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AH-GAH-PAY

Love that chooses the best for someone else, no matter what.



Love Intentionally

BIBLE STUDY

SIX-WEEK STUDY OF
1 CORINTHIANS 13 FOR WOMEN

BY RICK AND JOY MELICK

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WEEKS 1–2

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Knowing It Is Fine. Doing It Is Love.

I like to look at life through the lens of Scripture. When you do, you start finding sermons everywhere. So one day I asked my wife to try it. A few days later we were driving down the freeway, and in front of us was a sketchy minivan with no license plates and one enormous ladder strapped to the roof. With one ratchet strap. Not even a good one.

You need to know two things about my wife. She hates ladders on the freeway; she's convinced they're trying to kill us. And she is a two-ratchet-strap kind of person. Maybe three. The ladder was pulling sideways against that one little strap. She wanted to get as far away from it as possible. I, of course, pulled in right behind it. I wanted her to feel the tingle.

She said, "We need to tell the church this story." I asked what sermon she'd preach. "Oh, it's simple. I'd tell the story, and then I'd say, *Don't do stupid stuff.* Then I'd say, *Go to lunch.* And the best part is, they wouldn't know if I was talking about you or the guy in the minivan."

This study is a little longer than her sermon. But it's the same idea.

For the next six weeks we're going to live in one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. I want to ask you to do something hard: read it as if you've never read it before.

You've heard 1 Corinthians 13 at weddings. You may have it framed on a wall. But here's what I've learned from teaching it: the descriptions in this chapter aren't things we don't understand. They're things we refuse to do. This study is about doing them.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Study Works

YOUR WEEK

WHEN	WHAT YOU'LL DO
Monday–Thursday	About 25–30 minutes a day. Read the passage for yourself, then work through the questions.
Friday	**Love on Purpose.** A practical challenge with a real person, and a prayer.
Weekends	Off. Rest, and come to group ready to talk.
Group	Once a week, about 90 minutes. Bring this book.

THREE KINDS OF QUESTIONS

SAY **What does it say?** Slow down and notice what's actually on the page.

MEAN **What does it mean?** What did it mean to the people who first heard it, and what does it mean now?

LIVE **How do I live it?** With the people closest to you, this week.

A FEW HELPS

Use any translation you like. Quotations in this study are from the New International Version. You don't need to know any Greek. Each week has one or two Greek words, explained simply, because in this chapter the Greek really matters: every description of love is a verb. Love is something you do.

This study goes with *Love Intentionally*, the book it grew out of. Each week points you to the matching chapters if you want to go further. They're free at capitolcitystore.com/love-intentionally.

If you get behind, don't quit. Come to group anyway.

Love Is Patient, Love Is Kind

Patience takes. Kindness gives.
Both start with the people closest to you.

READ FIRST

I had to go to the county courthouse to renew my car tags. You can do it by mail. I didn't. So I found a parking place downtown, which is its own miracle, and pulled in behind a pickup truck that had to cost a hundred thousand dollars. Out climbed a guy in work overalls. I decided on the spot that he probably owned every cornfield from here to Ames. That was just an assumption. Not a judgment. Mostly.

We were headed to the same place, so I followed him in. He walked up to the courthouse doors looking like a man who had a secret. The doors are automatic. You walk up, they open. That's the way it works. But when he got to them, he stopped, looked around, and waved both arms wildly. The doors opened. He walked in.

Now, you wave your arms like that to flag down a bus. To scare away geese. To swat a bee. Not to open a door.

It's one of those buildings with two sets of doors. He walked up to the second set and did the exact same thing. Stopped. Looked around. Waved both arms wildly. And guess what? The doors opened.

The problem is, they opened for everybody else too. No arm waving required. He didn't know that. I'm pretty sure one day, a long time ago, a door didn't open for him. He waved his arms, and it opened. And from that day on, that's how doors work.

We all do this. At some point you formed a conclusion about how love works, how much patience is reasonable and what people deserve from you. You've been waving your arms ever since. Not because it works, but because that's what you decided the last time you thought about it. This week, consider that the way you've been doing it might not be the only way.

