

Conscientious Christians have a deep desire to be fruitful for Christ. The critical question is, “How can I be most fruitful?” Dr. Mack, from years of faithful service for Christ, has gleaned a wonderful way for you to increase the fruitfulness of your life from the Scriptures. This book will be a powerful tool in identifying areas of necessary change in order to have a maximum impact for Christ. I highly recommend this book to any Christian who wishes to change and grow in Christlikeness.

—**John D. Street**, Chair, MABC Graduate Program,
The Master’s College and Seminary

Wayne Mack has written a comprehensive book on how to truly have a maximum impact—living a fruitful life of love for others. This book is full of practical stories, clear practical application, and most importantly of all, Scriptures explained in their context. What a wonderful study to motivate Christians in their love for others because of what the Lord has done for us!

—**Martha Peace**, Biblical Counselor, Author of *The Excellent Wife*

Wayne Mack has written yet another biblical, practical book about a critical subject: how to influence others by exercising genuine Christlike love. After discussing the traits of such love in the context of 1 Corinthians 13, Dr. Mack provides numerous applications for review and discussion. *Maximum Impact* shows us the Christian way of winning friends and influencing people. If every Christian read this book and put it into practice, the church would truly be salt and light in the world.

—**Joel R. Beeke**, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

Wayne has done it again! He has written another wonderfully practical volume—this time breaking down the ultimate Christian character quality of love into easily digested, bite-sized pieces that all can readily consume. It’s a book that every Christian should read!

—**Lou Priolo**, Director, Center for Biblical Counseling, Eastwood
Presbyterian Church, Author of *Pleasing People*

Once again the body of Christ wonderfully receives what we have come to expect from the writings of Wayne Mack: clear and compelling

teaching about the dynamics of the Christian life. His combination of biblical word studies, generous scriptural cross-referencing, and humble, heart-searching questions for personal application (especially at the end of each chapter) all make for a fresh understanding of the so-called love chapter in our Bible. Take my advice and read 1 Corinthians 13, and alongside it, Wayne Mack's book. You'll be so grateful you did!

—**Lance Quinn**, Pastor-Teacher, The Bible Church of Little Rock

This book is one of those can't-put-it-down volumes, which quickly draws the reader in by the pastoral heart and practical insights of the author. From years of ministry and pastoral counseling experience, Dr. Mack brings out implications from Scripture rarely considered in today's superficial culture of cheap love and throwaway relationships. His challenging questions at the end of each chapter are a tremendous tool for churches and Bible study groups that desire a deeper, yet intensely practical guide to loving one another in a way that brings maximum impact to your life for the glory of Jesus Christ. I wholeheartedly recommend it!

—**Jerry Wragg**, Pastor, Grace Immanuel Bible Church

Maximum Impact is Dr. Mack's magnum opus! It encapsulates his lifelong teaching, counseling, and service to the people of God. With this tender exposition of one of the most familiar passages in the Bible, he has taught us in word what he and his precious wife live out in practice. Knowledge and application of these important principles are the basis to guide our every relationship and every endeavor. The Bible provides everything we need for life and godliness, and as you'll soon see, this life-changing passage (1 Corinthians 12:31–13:18) may be the most important teaching to affect our influence for Christ in our own world—in the situations and places that God has sovereignly assigned for us.

—**Deborah Howard**, Author of *Where Is God in All of This?*

Wayne and Carol Mack came into my life when they moved to South Africa in 2005. They both ooze a joyful, caring, and loving attitude. Their theology is spot-on and deeply ingrained. But most of all, they humbly, obediently, and visibly live out what they believe. And that

has more impact than flowery words and impressive proclamations. They showed me love, and I felt it; they did not have to tell me that they loved me. And here in this book Wayne lifts the veil to how they manage to live out love in such a practical and tangible way. If you and I can manage to apply only 20 percent of what Wayne teaches us in *Maximum Impact*, your life and those around you will be greatly enriched and God will be glorified.

—**Ian Murray**, Elder, Grace Fellowship Church

Dr. Mack has been one of the biggest mentors in my life, and now he can be yours too through this book. If ever I have known a man committed to living a fruitful life and having maximum impact, it is Dr. Mack. What a great opportunity in this book for us to learn better how to imitate such fruitfulness in our own lives.

