

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

Aaron and Jamie Ivey

COMPLEMENT

SEEING THE BEAUTY OF
MARRIAGE THROUGH SCRIPTURE

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MARRIAGE THROUGH SCRIPTURE

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table of contents

5	About the Authors
6	Introduction
7	How to Use This Study
10	Session One: What Is Love?
46	Session Two: Placing Courage
76	Session Three: Follow and Lead
110	Session Four: Fighting and Forgiving
148	Session Five: Sex
182	Session Six: Mission
216	Session Seven: Closing Challenge
220	Group Leader Tips
222	Endnotes

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Aaron and Jamie Ivey live in Austin, Texas, where they parent four kids and do their best to change the world from right where they are. Jamie hosts the podcast, *The Happy Hour with Jamie Ivey*, has written some books, and will stop anything for some '90s hip-hop. Aaron is a pastor at The Austin Stone, has written some books, is a songwriter, and loves spending time cooking in the kitchen. They both believe that stories make a huge impact on the world and are honored to share their story and lives with others.

INTRODUCTION

We are so honored you would join us for this Bible study. We don't take it lightly that you'd show up, dive in, and do the diligent work of refining and cultivating a healthy marriage.

Throughout the two decades of our own marriage, we've been through sweet seasons and difficult times. We all know marriage isn't easy, and no one just stumbles into a healthy and vibrant marriage that overcomes hardship and stands the test of time. But we've found God faithful to give us strength, direction, and wisdom on how to endure and thrive through His Word.

As you do this study, we hope you are encouraged and challenged by stories from our own journey, but more than anything we want you to discover the surprising beauty of marriage by seeing God's heart and design for it. And the best place to see that is in Scripture. God is not silent about it, and He doesn't intend for you to build a meaningful marriage without His loving help. He's the One who invented it, so He's the One who is most passionate about seeing your marriage reflect His very heart.

We encourage you to engage with the content of the study alongside your spouse. We wrote this together with the hope you'd do it together. Set aside time every week to get into the Scripture, write your thoughts, and engage in meaningful conversation with your spouse on a planned date night.

We are on this journey with you. We are fighting for your marriage, even from a distance. You are not alone, and we hope and pray that God does a powerful work in your marriage.

Aaron & Jamie Ivey

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *Complement*! We're so thankful you've chosen to do this study. We hope and pray you will truly see the beauty of marriage through Scripture in everything you read, study, view, and experience. To get started, we want to give you some information on how you can best use this study.

THE USER

Who is *Complement* for? While *Complement* was written and designed as a group Bible study for married couples, it is not limited to that type of use or that group of people. We also encourage engaged couples and almost-engaged couples to go through the study. It will certainly help lay a solid foundation for a godly, purposeful marriage. Also, regardless of whether you're a couple or an individual, you don't have to go through this with a group. The study is built in such a way that you can go through it on your own or maybe invite another couple to join you.

ELEMENTS OF THE STUDY

The study has two main parts: group time and personal study.

GROUP TIME

Once a week, you'll gather with your group to watch the teaching video. Aaron and Jamie will combine scriptural truth and personal experience to provide insight on different areas of marriage, including love, forgiveness, sex, mission, and more. Although the video teaching is included in the group time, the videos are also available for those who are going through the study individually. Go to LifeWay.com/Complement to purchase those videos. Your group time will also include review questions for the previous week's personal study and discussion prompts to help you debrief the video teaching.

PERSONAL STUDY

Between the group sessions, you will have three days of personal study to help you dig deeper into that session's subject. Those three days of study will include scriptural study and activity questions. As you work through each day, you'll note that we have designated a few questions as

“Connection Point” questions. These are questions we strongly encourage couples to talk through to help process what they are learning. The “Connection Point” questions will be identified with this icon: 

Day 4 is called “Talk It Out.” Here, we’ve provided a list of review questions to further help couples discuss and work through what they’ve learned during the three days of personal study.

The last section of the personal study is what we call “Date Night.” Couples know how important it is to spend time together. But when we start talking about what to do, we either come up empty and do nothing, or we do the same “dinner and a movie” date over and over again. If that’s you, we’re here to help! Each week we’ll provide you with two creative date ideas. We realize you may not like every idea, but our suggestions may spark other ideas you would enjoy. If you have great date night ideas, post them with the hashtag #ComplementStudy.

