



THANKS A MILLION!

**SANCTUARY FIRST
CONNECT BIBLE STUDY**

FEBRUARY 2025

WELCOME TO CONNECT!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and Godly responses to life issues, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our **website** and **App**, have fun exploring it all!

THANKS A MILLION!

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7)

This month we are turning our eyes to heaven and shouting out: Thanks a million!

Thanks for loving us and for going on loving us!

Thank you for showing us what love is and what love can do.

Thank you for coming among us, Emmanuel — God With Us — to embody the timeless power of love.

Thank you for the love that inspires us, rewards us and sustains us through all the world throws at us!

Thank you God!

Thanks a million!

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

- **Thank you for inspiring love**
- **Thank you for rewarding love**
- **Thank you for sustaining love**
- **Thank you for powerful love**

POEM

IN THIS WILD WORLD

In this wild world
let us make an harbour
A pocket in the fabric of time
Where we can treasure lost things
Where we can be together

In this broken moment
Let us make a shelter
and take shelter
under a canopy of all we can be
Where we can be together.

At our feet, sacred quiet,
where the miraculous goes unsaid
where promises grow and tears are shed
— seeds fly and trees fall into the sky
And we can be together.

In this commitment
this fledgling frescoed framework
a little alcove in the uncertainty of what could
be
we take a seat and take heart
And we can be together.

In this bond between us
we catch our breath and our courage
discovering who we can be in the dappled
light of nurture
sheltered, cherished, loved, a simple place
Where we can be together.

James Cathcart

PRAYER

LET US PRAY

Lord, your presence is life,

Fill me with your Spirit,

So that every fibre of my being radiates you.

Let my words speak life into all people I
encounter, into all situations.

Let my every action be the embodiment of
your love.

Breathe into me Lord and release your Spirit
upon my life

Amen

Laura Digan

WEEK 1: THANK YOU FOR INSPIRING LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

We are only able to love because God first loved us — loved us into our very being! Thank you God for making us in your image and imbuing us with all the divine love you have invested in us! May your love inspire us on and on to love.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What stories, songs, and images inspire you to love others?

READ 1 JOHN 4: 7-21

Thank you for loving us.

We love because he first loved us. Thank you God for investing us with this much love!

What is your initial response to this reading?
How does it make you feel?

Then discuss as a group what you are thankful for.

READ JEREMIAH 1: 4-10

Thank you for attentive love.

This is a beautiful, uncanny encounter.

What words and phrases stand out to you in this reading?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13: 1-13

Thank you for inspiring love!

Your love does not require us to grasp the mysteries of the universe, it's not a secret to uncover, or a puzzle to decode. But these beautiful enigmatic verses tell us there's also no ceiling on love, there's a cosmic picture we cannot grasp completely but will unfold eternally. One we can go on growing into...

How does love guide and shape people over time?

WEEK 2: THANK YOU FOR REWARDING LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

God's love, simultaneously huge, vast, unfathomable and sensitive, personalised, and caring — is incredibly rewarding. It doesn't reward the way a high paying job advert might claim. There's no annual bonus or access to an influential VIP circle. The salary is zero and no velvet ropes are going to be lifted aside.

But here's the thing: you're already a VIP and all the riches in the world can't compare to the rewards of God's eternal love...

SEEDS TO SOW:

When is God's love surprising?

READ PSALM 138

Thank you for enduring love.

What does the reading tell us about how God loves us? What especially strikes you about it?

READ LUKE 5: 1-6

Thank you for unexpected love.

Jesus clocks the boat and clocks an opportunity. Love is surprising! One of the ironies of love is that steady, constant love is not static and dull but constantly full of surprises as we lean into a rewarding life of love and surprise.

Why does Jesus choose to catch Simon off guard like this?

READ LUKE 5: 7-11

Thank you for enthusiastic love.

It's the best catch of their lives and they leave it all behind...

They don't say, "Give us five minutes to get this lot stowed away."

They don't say, "There must be 5,000 fish here, surely that could come in handy?"

Why would the disciples just walk away from it all like that?

WEEK 3: THANK YOU FOR SUSTAINING LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

We are never forgotten, cast aside or diminished by God. Love always notices, cherishes and builds up. God does not promise us lives free from pain or adversity, what God does promise is endless love throughout everything.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What are our roots? What roots us?

READ JEREMIAH 17: 5-10

Thank you for rooted love.

In God we don't have a rootless love, we have a rooted love! What's the difference between a rooted and an unrooted love?

READ PSALM 1

Thank you for fresh love.

True love is not stagnant, it is fresh and new each day sustaining us.

In our churches and worship communities are we looking for fresh water — fresh examples of God's love for us? Or are we sometimes content with stale and stagnant water — a water that isn't moving and isn't asking us to either?

What is our prayer for the church today?

READ LUKE 6: 17-23

Thank you for fulfilling love.

Jesus goes on and on loving us, sustaining us. Our hunger and our tears don't go unnoticed. Christ hungers and weeps with us, never abandoning us.

Jesus notices, acknowledges and cherishes the commitment we make to determinedly love him and one another.

On the biggest canvas possible — eternity — the love of God is fulfilling!

How can we communicate to the world what a deep, sustaining and fulfilling love can be found in Christ?

WEEK 4: THANK YOU FOR POWERFUL LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

Faster than a freight train, as immovable as a mountain, bigger than the moon but able to fit in the tiniest gaps. It's love. The most powerful force in the universe.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What local, national and international projects can we support that champion reconciliation, peace and grace?

READ GENESIS 45: 1-15

Thank you for forgiving love.

None of us get through the year, through the week, through the day — without the power of love's forgiveness — beautifully depicted here.

How do you think Joseph's brothers felt in that moment?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15: 47-50

Thank you for heavenly love.

The dust of heaven meets the dust of humanity in the love that transforms us. We are more than the sum of our parts through Christ. We are gold dust!

As we begin to recognise God in ourselves do other people recognise God in us? How can Christians live our lives in such a way that people glimpse God in us?

READ LUKE 6: 27-38

Thank you for openhearted love.

God's selfless love for us is a powerful inspiration for us to imitate that love in our lives — not just when it's convenient.

The ability to love our enemies is something we are able to do through the power of God's love. It's one of the strongest counter-cultural forces in the world. It takes tremendous power and grace to go on loving in the face of unfairness and rejection with no prospect of being understood.

It is the great irony of love that when we love openly, with no expectation of return, we can find ourselves blessed anyway — but not in the narrow ways we might plan, but in beautiful, surprising expansive ways.

We don't give money away in order to get money back ourselves.

We don't bless others with time and effort because it 'earns us' time and effort in return.

Love is not a transaction. It's a gift. And when we join the gift economy of love we get back more than we give, even if we give it our all.

We may never see, never know, what an impact our small gestures of love have on the lives of others down the line. So why do we do it? Why do we act out love in those times when we have no hope or expectation of ever knowing the 'outcome' or getting a 'resolution'?

Then come to God in prayer to draw it altogether.