

Fruits of the Holy Spirit – Session 2

Love

Timing: 40-50 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker (2 mins – timed): How many films can you think of with the word 'Love' in the title? (Offer a small prize for the winning pair!)

Introduction

Introduce this week's theme of *Love*

Key Point: God is Love and calls us to love one another

Key Verses: Gal 5: 22 , John 3:16

Talk about how you feel loved – through words, gifts, quality time, acts of service, touch [source: "Five Love Languages" – Gary Chapman]. This doesn't have to be a very personal story – maybe a kind thing someone did that made you feel loved recently.

Buzzgroups: How do you recognise love? Do people that you love recognise love in a different way that you've had to learn to practice?

1. A New People

The point: If you were to describe God in one word "love" would be it.

Key verse: 1 John 4:16

John 3:16 "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*" is one of the most widely quoted verses from the Bible. It has been dubbed as "The Gospel in a Nutshell."

Everything God does is from a place of Love.

Four different Greek words translated "love" in the New Testament:

1. **Eros** – romantic squidgy love, sensual desire and longing
2. **Philia** – virtuous friendship and loyalty
3. **Storge** – brotherly/sisterly, family affection
4. **Agape** – God's divine, self-giving love

Normally when the New Testament urges us to love, it's urging us to "agape-love" – to emulate God's self-sacrificial love.

So in saying "the fruit of the Spirit is love", the Bible is saying "let God make himself in you" enabling us to love ourselves and others through God's love flowing through us. This is the work of the Holy Spirit – restoring God's image in us. We were made in the image of God – reflecting him, like him, secure in the value and worthy of a great relationship with him. But sin spoiled that. And now the Holy Spirit is at work in us to restore it.

Illustration: What is your experience of Agape Love? Have you ever loved someone in spite of their actions? Have you ever treated someone badly and yet received love in return.

What will this look like and how can we work with the Spirit to grow this fruit?

2. A new value (Luke 15 – Story of the prodigal son)

The point: Many people see God as a harsh, unloving, unforgiving, distant figure. But the God we actually read about in the Bible doesn't answer this description.

How much of that image of God is portrayed through the way that we, as Christians, represent God? Do we display the agape-love that we read about in John 3:16? We may be the only Gospel that our non-Christian friends and family will ever read.

Ghandi: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

The story of the Prodigal Son is a story that illustrates perfectly the nature of the love that God gives to us, and the loving and forgiving bench mark to which we aspire. [Recap Luke 15]. In the story it's the love of the Father that is the one thing never in doubt. It is the kind of love that freely gives and releases and *forgives*, even in the face of ultimate rejection by his youngest son. Nevertheless the Father still looks down the road every day longing for the son to return, throwing a party when he does and totally, outrageously restoring him to his place as his true son.

The older brother, although on first glances appearing obedient and loyal, is not receiving and giving love in the way that he could. But his Father's reaction tells us that knowing God isn't about begrudgingly being obedient, but relationship, grace and love.

Romans 5:5 says *"hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*

3. A new mission

The Point: Love one another

Key Verse: *John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

At many points in the Bible we are told that the greatest of all commandments is to LOVE. But how does that look in our day to day lives?

Illustration: Tell a story about a way that you were 'unexpectedly loved' – e.g. a stranger being kind, a friend going 'that extra mile' for you.

Buzzgroups: What are the tiny, the big and the unexpected ways that we could display the love of God to those around us?

Challenge for the week: Think about ways that you can nurture this kind of love – loving people unexpectedly even in tiny ways. In doing this, the more we will understand and experience God's love and the more we will begin to see ourselves as God sees us. How can we demonstrate 'The Bible in a Nutshell' to those around us?

Ideas for ministry:

- 1) Ask everyone to stand, pray for the Holy Spirit to give encouraging words and pictures about the restoration of God's image in us. Perhaps after sharing, break into 3's with everyone having a chance to be prayed for
- 2) Break into 3's, each numbered 1, 2, 3. 1's can pray that we'd all receive the Holy Spirit and be transformed into God's likeness. 2's can pray for a new value set for us all that would look at ourselves and the world differently. 3's can pray about our mission, that we'd be filled with God's agape-love for those around us.