

# Going Deeper: 1 Corinthians 13 and Agape Love in Marriage

## Sermon Summary: A More Excellent Way

This message explores 1 Corinthians 13—often called “*The Love Chapter*”—not primarily as a wedding passage, but as Paul’s correction to a church that had become self-centered in their use of spiritual gifts. The Corinthians were using their gifts to elevate themselves rather than build up others. Paul redirects them to **agape love**—selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love that expects nothing in return.

### Key insight:

**Love—not gifting, productivity, performance, or even sacrifice—is the measure of maturity.**

You can do all the “right things” in marriage (provide financially, communicate, spend time together) but still be harsh, impatient, or resentful. Without agape love as the motivation, our actions are “nothing” in God’s eyes.

Paul gives us 15 characteristics of love that serve as both a mirror (showing us where we fall short) and a map (pointing us toward Christlikeness). The only person who fully embodies this love is Jesus—and our hope for loving well comes from becoming more like Him.

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## Key Biblical Themes & Background

### Agape vs. Other Forms of Love

- *Philia* — friendship
- *Eros* — romantic/sexual love
- *Storge* — familial love
- **Agape** — selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love
- C.S. Lewis described agape as love rooted not in the worthiness of the recipient, but in the character of the giver.

### The Corinthian Context

- The Corinthian church was divided and competitive.
- Spiritual gifts were being used for self-promotion.
- They equated spiritual performance with spiritual maturity.
- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13 as a corrective—each line confronting self-centeredness.

### Love’s Permanence

- Spiritual gifts are temporary.
- When “the perfect comes,” gifts will pass away.
- But **faith, hope, and love remain—and love is the greatest** (v. 13).

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# Recommended Resources

## Books on Love and Marriage

- **The Meaning of Marriage** — Timothy Keller
- **The Four Loves** — C.S. Lewis
- **Love & Respect** — Dr. Emerson Eggerichs
- **Sacred Marriage** — Gary Thomas
- **When Sinners Say “I Do”** — Dave Harvey

## Bible Study Resources

- **1 Corinthians (BECNT)** — David E. Garland
  - **BibleProject** — Videos & notes on 1 Corinthians
  - **Blue Letter Bible** — Greek word studies, including *agape*
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# Practical Application for Your Life

## 1. Self-Evaluation Exercise

Evaluate yourself using the 15 characteristics of love (vv. 4–7):

- Patient
- Kind
- Not envious
- Does not boast
- Not arrogant
- Not rude
- Does not insist on its own way
- Not irritable
- Not resentful
- Does not rejoice at wrongdoing
- Rejoices with the truth
- Bears all things
- Believes all things
- Hopes all things
- Endures all things

Rate yourself (1–10 or Always/Sometimes/Never). Identify your weakest patterns.

## 2. Next-Level Challenge

Invite your spouse—or a trusted friend/family member—to evaluate you using the same characteristics. This takes humility but offers invaluable insight.

## 3. Replace “Love” with Your Name

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 using your name in place of “love.” Where it rings false, those are areas for repentance and growth.

## 4. Daily Dying to Self

For agape love to grow, something in us must be crucified:

- The need for a trouble-free life
- The demand that everything works on *your* schedule
- The expectation that others meet *your* needs
- The craving for recognition or honor

Ask daily:

**“What demand am I making today that needs to die so Christ’s love can live through me?”**

## 5. Combat Modern Self-Love

The sermon notes modern trends like AI relationships, which offer affirmation without sacrifice. Self-centered “love” refuses discomfort.

Reflect:

- Do I seek relationships that *serve me* or where *I serve*?
  - Do I avoid difficult conversations?
  - Am I more patient with strangers than with my spouse?
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## A Closing Prayer

### Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You alone embody perfect agape love. Forgive us where our love has grown lazy, inward, or self-serving. Teach us that true maturity is measured not by performance but by love.

Crucify in us the demands for comfort, recognition, and our own way.

Fill us with Your Spirit so Your patient, kind, enduring love flows through us—into our marriages, families, and communities.

Let the love of Christ control us.

Amen.