

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 50: A Letter From John



Session Snapshot

Narrative Passage: 1 John 4:7-12

Gospel Focus: John 13:34-35

Student Takeaways:

- Students will understand that God is love, and that the fullest expression of His love for us was sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.
- Students will grasp that showing God's love to others is how they are recognized as followers of Jesus.
- Students will look at their lives and find people who need to experience God's love for them.



Overview

God is love and true love comes from Him. His love was made known to us by sending Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin so that we could have a relationship with Him. If we truly trust the Lord and follow Jesus, we will show love to those around us, and people will recognize us as Christians. In this lesson we'll dig deeper into the concept of this type of love. Students will examine their own lives and think about specific people they can show God's love to on a consistent basis.



Teacher Prep Video

Each *Thread* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your *Thread* lesson 50 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 50, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.



Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you'll be studying.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson we encourage teachers to help students know who wrote a particular book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **Why teach context?** Grasping the big-picture view of God's story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they're studying.

1 John

Author: 1 John was written by John the Apostle. John was one of Jesus' disciples and was referred to as "the beloved disciple." John was probably only a teenager when he spent his three years with Jesus. In addition to 1 John, he authored 2 John, 3 John, the Gospel of John, and Revelation.

Time frame: 1 John was probably written sometime after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but probably no later than 90 AD.

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Purpose: John was writing to a population (1st Century Christ-followers) who had seen their ranks diminished at the onset of Roman persecution. John was calling his audience to a faith that was doctrinally sound and application oriented. He reminded his readers of the teachings of Christ, and urged them to put them into practice.

John

Author: The Gospel of John was written by John the Apostle, son of Zebedee. A fisherman who left his trade to follow Jesus, John also penned the Book of Revelation, as well as the three letters in the New Testament that bear his name.

Time frame: The Gospel of John was probably written between 85 and 95 AD. John most likely wrote his gospel in Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos.

Purpose: John's stated purpose for writing this book can be found in John 20:30-31, the last two verses in his gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John's goal seems to have been to clearly communicate a full theology of Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Son of God.



Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- An introductory activity called Getting Started designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- A section entitled The Story featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- A special emphasis entitled The Thread where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- An application-focused segment called Wrapping Up helping teenagers ask the question, "How am I impacted by what I learned today"?

Getting Started

- **Goal:** For students to shift their attention to the importance of love and the reality that all people desire it.
- **Set-Up:** Paper, pens, timer, candy or other prize for the winning group.

BEGIN, by telling your students that you are going to have a contest to see how fast they can access their musical knowledge. Pass out paper and pens to students in groups of 2-3.

THEN say something like:

- **You are going to have two minutes to list all of the song titles that you can think of that contain the word "love." You can also include lines from songs that have the word love, but you will need**

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to give the title also. Titles are worth 2 points; lines from songs are worth 1 point. You can only use each song once.

NEXT, use a countdown timer on your large screen, a cell phone timer, or stopwatch and begin the two-minute clock. If you are able, choose a fun, upbeat, and appropriate song to play in the background while they make their lists. Give students a 5 second warning so they can write down their last idea, and then call STOP! Have students share their song titles and tally up the points. Award a prize for the winner.

THEN say something like:

- **Today we are going to be looking at the only true source of love so we can understand its importance. Understanding love is a big part of correctly understanding who God is. We are going to be looking at part of a letter that John wrote to the early church at a time when they were becoming increasingly confused about what they believed.**

Transition to The Story.

The Story

- **Goal:** Students will understand that God is love, and that the fullest expression of His love for us was sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.
- **Set-Up:** Students will need a Bible or a Bible app.

FIRST, explain to the students that you'll be looking at the letter of 1 John to examine the concept of love a little more deeply. Use the following information to help students understand the culture surrounding the church in John's day, and see how it may be similar to our own. This is helpful in seeing how John's instruction to the church then is so applicable to us now!

Connecting The Dots

As you teach The Thread, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it as a way to review and/or to connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- **The culture surrounding the letters from John was drenched in Greek religion and philosophy. Many Christians within this culture found themselves swayed by popular beliefs, including the early forms of Gnosticism (the belief that, among other things, special knowledge awakens the god within).**
- **John writes his letters as catalysts for revival, calling believers to remember the truth of the Gospel and focus on the essential foundations of the faith.**
- **Much like in today's culture, the church of John's day was surrounded by those who held to secular beliefs that stood in complete contradiction to the exclusiveness of the Gospel. And yet these individuals seemed to see themselves as 'Christians' in the sense that they claimed belief in God and association with the church. John warns believers not to be influenced by these acquaintances who sought to lead them astray.**

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Read or have a student read 1 John 4:7-8, and ask something like:

- **Why does John say that we should love one another?**

- o Answer: Because it is an important indicator that they belong to God. In a time of confusing beliefs, it is important to show evidence of genuine conversion in Christ.

- **Based on this verse, it is true to say that God is love. Would it also be true to say the reverse, that love is God? Why or why not?**

- o Answer: No. This was an important distinction in John's day as well as our own. God is love, but He is also many other things, such as: justice, life, light, wrath, creator . . . the list is long! To say that love is God makes love elevated to something that can stand apart from God as His equal. Many people, then and now, are confused by this and live as though love is the end result rather than love being an outcome of pursuing Christ.

