

Love Always...: Small Group Guide

A Study on 1 Corinthians 13:7

OPENING PRAYER (5 minutes)

Begin with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to create a safe, protected space for your group to share openly and honestly.

ICEBREAKER (10 minutes)

Question: Share about a time when someone created a safe space for you during a difficult season. How did that impact you?

SERMON REVIEW (10 minutes)

Key Scripture

"Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." - 1 Corinthians 13:7

Main Points

1. Love Always Protects - Love is "watertight"; it doesn't leak secrets and creates safe boundaries
 2. Love Always Trusts - Trust is choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions
 3. Love Always Hopes - Hope believes the future will be better than the present
 4. Love Always Perseveres - Love doesn't give up; it remains resilient through all seasons
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (30-40 minutes)

Love Always Protects

1. The "Phoebe" Question: Like the rescue dog in the story, many of us have experienced times when we weren't protected. How has that shaped the "walls" you've built? Are those walls still appropriate for your current situation?
2. Leaky Love: Milissa described love that "doesn't leak" as keeping confidences and not gossiping. When have you experienced someone "leaking" your trust? How did that affect the relationship?
3. Repairing Cracks: The sermon emphasized that "a love with lots of cracks is not a resilient love." What does it practically look like to repair cracks in relationships rather than ignore them?

Love Always Trusts

4. Two-Way Trust: Charles Feltman says trust is a two-way street—we extend trust AND we must be trustworthy. Which is harder for you: trusting others or being trustworthy? Why?
5. Appropriate Boundaries: How do we balance being open and vulnerable with maintaining healthy boundaries? What does appropriate trust look like in community?

Love Always Hopes

6. Lending Hope: The sermon said, "We can lend our hope to the hopeless." Who in your life might need to borrow your hope right now? How can you practically offer that?
7. Hope vs. Wishful Thinking: How is biblical hope different from just wishing things were better? What makes Christian hope active rather than passive?

Love Always Perseveres

8. Resilient Community: The story of the pastor who lost his wife and child showed how community persevered for him when he couldn't. When have you needed others to "carry" you spiritually? When have you been called to carry someone else?
9. Jesus as the Standard: The sermon concluded that only Jesus does this perfectly. How does knowing we'll fail at this sometimes free us to still try? How does God's perfect love empower imperfect people?

PERSONAL REFLECTION (10 minutes)

Take a few minutes of silence for personal reflection:

- In which of these four areas (protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres) do you most struggle?
- Where might God be inviting you to grow?
- Is there a relationship that needs repair? A crack that needs attention?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION (15 minutes)

Individual Actions

Choose one or two to commit to this week:

1. **Repair a Crack:** Reach out to someone with whom you have an unresolved conflict. Offer forgiveness or ask for it.
2. **Be Trustworthy:** Commit to keeping confidences this week. If someone shares something with you, don't "leak" it to others.
3. **Lend Hope:** Identify someone going through a difficult season and intentionally speak hope into their situation.
4. **Create Safety:** Make your home, your conversations, or your presence a "protected space" for someone who needs it.
5. **Check Your Walls:** If you've built walls instead of healthy boundaries, consider talking to a counselor or trusted friend about beginning to heal.

Group Actions

Consider as a group:

- **Prayer Partners:** Pair up for the next month to specifically pray for one another's growth in love.
 - **Vulnerability Practice:** Commit to being more open and honest in your small group, creating a culture of trust.
 - **Community Service:** Identify a way your group can collectively "protect" or "hope for" someone in need in your church or community.
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CLOSING REFLECTION

Read together 1 Corinthians 13:7 one more time:

"Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Reminder: We cannot do this perfectly in our own strength. Only Jesus loves perfectly. But empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can grow in becoming a community that reflects this love.

CLOSING PRAYER (5 minutes)

Pray together, using these themes:

- Thank God for His perfect, never-failing love
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to love like Jesus
 - Pray for specific needs shared during discussion
 - Ask God to make your group a safe, protected, hope-filled community
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FOR NEXT WEEK

- Re-read 1 Corinthians 13 daily
 - Journal about one way you practiced "love always" this week
 - Prepare to share a story of how you saw God's love at work
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LEADER NOTES

Creating Safety: This sermon touches on trauma and hurt. Be prepared for emotional responses. Have tissues available and be ready to pray with individuals after the group.

Confidentiality Reminder: Emphasize at the beginning that what's shared in the group stays in the group—modeling "love always protects."

Professional Help: Keep contact information for Christian counselors available if someone shares about significant trauma or abuse.

Grace and Truth: Balance challenging one another with extending grace. Remember, we're all works in progress.