—**Timothy Cantrell**, Pastor, Antioch Bible Church

Dr. Mack's book *Maximum Impact* provides readers with a look into ways they can personally make an eternal mark on the lives of others for Christ's sake. He uses very practical examples to show one's own need for growth in God's truth and in the lives of others to the glory of God.

—**Douglas Nichols**, Founder and Director Emeritus,
Action International

Wayne skillfully uses God's Word as a broom to sweep out motives, attitudes, and actions that keep us from loving others and having a maximum impact for Christ. Practical applications pulsate through this book and leave you no room to escape. If you don't want to change, put it down now.

—**Sybrand de Swardt**, Pastor,
Lynnwood Baptist Church

Dr. Mack does the church the immense favor of calling attention, in a thoroughly biblical way, to Christian fruitfulness, thereby raising it to the lofty standard by which God would have us measure it. Pastors seeking authentic congregational love should not hesitate to commend *Maximum Impact* to their flock.

—**Choolwe Mwetwa**, Pastor, Central Baptist Church

Through *Maximum Impact*, God teaches Christians how to have a maximum love impact in a world of un-love. This thorough biblical exposition of 1 Corinthians 13 by Dr. Wayne Mack is matched with vivid practical application, challenging the reader to examine and change his heart and life. I candidly recommend it, especially for personal reflection and group discussion.

—**Vorster Combrink**, Executive, Association for Biblical Counseling and Education, Manager, Counseling Ministry of Radio Pulpit

Comprehensive, convicting, and packed with gems of priceless truth. Another book that is vintage Mack! Some write from an armchair. Others from a heart shaped by Christ and His Word. Wayne Mack is one of the latter. Handle with care—you will never love or attempt to love in quite the same way again!

—**Roland Eskinazi**, Pastor, Goodwood Baptist Church

For almost two decades of pastoral ministry I have prayed, “Lord, since You taught the Thessalonian believers to love (1 Thess. 4:9), I am confident You can teach me too. Please teach me to love.” The book you hold in your hands is an answer to my prayers. Like a good friend and loving mentor, Wayne Mack comes alongside, as an instrument in the Spirit’s hand, to give us a Bible-saturated challenge to love others as Christ loves us. Read this book, apply it, and you will never be the same.

—**Paul Tautges**, Pastor-Teacher, Immanuel Bible Church

Worldly philosophy and effort have failed us. In *Maximum Impact*, however, Wayne Mack placards something that will never fail us—Christlike love (*agapē*). All who care to read and practice the words of this book will have no less than an ennobling experience.

—**Ronald Kalifungwa**, Pastor, Lusaka Baptist Church

If every Christian lived according to what is exhorted in this book, the local church would be a wonderful place and nonbelievers would be drawn to the church like bees to honey.

—**Chee-Eng Tan**, Elder, The Fisherman of Christ Fellowship

MAXIMUM IMPACT

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LIVING AND LOVING FOR
GOD'S GLORY

WAYNE A. MACK



P U B L I S H I N G
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the opening pages of this book, I want to do the biblical thing in giving honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7).

First, I want to acknowledge my deep appreciation to Deborah Howard, who took my extensive notes and used her considerable writing skills to shape them into the form that you find in this book. At times, I was tempted to scrap the whole project in that I was already extremely busy, plus I did not want to produce a book just for the sake of producing a book. At those times, my words to her were something like this: “Our bookshelves and bookstores are already clogged with books that contain shallow and unbiblical material. If the whole project should be scrapped, now is the time to decide, before I sign the contract. Let’s publish this book only if it can make a valuable contribution to the church and to Christians.” Her words to me, which kept me at it, were, “It’s a great book! Of course it should be published! It is going to be an important book, Dr. Mack.” So with that encouragement from someone whose editorial skills and Christian commitment I respect, I joyfully pressed on, preparing this book for publication. Thank you, Deborah.

In terms of giving honor I also want to express my thanks to Marvin Padgett, vice president-editorial of P&R Publishing, who immediately warmed to the idea of producing this book. As we proceeded, his positive and enthusiastic remarks (“What good news about *Maximum Impact*. Looks great! We want to publish your book. A study of 1 Corinthians 13 will be super. I have always been challenged by the message of this passage.”) reinforced the idea that the contents of this biblically based

tome could be of significant value to God's people. I could not ask for a better editorial relationship than the one I have enjoyed with Marvin. So thanks, my brother, for your valuable assistance.