THIS WEEK'S GREEK

μακροθυμία

makrothumia

MAK-RO-THOO-MEE-AH

Patience with people. Literally "long-tempered." You have the power to get even, to fire back or give the look, and you choose not to.

χρηστότης

chrēstotēs

KRAY-STAH-TAYS

Kindness. Goodness that is useful. Compassion in action: lending your strength to someone who needs it.

> **Go further this week:** *Love Intentionally*, Chapter 1, "Love Is Patient," and Chapter 2, "Love Is Kind."

The Chapter Everybody Knows

READ *1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13, then 1:10–12 and 3:1–3*

SAY

1 In 13:1–3, Paul lists impressive things a person could do without love. List them. What does he say each one is worth without love?

2 Count the descriptions of love in 13:4–8. How many describe what love does, and how many describe what love doesn't do?

MEAN

3 Paul wrote this to a real church. From 1:10–12 and 3:1–3, what was going wrong in Corinth?

4 In 12:31, Paul calls love "the most excellent way." Why do you think he places this chapter in the middle of a discussion about spiritual gifts?

LIVE

5 Which description in 13:4–8 comes easiest for you? Which one would the people closest to you say you struggle with most?

WORTH KNOWING

In English, the descriptions in verses 4–7 are mostly adjectives: patient, kind, not proud. In Greek they are verbs. Paul never defines love. He describes it in action. (See *Love Intentionally*, Introduction, "Three Kinds of Love.")

MY NOTES

WEEK 1 · TUESDAY

Jesus Is Patient With Us

READ *2 Peter 3:8–9, Matthew 26:69–75 and John 21:15–19*

SAY

1 According to 2 Peter 3:9, why is the Lord patient? What does he want?

2 In Matthew 26, how many times does Peter deny Jesus? How does each denial get worse?

MEAN

3 Peter uses the same family of words for "patient" that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13:4, and Peter had experienced that patience firsthand. Look up Matthew 14:28–31, Mark 9:33–34, John 13:6–9 and Matthew 26:40. How does Jesus respond each time Peter falls short?

4 In John 21, Jesus asks Peter the same question three times. Why three? What does Jesus give Peter instead of a lecture?

LIVE

5 Where has Jesus been patient with you, over and over? Then write the name of one person you've run out of patience with.

> *"You worry about your character, and let God worry about your reputation."*
>
> *Love Intentionally,* CHAPTER 1

FROM RICK · REGISTER FIVE

My wife and I were shopping at one of those places with a long row of registers. Each register has a light, and a voice announces, "Register number five is available." Everybody knows the unspoken rule: when a register opens, the person at the front of the line goes.

I was in a hurry. I had nowhere to be afterward. I just don't like lines. The lady in front of me was on her phone, loud enough that everyone could enjoy her conversation. *Ding.* "Register number five is available." She didn't move. My wife and I looked at each other. Finally she put her phone down, turned around to address the rest of the line, kicked her leg out for some reason and said, "Hee hee! I'm multitasking!"

My eyes got big. Multitasking is doing two things at once. She was barely tasking. And I was the one who needed patience.

MY NOTES

Walk, Keep in Step, Be Led

READ *Galatians 5:13–26*

SAY

1 Paul uses three phrases about the Holy Spirit in verses 16, 18 and 25. Write them down.

2 Find patience ("forbearance") and kindness in the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22–23. What other fruit sits beside them?

MEAN

3 "Walk by the Spirit" (v. 16) means living day by day in the Spirit's company. "Keep in step" (v. 25) is a military term: you march because you were told to. Being "led by the Spirit" (v. 18) is God changing you from the inside. Which of these is your part, and which is God's?

4 Why do you think Paul calls these things fruit rather than rules?

LIVE

5 Sometimes something blocks the Spirit's work in us: a habit, an attitude or a sin we've let slide. Read 1 John 1:9. Is there anything you need to bring to God today?

PATIENCE IS NOT BEING A DOORMAT

Makrothumia is strength on a leash: you could fire back, and you choose not to. It never means staying somewhere unsafe. If someone is threatening or harming you, patience is not the answer. Please talk to someone you trust.

