NOVEMBER 15, 2026

SERIES 3: JOY IN THANKSGIVING

LESSON 3.3: LET LOVE LEAD

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God is love, and love is the foundation of everything He does.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will minister to others in love.

LESSON TEXT I CORINTHIANS 13–14

KEY PASSAGE I CORINTHIANS 13:1

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

TEACHING OUTLINE

ICEBREAKER: What sounds do you find annoying or unbearable? What sounds are most pleasant?

TEACHER TIP: Connect the group's answers to the sound of a life lived with and without love.

CONNECT: Share the Connect segment.

I. LOVE AS THE FOUNDATION
   - A. The Primacy of Love

     DISCUSS: *How does it feel when someone does good deeds without love?*
   - B. The Attributes of Love
   - C. The Permanency of Love

     DISCUSS: *How does eternity shape our view of love? Are you surprised that spiritual gifts like the word of knowledge, tongues, and prophecy will cease one day?*
   - D. I will love God and others. **(V)**

II. LOVE AS THE GUIDE
   - A. Gifts for Edification
   - B. Gifts as a Sign to Unbelievers and the Uninformed

     DISCUSS: *Why is it important to minister from a place of love? How do we ensure we follow these God-given instructions?*
   - C. I will allow love to ensure the proper operation of spiritual gifts.

III. LOVE AS THE ORDER IN PUBLIC WORSHIP
   - A. Decently and in Order
   - B. Love and Submission

C. I will minister to others in love.

APPLY: Share the Apply segment. **(I)**

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer for God to strengthen our foundation of love.

CONNECT

PERHAPS, IN THE bleaker hours of your nine-to-five, you have found yourself watching the second hand creep across the clock's face. Traversing the time between lunch and final punch hearkens back to the Old Testament wilderness wanderings. Suddenly, you find yourself keenly aware of a clicking pen, nails tapping, gum chewing, loud breathing, or the cycle of ten pop hits on the public radio. Misophonia, a condition of extreme intolerance to certain sounds, affects many people and can create real distress in a world filled with constant noise. Those without diagnoses can still empathize with the overstimulation caused by populated cities, blaring music, and crowded rooms. Noise can be a nuisance.

In 2012 a group of neuroscientists published an article in the *Journal of Neuroscience* evaluating the most annoying sounds. Sixteen participants were put in an MRI machine and made to listen to a series of seventy-four audio recordings, rating them from least to most annoying. The top ten worst offenders were:

- A knife on a bottle
- A fork on a glass
- Chalk on a blackboard
- A ruler on a bottle
- Nails on a blackboard
- A female scream
- An angle grinder (power tool)
- Squealing brakes on a bicycle
- A baby crying
- An electric drill

While most seek to silence annoying noises, others simply adapt to the sound. Such is the case of Jerry Lynn, a Pennsylvania homeowner. One evening in 2004, Jerry needed to know where to drill into his living-room wall for a wire, so he set his wife's alarm clock and lowered it on a string through the second-story vent. Suddenly the string snapped, and the clock plummeted. Jerry thought the clock battery would run out in two or three months, but the clock rang every evening for thirteen years before it was finally retrieved from the ductwork. The couple largely ceased to notice the nightly alarm, which could be heard from any room on the first floor. When they did, it was

simply a humorous reminder of a poorly-thought-out plan. It is anyone's guess if the Lynns' dinner guests found their unstoppable alarm quite as charming (cnn.com, "An alarm clock stuck in a wall has gone off every night for 13 years").

In I Corinthians 13, Paul compared a life of ministry that lacks love to a banging gong or a crashing symbol. Love is the distinguishing factor between lives that aid and lives that annoy. Without it, our message is lost in the noise. Perhaps we have learned to live with loveless conduct and communication or simply tuned it out. However, the issue of love is worth our attention, as its presence or absence resounds into effective ministry.

