



# The Greatest Gift: Love

## RECAP

**This week's focus: "I will show you the most excellent way." (1 Cor 12:31)**

1 Corinthians 13 is known as the "love chapter". Sandwiched right in the middle of a conversation about spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul reminds his audience that love is greater than giftedness. This familiar passage is often heard at both religious and non-religious weddings due to its poetic and romantic overtones. Paul's reason for drawing his audience back to love wasn't to inspire wedding vows, it was to correct improper motives with the use of the gifts and encourage the church to unite around the gift giver rather than the gift.

Paul's favorite analogy for the church was the human body functioning as one unit with many parts. Chapter 12 tells us that spiritual gifts are distributed to every member of the body, in order that everyone may work together. In chapter 14 Paul instructs the church how to practice those gifts. With intention, chapter 13 is sandwiched in the middle of these two chapters. Gifts without love are useless.

The reason for Paul's emphasis on love is that the Corinthian Church was divided and competitive. They practiced spiritual gifts, but not in a manner that unified the entire body. They were more concerned about their pride, personal status and level of importance than they were of encouraging and edifying the body. They used their gifts to express how they were better or more deserving than others rather than demonstrating the heart of Gospel service.

Paul emphasizes that LOVE is more significant in the life of a believer than the gifts will ever be. In the struggle between giftedness versus love, love should always win. Paul tells the Corinthians, rather than using gifts to compete with one another, "*I will show you the most excellent way*" ... **LOVE**. In the first 3 verses, Paul lays out the supremacy of LOVE over all the spiritual gifts. Without LOVE, what you say becomes noise, without LOVE, what you know is useless, without LOVE, faith is meaningless, and without LOVE, sacrifice achieves nothing. Nothing matters if you are not living a life of LOVE.

Paul goes on to explain what LOVE is to the believers, by addressing the problems that he had previously identified from the last 12 chapters. He explains that LOVE is patient, kind, that it doesn't envy or boast, is not proud, not dishonoring of others, not self-seeking, not easily angered, and keeps no records of wrong. LOVE does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth, always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres.



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### SHARE (5-10 min)

1. Icebreaker Question: What's one of your favorite love songs? See how many songs you can name with "love" in the title.

### STUDY (about 30 min) Read 1 Corinthians 13

2. What stood out to you about the passages or message on Sunday? Is there anything that was unclear, or that you have questions about?
3. After reading chapter 13, how does the world's definition of love compare to the love expressed in these passages?
4. The love Paul describes seems so beautiful and simple. Why is loving like this so difficult?
5. What could potentially happen if we used our gifts (1 Corinthians 12) without love?
6. Read John 15:9-17. Why do you think Jesus commands His disciples to love? What does "agape" love require of us?
7. Out of the fifteen characteristics of love, which do you find to be the easiest for you to display? Which is the hardest?
8. What are some ways you can specifically grow in your love for others at home and in the body of Christ at GateWay, based on Paul's definition?

### SUPPORT (15 min)

**PRAY:** Ask God to help you experience and live out a life of LOVE/AGAPE. Pray for patience, kindness, and humility for one another. Pray that GateWay would be marked by love rather than by pride, ambition or conflict.