



Series Overview and Guides

2022-2023 ANNUAL THEME | SERIES 2

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER

Objective

what we hope to see God accomplish in us through this study

That we activate biblical love in every situation.

STATEMENTS OF THE OBJECTIVE

"I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."

—Philemon 7

"His [Gaius'] truth had not been kept secret in his mind, nor his love in his heart. Both were evident. The brethren had seen both, had been impressed by both, and bore witness to both."

—John R.W. Stott
The Epistles of John

Premise

why we are studying this

The concept of love has been long misunderstood and misused; however, our era seems especially deft at abusing the idea. Love today is defined in primarily childish terms, akin to a small child exclaiming, "You don't love me unless you give me everything I want!" How does a true lover of that person keep from reinforcing foolishness while expressing genuine care? Expressed in many variations, that dilemma is answered in the brief New Testament "love letters." Studying these epistles from the past will transform our present action and change future results.

STATEMENTS OF THE PREMISE

"This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love."

—2 John 6

"At the center of the universe is a love so great that it must be shared... Our enjoyment of relationships – even our most ordinary moment with our most ordinary companion – is more profound than we often realize; it is a reflection of God's own infinitely joyous fellowship as Father, Son, and Spirit."

—Drew Hunter
Made for Friendship

Theme

what the study is about

The recipients of these letters – and those they served – are living through changing, often difficult situations. Paul, John, and Jude send very brief letters with specific directions on how to live out agape love amid the challenges of this world. In short, the love letters answer these questions:

- Philemon – How does love cut through societal and personal sin?
- 2 John – How is love expressed in the midst of manipulation?
- 3 John – How can one love under persecution?
- Jude – How can love activate when biblical theology is being undermined?

STATEMENTS OF THE THEME

"But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love. And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives."

—Jude 20-23 NLT



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS

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SERIES 2 | SESSION 1

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL THEME 2022-2023

ACTIVATE

SCRIPTURE READING

Philemon 1-11

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Personal sin and cultural wickedness combine to create grand messes in people's lives. In such situations, activating *agape* love is paramount. *The Epistle to Philemon* teaches us how.

OBJECTIVE

We activate love in messy situations.

WE ARE ALL ONESIMUS

"What Paul did for Onesimus reflects the infinitely greater intercession and redemptive act of Christ for us, who because of our sin are all indebted to God in a way we cannot ourselves repay. As Luther said, 'Here we see how Paul layeth himself out for poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his cause... and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done some wrong to Philemon. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth Paul for Onesimus with Philemon. We are all his Onesimi, to my thinking.'"

—Arthur Rupprecht
Philemon

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we learn to show *agape* love to each other.

Use the back of this page to write specific prayer requests.

Session 1: Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

1. How would you counsel someone to be loving in these situations:
 - a. Suffering abuse or abandonment
 - b. Enduring persecution
 - c. Receiving injustice
2. Read Philemon verse 5.
 - a. What is Paul thankful for?
3. Read Philemon 8-11.
 - a. What is Paul encouraging Philemon to do?
 - b. When have you had to show love in a difficult situation?
4. Read Colossians 3:13.
 - a. How is forgiving someone an expression of love?
5. Read Hebrews 10:24.
 - a. What are some ways to spur each other to activate love and good deeds?



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SERIES 2 | SESSION 2

GROUP DISCUSSION



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SCRIPTURE READING

Philemon 12-25

KEY IDEAS

THEME

This personal letter serves up some brilliant philosophy:

- We learn that obedience is not based on power, but love.
- We see the primacy of Christianity in relationships.
- We are motivated to work as comrades (συνεργός, *synergos*) in Christ.

OBJECTIVE

We work together as loved brethren.

DIVINE PLANS

“Paul raises a theological claim for himself and his helpers. Their assistance in proclaiming the Gospel means that they share with the apostle the burden of the ministry of reconciliation. Along the lines of Isaiah 43:24 they thus share in God’s own work with its toil and labour. Hence they are God’s servants and workers. As such they can claim the obedience of the community. Nevertheless they are not lords of the community in the human sense; they are helpers of its joy.”

—Georg Bertram
*Theological Dictionary
of the New Testament*

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we work together as brethren in Christ.

Session 2: Love Bears All Things

1. Read John 13:35.
 - a. What is the primary directive for Christians?
 - b. Share some examples of how love has been shown to you, and you have shown love to others.

2. Read Philemon 17 -20.
 - a. How would you describe the relationship between Paul and Philemon?
 - b. What about their relationship is Paul counting on?

