

## I WANT LOVE

### I Corinthians 13:13

“What do you want in life?” is both a basic and important question. Some of us really don’t know. It isn’t that we are unwilling to try, it’s that we don’t know what we’re after. Some of us spend all our lives chasing after money, career, power, relationships, sex or health in the hope that if we get what we’re chasing it will turn out to be what we really wanted.

One thing is for sure: we always want something. Peter Drucker is probably the best-known name in modern management. He is wealthy, successful, famous and still married to his life-long wife. In an interview awhile back he said that people his age (he is now in his 90’s) no longer pray for a long life; they pray for an easy death. This is the story for all of us— we always want something. It’s the way we are wired.

Our list is long, but one “want” tops all lists. We all want love. St. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13:13, “. . . faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

When children were asked what love is they gave some interesting and touching answers:

“When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That’s love.”

“When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.”

“Love is when someone hurts you, and you get so mad, but you don’t yell at them because you know that it would hurt their feelings.”

“Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is okay.”

“Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and just listen.”

“Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.”

“Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford.”

“Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.”  
And last of all, “you really shouldn’t say ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.”

Descriptions of love are endless. Definitions are more difficult. That’s because we all experience love differently. Love includes feeling special, belonging, being safe, respected, appreciated, valued, treated right and much more.

The reason we all have a deep need for love is because we were all created that way by God. The Bible says, “God is love” (I John 4:8). **Love is essential to who God is and what God does. God loves and God wants us to love him.**

God created humans in his likeness and that included both the capacity for love and the desire for love. As fish were made for water and birds were made for the air, so we were created for love.

Whenever we lack love we somehow instinctively, intuitively, know that something is missing in our lives. We may not be able to pinpoint it or define it, but we know that we’re incomplete. We know that something is missing even if we can’t quite name what it is.

The Bible begins by telling about a loving God creating a loving couple and putting them in a safe and perfect place called the Garden of Eden. It was a place without worries, threats, diseases or death. It was a place where Adam and Eve could be themselves and totally enjoy the love and goodness of God.

But, if you know the story, you realize that Eden was lost to sin and to tragic choices. And ever since then we humans have had this deep yearning to go back—to be safe, to be whole, to be ourselves, to be secure in the love of God and one another. Some of us search for this basic need in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways. We make life worse rather than better. And it’s all because we just want to love and be loved.

Deep inside we all want to be safe. We want to be respected. We want to be valued. We want to be touched and appreciated. Love validates us as persons. It is powerful, transforming and affirming to be loved by someone and to give our love to someone in return. Just look at someone who’s in love and you can often tell. You can tell in their facial expressions. You can tell in their attitude and a demeanor. It changes all of life. It’s no wonder that we want love.

To satisfy our desire for love we need to understand how love works. First, we need to

understand that love is actions more than words. Although words are valuable and important, behavior is more important. In the New Testament in I John 3:18 St. John writes, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

We all know too many stories of people who glibly say, “I love you,” and then turn around and behave badly with lack of love, unkindness and abuse. Whether in your family or among friends, always measure love by actions more than words. I Corinthians 13 provides one of the most eloquent descriptions of love in all human literature although it never mentions saying, “I love you.” All the descriptions of love are actions:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, 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.

Very early in the morning on Monday, July 29, 2002, nine coal miners were rescued from 240 feet under the earth near Somerset, Pennsylvania. They had been trapped down there for 77 hours. It was the first time in 30 years that there was a successful rescue.

During those three full days underground they were in cramped quarters with cold rising water that sometimes was up to their noses. They shared one sandwich between them. They wrote goodbye notes to their families. They thought they were going to die, so they decided they would tie themselves together so that their bodies would all be found.

At one of the emotional low points in their ordeal, 43-year-old Randy Fogle started to shiver and experience tightness in his chest. The other nine feared he was having a heart attack or suffering from hypothermia. So they decided they would keep him warm with their own body temperature. They took turns hugging him and they hugged each other. According to Blaine Mayhugh, age 31, “When we were cold we would snuggle.”

I don’t know what your picture is of a Pennsylvania coal miner, but I didn’t even think that “snuggle” was part of their vocabulary. As much as I try I cannot picture coal miners deep underground snuggling with one another. And I’ll tell you what else I can’t imagine. I can’t imagine that in the darkness, with the possibility of death so near, that they whispered in each other’s ears, “I love you!” But they DID love each other—with actions more than words.

