

Small Group Guide: Love - Week 1 of Advent

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by praying that God would help you experience His love more fully and express it more freely to others.

Icebreaker

Share about a time when someone showed you love in an unexpected or memorable way. How did it make you feel?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. Love is the greatest virtue - Paul says that faith, hope, and love remain, but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13)
2. Before we can love God, we must know Him - The progression is: hear → believe → follow → love
3. God's love for us is extraordinary - He loved us while we were still sinners, adopted us as His children, and gave us eternal life
4. Love requires obedience - If we love God, we will obey His commandments (John 14:15)
5. Loving God means loving His children - We show love for God by loving other believers and obeying His commands
6. Love is impossible without Christ - We need God's help to both experience His love and express it to others

Discussion Questions

Understanding God's Love

1. The pastor mentioned feeling like we can only absorb "a thimble full" of God's ocean of love. What limits our ability to experience God's love? How can we increase our capacity to receive it?
2. Read Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:1, and John 3:16. Which of these expressions of God's love resonates most with you right now? Why?
3. The sermon suggested praying, "God, increase my ability to be loved by you." How does this prayer challenge or change your typical approach to prayer?

Expressing Love to God

4. How does the connection between love and obedience (Deuteronomy 7:9, John 14:15) challenge your understanding of what it means to love God?
5. In what ways do you currently express your love for God? Are there ways you've been generous with God like you would be with someone you love?
6. The sermon states, "Faith plus love shows itself in obedience." Where do you see this equation working in your life? Where do you struggle?

Loving Others

7. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 slowly together. Which characteristic of love comes most naturally to you? Which one is most challenging?
8. The pastor explained the "math" of 1 John 5:1-2: We love God's children by loving God and obeying His commands. How does this change your perspective on loving other Christians?

9. Who in your life is hardest to love right now? How might God be calling you to show love to them this week?

Evangelism and Sharing Love

10. The sermon emphasized that before people can love God, they must hear about Him. Who in your life needs to hear about God's love? What makes it difficult to share with them?
11. Why is Christmas/Advent a particularly good time to share God's love with others?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Choose ONE of the following to focus on this week:

Option 1: Deepen Your Experience of God's Love

- Spend 10 minutes each day meditating on one aspect of God's love (His sacrifice, adoption, gift of eternal life)
- Journal about how you experience God's love daily
- Pray: "God, help me to know and feel your love more fully"

Option 2: Practice 1 Corinthians 13 Love

- Choose one characteristic from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 that is most difficult for you
- Identify 2-3 specific situations where you can practice this trait
- Ask someone to hold you accountable

Option 3: Share God's Love

- Identify one person who needs to hear about Jesus
- Pray for them daily

- Look for an opportunity to share God's love with them (through service, conversation, or invitation)

Option 4: Love God's Family

- Reach out to 3 people in the church this week with encouragement
- Serve in a ministry area you haven't tried before
- Invite someone from church over for a meal

Personal Reflection

Take 5 minutes of silence for personal reflection:

- How will loving God and loving people change you this week?
- What is one specific action you will take as a result of this study?

Closing Prayer

Pray together using these themes:

- Thank God for His extraordinary love for us
- Ask God to help you experience His love more fully
- Request strength to love others with patience, kindness, and selflessness
- Pray for the specific people and situations mentioned during discussion

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll explore the second word in our mission statement. Come prepared to share how you practiced love this week!

Additional Resources

Memory Verse for the Week: "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands." - 1 John 5:2

Further Study:

- Read the entire book of 1 John this week (only 5 chapters)
- Study the "love chapter" - 1 Corinthians 13 - in different translations

Sermon Summary

This Advent message invites us into a profound exploration of love as the foundation of our faith journey. Beginning with Paul's declaration that love is the greatest of all virtues, we're reminded that before we can truly love God, we must first hear about Him, decide to follow Him, and develop faith in Him. The sermon walks us through Romans 10:14, showing how evangelism becomes the starting point of love—we cannot love someone we haven't heard about. But here's where it gets beautifully complex: we're challenged to not just understand God's love intellectually, but to pray for an increased capacity to receive it. The message draws from Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:1, and John 3:16 to paint a picture of God's extraordinary love—He died for us while we were still His enemies, adopted us as His children, and gave us eternal life. Yet the most challenging truth emerges from Deuteronomy 7:9 and John 14:15: our love for God must express itself through obedience. Faith plus love equals obedience. This isn't legalism; it's the natural overflow of hearts saturated with divine love. And in a beautiful mathematical twist from 1 John 5:1-2, we discover that loving God and loving His children are inseparably linked—we love each other best by loving God and obeying His commandments. This Advent season, we're called to pray a revolutionary prayer: 'God, increase my ability to be loved by You,' so that His love can overflow into every relationship we have.

Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Mentioned References:

1. 1 Corinthians 13 - The love chapter (multiple references throughout)
2. 1 Corinthians 13:13 - "Faith, hope, and love remain, and the greatest of these is love"
3. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - Definition and characteristics of love
4. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God..."
5. Romans 10:14 - "How can they call on one they have not believed in?"
6. Romans 5:8 - "God demonstrated his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"
7. 1 John 3:1 - "See what sort of love the Father has given us, that we should be called God's children"
8. John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"
9. Deuteronomy 7:9 - God's covenant faithfulness to those who love Him and keep His commandments
10. Daniel 9:4 - (Mentioned as showing love tied to obedience)
11. Nehemiah 1:5 - (Mentioned as showing love tied to obedience)
12. John 14:15 - "If you love me, you will obey my commandments"
13. 1 John 2:3-5 - Knowing God through keeping His commandments; love perfected through obedience
14. 1 John 5:1-2 - Everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God

Alluded to References:

15. Matthew 22:37-39 / Mark 12:30-31 / Luke 10:27 - The Great Commandment (loving God and neighbor)
16. Luke 10:25-37 - The Good Samaritan parable (context for "who is my neighbor?")
17. Matthew 5-7 - Sermon on the Mount (mentioned regarding Jesus' teachings)
18. Matthew 5:43-44 - "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"
19. 1 Timothy 5:8 - Taking care of one's own family
20. John 1:35-39 - "Come and see" (disciples following Jesus)
21. Romans 10:13 - "All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved"
22. Lamentations 3:22-23 - God's mercies are new every morning (alluded to)
23. 2 Corinthians 5:17 - New creation in Christ (alluded to when discussing adoption)
24. John 15:5 - "Apart from me you can do nothing" (paraphrased in conclusion)

Relevant Supporting Verses for Main Themes:

- 1 John 4:8, 16 - "God is love"
- 1 John 4:19 - "We love because he first loved us"
- Ephesians 2:4-5 - God's great love and mercy
- Romans 8:15-17 - Adoption as children of God
- Galatians 5:22-23 - Fruit of the Spirit (including love)
- John 13:34-35 - New commandment to love one another