

connect 360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

GC2 Strong

A GREAT COMMANDMENT AND GREAT COMMISSION AWAKENING

A BIBLE THEME STUDY

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GC2 Strong

A Great Commandment and Great Commission Awakening

A Bible Theme Study

How to Make the Best Use of This Issue 3

Writers for This Teaching Guide 7

DATE OF STUDY

God's Love Is the Foundation

LESSON 1 _____ **God's Love Fuels His Mission** 12
1 JOHN 4:7-21

LESSON 2 _____ **The Greatest Commandment** 27
MATTHEW 22:35-40; JOHN 13:34-35

Church Strong

LESSON 3 _____ **Devoted to the Apostles' Teaching** 41
ACTS 2:42-47; 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-4:8

LESSON 4 _____ **Devoted to Fellowship and the Breaking of Bread** 57
ACTS 4:32-37; 1 JOHN 1:6-7; MARK 14:22-26

LESSON 5 _____ **Devoted to Prayer and Worship** 72
ACTS 16:11-15, 25-33

Missions Strong

LESSON 6 _____ **The Missionary God** 88
JOHN 1:1-18; JOHN 3:16

LESSON 7	Jesus the Model Missionary	104
	MARK 7:24–30; MATTHEW 8:5–13	
	<i>Ministry Promotions</i>	
LESSON 8	The Great Commission	124
	MATTHEW 28:16–20	
LESSON 9	God Is Sending	138
	ROMANS 10:11–15; MATTHEW 9:35–38	
	<i>Leader Strong</i>	
LESSON 10	Jesus the Humble Servant	152
	PHILIPPIANS 2:1–11	
LESSON 11	Created for Good Works	168
	EPHESIANS 2:4–10	
LESSON 12	Disciples Needed	182
	ACTS 1:20–26; 6:1–7	
	<i>Capstone</i>	
LESSON 13	A Great Commandment and Great Commission Awakening	198
	ACTS 10:9–48	
	<i>Prayer for This Study</i>	214
	<i>Our Next New Study</i>	216
	<i>How to Order More Bible Study Materials</i>	218

FOCAL TEXT

1 John 4:7–21

BACKGROUND

**John 3:16; 1 Corinthians
13:1–13; 1 John 3:1–24**

lesson **1**

God's Love Fuels His Mission

MAIN IDEA

The only way for Christians to truly show love is to be consumed with God's love.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do I show God's love to others?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to understand that an awakened church will dwell in Christ's love and proclaim and demonstrate that love in Jesus' name



Introduction

Welcome to the awakening! It is an awakening to the Great Commandment and Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why awakening? Sadly, there are seasons and times when some churches in some areas of the world fall asleep spiritually. In those moments, the highest and most glorious of our Lord's instructions, like the Great Commandment and Great Commission, become so commonplace they are met in the pews with a yawn instead of zeal and passion.

This set of lessons is intended to help these two highest priority instructions of our Lord, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, be renewed, reimagined, and reignited. Throughout history, the Lord rouses His Church awake, and He is calling us to a new awakening today.

The main idea of today's lesson is, "The only way for Christians to truly show love is to be consumed with God's love." In Romans 13, Scripture ties the concept of "awakening" to this main idea. Paul writes, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:9b–11).

Love is a word that has been greatly misused and misunderstood. It is too easy for us to adapt God's concept of love to the all-encompassing parodies of love in our world. We say, "I love my truck," "I love chocolate cake," "I love the Dallas Cowboys." Then, we say, "I love Jesus Christ." This linguistic struggle can seem innocent enough until we begin to realize that our words often affect the way we think, just as the way we think affects our words. Therefore, of all the words Christians need to understand deeply and live their life accordingly, wouldn't we agree that "love" is at the top of the list?

Scripture is brimming over with life-giving teachings on God's concept of love. The primary text for this study is 1 John 4:7–21, and a deep dive into this text forms us into disciples who are consumed by God's love and therefore capable of showing God's kind of love to others. Through this study, readers can understand what fuels God's saving mission, and in turn, their

hearts and minds can be shaped in how they love God and love others. As we study together, the Holy Spirit will awaken us to God's love-fueled mission!

Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

First John 4 offers the Church one of the most compelling theological teachings on love that exists in Scripture, leading to practical Christian living in everyday life. In this chapter, the Church gets some of the most powerful verses that we quote every day, like: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (4:4); "God is love" (4:8); "Perfect love drives out fear" (4:18); "We love because He first loved us" (4:19); "Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister" (4:21). This chapter is packed with those teachings believers have long embraced.

