

A COMMAND TO LOVE

BUILDING DEEPER FAITH

Group Leader's Guide

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INTRODUCTION



SESSION DESIGN

Each session is designed around six segments, each with a specific goal. Knowing that the length of your sessions may vary, there is no set minimum or maximum time designated for each activity; however, it would be wise to devote the majority of your time to the Discover and Observe segments. Here's a snapshot of the six elements of each session.

Connect

The purpose of the Connect segment is to help your group members bond with one another. Group leaders and teachers sometimes try to deliver content before connecting with the participants. That's a mistake. Your group's ability to learn will be enhanced by this segment, setting the stage for the entire session.

To create an openness among your members, try using the kitchen-style class. When you think of a kitchen, you picture people sitting around a table, usually eating, laughing, talking, and interacting. It is an informal setting where people really enjoy themselves. That's the atmosphere you'll want to create for this group—a protected environment of love and acceptance, where the group members can discover faith and learn how to practice it.

Use the connecting time to lead your group in a time of sharing, caring, and praying.

Sharing. This may include an icebreaker that leads to a time when people share a concern, need, or prayer request. (Some icebreaker activities are provided later in this introduction.)

Caring. Caring builds on the sharing time by allowing people to help one another deal with problems or concerns. That may take the form of offering help, encouragement, or support. Caring also takes place outside the meeting time through kind acts that group members do for each other. You'll want to model this caring, and you may need to suggest ideas for how to care for each other as well. The following week, you may want to check on the concerns that were raised. Doing so will hold members accountable for the support they offer and ensure that no one is forgotten.

Praying. Finally, pray together about the needs and concerns of the group. There's more than one way to pray as a group. You might have one person pray for the group, ask a different person to pray for each need, break into groups of two or three where each person can pray for the others,

or pray silently. Vary the prayer methods you use, and be sure to spend at least half of your prayer time on spiritual needs.

Discover

The next segment of your meeting is Discover or Bible study time. A major focus of the Building Deeper Faith series is teaching the Bible.

As the leader, your role in helping students discover the truth is critical. Spend adequate time in personal preparation so that you'll be familiar with the Scripture for that session. Your personal connection to God and his Word will enable you to teach others effectively.

Encourage group members to bring a Bible with them. Every chapter of each Building Deeper Faith book has multiple Bible references. Ask students to look up some of them to read aloud.

Memorize

Biblical illiteracy is at an all-time high, even among church attendees. Help your group members hide God's Word in their hearts by memorizing Scripture.

Each chapter opens with a verse that can be used as a memory verse. There are a number of Scripture memorization techniques you can use with your group. (Several are included later in this introduction.)

Observe

This section is the heart of your teaching time. This is where you will help students understand the key concepts of the study. It's likely there will be more ideas than you can thoroughly explore during your session time. Don't let that frustrate you. Personalize the material to meet your group's needs. You may find that the group members already have a handle on some of the important concepts. That will allow you to spend more time elsewhere. By giving yourself adequate preparation time, you'll be able to personalize and adapt the lesson to meet your group's need. Be sure to draw from your own experiences and insights when leading the group. Be transparent.

Practice

This element is aimed at helping members apply the truths they've learned. It gives the group a chance to think about how to translate the truths into their lives in practical ways. For the most part, they'll actually practice (that is, apply to life) these truths outside the group meeting time.

Each chapter contains questions that call for the readers to think about how to apply what they're learning. You can use these questions to stimulate discussion during your meetings.

You may want to take time each week to see what actions group members took as a result of their learning. The Connect segment of your group meeting is a good place to ask some accountability questions.

Close

This is the element of your session that brings it home, leading the group members to make a resolution or commitment based on their learning. Here is an opportunity to summarize the ideas that you've discovered and ask participants what next step they will take as a result of what they have learned.

Encourage group members to prepare for the next session by reading the next chapter and practicing the simple disciplines that will make it more valuable: Bible study and memorization, daily prayer, and journal writing.

