

1 Corinthians Chapter 13

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 March 2017

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Good evening. Would you turn with me please to Psalm 84. Psalm 84.

Now who in their right mind would come to church on a lovely evening like this? Who would come to church? Why on earth have you come to church this evening when it's so lovely and sunny?

Well, because I hope and I'm sure that you feel about being in God's presence as David, or rather the sons of Korah do here.

Just listen to these first four verses. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, must swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young, a place near your altar.

[1 : 13] Lord Almighty, my King and my God, blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you.

There's only one reason to be here on a Sunday evening, when it's such a beautiful sunny time, is to be in the presence of the Lord. That's the only reason, isn't it? To be where the Lord is. And as the psalmist puts it, how lovely, how lovely it is to be where God is.

And he is here. We know he's everywhere. Of course he is. He's the God who fills every place and is in every situation. But he has especially promised to be where his people are. And this is the place in which he dwells.

So let's sing together, 371. We love the place. We love the place as Christians. It's not a burden to come to church. It's not an onerous task. It's a joy.

We love the place in which thy... We love the place, O God, wherein thy honour dwells. The joy of your abode, all earthly joys, excels. 371, let's stand together as we sing. 371.

[2 : 23] 371, let's stand together as we sing. The Lord is here by his Spirit.

And he's here to hear our prayers and receive our worship. Let's pray together. Let's come and draw near to him. O Lord, our God, our Father in heaven, as we gather again this evening, we're not here because our arms have been twisted.

We're not here, O Lord, because we want to earn brownie points or because we want to look good to one another or to you. We're not even here because we like to sing.

We're not here, O Lord, because we're interested in the things of God. We're not even here, O Lord, because our church family is here, brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are here because we love you. And we love to be where you are. And we love to enjoy your company and your presence.

[3 : 27] Yes, we thank you that we can go anywhere. And there's nowhere we can hide from you. Nowhere we can escape you or your love or care for us. You are on the cliff top and on the beach. You're in the mountain and in the valley.

Wherever we go, you are there. And we can experience and enjoy your presence there. But, Lord, it's something special about being in the very company of God's people.

Yes, Lord, in that sense, being in the church. Not the building, but where God's people are. Lord, it's a foretaste of heaven, as we've been singing. It makes us think about that day when, Lord, there's going to be such a crowd, a multitude that nobody can number.

There's so many millions and millions of those for whom you died, Lord Jesus, for whom, Lord, you set your love upon, Father God, who you brought to life and to faith, Holy Spirit.

And we shall be there gathered amongst that number and we shall adore and worship and delight and rejoice in you for all eternity. Not a moment of that time will we be bored.

[4 : 28] Not a moment of that time will we wish we were back on earth. Not for a moment of that time will we long for the things that take up our lives in this world because we shall be smitten with

you and delighted with you.

And, oh, Lord, we thank you that you've already given us a foretaste of that. Already as Christians this evening and through this day and in our lives previously, we've known something of that wonderful sense of excitement of being in the presence of God.

And as we look to heaven, we long and pray more than anything else, oh, Lord, that we may be sure that we're going to be there.

That we may have that certainty that Christ is our Savior who has taken our sins. That we may have that confidence to know that though we are sinful and fallen people, yet you've wiped the slate clean with the very precious blood of your Son.

that we might know, oh, Lord, that though we are unworthy, you have made us holy, acceptable and pleasing in your sight only by your grace and only by faith.

[5 : 34] And, oh, Lord, as we come again this evening, we long to know you here with us in that very special way, speaking to us, yes, in your word, receiving, Lord, our worship and our praise, hearing us as we pray and as we intercede for those in need.

But especially, Lord, how we long for you by your Holy Spirit to meet with us, to deal with us, where there's need for conviction to convict us, where there's need for encouragement to encourage us, where there's need for healing to heal us, where there's need, oh, Lord, for lifting up because we are downcast and lift us up.

Lord, we thank you that you know us, everyone, and that you are here to work in each and every heart. Lord, may we be not only willing, may we not only be desiring, but may we be longing and yearning and hungering and wanting and asking.

Oh, Lord, be amongst us and work in us, we pray. For we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, our King.

