

BRIARCLIFF CHURCH

Small Group Study Guide: The Fruit of the Spirit

Week of September 6 (Week 2)

Love: Galatians 5:22; 1 John 4:7–16



INTRODUCTION

On the first list of the fruit of the Spirit—"love," Jerry Bridges says:

"We cannot truly love God without loving one another. To recognize that there is someone I do not love is to say to God, 'I do not love you enough to love that person.' This is not to deny the reality of spiritual struggle in loving a particular person, because it often exists. I am referring to the attitude of not even wanting to love the person, of being content to allow a lack of love for someone to reside in my heart unchecked and unchallenged. Jesus linked loving God to loving man in Matthew 22:37–40, when he was asked about the greatest commandment in the Law. Devotion to God is the ultimate motivation for Christian character, but it is also true that love for other believers is the more proximate motivation for the exercise of Christian graces among one another. . . Love as a motivational factor helps us see what Paul had in mind when he said that love binds together all the virtues of Christian character. Love is not so much a character trait as the inner disposition of the soul that produces them all. . . although love may be more a motivational force than an actual display of Christian virtue, it *always* results in action on our part. Love inclines us and directs us to be kind, to forgive, to give of ourselves to one another. As Peter says to us, 'Above all, love each other deeply' (1 Peter 4:8)" (Jerry Bridges, *The Fruitful Life*, 47–49).

OBSERVING AND APPLYING THE TEXT

I. GOD SENT HIS LOVE INTO THE WORLD (1 JOHN 4:7-10)

1. According to verses 7-8, what relationship exists between loving others and knowing God?

2. How does John define God's love in verses 9-10?

3. How should God's sacrificial love for you shape the way you treat difficult people in your life?

II. FEAR IS THE ENEMY OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:18)

4. What kind of fear does John address in this verse?

5. What does John mean when he says that "perfect love drives out fear"?

6. What fears may be hindering your ability to trust God or love others fully?

III. LOVE IS INCARNATE AND RELATIONAL (1 JOHN 4:11-12)

7. Why does John say believers ought to love one another?

8. What does it mean that God's love is "made complete in us"?

9. Recognizing that love is not based on feelings, what are some practical ways you can show the fruit of love this week?

IV. OUR LOVE GROWS WHEN WE ABIDE IN GOD'S LOVE FOR US (1 JOHN 4:13-16)

10. What evidence does John provide that believers abide in God and God abides in them?

11. What does John mean by "abiding" in God's love?

12. What practices help you remain rooted in God's love and grow in love for others?

Key Takeaway

Love is the first and foundational fruit of the Spirit because it reflects the very character of God. God's love was revealed through the sending of His Son, overcomes our fears, becomes visible through our relationships, and grows as we abide in Him. The more deeply we experience and trust God's love for us, the more naturally His love will overflow through us to others.

"We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).