

LOVE IS THE WAY

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

WEEK FOUR

Chapters 7&8:
Who is my neighbor?

"If it doesn't look like love, if it doesn't look like Jesus of Nazareth, it cannot be claimed to be Christian. We are experiencing a fundamental distortion of Christian teaching of what it means to follow Jesus."

—Presiding Bishop Michael Curry

Welcome everyone to the fourth session. Invite folks to watch this Heineken commercial:

<https://tinyurl.com/heineken-ad>. Yes, it is a beer commercial, but it is really about loving our neighbor.

Connecting:

Invite the group to reflect aloud on this question:

- Is there a time where you felt someone made assumptions about you without really knowing you? Have you ever found yourself in a conversation with someone very different from you and finding common ground?

Close this section with prayer. You might use the prayer to the right as your weekly opening prayer.

Covenanting:

Lift up the guiding principles from your covenant as you center yourself in this time together.

Bible Study: I John 17-19 (MSG)

"God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.

We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.

If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both."

Read the scripture aloud. Invite the group to share their responses to these questions:

- What is the word or phrase that captures your imagination?
- Where is fear currently crippling you?
- What is the invitation that you hear God speaking to you in this passage today?

Loving God, fill my heart with the love that you freely give. Make love my first and last thoughts. May I love others and freely give to them. Make my spirit a spirit of joy, happiness, and love for both my friends and my enemies. Help me love abundantly as you have loved me. Amen.

Based on John 13:34
DailyPrayerGuide.net

Video: Watch this week's video with Rev. Dan Johnson.

Depending on the size of your group, you may want to move into breakout groups/rooms of three to allow for deeper sharing.

Going Deeper:

Invite the group to reflect aloud on these questions (courtesy of author Kate Bowler, written by Erin S. Lane):

- Martin Buber wrote, "Love is the responsibility for an I for a You." Rather than relating to other people as "it's" that we can control, we're meant to treat one another as "thou's" we're in relationship to. From this perspective, Bishop Curry believes, everyone is a neighbor deserving of our care. Who is hardest for you to see as a You? What small act of care could you start practicing toward them?
- Bishop Curry writes about the dance of nonviolent change in the church, country, and world. He describes this dance as learning to stand and kneel at the same time. Stand in your own conviction. And kneel before another's anger. Do you think this is an effective posture of love? What gestures would you add/amend to this description to reflect your own ethos of change?
- One of the challenges in our society today is that we tend to live in our own silos. We listen to media that reinforces our own worldviews. We gather in like-minded social groups. Which opportunities do you have in your life to build bridges with someone who may have a very different life experience or worldview than you?
- Our baptismal commitment is that we will be a community of love and forgiveness. How does our church live this out? Where could we do better?

Going Out:

Invite the group to share responses to these questions:

- What is your takeaway idea from this week's reading/video?
- One practice of compassion is to look at the people you meet with warm eyes and a soft heart. How can you practice that this week, and as you do, notice how that impacts your sense of connection and common humanity?

Closing:

Show the video "True Colors" as your closing invitation/blessing:

<https://tinyurl.com/truecolors-camdenvoices>

May we go forth to claim our true colors and to see the beauty of the true colors shining through all we meet this week.

Remind the group to read Chapters 9 and 10 for next week.