Again, I must express my gratitude to the dear woman whom God has given to me as a suitable "helper" in every area of my life and ministry. As usual, she has assisted me in writing this book by her prayers and careful proofreading and by making suggestions about grammar and words or expressions that might improve the way some statement was made. Carol has spent long periods of time skillfully reworking some sections of the book so that the truth is still there, but it is presented in a much more readable and interesting way. What a joy it has been for me to work together with my wife on this project. So many thanks to the one who has stood with me as we have ministered together for over fifty-two years.

I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to certain men, who aren't even aware that I have written this book, for the help they have been to me as I have recorded its contents on paper. During the more than twelve months in which this manuscript was being developed, I was blessed and challenged by the insights and stimulation I gained from books by Jonathan Edwards (*Charity and Its Fruits*), Alexander Strauch (*A Christian Leader's Guide to Leading with Love*), John MacArthur (*Commentary on 1 Corinthians*), and several commentaries by other Bible scholars. I also want to mention my deep appreciation to Ian Murray and Elsa Marais, who carefully read the book and made useful stylistic comments; to Steve Viars for writing a meaningful and excellent foreword; and to all the men and women who have read the material in manuscript form and written endorsements for the book. Any errors in this book are totally my fault, but some of the worthwhile thoughts are certainly due to the influence of the people whose names I have just cited. So I thank them for the part they have played in the completion of this work.

FOREWORD

I still remember the first day I laid eyes on Wayne Mack. I was a squeaky-clean doctoral student at Westminster Seminary, and Dr. Mack was one of my first-year professors in biblical counseling. I am not sure if doctoral students are supposed to be nervous, but I certainly was. It wasn't exactly the "first day of kindergarten" kind of nervousness, but I definitely had a lot of questions rumbling around my mind. Would I be able to handle the work? Would the instruction be based on Scripture? Would this degree program enhance my desire to help others?

Then Wayne Mack began speaking. Within minutes, I found myself praising God for what He was allowing me to experience. Wayne spoke with compassion, conviction, and clarity. He could pack more Bible verses into a single sentence than I could put into a sermon. I felt that I was listening to a cross between the apostle Paul, my grandpa, a trusted friend, and someone who gave clear evidence of having long walked with Christ. My concerns about the degree program melted away, and I decided then and there that I wanted to hear from Wayne Mack as long and as often as possible.

That occurred over twenty-five years ago, and I have since had the unexpected privilege of becoming one of Wayne's collaborators and associates. It was one of the sweet surprises of Christian ministry, when my teacher and mentor became my confidant and friend. I know that I speak for many when I praise the Lord for using Wayne to have maximum impact on my life by modeling biblical love to me.

I believe it is highly appropriate that Dr. Mack has written a book that unpacks the great love chapter in God's Word, 1 Corinthians 13. There are three reasons why I especially encourage you to read and carefully study this wonderful book.

First, Wayne's discussion of how to have maximum impact comes directly from the words of Scripture. So often in our day, books about leadership and impact are long on secular logic and short on the Word of God. Thankfully, Dr. Mack has taken the opposite approach. Paragraph after paragraph is devoted to a careful exposition of God's view on the subject of how to make a difference in someone else's life. Wayne takes time to set these verses in their original context so that people like you and me can confidently apply what we are reading.

Anyone familiar with Wayne's prior works can attest that fidelity to the Scripture is a hallmark of his ministry. I can even remember times back in school when I was tempted to take out a pen and make notes while Dr. Mack prayed. I do not think I have ever walked away from a discussion with Wayne when I have not learned or been reminded of something else from the Bible. This new book is equally trustworthy.

Second, *Maximum Impact* is intensely practical. It is obvious that Dr. Mack has spent many hours talking to real people with significant questions, hurts, and struggles. This book is anything but a dry theological treatise by an ivory-tower academician. Wayne knows people, and he loves them.

