

# MATURE

## Reaching Out in Love



Welcome to our fifth set of weekly bible reading notes to accompany our MATURE series—and well done for getting this far.

Our aim with these notes is to encourage one another to read God's word, so you may want to commit with a friend to do these bible readings and to pray each day – and then ask each other how you've got on during the week.

*This week we're going to spend some time in Ephesians 1 and 2 Corinthians 13, thinking about God's love for us, and our response.*

These notes should hopefully be useful for individuals and for families with and without children. Each day, there is a bible passage to read – **read that first**, and **pray** - ask God to help you understand it. (If it is your habit to spend some time with the passage and make your own notes, then do that now.)

Once you've read the passage and thought about it – have a look at the accompanying notes. The notes cover some of the context of the passage, an explanation and an application. There are also some accompanying questions or suggestions for action. As God speaks to you through his word, you may wish to write down what he is calling you to do (and share it with someone!) However, don't worry if sometimes you don't receive an obvious answer to prayer or clear instruction – just keep faithfully reading God's word, and He will use it in your life, as the Holy Spirit works in you.

After you've looked at the bible passage is

a good time to pray – pray for strength to do what you need to do – thank God for what you have learned about him – and bring your requests before him.

Then, you'll see that there is an activity for families with children; the target age range of these activities is 4-11ish, so you may need to modify them. This activity draws on one or two of the verses you've been reading, and give you some suggestions for sharing them with the family – over the breakfast or tea table perhaps. There's a starter activity to get people thinking, then reading the passage, some questions to answer, and then something to read – and a prayer so you don't forget to pray (just a starting point – do pray for longer if you can). Should take about five minutes – but can easily expand if you want it to.

Don't worry about communicating everything – particularly if you've got small children – communicating something of the good news of Jesus Christ every day is a great place to begin.

Enjoy – and let me know how you get on

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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## Reaching Out in Love





## Monday

### Ephesians 1:3-4 Chosen in Him

#### Read: Ephesians 1:3-4

We begin this week by reminding ourselves of why it is that we love one another; because God first loved us.

Here in Ephesians 1, we come to verses 3-10, where Paul praises God for all the things that he has done for us in Christ. Today we are looking at verses 3 and 4.

In verse 3, God is to be praised, or blessed—because he has blessed us. We have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, which means that we have received all we need for salvation in Christ, and that we can look forward to an eternity spend with Christ.

Then in verse 4, we are reminded that we are blessed, because God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be his holy people. This is an amazing truth, and should be of great comfort to us, that God should choose us; that God should choose me. We do not rely on ourselves for our salvation, we rely on God, because he chose us to be his people, before he created the world.

When we reach out in love to others, it is then to this love that we respond; a love which chose us, a love which has saved us. We know that we cannot earn our salvation, but we can respond to what God has done for us.

*So today:*

*Give thanks for all the spiritual blessings we have received. You may wish to take some time reflecting on some of them as you pray.*

*Pray that we would always remember and be comforted by the fact that God chose us before the foundation of the world.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about when we say 'thank you' or 'thanks'. Why do we say thank you? Why is it such an important thing to do?

#### Read Ephesians 1:3

Who are we to bless or praise?

Why do we praise God?

**Read:** We praise God because he has blessed us in Christ in many, many ways. We want to say thank you to God for all the things that he has done for us.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good things you give us. Help us to give you thanks and to praise you for all that you do for us. Amen.



## Weekend

### 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 The Context of Love

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul has reminded us that Loving character is more important than ability, and that character means loving after the example of Christ. Then Paul provides us with one final reason to love – the context of love.

Look at verse 8. Paul says – love never fails – all the gifts God has given us are temporary – but love never fails.

Then in verses 9 and 10 we see that we live in a partial place. We live in this world – and yet we look forward to the world to come. We live with the partial – and we look forward to the perfect. Paul uses two analogies to make this point.

