

THE GREATEST IS LOVE

7-10

BIBLE VERSES: Mark 2:1–12, Matthew 5:40–48, Luke 6:27–36, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, 1 John 3: 18, John 13: 34

The aim: The aim of this session is to look at the way the “agape” love of God is different to the way the world thinks about love, and for the children to think of practical ways in which they can be more loving to other people.

LEADER’S NOTES

“The greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

What is love? “The defining experience of life”, perhaps? Certainly it is true that when we love we are more alive, more giving, more in tune with the rest of creation. We need to be loved, to feel that we are important to somebody. We need to love, to feel that we are needed. If we don't feel loved, we become insecure. If we don't give love, we become self-centred.

Love has been cheapened in our society. Singers croon about “love”, which really means romantic feelings either reciprocated or unrequited. In either case, the experience is quite selfish – YOU make ME feel. I am in love with you because of what you do to my hormones! Pop songs recognise that you have to win the partner of choice, and if you don't you have a romantic sadness instead! Lyrics often miss out the main point of love: that it is about giving, not receiving.

Society is also increasingly self-centred. In our “where there's blame, there's a claim” culture, people are increasingly looking out for their own interests. We get what we can at whatever expense. In such a climate, Jesus' teaching on love is even more revolutionary than it was when He first taught it!

Love is not about getting, it is about giving. When we love somebody, we want what is best for them. Not what is easiest for us, not what gives us the best deal, but what is best for others.

Sometimes, that is easy to do – we all make sacrifices for family members and close friends. But Jesus goes one step further: our motivation should be love for everybody. Not just friends, but strangers as well. Not just strangers, but our right enemies. Love says, “I will do what I can to make things good for other people.”

This is totally different to the way the world looks at love, and the earlier activities attempt to show this. There is an exercise in seeing how much we are willing to do for other people, and an exercise to get the children thinking about how we show love. Children do not always realise that cooking and cleaning for someone are as much ways of showing love as playing board games and giving presents. (Martha gets a raw deal!) The teacher who is strict and won't let anything go might well be more loving than the one who doesn't mind what you do.

The Bible activities ask the children to look at Jesus' teaching on love, and encourage them to think of modern scenarios. There is also the story of the paralysed man whose friends carry him to see Jesus. This

is a great example of loving a friend. Not many people would give up a day to carry a grown man several miles in the hope of getting him healed!

There is also an opportunity for the children to make an effort to be loving to someone they don't like much. Some of the children will want to take up the challenge, others won't; but it is up to us to present opportunities.

Love is being radical. A huge step out of our self-centredness. Jesus' teaching is a challenge to all of us.

CONES AND DOMES

GAME | 🏹 WARMING UP

Divide the group into 2 teams.

Put the bowls over the floor. Half should be upside down and half right side up.

One team is “cones”. These have to turn the bowls over so that they are the right way up.

The other team is “domes”. They have to turn the bowls upside down.

When the whistle is blown, all the children run among the bowls turning them over. The aim for each team is to have all the bowls either face up or face down.

After 3 or 4 minutes, blow the whistle and stop the game. If there are more upside down bowls than right side up bowls, “domes” have won. If more of the bowls are right side up, “cones” have won.

The Point: Just for fun

EQUIPMENT

Bowls (Aim for at least one per child). If you have football-training domes, they will work well. If not, use paper or plastic picnic dishes.

DURATION: 5 MINS.

HONEY, IF YOU LOVE ME

GAME | 🏹 WATCHER | 🏹 WARMING UP

Everybody sits in a circle with one child in the middle.

The child in the middle goes to one of the children around the edge and says, “honey, if you love me, will you please, please smile?”

The child chosen replies, “honey, you know I love you, but I just can't smile.” If the child answering smiles at all, he is out and takes the place of the child in the middle.

If he does not smile, the child in the middle must choose someone else.

If the group find this “giggly”, you could raise the question, why do we find the idea of people loving each other so funny?

Alternative:

Instead of saying, “honey if you love me” let the child in the middle tell a joke to the child of his choice. If the child laughs, he goes into the middle. If not, the child in the middle must continue telling jokes until someone laughs.