The time you spend studying these pages will provide solid and specific answers to the questions you have about how to grow in biblical love. You will not be left scratching your head about how to apply the principles, because, like any wise counselor, Wayne knows that the task is not complete until the hearer knows how to be a doer of the Word. You will be challenged to take definite and understandable steps in your quest to have maximum impact in the lives of those the Lord has placed around you.

Third, this book will challenge you at the level of the heart. Love is not a set of behaviors that are arbitrarily pasted on the outer man. As Wayne will carefully explain, you cannot *be* loving until you *are* loving.

That might mean taking the time to evaluate various areas of your heart that need to change. Before you can have maximum impact on others, you might have to allow Wayne to use God's Word to have maximum impact on you. But speaking for a long line of men and women who have been helped by Dr. Mack's life and teaching, I guarantee that the process will be more than worth it if the end result is a heart that has been transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Thank you, Wayne, for allowing God to make you into a loving man. And thank You, Lord, for allowing such a loving man to have maximum impact on me.

Pastor Steve Viars, Faith Baptist Church, Lafayette, Indiana

INTRODUCTION

Little did I know on that cold, damp November day in 2007, when Carol and I arrived in Germany to begin a time of ministry there, that the end result of that ministry trip would be a book—a book about how to live a life of fruitfulness that will impact others. The weather was cold and damp, but we had a very wonderful time filled with joy, beauty, warm fellowship, rewarding service—and hard work. It was during this time that we visited with a seventy-year-old man who had lived in Napa Valley, California.

Napa Valley is famous for its fruit farms and vineyards. This man had worked in its fertile fields for more than forty years. In fact, he had gone to college and majored in agriculture, specializing in growing fruit trees and vineyards. As we visited with this man, I learned more about growing fruit and grapevines than I had ever known. He was a veritable storehouse of information about this subject, and we found it fascinating. We asked him many questions, and he gave us numerous insights about what is necessary if someone is to be a successful, productive fruit grower.

In a sense the conversations we had with this man motivated me to do a rather thorough biblical study of the theme of being a successful *Christian fruit* grower. I had already known that the Bible is replete with admonitions and instructions indicating that God wants all Christians—not just pastors or church leaders—to be prolific bearers of certain kinds of fruit. For example, I knew that we find this emphasis on bearing fruit in:

1. the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:17–20
2. the parable of the four soils in Matthew 13:18–23
3. Jesus’ teaching to His disciples in John 15:8, 16
4. Paul’s teaching in Romans 7:4
5. Paul’s prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:11
6. His teaching to the Colossians in Colossians 1:6

I also knew that these passages are the tip of the iceberg of many other passages that teach the same idea.

My study of Christian fruit-bearing also led me to the conclusion not only that it is God’s will that every Christian bear fruit, but that it is God’s desire for us to bear *different kinds* of fruit:

1. the fruit of personal character (Gal. 5:22–23)
2. the fruit of righteousness (Phil. 1:11)
3. the fruit of holiness (Rom. 6:22)
4. the fruit of goodness (Eph. 5:9)
5. the fruit of repentance (Luke 3:8)
6. the fruit of bringing people to Christ or building them up in Christ (Rom. 1:13; 15:25–28)
7. the fruit of living lives that will bring praise and glory to God (Heb. 13:15; Phil. 1:11).

In other words, the Bible makes it clear that God not only wants us to bear fruit, but wants us to bear many kinds of fruit. Sometimes being fruitful means that we are to live our lives in such a way that will bring glory and praise to God (Phil. 1:11). Sometimes, as the book of Hebrews teaches, the fruit He wants from us is the fruit of our lips, which involves giving praise and thanks to His name. “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb. 13:15).

There are times when the Bible speaks of God’s desire for us to be fruitful in terms of the spiritual impact we have on others—having an effective ministry with others in terms of their spiritual lives, in terms of building up the church, in terms of bringing them to Christ, in terms of

helping them to grow in Christ and become more like Christ and more useful in the church and world. In Romans 1:13 Paul refers to this kind of fruitfulness when he says, “I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), *in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles*” (see also Rom. 15:25–28; Col. 1:3–6).

This biblical emphasis on fruit-bearing has motivated me to write this book in which I will dwell on the theme of how to make a maximum impact for Christ. In it I will be presenting some suggestions and instruction aimed at helping us grow these different kinds of fruit! In it I will primarily focus on what God says is a fundamental requirement for bearing fruit in terms of our spiritual impact on others in our families, in our churches, and in our world.

