

BELOVED BE LOVED BE LOVE

Growing Further Discussion Guide

Be Love

Part 6: Four Habits to Make Love Last

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"I will show you my love forever." So says the Lord who saves you.
Isaiah 54:8 (TEV)

"I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you."
John 15:12 (NLT)

No matter how our culture changes, one thing remains the same—the longing for lasting love. We sing about it, we watch movies with happily-ever-after endings, so something in us knows that kind of love is possible. That something comes from God, who is the only totally reliable, unchanging, steadfast, dependable, trustworthy source of love. In Isaiah 54:8 He tells us He will love us *forever!* You can't make God not love you. So is there a catch? According to John 15:12, God expects us to love others the same way He loves us. We can't do it on our own—we need God's love living in us. In this lesson, we'll examine the four things love does. They are habits for a lifetime of love.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

1. TO MAKE LOVE LAST I MUST EXTEND GRACE.

1 Corinthians 13:7a

love ... never stops being patient ... (GW)

... puts up with anything ... (MSG)

... patiently accepts all things ... (NCV)

... is always ready to make allowances ... (NJB)

When does love stop being patient, according to 1 Corinthians 13:7?

- Define patience.
- What situations develop patience in our lives?
- Give an example of a time when someone was patient with you. Did you feel loved or not?

According to Ephesians 4:2, how does a loving person act?

- Discuss what it means to extend grace to another person.
- It can be said that grace covers a relationship like a roof covers a house, offering protection from the harsh environment. How does grace impact a strained relationship or improve a good one?
- The Bible says to accept one another as Christ accepts us. Where does the ability to accept others come from?

Fellowship—There is no doubt about it, all relationships can be trying at times. And it's usually our patience that's being tried. Based on your discussion of this point, how can you determine to be more loving toward others in your family, small group, or circle of friends? To whom do you need to show more grace? What can you do differently in your behavior toward that person?

2. TO MAKE LOVE LAST I MUST EXPRESS FAITH.

1 Corinthians 13:7b
love ... never stops believing ... (GW)
... always trusts ... (NIV)
... never loses faith ... (NLT)

According to 1 Corinthians 13:7b, when does love stop trusting?

- Share a time when someone believed in you even though you might not have believed in yourself.
- How did that trust make you feel?
- God expresses His faith in us by giving us free will. How does the fact that God gives you free will and trusts you make you feel?

How does faith express itself, according to Galatians 5:6? What does Paul say about the importance of this kind of response?

- Share a time when your ability to trust God was at its lowest point. How did God restore your faith in Him? What action was required on your part?
- What we think of as a problem can often be a protection from God. For example, the time your car didn't start turned out to keep you from being in a place where an accident occurred. Discuss how trusting God can change your perspective on a relationship or circumstance.

Discipleship—We grow in our faith when we believe in others as God believes in us. Trusting another person is the greatest gift of love. A measure of our level of trust is how quickly we give someone a second chance. Share a time when a second chance made a difference in your life. Who needs the assurance of your confidence and trust? Write down that person's name and plan on giving them that second chance this week. Let them see God in you.

3. TO MAKE LOVE LAST I MUST EXPECT THE BEST.

1 Corinthians 13:7c
love ... never stops hoping ... (GW)
... always expects the best ... (UAB)
... always looks for the best ... (MSG)

How does 1 Corinthians 13:7c describe lasting love?

- Satan's favorite words are, "You can't," whether you hear it from others or in your own head. Share a time when this attitude prevented you from taking a healthy risk.
- People rise to the level of our expectation of them. How could high expectations make a difference in someone's life?

Ministry—Ministering to the needs of others is often discouraging, particularly when we don't see any progress. Share a time when you saw an attitude of hope and optimism redeem a difficult circumstance. What advice can you offer your small group members next time they are tempted to settle for less than the best?

4. TO MAKE LOVE LAST I MUST BE WILLING TO ENDURE THE WORST.

1 Corinthians 13:7d
love ... never gives up. (GW)
... endures through every circumstance. (NLT)
... always perseveres. (NIV)
... never looks back, but keeps going to the end. (MSG)

Is it ever okay for love to throw in the towel and move on? Explain your answer by reading 1 Corinthians 13:7d.

- Keeping the commitment for the long haul is difficult sometimes. What helps a person to stay committed to a relationship when the going gets rough?
- Share about a time in your life when someone didn't give up on you. What difference did it make?
- When loving someone over the long haul seems impossible, what promises of God do you cling to and why?

Mission – Sharing Christ with a lost and hurting world is our most critical mission—and often the most discouraging. What is it that keeps us from telling others about Christ? Who have you given up on? If possible, how will you reignite your efforts to share Christ?

Take a moment to review any assignments/challenges made during the personal application and commitment section of your previous meeting. Seeing God at work in the lives of those who commit to him is essential for growth. Look at Pastor Rick's message assignment and see how you are doing.

PERSONAL APPLICATION AND COMMITMENT:

“Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up.”
1 Corinthians 13:7 (GW)

The number one lesson in life is learning to love. It’s a lesson you finally begin to learn when everything in you wants to walk away, but instead you choose to never stop extending grace, never stop believing, always expect the best, and are willing to endure the worst. Love at first sight is easy. It takes no effort at all. But love after twenty-five years or more of marriage may well be a miracle. Genuine love gets through the differences, the doubts, the defeats, the delays, the disease, the depression, and so much more.

What relationship have you been tempted to walk out on, to stop believing in, to lose hope for, or to give up on? This week, memorize 1 Corinthians 13:7 and spend time reviewing this lesson—every day if possible. Think about how God loves you. He is endlessly patient, He’s given you a purpose He knows you can accomplish, He always expects the best from you, and He walks with you through every circumstance. Determine to love like God loves you. If you ask Him to, He’ll give you His strength and the power to succeed.

“Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus [Let Him be your example in humility].”
Philippians 2:5 (AMP)

As we conclude this series in the relationship principles of Jesus, spend time as a group discussing how to take on the attitude and purpose of Christ. How will you let Christ be your example?

Growing Further Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Goals for this Week's Study

- Go around the group and name all the different people who need our lasting love (i.e. friends, parents, etc.). ~~–or–~~
- Share some of the advice that people typically get before they get married about how to have a lasting love.
- Discuss four characteristics of love that will help your relationships to be lasting.
- Pray for God's grace and faith in the members of your group as they work on loving others as He loves them.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.

✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60–90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.

At **GRACE** we use our name for the 5 purposes:

Glorify God

Relate to everyone

Act like Jesus

Care for other

Express God's love

✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Growing Further Discussion Guide

⇒ This Growing Further Discussion Guide is only a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. For most groups there are too many questions to answer in one session together. After considering the needs of your group you may choose one of the following options:

- One section of questions
- One or two questions from each section

⇒ Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, add Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.

- ⇒ The questions relating to the five purposes are helpful to develop balance and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can bring your group to an awareness of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.

- ⇒ Personal application is key to everyone's growth and should be included in every discussion. When asked how he or she intends to apply a certain principle a group member may say, "I need to spend more time in the Bible and in prayer." It is important for you to help group members make applications that are more specific and commit to a specific plan of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 30 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.

- ⇒ As the leader your goal is to help bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their need for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.