In verse 11 the difference between now and the future is like the difference between being a child and being fully grown. There is nothing wrong with being a child – but we grow up. And then in verse 12 we are reminded that we can see a reflection in a mirror – and there is nothing wrong with the reflection – but it is a reflection. We can look forward to the future where we will not have to look in the mirror – where we will be fully grown and mature – where we will be able to see face to face.

We look forward to Christ's return. And as we look forward to his return, we live now in the light of what is to come. As verse 13 reminds us,

love is the greatest thing. Hope and faith are important as we wait for Christ return, but love will outlast them both, love will last into eternity – love will define eternity, because eternity is about love.

And so as we seek to love as Christ loved us, as we seek to build a godly character in our lives, we keep before us what really matters – love. We keep before us what is really going

to make our lives worthwhile – love. We keep before us what we should be focussing on: love.

*So today*

*Thank God for all the opportunities we have been given to show love, and pray that we might be able to show it more and more as we await his return.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** put three 'good things' on a table—a chocolate or some sweets, a piece of fruit and a coin. Are they all good things? Which one will last the longest? Why?

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13:13

What are the three things Paul mentions here?

Why do you think Paul says love is the greatest?

**Read:** Love is the greatest, because love lasts forever. When we see Jesus face to face we won't need to have faith or hope anymore, because we will have what we have trusted in and hoped for! But we will still be able to love one another.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, help us to love other people as we look forward to your return.

Amen.



## Friday

### 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is...

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Here we move from a call to love, to an examination of what love looks like in practice.

As we work our way through this list that begins in verse 4, we see a mixture of positives and negatives.

Love is patient and kind. When we love, we don't jump to hasty conclusions and we aren't quick to condemn others – instead we are patient—we wait for the good to emerge. And we're kind – we do what we can to make the good come through.

That means that we are not jealous – we don't envy. We're not trying to make sure we are more important than others, instead, we're seeking the good of others – even if that means, in human terms, that the do better than we do. We don't boast – pushing ourselves forward at the expense of others – because we are not proud – instead, we look first to the needs of others. Love is not rude or self-seeking.

And love isn't easily angered. Again we're back to patience again here. Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. We all know how destructive a record of wrongs can be in a relationship – where everything relates to some key problem or mistakes in the past, and the relationship becomes swamped by these rival lists of wrongs. When we are loving we don't do that because we are more likely to recognize our own faults, than to look for faults in others.

Love doesn't delight in evil, but rejoices with truth. Love and truth go together. Truth can be said in an unloving way – but without truth, love is not really loving. Without truth, love can become a sequence of comfortable lies.

Then finally in verse 7, Love is about the long

haul. It is about protecting what is good for the future. It is about trusting and hoping – looking forward to the future with confidence, and it is about persevering now.

There is much here, that we can learn about love in relationships. Many challenges us for us here, as we seek to be more loving. Each of us will have something to learn about what it means to be loving, and to look first for the needs of others.

*So today*

*Look over this passage again, and pray for God's grace and Spirit to work in you to help you be more like Christ in love.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about the different ways in which we can show love to other people. Think about the things we do, and also the things that we don't do.

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-5

List the things that we do that are loving

What are we not supposed to do?

**Read:** Paul helps us to think about the different ways we can love one another as God's people. He wants us to do some things, and not to do others. we need to help each other in this.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, help us to love one another. Amen.



## Tuesday

### Ephesians 1:5-6 Adopted in Him

#### Read: Ephesians 1:5-6

Today we are continuing to move through this section of the letter, all about what God has done for us in Christ.

In verse 5, we read about how we have been predestined for adoption as sons. as we read right at the end of verse 4, this is 'in love'. Predestination can sound like a hard idea, but like being chosen before the foundation of the world, it is written for our comfort, that we might be reassured that God has a plan for us, and God's plan does not fail; our salvation does not depend upon our own abilities, but on Christ.

Also, we have been predestined for adoption as sons through Jesus. An amazing privilege, that God should bring us into His family.

Notice also why all this happens: it is God's will. We are reminded that God does not need to do any of this, that there is nothing about us that would force God to act, but that he does, because that is what he chooses to do.