While the primary focus of the book will be on making a maximum impact on others for Christ, I also write with the conviction that the different kinds of fruit we offer up to Christ with our lives cannot be easily separated. In other words, I understand that we will never be fruitful in making a spiritual impact on others or in bringing glory to God if we are not growing in personal holiness, and if we are not bearing the various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

In effect, I am saying that you can’t have one kind of biblical fruit without the others—they are inextricably related and intertwined. At times, you can’t see where one ends and the other begins!

And while I recognize this to be true, I want you to know that I still intend to make the primary focus of this book about how to live a life of fruitfulness *in terms of our spiritual impact on others*. Though all kinds of fruitfulness are important, I believe this one is among the “cream of the crop,” because it causes us to carry out the Lord’s frequently repeated great command to love our brothers.

1



THE “OVER THE TOP” WAY TO MAKE AN IMPACT: PART 1

I was with a friend several years ago who was quite annoyed at being asked if he was a senior citizen. (I was glad to be asked—it meant we qualified for a discount!) Because I am a senior citizen (at 74 waitresses don’t ask me if I am a pensioner anymore) and have been a Christian for 58 years and in what is called full-time ministry for 52 years, I have often been asked to answer questions such as: What is involved in making a maximum impact for Christ in the lives of others? What is the most important factor in being a prolific fruit-grower in terms of bringing people to Christ and building them up in Christ? How do I keep from wasting my life and ending up with nothing but leaves on the tree of my life?

As I have thought and prayed about these questions and sought to discern the primary biblical answer to them, I have come to the conclusion that the main answer is found in one very familiar passage of Scripture. It’s found in many other passages as well, and throughout this book we will allude to some of the other passages, but I want to

primarily focus on one passage of Scripture, because it pulls the answer together in such a way that it is hard to miss.

The passage I’m referring to is 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:8. In this well-known passage, Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, does several things. First he clearly identifies what the most important factor is; then he exposes some erroneous ideas about how to have a fruitful life and ministry; and third he uses a number of specific descriptive phrases to illustrate what this most important maximum-impact factor will look like in real-life relationships.

When you read that the contents of this book will involve an exposition and application of 1 Corinthians 13, some of you may be inclined to stop reading and put the book aside because this passage is certainly one of the best-known portions of Scripture. If that is your inclination, I can identify with you because that is what I might have been inclined to do if I were in your place. In fact, I resisted preaching on this passage and writing this book because I thought that I had already mined the depths of this section of Scripture. I had memorized this passage. I had often meditated on it. I had studied it. I had read Jonathan Edwards’s exposition of this magnificent chapter. I had preached numerous messages on it at different churches and retreats. What more could I discover in this section of Scripture than I had already uncovered?

Besides that, I resisted preaching or writing on this portion because I thought that most people would think there was nothing contained in 1 Corinthians 13 that they didn’t already know. Yet in spite of these thoughts, I couldn’t get this passage about love out of my mind. I thought about it. I prayed for direction concerning the subject of my next series of messages and the next book I should write. I knew that I needed to be personally challenged in this area. From observation in ministry and especially in counseling, I was convinced that real love is woefully lacking in many lives and churches. I was aware that churches and families were being shattered by a lack of love. I was concerned about the relative spiritual fruitlessness of many Christians. I understood that we as Christians should be bearing much fruit for God. I became increasingly convinced, as I reflected on this passage, that our lack of fruitfulness as Christians is often connected with our lovelessness. My reflections on

this portion led me to the conclusion that understanding and applying truths of 1 Corinthians 13 was a key factor in becoming a prolific bearer of spiritual fruit, which would bring glory to God (John 15:8).

As I prayed and pondered, my initial resistance was overcome, and I decided that there were many valid godly reasons for expositing and writing on this important section of Scripture. As we go through the rest of chapter 1 and chapter 2 (and other chapters), I'll be explaining and emphasizing why this passage and its teaching on real love are so significant. For now, if you still are not fully persuaded that this passage and its subject are of utmost importance, please read on; and if you have a sensitivity to biblical truth, you will soon see why I am excited about the potential for good that the teaching found in this book may bring to fruition.

