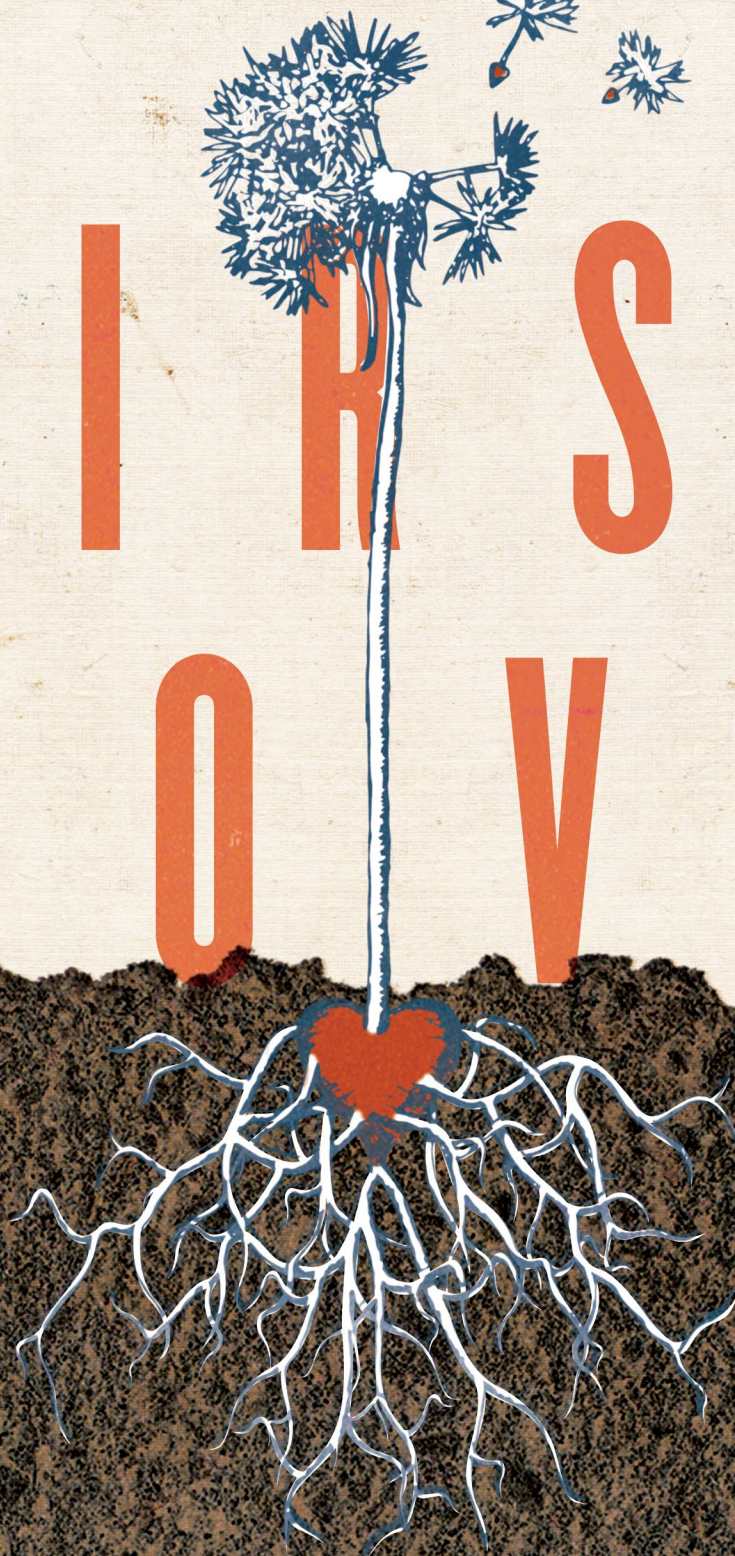


FIRST LOVE



FACILITATION GUIDE | THEME OVERVIEW | CURRICULUM

FACILITATION GUIDE

FIRST LOVE



Each year at YouthWorks, we develop content around a new specific theme for students. Our hope and prayer is always that the theme curriculum would help students connect with God, each other and the communities that they serve. We've seen thousands of students impacted by the First Love theme, and we're excited to make it available for your group.

We're excited to pass on an adapted version of this First Love theme to you, in hopes that you and your teenagers can experience and respond to the amazing love of God. While this curriculum is set up to be used for youth group or Sunday school, it can also be adapted for camp or retreat curriculum, personal learning and processing, or to guide small group discussions – there's a lot of possibilities!

The First Love theme curriculum is made up of several resources, mentioned below, that are designed to work together to engage students in a variety of ways. That being said, you know your students best! Feel free to customize the content and use what will be best for your group. Here's what's provided and some quick ideas of how to use each item:

- ▶ **Theme Overview:** Start here! The Theme Overview gives you a straightforward synopsis of the overall theme, how it flows throughout the week and some key Bible verses. You can use this to expand your knowledge of the theme or use it as a launching point to develop your own content for your group.
- ▶ **Curriculum:** Each week of curriculum includes various components like discussion questions, personal story prompts, small group question banks, videos, and experiential elements. The curriculum is designed to take around 45-60 minutes each week, but could take longer or shorter depending on the amount of discussion and any games or worship that you add in. The First Love curriculum is designed to be a four-week curriculum, however adaptations for one-week, three-week, five-week, and week/weekend camp or retreat are provided. You can find those adaptations on page 17.



