



05

SESSION FIVE

The Gospel Calls for Acts of Love

SESSION SUMMARY

In today's passage, we will study the biblical call to love. We cannot ignore the command to love—one of the most loudly and clearly stated threads of Scripture. Because God loved us, we respond by rightly love those around us.

SCRIPTURE

1 John 3:10-18

THE POINT

Love for God and love for others is the fruit of true Christianity.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

In a world filled with ideas about what love is, it can be hard to discern what it looks like to follow the Bible's commands to love. Our culture is obsessed with feelings. Most people view love as an emotion, which can come and go as it pleases. The world's definition of love does not always involve actions. However, while the Bible does talk about love as a feeling and emotion, it talks more frequently about love as being evidenced mostly in our actions. Passages about love fill the Bible. Statements such as:

- "A friend loves at all times" (Prov. 17:17a).
- "But love your enemies" (Luke 6:35a).
- "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18b).
- "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12b).
- "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14).

▪ **What is your favorite verse on love in the Bible, and why?**

While the Bible talks a lot about love in different contexts, it also makes clear that true love originates in God. God is the author and source of love, which was ultimately demonstrated when God sent His Son to die for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). When God rescued us from sin, He gave us a new identity and the fruit of love will be evident in our lives.

Option 2

As you begin today's session, play a game called *Fruit, Vine, Shrub*. After you call out the name of a fruit, allow students 30 seconds to decide whether the fruit grows on a tree, vine, or shrub. Here are some suggested fruits (the answer is in parenthesis)—be sure to mix it up:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| • Orange (tree) | • Banana (tree) | • Lemon/Lime (tree) |
| • Grape (vine) | • Tomato (vine) | • Pear (tree) |
| • Apple (tree) | • Strawberry (shrub) | • Kiwi (vine) |
| • Blueberries (shrub) | • Watermelon (vine) | |

Once you've been through the entire list, ask if an orange tree is able to produce watermelon. Then, ask:

- **Why can an apple tree only produce apples and a grape vine only produce grapes? What do you think would happen if they tried to switch roles?**
- **Why is it important for Christians to only produce fruits (traits/works) consistent with our faith?**

Just like an orange tree only yields oranges and a watermelon vine only produces watermelons, Christians should only produce fruit that is consistent with the love of Jesus and the new life He has given to us.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Love for God and love for others is the fruit of true Christianity.

CHARACTERS

- **John:** one of the original twelve disciples; author of the Gospel of John

PLOT

What does it mean to love? Our culture offers endless ideas about what it means to love, ranging from chemical reactions in the brain that produce a feeling we call “love” to simply accepting and affirming everyone in every life decision, no matter how immoral it may be. But what does the Bible say about love? Since God is the author and originator of love itself, maybe we should take our cue from Him in explaining what true and genuine love looks like.

TIMELINE

LOVE IN ACTION

Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ

GOD'S MESSAGE IS ONE OF LOVE

If you have ever done any gardening, you know tomato seeds produce tomato plants, pecan trees drop pecans, and orange trees produce oranges. Thinking these crops would produce anything other than what was planted would be insanity. The reason is simple: The genetic makeup of each tree or plant determines the fruit it might bear. A banana tree will never produce a bell pepper, an apple tree won't produce asparagus, and a grapevine will never produce garlic. Some factors might affect a tree or plant's ability to actually produce fruit—the amounts of sunlight, nutrients, and water available—but it is always limited to producing what it was designed to produce.

The same is true of people. People will always produce fruit according to how they are designed.

¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:10-13)

Similar to the way the physical fruit of a plant is connected to its genetic identity, people's spiritual fruit is also connected to their genetic identity. All of mankind has inherited Adam's sin nature, so our corrupted spiritual DNA only leads to death, moral decay, and distance from God.

Only through Jesus does our spiritual DNA change. When we trust in Him, we are born to a new life, new identity, and new purpose. Our old state of death and decay is done away with, and in its place we are given eternal life and our spiritual transformation begins.

- **What are some new qualities or characteristics we would expect to see in someone who has new life in Christ?** (p. 40, PSG)

At the moment of our salvation, God initiates a great work in us. This work makes us more into the likeness of His son—a work in which we partner with Him throughout our lives, until we meet Him face to face and the work becomes perfect and complete. We are all works in progress, but the proof that we have this new identity is the beginning of this work within us.

Those who do not know Jesus do not yet have this sanctifying work within them. Their course is opposite to believers', yet it the same course ours used to be. Some openly mock God and hate Christians. They say they do not believe or love God and never plan to, and their lives are marked by hate. We must certainly be

grieved by these people; we should intercede on their behalf for a change of heart, that they would see the truth of where they're headed, and have a willingness to submit their ways to God.

Others on this same course are not so easy to identify, and their spiritual DNA is just as corrupted as the former. These people may even be among the body of Christ, walking the walk and talking the talk. We cannot always discern the difference between real spiritual growth and a false church-going performance. But the Bible is clear, just as a corn stalk will not produce a tomato, a spiritually dead soul cannot produce the life-bearing fruit of Christ.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MARKED BY THEIR LOVE FOR OTHERS

During the Nazi Holocaust in World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her family helped many Jews escape. Corrie and her family were Christians and decided to show Jesus' love to others rather than playing it safe. They were in danger every day, and were eventually arrested and sent to work in prison camps. Even in the camps, they continued to show love to the people around them—even those who ran the prisons.¹

Corrie's story of those prison days especially sheds light on the power of Christ's love to enable us to show love to others (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Corrie and her family were only able to love their enemies because of the faithful, powerful working of God through them.

