

Discussion Guide

September 7, 2025

A Walk In The Park WK1

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Main Idea

Relationships can be one of life's greatest joys and one of its greatest challenges. Jesus commanded us in John 13 to "love one another as I have loved you," yet living that out is often easier said than done. Sometimes relationships feel like a magical day at Disney, full of laughter and delight; other times, they can feel more like a dumpster fire, messy and overwhelming. Paul reminds us that love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." That's a high calling—and it doesn't come without struggle. This week we're leaning into what it means to truly love others well, even when it's difficult. As you reflect, ask yourself: What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of this scripture?

Anchor Passage

"It (love) always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13:7, NIV)

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, John 13:34-35

1. Lead Yourself First

Before I can love and lead others well, I must first learn to lead myself. That means choosing to actively participate with what God is already doing in me—paying attention to my inner world instead of ignoring it. Each of us has both healthy and unhealthy parts. It's tempting to say, "That's not who I really am," but what if it is? If I don't bring those hidden, messy parts of myself to Jesus, how will He ever heal them? In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was overwhelmed with fear and stress to the point of sweating blood, yet He chose to submit it all to the Father. His example shows us that real self-leadership means withholding nothing. God can't transform the version of me that I pretend to be. Instead, through the Holy Spirit, I must face the parts I want to avoid and let Him lead me into wholeness.

Discussion: What is one part of your inner world—whether fear, doubt, stress, or something you try to avoid—that you find most difficult to bring honestly before God? How might inviting the Holy Spirit into that area change the way you lead yourself and love others?

2. Love Yourself Well

Jesus taught us to “love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself.” That means our ability to love others is directly connected to how we view and treat ourselves. Self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem—self-compassion means “suffering with,” showing patience and kindness toward our own struggles so that we can reflect that same love within our community. Loving yourself well involves wholistic self-care and Spirit-led self-leadership, choosing meaning over fleeting happiness. This is what we see in the incarnation of Jesus—He was committed to both deep connection with others and intentional solitude with the Father. Silence and solitude give us the strength to live with stability, while commitment and connection give us security in relationships. When we learn to love ourselves with Christlike compassion, we create a foundation for truly loving God and others.

Read Mark 12:30-31

Discussion: Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. What does healthy self-compassion look like for you, and how might practicing it help you better love God and the people around you?

3. Foster Connection Through Agape Love

Agape love is more than a feeling—it’s creating micro-moments of connection that foster shared positive emotions and draw people closer together. When we aren’t fostering connection, we’re often driving it away. Scripture reminds us that positive emotions can broaden our perspective and allow us to build—building our faith, our relationships, and mutual care within the community. This is the “broadening and building” effect of God’s love at work in us. We connect with others through confession, honesty, and shared experiences. Our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions are all interconnected, and our bodies sit in the middle of that connection. Agape love calls us to be intentional about fostering relationships that reflect God’s heart.

Discussion: Agape love is about creating small, intentional moments of connection that foster trust and care. What are some practical ways you can create those “micro-moments” of connection in your relationships this week—with family, friends, or your group?

We can’t give to God what we deny.

SUMMARY

At the heart of this series is the call to love well—the way Jesus loves us. It begins with leading ourselves honestly before God, continues with practicing self-compassion that allows us to love others from a place of wholeness, and flows into fostering real connection through agape love. Relationships aren’t always easy but when we submit our inner world to God, care for ourselves with His compassion, and intentionally create moments of connection, we reflect the love of Christ in powerful, life-giving ways.

CALL TO ACTION

Lead yourself honestly. Spend intentional time with God this week identifying one area of your inner world you've been avoiding, and invite the Holy Spirit to meet you there. Don't pretend—bring your whole self to Him.

Practice self compassion. Choose one tangible act of self-care or self-compassion (rest, prayer walk, journaling, silence/solitude) that will help you love yourself as God calls you to, so you can love others from a place of health.

Create a connection moment. Each day, look for one opportunity to foster a “micro-moment” of connection—whether through encouragement, confession, gratitude, or simply being present with someone—to reflect Christ's agape love.

GROUP LEADER RESOURCE

Connection Cards

Description:

Write a set of simple, fun, and meaningful questions on index cards (or print a list).

Examples:

- What's one word that describes how your week has been?
- Who is someone that has shown you love in a small but meaningful way?
- If you could relive one joyful moment, what would it be?
- What's one quirky habit you have that most people don't know about?

Pass the cards around and let each person draw one to answer.

Connection to the message:

This activity creates “micro-moments of connection” (Point #3), reminding the group that agape love isn't just about big gestures—it's often found in small, intentional moments of openness and care.

Note:

Have at least as many cards prepared as you have people in your group.