- ▶ **Theme Videos:** The First Love theme has three videos that are all around four minutes each, followed by several on-screen discussion questions that last a few minutes. These questions are also in the printable Devotional Journal if students prefer to journal their answers (you could simply print out those pages if you'd like). These videos are a main part of the teaching component in the curriculum, but you could also send them out to your students to use as devotional content.

On a logistical level, know that the videos are all connected and build on each other, so we don't recommend skipping around, though check the Adaptations page if you have limited time. You can download or stream the videos from our Vimeo page, using the links below. The password for viewing the videos is **Summer2016**.

Week 1 - [Abundant Vine](#)

Week 2 - [Vast Ocean](#)

Week 4 - [New Lens](#)

- ▶ **Devotional Journal PDF:** Our Devotional Journal is designed to be used daily for four to five days (Friday can be 'on your own' if needed). While some questions are designed to process a mission trip experience, most questions dig into the theme First Love. There are also journaling pages that go alongside the theme videos and it contains two nights worth of discussion group content (which mirrors Week 3 and the Additional Week). We've found that teenagers take roughly 20-30 minutes to go through the content for each day. We also have a section at the back full of ideas for further devotions in their everyday life.

Consider how you share it with students! Most people print these for each student (various programs have the ability to print this as a booklet). Other leaders may choose to use the content to lead small group devotions or discussions, and others have used the Devotional Journal as talking points to develop a longer teaching.

One more note - Wednesday devotions are a bit more interactive and have two additional components:

1. Monument Wall – some butcher paper on a wall where students write down ways God has been faithful to them. Our staff made it look like rocks, but you can do it as complex or as simple as you'd like. See page 26 in the Devotional Journal for more info.
 2. A space for worship, either live or a recording. If you're doing this remotely, consider sending a link to a worship song or two.
- ▶ **Small Group Guide:** While the curriculum has all of the question banks for either large or small group discussions, this resource is great to hand out to small group leaders. It provides several daily group discussion questions - feel free to pick and choose from these lists, though you can also pull questions from the Devotional Journal or make up your own.
 - ▶ **Parent Processing Guide:** You'll get a copy of our Parent Processing Guide, which provides daily theme-related questions for parents and guardians to reflect on, both personally and with their students. Share this with your parents and guardians!
 - ▶ **Graphics:** We have several graphics available to promote the First Love theme either on social media or on a slide for your event. These graphics can be found in a folder in your curriculum downloads.

Thanks for caring about students! We continue to hope and pray that this resource helps you and your students connect to God, each other and those that they serve



YOUTHWORKS THEME OVERVIEW

FIRST LOVE

"We love because God first loved us."

—1 JOHN 4:19

We were unable to love: Unable to love God. Unable to love others.

*But God loved us anyway. Not with a flimsy, only-when-it's-convenient, once-in-a-while kind of love.
But with a deep, all-of-the-time, for-all-of-time kind of love. A love that takes root and gives life.
A love that fills us, changes us, flows from us into the world.*

And so, we are able to love: Able to love God. Able to love others.

We love because God first loved us.

A NOTE ABOUT FIRST LOVE:

There are three big ideas we want students (and you!) to understand and move through during this theme. While each day of curriculum doesn't have a specific theme, know that the content flows through these three ideas:

God loves us. And that's the first big thing we need to understand. Love didn't originate with us. It began with God.

We love God. Our response to a God who loves us deeply is to love back, and two ways we can do that are through worship and obedience.

We love others. Another way we respond to God's love is to love others. That's how people will identify that we are Christ-followers: if we love one another.

Throughout this curriculum, we'll focus on different elements of 1 John 4:7-5:4, finding out what this passage tells us about how God loves us, we love God and we love others. In addition, videos focus on three ways of understanding God's love:

- God's love is like an abundant vine (John 15:1-9)
- God's love is like vast ocean (Ephesians 3:14-21)
- God's love is like new lens (Philippians 2:1-11, John 13:1-17)

Details about how to use this theme, as well as what it looks like day-to-day are in the First Love Curriculum.



C U R R I C U L U M

FIRST LOVE

WEEK 1

- Overall Focus: God Loves Us, an introduction to the First Love Theme, God's love is like an abundant vine
- Scripture Focus: 1 John 4:19, John 15:1-9
- Supplies Needed:
 - Video + a way to show it
 - Small purple beads (3-4 per person, preferably something they can put on a shoelace, sweatshirt tie, etc.)

YOUTH GROUP OPENING:

Start out the time with some of your group's favorite things – games, worship, dance parties... The important thing is to get them focused as you move into the theme content. AKA probably don't try to transition from laser tag into the theme.

INTRODUCE THE THEME:

You can be creative with your introduction to the First Love theme, but take only about *two minutes and make sure you cover the following points:*

- Our theme for the next few weeks is First Love.
 - We'll be talking about God's love for us, our love for God and our love for others.
- The theme verse is 1 John 4:19: "We love because God first loved us."
- Flow into the scripture reading, the video and the discussion groups.

Here's an example of how you could introduce it:

I was wondering: Think of a time when you did something nice for someone else, or served them? What are some reasons you did this? [Take a couple answers.] Well, one reason a lot of people do kind things for others (or serve others) is to show love for other people. In the next few weeks, we're going to be talking about what it looks like when we love others. But before we do that, we're going to talk about how we love God. But even before we do that, we're going to talk about how God loves us.

