



Theme: Love

1. We Love Because We Are Loved

Objectives:

Explore what it means to love and be loved.

Understand how God shows us love and teaches us to love one another through acts of service.

Reflect upon how our experience of love affects the way we live our lives and love one another.

Before you begin:

Create a reverent, quiet and comfortable space for the group. Ensure that all relevant materials are printed and readily available for the group and that the sacred space is set up ready for the closing time of prayer and worship.

Each reflection point should include:

- Reading a passage from the New Testament
- Exploration of the Church's Story (teachings of the church and examples from the lives of notable Christians)
- The opportunity for the participant to reflect on their personal experience
- An activity
- A time of prayer and worship

You will need:

- Print-outs of the chosen scripture passage/church's story for participants
- Instructions from the chosen activities
- For the time of prayer and worship:
- Card heart shapes, Ribbon or string, Pens, Small branches, Plant pot containing soil or sand to keep branches upright, Candle, Scripture, Reflective music

Welcome, Introduction & Opening Prayer

Gather the group together.

Briefly introduce the theme for this reflection:

Without love we do not live, we simply exist. The love that others show to us, and the love that God showers us with, bring us to life and help us to shine. The love we receive is a gift, but even more so than that, the love others show us teach us how to love others. From our earliest days our family and friends teach us how to be loving people and how to show others that they are loved.

Jesus is an integral part of that teaching. Our relationship with Him teaches us a great deal about how to love in the world. Jesus shows us that love, and sharing that love with others, gives our lives meaning and purpose.

Say the Faith in Action Prayer together:

God our Father,

We thank you for the gift of your love which you give to every person in the world. We thank you that because of your love we are never alone and should never feel afraid. We thank you for the gift of faith which allows us to know you, one God three persons. We thank you that because of that faith the whole of our lives are directed to living for other people. Through your son, Jesus Christ, our friend and brother, you show us how to love. Give us the strength we need to live lives of love and faith, so that the world might come to know your son more and more through our actions and words as we seek to live lives which help to build your Kingdom here on earth.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. AMEN

The Good News

Choose a passage from scripture that will help the group to reflect on the theme.

Below are some suggestions followed by discussion points:

John 15:12-17

This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. My command to you is to love one another.

John 3:16

For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.

Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophecies, they will be done away with; if tongues, they will fall silent; and if there is knowledge, it will be done away with. For we know imperfectly and we prophesy imperfectly; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will be done away with. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and see things as a child does, I think like a child; but now that I have become an adult, I have finished with all childish ways. Now we see only reflections as in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am myself known. As it is, these remain: faith, hope and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love.

Pointers for discussion

How do we know that God loves us?

How does Christ's life teach us to love one another?

Does everyone deserve to be shown love?

Do you think love is something that we can be forced or commanded to do?

Can you be taught how to love?

How can we show God's love to one another?

When is it difficult to love?

If you love someone, do they have to love you back?

The Church's Story

To help reflect and explore the Good News further, share some of the church's teachings and the lives of amazing Christians!

Pope Francis

"To love is much more than feeling tenderness or a certain emotion once in a while. It's a total challenge to creativity!" April 2006

"Love is not words, it is work and service. A humble service, performed in silence and concealed, as Jesus Himself said: 'When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.' " And this service is shown also when "we make available to the community the gifts the Holy Spirit has granted us, so that it may grow", and when "we share material goods so that no-one may be in need. This sharing and dedication to those in need is a style of life that God suggests also to many non-Christians, as a way of authentic humanity." (Jubilee audience, March 12, 2016)

"In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognise the paternal relationship God has with his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one is important in God's eyes." (Laudato Si 96)

“Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.” (Laudato Si 84)

“If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.”
Laudato Si 64

“Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.”
Laudato Si 42

“Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship.”
Laudato Si 230

“Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God.”
Evangelii Gaudium 5

Examples from amazing Christians!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)

Though Bonhoeffer was Lutheran, his life and work have had a deep influence on Anglican theology, and his example is often cited within the Church of England. Bonhoeffer was a pastor and theologian who stood against the rise of Nazism in Germany. His writings, particularly on Christian community, ethics, and discipleship, reflect the importance of love in action.

He believed that true Christian love could not remain passive in the face of injustice. This belief led him to join a resistance movement against Hitler's regime. Despite opportunities to live safely abroad, Bonhoeffer returned to Germany, knowing he was putting his life in danger. He helped many Jews escape persecution and continued to preach a gospel of peace and love amidst growing violence. His ultimate act of love was giving up his own safety for the sake of others.

Arrested for his role in resisting the Nazis, he was imprisoned for over two years. Bonhoeffer remained steadfast in his faith, encouraging his fellow prisoners and continuing to write letters, prayers, and theological reflections. On 9 April 1945, just weeks before the war ended, he was executed by hanging in Flossenbürg concentration camp. His life is a testament to costly discipleship and the transformative power of love in the face of evil.

