

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Motivate Learning

Unlike childhood learning, which is dependent on adults for decision making, adult learning is self-initiated. Therefore, first help learners to understand the importance of God's love so they will be motivated to embrace and apply this session.

Study Jesus' Love

John's commentary about love comes from the teachings of Jesus. Spend time reading Jesus' teaching about love (Matt. 22:37-40; John 13:34; Luke 6:35; Mark 10:43) to develop a broader understanding of how Christians should love. Consider at least five key lessons from Jesus' teaching about love that can enhance your presentation in this session.

LOOK BACK

Remind learners of last week's session about the assurance of victory we have in Christ Jesus. Invite volunteers to share "Live It" (p. 35) experiences as well as how their confidence in victory influenced their witness and impacted their lifestyle throughout the week.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Invite learners to share their favorite verse about love. Read Romans 8:35. Emphasize that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, believers should be assured of the love of God for them. Then ask them to share the times they felt most loved by God or someone else.

SHARE: Tell learners that love is a command from God with many benefits for those who obey that command. Explain that our love for others should be volitionally driven, not motivated by superficial appearance, emotional attraction, or sentimental relationships.

TRANSITION: Ask learners what it means to have the assurance of God's love. Then read the title and **The Point: "God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us."** Also read the question **"What do we know about God's love?"** which this session will answer.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

We Know God Is Love

// 1 John 4:7-10

DIGGING DEEPER: Explain that there are four different words for love in the Greek language: "Eros," "Storge," "Philia," and "Agape." Share that John is talking specifically about agape love. Invite a volunteer to read "Digging Deeper" (p. 39) and discuss the question at the end of the feature.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read 1 John 4:7-10.

DISCUSS: Ask learners how they would describe love in these verses. Guide them to discuss what the statement: "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" means. Encourage them to share their understanding of the command to love.

GUIDE: Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins "Love is the ..." (p. 38) and then use the commentary for verse 7-8 (p. 122) to identify the three times John discusses love.

ASK: "What does John mean in verse 8 when he says, 'The one who does not love does not know God because God is love?'"

EMPHASIS: Point out that love is a divine imperative that is essential to Christian discipleship. We cannot love God without loving others. Reiterate that our vertical relationship with God is informed by our horizontal relationship with our neighbor.

READ: Recruit a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins, "God's children have ..." (p. 39) to discuss the confidence we should have in God's love.

THE POINT: GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN WHEN WE LOVE OTHERS AS HE HAS LOVED US.

ASK: "What difference does God's love make in your life compared to other loves?" (This is the question from page 39.)

SUMMARIZE: Emphasize that Christians are commanded to love one another because love comes from God. We know God loves us because Jesus died for us.

We Must Love One Another

// 1 John 4:11-13

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 John 4:11-13.

SAY: "Every believer is called to love others, but we each love in our own unique ways." Remind learners that there should be concrete evidence of our love for others.

ASK: "Why is it so difficult to love all people as God commands us to love? Do you think some people do not deserve to be loved? Why?"

EMPHASIZE: Point out that we should love others because God loved us first through Christ Jesus, and He commanded us to love as He loved us.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins "The key to loving ..." (p. 40) to discuss that we are instruments of love and are to be engaged in loving others continuously.

ASK: "Why does God's love for us compel us to love one another?" (Question from page 40)

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 12 (p. 123) to help learners evaluate how we know we love others. Ask them to provide characteristics of God's love that is actively loving others through them.

OBJECT LESSON: Use the "Object Lesson" (p. 122) to help learners get a mental image of the love of God.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 12 (p. 123) to discuss the two results of loving people. Remind learners that God abides in us through His Holy Spirit. Emphasize that because of the Holy Spirit we can see the world with the eyes of our heart. Thus, we can love as Christ loved.

SUMMARIZE: Challenge learners that whoever lives in love lives in God. God's imperative to love others is non-negotiable. By loving others we become assured of the love of God for us.

We Must Not Hate // 1 John 4:19-21

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read 1 John 4:19-21. Emphasize there is no hatred in love.

DID YOU KNOW?: Invite a volunteer to read "Did You Know?" (p. 41) to discuss how sometimes life experiences can cause us to hate. Ask the question that follows the feature.

GUIDE: Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins "John left no gray ..." (p. 40) to point out that God-centered love is pure and devoid of any hatred. Underscore that the love of God frees us from all fear and gives us the power to love others as God loves us.

DISCUSS: "What options do disciples of Christ have when it comes to choosing whom they love?" Invite learners to explain their answers. "How does this relate to all relationships, including spouses, children, enemies, and so forth?"

SAY: Reemphasize that Christians are called to live in love and reflect the light of Christ in the world by loving others unconditionally.

GUIDE: Explain that we cannot claim to love God while hating anyone. Lead a discussion about why John calls those who claim to love God but do not love others, liars.

ASK: "Why can't love for God and hatred for people coexist?"

EXPLAIN: Point out that if we are going to walk in the light of Christ and have our faith grounded in His truth, we have to obey His command to love. Share with learners we are to walk in love so we can be assured of God's love for us.

ASK: "What steps can we take to obey these verses in everyday life?" (Question from p. 41)

SUMMARIZE: If we say we love God and do not love one another we are liars. Loving others is a divine command every believer has to obey.

CLOSE THE SESSION

EMPHASIZE: Remind learners that God commands us to love one another because He is love. An investment in loving others will yield a great return of union with God and abundant favor from the Lord. Share with learners that we can be confident of God's love for us because of the gift of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Challenge them to share God's love this week through application of "Live It" (p. 41). Tell them that our response to God's unconditional love for us is our unconditional love for others.

