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# Love Is ...

*A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study  
by Jeff S. Smith*



3. Is love something you feel or something you do? Is love something you expect to get, or is it something you decide to give (Acts 20:35)?

4. Which of the three—faith, hope and love—is permanent? Why aren't the others permanent (Romans 8:24, Hebrews 11:1)?

5. If true love never fails, for what should true love be willing to wait (Proverbs 7:6-23)?

6. List some steps that mates can take to avoid growing apart.

7. How can children sometimes be an impediment to the unfailing love spouses should possess?

8. How had the Pharisees' love for their parents failed (Matthew 15:1-9)? What was Paul's comment on such children (First Timothy 5:8)?

9. Explain Proverbs 15:17.

## Introduction

If you listen closely enough, you will learn that love is many things to many people. For some, “love means never having to say you’re sorry,” but one is left to wonder exactly what kind of *Love Story* that would produce. The Bible weighs in, arguing that God himself is love (First John 4:8), and that by partaking of his divine character, we can embody love as well. Nowhere is this more evident than in the thirteenth chapter of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church. That beleaguered congregation was competing among itself for supernatural superiority, forgetting why the Holy Spirit gave them gifts of tongues and prophecy in the first place. The more excellent path to spiritual greatness was down the path to love. This series of studies is based on another series of articles on the chapter written in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Each lesson contains part or all of the article and a number of discussion questions to provoke thought and discussion.

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## 13. Love Is ... Never Failing

Love is all these things and something more.

The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians begins by teaching us that great acts of benevolence and even religious service are worse than meaningless to God in heaven if they are occasioned by something other than love. Some men give great sums of money to charities to garner favorable publicity and they have their reward, but no commendation from heaven. Others commit seemingly great acts of piety, but out of a desire to draw praise for themselves and they have their reward, but none from above. Paul then comments upon Christ's condemnation of the hypocrites in Matthew 6, who fasted, prayed and gave alms in order to be seen of men. Because they did these deeds without the motivation of love for others than themselves, they were rejected by God.

Yet with all the fine qualities that compose love, the last one abides over them all. Love never fails.

Miraculous abilities were due to expire. Because faith is the evidence of things not seen, even it would cease in heaven (Hebrews 11:1). As for hope, once the thing hoped for is gained, hope is rewarded and retired. Once heaven is entered, hope will disappear (Hebrews 6:19-20). Of these three—faith, hope and love—the greatest is love, for it never fails. Love is merely perfected in heaven and expressed continually without disappointment.

Still, love is often tested upon this earth and pushed to its breaking point. Love of enemies is tested by bitterness. Love of family is tested by familiarity. Love of spouse is tested by time. Love of God is tested by temptation. True love does not fail; it overcomes evil with good (Romans 12:21).

That is what love is. It is our motivator, our rule and our reason.

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Love is the more excellent way that the Holy Spirit tried to introduce to the Corinthian saints who were competing over spiritual gifts. Reconsider First Corinthians 13:1-3. What is life without love as a motivator?

2. Read First John 4:7-12. How can the world “see God” in a sense (see also First John 3:14-18)?

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3. Why did King Saul's appreciation of David decline (First Samuel 18:6-11)?

4. Enduring love became a rare commodity in Old Testament marriages, so much so that many men covered themselves in violence against their wives and put them away without much cause (Malachi 2:10-17). What causes modern marriages to decline so that endurance is truly threatened (Matthew 19:3-9, Matthew 24:12)?

5. What are a few keys for the endurance of a husband's love for his wife (Ephesians 5:25-29, Proverbs 5:19)?

6. What are a few keys for the endurance of a wife's love for her husband and children (Titus 2:1-5)?

7. Every relationship that is built on love will experience its setbacks and disappointments. Apply what Job (13:15) said about God when he was disappointed to the way we endure in spite of relationship disappointments.

8. What role does complaining play in enduring love (Philippians 2:14)?

## 1. Love Is ... Longsuffering and Kind

The Holy Spirit tells us that true love is longsuffering, or patient. Surely, we know from experience that all human love is tested by the idiosyncrasies and shortcomings of another.

Marriages are tested by living in close quarters with someone who probably has some annoying little habits. The successful unions are composed of two people who learn to forebear mutually the other's oddities. Marriage, like life itself, is a marathon, not a sprint and endurance is required of its runners.