Our theme for the next few weeks is "First Love," and we'll be talking about where our love comes from. In fact, I'm going to go ahead and give you the answer right now. This short sentence we are going to keep coming back to says it best. It's from 1 John 4:19, and it says, "We love because God first loved us." We're going to unpack those seven words together and think more about what they mean.

Specifically, tonight we're going to read from John 15, we're going to watch a video about God's love. At the end of the video, I'll give you couple questions to discuss with the people around you.

Right now, though, if you have your Bible, turn to John 15. We're going to be reading verses 1–9.



SCRIPTURE READING

Read John 15:1-9. The video will have some reflective teaching on this scripture passage, so feel free to have it flow right into the video. However, you can do some additional teaching or additional introductions to the video if you'd like.

VIDEO

The video has about four minutes of content and is meant to have students begin to reflect on the scripture passage, specifically how God's love is like an abundant vine. It's also meant to spark discussion, either in the large groups or small informal groups. After the content portion of the video ends, two discussion questions will show up as part of the video for about two more minutes (but you can go longer). Here are the discussion questions:

- How will you rely on God's love this week?
- What could keep you from being connected to Jesus?

If you prefer to skip the video and would like to write your own talk, here are the basic points of the video:

- God's love is like an abundant vine
- A grape vine starts small and its branches grow strong, getting its strength and nourishment from the vine.
- A growing vine doesn't fulfil its purpose until it produces fruit. And the fruit isn't meant to stay on the vine! It's meant to be shared and enjoyed – and even multiplied into more vines that produce more fruit.
- The same is with God's love for us – it is like a vine that give us, the branches strength and nourishment.
- In the same way, we are like branches that produce fruit that benefit the world. But what good is a branch if it isn't connected to the vine – Jesus?
- When we remain connected to the vine, God produces in us spiritual fruit (reference the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5)
- This fruit is meant to be shared!

DISCUSSION GROUPS

As mentioned above, the video flows into two discussion questions:

- How will you rely on God's love this week?
- What could keep you from being connected to Jesus?

Feel free to take however long you need to in these discussion groups. We recommend having students get into informal groups of 3-5 for these questions.

PERSONAL STORY

Students love to hear how God is working in the lives of those around them – including your life and the lives of other youth leaders! Take 3-5 minutes to share a story from your life (or have another leader answer this) from this prompt:

- Share a story about a time in your life when God's love for you became evident in your life.

SMALL OR LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question Bank – choose from the following:

- When have you felt God's love and/or forgiveness most strongly?
- Read 1 John 4:9-10. In your own words, how does God show incredible love for us?
- In these passages, what are some specific ways God showed deep love for people?
- What do these stories show you about how God feels about people's everyday troubles?
- Do you think God loves you in the same way Jesus loved the people in the stories you just read? What are some reasons you think that?
- What are some ways you are experiencing God's love in your everyday life? In what ways do you wish you experienced God's love more fully?
- If anyone is feeling brave: "Share a story about a time in your life when God's love for you became evident in your life."



Close with this: This week, pay attention to the ways God is showing his love for you. Pray for God's love to stand out in your life and that you could be full of God's love this week, so you are able to share it with others.

EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENT

Small experiences or activities often nail a point home for students. Right before you end your large group portion, make purple beads available to students to remind them of the grapes they saw in the video. Tell them that this is a simple reminder to stay connected to the vine – Jesus – throughout the week and watch for the fruit that grows in their lives as a result. Instruct them to slide the beads onto the shoelace of the shoes they'll be wearing as they go throughout the week, put them on a sweatshirt tie, or just keep them in a pocket all week.

It will probably work best to have a bowl or two of beads near the exits for students to take from on their way out. You should have enough beads for each participant to take three or four.



WEEK 2

- Overall Focus: We Love God
- Scripture Focus: 1 John 4:19, Ephesians 3:14-21
- Supplies Needed:
 - Video + a way to show it
 - “Because God Loves Me” poster (see Experiential Element for more details)

YOUTH GROUP OPENING:

Start out the time with some of your group’s favorite things – games, worship, dance parties... The important thing is to get them focused as you move into the theme content. AKA probably don’t try to transition from a round of human foosball into the curriculum.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. The video will have some reflective teaching on this scripture passage, so feel free to have it flow right into the video. It is worth noting that this passage is basically a prayer. You could read it directly before the video, or another option might be to insert the reading of this passage between songs in a worship set before the video. You can do some additional teaching or additional introductions to the video if you’d like.

VIDEO

The video has about four minutes of content and is meant to have students begin to reflect on the scripture passage, specifically how God’s love is like a vast ocean. It’s also meant to spark discussion, either in the large groups or small informal groups. After the content portion of the video ends, two discussion questions will show up as part of the video for about two more minutes (but you can go longer). These questions are:

- When have you encountered the amazing love of God?
- How will you respond to God’s deep love for you?

If you prefer to skip the video and would like to write your own talk, here are the basic points of the video:

- God’s love is like a vast ocean.
- Reflect on the ocean – have you ever been there? Talk about what it’s like, help students understand how large it is, how powerful waves are, how deep it can be.
- Really soaking in something huge or beautiful in nature, like the ocean, or even mountains, the Grand Canyon, etc., can give us an experience that is unforgettable.
- Relate this to Ephesians 3: “May you have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high and how deep God’s love is.”
- Experiencing God’s love is also unforgettable, similar to when we experience something huge or beautiful in nature.
- God’s love keeps going as far as you can see and is also deeper than we can imagine.
- This love washes over us like waves, and draws us in, and beckons us to respond with new eyes to see and new ears to hear.
- It fuels us to respond like Luke 10 – “Love the Lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.”



