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Growing Further Discussion Guide

Be Love

Part 1: Love Matters Most

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“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses? Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:36-39 (NLT)

This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others! If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.

1 John 3:16-18 (GNT)

Last weekend we learned about *Love Matters Most* and that love is a choice, an action, a skill, and a habit. This guide is the first part of *Be Love* where we will learn about lessons of love through the Bible and sermons. We will learn how to make love a habit. We will also learn how to grow in love through our relationships.

Focus is an essential key for life to be effective, because effort without focus is not effective. Also essential is what we place our focus on for an effective life. Jesus says, in the Scripture above, that our focus should be on loving God and loving others. This discussion will cover three important truths about loving God and others.

Open your group with a prayer. This is only a guide – select the points you want to discuss.

1. THE BEST USE OF LIFE IS LOVE.

Love validates my faith.

- What does 1 John 4:8 tell us about those who do not love?
- Give two ways we show our love for God?
- Can a person who is not a believer understand true love? Why or why not?
- Can I hate my brother and love God according to 1 John 4:20?
- As a Christian when I struggle with hate should I:
 - ⇒ Stuff my feelings?
 - ⇒ Tell someone else?
 - ⇒ Confess the sin and surrender to the Holy Spirit?

Love integrates my life.

- What priority does Colossians 3:14 place on love?
- What priorities do we frequently place over love?
- When love is not at the center of our lives, we treat people differently. What are some examples of how people treat others when work or other priorities are at the center of their lives?
- Love is a unifying life principle that binds together our virtues. What would happen to our relationships and integrity if we chose not to love or forgot to love?

Love compensates for my sin.

- According to 1 Peter 4:8, what does love do?
- When I have chosen to love someone who expected me to judge them, what happened?
- Colossians 2:14 reminds us that Jesus' love for us canceled the charges against us. How should that reality cause me to show others the same love?

Love reverberates forever.

According to 1 Corinthians 13:13 what are the three things that will last forever?

- What actions of love have you seen benefit others?
- What are some personal examples you have seen where love has affected you, your family or close friendship for multiple generations?

How does 1 Corinthians 13:3 (MSG) describe life without love?

1 Corinthians 13:3 (MSG)

So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

- How am I "bankrupt" without love?
- What are some practical ways to make relationships a higher priority?

Discipleship—At times, our world can portray love as a concept worth sacrificing moral principles and others' rights for. Opposite to this worldview, God's love is not selfish. When you love in a way that honors God, your life and the lives of people around you change in wonderful ways. Discuss with your group some examples of selfish love and godly love. Compare both types of love and discuss the effects they have on your lives.

2. THE BEST EXPRESSION OF LOVE IS TIME.

How should we show love according to 1 John 3:18?

- What is the difference when someone gives their focused attention to another versus half-hearted words?
- Describe a few sincere actions where someone showed you love by using TIME?

What is the only thing that counts according to Galatians 5:6?

- How does our faith actually count in other people's lives?
- How can a busy schedule affect our use of time to love others?
- What are some ways men and women are affected differently when it comes to loving through faith?

Fellowship—Love is spelled: T-I-M-E. (T-ake I-ntentional M-oments [with] E-veryone) There is no replacement for time when it comes to loving God and others. It requires personal sacrifices, but will have eternal rewards. Relationships are more important than professional achievements or awards. They are more important than wealth or power. Relationships are everything in life. What changes and sacrifices are you willing to make so more time can be placed toward loving God and others?

3. THE BEST TIME TO LOVE IS NOW.

What does Galatians 6:10 instruct us to do when we have the opportunity?

- What are some opportunities to do good to others daily that we overlook because of our busy lives?

According to Ephesians 5:16, how should we be spending our time?

- Paul advises us to live wisely. What are some foolish habits that can be transformed to good deeds? (Example: Staying home to watch football instead of serving at church)

What does Proverbs 3:27–28 urge us to do? When?

- What are some typical excuses we make for refusing to help others immediately?

What does 1 Corinthians 14:1 claim should be our highest goal?

- Who are some good role models who put love as their top priority?
- What can we learn from those who make love their highest goal?

Mission—There are many opportunities in our daily lives for us to act in love towards someone who does not know Jesus. Identify one person who you will commit to showing God's love to this week. Discuss with your group how you plan to do this. If there are obstacles, ask your group for advice.

PERSONAL APPLICATION AND COMMITMENT:

In this series we will learn that love is more important than tasks and how to take action steps to implement this priority in our daily living. It's a wakeup call so we understand that what matters most in life is loving God and loving other people in relationships. Over the course of this series there are three things that are needed for commitment:

1. Learning lessons through the weekend message about love.
2. Establishing habits for love.
3. Memorizing Bible verses about love.

Which of the above three action steps will you commit toward to grow in love?

If you are already in a small group, will you commit to inviting someone else to join?

Finally, for homework, commit to spending at least fifteen minutes every day talking to and listening to others, in love, immediately. Who will you will spend this time with?

Growing Further Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Goals for this Week's Study

Ask for some suggestions from the group about what they believe is true about love.

Commit to studying and participating in the *Be Love* alignment series.

Pray for God's work in transforming our relationships.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.

✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60–90 days. Is your group strong in some of the purposes and not others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.

At **GRACE** we use our name for the 5 purposes:

Glorify God

Relate to everyone

Act like Jesus

Care for other

Express God's love

✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Growing Further Discussion Guide

⇒ This Growing Further Discussion Guide is only a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. For most groups there are too many questions to answer in one session together. After considering the needs of your group you may choose one of the following options:

- One section of questions
- One or two questions from each section

⇒ Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, add Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.

- ⇒ The questions relating to the five purposes are helpful to develop balance and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can bring your group to an awareness of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- ⇒ Personal application is key to everyone's growth and should be included in every discussion. When asked how he or she intends to apply a certain principle a group member may say, "I need to spend more time in the Bible and in prayer." It is important for you to help group members make applications that are more specific and commit to a specific plan of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 30 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- ⇒ As the leader your goal is to help bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their need for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.