



NG Study Guide: 1 Th 3:11-13 “Be Loving” [10.7.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis:

Most followers of Jesus are aware that love is an essential aspect of Biblical faith. But what does authentic Christian love look like? The Apostle Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians in 1 Th 3:11-13 reveals a heart that has been profoundly shaped by Jesus’ love and gives us a window into what to look like to live a life of receiving and showing the love of Christ.

I. The love of Jesus actively pursues [11]

11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you

In 1 Th 2 & 3, the Apostle Paul recounts how he was unable to visit the Thessalonians due to circumstances that are unexplained other than that “Satan hindered him” (1 Th 2:18). Paul sent Timothy instead and was encouraged by the positive report he received concerning their continued faith. Nonetheless, Paul’s prayer recorded in 1 Th. 3:11-13 reveals he still has a burning desire to visit Thessalonica in person. The Greek word for “way” comes from the root word “*euthus*”. It is the same word used when John the Baptist describes his role as making “way” for Jesus (John 1:23). Paul’s prayer is appealing to God that He would divinely ordain a way for Paul to get to Thessalonica. This is a fervent and active prayer. Paul has a deep “*longing*” for them to know Jesus’ love. Paul’s *longing* for the Thessalonians is mentioned other places in this letter as well. For instance, the word for *longing* in 1 Th 2:8 implies *pursuit*. Paul’s ministry was marked by a passionate longing and loving pursuit of the people God had called him to minister to. This pursuit often involved multiple letters and personal visits. Paul’s loving pursuit of people also led him to enter, at times, into uncomfortable territory with those he was leading. He regularly called out sin and warned of false doctrine. Nonetheless, Paul never failed to do so with gentleness, as described in 1 Th 2:8. Gently and kindly pointing people to the love of Jesus is the most loving thing we can do. This applies both in the love we show to fellow believers as well as to non-believers. The Great Commission to make disciples (Matt 28:16-20) flows from the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40). Once you have received the powerful love of Jesus pursuing your own heart, the desire should naturally be for others to experience that loving pursuit as well. This was the case for Paul and it should be the case for us Jesus-followers as well.

II. The love of Jesus overflows to others [12]

12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you

In verse 12, Paul turns his prayer from his desire to visit the Thessalonians to his desires *for* the Thessalonians. Paul had an incredible encounter with the love of Jesus in his own life and ministry, and he now desired for the Thessalonians to not only receive that love but to demonstrate the love of Christ to one another. The idea of *increase* implies a filling and *abounding* implies an overflow. If you can imagine a

container that is overflowing with liquid, the impact of the phenomenon goes beyond the container itself and affects other nearby objects as well. When a person is overflowing with the love of Jesus, it should naturally affect the other people around that person. It's clear from verse 12 that the overflowing effect of Jesus' love was supposed to have an impact both on those inside and outside the church. In other words, when you are overflowing with the love of Jesus, it should pour out from you to both your *fellow believers* and also *all people*, including any non-believers or pre-believers within your spheres of influence. Genuine love for fellow Christians and genuine love for the lost both pose unique challenges to our fleshly nature. More than any man-made institution or organization, the Church unites people who are radically different yet bonded by shared belief in the Gospel and submission to Jesus as Lord. It's a bond that runs deeper than blood. Actively loving people who are different than you can be extremely difficult. We must learn to recognize God has created us uniquely in His image. We are to celebrate these differences and work together, all the while maintaining grace for one another and forgiving one another along the way. This is what prompts the Apostle John to warn in 1 John 4:20; *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?* Simultaneously, it can be equally as challenging to love non-believers, especially when it comes to engaging a world whose values are often diametrically opposed to Jesus' values. We must work to build relationships with unbelievers around us in order to show them the love of Jesus. This is often a slow and difficult process, but one you must engage in if you are to live out Christ's mission. Though we often lack the courage to befriend others and build these relationships, the Holy Spirit empowers us to do so even when our flesh is weak. In the narrative account of Acts, the number one evidence of a believer being filled with the Holy Spirit is a boldness to proclaim Christ. A heart of love for both those inside the Church and those outside is strong evidence that one has received and is displaying the love of Jesus.

III. The love of Jesus establishes your heart [13]

13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints

Jesus' love not only has profound external influence but profound internal results as well. The word for *establish* in verse 13 implies being *strengthened*. So how exactly does Jesus' love strengthen your heart? For one, because of Jesus' love you are *blameless before God* [13a]. The ultimate expression of Jesus' love for you was the willing laying down of His life on the Cross, so that by grace through faith in Him you might be forgiven and saved. This gospel truth is not something that is just for the unbeliever. Even the longtime follower of Jesus must continually be established in gospel truth. As a follower of Jesus, you are redeemed and saved by grace, but there is also an inner conflict within you between your sinful flesh and your God-given desire to do what is right (Romans 7). Your experience in this life will never be fully free from the effects of sin. When you inevitably fail and make mistakes, it is essential you are established in this gospel of God's gracious love for you, otherwise an ungodly shame threatens to overtake you. Another way the love of Jesus establishes your heart is in the *hope for His return* [13b]. The reality is that Jesus is going to return and restore all things to their rightful order. His followers will dwell in His presence for all eternity, naturally giving us a present hope that transcends our circumstances. We know we have truly received, and are established in, Jesus' love when this hope is pervasive in our hearts in spite of whatever external realities we might be facing.

Study Guide Qs

Q1: Describe a time in your life when someone actively pursued you with the love of Christ.

Q2: What are some challenges of loving your fellow believers inside the church and how can these challenges be overcome?

Q3: What are some fears you have about building relationships with those "outside" the church (unbelievers and pre-believers) and how can you build such relationships?

Q4: How does the reality of Jesus' love for you impact your everyday life & how can you better focus on Jesus' love throughout your day?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

- 1. Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13. What do you discover about God and his love? How does this compare to other types of “love” you see in the world around you? What can you apply to your life?**
- 2. Make a list of your various “spheres” of influence (home, work, church, school, leisure activities, etc...). Write down the names of people, both believers and unbelievers, in each of those spheres and commit to praying for opportunities to love them.**

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Talk with your neighbors this week about what they value in their relationships with other people, share your values with them, and ask how you are doing at honoring those values as a neighbor.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. Feel free to use an icebreaker question or activity to get to know one another better.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

b. How would each of us like to apply the truths we learned to our life? This question may be answered simply by completing the study guide. Nevertheless, it will generally be beneficial for leaders to encourage each participant to conclude the study by considering how he or she desires to apply the lessons learned.