DISCUSSION GROUPS

As mentioned above, the video flows into two discussion questions:

- When have you encountered the amazing love of God?
- How will you respond to God's deep love for you?

Feel free to take however long you need to in these discussion groups. We recommend having students get in informal groups of 3-5 for these questions.

PERSONAL STORY

Students love to hear how God is working in the lives of those around them – including your life and the lives of other youth leaders! Take 3-5 minutes to share a story from your life (or have another leader answer this) from this prompt:

- “Share a brief story about a time when you clearly recognized God's love for you. Conclude by sharing what your response was to God's love.”
- This question is similar to last week's question, with the additional part about your response – you could use the same story as last week, or another story! You could also have another leader share their answer to this question.

SMALL OR LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question Bank – choose from the following:

- God loves us! According to this passage, how do we respond to God's love?
- Read 1 John 4:16. If living in love means living in God, what do you think living in God means?
- What is one way you could focus on loving God today?
- Read 1 John 4:18. What do you think this means? What fears might this be talking about?
- When you think of your relationship with God – how God sees you and what God thinks of you – what fears do you have?
- There is a lot we could be afraid of. But if God truly loves you with a perfect love – in all God's goodness and all God's power – what does that change?
- What can you do today to let go of fear and more fully depend on God's love?
- Read 1 John 4:19-21. Why do you think obeying God is part of loving God?
- Does keeping God's commands seem like a chore to you? Why or why not?
- Today what is one area in which you could better obey God?
- Which of these three things – loving God, letting go of fear, obeying God – do you need to focus on most today?

Close with this: Take a few minutes and pray for God's love to be made real in your life today and for you to be able to respond with love back toward God.

EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENT

Small experiences or activities often nail a point home for students. You can choose to do this activity to close your large group portion, or have students come back for a closing after their small groups.

Create a banner that says: “BECAUSE GOD DEEPLY LOVES ME...” Use separate butcher paper with the text and use different blank butcher paper beneath it. You could also use a chalkboard or whiteboard, poster board – or get creative. Have markers available near the poster.

After the video, invite students to share their response to God's love by adding it to the poster. Remind them that a response to God's love can be a feeling, an action, a realization or any other change in their life. Ask them to come up and write how they would finish that sentence: “Because God deeply loves me...” You might share a few of your own, or maybe one from each youth leader.



Play one or two worship songs as students come up. Choose reflective songs that say something about our response to God's love.

Here's an example of how you could explain this time:

God's love for us is like a vast ocean. So how will we respond? We can let go of fear, we choose to follow God and we can love God back. But there are many, many big and small ways to respond to God's love. We can respond with attitudes and with actions and with realizations and with commitment and with changes. How will you respond? I thought about how we would finish that sentence on the wall, and here's a couple answers I came up with:

- *Because God deeply loves me, I want to love others more deeply.*
- *Because God deeply loves me, I am free to not think about myself all the time.*
- *Because God deeply loves me, I have the strength to forgive.*
- *Because God deeply loves me, I don't have to find my identity in what others say about me.*

So what about you? As we sing a couple more worship songs, come and write on this poster just one of the ways you want to respond to God's love for you. How do you finish this sentence: "Because God deeply loves me..."



WEEK 3

- Overall Focus: We Love God – which means We Love Others
- Scripture Focus: 1 John 4:19, John 21:1-17
- Supplies Needed:
 - “Do You Love Me?” stickers, or supplies for students to make their own. See Experiential Element for more information.

A WORD ABOUT TONIGHT:

Since there is no video tonight, most of the learning comes through discussions surrounding this scripture passage, as well as some experiential activities. If you normally have a large group that breaks into small groups at the end, consider doing a “large group – small group – back to large group” order for this night.

YOUTH GROUP OPENING:

Start out the time with some of your group’s favorite things – games, worship, dance parties... The important thing is to get them focused as you move into the theme content. AKA probably don’t try to transition from a dance party into the curriculum.

SCRIPTURE READING + CONTEXT

Read John 21:1-17. You can do some additional teaching on this passage if you’d like, but there’s some important context that this passage needs before you read it to the group: Peter denying Jesus three times. Knowing this helps explain why Jesus asking him “Do you Love me?” and asking him to care for his sheep three times is significant.

Here’s an example of how you could say it (you could just read this too!):

Peter was one of Jesus’ closest friends, but when Jesus was arrested, Peter denied three different times even knowing Jesus. Jesus was put on a cross, died and was buried, but three days later, Jesus rose from death. Before he left earth, Jesus appeared to his followers several times. Keeping in mind that Peter probably still felt pretty guilty about saying he didn’t know Jesus, read what happens when Jesus appears to Peter and a few others.