Amen. Sunday evening for the last several weeks, and we've made it to chapter 13, which I'm sure for many of us, if not all of us, will immediately spring to mind.

[6 : 58] We know what this is about. We know what this chapter is about. The most famous chapter in 1 Corinthians, perhaps one of the most famous chapters, there's famous verses, or well-known verses, but the best-known chapter is chapter 13.

So 1 Corinthians chapter 13, if you've got the church Bible, that's page 1154, 1154, and we'll read the whole chapter together. And the NIV is, you may notice, sort of steals half a verse from the chapter before, so we'll steal that half verse as well and read from under that subtitle, Love is Indispensable.

1 Corinthians chapter 13. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I'm only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the faith, sorry, 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.

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.

[8 : 22] Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others.

It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease. Where there are tongues, they will be stilled.

Where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I reasoned like a child.

[9 : 26] When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, than which you'll see face to face.

Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain. Faith, hope, and love.

But the greatest of these is love. So if you'll turn back to 1 Corinthians 13, where we read a few moments ago, as we're continuing our journey through this letter of Paul to the Christians in Corinth in the first century AD.

and it's page 1154, 1154 in the Church Bible. Well, it's probably appropriate that we're in 1 Corinthians 13, being as today is Mother's Day.

And of course, Mother's Day is all about love, isn't it? It's all about the love of a mother for her children and the love of children for their mother.

[10:42] I think it's universally agreed around the world that there is no love as strong as the love that a mother has for their child. There's no love that's so faithful, so unchanging, so long-lasting, so pure as the love of a mother for a child.

And we all need love, as we thought this morning with the children. And we need love, not just the love of a mother, but we need love in every part of our lives. Every area of our lives demands love. Love is essential. Love is the glue, isn't it, in a marriage between a man and a wife. Love is the sweetness in a home. Love is the joy of being in a family.

Without love, a home is simply bricks and mortar. Without love, marriage is simply a piece of paper. And without love, a family is a nightmare.

The absence of love means simply existing. And the presence of love means life in its fullness. If that's the case in the world, if that's something that the world recognises and knows, then surely it must be much more so the case in the church, that the power of the church is in its love.

[12:11] The effectiveness of the church is in its love. Paul is writing here, as we've seen all the way through, to a very unloving church.

A disorderly church as well. A church wherever it met, got things wrong in its relationships with one another and therefore with the world and with the Lord.

And although as we've gone through, we've seen, particularly in the last chapter, it's a church that's got a lot going for it, especially in abundance of spiritual gifts that we saw there in chapter 12.

Yet it was missing that essential ingredient that made it a church that glorifies Christ and does real good to its members.

It lacked love. And what is so very sad is that in this church, not only was there a lack of love, but there was actually this lack of love had gone virtually unnoticed.

[13:13] Nobody was missing the fact that there was love absent from the church. Worse than that, they had no real desire for there to be love in the church. They had no longing for its presence.

And as we thought last Sunday particularly, they were people who were self-interested, were ruled by that law, as it were, what's in it for me.

Lovelessness permeated their gatherings together as church. So that instead of being a source of blessing when they met together, in whatever capacity it was, their meetings became harmful.

Back in chapter 11 and verse 17, Paul writes, in the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. What a terrible thing to meet together and people to be harmed rather than blessed.

the Holy Spirit was the one who'd given gifts to the church. He'd equipped them to be a blessing.

But again, those gifts that he'd given to individuals within the church were being used as a means of division rather than blessing.

[14:28] Rather than uniting, they were pulling people apart. They were using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to make themselves look good in the sight of others, to show how spiritual they were rather than encouraging one another.

And they particularly liked the big gifts, the showcase gifts, the ones that stood out from the crowd, speaking in tongues and prophecy and knowledge. They looked down upon the less public gifts, the gifts of helping, administration, and so on.

We see there in chapter 12 how Paul has to speak to them. Verse 24, the second part, but God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it so that there should be no division in the body, that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Speaking about the church as a body. Paul had to remind them that just as in the human body, every single part matters.

So in the body of Christ, the local church, every single member is vital. Every believer in the church is to desire greater gifts of the Holy Spirit, that they might be a blessing to others.

[15:53] As he says there, in verse 11, all these are the work of one and the same Spirit. He distributes them to each one as he determines.

