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ZONDERVAN™

Fruit of the Spirit

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LOVE

THE BIG PICTURE



It takes an enormous amount of courage to enter the character battles that Scripture challenges us to fight. I would like to propose that *treating others as more important than yourself* is one of the best definitions of love I have ever heard. I get so tired of superficial definitions of love. They seem to change with the seasons.

- Love is a gentle smile.
- Love is finding someone's space that is similar to your own.
- Love is standing up in a church service and shaking hands with people.
- Love is feeling warm and sentimental toward other believers.
- Love is the feeling you get when you are near someone attractive.

This is all lightweight, hollow stuff. The Bible cuts through all of the haze and says that if you want one clear definition of what love is, treat every person as though they were more important than you. This means you should treat family members, friends, employees, minorities, Republicans, and Democrats as though they are more important than you are. It means you should learn to honor others. To hold them in high esteem. To respect them. To believe they have something to contribute to your life.



A WIDE ANGLE VIEW

1

How would you have defined love at *one* of the following times in your life:

- When you were a child
- When you were a teenager
- When you were a young adult

How has your understanding of love changed over the years?



A BIBLICAL PORTRAIT

Read Philippians 2:1–11

2

What does this passage teach about what love looks like?

3

What has Jesus done to model perfect love for us?

How can we follow Jesus' example of love?

SHARPENING THE FOCUS



Read Snapshot “Putting Others First, Even at One O’clock in the Morning”

**PUTTING OTHERS FIRST,
EVEN AT ONE O’CLOCK IN THE MORNING**



I remember an experience some years ago when I was awakened at about 1:00 A.M. by our son, Todd, then five years old, who said, “Mom. Dad. I just had a nightmare.” As soon as I awakened, my instinct was to lay very still and pretend I was asleep so Lynne would get up and deal with him. After he kept trying to get our attention, I poked her and said, “Lynne, Todd had a nightmare.” I was hoping she would be so startled that her motherly instincts would take over. It worked like a charm. She jumped up and took care of him. But as I lay there, trying to doze off to sleep, I found myself thinking, “Oh no! This was a great opportunity to treat my wife as more important than myself, and all I could think of was me.”

4

Tell your small group about a time you had a chance to treat someone else as better than yourself but failed to do so.

Tell about a time you received God’s supernatural power and were able to love another person by treating him or her as better than yourself.

Read Snapshot “The Power of the Spirit”

**THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT**

The primary means by which God accomplishes His transformation in our lives is through the work of His Holy Spirit. If you have surrendered your life to Christ and asked Him to be your Savior and friend, one of the first things God does is put His Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, into your life. Through the Spirit, He begins the process of transformation. He begins to work twenty-four hours a day to change your natural instincts so that you begin to act and react to people in a supernatural, God-honoring fashion. The Holy Spirit will always be faithful to grow this kind of love in your life. The big question is, will you cooperate?

5

How have you experienced the transforming power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your life since becoming a follower of Christ?

6

Describe a time when you did not fully cooperate with the Spirit’s work or prompting. What were the consequences?

Read Snapshot “God’s Example of Love”

**GOD’S EXAMPLE OF LOVE**

Our God is wonderful, amazing, and loving beyond our understanding. He treats us like celebrities. We are VIPs in His sight. He even put our needs and interests above His own by giving His only Son for us. What greater motivation could we have to love others?

7

Choose one area below and list a practical way you can show love by putting the needs of others ahead of your own needs.

- Your home
- Your workplace
- Your neighborhood
- Your small group
- Your church
- Your community

What can your small group members do to support you and keep you accountable as you seek to express love in this area?

8

Describe a recurring situation in your life where putting others first is difficult.

What is one thing you can do to begin to change in this area of your life?



PUTTING YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE

PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Take time in the coming week to identify one person you need to love by putting that person's interests and needs before your own. Decide exactly how you will express love to that person by putting him or her first.

To whom will you be expressing love?

What will you do to put that person first?

When will you do it?

Who will be praying for you and keeping you accountable?

HOW WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED?

I remember attending the funeral of a man from our church some years ago. One of the things said about him during the eulogy was, "He put others first." All the way through that funeral, the Spirit put a mirror of reflection in front of me which caused me to wonder, "What are they going to say about me at my funeral? He was intense? He was a leader?" I hope people will say, "He loved others. He put others first."

Take time for honest and prayerful reflection and answer the following questions:

If you were to die today, what do you think people would say about you and the impact your life has made? What would you like people to say about you after you are gone?