

**SMALL GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE**

**I ♥ MY  
CHURCH**

**GROWING IN THE  
COMMUNITY OF FAITH**

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CHURCH**

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COMMUNITY OF FAITH**



I Love My Church Small Group Leader's Guide

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**HOW TO USE  
THIS BIBLE STUDY**

**I ♥ MY  
CHURCH**

Use this leader's guide for personal study as well as guidance on the overall theme of each Bible study. There is an introduction to the series and four lessons corresponding to each weekly study. Reviewing the leader's guide prior to teaching the lesson will give a greater understanding of the central thoughts within the lesson. There is also a personal challenge for the leader to strive to do each week.

## **Bible Study Outlines**

The Bible studies are designed to facilitate thought and discussion. Each lesson contains:

- Primary Verses for Study
- 5- to 8-Minute Story Video—Play the video at the beginning of each week's lesson
- Guiding Thought/Central Truth—A summary of the overall study
- Getting Started—A community-building activity for group study (Be sure to review this prior to your small group study. Weeks 1, 2, and 3 call for having note cards.)
- Introduction—A short paragraph to help direct thought and discussion
- Think It Through—The main points of the Bible study with questions
- How Does This Apply to Me?—Activities and questions to help the learner apply the study
- How Does This Apply to Our Church?—Activities and questions to help the group apply the study, including an introspective look at how the application of the study will affect the church as a whole
- What Am I Going to Do with What I Know Now?—A take-away that challenges the group to practically apply what they have learned

## **Enhancing Your Group Study**

Use the leader's guide to enhance your group study time. Share with your group what you personally learned while preparing for the lesson. Your openness will dictate the transparency of the dialogue within your group.

There is an abundance of material provided in each lesson. Pick and choose the questions and activities that are most relevant to your group. It's important not to skip the Getting Started section of the lesson. A valuable part of this series is not only learning about loving the church but actually practicing loving each other. The activities are designed to bring your group closer together and help them learn how to meet each other's needs. These activities may feel awkward at first, but they have value in teaching the full truth of the Bible study.

Keep in mind that this study is designed to incorporate heavy discussion. At the beginning of each meeting, you may want to encourage your participants to keep the discussion positive. In any group, you may have people who have experienced hurt within the church. Rather than focusing on past failures of the church, encourage your group to pinpoint places where an individual can practically act to spur on love in the church. Encourage those who have past hurts to use that experience as a way to help others avoid the same experience they went through. Spotlight how one individual can change the way an entire church experiences love. (A good example from the early church is the story of Dorcas in Acts 9:36-42. Her acts of kindness and service were so abundant that the church could not do without her even after she had died! We should all strive to be like Dorcas.)

Budget your time to allow for discussion of the How Does This Apply to Our Church? section. This is the real meat of the study. This section will reveal how God is at work in your group and how He may want them to express that work in the life of your church. Encourage your group to act on what God is prompting them to do. Encourage testimony of how God is using this study in their lives throughout your weeks together.





# WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION



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*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” —John 13:34-35*

When Jesus and His disciples gathered to share the Passover meal together, Jesus knew this would be His final intimate moments with the disciples. The words recorded in John 13:34-35 were spoken by Jesus hours before He was arrested. These words were important. This was something He wanted His followers to remember. His dying wish for His church was Love One Another.

These words were spoken by Jesus as a new commandment. God gave commandments one through ten to Moses; Jesus gave His disciples number eleven: Love one another. It's not optional to love each other in the church. If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, you must love one another. Jesus requires it.

Jesus said that love will be the church's identifying mark. It's how people will know we are Christians. Jesus' followers should be unmistakable. Our love for each other is evidence of Jesus' action in our lives. Our love for each other should depict the way He loves us. It should be sacrificial, servant-focused, compassionate, and unconditional.

It's important to note that Jesus' command focuses on the expression of our love toward one another within the church. The way we love other disciples is directly related to how we show Jesus' love to the world. Jesus commands us to love the people of the church the same way He loves us. By this love, all men will know we are His. We must first love each other if we are going to be an effective witness to the world. Our love for each other is a living example of Jesus' love for all people.