The context behind this chapter is that John is instructing the reader how to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1). The "spirits" that John is referring to are the forces of power standing behind the words that prophets, preachers, and others say about God. Not every word spoken about God and His Son, Jesus Christ, is equally valid and truthful. How do Christians begin to discern all they hear about God and determine what is true and what is false?

In this chapter, John gives two tests: first, the doctrinal test, and second, the test of love. These two tests belong together. Right belief and right love must coexist. By these "tests," a follower of Jesus Christ can discern what is true.

The first test is a doctrinal test. John explains, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God" (1 John 4:2). When the truth of the Holy Spirit is behind a preacher, speaker, author, or really anyone who speaks about God, they will consistently bear witness to the truth of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus is fully God and fully man. The full divine nature of God dwelt fully in human flesh.

Heresies regarding Jesus' divine and human nature have always existed. Some have speculated about a possible earlier form (perhaps docetism more than gnosticism) of false teaching that would eventually develop into the gnostic heresy that denied the full deity of Jesus and held that all material was evil and only the spirit was good. A gnostic person would reject the idea that the true God of the universe would ever exist in a material, fleshly body, and thus they would reject the gospel of Jesus, which has the power to save. John teaches that testing the spirits means listening closely to how people speak about Jesus. If the speaker does not acknowledge the divine and human nature of Jesus, then red flags ought to be raised. This is the first test for discerning what is truly from God and what is not when people speak about God and His Son, Jesus.

From here, John moved to the second test, the love of God as the foundation of our lives and God's saving mission. This test of love reveals whether a person has truly been born of God. This study focuses on this teaching.

Interpreting the Scriptures

God's Love Fuels His Mission (4:7–21)

4:7. In verse 7, John moved to the second “test” to determine if someone is of God. This is the test of love. It certainly follows a consistent New Testament pattern.

Jesus often taught His disciples a way of love that is set apart from the world's concept of love. In John's Gospel, he recounts Jesus' tremendous teaching on love at the Last Supper. Jesus instructs His followers to remain in His love, and in doing so, He will be like the “vine” that gives love to His followers, who are like “branches” (John 15:1–17).

Likewise, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:1–13, tells us that a person may speak all the right words, angelic words even, but if they do not have the right kind of love, they are irritating at best. This is a key that helps us understand John's two tests in this chapter we are studying. The first test was getting one's doctrine correct about Jesus, but this second test of love is just as vital.

First Corinthians 13 helps churches understand that without love, all doctrinal speech is like a clanging cymbal. Therefore, getting the doctrine of Jesus' nature correct is important, but love is a box that always must be checked.

Have you ever heard a Christian speaking something that is doctrinally correct, but he does so in a mean-spirited, uncaring kind of way? Some Christians make others want to run in the opposite direction of Jesus. Especially regarding those who teach, John is saying that observing how they love others is a way to test their validity. All Christian communication must be held accountable to love, and truth must be proclaimed in love.

4:8. This provides a clear way of “testing the spirits.” Christians ought not be fooled into thinking that every defender of the faith, every preacher, every blogger and podcaster, is equally benefiting the kingdom of God. If they are not loving, they are getting Jesus wrong and sending people away from Jesus rather than toward Him.

4:9–10. In verses 9–10, John defined God's kind of love.

The theme of this lesson is “God's Love Fuels His Mission.” This passage clearly helps identify God's motivation for His mission to save our world.

The famous John 3:16 supports this understanding. God loves our world, and He loves each person uniquely. All real love starts with God. He initiated it out of His eternal loving relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From eternity, long before our world came into being, God was love. That love exists in the Trinity.

This eternal love was the reason our world was born, and it is the reason God refuses to give up on our world.

Why would God want to save us? Humanity has certainly progressed, but our struggle with sin and corruption remains just as vivid as it was in Genesis 6. Humanity's wickedness on earth was and remains great. John 3:16 and 1 John 4:9–10 teach that the primary reason God wants to save our world is that He chooses to love His creation. God's love is the fuel behind His amazing gift of grace.

In some Christian conversations, there is tension regarding God's motivation/fuel in saving His creation. Is it out of God's love for people that He

directs our world toward His good, pleasing, and perfect will, where salvation rests, or are these things born more out of a divine motivation for His glory to be made known? Someone in your class may bring up this question. What is the “real” fuel behind God’s saving mission?