SMALL OR LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- From this story, what are some signs that Jesus loves Peter and the other disciples?
Jesus causes a ton of fish to miraculously fill the disciples’ nets, then he makes the disciples breakfast. Moreover,
- Before this story, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. Why do you think Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him?
Peter denied knowing Jesus three times, so Jesus was giving Peter the opportunity to replace each of those with a declaration that Peter loved Jesus. In essence, Jesus gave Peter the chance to replace, “I don’t know Jesus, I don’t know Jesus, I don’t know Jesus!” with “I love Jesus, I love Jesus, I love Jesus!”
- Think about what Peter did and said in this story. What are some signs that Peter loves Jesus?
Peter declared three times that he loved Jesus, but even before that, Peter couldn’t wait for the boat to get to shore but jumped in and swam to Jesus as fast as he could. (If God’s love is like a vast ocean, Peter responded by literally jumping into it!)



- Three times, Jesus tells Peter to take care of his sheep, but he's not literally talking about sheep. What does Jesus really mean?
People were often referred to as "sheep" who needed a shepherd. Jesus was talking about Peter caring for people who followed Jesus. And that's what Peter did! After Jesus left, Peter became the leader of the Church and really did care for Jesus' "sheep."
- If you were Peter, what would you be feeling or thinking during this interaction with Jesus?
Frustrated? Angry? Relieved? Embarrassed?
- In some ways, each of our stories are a little like Peter's.
 - Peter messed up by denying knowing Jesus. How do we sometimes mess up?
Take answers, but don't belabor this question or pry for answers.
 - Jesus obviously loved Peter, but he asked Peter three times if he loved Jesus. Jesus loves you too. Why does loving Jesus back matter?
Love invites a response of love! Because God first loved us, a natural response is to love God back. But it's true that sometimes our broken world gets between us and our love for God. If anyone feels like loving Jesus back doesn't matter, you might ask the follow-up question, "What are some reasons you say that?"
 - Jesus wanted Peter to do something with his love. He told Peter, "then feed my sheep." If you love Jesus, what do you think Jesus is inviting you to do with that love?

PERSONAL STORY

Students love to hear how God is working in the lives of those around them – including your life and the lives of other youth leaders! Take 3-5 minutes to share a story from your life (or have another leader answer this) from this prompt:

- "Share a story about a time in your life when you were able to really love God or others." Give students some tangible ideas of what this looks like in someone's life, and how loving God and loving others are intertwined!
- OR "Share a personal story that exhibits the difference between knowing about God and experiencing God." For example, it might be a story about how your relationship with God developed and became your own.

THE CHALLENGE

Transition to the Experiential Element by going back to the question that Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love me?" Jesus is inviting Peter to be a person of love – whose identity is grounded in the love of Jesus and who loves others because he knows God's love. And while Peter's life was messy at times, Jesus still trusted him to care for those around him. Finally, invite students to answer that same question that Jesus asked Peter. Here's an example of what that could sound like:

When Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Jesus was reminding Peter who he was meant to be – someone who loves Jesus! – and Jesus was giving Peter the job of caring for others. Jesus didn't need Peter to be perfect to give him the job of loving and serving people. Instead, Jesus cared about what was in Peter's heart. The same is true for you. You don't need to be perfect to follow Jesus and love others. But Jesus is asking you that same simple question: "Do you love me?" And if your answer is "yes," you can be sure that Jesus is inviting you to also love and serve others.



EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENT

Small experiences or activities often nail a point home for students. This activity works best after groups do their discussions on the John 21 passage. You'll need stickers that say "Do You Love Me?" for this activity. You can either make your own beforehand, or have your students make their own.

Cover these points in your explanation:

Take a "Do you love me?" sticker and put it somewhere you'll see it over the next 24 hours. At least three times in the next day, imagine Jesus is asking you that question. Then, listen for what Jesus is inviting you to do next. It might be to care for the person in front of you... or be more patient with something that is happening... or simply to say a quick prayer for someone. In your current situation, think about how Jesus is asking you to love and serve others out of your love for him.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

To close, thank Jesus for all the ways he has loved us and for the way Jesus has entrusted us with the responsibility of loving others. Ask Jesus to fill our hearts and our actions with love.



WEEK 4

- Overall Focus: We Love Others
- Scripture Focus: Philippians 2:1–11, John 13:1–17
- Supplies Needed:
 - Video + a way to show it
 - Cloth, soap, service project, or another way to symbolize footwashing (see Experiential Element below)

YOUTH GROUP OPENING:

Start out the time with some of your group's favorite things – games, worship, dance parties... The important thing is to get them focused as you move into the theme content. AKA probably don't try to transition from minute to win it games into the curriculum.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Philippians 1:1-11 (you'll read the John 13 passage after the video). The video will have some reflective teaching on this scripture passage, so feel free to have it flow right into the video. You can do some additional teaching or additional introductions to the video if you'd like.

VIDEO

The video has about four minutes of content and is meant to have students begin to reflect on the scripture passage, specifically how God's love is like a new lens. It's also meant to spark discussion, either in the large groups or small informal groups. After the content portion of the video ends, two discussion questions will show up as part of the video for about two more minutes (but you can go longer). These questions are:

- How is God reshaping how you see yourself?
- How will that change the way you love and serve others?