End the session in a way that affirms what you've learned together and the resolutions participants are making. You might choose to close with a prayer, a song, or an affirmation similar to the benedictions that are used at the close of a worship service.

ICEBREAKERS

During the Connect segment of your meetings, you'll want to use a variety of techniques to encourage group interaction. Here are a few options.

Getting to Know You

Ask group members to take turns introducing themselves. You might suggest one or two details for everyone to share, such as what school they attended, what their occupation is, a hobby they enjoy, their favorite food, or who their hero is. You can use this icebreaker more than once with the same group as long as you choose different details each time.

Introductions

Have group members pair up and interview one another. Then have each person introduce his or her partner to the group. Allow two to three minutes for the interviews. You might provide something to write on and direct their thinking with questions like: What's your favorite color? Where did you grow up? Do you have a pet? What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?

My Worst Moment

Ask for volunteers to share their most embarrassing or hilarious experience. Some other "worsts" that make this icebreaker interesting include a Christmas gift, birthday gift, or family reunion. This icebreaker also may be used more than once as long as you use a different topic each time.

Alliteration Descriptions

Ask group members to introduce themselves and say something they like using an adjective that starts with the first letter of their first name. For example, "I'm Rhonda, and I like rock climbing."

The Most Exciting

Ask members to share their most exciting moment. It might be an event, a holiday, their graduation, or an accomplishment.

Guess Who I Am

Distribute note cards and ask each member to record basic information about him- or herself, such as birthplace, school attended, or hobby, but not their names. Shuffle the cards and redistribute them, asking each person to identify the person described on their card.

Find Someone

Make a list of facts to discover about people. Include things like "Favorite color is blue," "Has a pet bird," "Has visited a mission field," or "Was on the homecoming court." Depending on the size of your group, you may want to list up to a dozen or more different things. Have the group circulate to find out who (if anyone) fits the descriptions listed.

Name Tag Pictures

Ask each person to draw a picture of something that represents themselves or something they enjoy. For example, someone who likes to restore old cars may draw a car on his or her name tag. Spend some time letting the group members ask each other what their name tag represents.

Secret Pals

Assign a secret pal for each group member (one of the other members of the group). Each person will do something special for his or her secret pal during the month. At the end of that time, members reveal their secret pal's name. Remember, names should not be revealed until the end of the month so that everyone can have fun guessing the identity of his or her secret pal.

Meal Deal

Everyone seems to relax and enjoy conversation while eating. Find occasions for your group to eat together, even if it's only a snack. You might bring in finger foods or desserts to share during the meeting. You might even have a pitch-in meal as part of your session or go out to eat together.

LEADER'S TOOLBOX

Open a carpenter's toolbox and you will see hammers, saws, chisels, and other tools. Look into a plumber's toolbox, and you will find wrenches, pipe cutters, torches, and other tools of the trade. Each trade requires its own specialized equipment.

Now, open your leader's toolbox. What tools do you have for building people with the Word of God?

Remember the way truth is taught significantly impacts what is learned. Wise teachers accumulate a number of tools to cultivate curiosity, communicate content, evoke emotions, prompt participation, inspire insight, fortify faith, and bolster behavior.

Most who enjoy teaching are always on the lookout for fresh ideas as well as ways to keep the basic methods sharp. Here is a variety of teaching methods that you can add to your tool collection.

Interactive Methods

Question and Answer. Sometimes called the Socratic Method, in this technique the teacher challenges learners by posing questions. There are three basic types of questions:

- Factual questions require the students to answer with specific information.
- Thought questions cause students to identify causes or solutions for certain situations. They are usually introduced with the words *how* or *why*.
- Rhetorical questions do not require an audible answer and are useful for emphasizing a truth or making a fact self-evident.

Forum. A forum is an open discussion or question-and-answer time under a moderator's direction. This is especially useful following a presentation such as a lecture, interview, film, or symposium.

Group Discussion. In a group discussion, everyone works together to identify a truth or solve a problem under a leader's direction. The leader must be prepared to introduce the subject, keep the discussion on track, and summarize the conclusions at the end.