Both glory and love can be supported in Scripture as God’s motivation behind His saving gospel mission. Rather than attempting to elevate one motivation over the other, it is legitimate to see that God’s glory testifies to His love. Every time God makes His glory known, His love comes shining through. God’s remarkable loving intimacy in the creation accounts, the patience God has with humanity, the covenants God makes, and the salvation that is revealed in Jesus all demonstrate the love of God. Certainly, His transcendent sovereignty also comes shining through, but frankly, one expects sovereignty; love, however, is a shocking attribute of God. Other belief systems and religions have concepts of sovereignty and transcendent power, but they do not portray such a loving God as we see in the God of the Bible, who sends His Son to die for humanity. Even God’s justice is an aspect of His love. God’s justice flows from His love, because love does not ignore what destroys His good creation.

In these verses, God’s love is not only clarified as His motivation in saving our world, but love is also defined in this text.

God gave us Jesus to die for us, that we might live. Love is defined by this act. Love is sacrifice. Love is giving up self for others. This is far beyond the world’s popular versions of love. Love is not an emotion, although it is emotional. Love is a choice that is based more in the heart and mind and determination of the one who freely chooses to love than it is in the notion that people have earned the right to be loved. God’s kind of love is something special that cares and sacrifices for others despite their sinfulness.

The church’s attitude toward others ought to be inspired by this love.

4:11–21. In these verses, God’s love transforms those who believe. God’s love goes out to His world, and when people freely respond and love God in return and love others, love has then been made complete.

John describes what a completed love looks like in the life of the church.

Completed love is first the picture of a church that is transformed into a unique people who have confidence regarding the next life and the judgment

of God. The church is transformed into a people who are not fearful of God or His accountability in their life. God's judgment and wrath against evil is true, and they have been poured out on His Son. Those who hold faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior need not fear the judgment and wrath of God.

Completed love casts out other fears as well. There are many things that terrify people. Death is terrifying. People are often terrified of others who are different and unknown. Loss and poverty are terrifying. This world is filled with terror. Many people go through life consumed by fear. They have a worldview that unless they get all they can and protect all they have; they will lose everything. Fear begets selfishness in the hearts of people, hindering the kind of life that God desires for them.

This is why God's love is so transformative. As believers come to understand God's sacrificial love for them in Jesus Christ, who provides and cares, they can face death, tragedies, loss, and threats with a unique kind of courage fueled by love.

The Church of Jesus Christ does not need to live in fear of others, because even if evil people bring death, the love of God propels believers into eternal life. The love of God that fuels His mission becomes the very thing that fuels the mission of the Church. Fear of others is radically transformed into love for others.

Focusing on the Meaning

What does this mean for us? Where do missionaries and evangelists get their courage? Where does the martyr get courage? Where do ordinary Christians get their courage to be faithful in the midst of brokenness where threats abound? The love of God has cast out their fear.

All over our world, Christians give in great financial sacrifice because God's love increasingly frees them from fear. They know God loves them and has promised to provide, and therefore, they are freed to give generously rather than living in fear for their own self-preservation. Christians share Christ with people in their life because the love of God is fueling them.

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect With Life

1. Welcome participants and say, *The Study Guide states there are an estimated 100 million songs dealing with the topic of love.* Ask your class to brainstorm just a few popular songs since 1960 that have had the word “Love” in the title. Examples to get them started are: “What the World Needs Now Is Love,” “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” and others. A sample listing may be found in the Teaching Resource Items. From the class and that list have them name at least a dozen songs. Have someone write them down. (A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.gc2press.org.)
2. Say, *A popular song from the 1940s was, “You’re Nobody til Somebody Loves You!”* Have someone read 1 John 4:19. Ask, *How does this verse correct the idea that love gives us value, rather than God’s love being the source of our value?*
3. Ask the class to examine a few other titles they named and discuss the distortion between their meaning of love, and the love of Jesus.
4. Discuss (in small or large groups): Do you think the culture today exemplifies any of these distortions? If so, which ones?
5. Say, *The lesson today dwells on how Jesus demonstrates and teaches us to love. How can a love-filled, revived, and renewed church become the means through which Jesus carries out His mission?*
6. *What difference could such a church make in a community? A city? Discuss.*

Guide Bible Study

7. Have a volunteer read 1 John 4:7–10. The Greek word *agape*, often used to describe God’s self-giving love, appears throughout this passage and 106 times in the New Testament.
8. Have the group gather into 6 small groups or one group for smaller classes. Assign each group one of the descriptions of *agape* found in the sidebar “*Agape Love*” in the *Study Guide*. Each group should write a license plate (7 letters or numbers) for their description. For instance, GODISLV, “God is love.” Give them about five minutes then call for each group to present to the class.
9. Have two members read to the class 1 John 4:7–9 and Romans 5:6–10 back-to-back as if they were together in one passage.
10. Have the groups read 1 John 4:11–21 and discuss these questions.
 - What are we supposed to do in response to the love God has shown us?
 - How can we know that God remains in us and we in God?
 - Whom has God given to us?
 - What is our testimony?
 - What allows us to be confident in the day of judgment?
 - What cannot coexist with love?
 - What is the commandment we are to follow?(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.gc2press.org.)

