

God's Love

This is a series of five one-hour interactive Bible studies focused on the very essence of God, as we are told in 1 John 4:16b: "God is love." The studies were written to help us ponder the magnitude of God's love and how it influences all aspects of our lives. The sessions are titled:

1. Being Filled with God's Love
2. How God's Love Influences My Life
3. How God's Love Influences My Relationships
4. How God's Love Helps Me Forgive
5. How God's Love Helps Me in Difficult Times

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God's Love: Being Filled with God's Love

Lesson 1

Opening prayer

The world often tells us we are just one of many out there and we are not uniquely and individually special. Or, if we do matter, it's our numbers and letters that make us worthwhile—our salary, our degrees, our grades, our position, or even where we live. This worldly perspective easily leads us into a downward spiral as we reach out for love, either fearing the love of others will run out, or protecting our hearts from the hurt of rejection. The world so easily skews what we think of as love, that God's love, freely and abundantly given, seems almost foreign to us.

Let's look at some of things God tells us about his love and see how it is so very different than what the world can give.

1. 1 John 4:16b says, "God is love." What does it mean to you that God is the very essence of love?
2. What do we learn about God's love in Psalm 103:8-11, and why is this so important to us?
3. What do we learn about God's love in 1 John 4:10, and why is this so important to us?

4. Read Psalm 139 and Psalm 23:6. What do we learn about God's love, and why is this so important to us?

5. What do we learn about God's love in 1 John 4:18, and why is this so important to us?

6. What do we learn about God's love in Romans 8:35-39, and why is this so important to us?

7. What do we learn about God's love in Hebrews 12:6, and why is this so important to us?

8. What truths did God teach the Children of Israel about his love? Why do we need to know these truths still apply to us today?

In Isaiah 43:1 –

In Isaiah 43:2 –

In Isaiah 43:3-4 –

In Isaiah 43:5-7 –

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9. As God's love takes root in our hearts, it changes. In what ways do we respond differently than those who do not know God?

1 John 4:11 –

Matthew 5:43-48 –

John 13:34-35 –

Closing prayer or hymn

God's Love: How God's Love Influences My Life

Lesson 2

Opening prayer

1. "Jesus loves me; this I know for the Bible tells me so." Even the youngest Christians know this basic truth—God loves me! The English language uses the word love in three different ways. Let's talk about them.

What or who do you love with a "really like" type of love?

What or who do you love with a friendship type of love? This is often called phileo (from same root word as "Philadelphia") love.

What or who do you love with a completely self-sacrificing love, that you would be willing to give your life for? This is often called agape love.

In which category did you put your love for God?

Which type of love are we talking about when we sing "Jesus loves me, this I know?" (See 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10,19; John 3:16; Romans 5:8.) How do you know this?

2. Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:7, and Genesis 2:22 tell us about the creation of the human race. How does this differ from how God created everything else?

What does it mean to be made in God's image?

What does this say about how God regards us?

3. Consider Paul, who went from being a persecutor of Christians to ultimately dying for his faith in Jesus. Surely Paul is an example of how God's love impacts our lives. Consider Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25. Paul's struggle is familiar to us. What obstacles do you find in doing what you want to do/not doing what you don't want to do?
4. As you meditate on God's love for you, how will this impact the priorities you set for your life? How and when can your priorities become a problem? (Review Luke 9:57-62 and Exodus 20:3.)

Think again about your priorities in life. How do our priorities change when we keep God first in our lives? Read Matthew 6:33.

5. How often do we say, "I don't have the time!" Consider this—who created and controls time? What tips can you share to help us use our time in a way that honors the love God has for us? (Review Psalm 31:15, and Isaiah 33:6.)

6. Money is necessary and not a bad thing. Money is one means God uses to provide us with clothing, food, shelter, and other things we need in life. When does money become a stumbling block in the life of a believer?

In Mark 12:41-44 we are told the widow's gift was greatest because it was absolutely all she had; she had nothing left. If we were asked to empty our wallets and bank accounts into the collection plate, most of us would struggle with compliance. How would meditating on God's love for us help us give more generously than we already do?

When considering our priorities, stewardship, and love for God and others, it is not enough to simply go through the motions. The motivation must also be there. God wants us to JOYFULLY serve him and others in response to his amazing love. Lord, work this desire in our hearts.

Closing prayer or hymn

God's Love: How God's Love Influences My Relationships

Lesson 3

Opening prayer

Paul tells us “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. ... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-25).

1. Discuss how this passage from Galatians has influenced your marriage and family relationships, giving examples of when (or how you would imagine) this passage has made a difference in your response to a family member or a situation.

