

PARENT PROCESSING GUIDE

FIRST LOVE



EXPERIENCE THIS THEME WITH YOUR STUDENT

Students benefit from being asked questions about their developing faith, but also seeing the faith of adults in practice – especially the faith of their parents. These two pages have information about the theme “First Love,” based on 1 John 4:19 – “We love because God first loved us.” We invite you to process what your student is processing through this content.

HERE’S HOW: Read the below theme description and Scripture passage – the same passage your student will hear and discuss. Think through the questions below. Take time to answer each question on a separate piece of paper. Each week, hang out with your teenager – maybe take them out for food or coffee once a week for the next few weeks and reflect on and discuss one of the themes each day. Rereading Scripture is also great repetition.



WEEK 1

SCRIPTURE: John 15:1–9

BIG IDEA: 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!

REFLECTION:

- How will you rely on God's love this week?
- What could keep you from being connected to Jesus?
- 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?
- Share a story about a time in your life when God's love for you became evident in your life.

WEEK 2

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 3:14-21

BIG IDEA: 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."

REFLECTION:

- 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?
- "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!

WEEK 3

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:19, John 21:1-17

Some context around John 21:1-17: *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.*

BIG IDEA: We love God – which means we love others

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.

REFLECTION:

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?
- What other stories can you think of where Jesus shows compassion to others?
- 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?
- Share a story about a time in your life when you were able to really love God or others. Give your student some tangible ideas of what this looks like in your life and talk about how loving God and loving others are intertwined!
- 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.

WEEK 4

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:1–11, John 13:1–17

BIG IDEA: 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, it's a 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!

REFLECTION:

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

- How is God's love prompting you to love others?