Encourage Application

11. Ask your class to turn to one another and answer the following questions:
 - How do I know when my fuel is running low for doing what God has called me to do.

- Who in my neighborhood needs to experience a practical demonstration of Christ's love for them? What can I do to practically show love to them?
- What could my church or church group do to impact people who aren't connected with my church? How can I manifest *agape*, the love of God for them?

(A copy of this assignment is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.gc2press.org.)

12. Close with reading 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, asking each member to focus on his or her own weak spot(s), and invite them to commit to expressing Christlike love in that area.
13. Close with prayer.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect With Life

1. Ahead of the class, recruit a volunteer to research the Great Wales Revival of 1859 and give a one-minute report of the conditions before the revival and some of the results afterward.
2. Do the same assignment with another recruit to research the Asbury Revival at the University of Kentucky in 2003.
3. Welcome participants and read the introduction to the "Bible Comments" to the class. *Welcome to the awakening! It is an awakening to the Great Commandment and Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why awakening? Sadly, there are seasons and times when some churches in some areas of the world fall spiritually asleep. In those moments, the highest and most glorious of our Lord's instructions, like the Great Commandment and Great Commission, became so commonplace that they are met in the pews with a yawn instead of zeal and passion.*

4. Ask the class the following questions:
 - Have you ever been part of a spiritually dead church? (No need to name the church)
 - What made you decide it was spiritually dead?
 - How did a sleeping church affect your personal spiritual life?
 - What effect did the church have on the community?
 - Did the church grow? Did it decline? Is it still asleep or has it come alive?

5. From the “Bible Comments” read: *The main idea of today’s lesson is, “The only way for Christians to truly show love is to be consumed with God’s love.” Throughout history, the Lord rouses His Church awake and He is calling us to a new awakening today.*

Guide Bible Study

6. Ask a member to read 1 John 4:7–11. Then ask how many times they read the word “love.”

7. Ask class members to turn to the sidebar “Agape Love” in the *Study Guide* and silently read it. Then, be ready to answer the following questions.
 - How many times do the definitions describe feelings?
 - How many times do they name or describe action?
 - If *agape* love is action, how may it awaken a sleeping church?

8. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Discuss what love is and what love is not.

9. Ask each member to write down who in your neighborhood needs to experience a practical demonstration of Christ’s love for them. How would you practically show love to them?

10. Ask a member to read 1 John 4:12–17. Using the *Study Guide* and *Teaching Guide* comments lead a lecture on this passage
11. Ask a different member to read 1 John 4:18–21 and ask these questions.
 - When it comes to loving others, what things cause us fear? Please explain your answer.
 - What is associated with fear?
 - Who are people that is hard for you to love?
 - Why should believers be confident in expressing and sharing love with others?
 - In verse 20 what two things cannot be true?
 - What commandment has God given that we must obey?

Encourage Application

12. Prayer prompts:
 - Think of people you need to ask forgiveness and pray for them, yourself, and that situation.
 - Think of people you need to forgive and pray for them, yourself, and that situation,
 - Think of persons God is asking you to show love to, pray for them, yourself, and for God's wisdom, words, and actions to show that love.
13. One pastor has given the following benediction at his church for over ten years: *Now go and love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself; and do it as if it's the most important thing in all the world—because it is!*
14. Encourage your class members to put this benediction to work this week.
15. Close with prayer.

YOUTH PLAN

Connect With Life

1. Introductory Activity
 - Option 1—Begin by writing “I love ____” on the board or on individual index cards and asking each student to fill in the blank. You’ll likely get a range of answers from Diet Coke to Star Wars to Mom. Go through each answer from students.
 - Option 2—Invite two volunteers to the front. Ask them to take turns naming as many songs as they can, from any genre, with the word “love” in the title. Singing is optional! The game ends when one player can’t think of any more songs. You can extend the activity by giving each player one opportunity to poll the group for answers.
2. Ask the group the following questions:
 - Do you think there are different kinds of love? What are they?
 - What kinds of love are represented in our answers? Is there romantic love, friendship love, strong preferences for objects or activities?
 - What type of love does God give? What does He ask from us?
3. Open with a prayer inviting God to open the hearts and minds of students to have a deeper understanding of His love. Ask God to show your students how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and how they are called to share it.

