

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Core Group Guide: Love One Another

Opening Take 5 minutes to have each person briefly share a high & a low from their week. Then have someone pray for any immediate needs as well as for the group time.

Core Questions You will spend most of your time on the second value, but make sure you get to all three.

Value #1: Know & Love God

Read *Ephesians 1:3* and answer the question below.

What have you sensed the Lord telling or reminding you about your identity in Him recently?

God's words define who we are, not any person's words, actions, or thoughts (not even our own).

It is crucial that we respond to what He's saying so that we live faithfully FROM our identity rather than FOR an identity.

You could ask it this way: "What have you been believing about yourself that is negative? What does God say about that?"

Take time to **LISTEN** to the Holy Spirit as needed and to **MINISTER** to one another through prayer & encouragement.

Value #2: Love One Another

Read *John 13:31-35* together.

Discuss. Use the questions to guide the discussion. Make space for confession and ministry as needed.

What is the context of this statement/command from Jesus? Does that impact how you read it?

What was Jesus' command to His disciples on the brink or betrayal? Is this a new commandment?

Compare with *Leviticus 19:11-18* (focus on v. 18) and *Matthew 22:37-40*. The key difference is not the words of the command, but expression. Jesus is now the model. You can focus in on John 13:34, "just as I have loved you," that is, sacrificially.

Read *1 Corinthians 13:4-7* together.

Discuss. Use the questions as needed to guide discussion. Make space for confession and ministry as needed.

If God is love, how does this passage describe Jesus?

You can read it again with "Jesus" in place of the word "love." Spend a silent moment meditating on that. You can ask your group, "What about this description of God's love really impacts you right now? if you feel the need to.

If you use your name in place of the word love, are you reading something truthful?

This is not an opportunity for shame but honest confession (which honors God) and a challenge by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' day, all Jews would have said that "Love the Lord your God" is the greatest commandment. However, many would have said "keep the Sabbath day holy" is the second greatest commandment, so keeping that commandment was their primary effort. For disciples of Jesus, "love your neighbor as yourself" should be our place of primary focus and energy. If we are weak in a way, we get to humbly seek God for growth and maturity in that without feeling obligated to feel condemned.

What often keeps us from being able to love our neighbors well?

If your group need more direction, check out *1 John 4:18-20*. Fear (of either judgment or lack) and a lack of a vibrant relationship with God are two reasons we struggle to love, but there are a lot.

Read *Titus 3:1,2* and/or *Ephesians 4:25-32* together.

Discuss and Apply. Make space for confession and ministry. Everyone should end with a next step.

How can we practically love each other better and others in our church community?

Have you negatively impacted any relationships lately by acting contrary to God's directions?

Is there any forgiveness that needs to be extended to someone who hurt you as an act of love?

This is not the same as agreeing with what they did or letting them off the hook ultimately. Instead, it is letting go of any place of unforgiveness and bitterness by giving the situation fully to God. He is alone is powerful enough handle everyone's healing in perfect love and patience. **IDEA:** Consider reconciling with the other party as needed according to *Matthew 5:21-24* and *Matthew 18:15-17*. Include your leaders in further plans for such situations and invite them into it as needed.

Value #3: Make Disciples

Read *Matthew 5:13-16* and answer the question below.

How have your words and actions proclaimed Jesus to those who do not know Him yet?

Closing Ministry Time

End in ministering to one another by praying specifically for each person's next step of obedience.

Additionally, take time to pray for a person or two you each know who does not currently know Jesus.