



# STUDY GUIDE

## SESSION ONE

# LoveGives

### MEMORY VERSE

*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever trusts in Jesus shall not die but have eternal life.* (John 3:16, emphasis added)

### INTRODUCTION

Love, the apostle Paul writes, is “the most excellent way.” It is the goal and focus of our Christian life. When we talk about being formed spiritually into the image of Christ, we are really talking about becoming loving as he was loving.

In our culture, *love* is a word that is overused and has many different meanings. We might say we love a sports team or we love a good movie or novel. We claim to love pizza or chocolate. We also love our friends and family—hopefully in a different sort of way than we love pizza!

The love Paul writes of—and the love we are talking about in this study—is *agape* love. Selfless, generous, not expecting anything in return, abundant—that is *agape* love. It is the kind of love God has for us and the kind of love God invites us to live in. It is part of the with-God life, which is the best way to live. Although *agape* is selfless and even self-sacrificing, it is also the most satisfying kind of love to both give and receive. This is a beautiful paradox: The more we give love, the more we receive it.

How can we live in this most excellent way? That is what we are going to talk about in this first session .

## SHARE YOUR STORY

Each of us has a story . The events of our lives—good, bad, wonderful, or challenging—have shaped who we are . God knows your story, and he can redeem every struggle and heighten every joy to help you be who you were created to be by his loving hands .

When we share our stories, we realize that we are not alone . We can connect with people who have experienced similar things . Likewise, sharing our stories gives others the opportunity to see God at work .

Your story can encourage someone else, and telling it can be a path to freedom for you and for those with whom you share it .

Open your time together with prayer . This should be a brief, simple prayer in which you invite God to be with you as you meet . You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting or pause to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion .

As you begin this first meeting, have everyone introduce themselves and then discuss your responses to the following questions:

*What in particular are you hoping to experience as we practice how to love through this study?*

### HELPFUL HINT #1: THE FIRST MEETING

Consider making the first meeting a little longer than the others so that group members can take time to get acquainted . It may help to have name tags .

If you are a new group, collect everyone's contact information at this first meeting .

*Think back on your life. Remember someone you knew—or still know—who you would describe as a loving person. What do they do and say that makes you describe them as someone who loves well?*

### HEAR GOD'S STORY

God uses stories to guide us . When we read the true stories of Scripture, we learn what God is like, we see his plan unfolding, and we learn principles for our own lives . Read the Bible passage below . Then use the questions to guide your discussion .

#### Read 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

*I will show you the most excellent way.*

*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. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, 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.*

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

- In the first part of this passage, Paul writes about things that are good, but not the best . What is Paul saying about things like generosity, prophecy, and faith?
- Next, Paul describes what love is, rather than telling us what we should do . How are these different? Why do you think Paul expresses his thoughts on love this way?
- The passage says that “love is patient .” What keeps you from being patient? Where do you find yourself being impatient? (Think about your coworkers, your spouse, your family .)
- The passage from 1 Corinthians can be summed up with two formulas: EVERYTHING – LOVE = NOTHING and  
LOVE + NOTHING = EVERYTHING .

What is the biggest barrier that keeps you from living and expressing love?

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Use this space to record your thoughts, questions, and ponderings as you watch the video and discuss the Bible passage.

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## CREATE A NEW STORY

God wants you to be a part of his kingdom and invites you to weave your story into his . That will mean making some changes as you choose to follow his way rather than your own . This will not happen overnight, but it can happen over time . By starting with small, simple choices, we begin to change our direction . The Holy Spirit helps us along the way, giving us gifts to serve the body, offering us insights into Scripture, and challenging us to love those both near and far from God .

In this section, consider how you will apply the wisdom you learned from the teaching and Bible study . Below are some practical steps you can take during the coming week .