Cultivating a longsuffering disposition is easier for some people than others. However, the Christian is bound by his discipleship to nurture this noble trait. We grow in patience when we do nothing from selfish ambition but humbly esteem others as better than ourselves and consider their interests in everything (Philippians 2:3).

Our forbearance grows when we are willing always to forgive one another as Christ forgave us, putting on the bond of perfection in true love (Colossians 2:12-14).

We have a habit of putting a rug over a spot in the carpet that we cannot eradicate. In this regard, love is that covering of a shortcoming or annoying habit that does not obliterate it but makes it easier with which to live.

But just because we are to be longsuffering, this does not mean that we should try to exercise our loved ones with our quirks. The one with the failing should be willing to work on it, that he not make so much suffering necessary.

Kindness seems less common these days than it once did. Our society has gotten more impersonal as our cities have grown bigger and our technology has replaced the personal touch. We no longer know our banker or butcher, or even our neighbors in many cases.

Of course, the darkness of that situation just makes the illumination of kindness all the more needed. Kindness is a desire to wish someone well and do things to facilitate his good fortune. It is a courtesy and compassion, strongest for friends but also potent for strangers.

Kindness requires a good nature, something tended by its owner even when faced with unkindness in return. Kindness allows the other person to go first and gives advantage to the one in need.

Kindness is gentle: gentlemen helping ladies with heavy packages and doors, ladies helping children with their coats and children sharing with each other. Kindness is polite rather and rough and insensitive.

Kindness is a little word with great potential. Without kindness, what is love?

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Give three or five synonyms for “longsuffering.”
2. The rationale for recommending longsuffering among disciples is that God is extremely so with all of us. What does God suffer long and why (Romans 2:1-4, 9:22; Second Peter 3:9)?
3. What is it about other people—brethren, spouses, children, neighbors, relatives—that so frequently requires longsuffering?
4. Ephesians 4:1-3 applies longsuffering to brethren. What attitudes and objectives are essential to longsuffering love?
5. How in the world can one combine patience, longsuffering and joy (see Colossians 1:9-11)?
6. List a few synonyms for kindness.
7. Kindness includes common courtesy, pleasantness and a genuine desire to do good unto others (First Peter 3:8). Provide a couple practical examples of kindness among Bible characters.
8. Explain the relationship between kindness and longsuffering to the “golden rule” of Matthew 7:12.
9. How can you show kindness today and tomorrow?

## 12. Love Is ... Enduring All Things

Life is a marathon, not a sprint (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Those who live life like a sprint usually die early or fail otherwise because life is a distance race, and speed is optional.

Marathoners pace themselves to travel more than 26 miles and still have enough strength to break the tape and cross the finish line. If they attempted to set the 100-meter dash record every step of the way, they would never finish the course set before them.

If life is a marathon, then love is our spiritual conditioning which enables us to endure all things.

The Greek word behind this use of endurance means patience in respect to things, according to commentator R.C. Trench. It is the ability to withstand all the hindrances, stumbling blocks and enticements of a carnal world without returning them in kind or being overcome by them.

How does love figure into this equation? Simple. The revolutionary command that Jesus gave in his sermon on the mount concerning love for one’s enemies requires just this kind of patience and endurance (Matthew 5:43-48).

All of us have spent some time trying to love someone who did not love us. Maybe it was an unrequited romantic affection, which was rejected with increasing dishonor. When trying to love one’s enemies, that patience is often repaid with ridicule and malice.

Paul commented that we should bless those who persecute us and strive to find peace with all men as much as it depends upon our actions (Romans 12:14-21). It takes a great measure of enduring love to refuse to retaliate against an enemy who is casting stones at us. Yet the Bible says that we must endure and heap coals of fire upon his head, only by doing good to the man who has done us evil. With that strategy, we might overcome evil with good and avoid our good being overcome by evil.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. If my love is going to endure all things, what might I need to lay aside (Hebrews 12:1-2)?
2. Specifically, what are some burdens that we choose to carry, perhaps because of experience or personality, which make enduring love more difficult (Proverbs 11:2, 29:23; Job 7:11)?

3. Although it pales in comparison to the hope for eternal salvation, hope must also be a part of our love relationships as well. How might we show that our love for a neighbor hopes all things (Mark 12:31, Luke 10:29-37, Romans 13:10, Ephesians 4:25)?

