

HAND OF PURPOSE

DISCIPLES GO FIRST!

LOVE FIRST!



THE MOST
EXCELLENT WAY

THE GREATEST
OF THESE

THE BOND THAT
HOLDS US
TOGETHER

BIBLE STUDY WORKBOOK

A HAND OF PURPOSE STUDY & REFLECTION WORKBOOK

Disciples Go First! Love First!

The Most Excellent Way • The Greatest of These • The Bond That Holds Us Together

PURSUE LOVE. PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE. DISCIPLES GO FIRST.

This workbook is built from the final “Disciples Go First! — LOVE FIRST!” message. It is designed for personal study, discipleship groups, leadership teams, and ministry training.

TWELVE SECTIONS · REFLECTION QUESTIONS · PERSONAL RESPONSE

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Read the Scriptures slowly and let the Holy Spirit apply them personally. The goal is not simply to identify someone else’s responsibility, but to ask what love requires of us. Work through the reflection questions honestly, write down what the Spirit brings to mind, and identify one practical step of obedience.

HOLY SPIRIT, SHOW ME MY RESPONSIBILITY.

I The Person, the Power, and the Presence of the Holy Spirit

What is the greatest evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in a person's life? Which gift, anointing, ministry, or evidence of the Spirit seems most impactful? What accomplishes the most? What most clearly demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is working in us?

- ◇ Prophecy?
- ◇ Words of knowledge?
- ◇ Miracles or extraordinary faith?
- ◇ Pastoring or teaching?
- ◇ Apostolic or evangelistic ministry?
- ◇ Intercession?
- ◇ Helps?
- ◇ Administration?
- ◇ Tongues or interpretation?

The Apostle Paul spends three consecutive chapters — 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 — helping the Corinthian church understand spiritual gifts and the proper use of those gifts. Right in the middle of that discussion he shows us something that must be in the middle of everything we do.

WHATEVER MY GIFT, CALLING, OR ASSIGNMENT — NO MATTER HOW GREAT OR SMALL — THERE MUST BE EVIDENCE OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. When you think of the Holy Spirit working in a person's life, what evidence do you tend to notice first?

2. What gift, calling, assignment, or ministry has God placed in your hands?

3. Would the people closest to you say that love is clearly visible in the way you carry that assignment?

II Different Gifts, Same Spirit, One Body

1 CORINTHIANS 12

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4 NKJV

“There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:5 NKJV

“And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:6 NKJV

Paul immediately establishes diversity. The Holy Spirit does not make every member identical in anointing and gifting.

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7 NKJV

Paul names manifestations including the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:11 NKJV

THE SAME SPIRIT INTENTIONALLY PRODUCES DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS.

We cannot look at another believer and say, “If you really had the Holy Spirit, you would be doing what I’m doing.” The Spirit Himself distributes differently.

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12 NKJV

“But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:20 NKJV

“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:21 NKJV

Paul also names apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, administrations, and varieties of tongues. Then he closes the chapter with a doorway into something even greater.

“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:31 NKJV

A MORE EXCELLENT WAY.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Have you ever judged another believer because their assignment or passion did not look like yours?

2. Whose different gifting do you need to value more intentionally?

3. How does the phrase “as He wills” change the way you compare your role with someone else’s?

III Put Love in the Middle

1 CORINTHIANS 13

Imagine having access to one of the greatest business minds on earth for an hour. After explaining several ways to do something, that person leans in and says, “But now I am going to show you the MOST EXCELLENT WAY of all.” That captures the weight of Paul’s transition from chapter 12 into chapter 13.

LOVE.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1 NKJV

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 NKJV

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:3 NKJV

TONGUES WITHOUT LOVE — NOISE.
PROPHECY, KNOWLEDGE, AND MOUNTAIN-MOVING FAITH WITHOUT LOVE — I AM NOTHING.
SACRIFICE WITHOUT LOVE — PROFITS NOTHING.

Paul is not diminishing spiritual gifts. He is showing us the indispensable way in which every gift must operate.

THE GIFT MAY REVEAL WHAT THE SPIRIT HAS GIVEN ME.
LOVE REVEALS WHAT THE SPIRIT IS DOING IN ME.

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4 NKJV

“does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:5 NKJV

“does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:6 NKJV

“bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:7 NKJV

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 NKJV

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.
PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.

- ◇ Prophecy? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Teaching? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Pastoring? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Evangelism? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Intercession? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Administration? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Helps? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.
- ◇ Leadership? PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Which description of love in verses 4–7 most exposes an area where you need growth?

2. Can a genuine spiritual gift be operating through you while your attitude still needs correction? Where might that be true?