And later on he says, if one part suffers, every part suffers. If one part's honored, every part rejoices with it. You are now the body of Christ. But he says there's something better.

There's something that's missing. There's something that's necessary. There's the greatest thing that you are to seek after. He's encouraged them to seek that the Holy Spirit would help them and use them. As he says in verse 31 of chapter 12, eagerly desire the greater gifts, yet I'll show you the most excellent way.

There's something better. There's something more impressive. There's something more excellent that every single Christian, whoever they are, whatever they're gifting, whatever their life, is to seek and to long for and to earnestly pursue.

And so, to make his point crystal clear, we have 1 Corinthians 13. In my opinion and the opinion of many others, the most perfect homage to love written in any language.

[17:12] What he shows us is this, that all spiritual life is worthless without love. All spiritual life is worthless without love.

He doesn't list every spiritual gift here, but he picks out those that particularly the Corinthians thought were the best ones, the great ones, the public ones, the showing off type ones.

And he shows that each one of them is utterly worthless without love. So he begins with the gift of tongues. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, that's the ability to speak a different language from your native language.

A supernatural gift, not that you learn it at school or that you learn it by using one of these online. Peter had this gift, you remember, in the beginning of Acts in chapter 2 and the other disciples as well, began to preach, we're told, and speak in different languages as the Holy Spirit enabled them. Think a bit more about what that gift is when we come to it particularly in the coming weeks. It sounds amazing, this gift, to be able to speak and speak to people in a foreign language which you hadn't had to learn.

[18:23] Well, that's great. But Paul says, what good is it? Even if I could speak the language of the angels, what good is it if everything that I say is devoid of love?

If I do not have love, I'm only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. The noise that somebody makes with their mouth when love is absent is as annoying as the constant banging of metal on metal.

Think back to when your children were young and you were in the kitchen and you wanted to amuse them and keep them busy and you gave them a spoon and a pan. And remember how after about 10 seconds the noise was unbearable and you took it off them again.

That's what Paul is saying here. That grating noise, that irritating noise is the noise of speaking without love. But they were doing a lot of speaking, weren't they?

But there was no love. Then he speaks about prophecy. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge. Again, we'll think a bit about that gift in the coming weeks as it crops up and understand what it means.

[19:39] But it means to bring revelation, spiritual insights that is given by God's Holy Spirit to understand a mystery or to understand a situation without using human wisdom, human understanding, God speaking directly into a circumstance.

He says, if I could have that sort of knowledge and fathom all the mysteries, if I could answer every single question that somebody brings to me, wouldn't we love to have that at times when we speak to people and say, well, what about this or what about that or how can you do this?

Oh, wouldn't you love to be able to roll off some great answer? But again, Paul says, that would gain nothing at all if it's done without love. That's a big challenge to us actually, isn't it?

There are times when we do have answers to people's questions, unbelievers, people on the street, whatever. I wonder, when we speak to them, is the motivation for the words we use from love or simply from proving them wrong or getting one up on them or putting them down?

That's a challenge, isn't it? Even when we're witnessing, you know we can do that. Even when we're in the open air or we're sharing the gospel with something, we can have that wrong attitude. We can have the knowledge of the gospel without the love.

[21:02] What an awful thing that is. And we know the danger of knowledge without love, don't we? We see that all around about us, the power of knowledge in the wrong hands is extremely dangerous and extremely harmful.

And then he turns to faith. And if I have faith, verse 2, that can move mountains. We know that faith is not a natural thing. We cannot generate faith.

It doesn't come from ourselves. We're not born with faith. We're born with unbelief. We're born with doubt. Only the Holy Spirit of God can give us faith. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves.

It's the gift of God. God must impart that faith to us. And do you remember that Jesus said to the disciples, and I'm sure that's what Paul is thinking of, the very words of Jesus.

He said, if you've got faith like a mustard seed, a tiny, tiny bit, you can say to this mountain, move and go and jump in the sea. Because faith is not about, the power of faith is not in its size, but in the person that the faith is in, the object of the faith.

[22 : 11] I'm sure that when Paul said this, if you have faith you can move mountains, there was a lot of people think, wow, that's what I would love to have. Imagine the power.

