

this is LOVE

week one

Instructions for the group:

(Anyone in the group can read these instructions to the group. Note: The group should run no longer than 90 minutes and it is not imperative to answer all of the provided questions each week.)

1) Welcome everyone in the group and invite everyone in the group to take a minute to introduce themselves stating the following (15-20 min)

- first and last name
- place of birth
- number of siblings
- favorite love song and why
- what you hope to get out of 'this is LOVE'

2) Have everyone in the group read the 'introduction' to 'this is LOVE' (see the back of this page). (5 min)

3) After reading the introduction answer these questions: (10-15 min)

(Everyone in the group should have a chance to answer the question if they choose)

Are there any ways that you can relate to the theme presented?

What are the unlikely experiences of love that you've observed (like picking up poop)?

4) Who is the most loving person that you have known in your life? If possible, briefly describe what characteristics they possessed that you felt were especially loving. (I.e. what is it that made them such a loving person?) (15 min)

5) Talk over the schedule for the coming weeks and take a poll to see if the group would like to meet at the home of a group member for the remaining weeks or continue to meeting at the church (note: if possible, meeting at just one home without bouncing from home to home is the best way to facilitate a great group experience). Of course, the church remains an option for groups that prefer this location. (10-15 min)

Write Location and time of next group here: _____

Schedule:

week one: January 14-20 (read the introduction during group)

week two: January 21-27 (read chapter one prior to group — located on church website)

week three: January 28-Feb 3 (read chapter two prior to group)

week four: February 4-10 (read chapter three prior to group)

February 14: the entire group is encouraged to attend an Ash Wednesday Service on Valentines Day at Highlands Church

6) Conclude the group time with a single person from the group offering to pray briefly for God's guidance in the coming weeks. (5 min)

Introduction

One afternoon, while hosting a party at my house in Paso Robles, I placed my hand in a poopbag. This was not an unusual thing for me to do, because picking up the poop from the grassy area in the backyard is my job. And I was fine doing the work mostly because my hand was safe inside of the bag and I was therefore assured that my skin would not come into contact with the toxic material.

There it was! The first of many “land-mines,” as my father-in-law likes to call them. The lawn was strewn with piles of dog crap that I had neglected to clean up for at least a week. So I began the dirty work of picking them up. First one. Then another. I couldn’t imagine that my little, twenty-pound, Cairn Terrier could possibly produce so much fecal matter. I scoured the lawn back and forth, dividing the area into quadrants, as a search and rescue team would do. I was determined that no kids would accidentally step on a dog turd and then track it into the house with them.

As I performed this task, I thought about a friend of mine who vowed that he would never get a dog for his family. And I remembered that one of the many reasons he gave for not getting a pet was that he did not want to spend the rest of his life demeaning himself by picking up pile after pile of poop. He could never envision himself stooping down and cleaning up after his dog one day after another... week after week and year after year. But as I reflected on the countless times I’d performed this ritual cleanup, I was surprised to discover that I wasn’t bitter or resentful in any way. In fact, I smiled and said the words, “This is love.”

Of course, I don’t enjoy picking up poop. But, I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world. Why? Because of love. I just love my dog. And no amount of excrement could ever convince me that it is not completely worth it to have her in my life.

Then—because I’m a incorrigible pastor and everything I think about is now filed away in the back of my brain as a potential sermon illustration—I thought about how this relates to God.

I know what you’re thinking: It’s a stretch. But, for just a second, try and bear with me.

God loves us tremendously. Whenever I’m talking about God’s love to someone, I always like to remind them that God loves them a million-billion times more than anyone else has ever loved them and a trillion-jillion times more than they have ever loved anyone. The point? God loves, loves, loves us.

When we see God through such loving eyes, so many of the words of scripture start to make sense. Love explains why God is so patient and willing to put up with our constant crap. You see, God doesn’t like picking up the stuff we leave behind in the beautiful world he created. But, because God loves us so much, God will continue to do whatever it takes.

Why does it matter? Why is it important for us to learn about God’s love for us? The answer is simple: The more we learn about God, the more we learn about ourselves. It is God who we are created by and it is God who teaches us how we are wired and who we are meant to be.

We are called to emulate and reciprocate God’s love to one another. We are supposed to reflect the kind of love that God extends to us to other people. And, if we do this, we will find and fulfill the mission of our life.

This book is an attempt at clearing up some misconceptions about love. So many people have unintentionally misconstrued love, misidentified, and even misplaced it. We need a serious conversation about love. We need to realign our concepts of love with honest truth. This means that we may need to extricate it from the fictional, erotic, shallow representations that have become customary.

It is my prayer that the pages of this book will stir up a conversation about love and thereby help you to explore and understand more deeply the truth about love and its source.

Finally, I have to admit that I’ve always had a dream to write a bathroom book. In other words, a book kept near the toilet and best read from time to time to lift the readers’ spirits and provide something interesting to talk about at parties. In essence, a bathroom book is something that is just part of life and speaks to the brutal everyday truth of it. I do hope that someday I will be on the toilet somewhere and I will find this book sitting on the ground next to me. That would most certainly be the greatest, most distinguished honor I could ever receive.

Most of all, I hope that ‘this is LOVE’ helps you to start to think about love differently. Perhaps someday you too will find yourself picking up dog poop in your backyard, or doing some other very normal task and also saying the words ‘this is LOVE’ to yourself. That is the point. It is to awaken us to the ever-present experiences of love that permeate our existence. The true answer to prayer would be to find people engaging in a vibrant conversation with each other. These conversations would hopefully draw people into the powerful truth of where love really comes from and how we are called to express it, experience it and engage it.

Get your poop bags ready. We are about to get real.