



theme: Identity #1 – Lovers in a Dangerous Time

materials: Pencils, paper, love song, bibles

welcome

Give everyone a pencil and paper and ask them to sum up their life as best they can in 5 short sentences. Hand all the papers in, mix them up, hand them back out randomly to be read out, and guess whose paper is whose.

interact

Put on a song that features the word “love” in it (there are one or two songs out there that have to do with love!!!) While you are listening, get your pencils again and write down 5 short sentences that describe God. You can’t sum Him up, of course, but what things do you think speak clearly of His revealed identity? Once the song is done, and everyone is finished, read out these sentences in an attitude of prayer, telling God who you know Him or believe Him to be.

What is the main thing that came out in all these sentences? Was there anything obviously missing?

read

Read out 1 John 4:1-21.

How is God described in this passage?

What does it mean to say: “God is love”? Is it also true that “Love is God”? (For that matter, what is love?)

What does this passage say about our identity as Christians? Who are we called to be?

How do we know if we are, or aren’t Christians, according to this passage?

Why does our love (or hate) for our brother impact whether God abides in us or not?

What do you think it means to abide in God, and for God to abide in you? How can we “live through Christ”?

Have you experienced that?

What do you think it means that “he who is in you is greater than he that is in the world”?

Is this a truth that you have experienced for yourself?

What do you think of verse 18? Have you experienced a love that casts out all fear?

think

“Whoever confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” Discuss in your cell how you can make this confession with your words and deeds in every situation of your life this week. How will you do this at school, work, home, with friends, etc...?

live & pray

Is there anyone whom you have not loved, anyone whom you have been hating? If so, re-read verses 19-21. What can or should you do about this situation?



useful resources

Website: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love -- might be neat to see what others say.
Book: *A Gift For God*, by Mother Teresa
Book: *The Four Loves*, by C.S. Lewis

leader's guide

God is described in this passage primarily as "love", but also a few times as Jesus Christ come from God in the flesh. God's love is a defining characteristic, and it has been revealed to us through His Son Jesus. This is the primary understanding we can have of the phrase "God is love", that God sent His Son to take away the sin of the world.

The phrase "love is God" is a dangerous one. Love has many definitions, and it is often elevated to the place of God and worshipped. But it should not be. C.S. Lewis said that when love is treated as divine it becomes demonic. God is love, not the other way around, and we can only understand true love through the actions of Jesus. We cannot come to understand God through our own efforts at love. On our own we are not capable of true love. We can only love because God first loved us.

As Christians we are called to find our identity in this love of God, and to be imitators of this love. As we are loved by God, so we are to love one another. If we do not love one another, if we hate our brothers, then we are lying about our love for God. So we have to confess that Jesus is the Son of God (v 15) and love one another, and then we abide in God and He abides in us. This is at the very heart of our identity as children of God.

God abides in us through his Spirit (v. 13). It is the Spirit of Christ living in us, and this is the only thing that makes it possible for us to love. Because God is love, His Spirit in us can look on others with love. Christ, whose Spirit lives in us, has already overcome the world on the cross, and His love in us is stronger than the hatred of the world, although sometimes it might not feel that way. God's love casts out a fear of punishment for us, enabling us to have confidence on the Day of Judgement, because His Spirit lives within us and is perfecting us. It doesn't mean we can never be afraid in this life, but that God has removed from us the fear of judgement.