The Point: Just for Fun

EQUIPMENT

Nothing

DURATION: 5 MINS.

FIND THE BALL!

GAME | 🏹 WARMING UP

The children should all stand in a circle, facing inwards, with one child who is “on” in the centre of the circle.

The tennis ball is passed, hand to hand, behind the backs of the children in the circle. The one who is “on” shouts “stop” and then has to guess where the ball is. If the circle is tight, with children standing shoulder to shoulder, this is harder, but you can make it easier if you wish by getting those in the circle to move out a little.

The Point: Just for fun

EQUIPMENT

A tennis ball.

DURATION: 5 MINS.

HOW DO YOU LOVE THEM?

DISCUSSION | 📄 GETTING STARTED

Ask the group, what does love mean? Who do we love? (I.e. parents, favourite pop stars, brothers and sisters, etc.) How would people know that you loved someone?

Ask these questions to the whole group, and then move them into small groups of around 6 people.

Give each group a sheet of paper and a pen, and ask them to write on the paper the people that they love, under general headings, i.e., “brothers and sisters”, not, “Michael and Janet.”

For each group of people, ask them to make a “spider” diagram to show how they show love to that group of people, and how that group of people shows love to them. In a spider diagram, the title (e.g. Friends) goes in the middle with a circle round it. Lines come out of the circle and at the end of each line, the group writes an idea. (E.g. Cheer them up when they are upset.)

If you wanted, you could prepare “spider” sheets for the group by drawing cartoon spiders with room for a heading on the body, and hairy legs ending in big feet in which the children could write their ideas.

When the group have had time to think, ask them to come together and let people share their ideas.

The Point: To look at the different ways we show love – it is often practical; for instance, parents cook for children and buy their clothes, and that is as much an act of love as kissing goodnight

EQUIPMENT

A sheet of paper and a pen for each small group.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

KARAOKE

MUSIC | 📄 GETTING STARTED

Sit the group in a semicircle around the microphone.

Ask if any of the group want to show off their karaoke skills.

If you have volunteers, give them a choice of songs to sing – make sure that the selection that you give the group are all love songs of some description. Let as many children as you want to choose a song and sing it: most children will want to perform in groups.

Have a leader who is prepared to sing if the children are reluctant – but make sure it is not your best singer or the children will become even more reluctant!

Encourage the children to cheer each group as they finish; it is a brave thing to sing in front of your peers!

Finish by playing song a latest pop song about love OR an old classic (e.g. 'Love is all around me' by Wet Wet Wet), while the children listen.

Ask the group:

- What do the songs you have heard say about love?
- Who do the singers love, and how do they show their love to the person they are singing to / about?
- Why does the singer love the person they are singing to?

(Points to draw out: Most are singing to their boy or girl friend. They show their love by singing the song, by wanting to spend time with the person, by feeling excited when they see that person. They love the person often because of the way they look, and because they make them feel good. The love is generally selfish.)

See if you can then play a Christian song about love. Ask the group if they can summarise what the song says. What is the difference between what the other songs said about love, and what this song says?

Make the point that when God talks about love, He is talking about something that you give, not something that you get – and you give it whatever you feel!

The Point: In the world, love is generally quite selfish – we choose whom we love, and often we love people because of what they do for us. Christian love loves people because they are made in God's image, and this activity should highlight.

EQUIPMENT

A microphone (optional) CD player - If you have access to a karaoke machine, excellent! If not, don't worry! Chart and party CDs for the group to sing along to. There are several "love song" compilation albums, which would be great! You need to find a song about love.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

ACTIVITY |  **WATCHER** |  **GETTING STARTED**

Mark a line on the floor. You can use masking tape, chalk, or a chair to indicate each end. One end is "not at all willing" and the other is "very willing".

Explain that you are going to read out some things that people might ask you to do for them. For each thing, the children need to think about how willing they would be to do it for:

- Their parents
- Their friends
- Their neighbour
- Someone they don't like

Read out the following list (or put in your own scenarios).

