

God's Love Story

Theme

The theme for this gathering is "God's Love Story." Have you ever thought of the Bible as a great love story? In the New Testament, we see the fullness of this love story when God sends Jesus to take on our sins and to die in our places. God's love is an active love. It's a love that never subsides, but remains constant and true. The purpose of this session is to gain a better appreciation of God's love for us and how we have been nurtured and held by that love.

Life Issue
What is God's
love story and
what does it mean
for my life?

Community Building & Opening Question

- What's your favorite place in nature? Why do you enjoy it so much?
- Tell about the first time that you met someone you care deeply about or love (a close friend, a mentor, a first date, the first time you saw or held a child, grandchild, sibling, niece or nephew, etc.).

Opening Prayer

Lord, you called your followers together in Christian community when you walked the earth. Gather us together today, so that we may grow closer to each other and closer to you. Be present with us, as we are present to one another. Guide us and renew us with your love and grace. Amen.

What does the Bible say?

John 3:16

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

Romans 5:8-11

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What do others say?

God loves the whole world. God **loves** the whole world. God loves the **whole world**. Stop and ponder those words from John 3:16. Words that a lot of us *know* by heart, but perhaps have a more difficult time *applying* to our hearts. The God of the Universe loves his creation. The God of the Universe loves you and me. That's incredible.

The story of God's love is a story of faithfulness and pursuit. Faithfulness in that God's love for creation is unchanging. The story we have in the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, of God creating the universe, tells us over and over again that when God looked upon what he had created, God said it was good. In fact, at the end of the story of creation, the writer of the book of Genesis tells us: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was **very good.**" God's view of us is that each one of us is very good. God does not view any of us as a waste, as a throwaway, nor even as just possibly okay, but as very good, as someone God loves infinitely. That has been true throughout history. It will be true throughout the future. God loves his creation and sees it as very good.

God's love story is also a story of God's pursuit of his beloved creation as we continually forget God's love for us and go running off merrily ignoring God's activity in our lives. God's love story throughout the Old Testament is one of pursuing his people. From sending Moses to deliver them from slavery in Egypt, sending Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem, sending the prophet Hosea to be a living picture of God's love for his unfaithful people, the list of God's pursuits is long. Time after time, God pursues and forgives creation until finally God makes the ultimate sacrifice and sends his only Son to die for us. As the first chapter of the Gospel of John says: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14). Or as another Bible version says this could be translated, "God pitched his tent next to ours" (Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith and other Cotton Patch Sermons*, 1972). God's love story of faithfulness and pursuit is so incredible that God became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ and lived among us.

Martin Luther called John 3:16 the gospel in a nutshell, the Good News of God's love in a nutshell. If you want to express God's love story for us in just a few words, simply repeat these words:

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

This verse is about God's action. This verse is about God's nature. This verse is about God's incredible inclusiveness. We did not go searching for God. God came to us. God did not come to us to punish. God came to love. God does not just love in theory. God's love is a love of action, of giving, of dying for us.

The cliches the world tries to foist on us are almost endless. There is no free lunch. You get what you pay for. If it seems too good to be true, it is too good to be true. God helps those who help themselves. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Just do it. But those cliches could not be any more wrong when it comes to God's love story for us. God's love is a love we don't deserve, could never deserve, but through God's amazing grace it is given to us and to the whole world. Why wouldn't we want to share that Good News with everyone?

Think About...

- As you read the John 3:16 passage, what words jump out at you? What thoughts come to mind?
- What ordinary, everyday things help you to remember God loves you?

- When, where, and how have you heard about God's love for you and for the whole creation? Who told you?
- How has God blessed you through others? How has God blessed others through you?
- What is a favorite or memorable Bible story, and how does it describe or provide an example of God's love for the world?
- In what ways might you share the story of God's love in order to help others come to know and believe in God's love?
- What would help you be more comfortable in telling others of God's love for God's creation and everyone in it?
- What do you want to remember and take away from the Biblical texts or the written reflection?

What's my response?

Select one or more ideas to remind you of God's amazing love for you and the whole world, and of how you might tell others about that love.

- Keep track of your prayers this month. How much of your prayer time do you use for thanking and praising God? This month, concentrate more on praising and thanking God for how God has been present in your life.
- Think about how you can be a blessing for others as you go about your daily routine. At the end of the day, write down ways that others have been a blessing for you.
- Read some Bible texts that focus on God's love for us and memorize a meaningful phrase. Examples: Psalm 136, Hosea 14:4-7, John 17, Romans 8:26-38, 1 John 4:7-21, and Revelation 21:1-7. As you read each of these passages, think about how each applies to God's love for you. What's your response to a love like this?
- Christians are called and sent to bear God's love to everyone. Do something this month that clearly shows God's love for another person.
- Thank God for your small group and pray that you and the other members of your group will be open to God's amazing love.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thanks for loving us so much. It's hard for us to imagine a love great enough to create the universe and everything in it. We marvel at how you have created and loved us and called us "good." We are humbled that you chose to die in our place because you didn't want us to live under the condemnation of sin. Allow us to put aside everything that would keep us from seeing your love in the faces of other people. As we go out into the world, help us to love others as you have loved and continue to love us. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Reflection written by Gary Medin

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