3. What would it practically mean to “put love in the middle” of your assignment this week?

IV Pursue Love and Build Up the Body

1 CORINTHIANS 14

“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1 NKJV

Paul does not say, “Forget the gifts and just love.” He says pursue love AND desire spiritual gifts. Love and gifts are not competitors. Love governs the way the gifts are used.

PURSUE LOVE — AND DESIRE SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

“Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”

1 CORINTHIANS 14:12 NKJV

1 CORINTHIANS 12 — DIFFERENT GIFTS. SAME SPIRIT. ONE BODY.

1 CORINTHIANS 13 — WITHOUT LOVE, EVEN EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY PROFITS NOTHING.

1 CORINTHIANS 14 — PURSUE LOVE AND USE THE GIFTS TO BUILD UP THE BODY.

Paul also connects the Spirit and love when writing to the Galatian church.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,”

GALATIANS 5:22 NKJV

“gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

GALATIANS 5:23 NKJV

Love is not listed as one spiritual gift among many in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul names it as fruit of the Spirit, and Jesus identifies love as a visible mark of His disciples.

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

JOHN 13:35 NKJV

THE WORLD MAY BE IMPRESSED BY OUR GIFTS.
JESUS SAID THEY WOULD RECOGNIZE HIS DISCIPLES BY OUR LOVE.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Are you more concerned with displaying your gift or building up people?

2. What does “pursue love” require you to actively do?

3. If someone observed your life for a week, what visible evidence of love would they see?

V Love Is the Bond — The Boat

What can love do in real-life situations, and what evidence can people actually see? Product advertisements often make bold claims: SUPER STRENGTH. EXTREME BOND. WATERPROOF. PERMANENT REPAIR. HOLDS UNDER EXTREME CONDITIONS.



THE FLEX TAPE BOAT ILLUSTRATION

The familiar Flex Tape boat demonstration presents a boat that has been cut apart and repaired with a bond claimed to be strong enough to put the boat back into the water. It sounds almost unbelievable.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE CLAIM IS TRUE?

There is only one meaningful answer: TEST IT. Put the boat in the water. Let the weight, movement, water, and pressure test what the claim says.

A CLAIM IS ONLY A CLAIM UNTIL IT IS TESTED.

But the boat gives us something deeper. A boat is not merely designed to stay together. A boat carries people. A boat is going somewhere. It has a destination.

THE BOND IS CONNECTED TO THE DESTINATION.

If the bond fails, the consequence is bigger than a failed demonstration. The vessel can take on water. The mission can be interrupted. People can be hurt. No one reaches the destination.

THERE ARE PEOPLE ON THE BOAT.
THE STRENGTH OF THE BOND AFFECTS EVERYONE ON BOARD.
LOVE DOESN'T JUST HOLD US TOGETHER.
LOVE HELPS US GET THERE TOGETHER.

“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

COLOSSIANS 3:14 NKJV

The Greek word translated “bond” is syndesmos — a bond, connecting tie, that which binds together.

LOVE IS THE BOND THAT HOLDS THE BODY TOGETHER.

A disagreement may feel private. Unforgiveness may feel personal. Division may appear to affect only two people. But there are other people on the boat — watching and waiting to see whether God’s love in us holds up when the bond is put under pressure.

THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE ON THE BOAT — WATCHING TO SEE IF
GOD’S LOVE IN US HOLDS UP WHEN THE BOND IS PUT TO THE TEST!

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Where is one of your relationships currently under pressure?

2. What is that pressure revealing about the bond of love?

3. Who else is “on the boat” and affected by the way you respond?

VI The Claim — “I Love God”

“We love Him because He first loved us.”

1 JOHN 4:19 NKJV

Before our love is tested, John tells us where it came from. We did not originate it. HE FIRST LOVED US.

HE LOVED FIRST.

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

1 JOHN 4:20 NKJV

There is the claim: “I LOVE GOD.” John compares the claim with visible evidence. The Greek word translated “liar” is *pseustēs* — a liar, one whose statement is false.

THE CLAIM — I LOVE GOD.
THE TEST — HOW WELL DO I LOVE THE BROTHER I CAN SEE?
THE EVIDENCE — WHAT DOES MY LIFE / RESPONSE REVEAL UNDER PRESSURE?

LOVE IS EVIDENCE THAT WE KNOW GOD.

“And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

1 JOHN 4:21 NKJV

“Commandment” is *entolē* — authoritative command or instruction. The NKJV’s “must” communicates the force of the command: the one loving God is to love his brother also.