STUDY FLOW

To help you understand the order and flow of the study, here’s what a sample week of the study might look like. For this example, we’re going to say your group meets on Sunday night.

Sunday: Group meets for Session One. Possible agenda:

- Leader welcomes the group and initiates introductions.
- Start with some icebreakers and/or get-to-know-you questions.
- Play the Session One teaching video. Aaron and Jamie teach on the subject of “What Is Love?”
- Following the video, your group will debrief the teaching.
- Pray and dismiss.

Monday–Saturday: Complete the personal study for Session One.

- During the week you will work through Days 1–4 (which include “Talk It Out”) of the personal study on “What Is Love?” Feel free to work through this material at your own pace.
- If possible, choose to do at least one of the “Date Night” ideas.

Sunday: Group meets for Session Two. Possible agenda:

- Leader welcomes the group.
- Use review questions to discuss what you learned in the Session One personal study.
- View the Session Two teaching video. Aaron and Jamie teach on “Placing Courage.”
- Following the video, the group will debrief the teaching.
- Pray and dismiss.

This schedule continues in a consistent fashion until Session Seven. The agenda for the Session Seven Group Time will be the same as previous weeks. However, this video wraps up the study. No personal study will follow.

NOTE TO GROUP LEADERS

Check out the “Group Leader Tips” on pages 220–221 to help you lead your group more effectively.

session one

*WHAT
IS
LOVE?*

#COMPLEMENTSTUDY

To love and be loved can mean a million different things to us. Whether we use love to describe how we feel about an evening walk under the canopy of starlight, a book we've read so many times the pages have worn thin, or the person we stood before in a crowd of witnesses and pledged our forevermore, we love, *love*.

*GOD CREATED
MARRIAGE TO
ILLUSTRATE HIS
UNBREAKABLE
LOVE FOR US.
MARRIAGE IS
A METAPHOR OF
JESUS' COVENANT
RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE CHURCH.*

The entire Bible, from beginning to end, is one unified story. It is a story of a God-King who had so much love to give that He didn't want to keep it all to Himself. All of His work was good, but to Him, nothing was quite as special as His humans. He made every single person in His very own image. But these humans broke His heart by rejecting His love. Their rebellion invited a dark lord to master over the hearts of His beloved people. But God had a plan. He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die a humiliating and painful death for the sins of His people. Jesus became sin so the people could become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). This great exchange was, is, and always will be the most awesome demonstration of love.

This is love.

God created marriage to illustrate His unbreakable love for us. Marriage is a metaphor of Jesus' covenant relationship with the church. Pastor and author David Platt wrote:

When God made man, then woman, and then brought them together in a relationship called marriage, he wasn't simply rolling dice, drawing straws, or flipping a coin. He was painting a picture. His intent from the start was to illustrate his love for his people . . . For God created the marriage relationship to point to a greater reality. From the moment marriage was instituted, God aimed to give the world an illustration of the gospel.¹

Marriage is everything you imagine it to be—sometimes more and sometimes less. It's romance and partnership. It's a promise of *with*—someone to eat with, pay bills with, cry with, figure out how to do life with. It's someone to laugh with in the middle of the night at things no one else would find funny. It's having someone know you best, see you at your worst, and choose to love you still. Some days you will love your spouse to the moon and back, and others you won't feel an ounce of love for him/her. Marriage is for friendship, companionship, intimacy, and so much more. A good marriage has a myriad of benefits. None of those benefits or meanings are to be disparaged, but they are also not the ultimate purpose of marriage. So what is the ultimate purpose of marriage? In this study, we'll dive into the Scriptures to find out. We'll see just how purposeful and intentional God was in designing marriage, not just for our benefit, but for so much more.

NOTES

GROUP SESSION

OPENING

- 1. Do you have a funny story surrounding your engagement or wedding? Please share it with the group.**
- 2. What drew you to this study?**
- 3. What is one way marriage is different than you thought it would be?**
- 4. How does our current culture view marriage? How does that view support or oppose biblical marriage?**
- 5. Name five characteristics of a good marriage and put them in order. Be ready to defend your choices.**

WATCH THE VIDEO

DISCUSS

1. What part of the video really got your attention? Why?
2. Did you have a good model for the true meaning of love growing up? If so, explain. If not, how has that affected your ability to love others, especially your spouse?
3. How would you define *agape* love? Who do you know who loves people with that kind of love?
4. What hinders you from loving your spouse in that way?
5. How is marriage like a puzzle?
6. How are you and your spouse different? How do you love your spouse through the differences?
7. What have been some moments in your marriage when you had to “stay at the table” and work things out?
8. When you zoom out, how do you see God putting the pieces of your stories together in your marriage?