3. Read Philemon 21 – 22.
 - a. What does Paul expect Philemon to do? Why? (Review verses 12-16)

4. Share a story of the greatest expression of Christian love you’ve heard of or experienced yourself?



SERIES 2 | SESSION 3



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SCRIPTURE READING

2 John 1-6

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Using purposefully circular reasoning, John explains the life of a Christ-follower. He or she is obedient to *love* in truth and *walk* in the truth. Each action is connected and feeds upon the other, positioning the Christian disciple to fulfill Jesus' command to love one another.

OBJECTIVE

We love and walk in truth.

THE GREATEST INCLUSIO

John 15:12-17 is an inclusio that describes what it means to love one another:

Command = Love one another (v.12a)

- Love as Jesus loved you (v.12b)
- Greatest love is laying life down for friends (v.13)
- Friendship is displayed in obedience (v.14)
- Friends know the truth (v.15)
- Disciples are elected (v.16a)
- Disciples are appointed to produce lasting fruit (v.16b)
- Everything needed is provided those who ask in Jesus' name (v.16c)

Command = Love one another (v.17)

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we obediently walk and love in truth.

Use the back of this page to write specific prayer requests.

Session 3: Love Rejoices in the Truth

1. Read 2 John 3.
 - a. What do each of these 5 great gifts communicate to all believers as benefits of our salvation? (Grace, Mercy, Peace, Truth, Love)

2. In 2 John 4, John says we are commanded by the Father to walk in truth.
 - a. What does *walking in truth* look like?

3. Read Deuteronomy 17:4
 - a. As Christians today, how can we apply this instruction?

4. What does *loving in truth* look like?

5. Why is there difficulty in our society with agreeing on what is true?

6. Read John 14:23 – 24.
 - a. What do we demonstrate by obeying the words of Jesus?



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SCRIPTURE READING

2 John 7-13

KEY IDEAS

THEME

The false teachers have spread out into the world, just as Jesus prophesied. Full of hubris, they purport to know more about Jesus' Person than the eyewitnesses and researchers who wrote the gospel accounts. John warns the church against facilitating such evil, encouraging them by example to engage in-person with the brethren instead.

OBJECTIVE

We engage with Christians and refuse false teachers.

INCARNATION

"The common error was Christological. The false teachers regarded Jesus as something other than God's Anointed One who had come in the flesh."

—Thomas Constable, *Notes on 2 John*

"The incarnation was more than a mere incident, and more than a temporary and partial connection between the Logos and human nature. It was the permanent guarantee of the possibility of fellowship, and the chief means by which it is brought about."

—A.E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Letters*

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we faithfully discern false teaching.

Session 4: Love is Not Arrogant

1. Read 2 John 7-13.
 - a. What main doctrine do these false teachers deny?
 - b. Why is this doctrine important to us?
 - c. How is this false teaching manifested in churches today?
2. Read 2 John 8-9.
 - a. What is our responsibility when hearing someone teach Christian doctrine?
 - b. Why is it important to be a discerning listener?
3. Read 2 John 10-11 and Acts 17:11
 - a. How should we respond to false teachers?
 - b. Why should we not encourage or support deceiving messengers?
4. How can we encourage those who are teaching the truth?
5. Discuss ways believers can encourage one another to love and good deeds.



SERIES 2 | SESSION 5



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SCRIPTURE READING

3 John 1-8

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Gaius flourishes by choosing the hard road of righteousness, and the Elder prays for that prosperity to deepen through development of his whole person, walking in truth, and engaging with Christians. By choosing the virtuous way of suffering and generosity, Gaius glorifies God, encourages the brethren, and prospers.

OBJECTIVE

We flourish on the righteous path.

HOSPITALITY

"It is our Christian responsibility to provide hospitality to those who are spreading the Gospel (Matthew 10:9-15). When we open our doors for God's servants, we must realize that it is to God Himself that we have invited (Matthew 25:34-40) and failing to take care of His children is considered as a failure to care for the Lord (Hebrews 13:1-2) and as we practice hospitality with diligence (Romans: 12:13), our righteous God will surely reward us."

—Timothy Bokka
A Blessed Christian Walk

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we walk in truth and generously engage with each other.

Session 5: Love is Kind

1. Read 3 John 1-4. Since the last time we studied walking in truth a few weeks ago, in what ways have you realized you were walking in truth?
 - a. When did you realize a temptation to deviate from the truth?
 - b. What lies can come from the world, the flesh, and the devil?
 - c. How will others see you are walking in truth?
2. Read 3 John 5-8.
 - a. Why is it important to support financially and with prayer those who are taking the Gospel to our community and the world?
 - b. Why should we carefully consider participating in the local church "staff appreciation?"
3. Read James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:6, and John 16:33.
 - a. Discuss what Christian prosperity is and is not.
 - b. How will doing and experiencing hard things help us to prosper spiritually?
4. How can we effectively confront the prosperity gospel, and why is it important?
5. What are a few practical steps we can take to apply love in action?



