**1 Corinthians 13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3If I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant. 5It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs. 6It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. 7It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophetic gifts, they will be done away with; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be done away with. 9For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, 10but when that which is complete has come, that which is partial will be done away with. 11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things. 12Now we see indirectly using a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I was fully known. 13So now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.**

Selfless Love Marches Victorious Over Self-Glorification

Doing a puzzle is supposed to be such a relaxing activity. You sit at the table and match the space and the pieces of the puzzle so that the picture on the cover of the box comes together on the table in front of you. There is joy as you place the individual pieces; each a step closer to the completion.

Puzzles start out easy enough. You flip each of the piece so the picture side is up. Then, you sort to find all the edge pieces so that you at least have a frame. Often after these easy parts of the puzzle are done, frustration sets in. Many puzzles have been thrown back in the box destroying all the work already done because it was just too tough. The task was too great. How frustrating it can be to be so close to completing the puzzle and yet be so burdened by those pieces waiting to be put into place.

So, it is with love. Love is to be a source of relaxation but it takes work. It is at the same time quite easy and frustratingly difficult. We all see the picture of love and what the final result is to be, but putting is all together so that it is what we see before us is not an easy task. Love is the puzzle of life.

When it comes to the life of a Christian, we don’t see the complete picture. Our physical eyes and our mind aren’t able to grasp fully all that love includes. But we know that source of all love is our God. Love lived out by the gift God bestowed upon us through his Son, Jesus Christ. It’s Jesus that is our picture on the cover of the box that God tells us to follow as we put our lives together. It is Jesus who completes the picture for the life of the child of God.

As we live as a child of God, there are just so many pieces. Look at all of them list that love is: **Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant. 5It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs. 6It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. 7It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8Love never comes to an end.** How might is be that all of those pieces can go together? How can we put them together so that the whole picture of love is complete? If you try to put them all together you will find that love is too big, too difficult, too hard for you to put together. Just reading through that list is like flipping the pieces over. Some we might easily see exactly where they are to go but those ones are just like edge piece falling into place. Finding out how to place all the other pieces of love within that border is often the source of continual frustration.

It's frustrating because love keeps a low profile. It seeks to flatten itself. It doesn’t draw attention to itself and the things is has done. The whole task of love is to put in all the effort, to strive with all your strength, to not leave anything out of place, to align everything just where it is supposed to fit; all with it not being for you.

No matter how hard you try, you are going to struggle with completing, with living love. How do I know? Because you’re sinners. Look at the list of things love is: patient, kind, contentedness, modest, humble, acts decently, caring, pleasant, etc. Living love means being able to always show all those things all the time with everyone. Failing to do so, you might have the border together, but it will not be complete.

Love isn’t about just doing the easy part and then sticking the whole thing back in the box undone. Love is more than the good feelings, more than the working together, more than the give and take. Love is putting the whole things together and working on it until all the pieces are in just the right spot. It stops acting like a child that quickly losses interest and go on to other things claiming that the task was too hard to complete. Christian stick at it. Not leaving love undone but keep examining and searching for the right piece at the right time in the right place.

How do you stick with it to complete the puzzle? Continue to look at the cover of the box, the picture of Jesus. It is Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the grave that paid the price for your sins and my sins. But God’s gift of faith, God shows us what love looks like. By God’s Word and the Sacraments, God encourages and reveals where and how love goes together as a work in progress. We know what the picture is to look like; but we don’t have a complete picture until all the pieces fall into place.

**Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I was fully known.** Our sinful natures create the frustration of not having the picture complete on this side of heaven. It likes to take pieces and mix them up. We wish we knew fully now what we will know fully in the future; how all these parts of life are to fit together to serve Christ. But we are fully known by our Lord. He is the one who has through death’s door and risen victorious from the grave for us. We take comfort in that. The Lord who made us knows our needs. He knows our concerns that are deep within our hearts. He knows he frustrations we feel when our life is faced with all the pieces not being the in places where we want them to be.

Replace the word love with the name Jesus. Jesus **is patient.** Jesus **is kind.** Jesus **does not envy.** Jesus **does not brag.** Jesus **is not arrogant. 5**Jesus **does not behave indecently.** Jesus **is not selfish.** Jesus **is not irritable.** Jesus **does not keep a record of wrongs. 6**Jesus **does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. 7**Jesus **bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8**Jesus **never comes to an end.** You need him not just as the picture on the cover of your box but to give you that love through his forgiveness he won for you on the cross. This forgiveness has opened the box at set a life before you to live to completion. This forgiveness will motivate and empower you to be selfless to let the pieces go where God has assigned them to go, to even allow a piece you might think surely has its place where fits so well actually be in the place where God wants it.

The only way to tap into this love is through the study of God’s Word. The temptation can be to stop flipping over pieces to see where they match up, to think the whole puzzle is ruined, and to in frustration give up. But let me remind you to look because at the picture of the one is on the cover, Jesus.

You, dearly loved over, are known by Jesus. He knows you needs. By his Word and Sacrament, he blesses all of us with his presence, which gives us forgiveness, life, encouragement, and guidance. But his Word of promise through his means of grace he accompanies us when the picture of our life, like a puzzle, is incomplete for our eyes to behold. But his Word of promise through his means of grace we are fully known so that we can with selfless love be parts of the greater picture of his love to the world and rejoice that Jesus has made us his. Stick at brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

Points to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* Why is love difficult to describe?
* List and define three of the things love is.
* How can you tell whether love is real love?
* Identify that biggest hurdle you have that stops you from showing love.
* How does the love of God address that hurdle?

Prayer: Jesus, we praise you with our whole being, for you have done wonderful things for us. At the cross we find full forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. At the empty tomb, we find comfort, joy, and hope. Your resurrection proves that you are God’s Son. We further praise you for your Word of truth, by which we have been made wise unto salvation through faith.

Our Lord and Savior, we praise you for your never-failing presence in our lives and constant protection; for your gift to us of the Spirit; for the washing of our sins in Baptism, and our communion with you in the Lord’s Supper; for your help in troubles, as well as your healing of our illnesses; and for your comfort to ease our sorrow. For these and all other blessing which only come from your love for us may our tongues be loosed to speak and sing your praise both now and in eternity.

Precious Redeemer, make your Word, through which you come to us, sweet to us and let it nourish our faith. We ask that you will continue to send your love upon us as you have promised. To the glory of your saving name, we ask these things. Amen.