Love is also value more than beauty. In other words, the love we want is a love that does

not depend on our good looks or the money we have or the position we hold or the power that is ours. We do not want to be loved just because of what the other person can get out of us. We all know that beauty fades, bodies age and it is a dangerous thing to be loved for our money. We just want to be loved for ourselves.

St. Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The Bible is clear that the greatest evidence of God’s love is the action of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, coming and dying for us—and it was while we were still sinners!

When I was a little boy I was given a stuffed elephant named Dumbo. He was white with ears that were red on the inside and button eyes. I don’t remember him much from my childhood but he is often by my side in old family pictures. He looked amazingly good in his youth. His fur was smooth and clean, he had both eyes and (as stuffed elephants go) he was good-looking.

My mother saved him and gave him to me after Charleen and I were married—she got Dumbo and me! As the years passed he increasingly showed his age; he was blind in one eye, patches of skin were missing and he was a dirty color. It seemed it was time to throw Dumbo away.

Then our daughter Jill claimed him. Jill is now grown, married and has a daughter of her own. And if you were to visit her New Jersey home you would see Dumbo prominently displayed. I can’t imagine her selling him for any price. Dumbo is still loved—not because of his looks but because of his value. And the reason he has value in Jill’s home is because of Dumbo’s relationship to her father.

That’s the way love is—value more than beauty!

Love is also received as much as given. As important as loving others is in our lives, we first need to receive love.

Gloria Chisolm is an author who writes about love, admitting that she was herself a closed person. One day a very good friend said to her, “I’m no longer going to talk to you about God’s love until you open your heart. Your heart is closed, and nothing is getting through. I’m wasting my breath and time.” That became a turning point in Gloria’s life. She realized that she had closed out the love of God and she deliberately decided to open her heart.

There are many of us who keep love out. The truth may be that we have good reason to

be closed because we've been hurt. We've loved those that have abused us. We've loved those that have abandoned us. **Once we've opened up and become vulnerable and then been hurt it's hard to open up again. But that's exactly what we need to do if we are ever to get the love we want and need.**

The first century Christians in Corinth had this problem. They wouldn't open up to love. Here's what St. Paul wrote to them in II Corinthians 6:11-13:

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

That's a word for us today. We must choose to open up, to take the risk, because love is received as much as given.

But love is given as well as received. Love doesn't go just one way. Loving and being loved are so closely connected that sometimes it is hard to distinguish which way it's flowing. I John 4:12 says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

When I was a teenager too young to drive I bought an old car at a nearby gas station. The price was good even if it had no brakes and had to be towed home. One day I was working on the engine and could not get it to start. The battery was charged; there was plenty of gas. Nothing I tried worked.

Then my father walked out of the house and offered to help. I knew he knew nothing because he was in his 40s and really old. He looked under the hood and told me that the ground wire wasn't connected to the coil. I had no idea what he was talking about and assumed he didn't know what he was talking about either. But after he left I connected the loose ground wire and the car immediately started. He was smarter than I thought!

Electrical systems need to be grounded to work. Electricity is invisible. Electricity is powerful. The circuit has to be complete. It's the same way with love. God loves us and we love others. When we are grounded the system works! That's what it means in I John 4:12 when it says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." His love is grounded in us.

Love is a triangle: God, others and us. We open our hearts and choose to receive the love of God. **God loves us even though we are sinners. God loves us because he is full of love and he has decided we are worth it. We fill up with love from God and then we love others even though they are sinners.** The circuit is complete. We are loved. We are grounded.

This is described in I John 4:16-21:

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

There is so much more that is taught within the Bible about love. We just can't cover it in such a short time. So maybe what we need is a simple summary:

- 1.) We all want love.
- 2.) God loves you.
- 3.) Open your heart to receive the love of God.
- 4.) Love others as God loves you.

Our Father we thank you for your great love in our lives, the love that is ours through Jesus Christ. Please help those of us who are closed to open wide. Help us to take the risk and receive all the love that you have for us. And may that love flow through us and complete the circuit as we love others. In the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen