

# LOVE

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## WHY LOVE?

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Because Jesus said to - Matthew 19:19:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 (New International Version)

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

## WHAT DOES LOVE LOOK LIKE?

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Is love just about having loving feelings towards people? How much do actions reflect how much you love someone? God's love for us can be seen supremely demonstrated on the cross. What sort of a love is this?

John 3:16 (New International Version)

<sup>16</sup>"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Luke 23:32-43 (New International Version)

<sup>32</sup>Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. <sup>35</sup>The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." <sup>36</sup>The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar <sup>37</sup>and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." <sup>38</sup>There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup>We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup>Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup>Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Also see:

Ephesians 4:25-32

Romans 12:15-18

1 Corinthians 12:21-26

## DISCLAIMER

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This training pack is not going to turn you into an instant super human compassion machine. Our suggestions might make minimal or zero impact (usually they will have a positive effect but there are simply no guarantees). Most of the time we learn to love people better by making mistakes. This is okay – it can hurt – but it's a very normal process to go through. Hopefully once you've learnt a lesson you will then be better able to handle a similar situation when it arises and you'll be able to pass on the lesson you learnt to others, as hopefully others pass on their lessons learnt to you. The bible is full of stories about people who learn lessons. Often they learn them the hard way. Imagine

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if you read about a new lesson everyday how much more equipped for life you would be! (this is a plug for having a daily devotional time) God's word will definitely help you increase the "love" in your group.

## Questions:

- Do you think your group is a loving group? Why? Why not?
- What is your expectation of what loving someone is? (eg. Do you expect to be closest buddies with that person for life?)

## THE GROUP ENVIRONMENT

Loving each other is something a group needs to do as a whole. It cannot be left up to the leader or to the people who are "gifted" in it. Everyone needs to love including – and especially – when they are not great friends. If the group is accepting and caring and full of fruits of the spirit then you can expect to see your group grow in its joy factor and you will probably find yourself becoming friends with people you never really would have clicked with if you had met them, say, at work. There is a unifying factor (Jesus) in small groups that should be taken advantage of at every possible stage.

Brainstorm: Think of a group you've been in that did the love basics really well. What evidence was there for this? What made that group special?

Maybe you've been in a group that just hasn't clicked? What do you think were the key factors for its failure? Was there anything which could have been done or avoided?

### **The 'difficult' person**

There are always going to be people we don't immediately click with or who simply have bad group skills (you know who they are, they tend to stand out like a red penguin). If bad relationships are left to fester, these people can simply wear the group down until everyone's attitude towards them becomes almost completely negative.

Personality traits of such people can include:

- Vocal people who make us cringe inwardly whenever they open their mouths.
- "Faux pas" people who make us restlessly uncomfortable.
- Rough round the edges people who offend us (cultural differences are often a big source of discomfort for people). Eg. Someone might be used to speaking about sex more openly than we're used to.
- Opinionated people who make us roll our eyes in exasperation.
- Unlovely people we would rather avoid because they are awkward to talk to.

Some of these people end up in our small groups. (You yourself probably exhibit some of these qualities) Others in the group may get along with them fine but for some reason they really get on your nerves. How can we replace the groan in our hearts with Christ's love?

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- View yourself accurately - as equally needy before God. (Ro. 3:23)
- Befriend them. We often judge or criticise people without knowing much about them. They may be on medication or a problem from their past has caused them to act in this way.
- Stop commiserating with others about how inappropriate or problematic that person is. Gossip only compounds the problem. (Prov. 26:20)
- Disciple them. Offer to meet with them for a set period of time to work on a specific area of growth or study. This would hopefully lead to them becoming a more positive and welcome contributor to the group.
- Pray for them - not just during your quiet time but *during your meeting* as they speak and *with them* outside meeting times.
- Talk to them about the issue. It may be that you need to speak the truth in love. This may be the most loving thing, rather than leave an issue un-addressed.

Think of how you've got to know your closest friends over a period of time. Along the way you learn things about them that can drastically change the way you see them. When you first meet someone, don't box them into a certain "type" of person based only on your initial assumptions. Get to know them and you may be surprised what you uncover.

Some practical tips:

- The first few weeks of a group are vital, and also the first week of a new person in the group.
- Model listening and interest in people's lives
- Share meals together regularly.
- Hear each person's testimony.
- Weekends away are fantastic.
- Practical care: baby sitting, mowing lawns, helping move house.
- SMS and emailing during the week.
- Encouraging people to identify and develop their gifts.
- Plain old encouragement.
- Share the Lord's supper.

## EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

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Sometimes you may find yourself in a group with someone who is a big disrupting factor who doesn't respond to any of the strategies outlined in this training. Often this is because of a mental disability or illness. It is very tempting to simply exclude someone like this from the group completely however loving someone is everyone's job, not just some people's job. If that person doesn't cause problems for your group they will just cause problems for another.

This training suggests that you then go in for a compromise. For example, cut a deal with the disruptive person that they can come every second week – then get the group to make real efforts to make those weeks a great time for that person. Give them a lift, meet at a familiar place each time etc... This should not be too hard if the person is

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aware of their problems but very hard if they think they are normal (in this case seek the advice of a professional or someone who has known them for a long time).

Also take steps to make sure the problem areas for that person are addressed. For example: if they have behave inappropriately around the opposite sex – run a lot of nights where you separate into gender groups. If they are prone to get very angry about certain issues, try and address other topics instead.

Most importantly, think positively about the disruptive person. Encouraging the rest of the group to be a shining light in their life and to pray for them constantly. If you are suddenly pro-active in reaching out to them you may find that they will actually stop hassling you and sucking up all your time. It is important that you don't allow a problem person to tear the group apart but if the group can love them and still have some time to itself then this is by far the best option.

## SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

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Ephesians 4:14-16 (New International Version)

<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Notice we have not called this section 'Conflict Resolution' or another management term. This is because it is unlikely in the extreme that a group would be able to resolve every conflict that arises amongst its members. However a loving group will manage conflict in a way that maintains friendships and respects the opinions of individuals without giving into the most dominate personality.

If you have not experienced conflict in your small group (or any group situation) you are either in a very new group or you are not pursuing authentic relationships. There are many different topics where people will disagree, this is okay, it's the way the group responds that is the issue.

The thing that should be focused on whenever conflict happens is the "truth". Sometimes the truth will be unclear (most likely in a complicated bible study or argument on values) but often it is straight forward (eg. Blaspheming is a bad habit). The trick is to speak the truth in a loving way that will help the person who is at fault.

Matthew 18:15-17 (New International Version)

<sup>15</sup>"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

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## Possible sources of Conflict in a small group

- **Theology:** Beliefs about some issues polarise. ie: creation/evolution, speaking in tongues or not, encouraging all the manifestations of the gift of the Spirit. Differing views on how to interpret the Bible - problem of interpreting the Bible literally. The problem of Satan and the evil spirits. Theology too head based, not applied.
- **Prayer:** We don't pray enough or our prayer is too formal and rigid. No freedom in the Spirit. Some monopolise prayer - some never pray.
- **Teaching:** Too much Bible study or too little Bible study. Study is based on feelings rather than what the bible says. No systematic teaching. Always teaching to the least experienced member.
- **Group size:** Group growing too fast. Group too small. There are no other young couples, young singles, etc in the group.
- **Relationships:** A couple break-up or there is jealousy amongst group members.

## Different styles of dealing with conflict

We use familiar animals to indicate the sorts of reactions you might see during a conflict:

**Turtles:** Withdraw into their shells to avoid and ignore conflict. This involves compromising both the issue and the relationship. This is not really conflict resolution but conflict avoidance.

**Sharks:** Use personal or institutional power to force others to accept their solution to the conflict. This is a competitive approach, where everything is either right or wrong. The relationship is compromised for the sake of the goals or issue.

**Teddy Bears:** Relationships are everything to teddy bears. There is no importance placed on their goals or the issue. Teddy bears seek harmony and avoid negotiation for fear of upsetting relationships.

**Foxes:** seek compromise. They hedge their bets in both relationships and goals/issues. By giving up some of their goals and desires, they aim to get others to do the same, arriving at a middle ground where both sides win something.

**Owls:** work for win-win outcomes. They value both goals/issues and relationships and are prepared to work at getting the best for both. They are not satisfied until all the tensions and negative feelings are fully resolved.

**Horses for courses** - it may appear that the owls are the ideal model for conflict management however this is not the case. Someone who seeks a fully explored consensus on the most trivial of issues can be very frustrating. Every style has its place.

Which style do you most commonly rely on – particularly when put on the spot? What about your group? How can being aware of this stuff assist you in making decisions on how to handle conflict when it arises?

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## PRAYER

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Praying for each other is one of the primary ways we can love each other. A lot of the time other people's lives – particularly their problems – are simply out of our control. They are not however; out of God's control so calling on the Spirit to come and help out is a very good idea. Things don't have to be going badly before we pray either. Prayers of thanks, praise and blessing are equally as valid ways of loving our small group.