Because we see these things, don't we, sometimes on TV and in films and things. People have got this great so-called magical powers and super powers to fly and all that sort of thing.

And imagine if I could do that, if I could move a mountain, if I could say, right, everybody look at me, I'm going to save that mountain, but I wouldn't be impressed. Oh, wouldn't people think I was amazing?

I think that's how they were thinking. But what good would it be if we had such faith to believe that we could ask God to move mountains? What use would that faith be?

What would it accomplish if it wasn't used for loving reasons? If we just had power and faith to do things so that we might look good or feel good about ourselves or receive the praise of others, if we didn't do it because we were motivated by love, then we've gained nothing, we've achieved nothing, it's absolutely pointless, it's worthless power.

[23 : 24] Dear friends, whatever gifts or abilities we have, however limited our power, however limited our faith, or however big it is, it is of absolutely no use whatsoever unless we use it with love.

Unless we use it with love. Unless we pray with love and ask with love. He's stripping back the hearts and the minds and the attitudes of the people here in Corinth.

And he says, thirdly, surely, this is the pinnacle of it, if I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship.

Now, some of you will have the older NIV which speaks about give my body to the flames when here, the newer NIV, it says, that I may boast.

It's the same thing in the sense that it's giving myself unto suffering and persecution unto death so that I can boast about it, about self-sacrifice, isn't it?

[24 : 31] Self-sacrifice. None of us have been put in that position, I don't think. Not yet.

It may well come. It may come in my generation. It certainly comes to many Christians in Iraq, Syria, China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, and the list can go on.

many Christians who have put on the test to say, is this Jesus really worth dying for? And they've said yes. And no wonder if we were put up on that spot, what we would say.

Perhaps in our hearts we'd say, yes, if I had to give my life for Christ, if I had to die for him, that wouldn't be so bad. I've got to die anyway. And think, if I was to die for Christ, I'd be a martyr.

People might write books about me. People might put up memorials to me. Or make a movie of my life. Actually, that doesn't sound too bad, does it? Dying?

[25 : 43] Think about the suicide bombers of today. Do you know the reason why they do it?

I'm sure you do. Because they're told they're going to get straight to heaven and get a wonderful reward. It's absolute lies. Absolute lies, isn't it?

But that's the motivation. They're motivated by the thought that I can do something glorious and spectacular. I can be a hero to these people and I can get a wonderful reward.

The Christian must do everything from love. To give ourselves to the service of Christ. To go on the mission field. To endure hardship.

If it's not done from love for Christ and love the lost, then it's absolutely pointless. It's absolutely pointless. How can God own that? See, God desires that the sacrifices that we make for him be born of love.

[26 : 53] One of my favourite missionaries of all time is a man called C.T. Stead. And on his desk, he had written a simple phrase which said this, If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice I make can be too big for him.

If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice I make can be too big for him. He didn't. He was quite an amazing man.

He went to China. He was a very rich young man. Played for cricket for England. Had a glittering career ahead of him. This was around about 130, 140 years ago.

Gave it all up, all his fortune, all his career, all his sportsmanship, everything, to be a missionary in China. He served for many, many, many years until his wife was very ill and he came back to England.

And then he left his wife in England and he went to Africa when he was an older man. And he stayed there and he laboured there. Thank you, Peter.

[28 : 00] And he worked there. The sacrifices God calls us to make are sacrifices out of love for him, out of thankfulness, not out of duty, not out of pride, not out of wanting to gain anything by them.

If we give, dear friends, financially, let it be giving because we are so grateful for God's provision for us. If we do evangelism, dear friends, and share the gospel, let it be ultimately because we love people to hear the name of Jesus and to sing his praises, not because we want to keep the pastor happy or whatever it may be.

Anything that we do which is not done out of love achieves nothing. It doesn't. It's not what God wants. It's not what he desires.

And so, Paul has already demolished the attitude and the arguments of the church that we do things to be great and we have things to be good and we want to be somehow earning brownie points from God.

And then he goes on to show in verse 4 that love itself is something which is unnatural but supernatural. Love is something which is not natural but supernatural.

[29 : 22] Look at the way he describes love and you will see, dear friends, as I will see, every single description of love is something which is absent from my life in reality.

