

January–April 2025



# Day by Day with God

Rooting women's lives in the Bible

FEATURING LYNDALL BYWATER, TANYA MARLOW AND NAOMI AIDOO

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Rooting women's lives in the Bible



Ministries



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Edited by Jackie Harris

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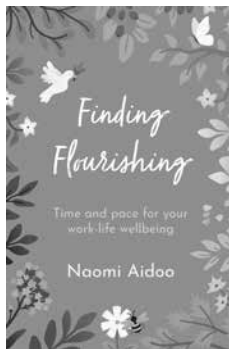
**Di Archer** is CEO of **tastelifeuk.org**, a charity she cofounded after a family experience of eating disorders. An educator, writer and speaker, she is also resources manager on the CPAS leadership training team.

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# Finding Flourishing webinar



Date: Wednesday 19 March 2025

Time: 8.00 pm (GMT)

Tickets: £5.00 or £7.50 to join with a friend

Book at:

[brfonline.org.uk/finding-flourishing-webinar](http://brfonline.org.uk/finding-flourishing-webinar)

Join Naomi Aido for an hour of teaching and sharing based on her book *Finding Flourishing* in which she explores a Christian view of wellbeing, aiming to point people to Jesus as well as to practical tools to support their flourishing amidst the pressures of life today.

Naomi writes:

*'Finding Flourishing* is a book in which I share a different perspective on work-life wellbeing: a perspective which doesn't automatically assume you've got everything together and just need a few tweaks, nor place unrealistic expectations on your time. Instead *Finding Flourishing* will enable you to keep going and keep growing in your own time and at your own pace.'

Praise for *Finding Flourishing*:

'Written by a busy working mum who knows what she's talking about, *Finding Flourishing* combines practical advice and inspirational content. This book provides a great opportunity to pause, reflect and reorientate our lives around the things that really matter.'

Ruth Jackson, presenter, Premier Unbelievable

Join this live event, hear Naomi speak out of wisdom and experience, and share your questions and comments.

# Welcome



Happy New Year! Thank you for joining us in our Bible studies for 2025. Whether you are entering this new year with energy and excitement or feeling rather drained and anxious, we pray that opening the scriptures each day will encourage you to press on and assure you that Jesus is with you whatever the coming days hold.

As ever, we've chosen a variety of topics to study. Some are topic-based and include references throughout the Bible; others enable us to work through a particular book, narrative or passage.

We begin by delving into the book of Malachi, an Old Testament prophet keen to teach God's people how to practise true religion, but also wanting them to know how just, loving and kind God is. We end by studying God's love in action, as we discover how Jesus fulfilled all Isaiah's visions of the suffering servant, and then we read the resurrection stories that remind us of the wonderful truth that Jesus is with us, always.

In between, we're considering what the Bible says about being creative and the value of silence and solitude, looking in detail at 1 Corinthians 13, exploring what Paul teaches us about the church in his letter to the Ephesians and learning from Saul and Jeremiah.

We also welcome a new writer to the team. Naomi Aidoo is a teacher, author and entrepreneur who is passionate about work-life wellbeing. Naomi writes on how women in the early church contributed to its growth and encourages us to consider our own contribution to building God's kingdom. How might Jesus want to lead us in the months ahead?

A friend recently gave me a pebble inscribed with the beautiful promise from Proverbs 3:5-6: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight' (NIV). As we begin this new year, may we know that Jesus is with us in every circumstance and situation and remember that he holds the future in his hands. We can trust him to guide us through.

Jackie

**Jackie Harris, Editor**

# True love: 1 Corinthians 13



*Jane Walters writes...*

A quick Google search confirmed what I suspected: 1 Corinthians 13 is the most quoted reading at weddings. Where else in the Bible can we find such an outpouring of love's virtues? Yet its value should not be confined to the narrow context of marriage, as we shall explore over the next seven days.