So, how are we doing? Are we following His commandment? Is there so much love in our church that the people in the homes around our building know we are His disciples? Can they tell it by the way we relate to each other in the parking lot? Can they tell it when they sit in the pews on Easter and Christmas? Can they tell it when we have barbecues and go out to dinner? Do they know that we love our church?

Have we ever confessed our love for the people in our church to those we work with? Why not? Do we feel loved in this small group? If you were in a moment of desperation, is there someone here whom you

could call? Do we really love each other? If we are going to truthfully evaluate our obedience to Jesus' commandment, we must answer these questions. We need to understand the purpose of the church and how it should be interacting in our lives. Understanding why we meet together will help us form a love for the people in our church.

The Bible studies in this series will address four ways that we express ourselves as a church—through Community, Serving, Giving, and Sharing. Each lesson will address how we as individuals and as a group of believers can obey Jesus' commandment to love one another. Love is the overarching theme of the entire series.

## **Personal Challenge**

As a leader, you are encouraged to meditate on John 13:34-35 in your personal study. Pray for God to reveal how you can help your group reflect an attitude of love toward each other over the coming weeks. Ask yourself the questions above and be honest with God about any failures or successes you may have experienced in church in regard to love. Pray for grace and forgiveness as you contemplate obedience to love your church. Pray that God will guide your discussions and lead every person into a greater understanding of what it means to love your church.



# WEEK 2: LOVE IN COMMUNITY



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*“Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” —Hebrews 10:22-25*

*“So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” —Romans 12:5*

*“The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” —1 John 2:10*

Hebrews 10:22-25 shows us a picture of how a functioning community of believers should practice loving each other.

We are reminded who we were and where we are going. Previously, all of us in the church carried an evil conscience and our hearts were filthy with sin, but now we are clean. We are encouraged to hold fast to our faith without wavering. But in an imperfect world where we struggle to resist temptation, how do we keep that full assurance of our faith?

We must meet together with other Christians. The church helps each of us to grow up into a mature Christian. Together we grow in works of service, encouragement, unity of faith, and love. Encouraging each other protects the members of the church from being carried away by false doctrines, trickery of men, and deceitful scheming.

Our church is what helps us to survive. Love, good deeds, and encouragement are lights in a dark and desperate world. They keep us going. This kind of love keeps us from stumbling. The people in our church know what we live day to day. They relate to and resonate with our issues because they live them too. The guy in the cubicle next to us at work or the lady at yoga class might make us smile occasionally or give us a compliment, but the people in our church journey with us. We are all travelers on the same path with the same goal.

We *need* each other. We can't walk this journey without help. It's too hard, and we are surrounded by huge obstacles. Those who walk

ahead of us can show us how to navigate the difficulties of the trials ahead. And they can encourage us from the other side of the dark forests. With their experience, they can help us walk through. It's the only way each of us will survive.

Romans 12:5 reminds us that we all have a responsibility to each other as members of the church. We belong to each other. And in 1 John 2:10 we see that as long as we love each other, we won't cause stumbling along the way. So, will you have your neighbor's back when their time comes to be tempted? Will you risk sharing their struggles and victories so that they might be more prepared for their venture into the world this week?

How will you encourage those around you in the church? What will you do to start? It's our purpose in meeting together.

And as the guy in the cubicle at work and the lady at yoga class see us walking together in unity and love, they will want to know our Jesus too.

## **Personal Challenge**

Over the next few minutes, write out some notes of encouragement for the people in your small group. It doesn't matter if you know the names of those who will attend. Write enough notes that you will have extra in case additional people show up unexpectedly. Consider using a single Bible verse or an inspiring quote, and let each person know that you are happy to have them in your group. Ask the Lord to guide your words as you write. Give out the notes during your group time or mail them in advance if you have addresses.





# WEEK 3: LOVE BY SERVING



*“Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.” —Titus 3:14*

*“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.” —James 3:13*

*“For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” —Galatians 5:14*

*“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” —1 Peter 2:12*

There’s something about serving and being served that inspires humility in a person. Learning to engage in good deeds brings us closer to understanding Jesus’ character. He emphasized the importance of service by kneeling at the feet of His disciples and washing them as a slave would for his master. He showed us how to humble ourselves to do good deeds by touching a leper to heal him and reaching down to save an adulterous woman from being stoned. Sure, He could have healed and saved these people without ever becoming personally involved with them, but He knew the immediate issue was not their real need. They were longing for love and relationship.

