

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Leader's Guide

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD LESSON 6: EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled *Our Relationship with God*. This series of lessons examines the relationship we have with God. It begins by understanding our identity in Christ which is a result of our becoming a child of God. This series looks at the attributes of God, how we learn about God and know Him better, and how we develop this personal relationship. Understanding ourselves in God's eyes, and having a clearer picture of who God is, will help us live the life that God designed for us.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is new Christians, those who would like a refresher on the basics of Christianity, as well as those preparing to teach these Christian practices and beliefs. Also, those with an interest in Christian thought will find value in these lessons as they pertain to daily living and choices.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

LESSON 6: EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to understand the ways in which God demonstrates His love for us, and how we can experience this love deep within ourselves.

LEADER'S NOTE

Everyone longs to feel loved. Loneliness and despair cause countless problems in the world! Even Christians – though we may know in our head that God loves us – sometimes fail to really experience this love in a life changing way. Think about how our lives would be different if we had a deep, secure sense that God loves and cherishes us, and desires a friendship with us. We have been accepted by God and He delights in us. This feeling of being loved by God is something more than head knowledge. It cannot be understood with our intellect alone. While you can present the facts to your participants, encourage them to seek God's love for themselves and pray for them.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What does the word 'love' mean to you? How do we use the word in everyday conversation?
- ❖ How do you know if someone loves you? What is the difference between knowing someone loves you and experiencing their love?
- ❖ Do you know without a doubt that God loves you? How have you experienced this love?
- ❖ How would it change our lives to know that we are loved, accepted and cherished by God?

STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH

- ❖ **What is Love?** Love can be described many ways. It is an emotion we feel towards others; we desire their best interests before our own, we accept them, care about them, appreciate their qualities, and look for ways to serve them. We like the feeling of being near them. Love can also



be an action, decision or choice we make. The Bible reminds us over and over that God loves us, and that God Himself is love. If we have been Christians for any length of time, we have probably come across verses such as John 3:16 which tells us that God loved the world, and 1 John 4:8 which states that God is love.

- Love desires the best for someone else (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).
 - Love is the choice to relate to someone and treat them as valuable (Romans 12:10).
 - Love is something we can feel so strongly, that all logic and other emotions are set aside (Song of Solomon 8:6-7).
 - Love is central to Christianity – knowing God's love, loving God and loving others (John 13:34-35).
- ❖ **How Does God Love?** We may know what love is, but we should ask ourselves if we have encountered the life-changing love of God? The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian Church, and in his letter he ached for them to be *“rooted and grounded in love... having strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge”* (Ephesians 3:17-19). In order to experience the love of friends or family, we need to see them love us and hear that they love us. Do we know in our heads and in our hearts that God loves us? First, let us look at some verses in the Bible that speak of God's love for us, and secondly at some of the loving things God has done for mankind:
- **He Tells us He Loves Us:** In the following verses God writes about His love for us:
 - We are able to love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).
 - God's love is unfailing (Exodus 15:13, Psalm 100:5).
 - God delights and rejoices in us, we are His joy (Zephaniah 3:17, Psalm 149:4).
 - **He Shows us He Loves Us:** In the following verses, God demonstrates His love for individuals and for all of mankind:
 - He chose a people to love (Deuteronomy 4:37, 1 Peter 2:9-10).
 - He turns curses into blessings (Deuteronomy 23:5).
 - He intimately knows us and every detail of our lives (Matthew 10:30, Job 31:4).
 - God takes care of us and protects us (Psalm 91:14-16, 1 Peter 5:6-7).
 - He redeems us from death (Psalm 103:4, Ephesians 2:4-5).
 - He has plans for our life, and His plans are good (Psalm 138:8, Jeremiah 29:11).
 - God sent His Son to die, not just for His friends but also for His enemies (Romans 5:8-10, Galatians 2:20).
- ❖ **Pictures of Love:** The Bible gives us pictures of different relationships to help us understand the love God has for us. Look at the following examples:
- **God loves us like a Potter loves his Clay:** Artists love the materials they work with, and not only the materials as they are, but they see great potential in them. God



cherishes us like a potter cherishes clay and warms it in his own hands. God molds us into the best person we can be by loving, nurturing and shaping us.