1

DAY

A GREATER REALITY

Father,
Make me a person of love. Help me to be
shaped and formed by Your love for me.
Lead me to love others the way You have
loved me.
Amen

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF LOVE

Marriage is a covenant of love between a man and woman. But for a husband and wife to experience a marriage that is unbreakable and full of love, we must first understand who we are as individuals. To do that, we must start at the very beginning.

Read Genesis 1:26-27.

What was God's purpose in creating humanity?

Every human being has been made in the likeness of God. This means we must look to God to know who we are and why we are here. We have to know who He is and what characteristics and desires He has shared with us.

Read 1 John 4:8 and write it below.

In light of how this verse describes God, what does He share with us?

Being made in the image of God also means we are made in the image of love. Love is in our DNA, our souls, our very beings. We are born with a desire to love and be loved. Your desire and need for love is not wrong or too big. You were created to be loved fully and completely.

Do you ever feel silly, needy, or ashamed by how deeply you want to be loved? If so, explain what makes you feel that way.

How does Genesis 1:27 encourage you to not minimize or belittle your desire to be loved?

In his book *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis said it this way:

... it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.²

In what ways have you made “mud pies” instead of receiving God’s “offer of a holiday at the sea”? What keeps you from being insatiably discontent with the lesser offerings of the world? How would your life change if you were?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE?

God created us to be in relationship with Him, represent Him to everyone around us, and use all of the intelligence, creativity, and abilities He has given us to cause the world to flourish. Isn’t that incredible? In the beginning of creation, God used a garden to teach us this concept. God called Adam to work the garden of Eden. But as Adam was digging and planting and taking care of the animals, God noticed something Adam couldn’t see for himself.

Read Genesis 2:15-18.

What did God see that Adam needed that Adam did not realize or see on his own?

*The Hebrew word for **helper** (**‘ezer**) means, “one who supplies strength in the area that is lacking in the ‘helped.’ The term does not imply that the helper is either stronger or weaker than the one helped.”³*

Man alone was insufficient to represent God to the world. God’s creation of humanity was only half-finished. So God made for man a partner, a friend, a helper—a person like him but not like him. Men and women are equal image bearers of God, but they are also distinct from each other. Those distinctions are necessary for the world to see a full representation of God. And both men and women are necessary to move the human project forward to flourishing.⁴

In our current culture, the word *helper* has gotten a bad rap. It is often implied that a *helper* is less than or a person of less dignity. We think of a *helper* in terms of a Robin to a Batman—Batman is necessary; Robin is not. But this is completely wrong. God made woman because man could not fulfill God’s calling alone. Men need women, and women need men. However culture may slice it and divvy out importance, weight, and significance, God says for the world to see a true picture of Him and for the world to move forward in peace and flourishing, we *equally* need men and women.

Imago Dei is Latin for “**the image of God.**” Every person is created in the image of God, which implies that an intrinsic value, beauty, and worth is found in every single human being.⁵

Misunderstanding the *imago Dei* is often what causes confusion and turmoil in marriages.

How might a misunderstanding of the value of men and women damage a marriage? In what ways have you seen your life flourish through partnership with your spouse?

Genesis 2:24-25 gives us a peek into the very first marriage.

*Therefore a man shall leave his father
and his mother and hold fast to his wife,
and they shall become one flesh.
And the man and his wife were both
naked and were not ashamed.*

In the Scripture above, circle what God intends for a husband and wife to experience within a covenant relationship.

So, if God's ideal marriage was the joining of Adam and Eve, what went wrong? Let's take a look at Genesis 3:1-13.



CONNECTION POINT

*Discuss
your
answers
to these
questions
together.*

Focus on verses 1-5. How did Satan lie and deceive Eve? How has this kind of lying and deception caused turmoil and distrust in your relationship with God? In your marriage?

.....
.....
.....

How was Adam and Eve's relationship with God changed as the result of their sin (v. 8)?