Over the years, it has been my privilege to write many other books, but I have not written any that I am more passionate about than this one. I say that because my newer, and deeper, examination of this passage in the last two years has rocked my world in a way that it has never been rocked before. My hope is that what God has done and is doing in my life through the deeper insights I have gleaned through my intense study, He will do in the lives of many others as they peruse and reflect on the truths found in this great passage of God's Word. So if your first thought was that a new study of 1 Corinthians 13 would not be worth your time, please hang on—don't jump to that conclusion too fast. Instead, I urge you to come to a study of this book expecting that you will be challenged, enlightened, convicted, and changed into an even more loving person.

As you read the chapters of this book, I encourage you to begin your consideration of every portion with prayer. In that prayer, ask God to give you a submissive heart, a heart that is eager and willing to be challenged, enlightened, instructed, convicted, and changed. Then, carefully and thoughtfully read the contents of the chapter, seeking to understand in a new and fresh way what each part of this magnificent passage says about how to have a fruitful, God-honoring, and impactful life. Conclude each reading session by completing the review, reflection, application, and discussion assignments at the end of each chapter.

And now, before we begin to explore the meaning of each phrase, let's begin our actual study of 1 Corinthians 13 by quoting the passage itself:

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. (1 Cor. 12:31–13:8 NASB)

The Broader Context

First, as we look at this passage I want to mention the broader context for this wonderful passage of Scripture. This passage was originally written to the church at Corinth, located in Greece, while Paul was ministering in Ephesus, which is in present-day Turkey.

Regarding the Christians who were part of the church in this place, Paul tells us that they had been sanctified (1:2), that they were recipients of the grace of God (1:4), and that many of the people in the church at Corinth were gifted by God (1:5–7). In the first twelve chapters, Paul deals with a number of issues that were going on in the church and lives of the people there.

For example, he wrote that he had heard that some of the people in the church were manifesting pride and arrogance. Others were guilty of immorality, and the church wasn't handling the situation rightly. He covered other topics such as the matter of believers' taking other believers to court, marriage and divorce concerns, Christian liberty issues,

and the idolatry question. He helped the Corinthian church, and us, understand why we feel and behave as badly as we sometimes do. He explained issues related to relationships between men and women as well as relationships in the church—including how we are to practice the Lord’s Supper (communion).

In chapters 12–14, Paul explores the difficult issue related to misunderstandings and confusion about spiritual gifts. In this section, he deals with mistakes made in trying to live a fruitful life and have an affirmative ministry for Christ. It was evident that the Corinthians were confused about how to make an impact for Christ, which involved erroneous thinking about the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit and the role they play in church growth and maturity.

Chapter 12 indicates their confusion about the gifts of the Spirit—among other things, they considered those in possession of some of the more spectacular gifts more important or personally holy than others in the church. They didn’t seem to comprehend why everyone couldn’t have *all* the gifts. Some apparently believed the extraordinary gifts were more important and useful than the ordinary gifts of preaching and teaching.

We also read in chapters 12–14 that the apostle Paul believed he needed to make it clear that the erroneous way the church was using these gifts was causing confusion and becoming a hindrance to the work of Christ. The people who believed they possessed these gifts were becoming proud and unsubmissive. In fact, several passages in this book to the Corinthians indicate that having extraordinary and unusual spiritual gifts doesn’t necessarily equal being godly and spiritual (see 1:10–11; 3:1–3, 16–21; 4:1–5, 17–19; chaps. 5–6).

These people didn’t understand the purpose for which the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were given. They didn’t realize that until the whole canon of Scripture was completed, these gifts of the Spirit served a very useful purpose, but after that were not needed. According to Hebrews 2:3–4, these gifts were given to validate the message of the apostles who had heard Jesus. They were limited to the apostolic age, and were to be operative as long as there were apostles around, and until the canon of Scripture was complete.