Small groups that pray for each other regularly are more likely to see regular answer to prayer (do the maths). You may have experience a group where only one or two people pray in a group of 10. This is disappointing because praying for each other is one of the primary ways we can express love for each other. Therefore equipping your group to pray for each other is very important.

- Give people a framework (see appendix)
- Modeling self-disclosure will help prayer requests go beyond the safe and superficial (eg. My friends grandmas dog or a sore toe).
- Expand people's knowledge or prayer by studying how people prayed in the bible.

There are many different ways to pray and we outline a few of the most common styles here:

### **Group Sharing Time**

Pardon the interruption. If one person is talking FOREVER, then interrupt them and tell them you'll meet with them one on one after small group. Even better: before you start sharing lay out some simple ground rules asking people to keep it efficient and if they'd like to talk more about something to do it after the prayer session (at which point you could pray again).

No gossip here. Don't allow "sharing prayer requests" to become an excuse for gossiping. This happens more often than you'd think. Much of this can be cut out if you speak in general terms and don't share all the details (names, etc.).

Keep your advice to yourself. A common response to someone who has shared a problem they are facing is to try and "fix" the problem and offer all kinds of advice. Obviously there is a right time for the group to provide input on a particular problem, but this shouldn't be the norm or the forum to do that. Use your best discernment.

That's an Answer! - Praise Report. Sometimes sharing prayer requests can become negative and focused only on problems. Encourage your group to share something for which they are thankful before they share their request. Some weeks, do only praises. Explain that prayer isn't just telling God our problems, but it's praising him.

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## **Prayer Nights**

These are best run by the really gifted prayers. The people who pray all the time and are constantly surprised by how little other people pray. Do not see these people as those who can't be matched in their spiritual-ness but rather as strong examples who the rest of the group can learn from. Encourage the people with this gift to introduce the group to different styles of prayer and reasons for praying for each other. If you are this person then find someone like-minded in the group and work together to get people excited about praying.

## **PRAYER MINISTRY**

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Prayer ministry is a bit different to simply praying. It is more specific. When you enter into a time of prayer ministry you are inviting the Holy Spirit to come and minister to specific people for a specific purpose. This may or may not be something that you have been used to in groups in the past. The most common form of prayer is to share some prayer points and then pray as a big group. This prayer definitely has its place and can be a regular part of small group life but there are many more ways to pray which we explore in this next section.

Prayer ministry is serving the Pray-ee. Therefore, with every decision you make while praying for someone you should consider 'how is this serving this person'? Don't use it as a time to serve yourself and sort out your problems. We would recommend splitting off into smaller groups of 2's or 3's when you go into a time of prayer ministry.

There is a lot of material that goes into the details on how to do prayer ministry and addresses some of the dangers that are involved as well. We don't have room to include it here so talk to the pray leaders at your church and ask them to come and teach your group.

Question: Do you have a desire to pray for each other? How much do people pray by themselves and for themselves? Try to actually focus on who God is.

## **Supernatural gifts of the spirit**

Gifts such as tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge – any gift that cannot be learnt but is divinely granted – are not the focus of this training however we would encourage you to pursue these gifts in a positive and biblical manner. They are good gifts given in love to grow and strengthen the church. Small Groups are an ideal place to see these gifts used in a healthy and God honoring manner. If you feel out of your depth with these manifestations of the Spirit we suggest you do some work to learn more and experience these gifts for yourself, ask one of your ministers for some guidelines and share your discoveries with the group. *Do not just ignore them!* The same applies for deliverance (exorcism of demons) which is also very much a reality that needs to be approached with great care and discernment. If you find yourself in a deliverance situation, always notify your senior pastor.

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## APPENDIX

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**Helping People Pray.** This is a summary. Please read pages 154-155 for the detail! K and R Morris, "**Leading better Bible Studies**" Aquila Press

**Common goal:** Establish a common value and goal regarding the prayer life of your group from the beginning.

A simple process taking small steps each week over several meetings:

**Week 1.** Write out a prayer and read it out or have it read out by another.

*Dear God, I thank you that....*

**Week 2.** Add

*Dear God, I thank you that...*

*And I ask that...*

**Week 3.** Add

*Father, I praise and worship you because you are....*

*I thank you that...*

*I confess that...*

*And I ask you that...*

*Father I also ask that you...*

*Amen*

These are read out by another

**Week 4.** Same format but individuals read their own prayers

**Week 5.** Onwards.

Encourage people to pray aloud using the basic format, or some elements of it, without writing their prayers down. Some may still need to write their prayers down so leave time for this.

### **Acts Model**

(At the start of the group's life you could teach briefly and focus on each per week)

A is for ADORATION prayers

C is for Confession

T is for Thanksgiving

S is for Supplication