It is always helpful to consider a biblical text's background. Paul was writing to the church he had founded in Corinth, a Roman colony located at the crossroads of a major sea route. Its culture was thereby influenced by the through traffic of other countries, and its population was cosmopolitan, with multiple expressions of religious beliefs and practices. Intellectual snobbery was rife, as was sexual depravity. Although the church was newly established, there were already deep-seated issues which Paul urgently needed to address. He was particularly concerned with the amount of division and sectarianism and the level of sexual immorality, which flagrantly disregarded Christ's call to holy living.

It seems to me that the references to love serve to pull together Paul's exhortations in the rest of his letter to live according to the gospel. Within a true understanding of what love demands is a call to look up – to look away from ourselves and each other and up at Jesus Christ, the head of the body, the church.

I wonder if, like me, you have ever been encouraged to substitute your own name for the word 'love'? We might read: 'Jane is patient, Jane is kind, etc.' It can provide a bit of a wake-up call when we do, but I feel it misses a point. We don't want to be thinking about love in a limited, human setting, bringing our understanding of love down to our level. Instead, we want to expand our thinking and challenge our attitudes. It is better, then, to substitute the name of Jesus for 'love' – after all, the Bible teaches us so clearly that God is love, through and through. And so, let us be encouraged to lift our eyes away from our circumstances, away from our preferred ways, and to consider how we can aim instead to follow in Jesus' footsteps. After all, he showed in word and deed, in attitude and behaviour, what it truly means to love.



## Hollow words need a love-filling

**If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (vv. 1-2, NIV)**

Some years ago, a friend recommended *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. She had recently read it and had experienced something of a revelation in her marriage. She had always been annoyed that her husband preferred to clean her car than hug her. He would repeatedly tell her that he loved her, but it felt meaningless without the actions she expected him to make. All of that faded away, though, when she read how 'acts of service' was his way of showing her love, whereas she received love through 'physical touch'. (I thoroughly recommend the book!)

In our relationships, we must guard against two equal and opposite situations: speaking words of love that are empty of meaning or lacking evidence; and acting in ways that lack love. If you've ever done a task for someone when your heart isn't in it, you'll know that when love is absent, resentment and even anger can be present. In the days when I found my mother very difficult, I would busy myself helping her – telling myself I was 'honouring my father and mother' – but inside my blood would be boiling. I tried to correct my attitude, kept biting my tongue, but in the end I simply prayed that God would give me more love for her. It led to some painfully honest conversations and a genuine exchange of forgiveness. I'm so grateful that, by the time she went to glory, our relationship was no longer one which went through the motions but was truly love-filled.

See what a difference it makes to turn these verses around: 'When I have the gift of prophecy/fathom all mysteries/give all I possess to the poor/give over my body to hardship *and have love*, I gain *everything*.'

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*Father, I ask that you create a new heart in me, with new hope and new love, as I serve you. I choose to let go of all ill-feeling as you fill me afresh through your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## Love takes a lifetime to grow

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. (NIV)**

Reading this chapter out loud, I find myself slowing down at today's verse, like I'm unwittingly leaving space for the words that seem to be missing: 'love *should be* patient, love *should be* kind...' Certainly, these qualities seem in painfully short supply in our broken world. How do we bridge the gap between the ideal and the reality?

We soon find we cannot be patient or kind or avoid envy, boasting and pride by willpower alone. If you've ever made a resolution, at New Year or other times, you'll know the agony of finding that you simply cannot sustain the pace of your initial enthusiasm. This verse from the Old Testament is a huge help: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty' (Zechariah 4:6). Where our willpower is finite and all too limited, God's Holy Spirit is an ever-available source of God's very essence, which is, of course, love.

In my first career as a retailer, I employed a new part-time member of staff. The interview had gone well, and she was keen to join the team. There was only one problem: as soon as she started the job, I realised I didn't get on with her. I felt irritated by her perfectly reasonable questions; I saw her carefulness as a lack of confidence. I spent so many hours praying about it but to no avail. Sadly, she gave up and moved on. My determination to be different each working day simply wasn't enough.

Developing as a disciple of Jesus Christ takes a lifetime. There are no short cuts, no quick fixes. We will make many mistakes and hurt many people. The only answer is to plug more deeply into God, allowing him to transform us by the power of his Holy Spirit.

