

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 5: God is Love (1 John 4)¹

Big Idea: God is love and shows what love is by sending his Son as a sacrifice for those who are unlovable.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) think critically about their own understanding of what love is; (ii) deepen their understanding of God’s love for them in Christ; and (iii) be challenged and inspired to reflect God’s love in their love for others.

Discussion Starter²

Split your group into pairs/triplets. Give each pair/triplet one or two of the following descriptions of love and get them to think through what is being communicated in terms of what love is.

“A single text from you can change my mood at any moment”

“Meeting you was fate, becoming your friend was a choice, but falling in love with you was beyond my control”

“You see me at my absolute worst, and you love me anyway”

“To love is nothing ... To be loved is something ... To love and be loved in return is everything”

“They say that love is the key to happiness. You must have unlocked my heart because I am so happy with you”

“Never love anybody who treats you like you’re ordinary”

“Love is easy and natural when you do it with all your heart”

“Love the person who deserves it, not the one who requires it”

“Love is the only thing that everybody needs”

“When love is not madness it’s never love”

“Love is the absence of judgement”

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² This Discussion Starter requires some forethought on the part of the leader in terms of ensuring that each pair/triplet has a balance of different kinds of descriptions. Some are more intellectual and thought provoking, whereas others are more light-hearted. It would be good if each pair/triplet has a mix of these rather than just one particular kind. A copy of the quotes has been included in Appendix 1 with larger print and spacing for you to make use of.

“Love is like a magic key that opens the door to happiness”

Bring the groups back together and get them to briefly report back to each other from their discussions.

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading

Read 1 John 4:7-21.

Passage Questions

Twice in this passage John makes his famous statement, *“God is love”* (verse 8 and verse 16). But as we saw at the beginning of our study, there are many different definitions of love. How has God shown his love?³

God sent his one and only Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice in order that we might avert wrath and experience life (v 9-10).

The quality and quantity of love can be seen both in terms of the one giving the love and also in terms of the one receiving the love. Verses 9 and 10 tell us a lot about God’s love and it is worthwhile considering the various parts in detail.

John says that God *“sent his one and only Son”* (v 9). What does this tell us about God’s love?

We may judge someone’s love by what they are prepared to give – the nature of their gift(s). God gives the greatest gift possible in his Son. Paul uses this line of reasoning in Romans 8:32 – “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

From verse 10, what did Jesus do when he was sent into the world?

God sent his Son “as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (v 10)⁴.

³ Be careful not to go into too much detail in this discussion given that the following questions seek to draw out the various aspects contained in verses 9 and 10.

⁴ You may need to take a little while unpacking this reference. If you have a group that is more spiritually immature you may like to provide a brief explanation yourself, such as the following: “An atoning sacrifice, or propitiation, is something or someone that turns away anger or wrath” (the NIV footnote is helpful here). If you have a more mature group you could ask the follow up question, “What does that mean?”

What does this tell us about God's love?

In John's mind it is the atonement (Jesus' death on the cross) even more than his incarnation (Jesus' birth) that demonstrates God's love. He says something similar in 1 John 3:16 – "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us". The extent of God's love is seen not just in the fact that he sent his Son but that he sent his Son to die as a wrath-averting sacrifice.

How are those who receive God's love described?

"... not that we loved God" ... "for our sins" (v 10).

What does this tell us about God's love?

In the ancient world (perhaps as it still is today) it was thought appropriate to love only those who were regarded as worthy of being loved. God loved us and sent his Son to rescue us not because we are loveable (clearly we are not) but rather because he is love.

From the rest of the passage, what should our response be to God's love?

On numerous occasions throughout the passage John calls on his readers (and us) to love one another in response to, and informed by, God's love for us in Christ.

Activity

Give people five or ten minutes to spend on their own in personal reflection. They may use the following questions to guide them in this⁵.

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I feel discontent in my circumstances or resentful of others?

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I am feeling distrustful or fearful?

If God is love, why do I become half-hearted or cold in living for him?

If God is love, can people see this truth in the way that I love those around me?

Application

As group members feel comfortable, have them share some of their thoughts from the time of personal reflection.

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 3 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

⁵ A print out of these reflection questions can be found in Appendix 2. It would be helpful to print off a copy of these for each group member to use during this time.

Appendix 1 – Discussion Starter

“A single text from you can change my mood at any moment”

“Meeting you was fate, becoming your friend was a choice, but falling in love with you was beyond my control”

“You see me at my absolute worst, and you love me anyway”

“To love is nothing ... To be loved is something ... To love and be loved in return is everything”

“They say that love is the key to happiness. You must have unlocked my heart because I am so happy with you”

“Never love anybody who treats you like you’re ordinary”

“Love is easy and natural when you do it with all your heart”

“Love the person who deserves it, not the one who requires it”

“Love is the only thing that everybody needs”

“When love is not madness it’s never love”

“Love is the absence of judgement”

“Love is like a magic key that opens the door to happiness”

Appendix 2 – Activity: Personal Reflection

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I feel discontent in my circumstances or resentful of others?

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I am feeling distrustful or fearful?

If God is love, why do I become half-hearted or cold in living for him?

If God is love, can people see this truth in the way that I love those around me?

Appendix 3 – Theology to Doxology⁶

For our 'Theology to Doxology' in this study the song, 'Here is love', has been selected. If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTOP304FOG0>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Here is love vast as the ocean
Loving-kindness as the flood
When the Prince of Life our Ransom
Shed for us His precious blood
(REPEAT)

Chorus 1

Who His love will not remember
Who can cease to sing His praise
He can never be forgotten
Throughout Heav'n's eternal days

Verse 2

On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide

Chorus 2

Grace and love like mighty rivers
Poured incessant from above
Heav'n's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love

CCLI Song # 3287884

Matt Redman | Robert Lowry | William Rees

© 2004 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)

Misc 1

(Bridge)

No love is higher no love is wider
No love is deeper no love is truer
No love is higher no love is wider
No love is like Your love O Lord
(REPEAT 4X)

Misc 2

(Ending)

Yes here is love
Vast as the ocean
Yes here is love
Vast as the ocean
(REPEAT)

⁶ Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.