

LIFE GROUP NOTES:

SERIES: Disciple

PART TWO: Indebted

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

1 John 4:7-12



INTRODUCTION

Anne Rice, one of today's most successful writers, first won fame with her 'Vampire Chronicles' in the 1970's. About a decade ago, she spoke of "a new spiritual beginning" as she re-embraced her Christian roots and began work on a series of books about the life of Christ. She told the story of her spiritual journey in the book "called out of darkness".

But in 2010 she announced her decision to "quit being a Christian" and spoke of Christians as being "quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous." She reaffirmed her commitment to Christ, but added, "Following Christ does not mean following his followers. Christ is infinitely more important than Christianity and always will be, no matter what Christianity is, has been, or might become."

Many of us have felt the same way. We've experienced being 'fed-up' with Christianity. In the midst of life's disappointments, perhaps we've sensed that God hasn't done what we were led to expect him to do. We're torn; we don't want to give up on Jesus, but we're unsure we want to continue being associated with anything "Christian". The apostle John points us to a better way, the way of a disciple.

DISCUSSION STARTER

Have you ever felt tired of "Christianity" and trying to live a 'Christian' life? If so, what factors led to that feeling? Perhaps there are others close to you who have completely turned away from Christianity. What reasons did they express for doing this? How much of it had to do with their views of Jesus himself?

MESSAGE SUMMARY

In his old age, the apostle John wrote a letter to followers of Jesus who had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. With the perspective of his long, hard, eventful life, he reiterated the point Jesus made during his last supper in John 13; 'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.' (1 John 4:7)

John emphasized that God, in his essence, is love, and that love was proven to us in Jesus: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (4:8-10). John could never doubt this love because he had seen it first-hand, as an eyewitness of Jesus.

God's love is for everyone. Every single person we encounter is someone God loves- and for that individual, God has sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice. John had personally seen Jesus offered on the cross as this sacrifice. Years later, he was still convinced of this.

Because of what John says, we have an obligation: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (4:11). The little Greek word 'ought' is a financial term about indebtedness. There is a debt-debtor relationship in the gospel. It's there between us and every single person we ever meet, and it's there between God and us. Since God so loved us, we owe it to others to love them. More specifically, since God loves others, we owe it to God to love others. When others are unlovable, we can remember that we're called to love them because God first chose to love us.

There's a sense in which we're indebted to God because of his overwhelming love for us, for which he doesn't want anything in return. He is saying "In return, all I ask is that you love other people." We're to love others in such a remarkable way that outsiders will notice. Our problem is that for too long we've settled for the brand "Christianity" and we've given up our influence and leverage in society. We gave it up when we opted for something other than love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What common characteristics of Christians do you find disturbing? How do they compare with the way Jesus comes across in the New Testament?
- 2) How convinced are you that God truly loves everyone? What gets in the way of this conviction?
- 3) In your own spiritual journey, how have you grown in experience and understanding of God's love?
- 4) In what ways have you felt overwhelmed by God's love for you?
- 5) Who is a person you find difficult to love? Why is loving them so difficult?
- 6) What would change most in your community if those who follow Jesus truly loved one another?

KEY POINTS

- The New Testament further reinforces the point Jesus taught in 1 John 13:34-35- that the main characteristic and defining mark of his followers is how we love.
- God, in his essence, is love, and his love is for everyone.
- Since God so loved us, we owe it to others to love them. We're in a sense indebted to God for his love for us, and in response, he asks us to love others.

Moving Forward

How much attention have you given lately to the love God has shown you, especially through what Jesus has done for you? Are you keeping this in the forefront of your mind and heart? Does your reflection on the life and death of Jesus fill you with an ever-increasing awareness of how great God's love really is? And does it fill you with an ever-increasing awareness of your privilege and obligation to love others? At this moment in your life, let your genuine experience of God's love take you forward into a genuine expression of your love for others.

Preparing for session 3

To help you prepare- use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your next life-group.

Look at the statements and commands Jesus expressed to his disciples in Matthew 28:16-20. How can this passage help us understand the meaning of the word 'disciple'?

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, think about how Paul related to people who weren't already followers of Jesus. What encouragement do you find here for your relationships with people who don't follow Jesus?

Read 1 Corinthians 5. The particular details of this situation may seem obscure, but what are the main principles that Paul appears to be trying to get across here as it relates to our relationships with people who are not followers of Jesus (esp. v12-13)