

Adult Teaching Resources

January 30, 2022



Season after Christmas

Psalm 147:1-20—"A Good Beginning"

In Christ We Have ...

Season of Epiphany

Acts 8:4-17 (RCL 8:14-17)—"Amazing Grace"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11—"Amazing Gifts"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a—"Amazing Oneness"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—"Amazing Love"

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“Amazing Love”

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

1 Cor. 13:13—And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Opening

After everyone arrives ask your group to form smaller groups of 3-4. Once settled, ask these questions for conversation and discussion within the small groups.

When have you tried to explain something in a logical, well-thought out way, to someone or some group who was totally unreasonable?

What was the issue or topic you tried to explain?

What was your position?

What was the pushback?

How did you explain your side of the issue?

What do you think kept them from understanding, or hearing, your explanation?

How did everything end?

Give each group time to share their stories and as time allows, open the sharing and conversation to the larger group.

Reading the Bible

What does Paul say he is if he speaks in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but does not have love? (a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal)

What does Paul say he is if he has prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if he has all faith, so as to remove mountains, but does not have love? (nothing)

What does Paul say he gains if he gives away all his possessions, and if he hands over his body so that he may boast, but does not have love? (he gains nothing)

What does Paul say that love is? (patient and kind)

What does Paul say that love is not? (envious or boastful or arrogant or rude)

What else does Paul say that love does? (it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.)

Reading the Bible *continued*

Paul says love never ends. What does he say will come to an end? (prophecies, tongues, and knowledge)

What do we only do “in part?” (we know in part and prophesy in part)

What will happen when the complete comes? (the partial will come to an end)

How did Paul act when he was a child? (he spoke like a child, thought like a child, reasoned like a child)

What did Paul do when he became an adult? (he put an end to childish ways)

How do we see now? (in a mirror, dimly) How will we see? (face to face)

What three abide? (faith, hope, and love) Which is the greatest? (love)

Making Connections

When have you given a gift out of obligation and not out of love? What was the gift? Would the gift have been different if love was involved? How did you feel about giving that gift?

Our Lesson Writers explains, “In v. 2, Paul mentions the gifts of knowledge and prophecy and faith, which he characterized as “higher gifts” in the preceding chapter. But even those gifts are worthless when not motivated by love, he wrote.” What other gifts are worthless when love is absent?

How can we tell when someone is motivated out of selfish gain? How can we tell when someone is motivated out of love?

Our Lesson Writer says, “No matter what we say, what we do, or what we give, Paul says, if we don’t know and share the love of Jesus, we accomplish nothing in Christ’s behalf.” What do you think? Do we accomplish nothing if we don’t know and share the love of Jesus? Why do you say that?

How do you define “patience?” What does patience have to do with love?

How do you define “kindness?” What does kindness have to do with love?

Paul says that love is not: envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Why is love not those things? How do those undermine love?

What does it mean to you that “love rejoices in the truth?”

How does love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Why does love never end when so many other things do?

What did you do when you were a child that you don’t do now that you are an adult? What did you believe when you were a child that you don’t believe now that you are an adult? How has growing into an adult changed your view and understanding of love and faith?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back together in their small groups from the beginning of the lesson. After everyone is settled, ask these questions for small group discussion and conversation.

How do you react when you try to look at yourself in a mirror that is foggy, smudged, or dirty? How much can you see? What do you do?

How do you react when you look at yourself in a mirror that is clean? How much can you see? What do you do?

How much of love and faith do you understand right now? Where have you learned those truths?

What unanswered questions about love and faith do you still have? What are you doing to find those answers?

What answers do you think will be revealed to you when we can see “face to face?”

Give each group time to share with each other. Then, open the floor for larger group conversation and discussion.

Finally, ask this question for the large group to answer.

Paul says that faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love. Why do you think Paul said love is the greatest?

The Challenge

This week, love intentionally everywhere you go and with everyone you come in contact with.

Prayer

Loving God, you are the God of love. Thank you for Paul’s reminder that we are to love, too. Help us to have faith. Help us to have hope. But more importantly, help us to live with love. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Boasting, or burning?—The translation of v. 3 appears differently in various translations, largely because of differing textual traditions. “If I give away all my possessions” is fairly clear, but “if I hand over my body so that I may boast” is more difficult. The NRSV translation chooses the textual variant *kauchēsōmai*, meaning “that I may boast.” The earliest and best attested manuscripts have this reading.