Buzz Groups. Buzz groups are smaller groups that simultaneously discuss the subject, often reporting conclusions to the larger assembly at the end of the meeting.

Dyads and Triads. Dyads are discussion groups of two. Triads are groups of three. Both allow for intimate personal sharing and are useful for involving everyone in a discussion.

Panel Discussion. A panel is a semi-structured discussion in which three or four people are chosen to represent different points of view. A moderator guides the discussion and summarizes conclusions at the end.

Personal Participation Methods

Interview. Interviews are live conversations that allow the class to benefit from expert observations, real-life experiences, or insights from someone with specialized knowledge of a subject.

Silent Reflection. Invite students to think about a passage, a question, or their reactions or observations concerning a clearly stated problem. Prohibit members from speaking for a minute or two so that early reactors don't dominate the thinking of others.

Charts. Charts are useful to compare and contrast characteristics of Bible characters, teachings, or events. They are also helpful to create lists of observations about a text, summarize lesson points, or simplify complex or long passages of Scripture.

Contests and Games. Bring out the child in every adult by creating your group's own version of a parlor game or a television game show that uses Bible characters and terms as clues or answers.

Direct Presentation Methods

Resource Person. A resource person is a guest presenter who is invited to share information or experiences directly related to the topic being studied by your class or group. The presentation becomes the basis for dialogue between group members or the guest and the group.

Object Lesson. Almost any physical prop can be used as a visual or sensory tool to reinforce a lesson point. An object lesson differs from a demonstration in that a demonstration illustrates a process or event, while an object lesson uses a prop as a metaphor to compare or contrast two things.

Debate. Two or more speakers alternately express their points of view (usually one pro and one con) about a proposition or issue. Each side has a chance to rebut the other's statements.

Storytelling. Storytelling is one of the most ancient means of teaching in which an illustration, real-life situation, imaginary scenario, historical incident, or personal experience is recounted verbally. Stories are usually used for illustrative purposes and should shed light on the subject at hand. To be effective, they must be action-oriented and told naturally with enthusiasm, good vocal expression, appropriate gestures, and facial expressions.

Testimony. A testimony is a variation of the storytelling method in which someone provides a firsthand, eyewitness account of a specific experience. It can be impromptu (ask if someone in the class can verify a point made in the lesson from his or her experience) or prepared (ask someone ahead of time to speak on a topic).

Team Teaching. In team teaching, two or more people take turns presenting lesson content. For example, one person may present a mini-lecture, followed by a response or questions by the other; then another mini-lecture, after which the partner may lead a group discussion. Or a team-taught lesson may be presented by teachers who carry on a dialogue with each other about a text, with one or the other of them occasionally engaging the whole class in learning activities that invite their participation in the conversation.

Audiovisual Presentations. Whiteboards, maps, bulletin boards, pictures, charts, audio recordings, and computer graphics are just a few audiovisual aids teachers can use to communicate and illustrate information. Most of these, however, as suggested by the word *aids*, are used to augment another direct presentation technique. More and more resources are now available that use audiovisual

means to present a wide variety of material. Technology can never replace the benefit of direct personal reflection and discussion in your class.

Direct Bible Study Methods

Group Observation. Observation simply means helping a group discover what the Bible says before they determine what it means.

Cross Referencing. This method seeks insight into a passage by looking for other texts that provide additional background information or restate it in another author's words.

Survey Method. A whole paragraph, section, or chapter (rather than a single verse) is taken as the basic unit of study.

Creative and Artistic Methods

Singing. Choose familiar tunes within easy voice range for most class members, or invite a soloist to sing to your group. (An alternative to this method would be playing a specific song or have music playing in background.)

Writing Assignments. Poems, limericks, short stories, testimonies, letters, sentences, paragraphs, journals, or articles are valuable expressions of new ideas, insights, and reflection.

Sculpting. Give group members a lump of play dough or modeling clay and invite them to illustrate something significant from the Bible passage your group is studying. (Or use another medium: paint, markers, charcoal, etc.)

