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## LOVE IS BEST

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*When I was 12 our family lived on a dairy farm.*

*I loved working on the farm with my Dad and I have great memories of learning lots of practical things from him.*

*I remember the first time I helped him set up an electric fence.*

*When I first saw it I wondered just how this thing was going to stop the cows getting from one part of the farm to the other. It looked pretty harmless, just a single strand of wire connected to a box at one corner of the paddock. When Dad flicked on the power switch nothing seemed to change — there was just a faint clicking sound which was the electrical pulse traveling down the wire.*

Dad then showed me that it was possible to *safely* touch the wire *if* you touched it for a very short time — between the clicks. But look out, if you touched the wire at the wrong time! You'd receive a harmless - but very painful - jolt of electricity.

Being a 12 year old boy, I just couldn't wait to share this bit of knowledge with my eight year old sister. Later that afternoon I took her down to the paddock and showed her the fence. She was also surprised at its simplicity and asked me how it might work. I was very 'helpful', I told her that it had some 'special properties', and to demonstrate I gave it a couple of quick flicks with my fingers.

Well my sister was never one to hang back, she walked right up to the fence and reached out and grabbed it firmly with both hands. I'm ashamed to say it now, but that's just what I had hoped would happen.

A little bit of knowledge, as they say, can be a dangerous thing. Of course in my sister's experience it wasn't the knowledge itself that was dangerous — it was how her older brother chose to use it! Instead of protecting her I played a nasty trick on her.

It's commonly thought that the more knowledge people have, the more they will behave in ways which are kind and loving — and helpful - to others. That's one of the reasons why we believe that education is so important.

But there's no guarantee that education will produce that result. It seems that far too often, we human beings use knowledge to gain an advantage over others. We use it to exploit them rather than help them. Or, we allow ourselves to feel superior to those who aren't 'in the know'. We become arrogant and self assured — dismissive of the concerns and needs of other people.

Often we're not bold enough to express these thoughts openly — but we think them. Sometimes however we are not even aware that we've begun to adopt these attitudes... They are sins that we commit unconsciously, which unfortunately for us, doesn't make them any more excusable!

In the Bible, St Paul refers to this situation when he writes: 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The person who thinks they know something does not yet know as they ought to know.'

He suggests that we need to be careful how we use our knowledge. In contrast to the knowledge that puffs up, Paul speaks of a love which he says: 'builds up'!

This love he says: 'is patient and kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres... where there is knowledge, it will pass away...' but 'Love never fails'.

This love that Paul talks about builds up because it's concerned about other people.

It's what is sometimes called 'tough love'. It's willing to make personal sacrifices for someone else. When we have this type of love we find ourselves identifying with them, standing beside them, bearing with them and genuinely encouraging them, not putting ourselves above them and not looking down on them or dismissing them.

When we have this kind of love we find ourselves using the knowledge we have to help others, not disadvantage them.

Looking back on my electric fence experience, Dad was trying to help me when he explained the dangers of the fence. I can't say that I did the same for my sister.

What a relief it is to know that in spite of the fact that we misuse our knowledge he understands and accepts us. God knows, we're guilty many times of failing to love. He knows how many times we 'puff up' rather than 'build up'. God knew this when he sent his son Jesus to be our Saviour.

Jesus' entire life was the ultimate example of the love that 'builds up'.  
On the cross, Jesus gave us the ultimate example of the 'tough love' that builds up.  
He died so that we could be forgiven, even of our sin and arrogance — even of our 'puffed-upness'.

If you've been 'puffed up' lately then God's forgiveness is for you! God wants to 'build *you* up' with this message about his forgiveness. And he gives you his Spirit so that you can trust him and become a person who lovingly 'builds up' others by demonstrating his loving care to them.

**Prayer:**

*Thank you Lord, for helping us to love—it's shown in so many different ways.*

*The love of a friend—providing support in times of need.*

*The love of a child—loving parents and brothers and sister even when they don't deserve it.*

*The love of colleagues and work mates who speak words of encouragement and challenge.*

*The love of a pet—that gives a greeting of unbridled joy each time you walk through the gate.*

*The love of Jesus Christ—which we don't deserve but which is so freely given and is always there.*

*Dear God, help us to live in that love.*