If you prefer to skip the video and would like to write your own talk, here are the basic points of the video:

- God's love is like a new lens.
- What do I see when I look at people – not just glance, but what when I actually pay attention? Often, its comparison.
 - Maybe turning to envy, if they have something I don't have.
 - Maybe if I feel like I'm better than them, I feel good about myself.
 - Other times we turn to tearing others down to feel good about ourselves.
- But this doesn't really take us anywhere good – why is it so hard just to see people they way they are without comparing ourselves to them?
- Slowing down and seeing people can cause us to see ourselves – making us want to be more. (More good looking, more rich, more followers, more intelligent, more adventurous, more laughs, more points at a game....)
- God's love gives us a new lens to see ourselves: instead of a lens of comparison, we receive a lens of compassion.
- God is making us a new creation and gives us a new reality – shaping how we see ourselves. When we know we've been created in Christ's image, knowing we can express God's love to others, our focus shifts away from ourselves and towards care for others.
- Refer to Philippians 2:2-4 – “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. But in humility, value others above yourself, not looking to your own interests but to the interests of others.
- Knowing God's love for us helps us see the value in ourselves, but also the value in other people around us – and we are drawn to respond to this!



DISCUSSION GROUPS

As mentioned above, the video flows into two discussion questions:

- How is God reshaping how you see yourself?
- How will that change the way you love and serve others?

Feel free to take however long you need to in these discussion groups. We recommend having students get in informal groups of 3-5 for these questions.

PERSONAL STORY

Students love to hear how God is working in the lives of those around them – including your life and the lives of other youth leaders! Take 3-5 minutes to share a story from your life (or have another leader answer this) from this prompt – you have three options this time.

1. “Share a story about how God’s love prompted you to love others.”
2. “Share a story about how you have seen someone else (maybe even a student or community friend) really show God’s love to others in a way that is plainly responding to God’s love for you.”
3. In advance, ask a few students to share the 30-second version of how they have been able to show God’s love to others this week.

SMALL OR LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This week we have several questions that have some discussions rooted in some Bible passages.

- **Questions:**
 - **Who should I love?**
 - Read Luke 14:12–14 and Matthew 5:43-47, then answer the following questions for each passage.
 - ▶ Who does Jesus say to love?
 - ▶ What reason does Jesus give?
 - ▶ For you, what’s hard about loving others like this?
 - What do you think God is saying to you specifically through these two passages?
 - Who is one person God is inviting you to be more loving toward?
 - **Why do I love others?**
 - Do you ever love others just so they will love you in return? What’s wrong with that logic for love?
 - Read John 15:12, John 13:34–35 and Matthew 25:31–40. What different reasons do each of these passages give for why we love others?
 - What’s one way you can show Jesus’ love to others today?
 - **What are the limits of love?**
 - What is one situation in your life where it’s hard to forgive someone?
 - What does Jesus say about the limits of forgiveness in Matthew 18:21–22?
 - Read Matthew 22:37-39. If you lived out these verses, what would it mean for the way you respond to that hard-to-forgive person in your life?
 - Read John 15:12–13. What would it look like for you today to love others like Jesus loved you in a sacrificial, everything-is-on-the-table sort of way?



EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENT + BRIEF FOOTWASHING TEACHING

Typically, we end our YouthWorks week with a time of actual footwashing. While this is an option for your youth group, you may want to do something else that is symbolic of this, but maybe less “hands-on.” We’ve outlined a short teaching on the footwashing passage below, to close out this theme, feel free to do an experiential element of your choosing – here are some ideas:

- Give everyone a piece of cloth to represent the towel in this story. Have students keep the cloth in their pocket to remember Jesus’s call to wash the feet of those around them.
- Get a few little soaps to hand out. If you have a super creative or tactile group, do some soap carving or even make some melt-and-pour soap together!
- Footwashing is symbolic of serving others – so consider a way to serve at the end of your group time. Maybe its cleaning up the church or youth room, signing up for a volunteer shift or making care packages or cards. You could also consider having students commit to an act of service that they’d like to do outside of church.

Here’s the teaching portion – it should take 3-5 minutes.

Remind them that all month (or whatever time frame you’ve used for this curriculum) you have been talking about God’s love for us and how we love others best when we are connected to God’s love for us – that “we love because God first loved us.”

Transition into talking about how when Jesus was on earth, he didn’t just come to die for us, but to show us how to live lives of love. Move toward the John 13 passage, inviting students to look up the passage as you give a little context. As students are looking it up, share that footwashing was something bottom-rung servants did, so that makes what Jesus did all that much more incredible.

Read John 13:1–17.

Emphasize that, nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus invited his followers to live lives of love, and today, Jesus invites us to do the same.

A big part of following Jesus is loving and serving others the way Jesus did. Tell students that you want to remind them of what it looks like to serve humbly as Jesus did. Tell them again the picture of servant-hearted love Jesus gave his disciples:

“[Jesus] poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel.”

Explain your final activity and tie it into the significance of the story of Jesus taking the position of a servant and loving those around him. Do this activity as a commitment to loving others because Christ first loved you.

All month we’ve been talking about God’s love for us and our response. And through these weeks, many of you have served others and learned from a lot of people. This kind of love isn’t just something for youth group or Sunday morning, but a lifestyle that Jesus invites us to live into. In fact, just before Jesus died, was buried and rose again – during one of his last times with his disciples – Jesus showed them what a living example of God’s love looks like, because he wanted them to remember how to live every day. We’re going to read about that example in John 13:1–17, so if you have your Bibles, go ahead and look up John 13.

This is a passage where Jesus and his disciples are at a house about to sit down for a meal. During this time in history a custom was that when you went to someone’s house a servant would wash your feet. This was one of the most humbling jobs. But no one came to wash Jesus and his followers’ feet, so we’re going to read what happens.



[Read John 13:1–17.]