THE “MUST” GETS ITS WEIGHT FROM THE COMMAND OF GOD.
WHAT I SAY ABOUT MY LOVE FOR GOD IS TESTED BY HOW I LOVE PEOPLE.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Where is your claim to love God being tested in a relationship right now?

2. What does your response under pressure reveal?

3. What would visible love look like in that relationship?

VII Disciples Go First

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

1 JOHN 3:18 NKJV

LOVE MUST BECOME VISIBLE.

In ministry, someone may come frustrated about a difficult person. After listening, the counsel can be: “Go to them and ask them to forgive you if you have done or said anything that hurt them.”

The response may be, “But I never said I did anything wrong!” Yet when asked what they want the other person to do, they often want that person to acknowledge shortcomings, humble themselves, apologize, and seek reconciliation.

WHO ARE THEY GOING TO LEARN THAT FROM?

Not merely from someone with a title, but from the disciple of Jesus in the room.

- ◇ If I want humility — I GO FIRST.
- ◇ If I want forgiveness — I GO FIRST.
- ◇ If I want reconciliation — I GO FIRST.
- ◇ If I want honesty — I GO FIRST.
- ◇ If I want love for difficult people — I GO FIRST.

WE GO FIRST BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.
DISCIPLES DON’T MERELY POINT TO THE WAY. DISCIPLES SHOW THE WAY.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Where have you been waiting for someone else to go first?

2. What part of reconciliation or humility actually belongs to you?

3. What first step can you take without trying to control the other person's response?

VIII The Difficult — The Condition Tests the Bond

THE ONLY TIME WE CAN TRULY DEMONSTRATE GOD'S
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE TOWARD SOMEONE IS WHEN THEY GIVE US A
CONDITION THAT WE HAVE TO LOVE THEM THROUGH.

It is easy to love people who appreciate us, agree with us, respect us, and respond well. Then someone gives us a condition: disappointment, disrespect, misunderstanding, criticism, accusation, stubbornness, or failure.

THE CONDITION BECOMES THE OPPORTUNITY.

When our own human love runs out and the situation gets difficult, we turn to God's Holy Spirit within us and acknowledge our need for His unconditional love. We draw from the love we have already received.

I'M GIVING AWAY LOVE I HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED.
THE DIFFICULT PERSON MAY NOT BE INTERRUPTING THE LESSON.
THEY MAY BE THE LESSON.
THE CONDITION TESTS MY LOVE.

Unconditional love does not mean unconditional access. Love can confront, establish boundaries, and require accountability without surrendering the character of Christ.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Who is giving you a difficult condition to love through?

2. What is that condition exposing in your own heart?

3. What would Spirit-supplied love look like while still maintaining truth and healthy boundaries?

IX The Hurtful — Betrayal Tests the Bond

Betrayal hurts differently because betrayal requires relationship. A stranger can hurt you, but betrayal comes from someone who had access to your trust.

Judas was one of the Twelve and was entrusted with the money box. At the Last Supper Jesus gave Judas the dipped bread, yet the others still did not immediately understand what Judas was about to do. Read John 12:4–6 and John 13:21–30.

BETRAYAL DOES NOT CANCEL MY RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

LUKE 23:34 NKJV

Jesus experienced betrayal, rejection, injustice, and crucifixion. What others did to Him did not redefine His character or derail His obedience to the Father.

THE PEOPLE AROUND JESUS COULD CHANGE THEIR TREATMENT OF HIM.

THEY COULD NOT CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF GOD WITHIN HIM.
THE WOUND TESTS MY LOVE.

Forgiveness does not pretend betrayal did not happen. Love does not automatically restore the same access or trust. Wisdom, repentance, boundaries, and accountability still matter.

SOMEONE ELSE’S BETRAYAL DOES NOT GET PERMISSION TO DECIDE WHO I BECOME.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Has someone’s betrayal begun to shape your character or reactions?

2. What is the difference between forgiveness and restored trust?

3. What would it mean to refuse to let another person's actions decide who you become?

X The Different — The Body Needs Every Part

“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:18 NKJV

The same Spirit intentionally gives different members different assignments.

As a young man in ministry, God put neighborhood evangelism heavily on my heart. We held Street Parties with race cars, Harleys, BBQ grills, a stage, and a band. People came outside, and we gave them the Gospel. We saw tremendous fruit.

Because God was speaking so strongly to me, I began wondering why everybody was not lining up to participate. I could even become critical of others in my local church because they did not possess the same passion I had for the lost.

I HAD CONFUSED MY ASSIGNMENT WITH EVERYONE’S ASSIGNMENT.