4. Is there ever room for hoping for a neighbor's downfall or disappointment (Proverbs 11:7)?

5. How does the believing spouse of an unbelieving mate express hope for all things (First Peter 3:1-7)?

6. As parents, how do we express hope toward our children (Proverbs 19:18, Ecclesiastes 9:4; see also Colossians 1:23, First Thessalonians 5:8, First John 3:3, Jeremiah 31:17)?

7. To what would you compare hopelessness if it seeps into relationships where love ought to reign (Job 7:6)?

8. Obviously, hope cannot be *pessimistic*, but should be *optimistic*. If love hopes all things, does it follow that sometimes hope exists in love without being *realistic*?

## 2. Love Is ... Not Envious

Envy is sometimes called the green-eyed monster. It lurks like a vampire, ready to drain out the affection of loved ones through a sense of injustice and covetousness.

The Bible tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and that is fairly simple unless envy rears its ugly head (Romans 12:15). It is hard to rejoice with a brother when you are secretly wishing the source of his joy would disappear, be turned to mourning, or be transferred to your greedy little hands.

Envy has destroyed many friendships. It is rottenness to the bones (Proverbs 14:30) and the slayer of the simple (Job 5:2). Because of envy, the ruling Jews rejected their Messiah and handed him over to the executioner (Matthew 27:18).

Envy is a sign of carnality, a disqualification at the day of judgment (First Corinthians 3:3, Galatians 5:21). As newborn babes in Christ, we should put away this emotion because all we Christians have tasted equally of the savory nectar of grace that exceeds every experience of man (First Peter 2:1-3).

Sometimes we envy sinners for their apparent freedom to do what they like, but envying the rotten fruit of iniquity is a mark of irreverence and infection in the heart (Proverbs 23:17). It is a sign that one does not understand the sacrifice and blessing involved in freeing us from our guilt.

Other times, we envy the good when they are blessed beyond us in some way: more money, better car, bigger house, better grades. These, however, are perish with the use; why endanger the soul to lust after them?

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Envy is from a Latin compound that might literally be translated "to look against" or "to look with ill-will." Envy differs from jealousy in that "We are jealous of our own; we are envious of another man's possessions. Jealousy fears to lose what it has; envy is pained at seeing another have" (*Crabb's English Synonyms*). What attitude do people generally take toward someone whom they envy? Is this consistent with the will of Christ?

2. What are some things we might be tempted to envy in another?

3. Explain the connection between envy and carnality or materialism (First Corinthians 3:3, James 3:13-4:4).

4. Consider Proverbs 14:30. How is envy rottenness to the bones? What is the opposite condition described in the same verse?

5. Envy and strife are joined five times in New Testament verses (Romans 1:29, 13:13; First Corinthians 3:3, Philippians 1:15, First Timothy 6:4). Why is there such a close connection between the two? (See also James 3:13-4:4.)

6. Explain how Romans 12:15 provides a better solution than envy to the victories and tragedies of our neighbors. Apply the “Golden Rule” as well.

7. Why is envy really a serious, spiritual problem (Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 1:28-32)?

8. How might one also become guilty of provoking another’s envy (Galatians 5:26)?

## 11. Love Is ... Hoping All Things

The Hebrew writer says that hope is the anchor of the soul and if he is the same man who penned First Corinthians, it is little wonder that he includes hope in his definition of love.

Also, it is little wonder then that we see so many people adrift in sin and despair these days; there is very little hope inhabiting the hearts of Americans. There is material hope, better defined as ambition and visions of wealth, but spiritually, we seem to be resigned to hopelessness.

Love hopes all things. It looks at the unbelieving spouse and holds out hope that one day he or she will investigate the gospel that motivates your love and obey it. Love hopes that one day you can sit side-by-side on a pew and sing songs of praise in harmony.

Love hopes all things. While it comprehends the disrespectful attitude among most youth, it holds great hope that we will save our own and that they can be a good influence upon their friends.

Love hopes all things. It hopes until the end that one’s unbelieving friends and relatives can be won to the cross.

When love stops hoping, love stops being love. It loses its anchor and is set adrift into doubt and doom. It may tolerate and get along, but the love has been swept away.

