

Small Group Leaders Notes

1 John 2:3-14

Context

In chapter 1 we learnt that God is light (v5), he is consistently and perfectly pure, “in him there is no darkness at all.” Wonderfully we can have fellowship with God through the message that John and the other Apostles proclaimed (v3.) It is a wonderful thought to think that we can have fellowship with the God who is light, but what will it look like? How can you tell if someone has fellowship with God?

In John’s day there were people claiming to have fellowship with God but their lifestyles showed that they did not really have fellowship with God. They claimed to have fellowship with God “and yet walk[ed] in darkness” (v6). Through the letter John gives us a number of markers that show us whether we really do have fellowship with God (1:7, 2:5-6, 2:29, 3:7, 3:10, 3:14, 3:19-21, 4:7, 4:13, 5:1-3.)

One of the key markers that John repeatedly returns to is the mark of loving other Christians (2:10, 3:10, 3:14-15, 4:7, 5:1-3.)

Big Ideas

Obedience

You cannot miss the references to God’s commands and obedience in these verses (v3, v4, v5, v7, ,v8). God gives his people commands and he expects us to obey. We are not saved by our obedience but we are saved for obedience. As children we are to obey our Heavenly Father. John is clear that if we claim to be God’s children but don’t obey him then we cannot claim to truly know him (v4, v9, v10.) A key marker of being in the light is obeying the commands of God.

Love

Time and again in the Bible God’s commands are summed up in terms of loving God and loving other people (Mark 12:28-33.) Before Jesus goes to the cross he commands his disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35, 14:21-24, 15:9-14.) The thing that will mark us out as Jesus’ people is our love for one another. John reinforces what Jesus commanded. We are to love our Christian brothers and sisters in the church as Christ has loved us. He is therefore calling us to a sacrificial love not a sentimental love. He is calling us to love with actions not just words. If we claim to have been loved by God and to live with him and enjoy fellowship with him then we will live and love as Jesus did (v6.)

Reassurance

Some of John’s statements so far could cause believers to doubt whether they really do know God. As we examine our love for one another and our purity we may be worried that we are not genuine Christians. In v12-14 John reassures those he is writing to that they really have been forgiven by God and they really do enjoy fellowship with him. This is a key aim of the letter (see 5:13.)

Area of Application

My suggestion is that you focus on how we can practically love one another as a Christian brothers and sisters as this is the particular command that we are being called to obey in this passage. The possible applications of this principle are almost limitless so don't feel constrained by my limited suggestions, instead use them as a springboard. The big aim is to be practical and grounded rather than merely theoretical.

Depending on the people in your group you may want to draw out some of the encouragements and reassurances that come in v12-14. If I were you I would keep v12-14 in 'my back pocket' as it were and be prepared to look at them if you feel that this would be appropriate as part of the study.

Suggested Questions

Starter Question - Can you think of a time when you felt especially loved by another Christian? What was the situation? How did they love you? What did they do? Why has that stayed with you?

The aim here is to get the ball rolling in the direction of love. In particular we want to get the group thinking and talking about practical love. Give everyone the time to tell stories and celebrate examples of love that we have experienced whether this is in this church or another church.

1. The big application in this passage is that we are to love one another;

a) Why is loving each other so important?

In particular focus on v5-6 and v9-11. See how loving one another is something that God commands us to do! God says that loving one another is a key marker that we are his people. You could, but you don't have to, go to John 13:34-35 and 15:9-14 to see how Jesus addresses this in slightly more detail. Please remember that the aim of these studies is not to do an exhaustive Bible study on every text that addresses the issue of love. The aim is to quickly grasp the principle and then help one another to apply it. So think carefully before you introduce a cross-reference. Will this sidetrack your group and move you away from application? Do your studies have a tendency to run on too long so that prayer is squeezed out and people end up leaving too late? If so then be disciplined and just stay in 1 John.

b) What is the model for our love?

We are to live as Jesus did (v6) and so that means we are to love as Jesus loved (see John 13 and 15.) Get the group to think about how has Jesus loved us? What did he do? What did it cost him? How does Jesus' love compare with the ways that we normally think and talk about love?

2. Think about when we gather together as the church on a Sunday;

c) How could you come to church and practically love your church family as Jesus has loved you?

Here is where we really get stuck into application so make sure you give plenty of time to this question and the following questions. Encourage the group to think about all sorts of practical aspects to our time together on Sundays. For example;

How can we love one another in the time we arrive and leave?

How can we love one another in where we park our car?

*How can we love one another in where we sit?
How can we love one another during the service?
How can we love one another after the service?*

Throughout the discussion keep reminding the group of Jesus' love for us. What will it look like for us to love others as Jesus has loved us?

d) How could you come to church and not really love your church family as Jesus has loved you?

You could ask this question in parallel to the previous question. Think about the same aspects to Sundays e.g. parking, when we arrive and leave, where we sit, who we talk to etc.

Again keep bringing people back to Jesus' love for us. How might our love be superficial and worldly rather than Christ-like and costly?

3. Loving one another is about more than what we do on Sundays. How can we be a home group that love one another as Jesus has loved us?

Here you can think both about the time when you are actually together each week as well as the rest of the week when you're not together. If you were starting a group from scratch what would the group look like if it loved each other as Jesus has loved us?

What will this mean for our attitude to home group? Our attendance? When we arrive? When the group finishes? (As leaders we can love our groups by making sure that the group doesn't finish too late.) How we pray? How we answer questions? How we pray and support one another through the week?

There are so many different possible avenues of application for this principle so take the time to think and pray through the right areas to focus on. Don't try to cover every possible application.

Encourage your group to make particular changes as a result of the study. Let's do all we can to make sure that the seed that has been sown is not snatched away but instead produces a harvest. Why not start next week by talking about the different things that you planned to do as a result of this study.

Make sure that there is time at the end of this study to pray about the applications that you have discussed. Let's confess our lack of love where that is appropriate (remember the wonderful promise of 1:9) and let's also ask for God's help to love one another as Jesus has loved us!