In other words, it's not perfect. It's not complete. Just take the first one, patient. Who really is patient?

You can say, well I am, you just don't know how patient I am with my husband. You don't know how patient I am with my parents. You don't know how patient... The trouble is that patient in every single one of us comes to an end, doesn't it?

There's not one of us who has kept our patience all through our lives in every situation. All of us have failed to keep our patience. There are people who test our patience. There are people who irritate us.

But love bears with people not through gritted teeth. But it bears with people gladly. See how short we are of meeting just that very first marker.

[30 : 29] Love is patient. Love is kind. In other words, it's always tender. It's always gentle. It's not snappy.

It's not grating. It's not rough. It's not insensitive. But the very opposite of those things. Have I always spoken in kindness? Have I always acted in kindness?

Have I always dealt with people in kindness? I haven't. But love is kind. It does not envy. When someone else gets the blessing, when somebody else wins the trophy, when somebody else does well, love doesn't sulk.

When somebody else is the teacher's pet, when somebody else gets the prize, when somebody else gets used by God in a particular way, love doesn't feel cheated.

It rejoices. It's happy for the other person. We know that that's a problem, isn't it? Envy. Then we see that love does not boast.

[31 : 40] In other words, love doesn't take every opportunity to talk about themselves. What's our favourite subject? Me, isn't it? That's the favourite subject. We love to talk about ourselves.

We could talk about ourselves till the cows come home. We love to talk about ourselves. Talk about the things that we've done. Of course, love is humble, isn't it?

Love knows that anything that we do is done by the grace of God. Any success we actually have is by the grace of God. Any achievement is the grace of God.

Love is humble. It does not boast. It is not proud. We're going to say, well, that's the same thing. In one sense it is, except as with boastfulness it's about talking, pride is something which is very inward.

We may not say it, but we think it inwardly. I was thinking about this when I thought about that nursery rhyme of Little Jack Horner. Remember Little Jack Horner? Little Jack Horner sat in the corner eating his Christmas pie.

[32 : 43] Stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, what a good boy am I. Now, we say that to ourselves, don't we? What a good boy am I that I've done this. We wouldn't say it to anybody else.

We want one to think we're proud or boastful, but perhaps in our hearts there's a little bit of a self-congratulation. Love isn't like that. Love isn't rude.

It doesn't put people down. It has here in the new NIV. It does not dishonor others. It does dishonor others. That's helpful. It means it's not rude.

It doesn't belittle people. Love doesn't belittle others to build ourselves up. It doesn't make little of their successes. The Father makes much of them. It doesn't speak as to embarrass the other or to hurt their feelings.

It's very careful. Love is very careful to honor others. Remember what Paul says? Treat, count others better than yourself.

[33 : 52] Oh, that's hard, isn't it? Count others better than yourself. It's not self-seeking. Well, that's really the center, isn't it, of what we've been thinking about with these Corinthians.

Self-seeking. In other words, love doesn't look into a situation and say, what's in it for me? What am I going to get out of this church? What am I going to get out of this Bible study?

What am I going to get out of this relationship? What am I going to get out of this act of service?

Now, love asks, how is this going to be a blessing to others?

How is this going to help others? How is this going to honor and glorify God? Not self-seeking. Not easily angered. See, the trouble with having pride is that pride is so very easy to hurt.

Somebody once said, if the problem is that people rub you up the wrong way, the problem is your problem, you've got a wrong way to rub up. If you understood what I was saying, if you get rubbed up the wrong way, it's because you've got a wrong way to rub up.

[35 : 03] Love recognizes how patient God is with me. How patient he's been. How long suffering he's been. How many times he could have rightly been angry with me.

Love is like that. People wind us up and anger us. Do we get easily angered? Is it because they've hurt our ego?

Is it because they've hurt our pride? It keeps no record of wrongs. Well that follows on, doesn't it, really as well. It doesn't bear a grudge. Somebody once said, I'm too lazy to carry a grudge.

We should be too lazy to carry a grudge. Don't bear a grudge. Or they say things like, I'll forgive them. I won't forget. That's not love, is it?

