



Working Together Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles; copies of this study; white board/markers or chalkboard/chalk or easel with poster board/markers; hymnals; if singing, musical accompaniment]

From the beginning, God did not want people to be alone or isolated. The Lord made each one of us and placed us in a family, community, and congregation. But because we are sinners, working and living with others can be challenging. In this Bible study, we will see God's framework for accepting others and how, with God's help, different personalities can work together toward a common goal.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, by Your hands You fearfully and wonderfully made each one of us. You so graciously gave us life, and through Your Son's victory over sin and death, You give us eternal life! Open our hearts and minds today to receive Your words of peace and love as we strive to work on our relationships with others. Help us to work together in love with tender hearts and humble minds to serve You and others in Christ's name. Amen.

The Word Of The Lord

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8).

Unity Of Mind

Hearing the phrase "unity of mind" may tempt us to think, "Great! Once everyone agrees with everything I say, we will have no problems in this group!" Not only would this be an impossible task, would it even be desirable? Responses may vary, however a single person making each and every decision for an organization, family, or group is not ideal. Variety is the spice of life!

Without unique ideas and fresh perspectives, would our society (workplace, community) be a place to learn, grow, or be inspired? Probably not. Instead, what would these places be? Answers and experiences will vary, but most may have a theme of "undesirable."

Unity of mind does not mean that everyone thinks the exact same thing on matters of working and serving together. So, what does God mean for us to have unity of mind? Unity of mind is to together love and serve God and to have the desire to love and serve others. Unity of mind comes through a shared faith in Christ Jesus. It is not necessarily the details of what that service to others may look like.

Read Romans 8:5.

Since we are born into a sinful nature, having our minds set on the things of the flesh is our default setting. We want the things that benefit ourselves individually. What are some of these things of the flesh on which we have our minds set? Answers will vary, but should focus on those earthly things that tempt us away from our Lord.

If we continue to constantly focus inwardly on ourselves – having our minds set on serving only us individually – we will have zero ability to be able to work with others. But, good news! Our Lord has rescued us from our sinful flesh-focused selves! Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, died on the cross for us! Our selfishness is forgiven, and now the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to set our minds on the things of the Spirit! Amen!

Read Galatians 5:22–23. What are these things of the Spirit? Focus on gifts from the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Read Philippians 2:1–4. As Christians, how can we have unity of mind even if we may not all agree on how some things should be done? Our unity is in our identity as children of God. We are baptized into God’s family. The Holy Spirit brings us to confess Jesus as Lord and the center of our lives. This confession is our unity of mind. How we go about serving others and working together comes from our common confession of Jesus, but our ideas on how to serve may vary.

The written and spoken Word of the Gospel is one of God’s means of grace. How does studying God’s Word together with other believers help to bring us unity of mind? God’s Word tells us that we all are sinners (Romans 3:23). As we study the Gospel together, by the power of the Holy Spirit we see that Christ “died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:15) and gives all who trust in Him as their risen Lord and Savior forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. Without this faith in Christ, we have no hope and no hope for unity.

Earlier we discussed how Holy Baptism unifies as children of God. How does God also work through Holy Communion to unify us? When we partake of the Lord’s Supper with fellow believers, we remember together Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins and are strengthened together by His grace and love so that we can serve Him.

Sympathy

How would you describe what sympathy is? Sympathy is feelings of sorrow for the hurt or loss experienced by someone else. Sympathy also involves understanding the feelings of another person.

What are ways in which we show sympathy toward others? Answers may vary, but should-focus on caring for others.

Read Romans 12:15.

While we might not always know the words to say to someone, we are usually able to have sympathy with those who are grieving. But, are we able to show sympathy towards someone who is angry, perhaps even angry at us? This question could be left as rhetorical, or something to reflect on silently. If answered, responses may vary. Listen actively to responses concerning the difficulty of showing sympathy when relationships have been broken.

There is a story about a dog that was hit by car and was able to limp to the side of the road and hide in some bushes. Along comes a woman who sees the dog in the bushes and walks up to it. But the dog would not let her anywhere near. The woman hears the growls and sees teeth bared at her, but what isn’t obvious is the dog’s injury. This dog is hurt. This dog is in pain. But what we see from the dog is only anger. Perhaps people are the same. Perhaps anger is just masking hurt.

Setting aside expressions of anger and trying to understand where others have been hurt can lead us to show sympathy.

The ultimate sympathy ever came from God Almighty, who saw us in our sufferings and pain, and rescued us from eternal death and separation to bring us to eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection!

Love

What do the following verses say about God's love for us?

Deuteronomy 7:9: God's love for us is eternal and does not change (steadfast).

Psalms 86:15: God shows His love for us by being merciful and gracious and slow to anger.

Zephaniah 3:17: God saves us and rejoices and exults over us.

John 15:9–13: Jesus loves us so much that He gave His life to save us. He commands us to love one another as He loves us.

Romans 5:8: God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:37–39: Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:4–5: Because of His great love for us even when we were dead in our sins, God has made us alive together with Christ and has saved us by His grace.

1 John 4:7–8: God is love. He commands us to love one another.

How does the Holy Spirit work in us to respond to God's great love? Of course there is a difference between how God wants us to respond and how we actually do respond. Through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are moved by God's eternal, unconditional, and perfect love to love others.

How would you describe "sisterly love"? Answers may vary, depending on one's relationship with her sister (or absence of a sister). "Sisterly love" can generally be defined as a closeness, a special bond, a relationship that can withstand trial.