MEMORY VERSE LEARNING

Many adults think they cannot memorize Scripture because their memory is not what it used to be. However, anybody can memorize Bible verses with the aid of some simple techniques. Try these methods with your group members.

Envelope Method

Write each word of a memory verse on a separate piece of paper. Mix up the pieces and put them into an envelope. Give each person or pair of people in your group one envelope. All the envelopes could contain the same verse or different verses. The first person or pair to put the words of the memory verse in the correct order wins.

Card Drill Method

On a piece of cardboard or construction paper, write the first half of a memory verse. Create several different cards, each with the beginning of a different verse. Hold a card for the group, and the first person to finish the memory verse (and give the verse reference) wins. A variation is to put memory verse references on the cards and have group members race to recite the verse correctly.

Push Pin Method

Write each word of a memory verse on an index card or piece of paper. Post the cards in an incorrect order in a place all can see, and then have group members take turns putting the cards in the right order.

Matching Method

Write a complete memory verse and reference on several index cards, and then cut the cards into two pieces so that the reference and half of the verse are on one side and the rest of the verse is on the other. Mix up the cards and have each person draw one piece of a card. When you give the signal, have the people try to find their “match.” You could make this a little more difficult by writing the verses incorrectly and asking group members to correct the mistakes after they match the two halves of the card to win.

Clue Word Method

Think of three to five words to serve as clues for a memory verse. Write each clue word on a separate index card. Number the cards, with the number one indicating the most difficult clue and the highest number indicating the least difficult (or vice versa). Divide the class into two groups. Show one group only the most difficult clue. If no one from that group can recite the verse, show the other group the same clue. If the other group cannot recite the verse on the first clue, go back to the first group and show the second clue. Keep doing this until the memory verse is correctly recited, and give the card to the group that recited the verse. The group with the most cards at the end of the game wins. A variation would be to assign a point value to each clue. For instance, if a group correctly says the verse on the first clue, it receives ten points. The second clue is worth eight points, and so on. The first group to get fifty points wins.

Whiteboard Method

Write the memory verse on a whiteboard. Have the group or each person individually read the verse. Then erase a letter or word. Have the person recite the verse again as though the missing letters or words were still there. Continue to do this until all of the words are gone, having each person or the group continue to say the verse.

Guess-a-Letter Method

Draw a blank line for each letter in a memory verse. Ask one person to guess a letter. If that letter is in the verse, write it in the appropriate blank(s). Allow the person to keep guessing letters until he or she guesses incorrectly. You could modify this game by letting the group guess individual words. When they guess correctly, fill in the entire word wherever it appears in the verse. You might also write the verse reference on the board above the blanks for the verse or make the reference part of the puzzle. The first person to say the entire verse correctly wins. (This method is similar to the game Hangman.)

Round Table Method

Have the group sit in a circle. Write the memory verse on a board where everyone can easily see it. Assign one word of the memory verse to each person in the group, then start at the beginning of the verse and have each person say his or her assigned word in turn to complete the verse. Gradually increase speed so that the group must recite the verse faster and faster. At some point, remove the board so that the group must recite the verse from memory. A variation of this is to have the first person in the circle say the first word of the verse, the second person say the first two words of the verse, and so on until someone repeats the entire verse from memory.

WEEK 1

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR BEING



FOCUS

This session explores the nature of our relationship with God by examining two important Scriptures: the Shepherd Psalm (Ps. 23) and the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus (John 13–17). We'll discover that God wants to meet our needs for companionship and love. Our response to his love is to love him in return and to obey him.

Discovery: God loves you.

PREPARE

- Read week 1 of *A Command to Love*.
- Study Psalm 23 and John 13–17, noting your insights. Recall how these passages may have influenced your own walk with God.
- Review the Observe section of this lesson to identify the concepts that you will lead your group to discover.
- Choose an icebreaker.
- Select a teaching method that will help your group arrive at the discovery for this session.
- Pick a memory verse learning activity.
- Gather the materials you'll need.
- Pray that God will use this study to transform lives.