Then an older woman in the church told me that she and others had been gathering for extended intercessory prayer — praying for the advancement of God’s Kingdom, for us, and for those Street Parties.

WHILE I WAS OUT THERE DOING MY PART, SHE WAS DOING HERS.

What I thought I was initiating may actually have been an answer to somebody else’s prayer. The evangelist needed the intercessor. The visible ministry needed the unseen servant. Different parts. Same Spirit. Same Body. Same mission.

LOVE KEEPS MY CALLING FROM BECOMING A MEASURING STICK FOR EVERYONE ELSE.

BEING RIGHT ABOUT MY ASSIGNMENT DOES NOT GIVE ME PERMISSION TO BE WRONG IN MY ATTITUDE TOWARD YOURS.

THE DIFFERENCE TESTS MY LOVE.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Have you confused your assignment with everyone else's assignment?

2. Who may be faithfully doing an unseen part that supports the mission you care about?

3. How can you honor someone whose passion, gift, or role is different from yours?

XI The Pressure Test

The boat brings the whole study together. The product made a claim. Pressure tested the claim. The bond revealed its strength.

THE CLAIM — I LOVE GOD.
THE BOND — LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.
THE PRESSURE — THE DIFFICULT, THE HURTFUL, THE DIFFERENT.
THE EVIDENCE — WHAT COMES OUT OF ME?
THE COMMAND — I MUST LOVE.

THE CONDITION TESTS MY LOVE.
THE WOUND TESTS MY LOVE.
THE DIFFERENCE TESTS MY LOVE.
AND IN EACH ONE, THE DISCIPLE GOES FIRST.

The gifts matter. The calling matters. The mission matters. But if love — the most excellent way and the greatest of these — is missing from the middle of what we do, we fail the test.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. Which pressure test is most active in your life: the difficult, the hurtful, or the different?

2. What is coming out of you under that pressure?

3. What would passing this test in love look like in a specific action?

XII Holy Spirit, Show Me My Responsibility

We spend a lot of time examining what other people should do: Why haven't they apologized? Why don't they change? Why don't they see what I see? Why aren't they doing what I'm doing?

Discipleship turns the question back toward our own obedience.

NOT: "HOLY SPIRIT, SHOW ME THEIR RESPONSIBILITY."

BUT: "HOLY SPIRIT, SHOW ME MY RESPONSIBILITY."

- ◇ Someone is difficult? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.
- ◇ Someone hurt me? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.
- ◇ Someone betrayed me? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.
- ◇ Someone's assignment is different from mine? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.
- ◇ I need to correct someone? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.
- ◇ I need to establish a boundary? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.
- ◇ I need to apologize or seek peace? — Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility.

MY RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT TO DO EVERYBODY ELSE'S PART.

MY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO FAITHFULLY DO MY PART — IN LOVE.

There are people on the boat. There is a mission before us. There is a destination God has called us toward. When pressure comes against the bond, disciples do not simply wait for somebody else to move.

HE LOVED FIRST.

SO DISCIPLES GO FIRST.

- ◇ FIRST TO LOVE.
- ◇ FIRST TO HUMBLE OURSELVES.
- ◇ FIRST TO FORGIVE.
- ◇ FIRST TO SEEK PEACE.
- ◇ FIRST TO HONOR THE DIFFERENT.
- ◇ FIRST TO ASK: HOLY SPIRIT, SHOW ME MY RESPONSIBILITY.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

1. What responsibility has the Holy Spirit brought to your attention through this study?

2. What part belongs to someone else that you need to stop trying to control?

3. What is your next act of obedience, and when will you take it?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Holy Spirit, Show Me My Responsibility

The person, relationship, or situation God has placed on my heart:

What this pressure is revealing in me:

My responsibility:

The action I will take:

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility. Thank You that You are present and at work in Your people. Thank You for every gift, every calling, every assignment, and every member of Your Body. Teach us the more excellent way.

Put LOVE back in the middle of everything we do. Let our gifts build people up rather than make us proud. Give us Your love for the difficult, Your grace when we are hurt, Your wisdom when trust has been broken, and Your humility to honor people whose assignment looks different from ours.

Lord Jesus, You loved first. Let Your love become visible in us. When pressure comes against the bond, let what comes out of us look like You. There are people on the boat. Help us faithfully do our part, in love, so that together we can fulfill the mission You have given us.

Holy Spirit, show me my responsibility — and help me do it in LOVE. Amen.

PURSUE LOVE.

PUT LOVE IN THE MIDDLE.

LOVE IS THE BOND.

THERE ARE PEOPLE ON THE BOAT.

HE LOVED FIRST.

SO DISCIPLES GO FIRST!

NOTES