How willing would you be to:

- Use your birthday money to buy a special present for:
Your parents; Your friends; Your neighbour; Your enemy
- Lend your only coat on a cold day to:
Your parents; Your friends; Your neighbour; Your enemy
- Help these people to tidy up after a party:
Your parents; Your friends; Your neighbour; Your enemy
- Stay up with these people if they were feeling upset:
Your parents; Your friends; Your neighbour; Your enemy
- Look after them if they were feeling really ill:
Your parents; Your friends; Your neighbour; Your enemy
- Go to the shops for them to buy something they really want:
Your parents; Your friends; Your neighbour; Your enemy

As you finish reading each question out, ask the children to indicate how willing they would be to do it by running to the appropriate point on the line. Pause slightly between each group of people to give the children time to move!

This should be done so that children give their gut reaction, not what they think they should do! If it is fast (but not too fast!) children should get into the rhythm of running up and down the line.

Make a brief summary at the end of the running:

“Most of you would do anything for your parents or your friends, hardly any of you would do things for your enemy, and you are quite mixed about your brothers and sisters! These are all ways that we can show love to other people. Who do you think God would want us to show love to?”

The Point: To think about what we would be prepared to do for other people. This leads into the Bible study.

EQUIPMENT

A line on the floor.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

LOVING GALLERY

BIBLE STUDY |  **WATCHER** |  **DIGGING IN**

Divide the children into groups of up to 5 children. Give each group a different Bible passage to look at.

The group should find their passage in the Bible – they may need help with this – and read it. When they have read it they should work out who was showing love, to whom, and how.

Then they should draw a picture showing their character showing love to other people.

When the pictures are finished display them in a line. Let the children walk along the pictures and look at the ways in which love can be shown.

Ask the children how they show love to other people? Would they like to be more loving? What would they like to do differently? (They can think of the answers to these questions: they don't need to answer out loud.)

Invite the children to go and stand near the picture that shows the type of love they want to start showing. They can pray quietly that God will help them to love in this way. Finish the activity by praying for all the children.

Passages to look at:

- Genesis 45:1-5 – Joseph forgives his brothers
- Ruth 1:16,17 – Ruth stays with Naomi
- 1 Samuel 2:18,19 – Hannah makes clothes for Samuel
- 2 Samuel 9:7-8 – David and Mephibosheth, Jonathan's relative
- John 12:3 – Mary anoints Jesus
- Acts 9:26-27 – Barnabas welcomes Saul
- Acts 9:36 – Tabitha makes clothes for the needy

The Point: To see the different ways in which love is presented in the Bible.

EQUIPMENT

Bibles, pens, paper.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

THE PARALYSED MAN

BIBLE STUDY | DIGGING IN

Divide the group into 2 teams.

Tell the story (from Mark 2: 1-12):

Once, there was a man who was paralysed: he couldn't move at all, but laid on his bed all day and every day. His friends wanted to take him to see Jesus, because Jesus could heal him. But the man couldn't move, and he was too heavy for one person to carry.

One day, his friends heard that Jesus was in Capernaum, which wasn't too far away. Perhaps they could borrow a horse and cart and take the man to see Jesus? But no one had a cart that they would lend, and the man was too sick to ride on a donkey, so what could they do?

Four of his friends didn't want the man to miss out on the chance to be healed, so they decided to take a day off work, and to carry the man to Jesus. They picked up his bed and carried it all the way to the centre

of Capernaum. It took a long time, and they were very tired, but at last they found the house.

The house was crowded with people who wanted to hear Jesus: people were listening outside the windows and the door.

“We can't give up now!” said one of the men, and they carried their friend up onto the roof, which wasn't easy with a bed!

Once on the roof, they began to pull at the roof materials with their hands. Eventually they made a small hole, then a bigger one, and soon the hole was big enough to admit the stretcher! They lowered their friend slowly through the hole in the roof and finally he was right in front of Jesus.

Jesus stopped speaking. He looked up at the roof and saw the faces of the four friends. He understood how much these men loved their friend, so much that they had been prepared to go to such lengths to bring him to Jesus! He was impressed that they had so much faith in him, and he looked at the man on the bed.