Hint: Some group members may be more comfortable writing their reactions than speaking aloud, especially at this first meeting.

CONNECT

Greet group members and welcome them to studying *A Command to Love*. Explain that the purpose of these sessions is to help believers grow in their new life in Christ.

People need to warm up to each other before they will share important things in their lives, so use one or more icebreaker to encourage relationship building.

If this group has not met before, explain that sharing each other's concerns, caring for one another, and praying together will be important parts of what they do together. Invite group members to share:

- Praise items—good things God has done in their lives lately.
- Prayer requests—concerns for themselves or for a friend.
- Needs—things in their lives or in the community that the group might be able to help with.

If this group has met before and has already established relationships, continue the sharing, caring, and praying time, using a variety of approaches.

Consider enlisting someone to record prayer requests and praise items for the group each week. This will help you remember to pray consistently for important needs and celebrate answers to prayer.

Lead the group in prayer.

DISCOVER

Review the verses for this session. The key verse is at the opening of the chapter.

Read Psalm 23:1–6 and John 15:9.

Ask group members to respond to these questions:

- What do these verses tell you about the way God cares for you?
- In what ways do these verses bring comfort to those who are sad or discouraged?
- How has God comforted you?

MEMORIZE

Lead your group in memorizing John 15:19. Remind the group that by memorizing Scripture, they can carry part of the Bible anywhere.

OBSERVE

The key points to observe in this session are:

- God provides for us.
- God protects us.
- God guarantees our future.
- The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united in seeking an intimate relationship with believers.
- God is our source, our redeemer, and our companion; thus we are equipped for any situation.

PRACTICE

Encourage group members to practice entering God's presence this week in one of the following ways: Intentionally slow down for five minutes on a stressful day and let God speak to you; listen patiently to the questions your family and friends ask; fast for one meal and spend time listening to God; or meditate on Psalm 23.

CLOSE

Close this session with prayer. As you begin, ask group members to breathe deeply and remember that God is their breath or spirit. Then give group members the opportunity to use their breath to put their concerns and thanksgiving into words. Affirm your willingness for God to shape you into Christ's likeness.

WEEK 2

SHARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WITH CHRIST'S BODY



FOCUS

In this session, your group will learn what spiritual gifts are, where they come from, who receives them, and how they are to be implemented in the body of Christ.

Discovery: You can identify and use personal spiritual gifts for God's glory.

PREPARING

- Read week 2 of *A Command to Love*.
- Study Romans 12:1–8, noting key ideas and words.
- Review the Observe section of this lesson to identify the concepts that you will lead your group to discover.
- Choose an icebreaker.
- Select a teaching method that will help your group arrive at the discovery for this session.
- Pick a memory verse learning activity.
- Gather the materials you'll need. If your church provides a spiritual gifts inventory, you will want to have a copy for each person.
- Pray for group members as they seek to discover what their gifts are and how to use them.

Hint: Many people are visual learners. Consider using a prop or visual aid in this session.

CONNECT

Use an icebreaker to encourage group members to share with one another. Then take a minute to encourage group members to talk about how they are applying the lessons of *A Command to Love* to their lives. Allow time for responses. Review prayer concerns from the last session and invite the group to share new requests for prayer.

Lead the group in prayer.

Hint: The icebreaker can be a great way to introduce the session's subject. Consider using an icebreaker that incorporates this chapter's theme.

DISCOVER

Review the Scriptures for this session. The key verse is at the opening of the chapter.

Read Romans 12:1–8. As you study the Scripture, direct group members' attention to the key words in these verses.

Ask group members to respond to these questions:

- Why does God give each of us at least one spiritual gift?
- Do you think some gifts are more important than others? Why or why not?

MEMORIZE

Lead your group in memorizing Romans 12:6. Remind group members that memorizing God's Word builds their strength to resist temptation and helps them make choices that please God.

OBSERVE

The key points to observe in this session are:

- There is a difference between fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts.
- The definition of spiritual gifts.
- Discovering and using your personal gifts.
- How your personality affects the way you use your gifts.