Read what Jonathan Edwards wrote about these gifts in his excellent book *Charity and Its Fruits*:

Ordinary and extraordinary.—The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, such as the gift of tongues, of miracles, of prophecy, etc., are called extraordinary, because they are such as are not given in the ordinary course of God’s providence. They are not bestowed in the way of God’s ordinary providential dealing with his children, but only on extraordinary occasions, as they were bestowed on the prophets and apostles to enable them to reveal the mind and will of God before the canon of Scripture was complete, and so on the primitive Church, in order to the founding and establishing of it in the world. But since the canon of the Scripture has been completed, and the Christian Church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased. But the ordinary gifts of the Spirit are such as are continued to the Church of God throughout all ages; such gifts as are granted in conviction and conversion, and such as appertain to the building up of the saints in holiness and comfort.

It may be observed, then, that the distinction of the gifts of the Spirit into ordinary and extraordinary, is very different from the other distinction into common and special; for some of the ordinary gifts, such as faith, hope, charity, are not common gifts. They are such gifts as God ordinarily bestows on his Church in all ages, but they are not common to the godly and the ungodly; they are peculiar to the godly. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are common gifts. The gifts of tongues, of miracles, of prophecy, etc., although they are not ordinarily bestowed on the Christian Church, but only on extraordinary occasions, yet are not peculiar to the godly, for many ungodly men have had these gifts (Matt. vii, 22, 23)—“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”¹

Further, the Corinthians were confused about the significance of these extraordinary gifts to the person possessing them—what did

1. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 29–30.

it mean about that individual? If someone had the gift of speaking in tongues, of working miracles, did that mean this person was especially godly and spiritual? Absolutely not!

In fact, sometimes in the Bible we’re told that extraordinary gifts were given not only to the godly servants of the Lord, but sometimes to ungodly men, as was the case with Balaam (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14), King Saul (1 Sam. 10:11), and Judas Iscariot (Matt. 7:21–23; 10:1–8).

The Corinthians needed to learn that the ultimate purpose for which God gives spiritual gifts to His people, whether ordinary or extraordinary, is not to exalt the person who has them or to impress or entertain others. The ultimate purpose (as in Eph. 4:11–16) is that the body of believers might be built up in love. This has a double meaning. The first is that the means by which the body is built up is through love, but also the goal of the building-up process itself is love. So these Corinthians had an improper understanding of:

- what is really important to God
- what is most useful in the cause of Christ
- how to resolve fighting and squabbling with one another
- why they were not to sit in judgment on one another
- what it means to properly relate to one another
- the most important ways to do the work of the church

It is in this context that Paul is led by the Spirit of God to write 1 Corinthians 13. It’s in this context that Paul says what he does in 12:31 and then, in chapter 13, goes on to expound just what that more excellent way is.

The Most Excellent Way to Make an Impact for Christ

And now, having considered the setting of chapter 13, let’s move forward in understanding what Paul has to say about the more excellent way to make an impact for Christ, as he does in verses 1–3.

First, in verse 1, Paul wants the Corinthians (and us) to know that having a life that is permeated and motivated by real love is a far more

excellent way to make an impact for Christ than being a person who has the spectacular gift of tongues.

The way Paul makes his point in these three verses is interesting. He does this by hypothetically using himself as an example of someone who possessed extraordinary abilities and did amazing things. In this section, he says that even if all these things were true but were not permeated and motivated by sincere love, they would be worthless. The point isn't that all these things are wrong and totally useless. The point is that unless they are permeated and motivated by love, they serve no God-honoring purpose.

Paul begins the discussion with the issue of speaking in the tongues of men and of angels. The word used here for the tongues of men is found in Acts 2:4. This word means to speak in another language without having learned that language. What it doesn't mean is that some senseless gibberish is some kind of magic spiritual language with which we must converse with our Lord.

To understand what this gift is about, we must go to Acts 2:5–11:

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues [languages] the mighty works of God.”

This perspective on speaking in tongues is certainly in harmony with the teaching of 1 Corinthians 14:6–12, 19.

Paul mentions not only tongues of men, but tongues of angels as well. We don't know what language the angels speak. In the Bible, they are able to speak—and understand—the same language as the people to whom they are ministering. So we may infer that to speak in the

tongues of angels means that we would have the incredible ability that the angels have to speak in and understand every language.

Here Paul supposes, for the sake of argument, that he has that miraculous ability to go anywhere in the world and speak the language of the people who live there. He says that if he has this incredible God-given ability to speak in any language and he is able to speak, preach, and exhort, all that ability is worthless and would accomplish nothing in God’s church, unless it is permeated, motivated, and saturated with love.