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*Lord, thank you that you are patient with us, bearing with us as we fail. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, that your loving attributes would grow as naturally as fruit, for the sake of others and for your glory. Amen.*

JANE WALTERS

## It's not about me!

[Love] does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (NIV)

The challenges of this chapter continue, with a wider swipe at our society's culture. There is a whole generation being brought up within a culture of 'me, me, me'. The camera lens is literally turned towards us. Our focus tends not to be an outward one. The mantra is not so much 'If it feels good, do it', but 'Only do it if it makes you feel good.'

Self-seeking is the very antithesis of love. The marriage service offers a helpful illustration within the words spoken as the bride and groom exchange the rings: 'All that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you.' This opening of the hands and heart to each other is not so we receive, but rather give – and the attitude behind that is a complete, selfless, not-counting-the-cost kind of giving. How this world needs to see love like this! How we need to be people who answer the call to live like this!

In our relationships and dealings with people, forgiveness is one of the most powerful acts of love. Too often, when we feel wronged or aggrieved, we can sense anger flaring up and, before we know it, we have spoken out words that ought never to have been said. If we are honest with ourselves, it is our pride that has been hurt. Our hearts can be fragile, it is true; but we really mustn't employ pride as a kind of bodyguard to protect it. When we do, we find it all the harder to meaningfully connect with others and love has, once more, been sidelined.

Instead, let's be people who learn to honour others, to swallow down our pride-fuelled anger, to forgive, then let go. Let love show us a better way.

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*Are you struggling to forgive someone? Think about the many ways Jesus has forgiven you. Ask him for more grace, so you can stop re-reading your records of wrongs and, in an ultimately selfless act, forgive them from your heart.*

JANE WALTERS

## Watch your mouth

**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (NIV)**

‘Love does not delight in evil.’ If we follow the suggestion I mentioned in the introduction and state instead, ‘Jane does not delight in evil’, I would nod my head in agreement. Why on earth would I choose to side with evil? Perhaps you had the same (self-righteous) response when using your own name. However, let us pause; take a moment to be honest with ourselves.

Oscar Wilde famously said that the only thing worse than being talked about was not being talked about, but gossip is not funny and it’s not loving. Stand at a bus stop, walk around a supermarket or spend time in a staffroom and you will hear people talking about other people. Tune your ear into the detail. Are they talking positively? Most likely, they are taking the opportunity to be catty, drawing further vindictiveness from their audience. Half the time, their information is second- or third-hand, a twisting of misinformation that results in rumours and gossip spreading like wildfire.

Far worse is when gossip happens in our church communities. ‘Have you heard about so-and-so...?’ ‘Just for prayer, are you aware that...?’ I have all too often been privy to information that simply wasn’t mine to know, and it’s so hard to discern the best way to respond, and I’ve had to reassure myself that at least having reached me, it will go no further.

Paul states that love ‘always protects’ – let us apply that to people’s privacy; ‘always trusts’ – that what we say in confidence remains in confidence; ‘always hopes’ – that people will believe the best about us and give us the benefit of the doubt; and ‘always perseveres’ – let us be those who swim against the current, refusing to be swept along by the gossipy tide.

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*Have you been subjected to gossip? Bring the pain to Jesus, who can heal you and help you forgive. Have you indulged in gossip, either by speaking or listening? Repent, receive forgiveness and pledge to do it no more.*

JANE WALTERS

## This is now and that is then

**Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. (NIV)**

In one sense, these verses make for curious reading. Paul has extolled the virtues of spiritual gifts in the previous chapter – and will go on to encourage prophecy in the next, but he’s not intending to diminish their importance here. Rather, he is showing us the truer perspective: that they are indeed valuable, but only for a time.

When my husband and I were dating, we regularly sent each other WhatsApp messages whenever we were apart. Several times a day, and especially first thing in the morning and last thing at night, we would pour our hearts out on to our phone screens. Keen never to lose this record, he printed them all out – hundreds of pages of tiny text! Now that we are married, it has mostly stopped, but that does not mean we have stopped loving each other; it’s simply that the moment has moved on, while the love has remained.