PRACTICE

Lead your group through a discussion of the following questions: What are your three highest areas of giftedness? How can you use them to serve God and others? What are your strengths and weaknesses? How do you see these affecting your ministry possibilities?

If your church provides a spiritual gifts inventory, give each person a copy. Direct them to complete these tools now or in the week ahead.

CLOSE

Close this session with prayer, asking the Lord to reveal each group member's spiritual gifts and direct them to where they should serve.

WEEK 3

SERVE ONE ANOTHER SACRIFICIALLY



FOCUS

Through this session, your group will gain a correct understanding of what it means to be a leader. Servant-leadership involves self-discipline, submission to spiritual authority, and cooperating with others in body of Christ. Servant-leadership can be sustained only through accountability to God and others.

Discovery: Leaders must be self-disciplined and under God's authority before they can lead others.

PREPARE

- Read week 3 of *A Command to Love*.
- Study Matthew 20:25–28, noting your insights.
- Review the Observe section of this lesson to identify the concepts that you will lead your group to discover.
- Choose an icebreaker.
- Select a teaching method that will help your group arrive at the discovery for this session.
- Pick a memory verse learning activity.
- Gather the materials you'll need.
- Pray for each member of your group by name.

Hint: Current events make great attention getters. You may wish to gather recent news stories that deal with personal or public finances as a starter for this session.

CONNECT

Use an icebreaker to encourage group members to share with one another. Review prayer concerns from the last session and invite the group to share new requests for prayer.

Lead the group in prayer.

Hint: People who are unwilling to pray in a large group may be willing to pray in a small group of two or three.

DISCOVER

Review the Scriptures for this session. The key verse is at the opening of the chapter. Before you begin, ask, “Who is the greatest leader in history? What made his or her leadership great?”

Read Matthew 20:25–28.

Ask group members to respond to these questions:

- What do these verses tell you about the way a leader should lead?
- In what ways do these verses confirm or conflict with society’s view of leadership?
- In what ways do you see yourself as a leader?

Especially emphasize that believers lead by influence. They are influencing someone, whether they realize it or not.

MEMORIZE

Lead your group in memorizing Matthew 20:26. Remind the group that before printed Bibles were common, all Christians relied on Scripture memorization to learn God’s Word. Ask how much Scripture group members would be able to rely on if persecution deprived them of their Bibles.

OBSERVE

The key points to observe in this session are:

- Servant-leadership involves self-leadership (leading inwardly), “followership” (leading under authority), and partnership (leading laterally).
- Effective leadership avoids the extremes of using and pleasing others.
- Leaders are accountable in two directions: vertical to God and horizontal to others.

PRACTICE

Challenge group members to enter an accountability relationship. Ask them to think of a person whom they might ask to become their accountability partner, and encourage them to contact that person this week.

CLOSE

Close this session by praying that each group member will finish well in the Christian faith and recognize opportunities to be a servant-leader.

WEEK 4

EXTEND GOD'S LOVE TO A BROKEN WORLD



FOCUS

This session will challenge believers to move beyond their fear or prejudice and offer compassionate help to hurting people in their communities. We'll identify some of the reasons we resist showing compassion to others and come to see why it is so important to offer help.

Discovery: Compassion is love in action.

PREPARE

- Read week 4 of *A Command to Love*.
- Study Matthew 25:31–40, noting your insights.
- Review the Observe section of this lesson to identify the concepts that you will lead your group to discover.
- Choose an icebreaker.
- Select a teaching method that will help your group arrive at the discovery for this session.
- Research some ways your group might meet needs. They might provide care packages for a children's home or prison inmates, collect canned goods for a local food pantry, do clean-up and light repair work in the home of a single parent or a widow, or put on a clothing drive for a local social service agency.
- Pick a memory verse learning activity.
- Gather the materials you'll need.
- Pray for your group members as they continue to grow in the faith.

Hint: Some group members enjoy doing small research assignments. Consider enlisting a group member to survey people on the question “Does what you believe about God affect how you treat people?” and share his or her findings as an introduction to this session.