Sometimes "sisterly love" can have the look of extremes. If you grew up with a sister, share some of the extremes you may have experienced with her. (For example, on looks – were you dressed like twins or complete opposites? On your relationship – how quickly it could go from angry at each other to love for each other? On competition – were you on the same team or the competition?) Encourage all to share and react to each other's experiences. Perhaps some individuals will have "sisterly love" stories about their best friend instead of blood sister.

What are some examples of "sisterly love" in your LWML society (zone, district)? Encourage examples to be shared.

How is God's love for us and our love for our sisters in Christ related? Both types of love are close, personal, and relational. However, God's love for us is perfect. Even the best examples of our "sisterly love" pale in comparison. But because of God's love for us, our love for our sisters in Christ is possible.

A Tender Heart

Think about the kindest person you know. What are some things they do to show kindness to others? Answers will vary, but will likely focus on types of unexpected, caring actions in which the kind person puts the needs of another person before her own.

Why do you think they are so kind? Help participants make the connection that this kindness/tenderness is a result of the Holy Spirit working in the individual's heart.

Read Ephesians 4:29–32. How do these verses describe what it means to be kind? Kind people use their words and actions to build others up and to show grace and forgiveness. Their hearts are tender toward others.

Even the kindest person we know won't always be kind in every situation, and neither will we. But, through the love of God in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can adopt kindness and have a tender heart.

A Humble Mind

What is humility? Humility can be defined as “being modest,” or “not thinking too highly of oneself.”

A tune by singer/songwriter Mac Davis goes, “O Lord, it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way” (“It's Hard to be Humble,” ©1980 Songpainter Music). We may occasionally (or often) think this way about ourselves, but is it true? No. Instead of perfect, what is a more accurate way to describe ourselves? Answers may vary, ranging from a sinful wretch to not perfect but forgiven.

Instead of puffing ourselves up by listing our accomplishments and expecting praise, let us put the focus on what our Lord has done for us and how we can work together to do the missions God has led us to do!

Read Ephesians 4:1–3, Philippians 2:5–11, and Colossians 3:12–13. What words or phrases in these verses have we already heard today? Words and phrases include humility, gentleness, love, unity, servant, compassion, and kindness.

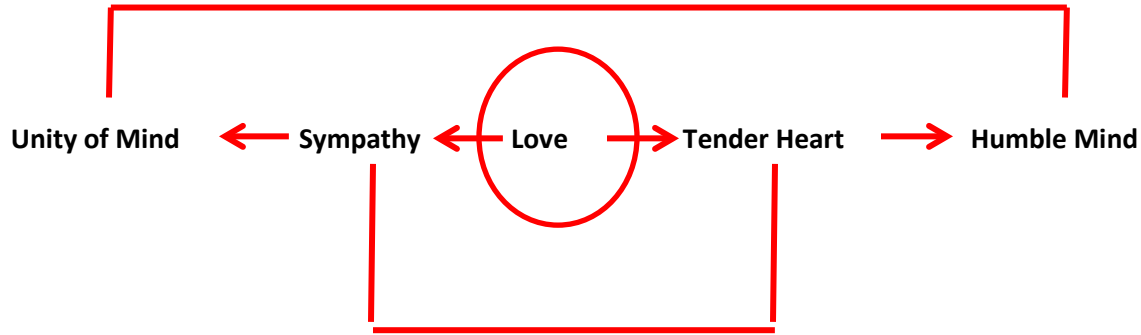
(On a whiteboard, chalkboard, or paper, write the following words.)

Unity of Mind Sympathy Love Tender Heart Humble Mind

What word is at the center of the line of words and phrases shown above? Love

Now watch carefully as your Bible study leader draws a diagram using these words and phrases. Do what the leader does on your own copy of the Bible study.

(Circle the word “Love” on the diagram.)



Flowing out of love, we are enabled to have sympathy and tenderness. (Draw arrows from “Love” to “Sympathy” and to “Tender Heart.”) How are sympathy and a tender heart related?
Both are emotions/qualities that are focused on others through love from God.

Because our hearts are full of God’s love, this love flows out to our minds. (Draw arrows from “Sympathy” to “Unity of Mind” and from “Tender Heart” to “Humble Mind.”) How are unity of mind and a humble mind related? God’s love works in us and through us to focus our hearts together on the needs of others. He works humility in us as we love and serve others.

(Draw a line connecting “Unity of Mind” to “Humble Mind.”)

Because of God’s love, how are we able to accept others and be able to work together? God’s love moves us to love others. His love moves us to put others before ourselves. This includes putting aside the attitude of “having our way” in our families, congregations, societies, workplaces, and communities. God’s love moves us to kindness, tenderness, and to care for others. Through the faith that He gives us, God moves us to acknowledge Him as Lord and works in us to be humble. When God blesses us with His gifts of unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8), we are able to set aside our differences and accept others. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to welcome their ideas, suggestions, and help in order to spread God’s love by serving others together!

Closing Prayer: We thank You Lord that Your love is at the center of our lives. Your love created us and redeemed us. Help us to love our sisters in Christ here today, so that we may have sympathetic and tender hearts toward each other. Give us unity of mind and humility so that all our words and actions honor You and build others up. Lead us and guide us to accept others and to work together. We ask this all in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Sing: “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” LSB 700, TLH 351, LW 286

Working Together
 Leader’s Guide
 Written by Rev. Jason Holden, Carbondale, Illinois
 Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019