Loving our church is intertwined with serving each other. When Jesus commanded us to love one another, He expected us to show that love by serving each other the way He served people. In Titus 3:14, the church is encouraged to learn to engage in good deeds so that their lives will not be unproductive. This is reminiscent of James 2:14-26, where James makes the case that faith without works is of no value. Unless we follow through with action that proves our faith, it’s dead.

Service also reveals our maturity as Christians. James 3:13 says that if we claim to have wisdom, we should show it by acting in good deeds. Our growth as Christians can be measured by our servitude to others. Imitating Jesus means becoming more of a servant every day.

As we do good deeds for others in the church, our love will be noticed by the world. Our service is a living testimony of our faith in Jesus. As the world grows darker and more hostile to Christianity, our service

will shine a light on the truth (1 Peter 2:12). Scoffers will be converted by the testimony of our deeds.

As Christians, we must learn how to act in good deeds because it shows others the depth of our love for Jesus and each other. It helps us grow in wisdom and truth. Serving is more about what Jesus is doing in us than what we are doing for other people.

## **Personal Challenge**

This week in your small group time, people will be asked to meet specific needs in your church. Begin now to pray that God would bring church members to the minds of your group. Pray that God would provide resources even before they are needed so that your group can serve the church this week. Ask for illumination that service will become a catalyst for your group to love the church.



# WEEK 4: LOVE BY GIVING



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*“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.” —Acts 4:32-35*

*“But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.” —1 Timothy 6:6-7*

*“And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” —Hebrews 13:16*

The first church knew that love meant sacrifice. They used their possessions to make sure that everyone’s needs were met in their congregation. They shared what they had, and because of their love, no one among them was needy. They relied on godliness to make them content. The generosity of the church in meeting all of the needs among them allowed the apostles to preach with great power. The actions of the church bore witness to the change that Jesus could bring to a life. Everyone was experiencing God’s grace, and it was a compelling witness to their world.

Not one person among them was needy. At this point, the church consisted of thousands of people. What is it that prevents us from experiencing that level of sacrifice and commitment in our churches today? First Timothy 6:6-7 gives us a clue. We don’t seek our contentment in Jesus. We don’t understand the value of godliness. We have been deceived into thinking that money and things are the source of peace and stability in our modern lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Money has never been a stable asset, and possessions can disappear with the flick of a match. We only have an illusion of control over them. However, godliness is a treasure that can’t be lost. It’s much more valuable than Grandma’s cuckoo clock or the stocks we have saved for retirement. Not only is it of precious value in this world, but unlike our special trinkets and loaded wallets, we can take it to the grave with us! It’s attained on earth and stored in heaven. It cannot be destroyed. So, when we compare worldly riches

with godly actions, it's no contest as to what should be sacrificed. The early church understood this spiritual economy, and everyone in their company benefited from it.

So does this mean that those of us who are rich should sacrifice what we have for the poor? Absolutely! But those who are poor also need to sacrifice to meet the physical needs of others. The act of giving has more gain than just meeting an immediate need in someone's life. It changes us and gives us something that we didn't have before we shared our wealth. And this increase in godliness is meant for all of us, rich and poor alike.

To the rich, it gives a new perspective: a realization that God supplies us with all things to enjoy. Riches are temporary and uncertain. Storing riches in heaven through giving is a sure foundation for the future, much more certain than any worldly investment can provide.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

To those who are poor, He asks them to no longer steal but to work and earn a wage so that they have something to share with those in need.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (Ephesians 4:28)

Because we love Christ and choose to follow Him, we work instead of steal. We toil so that we will have something to share with those in need. If we look at our work in this manner, it makes the job meaningful. It doesn't matter what we are doing. It doesn't matter if we are working at our dream job or not. If the purpose for which we work has meaning, our labor is not in vain. Obeying Jesus by loving our neighbor changes us. And it will change our attitude about work. It profits us.

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:15-20)

In this passage, Paul is thanking the Philippians for the financial gift that he received from them. No other churches shared with him or provided for his needs. It's good to give not only because it supplies a need for someone, but it is also an acceptable sacrifice that is well-pleasing to God. These gifts profit the giver (verse 17). God will supply all the needs of those who give. His coffers are filled with the riches in glory through Christ Jesus.