MY NOTES

His Yoke Is Kind

READ *Matthew 11:28–30, Titus 3:3–5 and Ephesians 4:32*

SAY

1 Who does Jesus invite in Matthew 11:28, and what does he promise them?

2 How does Jesus describe himself in verse 29?

MEAN

3 *Weary* means worked to exhaustion. *Burdened* means a load that keeps getting dumped on you. The word for "easy" in verse 30 is *chrēstos*, from the same root as "kind" in 1 Corinthians 13:4. What does it mean that following Jesus is a kindness to your soul?

4 According to Titus 3:4–5, what did the kindness of God do for us? Did we earn it?

LIVE

5 Patience takes almost anything without retaliating. Kindness gives almost anything to help. Who in your inner circle is most weary or burdened right now? What could you carry for them this week?

6 One of the heaviest burdens we place on people is our expectations. Is there anyone close to you who feels you're impossible to please?

FROM RICK · IT'S EASY

Early one morning I was sitting in bed next to my wife, writing devotionals about kindness. I'm a church leader, remember. Meanwhile, my wife was trying to sync her earbuds to her phone. In full disclosure, it was my fault she had to sync them at all. I had taken them to the gym.

She sat there opening the little case and shutting it. Opening it. Shutting it. Every time, the phone popped up a message that said, in so many words, *Tap here to connect.* What a moment for a church leader to practice what he preaches.

Instead, I got irritated. I said, "Just touch the screen on the phone." And then I said this: "It's easy." And I didn't say it nice. I said it like, *Woman, you are interrupting me while I teach my church about kindness.*

It's not that we don't understand kindness. It's that we don't do it, starting at home.

MY NOTES

Love on Purpose

Start with the people closest to you: the person who wakes up next to you, your children, your parents, your roommate, your closest friend, the coworker you see every morning. Write up to six names.

YOUR CHALLENGE

Patience. Circle the name of the person who tests your patience most. The next time they push your buttons, don't say what you want to say. Then pray for them by name, not that they would stop irritating you, but that God would bless them.

Kindness. Put a star beside the person who is most worn out. Before group meets, do one specific, useful thing to lighten their load.

WHAT HAPPENED?

PRAY

Father, I decided a long time ago how much patience people deserve, and I've been waving my arms at the door ever since. Show me a better way. Make me patient with the people closest to me, the way Jesus has been patient with me. Help me notice who is tired, and give me strength to carry some of their weight. I can't do this on my own. Do it in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER · OPTIONAL

1. Read Exodus 34:6. God describes himself as "slow to anger." How does the Old Testament prepare us for makrothumia?
2. Read Romans 2:4. Where does God's kindness lead us?
3. Read Luke 10:30–37. Which person shows kindness that is useful?

Not Envious, Not Boastful, Not Proud

Envy is the thought. Bragging is the words.
Pride is what you become.

READ FIRST

I'll go first and confess my envy. I am jealous of women. Not for the reason you think. I'm jealous because you get to carry purses.

Think about it. Phone, keys, wallet, glasses, charger, gum, a pen, a granola bar, the receipt you might need someday. Ladies, you have a place for all of it, and nobody looks at you twice. I have pockets. And my pockets are full.

Now, I'm a bag collector. I love a good bag. Backpacks, briefcases, travel bags, I've got them. But a man purse? Culturally, for me, that's a stretch. I just can't pull it off. I've tried. I still need a place to put my stuff, and every time I see a woman reach into her purse and pull out exactly what she needs, I feel a little twinge.

That's funny, and it's harmless. But that little twinge, *why does she get that and I don't?*, is the same seed that kept a grown man standing outside his own family's party in one of the most famous stories Jesus ever told. This week we'll look at three things Paul says love doesn't do. They never travel alone. **Want it. Got it. Flaunt it.**

THIS WEEK'S GREEK

ζηλόω

zēloō
ZAY-LAH-OH

To envy. Where we get "zeal." A boiling desire for what someone else has.

περπερεύομαι

perpereuomai
PER-PER-YOO-OH-MY

To brag, to be a windbag. It appears only once in the New Testament: here.

φυσιόω

physioō
FOO-SEE-AH-OH

To be puffed up, like a balloon. Big on the outside, air on the inside.

> **Go further this week:** *Love Intentionally*, Chapter 3, "Want It, Got It, Flaunt It."