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SCRIPTURE READING

3 John 9-14

KEY IDEAS

THEME

The image of diverging paths continues in the letter. They are particularly fleshed out in the attitudes and actions Diotrophes and Demetrius. Diotrophes loves to be first and is a miserable excuse for a servant-leader. Demetrius, on the other hand, is a doer of good and an imitator of God – like Gaius.

OBJECTIVE

We imitate Demetrius.

PSALM 139:23-34

“The temptation to use a role in the Christian assembly as a means of self-gratification remains a real one that all servants of God need to resist.”

—Warren W. Wiersbe
The Bible Exposition Commentary

PSALM 139:23-34

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my concerns.
See if there is any offensive way in me;
lead me in the everlasting way.

PRAYER

Read Psalm 139:23-24. Pray and ask God to reveal changes you need to make.

Session 6: Love is Not Self-Seeking

1. Read 3 John 9-10.
 - a. What do you learn about Diotrophes that makes him a poor church leader?
 - b. How does that compare to the characteristics of a good church leader?
2. Read Hebrews 10:24, and 3 John 11. Considering these passages, discuss examples of how we can show love for one another.
3. In what ways does the Church prepare us to show love for others?
4. How does your life demonstrate that you know God, not just know about Him?
5. Identify someone you know who is:
 - a. a godly person
 - b. a beloved benefiter
 - c. a truth testifier
6. Share with your group and let them know to provide encouragement.



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SCRIPTURE READING

Jude 1-10

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Jude develops a compelling narrative mainly through characterization. Humans, angelic beings, and the Triune God are all detailed through their being and actions. Thus, this passage compresses a great deal of theological truth into a tiny space. The major takeaways for people include: receiving salvation by grace through faith and knowing that the Christian faith & biblical truths are settled fact “once and for all.”

OBJECTIVE

We contend for the faith.

CONTEND

“Contend (*epagonizesthai*) was commonly used in connection with the Greek stadium to denote a strenuous struggle to overcome an opponent, as in a wrestling match...This unique compound verb pictures a person taking his or her stand on top of something an adversary desires to take away, and fighting to defend and retain it.”

—G. F. C. Fronmüller
in Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we vigorously defend the faith.

Session 7: Love Finds No Joy in Unrighteousness

1. Read Jude 1-4.
 - a. Why is the doctrine of salvation settled “once for all?”
 - b. How do people change the grace of God into something less?

2. What does it mean to “contend for the faith”? Discuss ways you can do this in today’s world.

3. Review verses 6 and 9. Discuss what we can learn about angelic beings from these two verses.

4. What does verse 10 inform us about the ultimate destiny of those who twist the gospel message?



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SERIES 2 | SESSION 8



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ACTIVATE

SCRIPTURE READING

Jude 11-25

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Again, Jude does theology with seamless skill. Discussing his big idea – contending for the faith – he describes the way things are and how they work for angelic beings, false prophets, Christians, and God.

OBJECTIVE

We edify Christ's body and glorify the Head.

THE APOSTATE LIFE

Jude described the apostates four ways: They were grumblers and faultfinders; they followed their own evil desires; they bragged about themselves; and they flattered others for their own advantage. Vocally discontented, sinfully self-centered, extravagantly egotistical, and deceptively flattering—such are apostates, then and today.

—*Bible Knowledge Commentary*

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

"The Christian life is viewed as having an *inward* look relating to the development of character (v. 20), an *upward* look relating to communion with God (vv. 20-21), and a *forward* look being consummated in final glorification (v. 21).

—D. Edmond Hiebert
Jude 17-23, Bibliotheca Sacra, Oct-Dec 1985

PRAYER

Pray for each other, that we build each other up in the faith.

Session 8: Love Never Ends

1. Read Jude 11-16.
 - a. Why is it important to identify false teachings and false teachers?
 - b. What or who are current illustrations of this?
2. Read verse 15 again.
 - a. What is going to happen when these are judged?
3. Read 20-21. We are told to do three things. Discuss them.
 - a. Build each other up in the faith.
 - b. Pray in the power of the Spirit.
 - c. Await the mercy of the Lord.
4. Read 22-23. What are you doing to remind yourself about and to ready yourself for the Lord's return?

