

THE LOVE CHAPTER

by Michele Hershberger and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

If I give away my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 1 Cor. 13:3

FAITH STORY:

1 Corinthians 13

FAITH FOCUS:

In this well-known “love chapter,” Paul is talking about a kind of love that is different from eros (sexual love) or philia (friendship love.) Paul is talking about agape love—sacrificial, divine love.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students understand that external good acts are worthless unless one has sacrificial love for the other.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Learn the difference between eros, philia and agape love
- Find examples in Jesus’s life that relate to each love phrase in this chapter
- Identify someone they like, and someone they don’t like, to give a valentine to

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for students
- 2 Paper, markers, scissors for students to make valentine cards

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

Welcome students, then say that you want them to respond with the first word that comes to mind when you say a word.

Say “Love” and go around the room at least once to hear students’ responses. Go around a second or third time until they don’t have any more ideas.

CONNECT: (5–10 minutes)

Invite students to make a valentine card for someone that they’d enjoy giving it to—it can be a friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, parent or another adult they appreciate.

Transition statement: *You've thought about what the word "love" might mean, and you've made a card for someone you love or like a lot. Now let's see what the famous "love chapter" in the Bible really says about love.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Ask students to turn to I Corinthians 13 and read the chapter together. Share a mini-lecture with them about the three kinds of love found in Greek: *philia* (friendship love), *eros* (sexual love) and *agape* (sacrificial love, divine love).

Ask: *What kind of love do you think Paul is talking about here? What evidence do you have?*

Explain that Paul was dealing with people in the church who were arguing because they thought some spiritual gifts were better than others.

Ask: *How is agape love the more excellent way? (I Cor. 12:31b.)*

For Paul, he is connecting this concept, agape love, with Jesus. Ask the group to think of an example from the life of Jesus for each love phrase in the chapter. We have included some possibilities, but make your students work for this!

- 1 Love is patient—Jesus is patient with disciples (don't snuff out a smoldering reed).
- 2 Love is kind—Jesus loved the Samaritan woman, or the woman caught in adultery.
- 3 Love is not envious—Jesus doesn't seek the approval of people after he does a miracle. Instead he says, "tell no one." He doesn't want people to follow him just because of miracles.
- 4 Love is not boastful—Jesus takes a flogging when they make fun of him and call him a king and prophet. (Ironically, he is!)
- 5 Love is not rude—Jesus was rude to Pharisees once or twice. What do you do with that?
- 6 Love doesn't insist on its own way—Jesus died on the cross
- 7 Love is not irritable—Jesus overturns the tables at the temple. Is that okay? Justice issue?
- 8 Love is not resentful—forgives soldiers on cross
- 9 Love doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.—Jesus stands up to Pharisees who falsely accuse
- 10 Love bears all things—the cross
- 11 Love believes all things—believes in motley crew of disciples, even Peter who denies him
- 12 Love hopes all things—has hope in the disciples
- 13 Love endures all things.—cross

APPLY: (5–10 minutes)

Invite students to now make a valentine for the person they like the very least. Lead by example—do this activity yourself. If they ask if they really have to give the card, avoid the question at this point.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Say: *It is only through the power of the crucified Christ that we can love like this. If we can't love our enemies, how are we any different than any other people who aren't Christian? (Matt. 5:43-48) How are our good deeds worth anything if we really don't love the people we are serving?*

Discuss: *Should we give our cards to the people we don't like? It's one thing to make them—it's another thing to actually give them! Who is willing to take that next step?*

Have a prayer, asking God to fill the group with agape love and to have the courage to love those whom we don't necessarily like.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Although this is a very common wedding text, the love between two people getting married probably wasn't at all what Paul had in mind when he wrote it. Paul is writing about agape love and its priority in the life of a church. If we take Paul's words seriously, most of us would probably have to make significant changes in how we relate to our Christian brothers and sisters. This "more excellent way" on how to treat each other is tough indeed. Bottom line: How do our words and actions within our church express our love, or lack thereof, for each other?

Three points need to be made:

- 1** Everything we do should be based on love. The Corinthian church was having problems with people who were so singlemindedly focused on their spirituality that they were despising brothers and sisters who weren't at the exact same place they were. Paul calls them to task, saying that all the spirituality in the world and all the right religious activities are meaningless if we can't figure out how to love each other. In addition, love is also the basis not only for our relationships, but also for our careers and other activities. If what we are doing in our lives and with our lives is not because of love or out of love, we need to take another look at it.
- 2** Love is something you do, not a feeling you have. Feelings come and go. Love is a cultivated habit. It is something that should be taught, learned and practiced in our congregations.
- 3** We don't have the whole picture and we won't be perfect. As verses 8-13 convey, when we see this life from the other side of the resurrection, we'll realize that the things we thought were so great were only child's play compared to what we know now. Exciting aspects of our spiritual lives like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will end. The one everlasting, eternal element of our faith is love.

WORKS CITED:

Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, First Corinthians. Richard B. Hays, John Knox Press, 1997