

# Week 1: The Bankruptcy of the Church

## Key Verses:

### 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

### John 13:33-35

<sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

## Idea:

*"To summarise, the contemporary church's perceived love deficit has created both an external image crisis and an internal existential crisis. Externally, many outsiders now perceive the church to be judgmental and unloving, and this is evident in the dramatic demise of the church's standing within society. Internally, many Christians experience hurt and disillusionment as a result of unloving behaviour by other believers, resulting in either guarded emotional detachment or complete disengagement with the institutionalised church."* [PAGE 9]

## Reflect:

- Do you agree or disagree with the suggestion that the Church (in Australia) has a perceived love deficit?
- What encounters have you had with people outside the church who have an essentially negative concept of Christianity and the institutionalised church? What was/is their primary criticism of the church and what has caused it? How have you responded to them?
- What experience do you have with Christians who have been wounded by their involvement in churches and have either stopped going to church altogether or are now barely hanging in there?
- Read John 13:34-35. What does Jesus say should be the defining characteristic of his true followers? Why do you think Jesus singles out this quality, even above faith?

## Pray:

- Pray for people you know who have left the church because they have been wounded. Pray for people you know who are not Christians and who may have a negative attitude toward Christianity. Pray for yourselves and your church, that you might better reflect the love of God to one another and to the world.