And so of course, verse 6, this is all to the praise of God's glorious grace. God's grace, his love for us that we do not deserve, should cause us to praise Him.

So by the end of verse 6, we are back where we began in verse 3: praising God for all that He has done for us in Jesus Christ, the Beloved. We rejoice in this reality: God loves us.

So today:

*Give thanks for all that God has done to show*

*us his love in Jesus.*

*Say sorry to God for times when we have forgotten his goodness to us and love for us.*

*Pray that we might remember his love for us.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about family, and the things we appreciate about family—whether that is immediate family or our wider families.

#### Read Ephesians 1:5

What does it mean to be adopted?

Why has God adopted us?

**Read:** The Bible tells us that God has chosen to adopt us as his children in Jesus Christ. What an amazing privilege to be part of God's family

**Prayer:** Dear God thank you for adopting us as your children. Thank you for loving us so much. Amen.



## Wednesday Ephesians 1:7-10 Redemption

### Read: Ephesians 1:7-10

In our final study on Ephesians 1:3-10 we are looking at all that God has done for us in Christ through the cross, and looking forward to what lies ahead.

We begin in verse 7 with the cross: redemption in Jesus' blood. Redemption carries the idea of being brought with a price, and that price is Jesus' death for us on the cross. This is according to the riches of God's grace, a free gift for those he has chosen and predestined for adoption, for us.

Then in verse 8 and 9, we see that not only is this grace lavished on us, but also this is part of God's plan which is now revealed in Christ. Paul makes reference to a mystery here, which he explains more fully later in the letter, but which he also talks about in verse 10: a plan to unite all things in Christ.

Verses 3 to 6 are all about what has happened before the foundation of the world, and verse 7 is all about what has happened on the cross; verses 8 to 10 help us look forward to the future, to God's plan to bring everything together in Christ.

No only has God done things for us in the past; God also has an amazing future mapped out for us in Christ. We look forward to the day when Christ returns and his purpose is revealed.

*So today:*

*Give thanks to God for saving us, by sending Jesus to die for us.*

*Pray that we would be those who live in the light of the glorious future that is to come.*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about different items and how much they might cost to buy—clothes, food, cars, houses etc. What about people? They are much more valuable.

### Read Ephesians 1:7

How does Jesus redeem us, or buy us back?

Why does God do this for us?

**Read:** Jesus buys us back at the cost of his own life, his own blood shed on the cross for us. But he does it for free, by his grace. Salvation is a free gift.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for buying us back as such a price.

Amen.



## Thursday 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Love is... Essential

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Love is a tricky subject. Not because we don't know anything about it, but because we think we do, and because we know it is important—everybody wants to be loved.

1 Corinthians 13 will help us over the next three days to think about what love is like, so we can reach out in love.

We start with verses 1 to 3. Here, Paul talks about all the accomplishments we might have, and how useless they are without love. In verse 1, without love we might speak well—but we just make an unpleasant noise. In verse 2, we might have lots of knowledge and wisdom and faith—but we are nothing without love. Then in verse 3, even if we give away all our possessions, and even if we were to give away ourselves, without love, we gain nothing.

We can probably see what Paul is getting out here, but understanding the context is helpful. Right at the end of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul introduces the 'most excellent way', and talks about love, as the way he wants people to behave in the church, in the body of Christ. He has been teaching the church that everyone has gifts, and they need each other.; now he reminds them that those gifts and abilities are nothing without love.

Love is essential. Our motives are important. We don't serve for ourselves, but for others; we don't seek to know God in our heads only, but in our heads and hearts. Without love, it's just worthless, pointless, fruitless, noise.

Love is what motivates us to act, in response to what God has done for us in Christ.

*So today*

*Give thanks to God for the his love for us in Jesus Christ*

*Ask God to help you to love.*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** get a pan lid or similar and play it with a wooden spoon. What kind of noise does it make? (presumably not a good one)

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:1

What are we if we speak without love?

Is that a good or a bad thing?

**Read:** Paul reminds us that we can do lots of things in church, but that we should always be acting out of love for each other.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help us to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.