

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF LOVE

Biblical Text: 1 Corinthians 12:29-13:1-7

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Introduction

When we speak about spiritual disciplines, we often think about activities such as retreats, prayer, Bible reading, worship, meditation, giving, holistic life and evangelism. These are important practices and can help us grow in our relationship with God. However, another discipline gives these practices meaning: the spiritual discipline of love. Christian love is not merely a feeling that comes and goes; it is a deliberate way of life expressed through our attitudes, words, decisions, and actions. We must learn to practise love daily to allow it to shape our relationships with God and our fellow human beings. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us that spiritual gifts, knowledge, faith, generosity, and sacrifice are incomplete without love. We may preach, pray, sing, teach, lead, and serve while still harbouring pride, jealousy, resentment, or unforgiveness. The important question is therefore not only *what gifts do we possess?* but also, *how do we treat people?* Christian maturity is demonstrated not merely by what we know or accomplish but also by the love we express.

A Walk to Remember

A helpful illustration comes from the film, "*A Walk to Remember*". Landon Carter is a popular but rebellious young man whose life is shaped by peer pressure and a lack of direction. After a prank goes wrong, he is required to participate in community activities, where he encounters Jamie Sullivan, a quiet, compassionate, and deeply religious young woman. Initially, Landon and his friends ridicule Jamie because she is different from them. However, as he gets to know her, he discovers her kindness, courage, faith, and compassion. Jamie encourages him to pursue his aspirations, and her influence gradually transforms his outlook on life. When he learns that she has terminal leukaemia, he remains by her side, supports her, and eventually marries her. Although Jamie later dies, her influence endures, inspiring Landon to complete college and pursue medical school.

Christ as the Supreme Example of Divine Love.

The significance of this story is that love changes how we see people, and when our vision changes, our behaviour can change as well. Landon initially judges Jamie through prejudice and peer pressure, but eventually recognises her dignity and worth. Similarly, we can judge people by their appearance, size, wealth, education, occupation, age, ethnicity, disability, social status, personality, background, or past mistakes. We may also let disappointment, betrayal, gossip, or negative experiences shape how we treat them. However, Christian love calls us to look beyond these labels and recognise every person's dignity. This does not mean approving wrongdoing or tolerating

abuse. We can speak the truth, maintain healthy boundaries, and pursue justice while treating others with dignity and compassion. The greatest demonstration of love is found in Jesus Christ. Romans 5:8 declares that God demonstrated His love for us while we were still sinners by allowing Christ to die for us. Jesus did not wait until humanity became perfect before expressing His love. Through the cross, we encounter forgiveness, grace, and the opportunity for reconciliation with God. Because we have received God's love, we are called to extend love to others. We forgive because we have been forgiven, serve because Christ served us, and practise patience because God has been patient with us.

Paul describes love in practical terms: love is patient and kind; it does not envy or boast, is not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable, and keeps no record of wrongs. Love rejoices in the truth, bears, believes, hopes, and endures (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). These characteristics show that love must be demonstrated through everyday conduct. It is not enough to claim that we love God if we deliberately cheat, exploit, humiliate, or treat people unfairly.

Love Must Be Expressed in Every Area of Life:

