



FOUNDATIONS

When God Builds His Church

Small Group Discussion Guide

FOUNDATIONS



PREPARATION

■ STUDY

Spend the week studying Matthew 5:43–48 and 22:34–40. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

■ DETERMINE

Which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

■ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

■ LANDING POINT

My love for God and others defines me as a disciple of Jesus.



GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

GOD IS LOVE

Love. It's the most powerful word in the English language. The first time someone in a relationship says "I love you" to their partner, his palms are sweaty and his throat dry. Why? Because he knows those words have weight.

Love isn't an idea. It's not a chemical reaction in the body. It's more than the feeling. Love is a Person. The Apostle John tells us "God is love." But God doesn't just tell us He is love. He showed His love by sending His Son. In Jesus we see true love lived out.

Q: *Recall a story from your life where you saw love in action. Share it with the group.*

BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF LOVE

This week and throughout this series we're going to discuss the DNA of Pinelake. What are the foundations of our community? What defines us? What traits do we want others to see in us?

Our love for God and others defines us as disciples of Jesus. It's the first and greatest character trait. Without love, it's impossible to live out the others. Jesus calls us to love like He loves. Love for God and others is the bedrock foundation of our faith.

Q: *Explain why love is the first and greatest character trait for a Christian.*



LEARN

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

JESUS AND A LAWYER

The Pharisees were the most respected religious leaders in Jesus's day. They had a reputation for going to extremes to follow every jot and tittle of God's law. Remember that annoying kid who sucked up to the teacher and tattled on anyone who broke the rules? Well, that's what the Pharisees were like. Legalistic rule followers who thought being "good" and always doing right made them better than everyone else.

One day a Pharisee approached Jesus with a question about God's Law (i.e., all the commandments in the Old Testament). He was a lawyer, so he was an expert in law. Like most lawyers, he knew how to use loaded questions to trap someone with their own words. He asked Jesus, "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus sees right through his tactics and comes back at the lawyer with a simple answer that summed up all of God's Law: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. There's no commandment greater than this one. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. Every command God ever gave depends on these two commands."

READ: *Read Matthew 22:34-40. In what way was the lawyer Pharisee trying to trap Jesus with His own words?*

Q: *How are these two commands to love related?*

TESTING YOUR LOVE

On another occasion Jesus was teaching His disciples about what it looks like to live as a citizen of God's kingdom (or life as it was meant to be lived). Many in His day had misinterpreted the Old Testament to say God's people should love their neighbor but hate their enemy. Jesus corrects this misunderstanding with a radical call to love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you. He goes on to say, "How is your love any different if you just love those who love you? Unbelievers do it all the time."

This was unlike any other teaching at the time. *Love your enemies? Pray for those who persecute you?* Many in the crowd might have walked away at this point. But Jesus was setting a new, radical standard of living for God's kingdom. He wasn't calling them to live conformed lives, but to live transformed lives.

Q: *Describe the differences between a conformed life and a transformed life.*

Q: *How might praying for your enemies change your attitude toward them?*



LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

LOVE IN OBEDIENCE

Jesus taught us to look at love in two spheres or types, vertical and horizontal. The first and greatest commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind refers to your relationship with God (vertical love). To love your neighbor as yourself and to love and pray for your enemy is the way we love horizontally.

How do we show someone we love them? We find out what pleases them and do everything in our power to do it. Love for God starts with obedience, with a commitment to live our lives in a way that pleases Him. Obedience means we don't allow our feelings, emotions, or anything else to stand in the way of doing what God calls us to do.

Q: *Give yourself a heart check-up. How would you evaluate your vertical and horizontal love on a scale of one to ten? Explain.*

Q: *What stubborn sins keep you from being obedient to God?*

A LOVE THAT CHANGES YOU

When we experience the love and grace of God through Jesus, it changes us. That's why Jesus put love for God as the greatest commandment. That's why He came—to show us love in action and what it looks like to live our lives with and for God.

When we love God with all our being, His love makes its way into every area of our lives. It changes our behavior, motivation, and priorities. It makes us see the time, talent, and treasure God has graciously given us in a much different way.

Q: *What area of your life most needs to be changed by love right now?*

LOVE OVERFLOWING

Jesus came to serve and give His life for others. He loved the poor, the sick, and the needy. But it also tells us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. This is radical love. Jesus loved His enemies all the way to the cross. Grasping this kind of love gets us one step closer to understanding grace. And there's no greater motivator for obedience and joy in our lives than knowing we're sinners who desperately needed (and still need) God's grace.

Q: *What's one thing you can do this week to show God's love in a real way to someone who needs it?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

A LOVE STORY

The gospel is a love story. It's the story your heart longs to hear. That you are loved by Jesus who "saw your heart to the bottom but loved you to the skies."¹ Jesus knows every dark corner in your heart and, yet, He loved you enough to see through the darkness and take the journey to the cross. He suffered the judgment for sin and terrible wrath of God so you could be forgiven and freed to live life as it was meant to be lived—with a heart full of love for God and others.

Q: *Do you feel like something is missing or broken in your relationship with God? Or is it hard for you to receive love from Him and others? Write down what you long to hear God to say to you as a response.*

Q: *Why is it necessary to understand the bad news of our sinfulness and brokenness in order to understand God's love demonstrated in the good news of the gospel?*



PRAY

Spend time in silent prayer meditating on God's love for you. Then, as a group, praise God for His love and grace seen in Jesus. Finish by praying for God to expose any sinful "heart blockers" so you can be free to love God and others.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read John 13:34–35 and reflect on how love for one another is a powerful witness of the gospel to those outside our community.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their life.



COMMENTARY

TWO COMMANDS TO LOVE The "greatest commandment" Jesus speaks of in Matthew 22:37 refers to Deuteronomy 6:5, which was and still is recited twice a day by faithful Jews. The command to love your neighbor as yourself comes from Leviticus 19:18 and 34.

A PRAYER FOR LOVE Although Paul was a church planter, he had a pastoral heart. The beginning of his letter to the Philippians (1:3–11) is filled with love and affection for these believers. He calls them "partners in the gospel" and prays for their love to grow more and more. This kind of love:

- Gives knowledge and discernment
- Purifies
- Bears fruit
- Makes you look more like Jesus
- Glorifies and praises God

LAW VS. LOVE Paul calls the law of God holy, righteous, and good (Rom. 7:12). The law exposes sin by showing us God's character. It also directs us to love God and others. "The real direction indicated by the law is love, rich and costly and extended even to enemies."²

ENDNOTES:

1. Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013), 184.
2. D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 191.