In Genesis 3:7,10,12, how was Adam and Eve's relationship with one another changed as the result of their sin, specifically in regards to "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) and "naked" and "not ashamed" (v. 25)?

Although Adam and Eve sinned, which distorted their relationship with each other and with God, God still had a perfect plan. Jesus became the Redeemer for our salvation and the perfect example of an unending, unchanging, unbreakable love. And now, despite the fall, one of God's most profound and powerful ways of demonstrating His love to the world is through His design of covenantal marriage. See, when God designed marriage, He intended it to reflect the eternal covenant between Christ and the church. Isn't that amazing? It's a living, breathing illustration of the covenant He's made with us! But it's not a perfect example because we're not perfect. At times, sin distorts the reflection, making it impossible for us

to clearly see God's love for us, much less display it to the world. That's why our primary focus is on Jesus to show us the way of love. He is our perfect example—our glasses, if you will—enabling us to see God and to love God. He transforms us by His love to be people who love.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33 (emphasis added).

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Read all of the highlighted verses. What does the word *as* show you about the greater meaning of marriage?

Write down everything listed in those verses that Christ does for the church.

Take a moment to consider some ways that your marriage reflects the glorious kindness of Christ and the church.

Through this Scripture, we see that God not only commands us to treat our spouses in a certain way, He also gives us tangible examples of what that looks like through the relationship of Christ and the church. Do you see how high the standard is for husbands and wives—and their love for each other?

Ephesians 5:1-2,21 gives us the framework for these instructions on how a husband and wife should treat one another. Read it below.

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.
And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself
up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
... submitting to one another out of reverence
for Christ.*

According to these verses, what are the most important things we should remember and do as we walk out our marital roles?

Marriage is hard. A million things can cause us to forget why we chose one another in the first place—work, kids, money, sex, and on and on. We need to be reminded a million times over why we got married and what God purposed for our marriage.

Southern California's Highway One stretches across some of the nation's most beautiful landscapes. For six hundred fifty miles you can weave in and out of the Redwoods, up and down the mountains, and around and around the most fragrant bends of prairie and ocean. It's not a quick drive, but you can experience the breathtaking coast of California by stopping at one of the many vistas.

When you're tucked into the height of the redwoods or a curve of the road that sends you far to the east, the ocean feels forever away—kind of forgotten. That doesn't mean the ocean has disappeared, but it's just more difficult to see from your vantage point. Similarly, we can get lost in the complexities and difficulties of marriage and lose sight of the purpose. But going to Scripture calls us back to the ultimate aim of our marriage. It's like finding our way to one of those vistas where we can see the ocean clearly again. The Bible helps us remember what marriage is all about and how to make the necessary adjustments to get back on track.

In Scripture, from the first marriage in the garden of Eden to the marriage feast of the Lamb, God has used the theme of marriage to reflect His relationship with His people. His covenant love and faithfulness set the standard for how we are to love our spouses. In marriage, when we say, "I do," we are making a similar covenant with our spouse.

What similarities do you see in the passages about God’s covenant love for His people on the left to the sample marriage vows on the right?

SCRIPTURE	MARRIAGE VOWS
<p>Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9).</p>	<p><i>I dedicate this marriage today and this home tomorrow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I will never leave you or forsake you. Wherever you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live; Where you die, I will die; Your people will be my people, and your God my God; May the Lord bring anguish upon me if anything but death separates us. I give all of myself to you.</i></p>
<p>“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Isa. 54:10).</p>	
<p>The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing (Zeph. 3:17).</p>	
<p>And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD (Hos. 2:19-20).</p>	<p><i>I take you to be my wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.</i></p>
<p>“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32).</p>	

A profound sense of joy, sacrifice, grace, and permanence is reflected in God's unconditional love for us. The same should be at the heart of our love and marriages so that we might reflect Him to the world.

Are we going to always get this perfect? No. Marriage is never a straight shot to bliss. We love; we fight; we make up; we mess up—over and over and over and over again. But how does remembering God's purpose for marriage help you reset when things get difficult in marriage? How does it stir in you a desire to never give up on what God has called you to in marriage?



AS YOU GO

Remember this truth: “And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD” (Hos. 2:19-20).

