DISCUSSION GUIDE

BUILT DIFFERENT :
“A Disciple Is Defined by Love”

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

MEMORY VERSE

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT

Built different: disciples love like Christ,
and this is foundational to any and every other characteristic.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

Discipleship Distinctive: Love and Service

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Gather in groups of three to five people to discuss the Observation and Interpretation questions.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: GIFTS WITHOUT LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3. What examples of spiritual gifts does Paul list? What happens if love is missing?

Suggested Response: Paul mentioned speaking in the tongues of men or angels, having the gift of prophecy, understanding mysteries, possessing knowledge, having faith that can move mountains, giving all he possessed to the poor, and giving over his body to hardship. He said without love, he was only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal. Without love, he was nothing. Without love, he gained nothing.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: THE CHARACTER OF LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Make a list of characteristics Paul used to describe love. Pay attention to what love is and what love is not.

Suggested Response: Paul said love is patient and kind. He said love does not envy or boast, is not proud, does not dishonor others, is not self-seeking or easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Paul said love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: THAT WHICH LASTS

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. What three things did Paul say will remain? What things did Paul say would stop or pass away?

Suggested Response: Paul said love never fails. He said prophecies would cease, tongues would be stilled, and knowledge would pass away. He said we know in part and prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. Paul compared this to leaving behind the ways of childhood and seeing only a reflection in a mirror before seeing face to face. He said faith, hope, and love remain, and the greatest of these is love.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: GIFTS NEED LOVE

In 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, Why did Paul compare spiritual gifts and the absence of love?

Suggested Response: Paul was showing that spiritual gifts and sacrificial actions do not automatically equal spiritual maturity. A person can speak powerfully, understand deeply, give generously, and still miss the heart of Christ. He was not lowering the value of gifts. He was teaching that gifts only serve their proper purpose when they are shaped by love. Without love, even impressive things become empty because they are not building up the people God meant them to serve.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: LOVE AS THE TEST OF MATURITY

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, Paul made the point that the Corinthian church was divided because of a lack of love, not a lack of spiritual gifts. How would love mend the divisions?

Suggested Response: Paul's description of love would have exposed what was missing in Corinth. The church had spiritual gifts, but they were also marked by pride, comparison, dishonor, impatience, and self-seeking. Paul showed that love is not mainly proved by how strongly someone feels but by how they treat people. Love is patient with weakness, kind in how it responds, truthful about sin, and steady when relationships are difficult. This means giftedness should be tested by whether it is making disciples more like Christ.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: LOVE IS GREATER THAN GIFTS

In 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, how is love greater than the gifts listed?

Suggested Response: Paul said gifts like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge belonged to the church's present need. They are real gifts from God, but they serve believers while we still know in part and see in part. One day, when Christ brings all things to completion, those partial gifts will no longer be needed in the same way. Love is greater because it reflects the character of God and the way of Christ. Gifts build the church for a season, but love is foundational to every mark of discipleship.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: In 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, Paul said the most impressive things we can do amount to nothing if we don't have love at the foundation. What are some ways people do the right thing but with the wrong motivation?

Suggested Response: I may serve, speak, give, or help in ways that look right on the outside, but my heart can still be driven by pride, resentment, control, or a desire to be noticed. Paul reminds me that love matters because people matter to God. The goal is not only to do something useful, but to do it with the heart of Christ.

As your group responds, use follow-up questions to guide below surface-level responses. Encourage transparent responses.

QUESTION 2: Review the description of what love is and is not (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). Which one feels most challenging to practice with real people right now?

Suggested Response: I may be challenged by patience, kindness, not keeping a record of wrongs, not being self-seeking, or persevering when relationships are difficult. These words become searching when I attach them to actual people and situations. Paul is helping me see where love needs to become more visible in my everyday life.

QUESTION 3: What relationship in your life could use patience and kindness? What would that look like?

Suggested Response: Patience may look like slowing down before I respond, giving someone room to grow, or not assuming the worst. Kindness may look like a gentle word, practical help, or choosing not to be sharp when I feel frustrated. Love becomes concrete in the way I treat the person in front of me.

QUESTION 4: Paul said love keeps no record of wrongs. How can you be honest about hurt without keeping a ledger?

Suggested Response: Being honest about a hurt does not mean dismissing it. It means addressing the hurt with the person involved, seeking reconciliation, then moving forward. Identifying hurt is not the same as keeping a ledger. The outcome may mean setting wise boundaries for the future. Keeping a record means continuing to bring the wrong back up so I can punish, control, or feel superior. It looks like keeping the other person in the jail of unforgiveness. Love does not deny hurts, but it refuses to let bitterness become the way I relate to people.

QUESTION 5: In 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, Paul said gifts are temporary, but love remains. What short-term thing are you tempted to hold onto more than love?

Suggested Response: I may value being right, being gifted, being productive, being respected, being needed, or being in control. Those things can feel important, but Paul reminds me that they are not the deepest mark of discipleship. Love is what gives every gift, word, and act of service its proper direction.

QUESTION 6: How can our group practice Love and Service in a way that helps people see Christ more clearly?

Suggested Response: Our group can practice love by paying attention to real needs, speaking with patience, serving without needing attention, forgiving honestly, and encouraging one another to use our gifts for the good of others. We can help one another remember disciples are not defined by giftedness alone. A disciple is built different because they love like Christ, and this is foundational to every other mark of discipleship.