



GOALS

Through this session students will...

- Understand the type of love we need to have toward each other if we're to be people to reflect God's love.
- Evaluate their relationships using the standard of love laid out in God's Word.

MATERIALS: Group

- Whiteboard and markers
- A roster/list of names of students who've been in this Bible study or a group photo to project (or both)

MATERIALS: Each Student

- Student journal pages for Session 7
- Session 7 Scripture sheets
- A Bible and pen (Students should bring their own Bibles. You can decide if you would like them to use a physical Bible or a Bible app like, "YouVersion.")
- Colored pencils/highlighters

Leading Up to the Lesson:

To emphasize this session's topic of love, consider showing your group love in practical ways this week. Some ideas: hand-written encouragement notes, something unexpected like eating lunch at school (if the school allows), showing up at a sporting event. These are a few ideas, but we encourage you to be as creative as you can. Share your favorite idea with us at facebook.com/InWordResources.

Prayer

Begin your session with a time of prayer. Pray for a clear understanding of God's love for us through this session—an understanding that spills over into love they show for others.

Review

In the last two sessions you've taken a before-and-after look at the apostles. Ask:

What brought about the dramatic change in the apostles' lives after Jesus' ascension?

How was this change seen in what the apostles said and did?

Did you do anything new this week to seek the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Getting Started

To get minds engaged, brainstorm on the following questions:

We see transformation around us every day. What are some transformations that we witness that are gradual and what are some that are radical?

Gradual:

changing of the seasons, caterpillar to butterfly, tadpole to frog, a baby learning to walk

Radical:

Crash dieter, flipping of a house, remodeling of a fast-food restaurant

Last week we talked about the transformations that took place in the apostles and early believers once the Holy Spirit came. What transformations did other people see in these men?

Sometimes we may miss minor transformations like losing a couple pounds, being another year older, growing a half inch. But radical change is hard to miss. (Think of a person restoring an old car or a renovating a house). Would you say that the transformations that took place in the apostles and early believers were radical changes?

Would the people in your school, your sports team, this community notice if our group was radically changed? How would they react?

With that in mind, what is some evidence of the Holy Spirit transforming a youth group into a youth ministry?

As you ask the last question, begin recording your group's responses on your whiteboard. Start a list of characteristics or traits of a transformed youth group. Your list might look something similar to the one below...

Characteristics of a Transformed Youth Group

- Obedience to God's word
- empowered by the Holy Spirit
- love
- repentance
- accepting of others

Hopefully "love" makes the list of characteristics. Circle that characteristic and explain that this is the trait that you will be focusing on in this session. If it doesn't make it on the board, keep pressing by asking "Is there anything we're missing here?"

DIGGING IN

Share that the book of 1 John was written to early believers throughout the Greco-Roman world to help them learn what it takes for a group to become missional minded.

Have your group read 1 John 4:7-12 from their student journal pages. Encourage them to draw a heart over any reference to love that they find. Again, you may choose to have them work in small groups with an adult leader if this seems to be a method to successful learning.

TAKING IT INWARD

After the group has read and worked through the Scripture, bring the group back together and compare notes using these questions.

How many hearts did you draw in this passage?

Share that 13 is the most they could have found; you may want to give a prize to the student(s) who is closest to that amount.

That's 13 hearts in six verses. What do you think is getting emphasized in this passage?

Look at all the hearts you marked and pick out an aspect of love that stands out to you?

As students share their picks, write them on the board.

INSIGHT

Take this opportunity to share some of what you learned about the Greek words for love that you studied in the personal prep. We've included a copy of the words below as well as a phonetic pronunciation of each word, just in case your Greek might be a little dusty. With middle school students a brief description of each of these might work best. You may also want to write each term on the whiteboard for students to refer to later.

Storge (STOR-gay) - While not specifically mentioned in the New Testament, this type of love existed between family members, such as the love between a mother and child. It denoted the natural type of love that forms from dependency and familiarity.

Eros (ER-os) - Also not mentioned in the New Testament, this was the Greek word for love that denoted the romantic love between a man and woman. It's also the root of the word "erotic" which has sexual connotations that accompany this type of romantic love.

Phileo (fil-EH-o) - This Greek word denoted the strong bonds between close friends or siblings. It's where Philadelphia, "the City of Brotherly Love," derives its name. This type of love is mentioned several times throughout the New Testament including John 13:23 which records Jesus' love for one of His disciples.

