

## STUDY GUIDE

**Monday, September 14 – Read James 2:14–18** The great reformer Martin Luther did not like the letter of James. He (mistakenly) believed the book taught that human works earn salvation. In fact, James offered an important reminder of what a faith-filled life looks like in practical terms. For example, he said, we do not feed the hungry to gain God's favor. We feed the hungry because our faith in God's saving favor leads us to help others be resilient in the loving spirit of Jesus. The apostle Paul taught the same idea as James. He wrote, "You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift....It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things." (Ephesians 2:8-10) The "good things" we do grow out of God's unearned gift. Have you ever felt as if you were working to earn favor with God? Do you need to change any of your thinking to put faith and action in the proper order? Faith does not mean sitting idle with our hands piously folded. Like the apostles, Methodism's founder John Wesley taught that we serve God with our head, our heart and our hands, that true faith produces good works. Working on Jesus' behalf looks different than it did before Covid-19 changed our world. What creative ways have you found in the last 4-5 months to work for God and God's people in ways that show your faith?

**Tuesday, September 15 – Read John 13:34–35** Jesus lived, and taught his followers to live, a resilient, tenacious love expressed by the Greek word "agape." "God does not merely tolerate sinners: he loves them....God for all his ability to punish and for all his own spotless purity does not regard sinners with aversion, but with love, with the costly love we see in the cross where Jesus died to save them." Christ-followers trust in and aim to live out the truth that Jesus showed that God loves us, and that God's love reshapes all of life for the better. The most distinctive response Jesus asked of his followers was to live in God's love, which meant loving one another. When he said his new commandment was to love each other "just as I have loved you," that took "love" to a whole new level of sacrifice and commitment. What, in practical terms, does it mean for you to love others as Jesus loves you? You invite a non-religious friend to church. Your friend asks, "There are a lot of churches – why should I go to yours?" Do you cite our big buildings, beautiful windows, impressive offerings, many volunteers, worldwide missions impact, superb sermons or music? How long would it take you to arrive at Jesus' way of answering that question: "This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other"?

**Wednesday, September 16 – Read Philippians 2:1–4** In verse 1 of today's reading, the apostle Paul listed four lofty spiritual benefits that can be ours in Christ. Then in verses 2-4, he appealed to his readers to live their day-to-day lives in ways that made those spiritual qualities into walking, breathing relational realities. His powerful vision of life continues to speak to Christ's followers today: "Christians are to work for the good of others rather than putting their own good first." Paul said we need Christ's love and the Spirit's presence to grow the kind of agape love he called the Philippians to live out (verse 1). How can this God-given, unselfish love turn "win/lose" conflicts toward the hope of "win/win" outcomes, especially when we are spending more time together than usual? How can you grow to see stronger relationships as worth more than always getting your way? In verse 2, Paul wrote, "Complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other." God created each of us unique, with our own minds and personalities. These differences add spice to our relationships. How can you live out Paul's call to "have the same love" and "be united" without sacrificing the good qualities that make you unique?

**Thursday, September 17 – Read John 15:9–13** Scholar William Barclay wrote, "We are chosen for joy. However, hard the Christian way is, it is, both in the travelling and in the goal, the way of joy. There is always a joy in doing the right thing....A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces." On the night before he died on a Roman cross, Jesus reminded his followers that living out his agape love is ultimately the path to joy. Jesus began John 15:9 with ten key words: "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you." As the moon reflects the sun's light, our love for others at its best reflects God's love for us. On this Thursday, how will you live out your commitment to love God and others? How can your church be, above all, a living model of God's unceasing love for all people? To what extent have you learned to see self-giving, not self-gratification, as key to a genuinely joyous life? Jesus said "remain in my love" less than 12

hours before he died on a cross. “Love” (agape) as he used it was more resilient and lasting than gushy emotion! How has taking Jesus as the best model of what love means changed or deepened your understanding of what it means to love others? In what situations have you had to make tough choices to answer the question, “What’s the most loving thing to do?”

**Friday, September 18 – Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15** “God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace” (verse 8). “You will be made rich in every way” (verse 11). The apostle Paul, not a rich man by earthly standards, wrote that! Even to people in the large city of Corinth, he used the farm language of harvest, of God increasing their crop. He challenged them (and us) to rethink what “rich” really means. God-given generosity toward others makes them and us more resilient. Paul’s specific focus was an offering from Gentile Christians to support poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Yet he focused on what God gives us: “everything you need always,” “every kind of grace” and “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way.” When (if ever) have you received a gift that “left you speechless,” that words couldn’t fully describe? How would you compare that feeling with God’s gift(s) of which Paul spoke? Scholar N.T. Wright wrote, “Paul’s vision of God’s people is firmly rooted in the Bible....Here we have three passages [note the references in today’s passage]...which together help him construct a larger picture of who God’s people are, what their goal in life should be, and how generosity in giving plays a vital part in it all.” How does (or doesn’t) generosity fit into your picture of what it means to be one of God’s people? How does generosity make you and others more resilient?

**Saturday, September 19 - Read Colossians 3:12-15** The apostle Paul called his readers to “take off the old human nature with its practices and put on the new nature.” (In other words, “resilience” is not just doing the same old things no matter what. Often resilience requires us to change.) In today’s reading Paul listed six positive qualities we can “put on” (verses 12, 14), with love as the crowning quality in the list. That kind of inner changing is not as quick and easy, of course, as changing a soiled garment for a clean one. If it were, we’d need verse 13 about forgiveness a whole lot less! But the image of “putting on” these lovely qualities reminds us that their ultimate source is God, not us. God offers them to us—it is up to us to decide to “put them on” to make our relationships better and more resilient. “Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint..., forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” “This life reflects [the Colossians’] identity as the loved, forgiven, reconciled people of God in Christ.” In what ways is God’s love, forgiveness and reconciliation shaping your life today? How much of the time do you live that way in your relationships? Has being “locked down” together made this kind of life more characteristic of you or less? If you fail to “put on” this way of life, what blocks you?

*Adapted from [www.cor.org](http://www.cor.org)*