

LEADING WITH LOVE

Study Syllabus

Scott Davis • Five Sessions from 1 John 4

Course Description

Leading with Love equips Christian educators to understand and practice five essential characteristics of godly love drawn from 1 John 4. Each session combines biblical teaching, memorable stories, practical classroom application, and discussion questions so that truth moves from the page into the hallway, the classroom, and everyday leadership.

Learning Outcomes

- Articulate five biblical truths about love from 1 John 4 and connect each to classroom leadership.
- Distinguish divine (initiating, sacrificial, abiding, transforming) love from natural, conditional love.
- Identify practical ways to initiate, sacrifice, abide, transform, and lead with love in school settings.
- Practice pausing, praying, and responding rather than reacting in difficult relational moments.
- Guard against burnout while serving faithfully from overflow rather than emptiness.
- Lead students and colleagues by example, humility, presence, truth, and grace.

Session Overview

Session 1 — Love Initiates

Key Verse: 1 John 4:7 — “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God...”

Big Idea: Real love does not wait. It moves first because God moved first toward us.

Core Teaching:

- We are first “beloved”—identity precedes instruction.
- Love originates with God, not personality or willpower (1 Jn 4:19; Rom 5:8).
- Jesus modeled initiating love (foot washing, seeking the lost, Philippians 2).
- Initiating love is not being a doormat; it delivers truth with a redemptive heart.
- Teachers are thermostats, not thermometers—setting the tone through Christ-like love.

Practical Takeaways: Lead with love without waiting for others to deserve it; start each day with intentional prayer; replace reaction with initiation; value small gestures; pray for divine appointments.

Discussion Focus: Classroom situations that require going first; barriers to loving first; small ways to initiate with difficult students; difference between initiating love and becoming a doormat.

Session 2 — Love Sacrifices

Key Verse: 1 John 4:9 — “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son...”

Big Idea: Love gives. God’s love became visible through the sacrifice of His Son so that we might live.

Core Teaching:

- Sacrificial love is rooted in grace received, not guilt-driven performance.
- Love and sacrifice are tied throughout Scripture (Gen 22, Passover, John 3:16).
- Sacrifice is not the same as burnout; Jesus withdrew to pray (Luke 5:16).
- Ordinary teacher sacrifices (attention, time, pride, comfort) become worship when surrendered.
- Love difficult people with wisdom, boundaries, prayer, and dependence on the Spirit.

Practical Takeaways: Redefine success as faithfulness; remember your why (Heb 12:2); offer energy as worship (Col 3:23); model forgiveness; guard against burnout; teach by example.

Discussion Focus: Healthy sacrifice vs. unhealthy burnout; small sacrifices with big impact; serving when unnoticed; loving difficult people with boundaries; how the cross reshapes daily sacrifice.

Session 3 — Love Abides

Key Verse: 1 John 4:12 — “If we love one another, God abides in us and His love has been perfected in us.”

Big Idea: Abiding love remains. It stays connected to Christ and stays present with people over time.

Core Teaching:

- Abide = remain, stay, continue, dwell—not disconnect when connection is hard.
- Fruit comes from connection to the Vine, not from trying harder (John 15).
- “Perfected” means matured/grown up, not flawless.
- Abiding love looks like patience, faithfulness in ordinary things, commitment through difficulty, and presence over performance.
- Teachers are seed planters; growth is often slow and hidden.

Practical Takeaways: Stay rooted in Christ; don’t run from hard seasons; be present; let love mature through practice; abide before you act.

Discussion Focus: Temptations to disconnect emotionally; practical rhythms for staying connected to Christ during the school day; abiding with slow-growing students; difference between abiding and enabling.

Session 4 — Love Transforms

Key Verse: 1 John 4:16 — “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love...”

Big Idea: God’s love changes us from the inside out and then uses us as instruments of transformation in others.

Core Teaching:

- Knowing about God’s love is different from believing it in daily life.
- God is love—He is the source and standard; His love is holy, not sentimental.
- Transformation is a process (illustrated by John’s own journey from “sons of thunder” to Apostle of Love).
- New creation language (2 Cor 5:17) goes deeper than behavior modification.
- Love transforms frustration into patience, criticism into compassion, routine into ministry, and classrooms into mission fields.

Practical Takeaways: Let God transform you before you try to transform others; watch for small changes; surrender control (1 Cor 3:7); be patient with others and yourself; celebrate progress, not perfection.

Discussion Focus: Difference between knowing and believing God's love; personal transformation stories; turning classroom frustration into ministry; seeing students as image-bearers; planting/watering while trusting God for growth.

Session 5 — Love Leads

Key Verse: 1 John 4:11 — “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Big Idea: Love that has initiated, sacrificed, abided, and transformed naturally leads others toward Jesus by influence and example.

Core Teaching:

- Christian leadership begins with following Christ (1 Cor 11:1).
- Jesus leads by serving (Mark 10:45) and by example (John 13).
- Three key surrenders for love-led leadership: pride, fear, and control.
- Leadership looks like presence, service, example, truth + grace, and endurance.
- Your example is your leadership; students study who you are.

Practical Takeaways: See your influence clearly; let grace take the lead; lead with humility; serve as a habit; use encouragement intentionally; keep eternity in mind.

Discussion Focus: Following before leading; the three surrenders; balancing truth and grace in discipline; the power of a teacher's example; which of the five truths is most needed this year.

Recommended Use

This study works well for faculty professional development, small-group teacher gatherings, or individual reflection. Allow time for the built-in discussion questions after each session. Encourage participants to leave with one concrete, Spirit-led step rather than an overwhelming to-do list.