Agape (ah-GAH-pay) - This Greek word denoted a sacrificial, unconditional love, the kind of love that God has for all of His creation. This is the highest and greatest type of love. It connotes a wishing of goodwill and benevolence to all, even the unlovable. This type of love goes deeper than simply showing kindness; it is the kind of love defined in 1 Corinthians 13.

TAKING IT INWARD

As your students consider what they have learned from 1 John as well as the insight you shared concerning the Greek words for love, take some time to discuss the following questions.

Thinking about the passage you read in 1 John why is "love" essential for followers of Jesus?

Why is loving fellow believers so important?

Is it possible to love someone without being best friends? Is it possible to love someone whom you don't enjoy being around?

Can you love people who aren't very loving in return?

Why do you think it is so important for others to see the way that this group loves one another?

What do you think it communicates if others don't see love demonstrated within our group?

How well do you think we, as a group, love one another?

What are some consequences of not loving each other that 1 John reveals to us?

LOVE INVENTORY

As your group begins to reflect upon how well they love others. Take this opportunity to share a few insights from what you read concerning love in the "Cross Checking" section of your personal prep. We've included the verses below just in case you feel led to read through some of these before encouraging students to dive into the love inventory that follows

John 13:34-35

1 Peter 4:7-9

Romans 12:9-10

2 Peter 1:5-9

Explain to your group that love is an essential part of being on mission with God. If your students are serious about being missional minded then they should examine their attitudes and actions to identify anything that doesn't reflect the type of love that John wrote about in 1 John 4. Take this opportunity to distribute your youth group roster, or a list of group members, or project a group photo. Invite students to move to a place of solitude or work in adult led small groups. Give students ample space so they won't be distracted by others. Before dismissing your group share these instructions:

Begin the exercise with a short time of prayer. Ask that God would speak to you and reveal truth to you about the way you love others. Thank Him for the love that He has shown you.

Look over the list of names on the youth group roster or reflect on the group photo before answering questions in the inventory. In addition to the names provided, are there any others that you may want to write down? Teachers, coaches, teammates, classmates, etc.?

Complete the Love Inventory on your journal pages, carefully considering each question as well as the names on the roster.

Before coming back together, close out your time in prayer. Pray that the Holy Spirit would transform you and the way you love others. Pray that you would love others better starting this very day!

TAKING IT INWARD

The inventory may take some time, so be sure to allow ample time for students to work through the exercise. This might also be a very convicting exercise for students, so consider keeping the atmosphere respectful and meditative as you bring them back together. This may even be a time where members of your group may need to take the opportunity to clear up some issues among one another and seek forgiveness for being less than loving.

Obviously you know your students best on how to process and seek any reconciliation that needs to happen between students. Below are some suggestions that might help your group process the inventory. Choose three or four questions that fit your group or feel free to move in an entirely different direction.

What questions did you struggle with the most? Why?

What areas do you struggle with the most in loving people?

Did you discover new areas where you are unloving?

How are you going to seek forgiveness?

Do you need to start seeking reconciliation with people in our group here?

Did the inventory reveal any poor attitudes or negative actions within the group as a whole that needs to change?

What do we need to do as group moving forward? Are there people we need to collectively apologize to?

Consider giving your group space to seek reconciliation and begin healing by allowing students to seek forgiveness from those they have treated less than loving. Here are a couple ways you can do this.

- **Allow the reconciliation to happen very organically. Perhaps play some quiet worship music and give students opportunity to go to one another and seek forgiveness. Close by having a few share about the process and how seeking forgiveness felt.**
- **Begin by asking a few students if they would be willing to share what they learned from the inventory and what they are going to do as a result of the things they have learned. As students share, gently encourage them to action.**
- **Sometimes a leader's example can be extremely powerful. Are there people in the group, students or adult leaders, from whom you need to seek forgiveness? Perhaps seeing your humility and love might move your group to action in mighty ways. If God didn't reveal anyone in the group that you need to reconcile with, perhaps even sharing what you learned from your experience might be powerful.**

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Close by discussing the following:

Are we “all in” as a group with this idea of loving others the way John described? If not, what is holding us back?

What are some practical ways we can show each other love in this group?

-Encourage each other daily, help each other as each has need, accept each other and value each other's role in the group, hold each other accountable

Given what we have learned in this session, do we need to go back and update our “Youth Group Decrees” or our Mission statement? How so?

Note: Share with your group something similar to what was shared in your personal prep. If a student has been the victim of abuse or neglect then forgiveness doesn't mean putting themselves back in the path of harm again. Be prepared to talk students through what love looks like in that situation.