- o Genesis 2:7, Isaiah 64:8, Psalm 139:13-16
 - **God loves us like a Shepherd loves his Sheep:** Good shepherds care for their sheep and would lay down their lives for their flock. They call the sheep and the sheep know the shepherd's voice. Sheep need guidance, protection and tender care. God's love for us is like that of a shepherd looking after his sheep.
 - o Psalm 23, John 10:11-15
 - **God loves us like a Friend loves a Friend:** Friends count on each other, desire the best for each other, and dearly love one another. Friends choose the company of one another voluntarily, and delight in each other's company. God calls us friends if we obey Him – no longer slaves or enemies!
 - o James 2:23, John 15:13-15
 - **God loves us like a Hero loves those in Danger:** A hero or rescuer must put the life of the one he wishes to rescue first. He desires their wellbeing above his own, and will go to great lengths to save them! We were in danger and faced certain death forever – but Jesus laid down His life for us!
 - o Ezekiel 34:11-12, Isaiah 46:3-4,
 - **God loves us like a Father loves his Child:** Good fathers are filled with love for their children – they delight in them and desire everything good for them. God calls us His children, adopted into His family. We are heirs along with Christ, royal children, dearly loved and longed for!
 - o John 1:12, Romans 8:15, 1 John 3:1
 - **God loves us like a Groom loves his Bride:** Perhaps most wonderful of all is the picture of God loving us like a groom loves his bride and longs to be with her! God sees beauty in us, adores us, desires to be with us, and loves us not just out of duty-- but out of emotion!
 - o 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-27, Isaiah 62:5
- ❖ **Experiencing God's Love for Ourselves:** Knowing all these things about God's love is important, but we must also experience it emotionally. If you have read about God's love but still have not experienced this relationship for yourself, here's what you can do:
- **Become Dissatisfied:** Choose to be dissatisfied with only a partial experience of God. Pursue a deeper understanding of God's love (Psalm 107:9).
 - **Repent of Sin:** If there is sin in your life that you are not repentant of, it can hinder your relationship with God and your experience of His love. (Psalm 66:18)



- **Make your Relationship a Priority:** Choose to set aside time alone with God. Feast on His word, the Bible. Pray at all times throughout the day and become aware of God's presence in your life.
 - **Fix your Eyes on Jesus:** Read the words of Jesus, meditate on His encounters with the people around Him and how He loved them. Because of Jesus' love, He calls everyone to repentance, – not just the holy, the perfect and the powerful, but also the lost and needy!
 - **Cultivate Gratitude:** Develop a habit of looking for evidence of God's love in your life. When God chastises us, it is in love. When God blesses us or brings us through trials, it is because of His love. Perhaps a journal (where you record what you are thankful to God for and how He is working in your life) will help you see His love for you.
 - **Preach the Gospel to Yourself:** Remind yourself of the sinner that you were, and your inability to please God on your own. Do you remember regularly what Jesus has rescued you from? What have you been given since becoming His child?
 - **Pray:** Ask God to give you a new experience of His love. We can pursue this during our entire lifetime as we continue to understand the fullness of His love!
- ❖ **How should it Change Our Life?** Experiencing God's love is something that will change us. Because God loves us, we do not have to work to earn our salvation and we no longer need the world's approval. And when we know how much we are loved by God, it gives us the freedom to love others sacrificially.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ How has this lesson changed your perspective on the love of God?
- ❖ How can experiencing God's love change the way we live our daily lives?
- ❖ What picture of God's love surprised you most? Have you experienced God's love in any of those forms?
- ❖ How has God shown His love for you this past week?

PRAYER

Pray for the participants. Pray that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Pray that they would comprehend with all the saints the breadth and length and height and depth of the love God has for each of us. Thank God that He loves us with an everlasting love, that He is faithful to us even when we stray, and that we can never be separated from the love of God.