Love hopes all things. It is the true believer that does not give up and takes the affection one has for God and lends it to men.

Love gives the benefit of the doubt and even when that is drained by disappointment, love replaces it with a new measure of hope that the offender will be converted. Love believes in the power of God unto salvation through the gospel of a risen savior. It does not resort to concealing the truth or making it more palatable to a staunchly immoral world. Love hopes all things.

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the Hebrew writer describe hope (6:9-20)? What happens when people quit hoping (Proverbs 13:12)?

2. What qualities does Paul connect to hope in Romans 5:1-5?

2. Can you think, then, of a one word synonym for “believing all things” that would not lead to gullibility?

3. What are some things that make it hard for people to trust even those whom they love (see Acts 13:13, 15:36-40)?

4. What does it mean to extend to someone “the benefit of the doubt”? When might it be unwise and therefore wrong to extend the benefit of the doubt to someone? Or is it never wrong?

5. What might a husband or wife do to plant seeds of distrust in a mate’s mind (e.g. Second Samuel 6:14-20)?

6. If one forgives another of lying or cheating, does it automatically follow that the previous level of trust is instantly restored? Explain.

7. What are “evil surmisings” (First Timothy 6:3-4 KJV)?

8. If we believe all things, how should we respond to someone’s explanation, apology or other comments (Matthew 18:21-22)?

### 3. Love Is ... Not Parading Itself or Puffed Up

When I was young, I loved to go to parades. I guess most children do. But on one occasion, I got to be in the parade. My best friend’s father was a state policeman and he let us ride in the back seat of the cruiser right up Fourth Avenue in front of the whole town (all 3500 Paden Citians).

Thankfully, I have not been in the back seat of a police car since then, but I will tell you, I was pretty proud to be there that fine Labor Day afternoon. Though only six years old and about 40 pounds, my chest had swollen out to twice its size. I made sure my little face was on full display up that street for all my friends to see and envy.

Of course, now I understand that love does not parade itself (First Corinthians 13:4). That is, the heart that truly loves does not draw attention to oneself to incite envy in the heart of another.

The playground attitude of "Look what I have done!" does not fit very well in the mindset of a disciple of Christ. It slows down the more important work of spreading the gospel and edifying the saved. No matter what the accomplishment might be, love causes us to avoid trumpeting it like a marching band in a parade.

When we practice to incite envy, we often give birth to her twin sister, resentment. Pride is the problem then on both accounts. The parader is bragging and the audience is steaming. Can anything good come out of this parade?

Our interest should be sharing with others our good fortune and constantly tending the path to heaven for all men. That road is closed to parade traffic.

Everyone has seen the animals at the zoo that prance about with their chests swollen out. The lion is proud of his strength, the peacock of his beauty. Have you ever see a person strut about all puffed up?

Such puffery is a symptom of excessive pride and arrogance. It is the unmistakable mark of someone completely impressed with himself. I have seen preachers with puffy chests and Bible class students competing with them. Neither impressed me very much.

A puffy person is trying to draw attention to himself, to what he thinks are his uniquely wonderful qualities. When one cannot avoid looking, however, he sees something far different: a person who feels so superior and conceited that he instantly makes enemies just by his attitude.

If you feel yourself getting puffed up, it is time to burst your bubble. Without the Lord, you are nothing and your excessive pride has the potential to render you that lonely.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Which of the following is/are similar to “parading oneself”?
  - a. showing off
  - b. showboating
  - c. bragging
  - d. tooting his own horn
2. The simplest interpretation of this expression is that, “Love does not brag and is not arrogant.” What were they bragging about in Corinth (First Corinthians 1:10-13, 11:22, 12:27-29)?
3. Think: Why are people so prone to boasting and bragging (see Galatians 5:26)?
4. When (if ever) should we desire that others envy us? Explain.
5. What did the Babylonians see in Hezekiah’s house (Isaiah 39:1-8)? What did God see in Hezekiah’s heart (see James 3:5, 4:16)?
6. Consider Proverbs 16:18-19. How does this apply to the effect of boasting upon friendships, neighborhood and brotherhood?
7. Of what did the Pharisee boast in the parable of Luke 18:9-17? Describe a modern parallel if you can.

## 10. Love Is ... Believing All Things

The apostle states that true love is believing all things, but in a world in which lying and cheating have become so common, it is more difficult to extend this kind of affection.