In fact, Paul says that being the greatest linguist in the world and having the ability to clearly articulate truth will be not only worthless but harmful, a hindrance to the church, if he’s doing it for any other reason than love for God and genuine love for others. So whether it’s the apostle Paul, you, or I who make this claim, we will come across to people like a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal if we have not love.

I’m sure you have been around people whose sincerity is suspect. How much attention do you pay to their words—even loudly and enthusiastically uttered? Sometimes they might just as well be saying, “blah, blah, blah.” They’re all noise and hot air!

I read about a preacher who when expositing on this verse would take a steel pot and a hammer with him into the pulpit. Then he’d begin to beat and beat upon the steel pot. At first, people were a bit amused, but after he beat on it awhile, they weren’t laughing or smiling anymore. When he continued to beat on the metal pot, the people became annoyed and irritated. Finally this pastor would ask, “Are you enjoying this? Does this please you? Do you find it helpful? Would you like me to continue to beat on this pot for the remainder of the message?” You see, it’s just meaningless noise.²

By way of application, you and I may be able to speak in the language of the people with whom we associate and say words that they can understand. We may be able to talk to children in one way, talk to our mates in another, talk to neighbors, talk to other church members, saying things that are true, and things they need to hear, but if our words are not permeated, motivated, and saturated, if they don’t *drip* with love,

2. Alexander Strauch, *Leading with Love* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 2006), 10.

not only will the best of our words be useless, but many people will be turned off and annoyed.

Ah! How important is love to the cause of Christ? It is so important that though our message is concise and relevant, it is meaningless if we don't have that remarkable aspect of love within our hearts.

Review, Reflection, Application, and Discussion Questions

1. What is the broader context of the 1 Corinthians 13:1–7 passage?
2. What does the broader context of this passage indicate about the people to whom Paul was writing?
3. What mistakes were some of the people in the church at Corinth making about the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit?
4. Summarize what Jonathan Edwards wrote about the ordinary and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.
5. Explain the meaning of “tongues of men” and “tongues of angels” in verse 1. What is the biblical basis supporting your view?
6. Do you agree that having a life that is permeated with 1 Corinthians 13 is the excellent, “over the top,” “beyond greatness” way of making an impact for Christ? If so, why do you agree? If not, why don't you agree?
7. In terms of the way this chapter defined what it means to speak in the languages of the people (i.e., not literal languages such as German or French, but in the sense of being gifted to communicate clearly to certain segments of people, be they children, young people, neighbors, fellow employees, personality types, men, women, well-educated, poorly educated, sports fanatics, artists, music devotees, people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, etc.), what languages or what abilities do you have to communicate God's message clearly to certain groups of people that need to be per-

meated with love if you are going to be a blessing to them? What implications does all this have for our ministries?

8. What application can you make of the teaching of verse 1 to your own life and to the ministry of the church? How should you and will you, by God’s grace, change in the way you relate to your family and church and people outside the church?
9. And now an important reminder that you will find after every chapter in this book: please remember as you reflect on the love principle presented in this chapter that the purpose of evaluation and application is:
 - a. not to discourage or destroy us;
 - b. but to motivate us to see our constant need of the cross and how much we owe to Jesus—without Him we’d never make it, but praise God we are not without Him;
 - c. and to motivate us to understand our constant daily need of grace—that our salvation never has been and never will be by the works we have done, but always by the work Christ has done and is doing for us; I want our studies in 1 Corinthians 13 to be a reminder that we need to live a cross-centered life; we need the application of the cross work of Jesus every day of our lives; remember there’s not a day in our lives when we are so good that we don’t need the cross, and there is never a day in our lives when we are so bad that what Christ did on the cross is not sufficient to provide forgiveness for us (Rom. 3:24; 5:20; Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:7; 2:1–2);
 - d. and to cause us to understand that we must and can, by His grace, on a daily basis put off from our lives the “unlove” that is displeasing to God and put on in our lives the love that is beautifully described in 1 Corinthians 13, so that we might become more and more like our Savior and more prolific in bearing fruit for Him as others see the grace of God at work in our lives, changing and transforming us (Eph. 4:22–24; 1 Tim. 4:7).