



LOVE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:30 - 14:1

Love is the most important gift of all.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

Love is required – The Corinthians were using the spiritual gifts to pridefully show off their spiritual abilities. All the while they were sinning through immorality and taking one another to court (see 1 Corinthians 5 and 6). Although Paul encouraged the Corinthians to pursue the gifts, he took time to interrupt his discussion of the gifts to teach them about love, which is what must motivate the exercise of every spiritual gift. In 1 John 4 we are told that we can love because God first loved us. Love is also a gift from God.

Unlike the other spiritual gifts, which a person may or may not have, love is required and ensures the proper operation of all the other gifts. To use a spiritual gift in an unloving way to further oneself or one's own cause is to accomplish nothing.

Love is action – Love is a word cheapened by over use today. We say we love pizza, candy, the beach, and a million other things. Love is defined as something we feel, not something we do. Here in Paul's description, not a single item refers to feeling. Paul doesn't say love is wonderful, delightful, or intense. Each description of love demonstrates a godly action toward another. Each of these godly actions requires sacrifice. Each of these sacrifices points to the ultimate sacrifice and demonstration of love: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Love never ends – When Jesus, the perfect, comes, we will no longer have a need for tongues or prophecy, healing or wisdom. All the gifts of the spirit will pass away because we will be in the presence of perfect wisdom, perfect knowledge, and perfect truth. Love, however, will not pass away. The cross--the greatest demonstration of love and the basis of our salvation-- will be celebrated forever. Sin will be destroyed, and we will all live in perfect love toward one another and toward God. The theme of heaven is love. When we recognize this and live in the good of it today, we bring a little bit of heaven to earth. Perhaps there is no greater earthly expression of the love of Christ than when someone sacrifices for another. When we do, whether we realize it or not, we are honoring the sacrifice of Jesus, the author of love.

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WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

Many quote 1 Corinthians 13 on love and try to separate it from the gospel. Portions of this passage might sound wonderful at a wedding ceremony, but without an understanding of the gospel and its connection to it, this description of love cannot be fully appreciated. The gospel defines and gives meaning to love. We know that the Bible says, "God is love." And the apostle John in 1 John 4:8-11 describes God's ultimate demonstration of love as the death of His Son on the cross. John goes on to explain that the cross is the motivation for loving one another. Paul also points to this in 1 Corinthians 13:10 when he says, "when the perfect comes..." "The perfect" is Jesus.

Since God is love, and Jesus is God, and He lives forever, love never ends! All other worldly gifts and knowledge will be superseded by a more complete truth that will come to us in eternity, but the love of Christ will remain forever. The love Paul speaks of is not a humanistic, works-based love, but rather a love which comes first from a heart changed by grace.



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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Psalm 31:5

Connecting the passage to Christ:

Just before Jesus died, He spoke the words of this verse, "into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The centurion who saw what happened praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Jesus had finished the work He set out to do. The wrath of the Father was satisfied. Our sins were paid for on the cross, which was the single greatest demonstration of the love of God..

Questions for reflection:

- How did Jesus' words affect the centurion? (The centurion saw that even in Jesus' very last breath, He spoke not a single ill word to anyone. He could tell that Jesus was no ordinary man and that He was righteous.)
- Why is it important that Jesus finished well, without sin? (Not only do we depend on Jesus taking our punishment on the cross, but we also depend upon Christ's perfection for our righteousness. Jesus takes away our sin and gives us His perfect life in exchange. His perfect life, given to us, fulfills the requirements of God's law.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY**BE A DOER OF THE WORD**

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.



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ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

TAKE A LOOK AT THE FLAWS

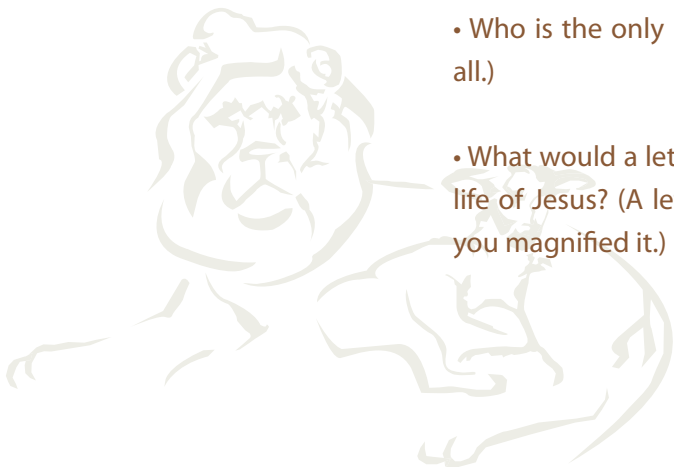
Supplies:

- Microscope
- newsprint (a close up of the pin or other objects can be used to substitute if you don't have a microscope.)

The object of this exercise is to demonstrate that even things that seem to be perfect are really full of flaws. Only Jesus is perfect. Even our best works are stained with sin (see Isaiah 64:6).