So with a right attitude, what could we accomplish as a church? What could God do with the wealth that He has so richly supplied to us? How deeply could we love our church and witness to our world if we, in faith, trust that God is the supplier of all our needs?

## **Personal Challenge**

Pray that God would prepare the hearts of your group members to receive the message of loving through giving. Pray that He would help you to understand the value of godly treasures and would begin to orient your thinking about security and possessions to His view of these things. Ask God if there is anything that He might want you to sacrifice this week. To where or to whom might He be leading you to give? Act on what He speaks to you before your next small group meeting. Share your experience with your group as appropriate.



**WEEK 5:  
LOVE IN SHARING (LOVE IN TELLING)**



*“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” —Colossians 3:14*

*“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” —John 17:22-23*

*“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” —Acts 2:44-47*

The church will be known by its love. As the church grows together in unity and loves each other through good deeds and giving, the world will have a living example of Jesus' love for them. In the early church, the Lord added newly saved Christians to their group daily.

Every day, they worked on their relationships with each other. They worshiped together, they studied the Bible together, they ate together, and they spent time together in each other's homes. They were of one mind. This doesn't mean that they were all alike or even that they knew everyone in the church. These were people from all over the world who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover when they heard the message of Jesus and committed to being His church. They came from different backgrounds and had different socio-economic levels. Some of them probably didn't even speak the same language. There were thousands of people in this church. It would be impossible to know everyone intimately. So how could such a huge group of diverse people be known for their unity?

Colossians 3:14 tells us that the perfect bond of unity is found in our love for one another. These people in the early church wanted to learn everything they could from the apostles' experience with Jesus. They were committed to growing in their faith and learning how to be disciples. Jesus' teachings and life portrayed a Savior who was devoted to love, service, sacrifice, giving, and unity with the Father. As these

Christians learned to be better disciples of Jesus individually, they grew to love other people with a common life goal of following Jesus. Their love was reciprocated and replicated over and over again. They didn't have to know all the people in the church in order to love them. They loved everyone who loved their Savior, whether they knew them or not. And that was enough. Loving Jesus unified the early church. And in the modern Church, if we as individuals keep our focus on Jesus, we can live in unity too.

Our unity as a group of Christians will directly impact how effective we are at reaching those around us. People know when there is tension and a lack of love in a church. If Christians can't love each other, how can they love a lost world? How will we ever be able to convince our neighbors that God is love and that He sent His Son to them out of love if we can't show them that the church is love?

Our unity is important enough to Jesus that He prayed for us in the moments before He was arrested. John 17 contains His prayer for us. He was concerned with our unity. He must have known how much we would struggle to love each other. He related our unity directly to how much the world would know that God sent Him and that He loves them. Our unity as a church is a powerful witness of Jesus' ability to change lives. When a group of people gets together, our earthly nature is to seek power, exhibit jealousy, and act in selfishness. But with the saving power of Jesus among us and a striving to follow after His will and His ways, we can overcome our nature and act out of love for one another by seeking the good of others above ourselves.

As the early disciples grew in their faith, they expressed more love to those who were worshiping and fellowshiping with them. They were willing to sacrifice for the sake of others because they were learning of the sacrifices God had made for them through Jesus. Their obedience to following Christ's example fostered love among them. And as the world witnessed their love, it made a compelling case for knowing their Jesus. The people around them were drawn to the church. They were intrigued by the actions of this group and wanted to find out their motivation. And as they heard about the Jesus who was moving these Christians to such acts of love and observed the unity among them, they saw proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

When a desperate world sees our godly behavior and unity of faith, it can't deny that there is something different about us. The love we have for the church will draw people into a relationship with Him. If you want to reach the world for Jesus, start by loving your church.

## **Personal Challenge**

List the ways that this study has affected your view of the church and its role in your life. How do you see your actions changing because of what you have learned?

Write down the names of the people in your small group. Next to each name, write one thing that impacted you regarding that person during the last weeks. It can be an insight that they shared or an act of kindness that you witnessed, anything that was significant to you. Consider writing notes of encouragement to each of them, letting them know the impact they had on you.

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