Yet those who are closest to us should deserve this component of love. We ought to be able to extend the benefit of the doubt to our spouses, parents, children, brethren, and neighbors. The inability to trust others is a great impediment to happy relationships.

Sometimes we do trust and get burned and become bitter, contending that we will never trust anyone again. How sad—but not for Satan, who wins a twin victory. He has destroyed one association and provided for unpleasantness in every relationship you will have in the future.

A marriage in which the two mates do not trust one another is doomed. The motives and reasons of the other will be placed under suspicion even before they are known. This atmosphere of distrust violates God’s ideal for love and marriage and so it will not work. Mates will become enemies.

The other side of this coin, however, involves refraining from giving a loved one reason to distrust. If you lie once, you will be forever branded as potentially dishonest. It automatically becomes harder to extend to you the benefit of the doubt. The Christian will forgive, but only through a renewed attention to honesty will you reclaim a full measure of believing all things.

Teenagers who are desperate for greater freedom often make promises of responsibility. If they are caught in a lie or cover-up, they destroy their parents’ trust and set their liberation cause back.

Love is believing all things, but that is a two-way street. When trust is injured, love is sure to follow.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. If you love me and I tell you the sky is green and the Bible is fiction, should you believe all these things? Is “believing all things” tantamount to gullibility? What is the distinction (First John 4:1, Hebrews 5:14, Colossians 4:5)?

3. List a few things that spouses have to bear to preserve their marriages over time (see also Proverbs 10:12).

4. Colossians 3:12-13 lists a few of the attitudes of the heart that must accompany love in order for it to be forbearing. List them here:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| a. | d. |
| b. | e. |
| c. | f. |

5. Paul says in Ephesians 4:1-2 that “lowliness” has something to do with a forbearing love. What does he mean?

6. Consider First Corinthians 9:3-14, focusing on verse 12. Although the context is Paul’s financial support, he makes a point that we can apply more broadly. How might we sometimes prove our love to be forbearing by not exercising our rights and forcing our way?

7. One of the hardest things for many to endure is chastening. Some are unable to bear reproof or correction (Hebrews 12:7). Why?

8. Sadly, some find themselves in relationships similar to the enslavement described in First Peter 2:18-21. What does Peter recommend?

## 4. Love Is ... Not Behaving Rudely

What causes people to be so rude sometimes? There is something wrong somewhere.

The cashier acts like she is doing you a favor by taking your money; the neighbor seems like saying hello would exhaust him. Sometimes husbands and wives are rude to each other, using malice toward one’s spouse that would never even be used on strangers.

Rudeness is contagious. If someone is rude to me, I tend to get offended and angry and the chances grow that I will pass that rudeness on to the next person I meet.

Rudeness is embarrassing. One hates to see a husband treating his wife poorly. One can’t stand to watch a parent—who once prayed for a healthy baby—mistreating an innocent child.

If rudeness is such an eyesore and transmitted by contagion, it must then also be treatable, perhaps even curable.

The Holy Spirit informs his readers that rudeness need not be tolerated in oneself. It is the plank in one’s eye that can be removed by careful operation and dedication to doing better.

When someone is rude to you, kill his evil mood with kindness; “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone” (First Thessalonians 5:15). Don’t retaliate and don’t allow the venom to be transferred to your own heart.

When tempted to act rudely, stop and think about your words. Be quick to hear but slow to speak and show wrath (James 1:19-20). Bridle your rude tongue like a bucking bronco until it is tamed (26).

The Christian’s mouth should be a spring of grace and blessing from which no bitter water can come forth.

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Describe a personal encounter in which you were treated rudely. How did it make you feel, especially about the person who so treated you?

2. Suggested synonyms for rudeness include disgraceful, dishonorable and indecent. Antonyms are mannerly and decent. The apostle Paul was once accused of this very thing (Acts 23:1-5). Did he have just cause to speak as he did?

3. What causes people to behave rudely?

4. When is rudeness justified? In talking to children? In arguing with one's spouse? In speaking to underlings or beggars? In responding to enemies?

5. Consider Ephesians 4:29-32. Rudeness is expressed through facial expressions, gestures and even apathetic selfishness, but most notably in words. Especially when we feel justified in our rudeness, what should replace that kind of language in our mouths (see also James 3:8-12)?

