

LAUNCH

How do I know God loves me?

Description

Everyone deeply longs to know they're loved. But sometimes it's hard to know you're loved, even by the people you're closest to. So how do you know in the core of your being that God loves you, when God can feel intangible? Explore what Jesus teaches about how God loves you and how you can love him back.

Goals

1. Help participants feel accepted, safe, and free to ask questions and grow spiritually.
2. Explore what Jesus teaches about how God loves.
3. Challenge participants to respond to God's love by loving God back and by loving others.
4. Assess where participants are with God now and where they might go next.

Outline

Starter: "You Are Loved"

Story Part 1: Ashley (alternate story: Rick)

Bible Encounter: John 15:9-17

Story Part 2: Ashley (alternate story: Rick)

Experience: Affirmations, "Pay It Forward," Self-Assessment

Opening

Give a sincere and warm welcome to each person, letting them know you are glad they chose to come to the session. Share the vision for the group, then feel free to use the following language to open the session:

Today, we're going to learn and talk about the question "How do I know God loves me?" As we dig into that question, a second question comes up: "If I can know for sure God loves me, how will I respond?"

We'll start by watching a short video to get us thinking about being loved and what that means to people. Then, we'll look at a personal story of a young woman who wrestled with this question in college. We'll see what Jesus has to say about love. We'll watch a clip from "Pay It Forward" for an idea of how to apply what we're learning. And we'll end by considering if we've answered this question about God's love and how each of us might want to respond.

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Starter: "You Are Loved"

Share an experience when you felt loved. What happened, and how did that experience encourage you?

Story Part 1: Ashley

What is something that keeps you from feeling loved by God?

Bible Encounter: John 15:9-17

Context: Loves means different things to different people. This study looks at how Jesus talked about love, God's love in particular. At this point in the book of John, the disciples had been traveling and ministering with Jesus for a long time. Jesus was days away from dying on the cross, and he knew it. So he prepared the disciples for his death by providing them with comforting words about his return, and instructions on how to proceed in life and ministry after his departure.

1. How does Jesus define love? How does he demonstrate love?

- In verse 13 ("no greater love"), Jesus was basically saying that he possessed this kind of love and foretold how he would show it on the cross.
- Your notes:

2. How did Jesus know God loved him?

- Jesus had an intimate relationship with his Father. He set the example that we can have it too, even if we lack intimacy with our earthly fathers.
- Some participants may want to talk about intimacy or lack thereof at this point. Let them briefly voice their thoughts, but guide the discussion back to the other Bible Encounter questions that will show how this intimacy is lived out with God.
- Your notes:

3. Why was it important for Jesus to talk about his love?

- The timing of his death was just days away. He knew this would cause impending grief.
- He wanted them to know the joy of remaining in his love.
- It was important that the disciples stay unified, and keep their loving community going and growing after Jesus' departure.
- Your notes:

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4. What is the key to remaining in Jesus' love?
 - Keeping Jesus' commands.
 - Jesus set the example to follow because he followed God's commands himself and remained in his Father's love too.
 - Your notes:

5. In these verses, what is the relationship between obedience, love, and joy?
 - There is an interconnected relationship: each aspect supports and fuels the others. Similarly, a lack in one area starves the other two.
 - Your notes:

6. Why does Jesus identify his disciples as friends, not servants? How are they different?
 - He wants to have an intimate relationship with them.
 - Jesus wants them to know his business, what he knows (vs. 15-16).
 - Your notes:

7. According to verses 16 and 17, what additional responses to his love is Jesus expecting from his followers?
 - Recognize they had been chosen and appointed.
 - They were expected to go and bear fruit.
 - They had freedom to approach the Father. Jesus promised God will give us whatever we ask as we try to implement God's purpose to love others. This is meant not as a blank check for selfish prayers, but rather as a key means of partnership with God in loving others.
 - They were expected to love each other. This was more than just being a more loving person because it's a nice idea, but because community is a visible demonstration to the world of God's love.
 - Your notes:

Story Part 2: Ashley

Experience: Affirmations, "Pay It Forward," Self-Assessment

Affirmations Reflecting on these affirmations, have you personally experienced God's love in any of these ways? Are there any of the affirmations in particular where you need to experience God's love?

“Pay It Forward” How do you respond to Trevor’s vision?

How could you be part of God’s movement to change the world by paying forward the love of Jesus?

Before we meet again, how can you spread God’s love to one person with a significant act of kindness or help?

Self-Assessment Give a self-assessment handout to each participant.

Now that we’ve made goals for next week, I’d like to check in with each of you individually to see how you’re feeling about tonight’s theme and if I can support you in other ways. Please take a minute to fill out the assessment and hand it in to me before you leave.