

SMALL GROUP PROCESSING GUIDE

FIRST LOVE



WEEK 1

NIGHT OVERVIEW:

- Main Points: God Loves Us, (and 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

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.



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WEEK 2

NIGHT OVERVIEW:

- Main Points: We Love God as a Response to God's Love, God's Love is like a Vast Ocean
- Scripture Focus: 1 John 4:19, Ephesians 3:14-21

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.



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WEEK 3

NIGHT OVERVIEW:

- Main Point: We Love God – which means We Love Others
- Scripture Focus: 1 John 4:19, John 21:1-17

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (AND SOME ANSWER IDEAS IN GREY)

- 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?

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WEEK 4

NIGHT OVERVIEW:

- Main Focus: We Love Others, God's Love is like a New Lens
- Scripture Focus: Philippians 2:1–11, John 13:1–17

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?



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EXTRA WEEK

Your youth leader will tell you if you're doing this extra content – it will likely fit between Weeks 1 & 2

NIGHT OVERVIEW:

- Overall Focus: God Loves Us
- Scripture Focus: Matthew 20:29–34, Mark 10:13–16, John 11:32–36

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.