LEARN

I. LOVE AS THE FOUNDATION

A. The Primacy of Love

Paul interrupted inspired instruction on the proper use of spiritual gifts to show the church a "more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12:31). Speaking in diverse or angelic tongues, prophesying, having spiritual knowledge or the gift of faith are all void without a foundation of love. While the church should seek spiritual gifts, pursuing love is an even greater priority. Radical sacrifice for the poor—even laying down our lives for our faith—is unprofitable without love.

The blessing of giving for the giver is in the expression of genuine love. In the case of speaking in tongues, a speaker lacking love could do more harm than good. In moments of faith, prophecy, and revelation, gifted people who lack love also lack substance; their contribution is essentially worth nothing (verse 3). Sacrificial people who lack love are not personally profited by their works because their motivations are false.

We may desire to be spiritually gifted or publicly generous for many reasons. We might seek public recognition for our spirituality or serve others to make ourselves look or feel better. Motivation matters. When we act without love, our influence and our very souls are hollowed. When we act in love, the smallest acts of grace are hallowed.

DISCUSS: *How does it feel when someone does good deeds without love?*

B. The Attributes of Love

Love is the fertile ground where many other virtues blossom. Love is longsuffering and kind. Love does not envy, but is content, and rejoices when others are blessed. A loving person is not self-promoting, puffed up, or insistent on getting his or her own way. A loving person works for the benefit of the body rather than the individual. Love does not behave inappropriately, spiral to anger easily, or think evil of others. Those who are operating in love will manage conflict with maturity and grace. Love does not rejoice in evil, but it rejoices with the truth.

Loving people don't enjoy being proven right about people's failures or seeing their enemies harshly avenged. Loving people don't say, "I told you so" when others fail and fall. They rejoice when truth prevails over falsehood and deception. Love bears all things; it can carry the heaviest burdens. Love believes all things, even believing the best about people. Love hopes all things, desiring the best possible outcome in the most challenging circumstances. Love endures all things; it is unbreakable under every kind of pressure. In I Corinthians 13, love is personified as if

it were an active force. God so constantly behaves in love because He is love (I John 4:16). That is why we must be so trained by love that this Christlike virtue is completely embodied in us.

C. The Permanency of Love

Paul put love in eternal perspective. The virtue that endures all manner of opposition in this life, maintaining belief and hope, will endure in the resurrection. Love never fails or falters. One day when Jesus returns, spiritual gifts like prophecy, tongues, and special knowledge will cease and fade away because we will no longer need them to draw close to God. We will see Him face to face. Knowledge and gifts are partial in their scope. Alluding to eternity, Paul wrote, "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part [or incomplete] shall be done away" (I Corinthians 13:10).

Like children mature in speech and understanding, no longer using baby talk or believing monsters lie beneath their beds, we will mature beyond our need for spiritual gifts. Gifts are like a clouded window into God's kingdom, allowing us to see the blurred figure of one whom we will one day meet face to face. What a day that will be!

In the presence of God, our revelation will be complete, and we will know God as He knows us (verse 12). Gifts like prophecy will instantly be obsolete because of our direct knowledge and access to God Himself. However, we will not cease to love; our love will be perfected.

> **DISCUSS:** *How does eternity shape our view of love? Are you surprised that spiritual gifts like the word of knowledge, tongues, and prophecy will cease one day?*

D. I will love God and others.

The desire to grow up is healthy and natural. Perhaps you remember eagerly anticipating your driver's license or your first date. Those who desire spiritual maturity should note that gifts are indicators of grace, while love is evidence of growth. This virtue will abide in God's new creation as the principal way we relate to Him and His kingdom. Because love will abide while gifts fade, we should prioritize that which is both first and final. We will never outgrow our need for love.