“It's okay, your sins have been forgiven,” Jesus said.

The friends looked at one another: They wanted their friend healed!

The scribes looked at one another, too. Only God could forgive sins. They were furious with Jesus for saying that He could forgive sins.

Jesus looked calmly around the room. “I know what you are thinking,” He said, “but I do have the power to forgive sin, and so that you know I have, I command you,” (he looked at the man on the bed), “take your bed up and walk!”

The man stood up, lifted up his bed, and walked out of the house to join his good friends again.

Ask these questions to the teams alternately. If they get the question right, they get 2 points. If one team misses a question, the other team can score a bonus point by answering it correctly themselves.

As questions are answered, remove the sheets of paper from the big picture. The team who has answered the question is allowed to guess what the picture is. The team who guesses correctly gets 5 extra points.

Questions:

1. Where was Jesus? (Capernaum)
2. What was wrong with the man? (He was paralysed.)
3. How many of his friends carried him? (4)
4. Why couldn't they get into the house? (Too crowded.)
5. What did they do instead? (Make a hole in the roof and lower him in.)
6. Why did they want their friend to be healed? (Because they loved him.)
7. What did Jesus do before he healed the man? (Forgave his sin.)
8. Who was annoyed with Jesus? Why? (Scribes.)
9. Why did Jesus heal the man? (Because of the love and faith of his friends.)

Bonus question:

(Each team can answer.)

- How did the friends show love to their friend?

(They took time off work, they carried him all the way to Jesus, and they didn't give up)

The point: Because the four men loved their friend, they were prepared to carry him to Jesus so that he would be healed. This is a good example of love in action.

EQUIPMENT

A picture showing someone doing a loving action – a poster of someone feeding a third world child, Superman rescuing someone from a building, etc. Look in a mission society magazine. If you can't find a picture, draw your own illustration. Cover the picture with 9 pieces of paper.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

JESUS SAYS, "LOVE YOUR ENEMY"

BIBLE STUDY | 📖 DIGGING IN

Matthew and Luke both have examples of what real love is like, and this is a chance to look at them.

Divide the group into smaller groups of up to 6 children. Give each group one or two of the references listed below.

Help the children to find their verses in the Bible and to read and understand them. Ask the children to think about how they could put Jesus' teaching on love into practice today. Each group should take their verses and make a short presentation to show the rest of the group. (For instance, they could make up a short role play to show this love, or they may prefer to do a short talk, or create a poster showing the teaching.)

Allow the children to show their presentations to one another.

Verses:

1. Matthew 5:40 – Give your tunic as well as your cloak.
2. Matthew 5: 44 – Bless those who persecute you.
3. Matthew 5: 40 - Pray for those who mistreat you.
4. Matthew 5: 47 – Don't just greet your friends.
5. Luke 6: 29 – Turn the other cheek.
6. Luke 6: 30 – give to everyone who asks you.
7. Luke 6: 31 – treat others as you would like to be treated.
8. Luke 6: 36 – give to people even if you know you will never be paid back!

The point: Jesus' teaching on love is radical. This activity gets the children to think about how we could be radical in our attitude to others today.

EQUIPMENT

Bibles or Bible passages for each small group, pen and paper.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

I CORINTHIANS 13:1-8

BIBLE STUDY | 📖 **WATCHER** | 🕒 **DIGGING IN**

Read 1 Corinthians 13.

- What gifts are more important than love?
- Why is love so important?
- How does Paul describe love? What does God mean when He says we should be loving towards other people?
- Can you think of a way in which you could demonstrate each of the qualities of love that Paul mentions? e.g. how could you be patient with somebody?, etc
- When might you make a definite decision not to get things for yourself, so that someone you love can have them? And so on.

The Point: 1 Corinthians 13 is the definitive passage about love, and here the group is encouraged to think about what it means in practice.

EQUIPMENT

Bibles

DURATION: 10 MINS.

GIFTS OF LOVE

ACTIVITY | 📖 **WATCHER** | 🗨️ **RESPONSE**

Say that there are many ways to show love to other people – not just by giving presents, but by listening, by helping – even by telling someone that they have done something wrong!