What does the word of God say? He says, I'll take your sins and I'll cast them into the deepest sea. I'll separate your sins from you as the east is from the west. God says, I will remember your sins no more.

[36 : 11] Not that he forgets them. It's an act, a purposeful act of the world to remember no more. Love forgives and in the right sense forgets.

It does not delight in evil. Verse 6. It doesn't laugh at another's misfortune. when they fall over or hurt themselves.

It doesn't say, served him right, he had that coming. That's not love, is it? That person who's fallen into terrible sin, that person whose life is a mess and maybe have done you harm and now they've come a cropper.

Love doesn't delight in that. Love mourns over that. Love sorrows over that. Because we know that there but for the grace of God go I.

Doesn't delight in evil, doesn't delight in harm, but it says rejoices in the truth. What is it that we delight in the truth? Love finds pleasure in what is good. Love finds pleasure in what is just, what is honest, what is praiseworthy.

[37 : 23] even though it's to our detriment at times. Love rejoices in truth, the wonderful truth of the gospel, but more than that, the truth that's found in a person, in their life, in their uprightness, or whatever.

We rejoice in what we see of Christ in others. On to verse 7, it always protects. Peter wrote in 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 8, love covers over a multitude of sins.

In other words, love is like a shield. Love is like a protective barrier over the sins of others, so that we do not go about exposing the failings of others.

Love does not gossip about the faults of someone. It protects a person. If they expose themselves and hurt themselves, we can't do much about that, but as much as we can, love protects them. Won't speak a bad word about them. It covers over those multitude of sins, because again, dear friends, if we were to put on the screen there, each one of our faults and failings, each one of the mistakes that I've made or you've made, that would be horrible, wouldn't it?

[38 : 42] Wouldn't it be horrible? Wouldn't it need all that wall? That's just for me. love protects. Love trusts.

That really follows on. Always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always persevere. You think that poor old Paul is repeating himself, but he is because he's oppressing this home.

Love that protects, love that trusts, in other words, gives the other the benefit of the doubt. isn't always suspicious of the other person's motivations, takes their word as truthful.

Doesn't mean he's stupid, love isn't stupid, doesn't mean that where somebody is an habitual liar that you take everything they say without a pinch of salt, but it means ultimately that when you meet people you trust them, and if they prove to be dishonest and untrustworthy, that's a shame, but I'd rather start from that position than the other.

Love trusts. Love always hopes. In other words, it isn't a pessimist. How many Eeyores are there that you've met?

[39 : 51] Don't they? Everything's doom and gloom. Oh, such a terrible life. Things can only get worse. I like Eeyore.

It cheers me up. But people who are Eeyores don't cheer me up. I'm sure they don't you. We don't want to be Eeyores. It doesn't mean that we can't share with one another when we're struggling. It doesn't mean that we can't ask, please pray for me, but it hopes because it's hope is in God, not in self, not in the situation.

It doesn't say, look at the world, what a terrible world, an awful world, the whole world's going down the tubes. It hopes in God, the promises that he's given.

It hopes in the gospel, it hopes in the church, it hopes in Christ. It hopes because it has a God to hope in. It hopes as well for the people. We share the gospel and we speak with others and we long to see them saved and again and again we're rebuffed and turned away.

But dear friends, does that mean we should stop hoping? Of course not. It means we can press on and persevere because that's the next thing, always perseveres. doesn't give up.

[41 : 00] It doesn't give up. There's lots of obstacles to love, isn't there?

Lots of handicaps to love, lots of things to stop us from loving, lots of things in ourselves and in other people that would make us want to say, well I've tried, but that's it.

I've given them enough of my time, enough of my love. No, love that is love presses on, perseveres because it has hope. It has hope not in the person, not in ourselves, but in God.

It goes on and on and on and on and on. We were just looking just the other week at John and chapter 13, speaking about Jesus and it says having loved his disciples, he loved them to the end. He loved them to the end. Loved them to the fullest extent. He loved them all the way to the cross. That's love. And then finally in this section, we go to verse 8.

[42 : 06] And we see that love is the most excellent of all things to possess and to seek after because everything else, even spiritual gifts, have a sell-by date.