6. Certain words and topics in every language are rude due to their profane nature. What three categories of speech are condemned under this heading in Ephesians 5:4? What is "speech seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6)?

7. What are some situations in which it would be rude to insist on going first? What is the godly alternative (Philippians 2:1-5)?

8. Identify the act of rudeness contained in James 2:1-9. How else might we witness rudeness in the process of assembling to worship?

9. How should we respond when treated rudely?

## 9. Love Is ... Bearing All Things

I wonder sometimes how shoe repair stores stay in business.

Or television repairmen. Or people who fix watches. Or just about anything else that I own. When it breaks, it's gone and another replaces it.

We live in a disposable society, even eating many of our meals from foam containers or off paper plates. Purchasing an automobile used to be a decision that lasted a decade or more but now many exchange their rides every other year.

Sadly, this attitude has affected our views toward marriage. This most blessed of unions, wrought by God himself, has become a disposable commodity. No-fault divorces, teenage sexuality and the death of shame have all contributed to a decline of that attribute of love, which is perseverance.

Sure, it takes perseverance to run a marathon or work a jigsaw puzzle, but for marriage? You had better believe it. Your vows likely included some reference to richer and poorer, sickness and health, good times and bad. Riches, health and good times require little perseverance, but the other side of that coin is inevitable and it is then that the vows are tested.

Genuine love is able to bear all things. All his quirks and idiosyncrasies. All her emotions and unpredictability. Now, that does not mean that we should bless one another with constant tests, giving our spouses the chance to persevere greatly. It means that we ourselves should be ready to bear anything for the life of our union.

This endurance is also required in friendships and in other family relationships. We all test one another from time to time, usually unintentionally, but sometimes severely. The love that survives is the kind that learns to bear all things. Even great things.

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways do we live in a "disposable society"? How might this affect the way that we look at our relationships?

2. Which of our relationships can we consider to be disposable?

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Read Psalm 119:104, 128 and Proverbs 23:23. What should be our attitude about iniquity and truth?
2. What are some circumstances in which we might be temporarily benefited by our sin or the sin of someone else?
3. Read First Corinthians chapter five. The members of that church were not necessarily rejoicing over sexual immorality—what were they rejoicing about?
4. What are some sins that modern people rejoice in their ability to tolerate?
5. In what ways might we rejoice to watch other people sin?
6. What is the danger in rejoicing when iniquity invades your enemy's life (Psalm 35:15-19, Proverbs 17:15, 24:17-18)?
7. Even beyond that, what should be our strategy in dealing with enemies (Romans 12:17-21, Psalm 35:11-16)?
8. Why does the truth often hurt? Should that change our attitude about it?

## 5. Love Is ... Not Seeking Its Own

Peter and John had a private conversation with Jesus between the resurrection and the ascension. During this grave and sweet time, the Lord petitioned Peter concerning the man's love for him. Searching to learn how deep his devotion was, Jesus challenged him to "feed his lambs" (John 21:15-19). Christ was defining the life of an apostle for the remainder of time and it would be one of selflessness, trial and spiritual conquest.

Examining the life of Christ shows us the nobility of a love that seeks the welfare of others. We are wounded to learn that Christ forfeited the glories of a heavenly existence to live and die as a man on Earth, where his royalty was mocked and spat upon (Philippians 2:5-11). The mind of Christ, which is supposed to come to define our own, looks out not only for one's own interests, but also for the interests of others, in humility and love (Philippians 2:1-4).

Selfish ambition is the pursuit of one's own welfare, even at the expense of others. It ruins friendships and divides families. It neglects spiritual priorities and justifies carnal indulgence. It creates rivalries that overthrow Christ's golden rule about doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12).

Married people will not long survive in wedded bliss unless they form their union on a foundation of selflessness. The home will become a battlefield of egos and competing interests until the marriage is sundered. Love is letting the other go first, letting the other choose. If both love as God teaches, no one will have to sacrifice all the time, but each will have to be prepared to do it part of the time.

