



## Getting the Most Out of *Love*

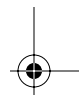
At the time InterVarsity Press asked for a guide on love, I felt I had never known less about loving others. I could make no claims of loving as Christ calls us to love. I had a critical spirit and, at the very least, sought my own good rather than the good of others. I wasn't even sure I knew how to love my husband and children. I needed to be changed by the Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

As a result of working through the passages in this guide, I have found that I do not know how to love. I cannot love others through my own effort or power. I realized I don't even know how to be loved or to bask in the great love and grace that God pours out on me. I needed (and need constantly) to go back to square one—back to the fundamental life-changing truth that God himself loves me dearly and values me beyond comprehension.

I remember one morning during my quiet time desperately wanting God to change me and my pattern of thinking. I had confessed every sin that came to my memory—every evil attitude that I knew—and still felt no relief. I wondered if I was blocking his work in me, though that was the last thing I wanted to do. Then my mind went back to Romans 8 and the description of God and his everlasting love for me. I turned to that chapter again and read out loud several times that nothing can separate me from God's love—even myself.

From that experience and others, I know that it is only as I know and believe and experience his love that I can even begin to think about loving others. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). Praise God for his great love for us! God's love for me is the only foundation on which I can build a life of love for others.

I am also reminded through these passages that to love is indeed a choice. A choice that is often difficult and costly. One that may be





void of warm, fuzzy feelings. A choice that involves doing the opposite of what my natural inclinations call me to do.

Obedying Christ's command to love others might mean praying for them when I do not feel like praying or when praying takes me away from something that has more obvious benefits. It sometimes means serving others (even when I am treated like a servant). At times, loving others means bending my will in their direction or giving the time and emotional energy that it takes to gently comfort someone in pain.

As you consider God's love for you and what it means to respond to his love by loving others, may you first of all know God and his love deeply and experientially, and from that solid foundation grow in your love for others.

#### **Suggestions for Individual Study**

1. As you begin each study, pray that God will speak to you through his Word.

2. Read the introduction to the study and respond to the personal reflection question or exercise. This is designed to help you focus on God and on the theme of the study.

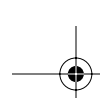
3. Each study deals with a particular passage—so that you can delve into the author's meaning in that context. Read and reread the passage to be studied. The questions are written using the language of the New International Version, so you may wish to use that version of the Bible. The New Revised Standard Version is also recommended.

4. This is an inductive Bible study, designed to help you discover for yourself what Scripture is saying. The study includes three types of questions. *Observation* questions ask about the basic facts: who, what, when, where and how. *Interpretation* questions delve into the meaning of the passage. *Application* questions help you discover the implications of the text for growing in Christ. These three keys unlock the treasures of Scripture.

Write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided or in a personal journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding of yourself and of God's Word.

5. It might be good to have a Bible dictionary handy. Use it to look up any unfamiliar words, names or places.





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6. Use the prayer suggestion to guide you in thanking God for what you have learned and to pray about the applications that have come to mind.

7. You may want to go on to the suggestion under “Now or Later,” or you may want to use that idea for your next study.

**Suggestions for Members of a Group Study**

1. Come to the study prepared. Follow the suggestions for individual study mentioned above. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.

2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this guide.

3. Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.

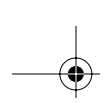
4. Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly.

When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.

6. Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of





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the study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.

7. Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.

8. If you are the group leader, you will find additional suggestions at the back of the guide.