Fight for this truth: God created marriage to illustrate His unbreakable love for you. You are made to be loved and to love. Your desire to be loved is not too big, too annoying, or too needy. But the world's offer of love will never satisfy our deep need for love; only God's love will satisfy.

Pray this truth: *God, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for teaching me . . .*

Help me to trust and obey You with . . .

Amen

2

DAY

GOD'S BELOVED

Father,
I ask that You use Your Word to teach me about Yourself. Renew my mind to think about love the way You think about love. Transform my heart through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. Help me to love You, love my spouse, and love my neighbors with the kind of love with which You love me.
Amen

Our definition of *love* is formed by our relationships and experiences. For many of us, this often creates a chasm of dissonance between what we hope to experience and what we have actually experienced.

Think about it like this. We are told, “God loves you.” But we understand this declaration of love through our experiences of love. This is how it might translate: *God loves you. God [is going to say He loves you, but then He’s going to get tired of you messing up all the time and leave] you. God loves you. God [says beautiful things but does the opposite of that thing] you. God loves you. God [cares most about your happiness and will never ask you to do something hard] you.*

This language disconnect makes it crucial that we define our terms according to the standard of truth. Because we believe God is the essence of love, we believe we have no better Source from whom to derive our definition, belief, and expression of love. Our hope is that as we grow in knowledge of God’s love for us, our love for Him and one another will be awakened.

Write out what love means to you on the next page.

If I'm totally honest, love has meant this to me . . .

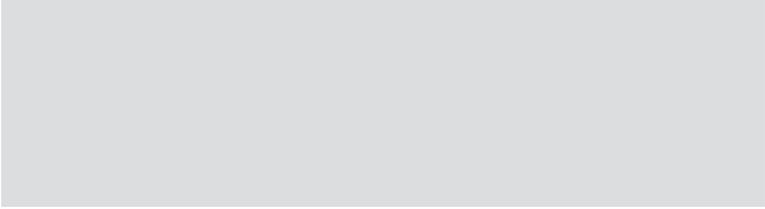
No doubt your response has been shaped by family, experiences, education, and culture. If we had parents who fed, clothed, and cared for us, we may have developed a sense that love is security. If we had a cinematic meet-cute, we may believe romantic love is a spontaneous gift of magic from the universe. If we have experienced betrayal, death, or abuse in relationships with people we loved, we might have very little faith in “love.”

Using the word bank below, jot down in the spaces provided how the following people or experiences have impacted your experience with love.

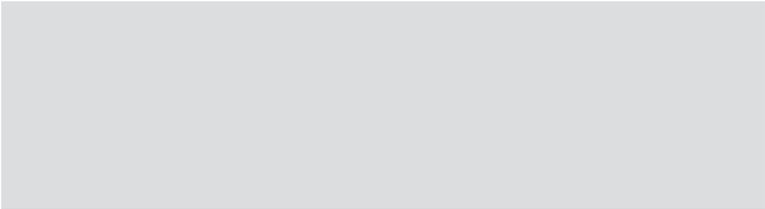
inspiring	sex	magical	just a word
disappointing	loyalty	vulnerable	commitment
selflessness	short-lived	friendship	happiness
passion	trust	acceptance	betrayal
unconditional	conditional	compassion	feeling at home with a person

Family (parents, siblings, close relatives, etc.)

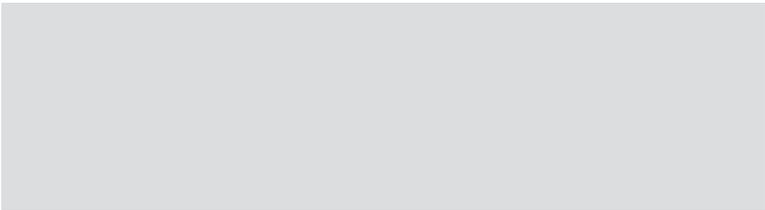
Friends



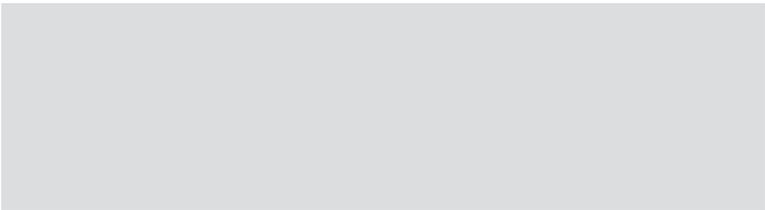
Faith



Culture (art, literature, music, social media, geographic locations, etc.)



