

# **CULTIVATE**

LIFE TOGETHER IN THE SPIRIT

**FEBRUARY  
GROUP GUIDE**



# Welcome to Cultivate. We're so glad you're here.

This month, we turn our attention to the first fruit of the Spirit: love. Not as an idea to define or a feeling to manufacture, but as a gift we receive through a life given for us. Scripture reminds us that love is not something we initiate, but something we respond to—received before it is ever practiced.

**“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).**

Every act of love, every movement toward patience, kindness, or peace, begins here.

Love is the soil from which all the other fruit grows. When love takes root, joy has room to emerge. Peace can settle. Patience can endure. But love does not grow through pressure or performance. It grows through presence and through staying open to God while being attentive to one another.

Your group is one of the places where that kind of love can take root. A place where people don't have to pretend they are more loving than they feel. A place where we can notice how the Spirit is quietly shaping our hearts through ordinary faithfulness and small, unseen choices.

For February, you'll notice a brief section for individual reflection included in the guide. This is designed to be done on your own, outside of group time. These moments are not additional homework or preparation requirements, but simple invitations to pause, pray, and notice what the Spirit may already be cultivating in you. Some will find this personal space and study especially meaningful; others may engage more fully during group conversation. Both are welcome and faithful ways to participate.

This month is not about trying harder to love better. It's about making room for God's love to shape us first. It's about being reminded our picture is on God's refrigerator. As we slow down, reflect, listen to Scripture, and share honestly, the Spirit does the work we cannot do on our own.

Throughout February, your group will continue to be a kind of garden bed—a space set aside for God's forming work. Together, you will listen, reflect, practice, and learn to trust that love grows best over time.

Thank you for helping create space in your community where love can be practiced, received, and sustained.

We believe that as we walk through this month together, God will continue cultivating love in our community—one small, faithful step at a time.





# Personal Reflection and Practice

Look up the passages below on your own and read them slowly. As you read, notice what it reveals about love, its source, its posture, or its purpose, and name the main idea in your own words.

## Love as God's Character

Exodus 34:6–7

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Psalm 103:8–13

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1 John 4:7–12, 16–19

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**Love is something we receive before we reflect. Formation begins with identity.**

## Love as Commanded Orientation

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (The Shema)

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Leviticus 19:18

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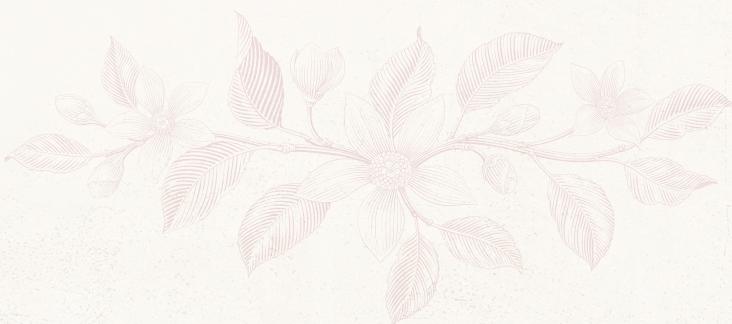
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Matthew 22:34–40

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**Love is not sentimental—it's orienting.  
It orders our lives.**



## Love as Endurance

Ruth 1:16–17

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Hosea 11:1–4

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Romans 8:35–39

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**Sometimes love is costly, patient, and resilient.**



## Love as the Mark of a Formed Life

John 13:34–35

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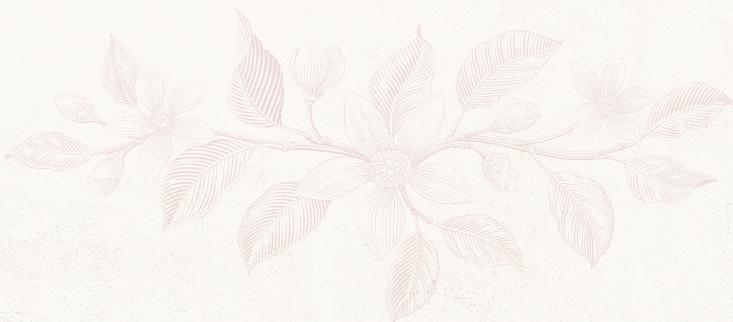
Colossians 3:12–14

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**Love is not one virtue among many.**

**Love is the measure.**



# GROUP TIME

This outline is simply a suggested flow for your time together, not a prescription you must follow. Every group has its own rhythm, personality, and needs, so feel free to adapt the structure in whatever way fosters meaningful conversation and connection. Use what serves your group, release what doesn't, and trust that the Spirit will guide you as you shape each gathering.

## FEBRUARY Cultivating Love

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**Goal and Purpose:** Reflect on love as the first fruit of the Spirit, explore how it takes root in our lives, and begin noticing where love is growing, challenged, or being gently formed by God.

### Themes for the Month:

**Week 1:** Love That Obeys

**Week 2:** Love That Remains

**Week 3:** Love That Serves

**Week 4:** Love That Never Ends

# SESSION

## 1. Welcome + Opening (10 minutes)

### Leader Says:

“Today, we continue our Cultivate journey by turning our attention to the first fruit of the Spirit: love. This month isn’t about trying harder to be more loving, but about paying attention to how God’s love is already at work in us and learning to stay open to the slow, forming work of the Spirit as it shapes the way we live and relate to others.”

