Now do you see why love is so extraordinary? And the pinnacle of love is certainly God’s love, put on display through the person and work of Jesus. It was in him that the world got a glimpse of the heart of love…the selfless giving up of oneself for another. That is the gospel in all its richness. That is love.

One thing that strikes me when I read through this list is the idea of selflessness in love. It is certainly at the core. For if you flip these things around and look at their opposite, you get a great picture of selfishness. Love is patient. Impatience is rooted in selfishness. Love is kind. Being unkind is usually spurred on by selfish desires. Thus, the opposite of love is looking out for self…defending self…exalting self. True love is quite the opposite. True love is selfless.

Perhaps one thing that can motivate us to do the hard work of love is the final truth we see here in this passage. For in addition to love being essential and extraordinary, it is also eternal. Love will not cease like prophecies. Love will not be stilled like tongues. Love will not pass away like knowledge (vs. 8). For one day, when we are in heaven, the spiritual gifts will no longer be necessary. Why? Because the spiritual gifts are the ways God’s Spirit manifests Himself in the church, His body. And when we are in heaven, we will no longer need God to manifest Himself in these ways. At that time, we will be, in a very real and physical sense, present with God in a way we have never been before. We shall see Him “face to face” (vs. 12). As Revelation 21:3 says, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

Love is eternal. Unlike the spiritual gifts, it will never end. It lives here in the present, alongside the essential virtues of faith and hope. But out of those three, love is the only one that will endure forever. So, in all things, love should reign supreme. It should be valued more than any gift. It should be exalted more than any ministry. It should be held in the highest esteem. It should be practiced. Love should pour forth through everything we do. It should flow through our gifts to permeate the body with its life-giving power.

Certainly, there is no doubt that spiritual gifts are of great value. We know that faith is vital. And hope is indeed important. But then there is love. Love is the greatest.

**Bible Reading Group**

**Skerries, Lusk and Rush PArishes**

**33rd meeting - Oct 2013**

**Music** – Take time to settle down, quieten the mind, and come into the presence of God.

**We pray together**:

God our Father, source of all light, you have sent your Son into the world, to reveal yourself to all your children. Send your Spirit upon us now, that we may meet Jesus in the Word that comes from you. May we come to know him, may we come to love him more deeply and so be drawn closer to the happiness of your Kingdom. Amen.

**Scripture: (1 Corinthians 13)**

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

**Quiet Time:**

**Take some time to let the words of Scripture sink into your heart. Then see if a word or phrase resonates with you in any way. Focus on that word or phrase for a time and ask the Lord**

**to show you what He is saying to you personally today. If you wish you can share your thoughts with the group.**

**To Think About**

**See Reflection below**

**Prayers of Intercession.**

<http://www.shepherdproject.com/essential-extraordinary-eternal-love-reflections-on-1-corinthians-13-in-the-church/>

**Reflection on 1 Corinthians 13**

In this passage, Paul becomes a poet, speaking truths to the Corinthians about love in creative verse that is as beautiful as it is powerful. There is much to be gleaned from this passage—many details about love as well as a few overarching principles. The passage actually breaks down quite conveniently into three main truths on love. As we come to understand these truths in the depths of our minds, and most importantly, our hearts, they will transform the way we live our lives. Let’s take a look…

The first thing we see about love here is that it is essential. Love is fundamental, basic, elemental. It is as vital as the air we breathe, as oxygen is to life. Without love, life would mean little. Something without love becomes nothing. No love, and our actions are futile. Through a chain of “if” phrases, Paul writes that if a person has certain things but does not have love, that having those other things matters little. The things he speaks of correspond to the spiritual gifts. But perhaps what is more powerful is what follows those “if” phrases. The first speaks of a “resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” Gordon Fee points out that this is a reference to the instruments used in their pagan religions, which we saw previously was characterized by the mute, lifeless idols. This phrase is symbolic of emptiness. A hollow noise. This signifies that using our gifts in ministry without love offers nothing of value. Paul’s point is certainly clear throughout these first three verses: If I exercise gifts without love, I give nothing (vs. 1). If I exercise gifts without love, I am nothing (vs. 2). If I exercise gifts without love, I gain nothing (vs. 3). I give nothing…I am nothing…I gain nothing. See how essential love is? If

someone uses their spiritual gifts without love, they might as well not bother. It is like baking a cake without flour or running a touchdown without a football. It is futile.

Why? Well, for one, it is an issue of motives. Our gifts are intended to be used for the building up of the body. Our gifts are not given for ourselves, they are given for others. This is an important shift in perspective. We serve because we love the ones we are serving. We shepherd out of love for the people we are shepherding. We teach since we love those we are teaching. Using our gifts should flow out of a love for God and for others, not because it makes us feel good or gives us a feeling of satisfaction, meaning, or significance. Yes, perhaps these latter things will be byproducts for using our gifts, but they should not be the motivations. The motivating force behind the use of our gifts should be love.

Secondly, love is not only a motivation, but it is a power that flows through our gifts into the lives of others. People should feel God’s love more deeply because we have used our gifts out of love for them. As we use our gifts in the church, love is able to permeate the church. It is life-giving oxygen for the body. And if we are doing works in the church for other reasons, they are empty of the true power of God, because they are empty of love.

So, we see that love is essential. But not only is it essential, it is also extraordinary. Love is an amazing thing. And while it is not easy, when love in its pure form is exercised to the extreme capacity, it can be extraordinary. Take a look at this extraordinary love…

Love is patient.
Love is kind.
Love does not envy.
Love is not proud.
Love is not rude.
Love is not self-seeking.
Love is not easily angered.
Love does not delight in evil.
Love rejoices with the truth.
Love always protects.
Love always trusts.
Love always hopes.
Love always perseveres.
Love never fails.