Impactful Experiences (both positive and negative)



Understanding love can be extremely difficult because our view of love is so often shaped and defined by broken and sinful humans. People will always fall short in their ability to love perfectly, but God will not. God's love is pure. It is blameless. It is without fault. To truly understand love, we need to look at the One who loved us first. It's when we see His love that we'll begin to understand how much better and altogether different His definition of *love* truly is.

Read the following passages and **highlight** or circle the word *love* every time it's used:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

JOHN 15:12-13

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

1 JOHN 3:16, NIV

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

1 JOHN 4:7-11, CSB

What is the importance of understanding we were loved by God first?

How do these passages say Jesus demonstrated God's love for us?

How does God call us to demonstrate our love for one another?

Our ability to love God and one another is not dependent on our personal experience with love, our personality type, or our willpower. True, genuine, transformative love is not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us. This is where all of love begins—receiving the impeccable, all-satisfying, never-ending love of God. Scripture shows us this love was best displayed for us through the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Sacrifice is a daunting, unpopular concept. Our western culture promotes a lifestyle of having everything we think we deserve, when we want it and how we want it. We don't like the idea of sacrificing anything. Our consumer-driven society reveals how little we actually value any type of real sacrifice. When we do hear stories or quips about sacrifice, it's generally in terms of a player or soldier "taking one for the team." This is what Paul was talking about in Romans 5:6-7.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.

Maybe, just maybe, we would sacrifice our lives for a really good person, a person we love, a person we're devoted to, a friend.

But that's not what we see Jesus did.

Read Romans 5:8-10.

... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Underline every description of who Jesus Christ died for. What do you learn about who Jesus died for?

Fleming Rutledge wrote,

If we think of Jesus' sacrifice in the same way that we think of soldiers in wartime, therefore, we will miss the entire point. Jesus is speaking to a group of people who are not going to be beside him on the battlefield. Quite the opposite. They have consistently misunderstood him and are about to deny and abandon him. The twelve disciples are very poor excuses for friends. Only in the sacrifice of Jesus are they transformed from enemies into friends.⁶

Sacrifice is a romantic ideal. It's an exquisite demonstration and manifestation of love. And most of us, if placed in a do-or-die situation,

would lay our lives down for our spouses. Where marital sacrifice gets difficult is in the everyday, ordinary practice of self-sacrifice for the sake of love and unity. And the longer we are married, the more we are tempted to stop sacrificing. We become dull in our awareness of needing to sacrifice for our spouses.



CONNECTION POINT

*Discuss
your
thoughts
on this
exercise
together.*

Read the following scenarios. What do you think it could look like to walk in sacrificial love in each of these circumstances?

1. You come in from a long day at work, and you can see it all over her face—stress, anxiety, weariness. She's done. But so are you. It might not have been a two-year-old pulling at you all day, but adult coworkers aren't any easier. All you want is to take a half hour of some quiet time.
2. For days he has been in a funk. Moody. Short. It feels like he hasn't seen you at all. You feel utterly disregarded.
3. She asks without looking up, "Would you mind grabbing me another cup of coffee?" You didn't intend to, but a scorecard appeared in your head, and you checked off another box of when you got her coffee. And seeing all the checks—picking up dry cleaning, giving the kids a bath, dropping a load of clothes in-between client calls, mowing the yard, running the kids all over tarnation—sends you spiraling.
4. He never wants to have sex. You wonder how long it will take for him to initiate if you don't.

It's possible these illustrations brought a recent situation to mind in which you didn't love your spouse as sacrificially as you wish you would have. If God is bringing a moment to mind, spend some time praying and repenting. Reflect on how Jesus' sacrificial love inspires and compels you to love your spouse.

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We are called to present our bodies as a living sacrifice before God.
Paul wrote:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

ROMANS 12:1

Underline the phrase “by the mercies of God.” The NIV translation of the phrase is—“in view of God’s mercy.” Read the verse again, this time substituting “by the mercies of God” with “in view of God’s mercy.”

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, ^{in view of God's mercy} ~~by the mercies of~~ God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

ROMANS 12:1

How does the phrase “in view of God’s mercy” motivate you to live a life of sacrifice?