Probably that way. Everything else must come to an end. Love is the only thing that endures and that does not come to an end. It never fails. Everything else will fail us at some point or another. And so verses 8 to 10, we have some of those gifts again spoken of, prophecy and tongues and knowledge, etc. All the things that the Corinthians thought were the real bee's knees, they were the real marks of being a spiritual church.

They were the things they were proud of. They were the things they would like to market and advertise. Here's a church where we have the spiritual gifts actively at work. And Paul says this, they're only here for a little while.

They're only here for now and then they'll be gone. I waited two weeks for the sale at Boyce. You see there was a sale at Boyce started on Friday.

[43 : 12] I waited two weeks for it when they advertised it because it had some wheelie bag carry-on luggage. I thought that's great, I'm going to get some of that. Went on Saturday, it was all

gone. Even the things that we long for, the things that we hope for, they're just there for a while, aren't they?

But love is here to stay, it never fails. Prophecies cease, tongues still, knowledge pass away. And even then it's only in part. These gifts, these spiritual gifts are only for a while and they don't give the full amount.

They don't do everything, they don't solve all the problems in the church. We said if only we had a church where we had these spiritual gifts, we'd be all singing, dancing, wonderful, marvellous, revival church.

No we wouldn't because Paul says they're just for a little while. In fact he puts them down to being childlike. Talk about this as I say in the coming weeks, I don't want us to bear much time upon it. But ultimately the only thing that actually lasts and doesn't change and will never be replaced is love. And if you're praying for the church and you're praying for yourself, when you're praying what shall I pray for this church and what shall I pray for the members of this church, then pray for love. [44 : 30] Lord give me a greater love for you and for your people. Give me a greater love in word and deed. Give me a greater love in my heart for those who irritate me. Give me a greater love for those that I find difficult.

Give me a greater love for the lost. love for you and for your love for you and for your love. Because Paul is saying this, that the way to spiritual maturity is love. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

There's a time when you have to pack away the children's toys and get out the man's tools. tools. And sometimes as Christians, we're so much enjoying the toys that we don't get our hands blistered on the tools.

Of all the qualities, of all the gifts, of all the fruits that every Christian should produce as evidence that they are born again, it is love. In fact, says Paul, there are three, not just love.

He says in verse 13, in that last verse, faith, hope and love. They are the fruit of the spirit. They appear in Galatians 5 in that list. But the one way to cultivate most of all is love.

[45 : 49] In fact, as we go into chapter 14, he immediately says, follow the way of love, the path of love, the life of love, the work of love. Really, he's echoing the words of Jesus, isn't he?

All that we're saying here is exactly what Jesus said to his disciples. What was it? He stressed to them again and again and again and again. It was love. There in chapter 13, verse 34, a new command I give to you, love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. Dear friends, let me urge you to practice love. Let me urge you to pray for love.

Look for opportunities to love. Seek them out. How are the disciples to live the life of love and love one another?

Because they saw it in the life of Jesus. As I loved you. Love one another. Well, let's pray together. Oh Lord, our God, we know that we need more love.

[47 : 08] love. Not the sort of love that we read about or hear sung about. Not the sort of love which seems to dominate the thinking of those outside of you, outside of your love.

They don't know anything of your love, Lord. They don't know the power and the reality of what it means to be loved. with that endless, infinite, unchanging love. But we do.

We're so grateful for it. We're so grateful for that love that you've poured into our hearts. We're so grateful for that love which has opened our eyes to see that in every circumstance, situation, you will love us and never take your love from us.

But Lord, when we begin to look inwardly, we see there's such a low level of love. Our tank is not full. It's not even half full.

Really, Lord, if we're honest, we're just running on the reserve of love. Loving when we have to love. Loving because love is demanded. But finding so often those things of which you've spoken, those words which must have been like arrows piercing the hearts of the believers in Corinth are the same arrows that pierce our hearts.

[48 : 21] Don't we keep a record of wrong? How long ago was it that that person said something? We've still got a little bit of resentment. Oh Lord, please work in us.

Please change us. We want to be men and women of love. We want to be a church which is marked by love. Real love. Genuine love. Holy Spirit love.

Christ-like love. Amen. Amen. The Lord Jesus says this to the church at Ephesus.

I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you've fallen.
Repent and do the things that you did at first.
Give us heavenly love. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.