- In the family: Parents should love their children through affection, protection, provision, guidance, encouragement, and appropriate discipline without humiliation or abuse. Children should love and honour their parents through respect, appreciation, gratitude, and responsible conduct. Family relationships should be characterised by patience, understanding, forgiveness, and mutual care.
- In leadership and the workplace: Christian CEOs, managers, and supervisors should exercise authority fairly, recognise people's contributions, avoid favouritism, and treat employees with dignity. They must not exploit subordinates, manipulate records, or use their positions to intimidate others. Love in leadership means serving responsibly, correcting constructively, and making decisions based on truth and fairness.
- In education: Christian lecturers should teach and assess students fairly, provide constructive guidance, respect professional boundaries, and avoid discrimination. Christian students should respect lecturers and fellow students, acknowledge others' work, and refuse to cheat, plagiarise, or undermine another person's progress. Love does not mean lowering standards; it means upholding standards while treating everyone fairly.
- In healthcare: Christian doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals should treat patients with compassion, competence, respect, and appropriate decorum. They should listen carefully, protect confidentiality, communicate honestly, and avoid discrimination. Patients and their relatives, in turn, should treat healthcare workers respectfully and raise concerns through appropriate channels.
- In transportation and public interactions: Christian bus and train drivers should respond cordially to passengers, drive responsibly, and treat people with patience. Passengers should likewise respect drivers, follow reasonable safety instructions, and communicate courteously. The same love should be evident in shops, businesses, public institutions, and on our roads, where patience, honesty, and consideration for others are essential.
- In business and public service: Christians should refuse cheating, bribery, dishonesty, exploitation, and the abuse of entrusted authority. A trader should not deceive customers, an employee should not falsify records, and a public servant should not demand improper payments. Love requires honesty, accountability, fairness, and respect for the rights and dignity of others.

- In the church and community: We should welcome strangers, encourage the discouraged, assist those in need, appreciate others' contributions, and avoid gossip, destructive competition, and unnecessary hostility. We can disagree without becoming enemies, correct without humiliating, and pursue justice without hatred.

These examples demonstrate that love is respect, appreciation, fairness, honesty, kindness, and responsible action. It is shown when we listen to others, acknowledge their contributions, keep our promises, celebrate their success, and treat them well even when they cannot reward us. Love also means refusing to define people permanently by their mistakes while maintaining appropriate accountability for wrongdoing.

However, we must recognise that practising Christlike love consistently is not easy. When we are offended, betrayed, insulted, or disappointed, our natural response may be anger, resentment, or revenge. We cannot overcome these tendencies through human effort alone. We need to depend fully on the Holy Spirit, who transforms our character and empowers us to live according to the will of God. Galatians 5:22-23 identifies love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us exercise patience when we are provoked, humility when pride rises, kindness when we are tempted to be harsh, and self-control when anger threatens to dominate us. Nevertheless, dependence on the Spirit also requires our willingness to cooperate with His work through prayer, obedience to Scripture, repentance, and deliberate practice. We must learn to pause before reacting, apologise when we are wrong, correct others fairly, resist dishonest opportunities, and choose compassion over hostility. When we fail, we should seek God's forgiveness, make amends where possible, and continue growing in love.

We Can Practise This Discipline Daily By Asking Ourselves:

- Did I treat people with respect and dignity today?
- Was I honest and fair, even when dishonesty could have benefited me?
- Did I appreciate and encourage those around me?
- Did I use my position to serve others or to intimidate them?
- Did I depend on the Holy Spirit when faced with difficult people or situations?

These questions help us move beyond speaking about love to practising it intentionally.

In conclusion, the spiritual discipline of love must extend beyond the church into our homes, workplaces, schools, hospitals, public transportation, businesses, and communities. The Christian parent, child, CEO, manager, supervisor, lecturer, student, doctor, driver, passenger, trader, and public servant should demonstrate love through integrity, fairness, respect, and compassion. Our faith must influence not only what we profess but also how we treat people. Let us remember that love is not merely what we say; it is what we practise. It is not merely what we feel; it is how we treat others. We cannot consistently demonstrate this love through our strength alone; we must trust and rely on the Holy Spirit to form the character of Christ in us. May our homes become places of love, our workplaces environments of fairness, our churches communities of genuine fellowship, and our society a place where people experience the grace of Christ through our conduct.

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank You for demonstrating Your love through Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, empower us to love as Christ loved. Teach us to be patient, kind, honest, fair, forgiving, and compassionate.

Help parents and children to love one another, leaders to exercise authority responsibly, lecturers and students to uphold integrity, healthcare professionals to treat patients with dignity, and drivers and passengers to treat one another courteously. Deliver us from pride, cheating, favouritism, exploitation, and hatred. Help us to speak the truth, pursue justice, appreciate others, and treat every person with dignity. Transform our hearts and guide our daily actions so that people may encounter the love of Christ through us. In Jesus' name, Amen!