Love is also a guiding principle in friendships. Recall all that Jonathan did for his friend David, for no other reason than it was just and they were friends. "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). Selfishness tears down; selflessness builds up.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Seeking one's own is about "looking out for number one." So often, this self-serving attitude interrupts a person's desire to worship God. Even in worship, sin can lie the door of those who are tempted to offer strange fire (Genesis 4:1-7, Leviticus 10:1-3). Explain how worship should be concerned with seeking divine approval rather than human, and how some today reverse the roles (John 4:23-24, Colossians 3:17, Ephesians 5:10, 17).

2. Consider Luke 10:25-37. What are the two objects of love the lawyer acknowledged and Jesus validated. Whose welfare did the Good Samaritan seek? What is the application of the parable?

3. Self-seeking was a problem in the Corinthian church. Identify it in the following verses from First Corinthians:

- 6:1-8:
- 8:1-13, 10:23-24:
- 11:17-22:
- 14:26-33:

4. What always follows self-seeking—whether at home, the church or among others (James 3:14-16)? Explain the willingness to yield (17).

5. How did Christ embody the attitude of not seeking his own (Philippians 2:1-11)? How did he illustrate it (John 13:3-17)? What is the cure for self-seeking?

6. Consider Romans 12:9-13. Seeking the welfare of others is love without hypocrisy. Identify some occasions in which we can actively give preference to one another instead of to self (see Luke 14:8-11).

7. How does this apply to marriage (Ephesians 5:25-29)?

## 8. Love Is ... Not Rejoicing In Iniquity, But Truth

Why would anyone rejoice in iniquity?

Well, there are many reasons. Sometimes iniquity brings temporal blessing. Somebody lies on our behalf and we avoid some punishment or expense in the process. We have not told the lie, but have perpetuated it by our silence, rejoicing in the benefits of iniquity without concern for the eternal consequences.

Perhaps we have become voyeurs. Certainly America's fascination with reality programming teeters dangerously on the precipice of rejoicing in iniquity. All the sins we could never commit are played out for us on television and the Internet. *The Jerry Springer Show* and a million web sites are out there to appease the mind that cannot commit iniquity itself, but rejoices in the spectacle of others engaged in it.

We are also tempted to rejoice in iniquity when our enemies are its victims. Although Jesus told us to love our enemies and Paul told us not to return evil for evil, it is tempting to celebrate when an enemy is sinned against or dealt an injustice. We forget that another sin was committed because it was committed against the right person in our estimation, but God hates even that sin.

It is not wrong to glorify justice and when a criminal is punished, truth and right have prevailed. "Vigilante justice," however, is as unlawful as the original act and we become its partners when we rejoice in exacting a small measure of vengeance on those who have wronged us—when we gossip about the gossip, or steal from the thief. Love does not rejoice in iniquity. True love finds no comfort when sin is committed, even if the perpetrator is happy or the victim appears to be deserving. Vengeance belongs to God alone.

Love rejoices instead in truth, but it is not always easy to hear the truth or to accept it, especially when the truth challenges dearly held beliefs, the notion of a loved one's salvation, or our own character. Yes, the truth hurts. It hurts like a shot of penicillin.

Love rejoices in the truth and when the sword of the Spirit finds its mark and produces a pricked heart, it is glad. Love does not excoriate the one who delivers painful truths, labeling him a watchdog or judgmental. Ahab called Elijah the troubler of Israel and the Jews killed Jesus and Stephen because the truth hurt and they did not rejoice in the shame. Nathan hurt David with the truth and both the fifty-first psalm and his continued status as "a man after God's own heart" were the result.

How will you respond when wounded by the truth, when you need to make correction, personally or doctrinally (see Micah 7:8)?

2. Consider Titus 1:15-16. How do the defiled and unbelieving behave? How are they able to endure such a double-minded life (Ephesians 4:17-19)?

3. What mental image does the Greek text create for “love thinks no evil?”

4. Instead of keeping such an account, what does God expect of his people (Matthew 18:21-35)?

5. Explain the emphasis Jesus puts on forgiving from the heart.

6. How did the following people show mercy to the ones who had wronged them?

- Jesus to Peter (John 21:15-17):
- Corinthians to withdrawn member (Second Corinthians 2:4-11):
- Paul to John Mark (Acts 13:13, Second Timothy 4:11):

7. All this is closely related to the problem of self-pity. What does self-pity sound like? Can you think of some Bible examples? List them.

## 6. Love Is ... Not Easily Provoked

In a society that thinks something called "Sensitivity Training" is necessary, it is obvious that we have a problem with being too easily provoked to anger and hurt feelings.