CONNECT

Use an icebreaker to encourage group members to share with one another. Review prayer concerns from the last session and invite the group to share new requests for prayer.

Lead the group in prayer.

DISCOVER

Review the Scriptures for this session. The key verse is at the opening of the chapter. Consider inviting three group members to perform a dramatic reading of the Matthew passage. The parts could be the narrator, the king, and the sheep.

Read Matthew 25:31–40 and 1 John 3:17–18.

Ask group members to respond to these questions:

- According to these verses, what will bring God’s commendation?
- In what ways should we do the things that these verses suggest: feed the hungry, clothe the needy, and visit the sick and imprisoned?
- Who are we really serving when we serve the needy?
- What should be our motive in serving those in need?

MEMORIZE

Lead your group in memorizing 1 John 3:17–18. Remind the group to continue the habit of Scripture memorization even after this study has concluded.

OBSERVE

The key points to observe in this session are:

- Compassion is love in action.
- Caring for others is one way of being salt and light in the world.
- Compassionate action should be undertaken intelligently.
- We must overcome fear to reach out to others.

PRACTICE

Present one or two ideas for compassionate action that the group might be able to undertake. Challenge the group to form a plan and then take action.

CLOSING

Close the session by praying that God will lay a burden on each person’s heart to live as salt and light. Before you dismiss, encourage group members to pray for one another during the week.

WEEK 5

REMEMBER GOD'S LOVE THROUGH HISTORY



FOCUS

In this session, your group will come to understand that God is always at work through his church and that we can serve him more effectively if we know his whole story and our place in it.

Discovery: The church will always be God's chosen instrument for reaching the world.

PREPARE

- Read week 5 of *A Command to Love*.
- Study Matthew 16:13–19, noting your insights.
- Review the Observe section of this lesson to identify the concepts that you will lead your group to discover.
- Choose an icebreaker.
- Select a teaching method that will help your group arrive at the discovery for this session.
- Pick a memory verse learning activity.
- Gather the materials you'll need.
- Pray, asking the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom for communicating his truth.

Hint: Personal testimony is an incredibly powerful teaching tool. Consider asking group members to share the story of how they came to be part of Christ's church.

CONNECT

Use an icebreaker to encourage group members to share with one another. Then take a minute to invite group members to talk about how they are applying the lessons of *A Command to Love* to their lives. Allow time for responses. Review prayer concerns from the last session and invite the group to share new requests for prayer.

Lead the group in prayer.

Hint: Encourage group members to connect with one another during the coming weeks. Relationship building can and should take place outside the group meetings.

DISCOVER

Review the Scriptures for this session. The key verse is at the opening of the chapter. Before you begin, observe that genealogy is an increasingly popular hobby. Ask, “Why are people so interested in knowing where they came from?”

Read Matthew 16:13–19.

Ask group members to respond to these questions:

- What does this passage tell you about the church?
- On what does Jesus say he is building the church?

If someone in your group has a Catholic background, he or she may suggest that Christ’s words in Matthew mean that the church is built on Peter, whom Catholics call the first pope. Show the context of these verses by pointing out that the church is built on Peter’s confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.

MEMORIZE

Lead your group in memorizing Matthew 16:18. Consider offering a gift (perhaps a Bible) to anyone who can recited all key verses from *A Command to Love*.

OBSERVE

The key points to observe in this session are:

- The four major eras of Christian history are formation, deformation, reformation, and transformation.
- Three major divisions of Christianity worldwide are Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant.
- The church is the worldwide fellowship of all believers and is much larger than any local church.
- Evangelical Christians are committed to faithfully proclaiming the message of the Bible.
- The church needs to be revived continually.

PRACTICE

Ask the group, “What is the greatest need facing our church? What can you do to help meet it?” Encourage group members to take the next steps to make a difference in your local church.

CLOSE

Close this session—this study—with a prayer addressed to the Father, in the name of Jesus, and seeking the instruction and comfort of the Holy Spirit.