Ask the children to find a space by themselves where they can think. On a piece of scrap paper they should write a list of up to 3 people that they would like to show love to. (This could include enemies as well as friends and family members: if your group are more mature, challenge them to want to show love to people that they find hard to like!) Ask them to think about how they could show love to these people in practical ways – not just by giving flowers!

Next the children should take some card. On each card they should write the name of the person and the thing they will do to show love to that person. (Mother: I will show my love by keeping my room tidy!) When

they have written the card they can wrap it up in pretty paper and put a tag on it bearing that person's name.

When the children have finished their cards, bring the tree to the front. Ask the children to bring their "gifts" to the tree and to hang them on it.

Pray together that the children will be able to show their love to the people they have been thinking about over the next week.

At the end of the session, give the children back their "gifts" so they can take them home and remember to do what they have planned!

The Point: To think about how we can show love to other people.

EQUIPMENT

Scrap paper, card, pens, wrapping paper, gift tags, Sellotape, a small tree or mug tree.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

LOVE IN DEED AND TRUTH.

CRAFT IDEAS | 📄 **WATCHER** | 🙌 **RESPONSE**

Read 1 John 3:18 to the group. "Do not love in word and tongue, but in deed and truth."

Ask the group what they think this means. Can they come up with any examples?

If you have a large group, you might like to do this activity in smaller groups, if not, do it all together.

Choose two or three volunteers to write the verse on poster paper. They should use marker pens, and write the verse in the middle of the paper.

The rest of the group should draw small pictures to illustrate the verse. For instance, doing the washing up, making a bed, a doctor bandaging a hand and so on. These pictures can be stuck around the edge of the poster paper.

To make the poster more eye catching, rather than have the group draw the pictures, they could use marker pen to draw stick people doing whatever, and then "dress" the stick people with tissue paper clothes that they stick over the top.

The Point: To think about how we could put into practice God's teaching on love.

EQUIPMENT

Large sheet of paper, small pieces of paper, felt pens/markers, tissue paper, scissors and glue.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

BRACELETS

CRAFT IDEAS | RESPONSE

Ask the group if there is anyone that they know they should love, but that they find it hard to love. Don't ask for verbal answers, just let them think. If you can think of someone in your own life that you struggle with, you could share that with the group.

Ask them to choose one person that they want to make more of an effort to love, with God's help. It could be a family member, a teacher, or a schoolmate.

Invite the children to make a bracelet or a necklace for the person they have chosen.

You should provide plenty of beads for the children to use, and coloured thread to thread them on to. Some children will just thread beads, some will want to plait the thread together and make a more ambitious bracelet.

Come together as a whole group, and let a leader pray generally that the group members will all be able to find ways to show love to the person they have each chosen, and that God will help each of them to change their feelings about the person.

Alternatively, ask the group to get into pairs and pray with each other that they will be able to love the person for whom they have made the bracelet.

Challenge the group to be brave enough to give the bracelet to the person they have made it for, and to keep asking God to help them be more loving.

A good way to change our attitude to someone is to pray for him or her.

The Point: The group can decide whom to give their bracelet to: if they want to make an effort to love someone that they find hard to love, this is an opportunity to do so. However, most of the group will want to give the bracelet to someone they like already.

EQUIPMENT

Beads and string (The Early Learning Centre sells a good variety of beads at low prices, or look at www.yellowmoon.org.uk)

DURATION: 5 MINS.

JOHN 13:34

MEMORY VERSE | RESPONSE

A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another. As I have loved you, love one another. John 13:34

Read the verse to the group.

Ask the children to listen to the verse again, but this time, they should move to another position every time they hear the word, “love.” If they are sitting, their new position should be standing or laying, and so on.

Repeat the verse 4 or 5 times until the entire group are into constantly shifting position!

Then ask the group if they can repeat the verse together while the leaders change positions!

The Point: To encourage young people to learn the Bible.

EQUIPMENT

Nothing

DURATION: 5 MINS.

LOVE MATCH - A DRAMA ABOUT LOVE

DRAMA

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