We are becoming more Orwellian every day, more like the old Soviet Union, in which people with wrong thinking are sent away to be deprogrammed and retrained to love “Big Brother” and speak only language that is sanitized and emasculated.

It should never be our intention to offend someone intentionally. We should “look out for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4) and avoid becoming a stumbling block in a brother’s way (Matthew 18:15-17). At the same time, we must surely realize that opening our mouths increases the likelihood that eventually we will say something that is taken the wrong way.

But the problem we are developing is not a matter of insensitivity. The problem that is growing is oversensitivity. We seem to be a people obsessed with victimization, in love with the idea of being wronged and deserving of others’ pity.

Some worshipers seem intent upon finding some hidden agenda in the preacher’s message, by which they can claim they were personally wronged and deserving of a visit and apology.

We see spouses in deteriorating marriages behaving just the same way – literally looking for a reason to be offended, all too happy to take an innocent remark the wrong way and inflate it out of proportion.

Paul tells the Corinthians that true “love is not easily provoked” [KJV]. That is when we assume the best of others, conquer our pride and make up our minds that we are not going to be baited into a conflict even if an insult is intended. Water off a duck’s back.

“It is honorable for a man to stop striving, Since any fool can start a quarrel” (Proverbs 20:3). Don’t be so easily offended; be bigger than one of small faith.

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Actually, there is nothing in the Greek text that would indicate that “easily” should modify provoked in this verse. The Amplified Bible renders the phrase, “it is not touchy or fretful or resentful,” and that is an excellent explanation of the Teflon response to slights, both real and perceived. The NRSV adds “not irritable.” One commentator has compared this condition to having a chip on one’s shoulder. Explain that expression and how it opposes godly love.

## 7. Love Is ... Thinking No Evil

2. What kinds of things put chips on people's shoulders?

3. Bitterness is often at the root of this problem. One is a raw nerve, perhaps on one subject or even on every subject because of some overwhelming dissatisfaction with life. How do we see this in King Saul's estimation of David (First Samuel 18:7-12; see Job 5:2)?

4. The "easily provoked" person often responds with great anger. Perhaps we are only treating symptoms at this point, but what must he learn about this anger (Matthew 5:21-24, James 1:19-20)?

5. What is the danger if we are in the habit of interpreting things we hear with a negative outlook? What is the danger if we always interpret things positively?

6. What does Christ honor more than easy provocation (Mark 11:25-26)?

7. What offended the Pharisees about Jesus (Matthew 15:1-14)? Did he pledge to apply his sensitivity training and alter his approach? What's the lesson?

In defining genuine love in First Corinthians 13, Paul states that it thinks no evil.

The Proverbs teach that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (23:7). There are some of us who have just enough self-control to allow our minds to contemplate many evil things without ever committing them. Such an ability may mask one's true feelings, but the corruption of the heart and deterioration of love are evident nonetheless.

The Greek word employed here by the Holy Spirit is a business term used to describe entering a debt on a ledger. We might imagine a person spending his whole life keeping record of who has wronged him and how, waiting for the opportunity to settle the score.

Genuine love, however, does not operate in this fashion. The ironic thing about grudge holding is that it does far more damage to the bearer than the target. This yearning for revenge and constant victim mentality eat away at the grudge bearer until he is nothing but raw bitterness and resentment. Genuine love cannot exist in such an unkind environment.

Jesus taught us to be willing to forgive others their trespasses and to have mercy on those who sincerely request it. He reasoned that we require so much grace from God due to our trespasses against heaven, that it should be no great thing to forgive men their comparatively minor offenses. Yet some keep a running tally in their minds of every insult, intentional or not, for future reflection.

The evil tally attitude is very dangerous to marriages. Someone forgets a birthday or burns the bread and never hears the end of it. Despite apologies and even acceptances, the offense is remembered and regularly trotted out whenever a new conflict arises. Nothing is ever truly forgiven, just put away for a little while until useful again.

Love thinks no evil; it does not keep a record of offenses—a litany of resentment.

### QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Sometimes external actions mask who a person really is for a while and someone quite different is lurking beneath the surface. What is the warning issued in Proverbs 23:6-7? How does Jesus apply it (Matthew 15:15-20)?