How can you consistently keep this phrase in mind?

Read Hosea 6:6 and write it below.

Eugene Peterson paraphrased the verse like this, “I’m after love that lasts, not more religion. I want you to know GOD, not go to more prayer meetings” (Hos. 6:6, The Message).

In what ways have you put religion above love in your relationship with God?

In what ways have you made cold, “take-one-for-the-team” sacrifices in marriage without considering God’s mercy in His sacrifice for us?



AS YOU GO

Remember this truth: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13).

Fight for this truth: Your ability to love is not dependent on what your past or present experience with love is, how loving your personality is, or what kind of day you are having. Your ability to love is rooted in God’s transformative love for you.

True, genuine, transformative love is not that we have loved God but that He has loved us. This is where all of love begins—receiving the impeccable, all-satisfying, never-ending love of God.

Pray this truth: *God, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for teaching me . . .*

Help me to trust and obey You with . . .

Amen

DAY

3

**A LOVE
LIKE NO
OTHER**

Father,
No love could ever compare to Yours.
Teach me to love my spouse in a way that
reflects Your perfect love. I am incapable
of loving perfectly, but with the help of
Your Holy Spirit, empower me to love in
a way that helps my spouse see Jesus. As
I sit in Your Word today, my heart is open
to receive what You have to say.
Amen

Today, we will study the passage that has been read at weddings worldwide—1 Corinthians 13, affectionately known as the love chapter. Although it wasn't originally written in the context of marriage, there's a good reason it's read at so many covenant ceremonies. It's beautiful, lofty, and empowering. Every lovestruck couple truly believes they will be the ones who embody every phrase and finally get marriage right.

However, we must keep in mind why Paul wrote this beautiful charge to love one another so vigorously and relentlessly. The church at Corinth was in grave trouble. She was fractured because of the people's pride, self-importance, and power. Their disunity was distracting them from advancing the gospel. Paul told them what they needed to hear to correct the problems, heal the body, and function in unity again.

Remembering God's love for us and His command to love others as He loved us is the antidote to heal the brokenness in our hearts and marriages that comes from pride, self-importance, wounds, and distance.

The love chapter teaches the preeminence, perfection, and permanence of love.

THE PREEMINENCE OF LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 and write it below.

Draw a box around the phrase “but have not love” or “do not have love” (CSB) every time it’s used. What did Paul say is worthless without love?

Paul wrote about a love that is preeminent, or superior, to all other things. He said love is so supreme that if he didn’t have love, he *was* nothing (v. 2) and he *gained* nothing (v. 3).

What do you think he wanted us to understand and believe by writing these two statements?

Paul stated that having the ability to speak well, to speak with the gift of tongues, to have prophetic powers, and spiritual wisdom, all faith, generosity, and a heart of sacrifice—all amazing things—are less than the importance of having love.

Out of the gifts and abilities listed, which ones seem the most important to you? Why do you think love might seem less effective than these other traits or gifts?

THE PERFECTION OF LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

What an incredible description of love. Sometimes, this type of love may seem unattainable, but the hope found in Scripture is that God actually wants to teach, empower, and develop this kind of love within each of us. One of the best ways to grow in love for each other is to take the time to examine how you're currently doing in loving each other. Take an honest inventory of how you want to grow and how your spouse is growing. Then, remind yourself how Jesus perfectly expresses this love toward you.

<i>LOVE</i>	Definition	How have you seen Jesus perfectly express this aspect of love?	What is an example of how your spouse has expressed this aspect of love to you?	In what way do you want to grow in expressing this aspect of love to your spouse?
Is Patient	<i>to not lose heart; to be long-suffering in bearing the offenses and injuries of others</i>			
Is Kind	<i>of good and benevolent nature or disposition; considerate</i>			
Does Not Envy	<i>covet; to be discontent with regard to another's advantages</i>			
Does Not Boast	<i>to speak with excessive pride, especially about oneself</i>			

Is Not Arrogant	<i>claims to superior importance or rights; overbearingly assuming</i>			
Is Not Rude	<i>impolite in a deliberate way</i>			
Does Not Insist On Its Own Way	<i>demanding our preferences or rights</i>			
Is Not Irritable	<i>easily excited to impatience or anger</i>			
Is Not Resentful	<i>to feel or show displeasure or indignation from a sense of injury or insult</i>			
Does Not Rejoice At Wrong-doing	<i>to feel happy when someone else commits a blame-worthy action or behavior</i>			
Rejoices With the Truth	<i>celebrates when someone acts or behaves in correspondence with the Word of Truth</i>			



CONNECTION POINT

*Discuss
your
answer
to this
exercise
together.*

Choose one or two of the characteristics of love and share with your spouse how well he/she has expressed this aspect of love to you. Encourage your spouse in the ways you see God loving you through him/her.

