

# MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

## STUDY FIVE

### Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

*1 Corinthians 13:1–8*

*Love is one of those few essentials for life. It is absolutely basic, indispensable, vital. It is the glue that when applied will bond a couple regardless of what they're going through.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HEN scientists determine whether a habitat is suitable for life, they always look for one thing first: a source of clean water. While a thriving ecosystem requires other features like sunlight, a food chain, and shelter, *nothing* is as essential as water. Drain the water from an environment, and all life drains away with it.

In the same way that water is essential to life, *love* is essential to *relationships*. Without love, even the most flourishing relationships wither. When love thrives, however, couples thrive. Love acts like a glue that tightly joins spouses to one another—even through those dry spells when the struggles of life threaten to tear them apart.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will explore the biblical understanding of love and will show how followers of Jesus today can apply this essential glue to their relationships and form stronger bonds than ever before.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## **Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply**

*1 Corinthians 13:1–8*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Since our God is a God of love, He desires to have a close relationship with us and to communicate with us. Say this prayer before you interact with God through His Word:

*Father, thank You for Your love. I ask that You teach me through Your Word what true, Christlike love looks like so that I might love others as You have loved me. In Jesus' loving name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

First Corinthians 13 contains the greatest treatise on love ever written, and its words have echoed from generation to generation. While many are familiar with this passage, few realize that this chapter on love sits in the context of a longer letter penned by the apostle Paul.

The Christians in Corinth had drifted far from the teachings of Jesus. They measured spiritual greatness solely based on a person's ability to do supernatural things, like speaking in tongues, uttering prophecies, or performing miracles. Yet Paul revealed that this mentality was misguided, and he showed them "a way of life that is best of all" (1 Corinthians 12:31).



### **Observation: The Essential Nature of Love**

In the first step of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, we read a passage slowly and carefully to observe what the passage says.<sup>1</sup> One way we make observations is by noting *repetition* of key words or phrases.

Read *1 Corinthians 13:1–8*, and every time you see the word "love," either take a note or mark it in your Bible. How many times does Paul use the word "love" in this passage?

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### **The Priority Love Represents—1 Corinthians 13:1–3**

According to *1 Corinthians 13:1–3*, what four gifts does Paul decri as "nothing" if they are not exercised with a posture of love? (Hint: Look for the word "if.")

13:1: \_\_\_\_\_



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13:2a: \_\_\_\_\_

13:2b: \_\_\_\_\_

13:3: \_\_\_\_\_

*Love is more valuable than prophetic knowledge and utterance. Love is more valuable than biblical awareness. Love is more valuable than personal faith. Love is the one essential. Believe it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

**The Characteristics Love Displays—1 Corinthians 13:4–8**

Paul opens this chapter showing *why* love is important, but he leaves open the question of *what* love actually is until *1 Corinthians 13:4–7*. In these verses, Paul defines love by listing both its positive and its negative characteristics—what it is or *does* and what it is *not* or does *not* do. Fill in the chart below to see how Paul characterizes the all-important concept of love:

Verse	What Love <i>Is</i> or <i>Does</i>	What Love Is <i>Not</i> or Does <i>Not</i> Do
13:4		
13:5		
13:6		
13:7		



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*1 Corinthians 13:1–8*

What powerful truth does Paul proclaim to conclude His discussion of love in the first half of *13:8*?

Possessions and wealth will eventually fail us. Others can fail us, and we often fail ourselves. But true love—love rooted in the character of God—has blanketed creation from the very beginning and will continue to protect and shelter us until Jesus returns. That kind of love will *never* fail us.



### Interpretation: Biblical Love

Paul introduced the concept of love by describing how it is far greater than what many consider to be desirable spiritual gifts. What other kinds of things does our society place above love? Based on *1 Corinthians 13:1–8*, why is love superior to these things?

What contrast did Paul make in *1 Corinthians 13:6*? What does this verse claim is an essential companion of love? How do these two concepts complement one another in a thriving relationship?



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*1 Corinthians 13:1–8*

*Truth and love have been lifelong friends. Where you find love, you find truth. Love thrives on truth. Love always speaks truth. When you seek the highest good of another person, it requires truth. Where there is love, you will find transparent and unguarded honesty, even if the honesty is not easy to express. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Write a brief definition of *biblical* love based on your study of this passage so far. How does this definition differ from the world’s standards for love today? Feel free to use a *Bible study tool* like a *Bible dictionary* to guide your answers.

Libraries across the globe are lined with books that attempt to define this single term. However, none has accomplished this task quite as eloquently and accurately as Paul. The reason is that Paul recognizes that love is incomplete without one central factor: *God Himself*.



### Correlation: God Is Love

If 1 Corinthians 13 is the greatest treatise on love ever written, *1 John 4:7–21* follows closely behind. While Paul’s discussion of love focuses on love’s characteristics, John addressed the importance of love as an essential characteristic of God. As he says, “God is love” (4:16, emphasis added).

According to *4:9–10*, how did God reveal His love for humankind? What was loving about this action in particular?



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According to *1 John 4:11–12, 19*, what is the basis of our love for others? In other words, *why* are we able to love others?

How do the theological truths discussed in John’s letter complement the teachings of Paul to provide a fuller perspective on biblical love?

We love because God first loved us. Before you move on, pause, and reflect on all the ways you’ve experienced God’s love this year, this month, this week, and even today.

Now, let’s move to application to see how we can channel this love God has poured out upon us and, in turn, channel it to those dearest to us.



### Application: Applying the “Glue of Love”

Paul’s discussion on love describes *what* the glue of love is, and Pastor Chuck explains how we can apply this glue to our own relationships today with three simple exhortations:

1. *Write it down:* Express your love for another in your own handwriting. You’ll never know how much a physical reminder of your love could mean to someone.
2. *Risk it often:* By offering love to another, we risk disappointment, rejection, and heartbreak. Yet without vulnerability, we will never experience the true joy love offers.



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3. *Do it now:* Don't wait until it's too late to tell another you love him or her. Children grow up. Friends move. Parents pass away. Don't just tell, but *show* your love.

Reread *1 Corinthians 13:4–7*. Which of the negative characteristics that Paul addresses do you find yourself showing most? How do you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you to shed this quality and put on one of the positive characteristics of biblical love? How will cultivating this positive characteristic strengthen your relational bond with others?

Think about those closest to you: your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, your best friends. In what way has one of these people shown his or her love for you recently? What practical steps can you take this week to both tell and show this person you love him or her?

Just as water can revive a dying body, so also can love revive the soul of a relationship that might have felt dead for years. All of humankind was once dead in its sin until God displayed the greatest act of love ever—offering His own Son to die so that we might live. Receive that gift of love, and experience in your relationships the closeness that only God-given love can create.



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### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I praise You because You are love. Thank You for the perfect example of love You've shown me through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for my sins. Give me the strength to extend this kind of love to others. I ask that You would cultivate these characteristics of love in my life so I might be closely bound to those I care about most. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