What do you do as a family to strengthen the bond between you and the Spirit?

2. How does this passage influence your relationship with Christian friends? With non-Christian friends?

3. What differences do you think these gifts of the Spirit make in our relationships with employers, employees, and co-workers?

Discuss: “The world doesn’t read the Bible; therefore, Christians must be the Bible to the world.”

4. How do our words influence our relationships? (Proverbs 12:18, James 3:17-18) What tips can you share to control what you say?
5. What tips do you have for loving the unlovable, whether that be a difficult family member or a smelly, wild person who lives under a bridge, or anybody in between?
6. Discuss how this saying could influence your relationships: “Love is an attitude—a condition of the heart without which the activity of the hands can have no value.”

7. If we are honest with ourselves, we know our hearts are not always filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. What do we do about that?

Thought to ponder:

Having God in our hearts does change us and make us stand out from the rest of the world.

Think of:

- the hardened criminal who said, “Jesus, remember me.”
- an order-following centurion who said, “This man was the Son of God.”
- the timid Pharisee who stepped out of the shadows: “May I care for his body?”
- a rich man from an empty religion: “I know of an empty tomb.”

These are the things that come from faith. The unmistakable flavor of love hangs all about them. This is the sound of people changing. This is the accomplishment of Christ and of his life turned loose in the barren wilderness of the world. – *More Prepared to Answer*, Mark Paustian, pg 207.

Closing prayer or hymn

God's Love: How God's Love Helps Me Forgive

Lesson 4

Opening prayer

1. Recall a time when you or someone you know allowed unforgiveness or bitterness to take root. What were the consequences?
2. How important is forgiving according to Matthew 6:14-15?
3. In the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:22-35) the master forgives a huge debt for his servant. But then that same servant refuses to forgive the much smaller debt of another man. Read Matthew 18:34-35. Why do you think God's sentence against us is so severe if we don't forgive?

4. But isn't there a limit to how often I forgive? And aren't some things just too big to forgive? See Matthew 18:21-22 and Hosea 3:1.

5. Think of a person who has hurt or mistreated you, whom you have had difficulty forgiving. Consider that situation as you discuss these four statements about what is required to forgive others. How would a focus on these requirements help you forgive? What have you found helpful when trying to forgive someone?

a. Forgiving requires refusal of pride in my heart.

b. Forgiving requires the reality of my own sinfulness; an awareness that all have sinned and fall short of God's required perfection—I am chief among those sinners.

c. Forgiving requires a desire to please and obey God.

- d. Forgiving requires a sincere love for souls and realization that I must reach out with the gospel to all people—even those who have wronged me.

6. What joys do you experience when you have sincerely forgiven someone?

This week, ask God to help you forgive. Pray for those you are struggling with forgiving. Pray for someone who needs your forgiveness.

For your pondering—some Bible wisdom that may help you forgive:

Ephesians 4:1-3

Philippians 3:13b-16

Hebrews 12:5-6,11

1 Peter 5:6-7

Psalm 24

Psalm 133

Matthew 7:7-8

Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32

Romans 12:17-21

Psalm 55:22

1 Peter 4:7-8

Isaiah 43:1-2

Psalm 55:22

1 Samuel 25

The Lord's Prayer
(Matthew 6:9-13)

Closing prayer or hymn

God's Love: How God's Love Supports Me in Difficult Times

Lesson 5

Opening prayer

*When sorrows like sea billows roll-
Whatever my lot
Thou hath taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.* – Horatio Spafford, 1873

Sorrow is a natural response to trials and difficulties. But in his Word, God helps us discover why even in the darkest times of our lives we can say with convincing clarity, “It is well with my soul.”

1. How does joy differ from happiness?

2. Read James 1:2-5, 12. It seems strange that we should “consider it pure joy... whenever we face trials of many kinds.” How can this be? Do you think trials are important in a Christian life?

3. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. The author compares the Christian life, with all its difficulties, to a race. What advice does he give for this marathon and what's the analogy to our lives?

a.

b.

c.

d.

4. In Hebrews 12:7-11 the author goes on to tell us to look at hardship as a discipline. Read these verses. Where is the encouragement in what this tells us?

What do you think it means to "share in his holiness" (vs 10)?

The results of discipline are "a harvest of righteousness and peace" (vs. 11). What might this look like in a person's life?

5. How can our attitude toward our trials affect our spiritual growth?

6. Difficult times can be truly difficult. Even Jesus struggled in his life on earth. Read Matthew 26:36-46 and identify first what Jesus did and then some practical things that we can do or that we can do for others as we face difficulties?

Closing prayer or hymn