OUR THEME:

LOVE PROTECTS

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Let's be honest, when you hear the word "safeguarding," what comes to mind? Policies? Paperwork? Training sessions that eat into your Saturday morning?

For many of us in church life, safeguarding can sometimes feel like something imposed from the outside - a box-ticking exercise to keep the charity regulators happy. But what if we've been looking at it all wrong? What if safeguarding isn't about compliance at all, but about the very heart of what it means to follow Jesus? At Thirtyone:eight, we've been speaking about the theological heart of safeguarding for decades.

In its simplest terms, safeguarding is the protection of those in our care. In 1 Corinthians 13, we're told that love protects. Safeguarding isn't an external pressure or 'thing to do', it's an act of love. And love is central to our faith.

The Most Natural Thing in the World

When you love someone, protecting them isn't a duty — it's instinctive. Think about a loving parent with their child, or how you'd naturally shield a friend or relative from harm. You don't need a policy to tell you to keep them safe. You just do it, because that's what love does.

Paul knew this when he wrote those famous words in 1 Corinthians 13. Right in the middle of his description of love, alongside patience and kindness, he says, 'love protects'. Always. Not sometimes. Not when it's convenient. Always.

The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8). Not "God is loving," or "God sometimes loves," but God IS love. He is the source, the definition and the very expression of love itself. Before anything else existed, there was God. Which means before anything else existed, love existed.

As Christians, we're called to love others as God loves us (John 13:34-35). Not because we're naturally brilliant at it, but because He loved us first (1 John 4:19) and he shows us how to do it. And if God's love protects, then ours must too.

There are no exceptions to love

Jesus says to 'love your neighbour' (Matthew 22:39). And when questioned, he revealed that "neighbour" means everyone (Luke 10:25-37). My neighbour isn't just the person who looks like me, thinks like me, or makes me comfortable.

It's everyone - the confident leader and the quiet newcomer. The teenager who's finding their feet and the elderly member who's been at the church for decades. The person who's easy to love and the one who isn't.

Throughout Scripture, God consistently shows special concern for those most at risk: the child (Matthew 18:6), the widow (James 1:27), the foreigner (Leviticus 19:33-34), and the unfathered (Psalm 82:3).

God pays attention to those who need protection, and if we're serious about following Him, then so must we. There are no loopholes. His love protects everyone, and so should ours.

Love in Action

"Let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth."

(1 John 3:18)

The beautiful thing about biblical love is how practical it is. Scripture shows us exactly what love looks like in real life.

Love doesn't:

- harm others
- seek its own interests
- get easily angered
- dishonour people
- delight in evil

Love actively:

- shows patience
- extends kindness
- speaks truth
- trusts, hopes, and perseveres
- never fails

And of course, Love protects. Always.

Safeguarding is a defining mark of Christian love. It is one of the most practical, faithful ways we live out our calling. Love is a choice and an action. It is doing whatever is needed to keep one another safe.

LOVE PROTECTS CONTD.

Sacrificial Love

Jesus set the bar high when he said,

"Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

(John 15:13)

Love costs something. It requires sacrifice.

In safeguarding, that might look like:

- giving up your time for criminal record checks and training sessions
- following processes even when they feel inconvenient
- challenging behaviour, even from people you respect
- paying attention to power dynamics and appropriate boundaries
- supporting volunteers with proper supervision and care
- speaking up when your gut tells you something's off
- resisting the temptation to cut corners just to save time or money

None of this feels particularly 'spiritual' in the moment, but safeguarding isn't a distraction from ministry; it IS ministry. It's not separate from discipleship; it IS discipleship, because it is a form of love.

If We Don't Protect, We Don't Love

Paul says that even if we speak 'in tongues', prophesy, or have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, we have nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2)

In church life, we can preach brilliant sermons, run dynamic youth programmes, and pack out our Sunday services. But if we fail to protect people from harm, we've failed in our fundamental calling to love.

This Safeguarding Sunday

This year's theme helps us to make a connection we sometimes miss:

Safeguarding = Protection, Protection = Love,
Therefore, **Safeguarding = Love in Action**

Safeguarding isn't bureaucracy getting in the way of "real" ministry. It's a profoundly Christian calling that flows naturally from who God is and who we're becoming in Him. It reflects the heart of the Good Shepherd, the One who leaves the 99 to protect the one who's vulnerable (Matthew 18:12-14).

This Safeguarding Sunday isn't about adding another burden to your already busy schedule. Instead, it's an invitation to see protection not as obligation, but as opportunity, worship, and love made real.

The Heart of It All

God has always been in the business of protection. From Eden's boundaries to the cities of refuge, from the shepherd's rod and staff to Jesus laying down His life – our God protects His people. And He calls us to do the same.

Yes, safeguarding involves policies, procedures, training and more. But at its heart, it's about people - precious, valued people made in the image of God. When we protect them, we love them. When we love them, we reflect the heart of God.

Because love protects. Always.

This Safeguarding Sunday, let's embrace protection not as a duty, but as one of the most beautiful expressions of our faith. Because when we truly understand that love protects, safeguarding stops being something we have to do and becomes something we can't help but do.