- **Do you think people who do not know Christ are capable of love? Based on this passage, what is the difference between those who know God and those who do not when it comes to our ability to love?**

- o Answer: Yes. Of course people are capable of love, in a human sense, even if they are not in a relationship with Christ. But, God's Word is clear that our human love is very limited by our sinfulness. We cannot love in a way that reflects the love of God unless we are doing it in the power of God. We cannot give what we don't have. To share the love of God, you must first experience it for yourself. Our human love may draw others to us, but the love of God is intended to point others to Him.

THEN, read or have a student read 1 John 4:9-10. Ask something like:

- **What do you think "atoning sacrifice" means in this passage?**

- o Answer: Our sinfulness brings God's wrath. Because God is just, there must be a payment for sin. He shows love in that He is both just and merciful in providing His own son as the payment for the debt that we owe for our sin. On the cross, Christ was the propitiation, or substitute payment, that settled the debt that we owe before God. He took our punishment and gave us His righteousness.

- **Understanding this, re-read verses 9-10 and describe how God's love is different from human love.**

- o Answer: God's love cost Him a great deal. His love is final and permanent. He gave His Son once and for all so that we could have life in Him. Human love changes and is often based on our own wants and needs rather than a free gift to others. God gave us a love that we did not deserve and it is very hard for us to do that for others.

NEXT, read or have a student read 1 John 4:11-12 and ask something like:

- **How does understanding God's perfect love for us help us to know how to love others?**

- o Answer: When we look at how undeserving we are of God's love, we are able to love the unlovable. We are no longer limited to love only those who love us or who we feel deserve our love, but we are free to love others through the power of the Gospel.

- **How does loving people when they don't deserve it point them to God?**

- o Answer: God's nature is not the same as ours. What makes His love perfect is that it does not have the limits that we have. When we love the way God loves, we show that we are different from the world. We show others that there is transforming power in a relationship with Christ and that His character can be trusted.

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If students don't have any questions, transition into The Thread and take a look at seeing where we notice the connection of the Gospel to the big-picture narrative of Scripture.

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FIRST, instruct students to turn over to John 13:34-35. While they're finding it, use some of the Bible Background material to provide some context for the book of John.

THEN, read or have a student read the passage. Ask something like:

- **What words or actions come to mind when you think of how Jesus loved the disciples?**
 - o Answers will vary. Some possible answers may include: He taught them, forgave them when they were wrong, served them, took care of their needs, and ultimately died for them and for us.
- **Way back in Leviticus 19:18 believers were told to love their neighbor. Why do you think Jesus said this was a new commandment?**
 - o Answer: Everything changed when Jesus arrived. His presence marked the arrival of God's greatest act of love – the giving of Himself! Jesus was now telling them not just to love each other 'as themselves,' but to show that they have experienced something greater. To be loved by Christ is to see a glimpse of God's character. That is what we are to show to others!
- **Verse 35 says that loving others with Christ's love shows that we are His disciples. How might neglecting to show that love cause others to question if we belong to Him?**
 - o Answer: When we do not show the love of Christ to others, we are behaving as if His love is not in us. We are not showing that we understand who He is and what He has done for us. There is no reason for others to think that we are united with Christ if we behave like we don't know Him.

FINALLY, say something like:

- **We all have days where we feel more human than spirit-filled, but it must be our goal to live with an understanding of God's love in a way that it overflows from us to others. When it becomes difficult to love others, we need to draw near to God and ask Him to remind us of His great love for us. It may also be helpful to spend time in prayer asking God to show you sin in your own life that may need to be confessed. This is a great way for us to remember how much God forgives us and loves us unconditionally. When we keep that in perspective, it becomes easier to show love to others, even when they may not seem to deserve it.**

If your students don't have any more questions, transition into the "Wrapping Up" section.

Wrapping Up

- **Goal:** Students will look at their lives and find people who need to experience God's love for them.
- **Set-Up:** You may find a dry-erase board helpful, though not essential.

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FIRST, explain to the students that they're going to take some time to discuss what it means to practically put Jesus' command to love others into practice. Say something like:

- **Talking about love is not enough. Love is not an idea. It is an action! If we are going to love others the way God loves us, then like Him, we have to do something to show it. There are people all around you who need to experience God's love and He tells us to be intentional about showing it to them.**

NEXT, lead students to consider the following thoughts. Ask:

- **Think of one person in your life that that needs to experience God's love. Got it? Now, think of how you show God's love to them. For example, do they need to experience forgiveness from you to see what God's forgiveness looks like? Do they need to have an understanding friend to feel what it is like to be valued the way God values us? Do they need help with a physical need to know that God cares about the details of life?**

THEN, allow students a moment to consider their responses. Then without having students divulge any specific names they've considered, have them share some of the practical actions they've thought of. Challenge students to consider the things they've come up with not just as answers in a small group setting, but actionable things they plan to do to show God's love in their world. Be sure to follow up with them some time during the week to see how they're doing in implementing these changes.

FINALLY, close your Bible study in prayer, asking the Lord to give the students courage to show those around them the love of Christ.

- **If you've purchased the *Tracing The Thread* devotional journal, remind students that they'll be working through Week 50 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions, and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.**
- **If you'll be utilizing the digital devotions included in the *Thread* curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.**

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.