Cessationists would assert that the gifts of the Holy Spirit stopped after the time of the apostles. This is not what Paul is maintaining here. Just as my husband and I stopped texting each other when we were able to say it all face-to-face, so these gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues and having words of knowledge as ways of communicating with God, and on behalf of him, will one day not be required, because we will see him face-to-face. Hallelujah! What a glorious day that will be!

We need, therefore, to avoid falling into both traps, neither venerating the gifts so highly that we can’t see their temporary nature nor dismissing them as unimportant just because one day they will fade away. This is now; that is then.

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*Spend some time thinking ahead to the day you will see God face-to-face. What would you like to say to him? How will it feel? Thank him for the reality of that hope and the enduring nature of love.*

## Maturing is not optional

**When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (NIV)**

I'm a big fan of childhood. Who doesn't want to spend their time playing, coming in to find food already prepared and being tucked up in bed when you're tired? I'm feeling quite wistful just thinking about it. I remember when my younger son was in year four at primary school, complaining that he just wanted to play in the sandpit as he had in reception.

The fact is, for most of us, growing up is something we cannot avoid – and with good reason! We are hard-wired to mature, to develop, to be stretched emotionally, mentally and physically. It is all part of God's 'very good' plan of creation. But how about maturing spiritually? Earlier in this letter, Paul has berated the Corinthian church for their childish behaviour – demonstrated in their divisions and factions – and bemoaned that 'I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready' (3:2).

The process of growing up inevitably involves discarding childish things. The things you adorned your younger self's bedroom with – David Cassidy posters, anyone? – are hardly appropriate now. What of our spiritual habits? So much of this chapter has pointed to our need to change. Children are famously self-absorbed, acting like the universe revolves around them. They are notoriously impatient: 'Are we there yet?' Surely, we wouldn't want to be stuck in those behaviours, would we?

I want to suggest that it is Christ's love for us that compels us to leave our old ways behind. As surely as he said to the disciples, 'Follow me,' and they abandoned their nets and were drawn into their faith adventure, so too can we experience the fullness of new life if we just let go.

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*Has anything in today's reading or notes particularly challenged you? Is there something practical you can do in response? What can you let go of? What is God calling you to take up?*

JANE WALTERS

## What remains

**And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (NIV)**

Yesterday's thoughts centred around the changes that occur as we mature and develop as people and believers. We naturally jettison things along the way, whether that's physical possessions or more personal, internal things. Eventually, all the 'stuff' fades away until what remains is distilled down to the very essence of life, into what's truly important: faith, hope and love.

I have in mind the settlers who panned for gold in the 19th century. Many had travelled in great hope of a better life, even a prosperous one. They believed the reports and had faith that they were true. They endured long hours of sifting through soil, silt and mud, examining it, peering in for the slightest glimpse of the precious metal whose discovery would transform their lives. When all the muck was washed away, they were left with something that would never rust or tarnish or, for that matter, lose its value.

In a real sense, we too are spending our days panning for gold. Job learned the truth of this. In his intense suffering and extreme loss, he was able to say of God: 'He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold' (Job 23:10). Throughout his trials, when he was all but reduced to nothing, Job's faith and hope in God prevailed until the day when God revealed himself and lovingly rewarded him.

Forget the Hollywood image of a couple promising to love each other forever. Sometimes love looks more like the gold with its mud and silt still clinging: sleepless nights caring for someone, washing the feet of the homeless, getting our hands dirty for love's sake, demonstrating that love's enduring, transforming power is priceless.

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*God, what can we say in response to your amazing love? Thank you that you love us unconditionally and for all eternity. May we show your love to all we meet today, spreading hope and encouraging faith. Amen.*

JANE WALTERS

# Treat yourself to time out with God every day!

**Day by Day with God** provides a short printed Bible passage, explained and applied especially for women, by women who have themselves found the Bible a source of strength and inspiration for life.

A suggested daily prayer or meditation helps you connect the daily notes with your own spiritual journey as you seek to follow Jesus more closely.

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