

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. We offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement on an answer. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Luke 6:32-36 *Spend time in quiet reflection on this passage. Select three readers to read the text out loud slowly, with a minute or two of silence between each reading. It would be best if the readers used different translations, but this isn't necessary. This is a great way to invite your group to "live in the text."*

After the third reading followed by a period of silence, use the following questions as a guide for discussion.

1. What do you think is Jesus' key instruction in this passage?

As we read, what were some phrases that stuck with you?

2. What are some common ways, both good and bad, that Christians in our society distinguish themselves from non-Christians?

How could you spot a Christian in public?

3. Why isn't it enough for Jesus to say, "love everybody" and leave it at that? Why does he tell us to love our enemies?

4. In this text, what does Jesus tell us to *do* besides love our enemies?

How did Jesus serve as an example of this?

Can you think of a Gospel story or parable that puts this teaching into action?

Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10; Banquet in Luke 14

5. How essential to being a Christian is loving our enemies? Why?

What is at stake if Christians do not love their enemies? What is the problem?

6. Have you seen any recent examples of people loving their enemies?

What did it look like?

What risks did they take?

What was the result?

7. Who might be enemies of our church?

In practical terms, what would it mean to love them?

III. Cultivating Love *Practical suggestions and reflections to help participants connect the discussion to their daily lives. Challenge each person to try at least one of these each week.*

When two strangers meet each other, the question is often asked, "So, what do you do for a living?" Our market-driven culture encourages us to size each other up with questions like that. Can you think of a better question to ask strangers upon meeting them?

Reflect on your relationship with God and with others in your church. Are you approaching these relationships primarily for what *you* can get out of them? Make a side-by-side list of ways in which you are giving in your relationships, and ways in which you are receiving. Does the scale tip in any one direction? What does this say about where you are with the fruit of love?

With the aid of a concordance, look up how many times the phrase "one another" occurs in Paul's letters. What do these verses reveal about the nature of the early church? How does it compare with your experience of church? What can your group do to apply these verses in concrete ways? (a handy online concordance is at <http://bible.crosswalk.com/>)

IV. Other resources

The point – Jesus said that if we love one another, then the world would know we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). The greatest strategy for the church to reach the world for Christ is simple: Love each other. If we do that, then our non-Christian friends and neighbors will be able to see God's love living in us.

Prayer *Creative suggestions for group prayer*

Consider praying the following prayer out loud and in repetition:

*Our Father in Heaven, help us to love as Christ **taught** us
 help us to love as Christ **showed** us
 help us to love as Christ **empowers** us
 help us to love as Christ **loves** us
 In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Meditative Reading

The week's method of approaching scripture is in the tradition known as *lectio divina*, which is Latin for "divine reading." It has been practiced for centuries by those who, rather than seeking to master a text of Scripture, have sought to let a text take mastery over them. For more information, you might consult chapter 5 of Richard Foster's *A Celebration of Discipline*, or do a web-search.

Kid-friendly activity

An activity designed to help kids and adults connect the scripture to their lives. Works best when adults participate in the activity with the kids.

Offer a prayer of praise for the good things God is doing. Ask the group members to suggest a song about God's love.

Ask each group member to share a "bully" experience. How did it make them feel when they were mistreated by bully?

Read Luke 6:32-36 aloud.

- How does God want us to treat people at school or in our neighborhood who are not nice to us?
- Why do bullies act the way they do? How would loving them change that?

About this series

These lessons are designed to help groups explore the fruit of the Spirit as presented in Kenneson's *Life on the Vine*. They are part of a project sponsored by SaltandLightResources.com involving sermons and group discussions on this material. It would be ideal to connect small group discussion and sermon series, but these lessons are written so that they will be beneficial by themselves.

Life on the vine: Love

Small group guide based on

Life on the Vine, by Philip Kenneson (IVP, 1999. ISBN 0830822194)

www.saltandlightresources.com

By John Grant, Jon Camp, Trey Finley, and Ben Siburt

Theme: Is our group growing in love toward God and one another? How can this fruit be cultivated in our lives?

When Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-25, he mentions love first. Love is central to the Christian life. In his book, *Life on the Vine*, Kenneson asks the important question: "How do we cultivate a life marked by God's love—a love that is always directed toward the needs of others—in a culture so thoroughly saturated with self-concern?" This lesson will begin to answer that question.

This discussion guide will invite participants to consider how the fruit of love functions in their lives.

Leadership tip: These guides are written for leaders to use in facilitating discussion. We do not recommend copying them for every group member because that might distract attention away from the question under discussion. The exception would be to let your apprentice leader follow along and observe how you tailor the questions to fit the group's needs.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ In three minutes, how many songs can the group name that have the word "love" in the title? Have someone keep a list.
- ❖ How would you say our culture defines love?
- ❖ Describe the kind of person who you think is easy to love. What percentage of people do you think fit this description?