WEEK 2 · MONDAY

Are You Envious Because I Am Generous?

READ *Matthew 20:1–16, then James 3:13–18*

SAY

1 List the times of day the landowner hires workers. What did he promise the first group? What did he promise the others?

2 In verses 11–12, what exactly do the first workers complain about? Were they cheated?

MEAN

3 Read verse 15 slowly. The NIV says, "Are you envious because I am generous?" The older translations say, "Is your eye evil because I am good?" What does envy do to the way we see God's goodness to other people?

4 James 3:14–16 traces where envy leads. What words does James use for it, and what does he say grows from it?

LIVE

5 Envy isn't just wanting things. It's wanting what *she* has. Women often envy things we'd never say out loud: a marriage, a body, a calling, children, a friendship, a peaceful home, the way people light up when she walks in. What is your "purse," something harmless you envy? What is something not so harmless?

WORTH KNOWING

Every worker in the story got paid. Not one of them went home with nothing. Envy rarely starts with real need. It starts by comparing. (See *Love Intentionally*, Chapter 3, "Two Kinds of Envy.")

FROM RICK · SHE MUST HAVE THE SECRET

My wife and I work out together, but I think we go for slightly different reasons. This week she was on the bench doing a set of dumbbell presses, and the whole time she was talking to me. "Don't forget we have to take the trash out tonight, and then we have to stop at Hy-Vee on the way home, and then we have to call the kids…" The entire set. I didn't say anything, because whatever she's doing is clearly working. She must have the secret, and I don't.

When she finished, I asked, "How was it?" She laughed. "Hee hee, it was fun." That's my purse-level envy. Harmless. But it's the same seed.

MY NOTES

WEEK 2 · TUESDAY

If I Can't Have It, Neither Can You

READ *1 Kings 3:16–28, Genesis 37:3–11, 18–28 and Matthew 27:15–18*

SAY

1 In 1 Kings 3, what does each woman say when Solomon offers to divide the baby? What does each answer reveal about her heart?

2 In Genesis 37, list what fed the brothers' envy (verses 3–4, 5–8, 11). Where did it lead?

MEAN

3 Envy has two halves. The first says, *I want what you have.* The second says, *If I can't have it, I don't want you to have it either.* Where do you see each half in these three stories?

4 In Matthew 27:18, Pilate knew why the leaders handed Jesus over. The NIV says "self-interest," but the Greek word is envy. Why would religious leaders envy Jesus? What did he have that they wanted?

LIVE

5 The second half of envy is quiet. It sounds like a little relief when someone else's plans fall through, or a "bless her heart" with an edge. Be honest: have you ever felt a little glad when someone else didn't get what she wanted? What was underneath it?

Envy is a seed. Give it a little room and it grows into bragging, then pride, then division. That's why we deal with it at the seed.

Love Intentionally, CHAPTER 3

MY NOTES

What Do You Have That You Did Not Receive?

READ *1 Corinthians 4:6–7, 18–19; 8:1; Philippians 2:3–8; James 4:6–10*

SAY

1 Paul uses the word for "puffed up" six times in 1 Corinthians, and five come before chapter 13. From 4:6, 4:18–19 and 8:1, what were the Corinthians puffed up about?

2 Write out Paul's three questions in 1 Corinthians 4:7.

MEAN

3 In Philippians 2:5–8, list each step Jesus took downward. How is that the opposite of being puffed up?

4 James 4:6 says God opposes the proud. Verse 10 says who does the lifting. Why is it a relief that lifting us up is God's job, not ours?

LIVE

5 Bragging is rarely loud. It can sound like a humble complaint, a carefully chosen photo, or a story that somehow always comes back to us. Where are you most tempted to "dress the part," to look more put-together than you are?

6 Answer Paul's question for yourself. List five things you have that you did not earn.

FROM RICK · I DRIVE. YOU RIDE.

My wife and I were on our way to Hy-Vee one afternoon. I turned west into the setting sun, and it was pouring through the windshield of the truck. My wife said, "Stop. You have to stop." (I don't know if you ladies do this, but whenever she wants me to stop, she puts her hand up like a cat and grabs the door handle.) "Stop!"

"What are you talking about? I'm fine." I had my Maui Jim sunglasses on. I also have a creation called a *sun visor.* "Stop! I can't see where we're going!"