### Share:

Invite people to share a time when love has been hard. It may be a relationship, a season, or a situation where loving well felt costly, confusing, or beyond their capacity.

### Leader Note: Creating a Safe Start

Before inviting people to share, remind the group that this is a space of trust and grace. Participants are welcome to share at whatever level feels safe for them, and passing is always an option. Encourage speaking generally rather than naming specific details or individuals if that feels more appropriate.

Offer a few quiet moments for personal reflection, allowing participants time to consider their response and, if helpful, jot down notes before speaking aloud. As a leader, practice listening without trying to solve or fix anything, and consider writing group reflections below as stories are shared.

## 2. Watch the Teaching Video with Pastor Rich (10–20 minutes)

### Leader Says:

“When you hear the word love, what posture or response rises in you right now? Do you experience openness, caution, longing, gratitude, or resistance? Why?”



### Video Summary (for leader reference):

- Love can be clearly defined, but a life can still fail to be defined by love. There is a difference between knowing what love is and living from love.
- Many people carry real experiences of betrayal, loss, or counterfeit love, which shape how they approach love today.
- The invitation this month is to seek genuine love, not a performance or imitation, but the real love that comes from God.
- Love is the first fruit of the Spirit because it is foundational. All other fruit grows from it.
- Biblical love is not primarily a definition but a way of being marked by patience, kindness, endurance, and faithfulness.
- God’s love does not come temporarily or conditionally. It remains. Nothing separates us from it.
- We do not begin by loving God; we begin by receiving God’s love, which then shapes how we love others.

- The journey of spiritual formation starts here by embracing and trusting the love of God that holds us fast.

After watching the video together, invite a time of sharing to hear what stood out for all those in the group. Was there a particular story that resonated with the group? Has everyone always considered love to be the foundational fruit from which the remaining grow?

### 3. Group Reflection: Sitting With Genuine Love

#### Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

- \* As an alternative or if time allows, consider repeating the steps below a second time while focusing on Romans 8:35–39.

#### Hear the Word (5 minutes)

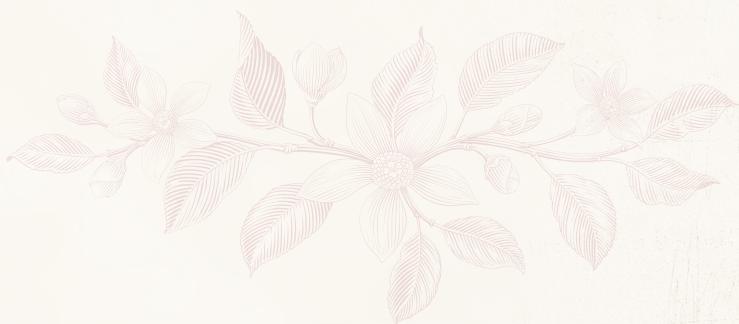
##### Leader Directions:

Invite one person to read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 aloud slowly. After a brief pause, invite a second person to read the same passage again, in a different translation (perhaps consider the NIV and the ESV).

##### Leader Says:

“As you listen, don’t try to analyze or fix anything. Simply notice which word, phrase, or description of love catches your attention.”

Allow 30–60 seconds of silence after the second reading.



#### 4. Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Invite participants to sit quietly with the passage and reflect on these prompts (spoken aloud or they can use the guide and space printed below):

- Which word or phrase stood out to you?

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- Does this description of love feel comforting, challenging, or both?

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- Where do you sense this kind of love already present in your life?

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- Where does it feel tender or difficult to imagine?

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**Leader:** Feel free to encourage journaling or silent reflection. Remind them that insight is not required—attention is enough.

## 5. Shared Reflection (8-10 minutes)

**Leader Directions:** Invite group discussion and sharing where comfortable. The prompts below are the same the group used for personal reflection.

### **Suggested sharing prompts:**

- Which word or phrase stood out to you?
- What made you notice that particular aspect of love?
- What does this passage reveal to you about the kind of love God offers?

(Avoid asking how they will “apply” the passage—stay with noticing and receiving.)

### **Optional Closing Question** (if time allows)

- What might it look like to let this description of love shape us slowly over time, rather than trying to live it out all at once?

### **Leader Note: Holding the Space**

This activity invites Scripture to meet people where they are. Resist the urge to interpret or explain the passage for the group. Trust that the Spirit will highlight what each person needs. Silence is not something to rush past—it is part of the work.

## 6. Closing + Prayer (5 minutes)

If you are a leader, end with encouragement and reminders of the slow, faithful work of love:

“Love grows slowly. It deepens through presence, patience, and trust. You don’t have to manufacture it or get it right all at once. Simply stay open to the love God offers you, and trust the Spirit to grow what needs time.”

### **Closing Prayer:**

God of love,  
Thank you for loving us first before we knew  
how to return it,  
before we trusted it, before we believed it could last.

Help us receive your love where we are guarded,  
and trust your love where we have been hurt.  
Teach us to stay present to your work,  
even when growth feels slow or unseen.

Grow in us a love that is genuine, a love that remains,  
a love that reflects your heart in quiet and faithful  
ways.

As we leave this place, help us carry your love  
into our relationships,  
not by striving, but by staying open to the Spirit  
who forms us over time.

We place ourselves in your care and trust your  
patient work in us.

Amen.