PRAY: Close the session with a prayer, asking God to touch the heart of learners so they can love others as He loves them. Ask God to allow them to confidently rest in His love.

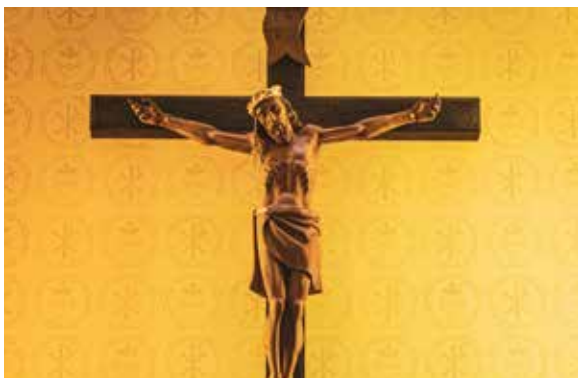
OBJECT LESSON

Download an image of Christ on the cross, and display it in front of the class.

ASK: Direct attention to the picture and ask learners what does this say about God's love. Remind learners that love is never passive.

GUIDE: Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, and say: "we can be assured of God's love if we obey His command to love one another." Emphasize that God sacrificed His Son to demonstrate His love for us. In the same way, we have to demonstrate sacrificial love for others.

EMPHASIZE: Point out that no one who invests in love will ever lose. It is by looking at the world with the lens of love that we see how God sees us.



COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 4:7-10

Verses 7-8. John began his command to love one another by stating that love has its origin in God. The true nature of love can be found by considering what love means in the activity of God. The statement "God is love" (v. 8) reveals that all His activity is loving activity; whatever actions God takes, He does so in love. When believers express God's love, it signifies: (1) we have been born of God and (2) we know God and act like Him. John emphasized his point about love by stating the opposite: those who don't love are the exact opposite of those addressed in verse 7. This is the third time John has described those who don't love: (1) they are not of God (3:10); (2) they remain in death (3:14); and (3) they don't know God (4:8). The absence of love is the proof that although one may claim knowledge of God, that apparent knowledge is not real.

Verse 9. The coming of Jesus is the supreme example of love; it demonstrates God's own love to us and for us. John expressed the uniqueness of God's relationship to Jesus: "God sent his one and only Son into the world." In one sense, all Christians are God's sons or daughters because of their being born from God (1 John 3:1). But John described Jesus' relationship as "one and only" or "unique." John further expressed Jesus' action as for the benefit of others: so that we might live through him. As Christians, we know we are loved because God sent Jesus to show us love by providing what only He can provide: salvation. When we are saved through God's love expressed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we live through Him.

Verse 10. John revealed the nature of God's love. There is no explanation or definition of true love that does not start with God's love. This deep kind of love involves sacrifice. The phrase "atoning sacrifice" (see discussion of 1 John 2:2 in the first session of this study) reflects God's

forgiveness of sin. Love begins not with us but with God. We know we are loved because God sent Jesus.

1 JOHN 4:11-13

Verse 11. Since God has loved us, “we also must love one another.” Believers cannot experience God’s love and remain unmoved by the obligation to love other people in the same way God loves us. Instead of “must,” many English translations render this part of the verse as “we ought to love one another.” Either way accurately expresses John’s intent. In other words, since God demonstrated His love for us in Jesus, we are expected to love one another. John expressed this truth as a requirement, not an option as people today misunderstand it.

Verse 12. How do we know if we love one another? John’s answer is: God’s love is seen in our love. John’s statement, “No one has ever seen God” is certainly true in a physical sense. Moses only saw God’s back and even that had such an impact on his physical appearance he had to wear a veil because God’s glory shone in his face (2 Cor. 3:13). Only when believers love others do they more fully experience the love of God in their own hearts and know the presence of God within them. When we love others, God’s love for us extends its full effect in our lives and our love for God reaches its full expression.

What is the result of loving others? John gave two answers in verse 12: (1) “God remains in us” and (2) “his love is made complete in us.” The permanent relationship between God and believers is repeatedly stressed in the New Testament. By loving one another, God’s “love is made complete” within His people. The word translated “complete” refers to being mature or bringing something to the desired end.

Verse 13. The Holy Spirit is the assurance of both God’s living in us and our living in God. John reminded believers that the Holy Spirit’s presence is a gift that can’t be earned by getting rid of all the sin in our lives or doing certain activities. Rather the Holy Spirit is given to us.

1 JOHN 4:19-21

Verse 19. This verse reveals the reason we love; “we love because he first loved us.” All of God’s activity, from creation through Jesus’ earthly ministry, continuing even to God’s activity now is motivated and demonstrated by His love for all His creation, especially human beings. Before creation began, God first loved us.

Verse 20. Part of John’s purpose in writing 1 John was to refute the claims made by false teachers. To do this, John usually began referencing these false teachers with phrases such as: “if anyone says.” What the false teachers of John’s day claimed (and some false teachers today claim) is that love for God does not mean that Christians must love each other. John refuted this false claim. If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar.” Further, John revealed why: “For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” Our love for God is revealed in and fulfilled by our loving relationships with others.

Verse 21. John repeated God’s command from verse 11, substituting his brother and sister for “one another.” The Greek text does not include the word for “sister”; but regardless John intended both males and females. The Greek New Testament frequently, as here, uses brother for Christians of both genders.