So I said to her, as nicely as I possibly could, "You don't need to see. I can see. I can park. I drive. You ride." She didn't like it. I liked it a lot. That's what puffed up sounds like.

MY NOTES

Everything I Have Is Yours

READ *Luke 15:11–32, then Ephesians 2:8–10*

SAY

1 In verses 28–30, what does the older brother do, and what does he say? Notice what he calls his brother. Why does that matter?

2 What does the father do in verse 28? What two things does he say in verse 31?

MEAN

3 The older brother was envious of a young goat while standing on a ranch that already belonged to him. How does envy make us forget what we already have?

4 Ephesians 2:9 says we are saved by grace "so that no one can boast." Verse 10 calls us God's handiwork, his masterpiece. If you are God's masterpiece, how does that change the way you look at another woman's gifts?

LIVE

5 Jesus ends the story without telling us whether the older brother went in. Whose good news do you need to celebrate, even if part of you would rather stay out in the field with your arms crossed?

The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Love Intentionally, CHAPTER 3

WORTH KNOWING

The father leaves his own party to plead with the son who won't come in. God pursues the proud and the envious just as he runs to the one who wandered off. Both sons needed grace. (See *Love Intentionally*, Chapter 3, "Everything I Have Is Yours.")

MY NOTES

Love on Purpose

Think of the women in your life: sisters, friends, neighbors, coworkers, other moms, women at church. Write up to six names, including at least one woman you have quietly compared yourself to.

YOUR CHALLENGE

Rejoice. Read Romans 12:15. Circle one name. Before group meets, celebrate her out loud with a note, a text, a call or a small gift, especially for something you wish you had.

Ask. Ask someone close to you, "Where do you see envy, bragging or pride in me?" Don't defend yourself. Just say thank you. If you need to make something right, use the APOLOGY on the next page.

WHAT HAPPENED?

PRAY

Father, thank you that everything I have is a gift from you. Forgive me for the times I've stood outside the party, keeping score and wanting what you gave someone else, while everything you have was already mine. Let the air out of my pride. Make me a woman who rejoices when others rejoice and who brags only about you. Thank you that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. In Jesus' name, amen.

When You Get It Wrong

Envy, bragging and pride hurt the people closest to us first. Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12). When we don't, we make it right. Two things to remember: an apology doesn't have to be accepted to be right, and when someone really owns it, let it be over.

AN APOLOGY

A **Admit it.** "I was wrong." Not "if I hurt you."

P **Put it right away.** Don't let it sit for days.

O **Offer understanding, not excuses.** Explain without making it her fault.

L **Lose the "but."** "I'm sorry, but…" isn't an apology.

O **Only say what you mean.** Don't promise what you won't do.

G **Get specific.** Name what you did and how it landed.

Y **You matter to me.** Say it. That's why you're apologizing.

GO DEEPER · OPTIONAL

1. Read Psalm 73. Asaph envied people who seemed to have it easy. What changed his perspective (verses 16–17, 23–26)?
2. Read Philippians 4:11–13. Paul says contentment is something he *learned*. How might you practice it this week?
3. Read 1 Peter 5:5–6. What does it look like to be "clothed with humility" with the women around you?
4. Read Jeremiah 9:23–24. If you're going to boast, what does God say to boast about?

MY NOTES

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rick and Joy Melick

Rick Melick has served as senior pastor of Capitol City Church in Des Moines, Iowa, since 2016. A pastor and church planter for more than three decades, he has planted churches in California and Arkansas and served churches in Texas, Tennessee and Washington. He also serves as a chaplain with the Iowa State Patrol. This study grew out of his book and teaching series *Love Intentionally*.

Joy Melick grew up on a cattle ranch in northern Arkansas: practical, frugal and a two-ratchet-strap kind of person. She helped shape and edit this study. As you've probably noticed, she is also the hero of most of its stories.

Rick and Joy have been married since 1989. They are best friends and work out together five days a week, though, as you read in Week 2, not always for the same reasons. They have two grown sons, two daughters-in-law who are the daughters they never had, and grandchildren who call Rick "Bapo." Their family has taught them as much about love as any commentary ever has.