



Welcome to Church

Small Group Guide: Extending the Love of God

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to open your hearts to love others as He loves you, and to reveal specific people He's calling you to serve.

Icebreaker

Share a time when someone showed you unexpected kindness or love. How did it impact you?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **Prayer is the most we can do for one another** - Not the least, but the most powerful way we engage in each other's lives
2. **Following Jesus means embracing His mission** - We cannot claim to follow Christ without loving others
3. **The church should love differently than the world** - Our love should be extravagant and uniquely distinct
4. **No one is outside our call to love** - Everyone is our neighbor
5. **Personal mission is more effective than programs** - Being intentional in your own circles is more powerful than any church program

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

1. **The lawyer asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" but was really asking "Who isn't my neighbor?"**
 - When have you found yourself looking for the minimum requirement in loving others?
 - What makes us want to limit our obligation to love?
2. **The Good Samaritan's love was inconvenient, compassionate, messy, costly, and continual.**
 - Which of these five characteristics is most challenging for you personally? Why?
 - Can you think of a time when loving someone well required one or more of these sacrifices?
3. **Sarah shared about pausing to pray before offering advice.**
 - How often do you pause to pray for someone before trying to fix their problem?
 - What might change in your relationships if you made prayer your first response instead of advice?

Personal Reflection

4. **The sermon mentioned we often don't look up from our lives long enough to see others.**
 - What distracts you most from seeing the needs around you? (schedule, phone, self-focus, etc.)
 - What practical step could you take this week to be more aware of people around you?
5. **The pastor said, "If I get involved, how long will I need to be involved?"**
 - Be honest: Does the fear of long-term commitment keep you from getting involved in someone's life?
 - How does Jesus' continual love for us challenge this perspective?
6. **Matthew 4 and Matthew 28 bookend Jesus' call: "I will make you fishers of men" and "Go and make disciples."**
 - How would you describe your current engagement in Jesus' mission?
 - What's one barrier keeping you from being more engaged?

The BLESS Acronym

Review the BLESS framework for extending God's love:

- **B**egin with prayer
- **L**isten to their story
- **E**at with them
- **S**erve them
- **S**hare the gospel

Group Activity: Take 3-5 minutes of silence for each person to ask God to bring someone to mind. Then share with the group (just first names) who God laid on your heart.

Application Questions

7. Within the Church:

- Who in our church community has God placed on your heart to pray for regularly?
- Is there someone in our congregation you could reach out to this week with a text, call, or coffee invitation?

8. In Your Circles:

- Name 2-3 people in your neighborhood, workplace, or regular activities who don't know Jesus.
- Which step of BLESS could you take with one of them this week?

9. Practical Next Steps:

- Would you commit to praying daily for one specific person this week?
- How could you create an opportunity to share a meal with someone who needs to experience God's love?
- Is there a messy or costly situation you've been avoiding that God is calling you to step into?

Group Challenge

This Week:

- Each person commits to one name they will pray for daily
- Share that name with at least one other group member for accountability
- Take one practical step from the BLESS framework with that person

Next Meeting:

- Come prepared to share what happened when you stepped out in love

Closing Reflection

Read together: **1 John 4:11-12** "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*"

Final Question: What would it look like for God's love to be "perfected" or "made complete" in you through loving others this week?

Closing Prayer

Go around the circle and have each person pray for the person on their heart (by first name only if privacy is needed). Pray specifically that:

- God would give you compassion for them
- You would have eyes to see opportunities to love them
- God would prepare their heart to receive His love through you
- You would have courage to step into inconvenient, messy, costly love

Additional Resources

- Consider using Exchange's Community Engagement Trailer for a neighborhood event
- Explore serving opportunities with Raleigh Dream Center
- Connect with your group leader about ways your small group could serve together