Jesus was showing his followers what humble servant-hearted love looks like, and he was very plainly saying, “This is what your lives should look like! Go love other people in the same way I have loved you!”

And 2,000 years later, I think Jesus is telling his followers the same thing: “Before you did anything, I first loved you by becoming a servant and dying on the cross. Now you can go love others – not just at church, but every day of your life. Love God, love others because I first loved you.”

When he washed their feet, Jesus was giving his followers one picture of what servant-hearted love could look like. In the same way Jesus reminded his disciples that they are meant to go and love others, we want to remind you that you, too, are meant to go and love others.

In a moment, we’re going to pass out some pieces of cloth (or soap). I want you to take that cloth and keep it in your pocket – bring it with you to school each day. As you go throughout your week, every time you notice this piece of cloth, let this be a reminder of what servant-hearted love for others can look like in your life.



ADAPTATIONS:

IF YOU HAVE THREE WEEKS:

- Cut the third week of curriculum (the one without the video).

IF YOU HAVE FIVE WEEKS:

- We have an additional week of curriculum on pages 18-19. This curriculum would fall between Week 1 and Week 2 of the standard curriculum (thus, you'd watch a video every other week).

IF YOU WANT TO DO IT ALL IN ONE NIGHT OR MORNING:

You have several options.

- Pick one of the days with a video – while you'll need to fill-in-the-blanks, each day can stand on its own. Just make sure that if you want to communicate “We love because God first loved us,” you don't forget one side of that.
 - Week 1 – focuses on God's love and the need to be connected to God
 - Week 2 – focuses on God's deep love. This one is more reflective than others and has a bit less teaching.
 - Week 4 -focuses on how God's love reshapes how we view ourselves and others. If you're going to pick one night, this one is a good summary of the theme and is most actionable.
- Watch all the videos back-to-back and do the discussion questions. If you go this route, don't forget to read the scriptures before the videos, since the videos refer back to those. Skip the personal stories, extended question banks and experiential elements. There's an outline of what this would look like on pages 20-21.

IF YOU WANT TO DO THIS AT A RETREAT OR A WEEK-LONG CAMP:

This curriculum works really well for a retreat theme.

- Split up the content so each “week” is a large group session. Feel free to cut certain parts or shift things around so it doesn't feel cookie cutter.
- Consider using the Devotional Journal to compliment the retreat. You can also pull questions and activities from this journal for large group sessions.
- If you spend a longer chunk of time together with this theme, and have a group that would handle this well, consider closing the retreat with a footwashing service.



ADDITIONAL WEEK OF CURRICULUM:

- Overall Focus: God Loves Us
- Scripture Focus: Matthew 20:29–34, Mark 10:13–16, John 11:32–36
- Supplies Needed:
 - None!

SOME LOGISTICS

This week of curriculum fits right between the standard Week 1 and Week 2 curriculum outlines. For reference, your five weeks would look like this:

- Week 1 – *Video*
 - God Loves Us
- Week 2 – *No Video*
 - God Loves Us
- Week 3 – *Video*
 - We Love God
- Week 4 – *No Video*
 - We Love Others
- Week 5 – *Video*
 - We Love Others

Note that the parent guide does not have this additional week and follows the standard 4-week curriculum. The Small Group Guide has this additional week on the last page, but you'll need to give some direction on what week goes where.

YOUTH GROUP OPENING:

Start out the time with some of your group's favorite things – games, worship, dance parties... The important thing is to get them focused as you move into the theme content. AKA probably don't try to transition from playing "Scream Scattergories" into the theme.

PERSONAL STORY

Students love to hear how God is working in the lives of those around them – including your life and the lives of other youth leaders! Take 3-5 minutes to share a story from your life (or have another leader answer this) from this prompt:

- This week is heavy on using scripture to see what God's love for us looks like. Share your favorite passage that shows a good example of God's love and explain how this passage has impacted you.

SCRIPTURE READING + DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – EITHER SMALL GROUP OR LARGE GROUP

Sometimes it can be hard to put a face on God's love for us. That's why God's love became human and came down to earth. Jesus perfectly expressed God's love.

Look up the following three passages (one person can look up each). As you read, listen for the ways Jesus showed God's compassion for the people around him.

Matthew 20:29–34 | Mark 10:13–16 | John 11:32–36

In these passages, what are some specific ways Jesus showed deep love for people?



Here are some basic answers to guide you:

Matthew 20:29–34: Jesus stopped and made time for the two men, which gave them respect and dignity. He healed them and in doing so also reached out and physically touched them – something some people would have been unwilling to do.

Mark 10:13–16: At the time of this story, children were considered fairly unimportant. Jesus intentionally made time and compassion for them, even though crowds of adults were waiting for his attention.

John 11:32–36: We often only focus on the part of this story where Jesus raised Lazarus from death. But when you really love people you hurt when they hurt. Jesus came to be with a mourning family and expressed deep sorrow over Lazarus' death. This story shows how much Jesus cares when his followers are going through hardship.

What other stories can you think of where Jesus shows compassion to others?

Jesus healing people of various illnesses, Jesus washing his disciples' feet, Jesus talking with the woman at the well, Jesus stopping the religious leaders from stoning the sinful woman, Jesus hanging around the outsiders of society, Jesus miraculously feeding large crowds of hungry people...

What do these stories show you about how God feels about people's everyday troubles?