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910)

Florence Nightingale is well known for her contributions to modern nursing, but her work was deeply rooted in her Christian faith. Born into a wealthy Anglican family, Florence felt

called to serve others from a young age. She believed that this call to serve was a direct response to God's love for her, and it was through loving others that she could express her faith. During the Crimean War, Nightingale and her team of nurses revolutionized healthcare by caring for wounded soldiers in conditions of great hardship. Despite facing danger, illness, and opposition, Florence persisted in her work, often described as an "angel of mercy" by those she cared for. She saw each patient as a beloved child of God and made it her mission to improve their care. Florence's love and compassion extended beyond the war, as she dedicated her life to reforming healthcare and improving hospital conditions. Her commitment to serving others through nursing not only saved lives but also brought dignity and hope to many. She remains an enduring example of how love and faith can transform society and provide healing, both physically and spiritually.

William Wilberforce (1759–1833)

William Wilberforce, an English politician and devout Anglican, is remembered for his relentless campaign to abolish the transatlantic slave trade. Inspired by his Christian faith, Wilberforce dedicated his life to seeking justice for the oppressed, believing that love for God must be demonstrated through love for one's neighbour. For decades, Wilberforce fought tirelessly against the economic and political interests that supported slavery, often facing ridicule and opposition.

His faith in God's love and the belief that all people were made in God's image sustained him in his long battle. Despite severe illness and personal hardship, he never wavered in his commitment to ending the inhumane treatment of enslaved people. In 1807, Wilberforce's efforts were rewarded with the passing of the Slave Trade Act, which made the buying and selling of enslaved people illegal in the British Empire. He continued to work for the full abolition of slavery, which was achieved shortly before his death in 1833. Wilberforce's love for others, rooted in his Christian convictions, transformed society and brought freedom to millions.

Janani Luwum (1922–1977)

Janani Luwum, the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, is remembered as a martyr for standing up to the brutal regime of Idi Amin. His life reflects profound Christian love and the willingness to lay down one's life for others. As Uganda fell under Amin's violent dictatorship, Luwum spoke out against the widespread human rights abuses and the persecution of Christians. He believed that his faith required him to stand up for truth and justice, even though it put him in danger. In February 1977, after delivering a letter of protest to the government, Luwum was arrested.

Knowing the risks, Luwum continued to call for peace and love in the face of terror. He encouraged his fellow Christians to trust in God's love and remain faithful to Christ, no matter the cost. A few days after his arrest, Luwum was murdered on Amin's orders, becoming a martyr for his faith and for justice. His sacrifice is remembered each year on the Anglican calendar on 17 February, a reminder of the power of love in the struggle for peace and truth.

Personal Story

During this time, the young people should be encouraged to think about their FIA journey so far, and share with the group how the acts of service they have participated in have been examples of showing others God's love.

You can, at this point, review the acts of service young people have participated in thus far, and give them the opportunity to reflect in their journal the acts of service they have done, if they have not done so already.

Activity Suggestions

Exploration

- Make a podcast or video, interviewing one another about the different ways you can show love to others and the ways in which you have been shown love by other people. Question one another on whether or not the society we live in exposes us to a different way of showing love to that of Christ's way, e.g. commercialised feast days such as Valentine's; spending a lot of money on people, equating social media "likes" and "follows" to being truly loved.
- Make a collage of words and pictures to show different ways of being shown love and showing love to others.
- Listen to a popular love song. What kind of love is it about? What can we learn about love in popular culture?

Understanding

- Plan an assembly or worship service that explains how the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer/ Florence Nightingale/ William Wilberforce/Janini Lawum or an amazing Christian of your choosing was an example of God's love to others.
- Create an informative poster explaining how one of the above put into practice the teachings of Jesus and the Church.

Reflection

- Give yourself an action plan for putting love into action in your daily life.
- Ask a friend or relative to list ways they have seen you put love into action.
- Make a list of all the people who love you, then make a list of all the people you love. Consider the similarities and difference of each list. What does that tell you about the way you love? Is it possible to show love to people we do not even know?
- Find out about some of the projects undertaken by Christian charities who put love into action. See how love of others drives work of the good of all.

A time of Prayer and Worship

Begin with a time of quiet, or play a song which speaks of God's love.

Scripture Reading

A reading from the Gospel of John (15:5-12)

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.

As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.

Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.' I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

Reflection

Play quiet and reflective music

- Invite each young person to take a heart shape and on one side draw or write an example of how they have been shown love and how it made them feel.
- On the other side, ask each young person to write or draw a time when they showed love to another person and what difference it made.
- Thread a string or ribbon through a hole in the top of the shape and make a loop.
- Invite the young people to place their hearts onto the twig tree.

A time of prayer

Response: I am loved, therefore I love.

Lord, you created me. You designed me. I am unique, special, one of a kind. You cherish me. You know me inside out. **Response.**

Lord, I thank you for giving me the people who transform my life by showing me love. They shape and inspire me. **Response.**

Lord, you command me to love you, show me how to love through your words and actions. I am called to love. **Response.**

Lord, you challenge me to be an instrument of your love. I can bring your love to others in the way I live my life. **Response.**

Concluding Prayer

Let us pray,

Lord, you are the vine and we are your branches. Help us to be more deeply rooted in you. Give us the courage to respond to your love by showing love to others. Fill us with your Spirit, so that through the love you have shown us, we can bear the great fruits of love in our daily lives. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.