(V) PLAY VIDEO NOW

LI. LOVE AS THE GUIDE

A. Gifts for Edification

We are called to pursue love first and then desire spiritual gifts, specifically prophecy, which brings clear public benefit (I Corinthians 14:1). When people speak in tongues, they are speaking to God and edifying or building up themselves. However, without an interpreter, their message is unknown to the church. Like a musician plays a recognizable tune or a trumpeter calls an army to battle, we should seek for the Spirit of God to clearly communicate through us. Prophecy in the known language of the hearers is more helpful in corporate settings than speaking in tongues because it can be clearly understood. Those who do speak in tongues for the benefit of the church should pray for interpretation so they can encourage and exhort the church.

Paul did not forbid speaking in tongues, but he reoriented the focus of church gatherings toward shared growth rather than wonderful personal experiences. Those who speak in tongues without an interpreter should speak to themselves and to God (verse 18) rather than commanding the attention of the church and possibly interrupting ministry of the Word. Zeal for spiritual gifts is fitting, but believers should seek to edify the church.

B. Gifts as a Sign to Unbelievers and the Uninformed

Tongues with interpretation are a sign to unbelievers, whereas prophecy primarily benefits the believer (verse 22). For those who have already received the Spirit, praying in tongues is highly beneficial for personal devotion. Yet in public gatherings, prophecy can bring a timely word to a church that will be more needful than hearing another believer speak in tongues. In the case of the unbeliever, speaking in tongues abruptly captures the attention of someone who has never witnessed such a demonstration.

Tongues highlight that a message is coming from God, not simply the person speaking. However, without interpretation or prophecy, a group of people speaking in tongues would confuse those who are inexperienced or unbelievers (I Corinthians 14:23). Prophecy can expose the secrets of an unbeliever and confirm the miraculous working of the Spirit in the church, inspiring unbelievers to turn to Jesus. In the church at Corinth, everyone had a song, teaching, message in tongues, interpretation, or revelation. Paul did not discourage their zeal but encouraged them to pursue gifts correctly, by doing everything to build up others, considering the spiritual needs of the church over their own needs, and the perspective of a nonbeliever.

> **DISCUSS:** *Why is it important to minister from a place of love? How do we ensure we follow these God-given instructions?*

C. I will allow love to ensure the proper operation of spiritual gifts.

When we seek spiritual gifts for the sake of spiritual gifts, they will fail to accomplish their intended purpose. But seeking spiritual gifts for the sake of love strengthens the church. As previously indicated, love is the maturing characteristic that will define believers in the present and in the future age. Once again, Paul called the church to maturity (verse 20). Regarding evil, they should have childlike innocence, but in understanding the practice of spiritual gifts in the church, they should think and act like adults. Children are irresponsible, while adults take responsibility for others. A strong indicator that we are maturing is that our actions are rooted in self-sacrificing love.

LII. LOVE AS THE ORDER IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

A. Decently and in Order

All things should be done “decently and in order,” giving consideration to blessing the church and glorifying God (verse 40). Behaving properly in church enables each person to grow, learn, and be comforted. If we only come to church for a personal blessing or emotional experience, we have fundamentally missed God’s purpose for gathering together. Our expectations of church can be very self-oriented: I will be greeted, I will be sung to, I will be preached to, I will receive what I need in corporate prayer. Sometimes we need a righteous reorientation from “I” to “all.”

Mature saints have learned that even in public ministry, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Remember, love is not puffed up, self-seeking, or improper. Love motivates us to be used by God so we can be useful to our brothers and sisters. My brother needs healing; because I love him, I will seek the gift of healing. My sister needs direction; because I love her, I will ask God to reveal a word of wisdom. An unbeliever needs salvation; because I love this person, I will pray to interpret the message in tongues or prophesy. Fear fades away when we pursue love.