Guide Bible Study

4. Read 1 John 4:7–8. Use the material in the sidebar, “*Agape Love*” from the *Study Guide* and clarify for your students what kind of love the passage is referring to here. Help students understand the different between *agape*, *eros*, and *phileo* love.

- In this passage, John encourages us to love one another. Why did he say we should do that?
- In what situations have you felt the most loved? What contributed to that?
- What does it look like in your contexts—at school, at home, in your activities—to love one another?
- The text says that those who love know God and those that do not love do not love God. Have you ever experienced someone who was doing something in obedience to God, such as telling the truth or serving others, but doing it in a mean-spirited, unkind way? How did it affect your perception of them? Did it reflect on their church, organization, or even God?

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.gc2press.org.)

5. Read 1 John 4:9–10 and ask your students the following questions:
 - We’re called to love others because God is love. How has God demonstrated that love to us?
 - Why do you think God would want to save us?
 - God’s sacrificial love for us is a grand theme across Scripture. Can you think of any other verses that say something similar to this? (John 3:16 is an easy one.)
6. Read 1 John 4:11–12 and ask these questions:
 - Where does our love for others come from?
 - Have you ever tried to show love to someone in your own human power? How did that go?
 - According to these verses, how does loving each other through God give others a visible view of an invisible God?
 - What does it mean by “his love is made complete in us”?
7. Divide into two small groups. Have each group read through one of the following passages and summarize it to share with the group. Ask them to think through how it relates to today’s discussion of love.

- 1 Corinthians 13:1–3
- 1 Corinthians 13:4–8
- 1 John 4:13–21

Ask your students:

- What good is it if you do great things without love?
- What good is it if you feel bad for others but do nothing about it?
- What is it that gives us the power to love the way that 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 describes?

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.gc2press.org.)

8. Personal Reflection/Invitation Into Personal Reflections
 - Do you have a personal example of a time where you were a resounding gong? Where you did something good, but it was without love? Share how you recognized the issue and responded.
 - Invite students to share their own personal experiences as well.

Encourage Application

9. As you wind things down, invite your group to close their eyes and ask God to remind each student of His deep, redemptive, abiding love for them. Give your students a few minutes to meditate on God’s transformative love.
10. Ask your students to approach this prayer exercise with open palms, signifying their willingness to accept what God has for them. Ask God to reveal a person who they can reach out with an act of love. Are there any classmates, neighbors, or coworkers who need to experience a practical demonstration of the love of God? What could you do to show them love? Could you rake leaves for a neighbor? Offer a ride to a teammate? Cover a shift for someone? Ask God to show you.
11. Close in a prayer of gratitude for God’s immense love for us and the privilege to share that love with others.

Our Next New Study

(Available to use beginning September 2026)

And Then We Came to Romans: A Study of Paul’s ‘Weighty and Strong’ Letter

Following a treacherous sea voyage, replete with a shipwreck, Acts reported in a rather anti-climactic, matter of fact manner that Paul and his companions “came to Rome” (28:14, 16). The title of this study of Paul’s famed letter to the Romans is a play upon that turn of phrase.

As it happens, Romans follows Acts in the New Testament canon. Though significantly shorter in length than Acts, Romans is the longest letter composed by Paul that has been preserved for our instruction and inspiration.

And instruct and inspire it does! Generations of Christians have turned to Romans, a “weighty and strong” letter (see 2 Corinthians 10:10), to learn of salvation through Christ and life in Christ. In this 13-week study, we will journey through Romans from beginning to end, section by section. Having done so, we have a fuller grasp of how this letter flows and what this letter teaches, and we, in turn, will rejoice and be glad that we came to Romans.

Lesson 1	A Longing Apostle and the Powerful Gospel	Romans 1:14–17
Lesson 2	An Impartial God and a Sinful People	Romans 2:5–16
Lesson 3	The Just Justifier	Romans 3:21–31

Lesson 4	What Wondrous Love Is This!	Romans 5:1–8
Lesson 5	Buried With Christ Through Baptism	Romans 6:1–14
Lesson 6	Who Can Separate Us From the Love of Christ?	Romans 8:31–39
Lesson 7	The Scandal of the Gospel	Romans 9:30–33
Lesson 8	All Who Call	Romans 10:5–13
Lesson 9	When Theology Turns to Doxology	Romans 11:33–36
Lesson 10	How Then Shall We Live?	Romans 12:1–2
Lesson 11	On God and Government	Romans 13:1–7
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