- Love is an action by which you “will the good of another, as God defines the good .” Think of a person in your life . What would it look like to will their good?
- The enemy of love is hurry . How do hurry and busyness keep you from being able to give love?
- Read the three questions below and carefully consider which action step God is challenging you to take this week .
- One action that is the signature of love is giving . Love gives attention, time, and help . Who is God asking you to give attention, time, and help to in the coming week?
- Look again at the passage from 1 Corinthians: “Love is patient, love is kind .” This describes how we should love, but also how God loves us . When has God been patient and kind to you? How did that impact your relationship with him? What is one step you could take to be more patient?
- Write the names of two or three people who you could express love to in the ways you have explored in this lesson . Think of people who

might be spiritually curious but might not yet have a relationship with God . Commit to praying for God’s guidance and for an opportunity to have a conversation with each of them .

Mark your chosen question and write your response below . When everyone is ready, share your choice with the group .

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To close your time together, pray for the commitments each person has made for the coming week . You can have one person pray or, if the group is comfortable, take turns with each person praying for the person on their right side . There is a *Prayer and Praise Log* in the Toolkit section you can use to note any specific prayer requests that group members share .

#### FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

If you would like to explore related Bible passages on your own, read the passages below and record your reflections in a journal . A great way to gain insight about a passage is to read it in several translations . You may want to use a Bible app or website to compare translations .

Read 1 John 4:19-20

*We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.*

- According to these verses, what motivates us to love?
- Which is easier: to love God or to love people? Why? Write down your thoughts .
- Who is your “brother or sister”? What does love for people you disagree with look like?

Read 1 John 3:16-20 (NLT)

*We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?*

*Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.*

- How do we know what love is?
- In our group time, we talked about the idea that “love gives.” What specifically is this passage asking us to give?
- How can you show love with your actions, not just your words?

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Use these devotions to meditate further on this week's topic . On the first day, you may want to read over all the week's verses to get the big picture of the passage . Then, each day, read that day's verse . Take your time; ask God to speak to you through his word; notice which word or phrase stands out to you . Then take time to journal your response to him . Listen to what God wants to say to you through his word and respond to him as you meditate on the truths of Scripture . This week's devotions are taken from The Message translation .

Day 1

Read Psalm 145:8

*God is all mercy and grace—  
not quick to anger, is rich in love.*

Reflect: Do you ever find yourself “quick to anger”? What does it mean that God is “not quick to anger”? What does it mean to be “rich in love”? How have you experienced God's love?

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Day 2

Read Psalm 145:9

*God is good to one and all;  
everything he does is suffused with grace.*

Reflect: What is one specific way God has been good to you? Spend some time journaling—or even drawing—what it means to be “suffused with grace .”

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Day 3

Read Psalm 145:10-12

*Creation and creatures applaud you, God;  
your holy people bless you.*

*They talk about the glories of your rule,  
they exclaim over your splendor;*

*Letting the world know of your power for good,  
the lavish splendor of your kingdom.*

Reflect: Imagine creation applauding their Creator . Think of a whale breaching in the ocean, trees waving and bowing in the wind, waves breaking on a beach, an eagle soaring on a clear day . How do these things “exclaim” God’s splendor? How can you echo that praise?

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Day 4

Read Psalm 145:13

*Your kingdom is a kingdom eternal;  
you never get voted out of office.*

*God always does what he says,  
and is gracious in everything he does.*

Reflect: God not only keeps his promises, but he does so graciously . What promises has he kept for you? How have you experienced his grace?

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Day 5

Read Psalm 145:14-16

*God gives a hand to those down on their luck,  
gives a fresh start to those ready to quit.*

*All eyes are on you, expectant;  
you give them their meals on time.*

*Generous to a fault,  
you lavish your favor on all creatures.*

Reflect: What promises do you find in these verses? In what ways has God provided for you, whether physically, spiritually, or emotionally? What does it mean to “lavish [God’s] favor”?

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Day 6

Read Psalm 145:17-18

*Everything God does is right—  
the trademark on all his works is love.*

*God’s there, listening for all who pray,  
for all who pray and mean it.*

Reflect: What does it mean that God’s trademark is love? What do these verses tell us about God’s consistency and reliability? Spend some time right now talking with God, who is always listening .

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