

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Patient, Kind, and No Envy**

### **Lesson: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

Love is patient, love is kind, and love does not envy...

If someone were to ask me to recommend the most beautiful passages in the Bible, I would likely choose 1 Corinthians 13. Many of you might also love 1 Corinthians 13. This chapter is so famous and beautiful that it is often framed and hung on walls or printed on cards that people exchange with one another.

Although 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most beautiful chapters and letters in the Bible, the background behind its writing was far from beautiful. The city of Corinth, which appears in the Bible, was located in the coastal region of Greece and was a center of trade. Due to its bustling trade, Corinth was home to a diverse mix of ethnicities, races, and cultures. There were Greeks, Romans, Jews, as well as merchants, immigrants, and slaves who had come from other countries for trade.

Because of this cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, establishing a single church was no easy task. Yet, by God's grace, the church in Corinth was founded. People from all walks of life gathered to hear God's Word. The beginning of the Corinthian church was full of grace and beauty, but as time passed, the members began to struggle with deep conflicts, unable to love one another due to the differences and stereotypes they held about each other. They rejected one another and fell into serious division.

**(Slide 1)** Within the church, the Jews prided themselves on being superior and felt uncomfortable doing anything with people of other ethnicities. The Romans were confused about whether to follow God's Word or the emperor's commands, and at times, they valued the emperor's words more than God's. The Greeks, who came from a culture of worshiping many gods, misunderstood God as just one of their many gods.

Moreover, the economic differences among the members were stark. Those who were wealthy and could offer much to the church always wanted to have a loud voice in controlling the church, believing that things should go their way. They often complained about the poor, the sick, and the marginalized, who could contribute little, and even thought these people were unnecessary in the church. Some judged others based on whether they washed their hands before meals or by their outward appearance, choosing to spend time only with those who met their

standards. The church was filled with unfounded rumors that hurt one another, and there was no room for embracing differences.

The conflicts ran so deep that it became increasingly difficult for the church to move forward with a unified direction. Every meeting turned into a session of mutual blame, with comments like, “Don’t come to church anymore!” or “If things keep going like this, I won’t come to church anymore!” becoming all too common. Yes, the situation in the Corinthian church had become so messy that it could hardly be called a church anymore.

Friends, as you listen to the story of the Corinthian church, what thoughts come to mind? How do you feel? Do you sympathize with their situation to some extent? Or do you feel that their story is just theirs and not relatable?

While Wisconsin, especially the Midwest, may seem less racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse compared to places like California, New York City, or other major cities, if we look closely, we might find aspects like generational diversity that we can relate to.

I happened to come across a video that effectively illustrates the characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Let’s take a look at it. **(Slide 2)**

The Corinthian church began with grace and had the potential to become a beautiful church by using its diverse talents and strengths. However, they failed to do so. Instead of seeing their diversity as a strength, they viewed it as a weakness. In the end, they could not accept their differences, became divided, and turned into a community that hurt one another.

At the time, the Apostle Paul, after founding the Corinthian church, was traveling on missionary journeys to establish other churches. The conflicts in Corinth were so severe, and the church was about to fall apart, that news of their struggles reached Paul’s ears.

Through his letter, Paul speaks about what a healthy church looks like, what a healthy community is, and what is most essential for a healthy church, community, and life of faith. This is 1 Corinthians 13.

I could summarize Paul’s letter on love or share my own understanding, but his letter is so perfect that I want to share it with you in its entirety without any

reduction. Through his letter, I hope we can all reflect on what is most important for the church, the community, and the life of faith.

**(Slide 3-6) 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NIV):**

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

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

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

**(Slide 7)** One of my favorite movies is *A River Runs Through It*. This film tells the story of a Presbyterian minister's family in the early 1900s. Reflecting the patriarchal norms of the time, the minister was the absolute authority in his household, controlling his family with emotional restraint, strict principles, and sparing praise. However, behind his serious and strict attitude lay a passion for literature and fishing, as well as deep love for his wife and children.

He had two sons. The older son resembled his father in many ways. He wholeheartedly embraced his father's teachings, growing up to love literature and poetry, and became a model individual. On the other hand, the younger son, though deeply bonded with his brother, was very different. From a young age, he was

passionate, bold, and at times reckless. The older son was cautious, thoughtful, and obedient but lacked leadership qualities. The younger son, however, was charming, impulsive, and naturally became the center of any group he was in.

As the brothers grew older, these differences became more clear. The older son followed his father's rules in fishing, graduated from an elite university in the East, and lived a disciplined life. The younger son, however, broke away from his father's rules, developed his own unique fishing techniques, worked as a reporter for a small local newspaper, drank during work hours, gambled in his free time, and eventually fell into deep debt, which led to his death. To the father, the younger son was so different that he remained a mystery.

The father, who rarely showed emotion, finally spoke of his deceased son long after his death, saying, "He was beautiful." From the pulpit, he preached these words, filled with longing for his son:

**(Slide 8)** "Each one of us here today will, at one time in our lives, look upon a loved one who is in need and ask the same question: 'We are willing to help, Lord, but what, if anything, is needed?' For it is true, we can seldom help those closest to us. Either we don't know what part of ourselves to give, or more often than not, the part we have to give is not wanted. And so it is those we live with and should know who elude us. But we can still love them. We can love completely, without complete understanding."

Friends, we must love one another. When we notice differences, we try to understand them. We make efforts to see things from the other person's perspective, to adjust them to fit us, or to adjust ourselves to fit them. However, no matter how hard we try, we eventually grow weary of the differences that cannot be bridged, and we reach a point where understanding seems impossible. Most people, at this point, begin to resent or give up on one another. But the Bible tells us that from this point onward, we must accept one another not through understanding but through love.

Friends, love one another. This is what God commands us to do. Love is patient, love is kind, and love does not envy. We can love completely, without complete understanding. Amen.