At some point, perhaps initially due to a scribal error, the word changed to *kauthēsōmai*, only two similar letters different in Greek, meaning “that I may be burned.” This is attested in the later textual traditions that became most popular. That tradition was at the root of the Latin Vulgate translation, and was also followed by translators of the familiar King James Version.

Plurality of texts is less important than the age of texts, so it seems most appropriate to go with the earlier reading, which makes perfect sense. The latter reading, “so that I may be burned,” has to be interpreted against the possibility of extreme persecution, or perhaps the branding of someone who sold themselves as a slave.

Few people today would even consider selling all of one’s possessions or committing all of one’s work to helping the poor. Even that, however, could be motivated by a desire for attention rather than love.

Patience—Raymond Bryan Brown described loving patience in this way: “Patience is gentle strength that has staying power. It is not insensitivity, but sensitivity to others that bears with them in the midst of difficulty. Patience is not weakness, but strength that emerges under stress. It is capacity to accept strain. Christians are able to be patient toward others because God exercises patience toward them and all mankind and because God grants them the gift of patience through the operation of His Spirit” (from “1 Corinthians” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970], p. 372).

Greed—While Paul focused mainly on the behavior of churches and church members, it can be instructive to imagine how love could apply in other areas, such as business. Can you imagine what it would be like if large companies and financial institutions cared less about profits and more about service—or more about using profits to benefit others rather than to enrich themselves? Even for those who strive to be faithful, it’s hard to keep others in mind when the money is rolling in.

Seeing clearly—Paul and others who lived two millennia ago did not have mirrors as perfectly clear as ours, often relying on metal mirrors of polished brass or silver. The clearest image of themselves they could see would have been when reflected in clear water and good light.

Digging Deeper *continued*

This reminds me of a visit I made to Fred Rogers' office many years ago. Fred had won many awards for his work as "Mr. Rogers" in children's television, but none of those were on display. I remember three pieces of wall art. One was a plaque with the Greek word for grace (*charis*), which is at the root of the kindness he lived and promoted.

The second was a Hebrew inscription from the Song of Songs 6:3: *ani ledodi vedodi li*. It means "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." It reminded me that Fred had a wife and a personal life beyond his professional life.

The largest item on the wall was a framed piece of Chinese calligraphy. When I asked for a translation, he told me it meant "If you want to see yourself clearly, don't look in muddy water."

Paul's poetic prediction reminds us that this world offers only a dim and muddy view of what is truly real, but one day we will see clearly.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

What did Paul mean by “love”?

We all know that “love” can be interpreted in many ways, and not all of them laudable. “Love” can mean “like,” as in “I love ice cream,” or “I love New York.” The word can be cheapened to describe a sexual encounter as “making love” even if the participants are casually hooking up. It can be used to indicate warm affection, as in “I love my teammates,” or “there’s a lot of love in this room.” And, it can be used to describe a deep, genuine, and selfish commitment to another, the way husbands and wives should love each other, and parents their children.

Paul’s readers would have been familiar with several related concepts, all of which could be translated in English by “love.” They knew that the Greek word *eros* described a love of deep desire or passionate longing. Our word “erotic” is derived from it, though the word is not explicitly sexual, and certainly not inherently negative. Passionate longing is a good thing in the proper context—but even then, it is not Christian love.

The familiar word *philos* is often translated as “brotherly love,” as in Philadelphia, “The City of Brotherly Love.” It could, however, refer to a sense of strong affiliation in other contexts: “philosophy” is the “love of wisdom.”

The term *storgē* carries a similar connotation, a kind of “family” affection. Both of these are good and positive words—but also have a strong component of self-interest. They do not describe Christian love.

Agapē (*a-GAH-pay*), on the other hand, is a very specific word used to describe the kind of selfless love that Jesus demonstrated and expected of his followers. In Classical Greek, the word had a rather neutral meaning, but translators of the Septuagint (an ancient Greek version of the Hebrew Bible) chose to use *agapē* when translating references to God’s love. Over time, in the Hebrew and Christian communities, the word took on the specific meaning of “God’s kind of love”—self-giving love—love that doesn’t have to be earned. It is this kind of love that Paul has in mind throughout 1 Corinthians 13. *Agapē* love is not some kind of sentimental ooze, but something that is strong, intentional, and brave beyond words.