John continued by talking about this supernatural love that is within us and identifies us.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:14-15)

While the positive fruit of love is evidence of our new spiritual DNA, continuing in sinful practices is evidence of a lack of change. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught on this problem (Matt. 5:20-22). The Scribes and the Pharisees were very religious people. They faithfully tithed of everything they owned and followed all the rules. They clung tightly to religion; if anyone could be called righteous, it was them. Yet Jesus said their righteousness was not enough. Only the righteousness of Jesus, which exceeds what they had shown, would be sufficient. In other words, Jesus said no one does good on his or her own (Ps. 14:3)—not even those who look like “good” religious people.

Jesus, fully God and fully man, lived the perfectly obedient life we could never live. Then He died the death we all deserve, paying the penalty of wrath our sin earned us. When He rose from the grave, He defeated death so we could have new life and spend eternity with God. And when we come to Christ in faith that His work—His perfect life, sufficient sacrifice, and powerful resurrection—as our only hope, a great and glorious exchange occurs.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE IS FOUND BY LOOKING TO JESUS

A group of angry pirates surrounded their captain and a captured naval commander. The ship's captain began yelling out battle cries for his men to rally around: "Let's feed him to the sharks!" and "Take all of his gold!" The parrot on the captain's shoulder repeated each phrase, but he didn't stop there. Unfortunately, the parrot began to rattle off other statements he often heard from his master: derogatory comments about the crew and his plans to hide the gold from them.

This is a scene from a clever commercial from GEICO®. It ends with the phrase: "If you're a parrot, you repeat things. It's what you do." Following this statement is a pitch of the slogan, "If you want to save money on car insurance, you switch to GEICO®. It's what you do," There are several other similar commercials, all inferring the actions of an animal or type of person to the inevitable outcome. These commercials tap into the reality of what we all know.

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

Later John explained that we love others because God first loved us (1 John 4:11,19). God sent His Son to show us His love for us. Christ walked to the cross to show His love for us. God raised Jesus from the dead to provide a way for us to experience this love. God began the journey of love we experience through Christ, but it ought not stop with us.

We are conduits of God's love—in other words, we are the way people see His love in the world. This love is not a power we can provide on our own. Only because of God's love to us can we bring true acts of sacrificial, life-giving love to a lost and weary world. We must pass on His love to those around us and complete the journey of God's provision through our hands and feet. Our love, and expression of God's love to others, cannot simply be through telling them how much God loves them or how much we love them; instead, we have to show this love by the way we live—a combination of the words we speak, the way we treat others, and our general attitude about life.

None of us will love others perfectly, but the fact that we don't love perfectly should still rattle us. Christ-followers' main desire is to honor God with every moment, and the natural fruit of His disciples will be a deep and abiding love for others. As recipients of the merciful and powerful love of Christ, let's walk forward—marked by love—in grateful worship, allowing the love of God to spill over to those we encounter.

- **What are some practical ways you can show love to the people around you?** (p. 42, PSG)

TIMELINE

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Love (p. 41, PSG)

Saying God is love means God is the essence of love or that perfect love resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. God's greatest act of love toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In teaching the church about the nature of true love, the apostle John reminded Christians that love is not merely a matter of feelings or words but of action. Love was demonstrated and defined most clearly by Jesus' action of laying down His life for His people.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some changes God has made in you since you became a Christian?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When was a time when you were able to love someone and the only explanation for that love was the work of Christ within you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the reality of Christ's right standing with God, which has been given to you, change how you think about loving others?** *God's love for us in Christ is the model and standard by which we understand how to best love others. Jesus serves us; we should serve others. Jesus had compassion on the broken; we should have compassion on the broken. Jesus stepped down from His heavenly throne to meet our deepest needs; we should step out of our comfort zones and seek to meet the needs of those around us.*
- **What are some practical ways you can love others according to the love you have been given?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

It only takes one difficult relationship to see how the love we are called to exhibit is not something we can build up on our own. Loving others like Christ loved us can only be done with supernatural power. This is why nonbelievers are unable to truly display the fruit of love. Why? First, the power of the Holy Spirit is not within them. And second, true and genuine love seeks for others to be happy in God, the source of all love. Thus, the call to love is a calling they can never carry out.

- **How does the world's love differ and fall short of God's love?** *The world's love is often self-serving; it doesn't seek to lead others to God and a right relationship with Him; it is often only explained as an emotion or feeling; and so on.*
- **Why should love always seek to lead people to the source of love—God?** *Truly loving your neighbor as yourself requires pointing that person to finding joy in God and loving Him with all that we are.*



HEART

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? Both made a sacrifice yet God only accepted Abel's as righteous. Abel is listed in the hall of faith, which says Abel's sacrifice was a more acceptable sacrifice because of his faith (Heb. 11:4). Since we know our salvation is never by the works we do but by faith (Eph. 2:8-9), we must assume that though Cain and Abel both obediently sacrificed, only one did so with the undercurrent of faith: Abel. Cain's offering was given without heart, without faith, and without love.

- **What most often prevents you from showing love to others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the Bible's teaching on love challenge the way you previously viewed it?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

How do we love others with God's love? Here are five actions to consider as we strive to show the world around us the love of Christ.

1. Pray: Regardless of age or ministry training, we can all pray.
 2. Pay attention: We don't need to look too far to know people with needs.
 3. Share the gospel: As we seek to minister to those around us, we should be a continual source of gospel truth.
 4. Provide for those who are where you cannot be: Get involved by supporting missionaries and organizations who are sharing Jesus' love with the nations.
 5. Share the needs with others: As you see needs, pray for them and provide for them, but don't forget to tell others too. Invite others to get involved in the act of love.
- **Which of these actions comes most natural to you?** *Answers will vary.*
 - **Which of these is the best next step for you to work toward?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #7, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 1 John.

SOURCES

1. Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place: The Triumphant True Story of Corrie ten Boom* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject