing good”. This love took Him all the way to the cross.

1 John 3:17-18 tells us “If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.”

Nowadays we feel good when we send someone a sweetly worded text from our Cell phones, this tells the person that they’re thought about, but is this the practical love which God wishes to pour out through us? Perhaps we should do more.

Prayer: Lord help me to love others in a practical, active way. Teach me how to love with Your true love which shows itself in action. Words and talk are not enough, I know.

DAY 2**Read - Philippians 2:1-11**

“He always had the nature of God, but He did not think that by force He should try to remain equal with God. Instead of this, of His own free will He gave up all He had, and took the nature of a servant...” vs 6-7

God’s love is sacrificial and selfless: God’s love cost Him so much. Jesus went beyond just dying for His friends, He died for His enemies, that is, He died for you and for me, because we’re sinners. And He sacrificed Himself for us so that we could have a loving relationship with Him. Only God has such love, and His love is truly the greatest love of them all. The Greek word for God’s love is ‘Agape’. It is beyond human love.

God is immeasurably generous in His love for us. His love continues to give and is never ever depleted. God gives His love abundantly and without measure, and delights to do so.

An amazing aspect of God’s love is its selflessness. This particular characteristic of God is astounding to me. This selflessness will take you by surprise, because it is not something that we as humans are used to. We don’t see it very often. We tend to be suspicious toward people because we know that usually the bottom line is ‘what’s in it for me?’ But it is not so with God. He truly and simply just cares about you, with no strings attached. In 1 Corinthians 13 we learn that God’s love is “not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking”. [vs 4b-5a]

Prayer: Almighty God, how can I learn to love as You do? The sacrifices You are willing to make and the fact that You give entirely selflessly, is overwhelmingly. Teach me to love as You do.

DAY 3**Read - 1 Chronicles 16:23-36**

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His love endures forever” vs 34

God’s love is enduring: We live in a fickle world. The sad statistic of divorce and broken homes is a testimony to our inability to commit to lasting relationships. Love is seen as something elusive. It is here one day and gone tomorrow, but that’s not what we experience when we discover God’s love. His love is everlasting.

Read these amazing words: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Romans 8: 35, 37-39]

This is deeply comforting. These verses tell us about true love. It lasts. It lasts because it is an act of the will. God chooses to love us forever, no matter what. His love endures through our failures and hard times. Listen to what Paul says: “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” [1 Corinthians 13:6-7]

In a world where so much is transient, we can raise our voices in praise as we sing: “Great is Thy faithfulness oh God our Father!”

Prayer: Thank you that I can feel secure in Your great love for me. It never fails, never lets go.

DAY 4

Read - Romans 5:1-11

“But God has shown us how much He loves us -- it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!” vs 8

God’s love is unconditional and undeserved: This leads on from our understanding about the enduring love of God. God’s love is not dependent on our earning it or deserving it, He loves in spite of us and our weakness and sinfulness.

Nothing in this world-experience of ours prepares us for this type of love. Perhaps the love we see in some parents gives us a small taste of the forgiving, selfless love of God, but still God’s love is far more unconditional. His love has no strings attached.

This is the heart of our Heavenly Father: He simply loves and cares for His creation, because they are His creation. He wants only good for them and does all that is in His power to do good for them. He even takes it to the most extreme measure by demonstrating His love for them by laying down His own life to die on the cross. There is no greater demonstration of unconditional love than to lay down your life for someone who really doesn’t deserve it.

God has the incredible capacity to love like this, but, unfortunately, we struggle to find the capacity to receive love like this. How do we allow ourselves to accept love that expects nothing in return?

Prayer: *Our Loving Heavenly Father, please grow our capacity to receive Your unconditional love. We read about it, we hear about it, but we long to feel it. Open our hearts to Your love.*

DAY 5

Read - Isaiah 61:1-2 and 5-8

“The Lord says, “I love justice and I hate oppression and crime. I will faithfully reward my people and make an eternal covenant with them.” vs 8

God’s love is just / judicial: As we learnt last week with God’s holiness, God’s love and holiness are intertwined. God’s love does not give us license to do as we please. In Galatians 5:13-15 Paul says: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” If God is love, He expects us to be loving too.

In the Old Testament we read this wonderful advice for life: “He has shown you, O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”. [Micah 6:8] Justice is important to our loving God.

God is our loving Father and in Proverbs 3:11-12 we read: “My child, when the Lord corrects you, pay close attention and take it as a warning. The Lord corrects those He loves, as parents correct a child of whom they are proud.”

Our love for others is a sign of our belovedness. We love, because God loved us. We are judged if we are unable to love others, because it means we have rejected God’s love in and through us.

Prayer: *Help me to realise that You expect us to love others and that we will be judged if we don’t.*

DAY 6

Read - Romans 11:33-36

“How great are God’s riches! How deep are His wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain His decisions? Who can understand His ways?” vs 33

God’s love is wise: God’s love is much more perfect than even a parent’s love. God exercises His love with perfect wisdom. Sometimes He acts in a way that seems unloving to us, but in reality is the greatest act of the love that He can do. For example, He may allow you to go through a trial or a test that lasts longer than you thought you could handle. And even though you cry for deliverance, He delays His hand. During the trial you may question God, but after it’s all over you look back and see that God, in His love, was developing and strengthening your faith and patience, not to harm you, but to equip you. It can be a tough love, but it’s the best and most perfect type of love. A love that truly has your best interests in mind.

It’s important for us to recognise that God’s love is all-knowing and wise. We never need question His motives in what He does or does not do, we need, instead to allow Him to come alongside us and guide us through. The more we can learn to trust Him, and not buck against Him, the more we will see how He is shaping us into the type of person that we would be proud to be.

Paul says in Philippians 1:9-10: “I pray that your love will keep on growing more and more, together with true knowledge and perfect judgement, so that you will be able to choose what is best..” God’s love helps us to choose wisely.

Prayer: *Guide me, Lord, teach me Your loving wisdom in all that I say and do. Help me to not do or say anything without Your Spirit’s guidance.*