B. Love and Submission

Loving one another involves submitting to one another out of reverence for God. Submission can be practically demonstrated in our silence as we wait on one another. When we want to speak in tongues but there isn't an interpreter, we are self-controlled and speak to ourselves and to God instead of speaking over others (verse 28). When prophecies are given, we wait our turn, speaking "one by one" and giving others a chance to speak (verses 29–31). We share and evaluate words of prophecy with wisdom and discernment, speaking to serve instead of just speaking to be heard (verse 29). We avoid disorderly conversations and distracting questions, saving them for an appropriate moment instead of disrupting a service (verse 34).

We minister with an awareness that God's Word has not been revealed to us or expressed by us in isolation, but we are subject to the body of which Christ is the head. If we consider ourselves to be spiritual, we will acknowledge the proper order commanded by the Lord Himself. Some will be ignorant or spiritually immature, and we need not make it our shared objective to discipline or change them. Instead, we should patiently set an example of proper conduct and participation in spiritual gifts.

C. I will minister to others in love.

From time to time, even the best drivers in the nicest cars get lost. Reasonable people don't keep going in circles, nor do they sell the minivan because they are lost. The simple solution is checking the map or GPS and getting back on the route. Spiritual gifts are an important vehicle for ministry in the church. The Corinthian church was zealous for gifts and needed some direction. The apostle did not crush their enthusiasm but pointed them back to the path of love. The potential of spiritual gifts is exciting and biblical, and we should seek the Lord so they operate in our local church. The prospect of a church ordered by love is even greater, and in this community, giftedness is inevitable.

TEACHER OPTION: *Share the story below or one of your own to illustrate the power of building up the church together.*

APPLY

OLE KIRK KRISTIANSEN was born in a small parish in Denmark in 1891, the tenth of thirteen children. In his own words, he grew up "in a modest home but a good home, trusting in the mercy of God." From the age of seven, Kristiansen worked as a shepherd and cowhand, helping at nearby farms. He completed his high school education and apprenticed as a carpenter and joiner. When World War I broke out, he was conscripted but allowed to leave

after six weeks, as he had a travel notice to do factory work. At age twenty-four, Kristiansen purchased a woodworking and carpentry shop where he produced finely crafted furniture and tools, did body work for carts, and worked on some larger-scale projects like homes, farms, and a church building.

As a devout Christian and involved community member, Kristiansen's values guided him to pursue excellence in the small things, even the creation of a wooden stool. However, he faced his share of personal and professional challenges. In 1924 while Kristiansen and his wife took a Sunday afternoon nap, his sons accidentally set fire to some wood shavings. While no one was injured, the family home and workshop burned to the ground. The 1929 Wall Street stock market crash made carpentry work too expensive for farmers. In 1931 Kristiansen laid off his last journeyman and was forced to transition from carpentry to manufacturing.

In the midst of the financial crisis, Kristiansen lost his first wife and was left to raise their four sons alone. In his 1932 memoirs, he wrote, "I looked to the future with hope. But within two months my world was tumbling. . . . We were in a difficult time—but it was as well that we could not see what lay ahead. During the summer we were asked to make toys . . . and as we had no other work, we looked on it as a gift from God." Kristiansen was discouraged from making toys by his siblings, who were guarantors on a company loan, and urged to focus on more serious manufacturing.

(I) DISPLAY IMAGE NOW

However, Kristiansen ultimately saw the value in play and decided to concentrate all his efforts on building a successful toy-making company. He rebranded his woodworking shop with a name based on two Danish words: *Leg godt*, meaning "play well." In 1944, the factory burned down, but when it was rebuilt, LEGO became the first toy factory in Denmark to buy a plastic molding machine. The year the signature "stud-and-tube coupling system" was patented, Kristiansen died, leaving a booming business to the son who once burned down his workshop. While others discredited the value of child's play, Kristiansen saw that even the imaginative use of wooden bricks could glorify God.

Maybe we need to become like little children to remember the delight of building something together. Our gifts aren't for ourselves; they are for the edification of the body. Building up the church is something we can all contribute to in our own unique ways. When love is the guiding principle, what we build will undoubtedly glorify God, endure every challenge, and bring joy to the builders.