Because he loves us, Jesus cares about our everyday issues. That doesn't mean everything will be made right immediately in the way we want. But that does mean we have a God who cares – who invites us in, who takes the time to hear from us, and who mourns alongside us when we are suffering.

Do you think God loves you in the same way Jesus loved the people in the stories you just read? What are some reasons you think that?

Give students a chance to process this and share their impressions. This is a subjective question, so there are no right or wrong answers – just what students think.

BRIEF TEACHING

What ways could you experience God's love this week/month/during an event? Jesus often showed people love in surprising and unexpected ways. In Jesus' time, people didn't think children were very important, but Jesus did! And not just children – Jesus was often found caring for people who were considered outsiders. And although he would raise Lazarus from death, Jesus wept in sadness at Lazarus' grave. Jesus revealed just how much God really loves us. Perhaps this week Jesus will reveal something new about how much God loves you.

But you may have to pay attention – you don't want to miss this! Look around you right now and notice all the places there is blue... Now look for yellow... Now look for green... We don't always notice colors if we aren't looking for them, but once we begin looking, they begin to pop out all around us. God's love is like that. If we shift our attention, we start noticing all the places God is showing compassion toward us. This week, pay attention to the ways God is loving you.

EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENT

Maybe, just maybe, you might forget to do this... real talk. So, do something to remind yourself to intentionally think of how God is loving you right here right now. Things you could do:

- Set a reminder on your phone for every day at a certain time.
- Pair up and commit to texting someone else (or get a group text going) to do daily reminders to notice God's love.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Pray for God's love to stand out in each of your lives. Pray that you could be full of God's love this week, so you are able to share it with others.



ALL-IN-ONE OUTLINE

If you decide to do all three videos in one session, it will probably take 30-45 minutes – this is assuming you take 2 minutes for each scripture reading, 4 minutes for each video + 4-6 minutes for each group of discussion questions. Any games or worship that you do is not counted in that time frame.

YOUTH GROUP OPENING:

Start out the time with some of your group's favorite things – games, worship, dance parties... The important thing is to get them focused as you move into the theme content. AKA probably don't try to transition from a modeling contest into the curriculum.

INTRODUCE THE THEME:

You can be creative with your introduction to the First Love theme, but **take only about two minutes and make sure you cover the following points:**

- Our theme for today is First Love.
 - We'll be talking about God's love for us, our love for God and our love for others.
- The theme verse is 1 John 4:19: "We love because God first loved us."
- Flow into the scripture reading, the video and the discussion groups.

Here's an example of how you could introduce it:

I was wondering: Think of a time when you did something nice for someone else, or served them? What are some reasons you did this? [Take a couple answers.] Well, one reason a lot of people do kind things for others (or serve others) is to show love for other people. In the next few weeks, we're going to be talking about what it looks like when we love others. But before we do that, we're going to talk about how we love God. But even before we do that, we're going to talk about how God loves us.

Our theme for today is "First Love," and we'll be talking about where our love comes from. In fact, I'm going to go ahead and give you the answer right now. This short sentence we are going to keep coming back to says it best. It's from 1 John 4:19, and it says, "We love because God first loved us." We're going to unpack those seven words together and think more about what they mean.

Specifically we're going to read from John 15, we're going to watch a video about God's love. At the end of the video, I'll give you couple questions to discuss with the people around you.

Right now, though, if you have your Bible, turn to John 15. We're going to be reading verses 1-9.

PART 1 – GOD'S LOVE IS LIKE AN ABUNDANT VINE

SCRIPTURE READING

Read John 15:1-9. The video will have some reflective teaching on this scripture passage, so feel free to have it flow right into the video. However, you can do some additional teaching or additional introductions to the video if you'd like.

VIDEO + DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The video has about four minutes of content and is meant to have students begin to reflect on the scripture passage, specifically how God's love is like an abundant vine. It's also meant to spark discussion, either in the large groups or



small informal groups. After the content portion of the video ends, two discussion questions will show up as part of the video for about two more minutes (but you can go longer). Here are the discussion questions:

- How will you rely on God's love this week?
- What could keep you from being connected to Jesus?

PART 2 – GOD'S LOVE IS LIKE A VAST OCEAN

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. The video will have some reflective teaching on this scripture passage, so feel free to have it flow right into the video. It is worth noting that this passage is basically a prayer. You could read it directly before the video, or another option might be to insert the reading of this passage between songs in a worship set before the video. You can do some additional teaching or additional introductions to the video if you'd like.

VIDEO

The video has about four minutes of content and is meant to have students begin to reflect on the scripture passage, specifically how God's love is like a vast ocean. It's also meant to spark discussion, either in the large groups or small informal groups. After the content portion of the video ends, two discussion questions will show up as part of the video for about two more minutes (but you can go longer). These questions are:

- When have you encountered the amazing love of God?
- How will you respond to God's deep love for you?

PART 3 – GOD'S LOVE IS LIKE A NEW LENS

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Philippians 1:1-11. The video will have some reflective teaching on this scripture passage, so feel free to have it flow right into the video. You can do some additional teaching or additional introductions to the video if you'd like.

VIDEO

The video has about four minutes of content and is meant to have students begin to reflect on the scripture passage, specifically how God's love is like a new lens. It's also meant to spark discussion, either in the large groups or small informal groups. After the content portion of the video ends, two discussion questions will show up as part of the video for about two more minutes (but you can go longer). These questions are:

- How is God reshaping how you see yourself?
- How will that change the way you love and serve others?