Pass the newsprint around to the class and ask them to describe the letters. Help them begin to describe the way they look describing them as neat or sloppy, crisp or rough. Then place the newsprint under the microscope and magnify the print to expose all the flaws of the letters. Give every one a chance to look and then draw out the class with the following questions:

- How did your thoughts about the printed letters change when you saw them under the microscope?
- How are these letters like our lives? (Often our lives look pretty good on the outside. However, if we could see all the sin mixed in, we would see that we are not as good or perfect as we may appear.)
- How are these letters like our good deeds? (Our good deeds seem righteous but often we perform them for selfish reasons because we want to look good. Our motives are mixed.)
- Who is the only perfect man? (Jesus is the only perfect man who had no sin at all.)
- What would a letter look like under the microscope that represented the perfect life of Jesus? (A letter representing Jesus would be perfect no matter how much you magnified it.)



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MEMORIZE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE

Match the boys against the girls and give them one minute to memorize the list of characteristics of love from 1 Corinthians 13:48. Then hand out a piece of paper to each person and ask them to list as many as they can remember. Have the children trade papers and grade each other, placing a score at the top of the paper, one point for each correct characteristic named. Then total all the boys' scores and compare it with the total girls' score. (If you have more of one group than the other, randomly select an equal number of papers.)

Announce the winner. Then use this exercise as an introduction to talk about the different characteristics of love and what they have in common. Help the class understand how each involves sacrifice and not feelings. Then explain to them how each characteristic points to the cross.

I LOVE SKIT

Supplies:

Props as desired

The purpose of this skit is to help demonstrate just how we have overused and cheapened the word love. Use the following dialogue or simply ad-lib your own version. Enlist the help of another adult helper.

Mark: "Hey Ed, isn't your birthday tomorrow?"

Ed: "Yes, it is."

Mark: "I love birthdays. What are you going to do?"

Ed: "My mom is having a birthday party for me."

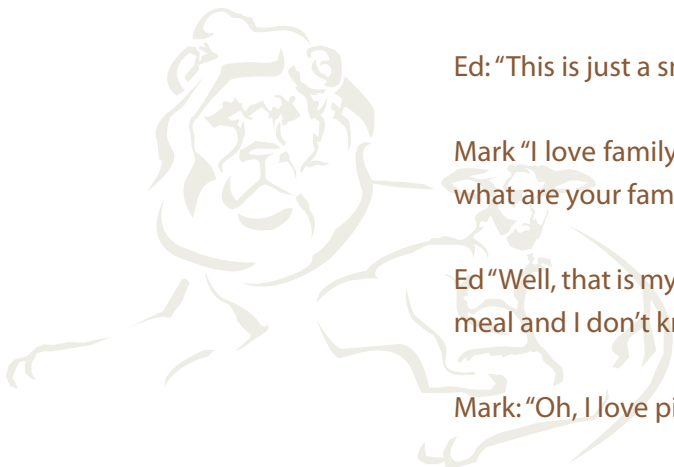
Mark: "I love parties. Hey, I wasn't invited."

Ed: "This is just a small family gathering. It's a family tradition."

Mark: "I love family traditions. We blow birthdays out of proportion you know. So what are your family traditions?"

Ed: "Well, that is my problem. Each year on our birthday you get to pick your favorite meal and I don't know what to pick. I was thinking of picking pizza."

Mark: "Oh, I love pizza. What are your other choices?"



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Ed: "Well, I really like steak, but it is so ex . . . (Mark cuts off Ed.)

Mark: "Oh, steak. I lo - v - e steak; especially a good filet. I love a good filet."

Ed: "Then there is mom's chicken parm."

Mark: "Tough choice. I've had your mom's chicken parmesan. I love your mom's chicken parmesan."

Ed: Well, whatever I choose it will be good. One thing I don't have to worry about. I always get double chocolate cheesecake for desert."

Mark: (Drooling) "Double chocolate cheesecake. I l-o-ve-ve double chocolate cheesecake."

Ed: "Is there anything you don't love?"

Mark: "Sure, lima beans."

Skit ends.

Talk to the class about the real meaning of love and how all love points back to the sacrifice of Jesus.

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

Draw a picture that depicts one of the characteristics of Love.



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FOR THE OLDER GRADES

WHAT IS LOVE?

Supplies

Paper and pencil

Have the class write their own definitions for love. When they finish have them turn their papers over. Then have the students look up the following three scriptures, read them, and come up with a new definition for love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

1 John 4:10

2 John 1:6

Ask the class how their definition of love changed after reading the scripture.

Ask them to explain how the gospel defines true love.

Invite volunteers to share both their first and second definitions of love.

Draw out the class as to how this exercise might change the way they look at 1 Corinthians 13 and even how they might use the word love in future conversations.

A LITTLE BIT MORE

The perfect – Some point to 1 Corinthians 13:10 and suggest that the perfect is the Word of God, the Bible. They claim the gifts of the Spirit have ceased now that we have the perfect, the Scripture. This passage however makes more sense when we see the perfect as Christ. This is because we do not yet see God face to face, nor do we know fully. When Jesus, the perfect, returns, we will see God face to face. The gifts will no longer be needed for we will have the person all the gifts are meant to point to; we will have our Savior. Who then will need a prophetic word when the incarnate Word stands before us? Who will need a tongue when all our sin is wiped away and we will worship in Spirit and in truth without hindrance? When we understand Jesus to be the perfect then our hope for His return is ignited within us.

