

Small Group Study Guide

A More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 13

Introduction: In chapter 12, Paul describes how the body of Christ is one body yet with many parts. Each believer is spiritually gifted and is to use his or her gifting for the good of the church. There is no doubt that Paul thought that understanding and using our spiritual gifts is vital, yet, as important as all of that is, he says that there is “a still more excellent way” (12:31b). The more excellent way is love, which Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13. This passage is probably one of the better known passages of Scripture because it is often read at wedding ceremonies. There is no problem with that, but it is important for us to notice that the original context of this passage was not marriage, but the functioning of the body of Christ and the use of spiritual gifts.

1. Thinking back on our study of 1 Corinthians, why do you think it was necessary for Paul to write about love to the Corinthians?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

2. How does Paul describe the result of spiritual gifts that are used without love?

Brian said:

Spiritual gifts are great. They are important. But love is supreme. Gifts exercised without love are wasted and worthless; they do not have the impact they are intended to. Ministry done in love is a more excellent way, because love is supreme.

3. Why would these spiritual gifts, used without love, be wasted and worthless?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

4. How would you summarize Paul's description of love?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

5. What does it mean that love never fails (v. 8)?
6. What does Paul say will happen to spiritual gifts when Christ returns?

7. Why won't gifts like prophecy, knowledge or tongues be necessary when Christ returns?
8. If you know your spiritual gift, what would it look like to use that gift with love? How about without love?
9. As you think about areas where you serve and minister, would you say that you consistently serve with the kind of love that Paul is talking about here? Why or why not?

Brian said:

"What if I'm just not a very loving person; should I just not serve?" Again, the answer is no. We are all gifted to serve and have an important role in the church. And so the focus of this question is really on how do we become a loving person in our service. And here is how I'd answer that question – YOU can't. On our own, we will not be loving. But Christ can love through you. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22 that *the fruit of the Spirit is love*. Love is something that God does in us. It is the life of Christ in us.

10. Do you agree with Brian's point that you can't be loving on your own?
11. What does it mean to have Christ love through us in our service? How do we experience this reality in our lives?