

“Love That Never Fails”

30-Minute Bible Study — Participant Handout

1 Corinthians 13 • The Five Theological Criteria

Name: _____ Date: _____

Opening

Icebreaker Question

“Think of someone who loves you really well. What is one thing they do that shows it?”

My answer:

Block 1 — The Source of Love & Why Human Love Fails

Key Truth: 1 John 4:8 doesn’t just say God loves — it says God **IS** love. A love that never fails must be rooted in God’s own nature, not in human willpower or emotion.

1 John 4:8

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

Human love alone fails in three ways. Fill in the blanks:

Type of Failure	Biblical Example	What It Looks Like
_____	1 Samuel 18:6–9 (Saul & David)	Loves only when his/her status is unchallenged
_____	Luke 15:11–13 (Prodigal Son)	Wants the benefit, not the relationship
_____	Matthew 26:69–75 (Peter’s denial)	Breaks down under pressure or fear

(Answers: Conditional • Self-Interested • Finite)

Block 2 — Criteria 1–3 for a Love That Never Fails

1. It Must Originate in God — 1 John 4:7

Humans can only sustain agape love to the degree they are drawing from a **divine source** — through relationship with God, prayer, and the Holy Spirit’s work in their character. We cannot originate it; we can only *receive and pass it on*.

What is one way I can draw more intentionally from God as my source this week?

2. It Must Be Modeled on Christ’s Love — *John 15:13 / Romans 5:8*

Jesus set the standard: laying down one’s life. The cross is love that held even when rejected, mocked, and crucified. He died not for friends who deserved it, but for *enemies* who didn’t.

Romans 5:8
“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

3. It Must Be Empowered by the Holy Spirit — *Galatians 5:22*

Love is the **first** fruit of the Spirit — supernatural, not manufactured. You cannot produce agape by trying harder. It grows from spiritual union with God.

- Discussion Questions**
1. If agape originates in God, what does that say about trying to love better through willpower alone?
 2. What would it look like practically to “draw from” God before engaging a difficult relationship?
 3. How does the cross change what you think love is supposed to cost?

Block 3 — Criteria 4–5 for a Love That Never Fails

4. It Must Be Expressed in Covenant, Not Contract — *Lamentations 3:22–23*

CONTRACT	COVENANT
<i>“I will love you as long as...”</i> Performance-based Conditional on behavior Ends when terms are broken	<i>“I will love you regardless...”</i> Commitment-based Unconditional by design Holds even when terms are broken

Lamentations 3:22–23
“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

5. It Must Include Forgiveness as a Permanent Posture — Matthew 18:21–22

Jesus said forgive not 7 times but **seventy times seven** — meaning *without limit*. A love that never fails cannot coexist with unforgiveness. Bitterness is how love dies.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a contract relationship and a covenant one? Give a real-life example.
2. Is there a relationship in your life where you've been operating with a "contract" mindset?
3. What makes unlimited forgiveness feel impossible — and what would make it more possible?

Personal Application

Take This Home

Of the five criteria below, circle the **ONE** you feel most personally challenged by this week:

Criterion 1	It must originate in God (draw from the source)
Criterion 2	It must be modeled on Christ's love (costly, sacrificial)
Criterion 3	It must be empowered by the Holy Spirit (not willpower)
Criterion 4	It must be expressed in covenant, not contract (unconditional)
Criterion 5	It must include forgiveness as a permanent posture (without limit)

One specific step I will take this week to grow in this area:

Memory Verse for the Week

1 Corinthians 13:8a

"Love never fails."

Quick Reference — The Five Criteria

#	Criterion	Key Scripture
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1	Must originate in God	<i>1 John 4:7</i>
2	Must be modeled on Christ's love	<i>John 15:13 / Romans 5:8</i>
3	Must be empowered by the Holy Spirit	<i>Galatians 5:22</i>
4	Must be expressed in covenant, not contract	<i>Lamentations 3:22–23</i>
5	Must include forgiveness as a permanent posture	<i>Matthew 18:21–22</i>

"Love never fails." — 1 Corinthians 13:8



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