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Read 1 Corinthians 13:7 from your Bible. Then, read it again from the AMPC:

Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything without weakening.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:7

This is an undeniably high bar for love. Most of us desire to love one another this fully and completely but have subconscious (or conscious) limits.

Being as honest as possible, what limits your love? Describe the circumstance that could cause you to quickly believe the worst about your spouse or could cause the love and hope in your marriage to fade.

THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8b-13.

How did Paul stress the permanence of love in this passage?

Paul wrapped up this section by showing that everything passes away—nothing is permanent in this world. Even the spiritual gifts the Corinthians put so much stock in—prophecy, tongues, and knowledge—were going to cease. Everything we are able to see, however clear it might seem to us in the moment, is merely a shadow or a portion. What will remain? Faith, hope, and love, with the greatest being love. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13). Why not? Perhaps because love is the “essence of God’s character.”⁷ The greatest love of our life is merely an imitation of the supremacy, perfection, and permanence of the love of Jesus Christ.

Read Deuteronomy 31:6.

What did God promise Joshua?

What did He say Joshua would experience if he trusted this promise?

Permanence breeds an environment for trust, love, security, vulnerability, and intimacy. We have no control over when death may part us from our spouse, but we are called to imitate Christ in the permanence of love. Dr. Timothy Keller wrote, “Real love, the Bible says, instinctively desires permanence.”⁸



CONNECTION POINT

*Discuss
your
answers
to these
questions
together.*

Spend a few minutes assessing your marital environment. Is there any fear, anxiety, or dread present because of the thought that your love for one another may not be permanent?

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What would it look like to renew strength and courage in your relationship through the reminder that you're not going anywhere? Discuss with your spouse.

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AS YOU GO

Remember this truth: “Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything without weakening” (1 Cor. 13:7, AMPC).

Fight for this truth: No one can and will love you as fully, deeply, and faithfully as God will. The more we surrender to the love of God and the more we depend on the Holy Spirit to help us love, the more we will be able to show our spouses the kind of love we so desperately want to and need to.

Pray this truth: *God, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for teaching me . . .*

Help me to trust and obey You with . . .

Amen

4

DAY

TALK IT OUT

We encourage you to take a few minutes on this day to sit with your spouse and process what you studied this week. Use some or all of the following questions to guide your discussion:

1. Which day of study was your favorite and why?
2. What was the most difficult portion of the study for you and why?
3. Do you think we truly understand the purpose of marriage? Why or why not?
4. How well does our marriage reflect the gospel and the love of Christ?
5. How has our understanding of love shaped our marriage for better or worse?
6. How do we display sacrificial love for each other? How can we get better at that?
7. Which of the characteristics of love from 1 Corinthians 13 do you struggle with the most?
8. How can we help each other in the areas of love we're weakest in?
9. Which of the "As You Go" statements really captured your heart? Why?

Finish this day by praying together. Express your gratefulness for the love Christ has shown and also given you to express to each other. Spend some time praying about the areas of your marriage that God has revealed to you that need attention or refining.

It's so important that you and your spouse spend quality time together on a consistent basis. You'll need to be purposeful and intentional to make this happen. We want to help. Each week we'll provide one or two simple date night ideas. Of course, "date night" could be a "date morning" or "date afternoon." Whatever best fits your schedule. And if you're wondering what to talk about, feel free to use the designated connection points found throughout this week's study or the discussion questions found on Day 4.



DATE IDEAS FOR THIS WEEK

1. Make a picnic meal and head to a local park. The meal can be as simple or elaborate as you want it to be. Find a picnic table or just throw an old quilt down under a shade tree and enjoy time with each other.
2. Grab a puzzle out of the closet or go purchase a new one. Open the box, dump out the pieces, and work together on it. (Just don't work in silence!) Have some great conversation as you work.