

Weekly Study Guide

The week of February 14, 2016

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SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

Option 1:

Christian growth takes practice. Nobody runs a marathon with their first step out the door. Use these weekly "soul training exercises" to help you practice cooperating with the Holy Spirit so that you can hear and walk by the Spirit's leading all throughout your life.

This week's exercise goes by the ancient name *lectio divina*, and it involves reading the same passage several times over and paying special attention to the words and images. First, read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 at least three times (slowly and pausing in between to note anything that stands out to you.) Ask God what He wants to say to you through this passage. Second, reread 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, but substitute the word "God" in place of the word "love;" "God is patient, God is kind..."

Option 1 & 2:

Regular habits of private Bible reading strengthen our relationship with God and teach us how to follow Jesus. In addition to the thematic exercise above, you can use this guide each week to lead you through relevant sections of the Bible.

Daily Readings

MONDAY

Mark 8:22-26

TUESDAY

Mark 8:27-33

WEDNESDAY

Mark 8:34-9:1

THURSDAY

Mark 9:2-13

FRIDAY

Mark 9:14-29

SATURDAY

Mark 9:30-37

Group Discussion

CONNECT

Dr. Gary Chapman wrote a book about the five love languages - acts of service, gifts, words of affirmation, physical touch, and quality time - which are you the best at giving? receiving?

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

We are learning that God's love is extravagant and unprovoked. Earned love is a lie, and God's love for us never depends on our performance.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Jesus told one of his most famous stories to explain one of his most infamous habits: eating with "tax collectors and sinners." This story is often called "The Parable of the Prodigal Son," but you will be asked to consider whether that's the best title. Read this story in Luke 15:11-32 and consider especially the love of the father in Jesus' story.

- Do you think the younger son understood his father's love for him at the beginning of the story? What keeps people from failing to grasp love when it is there for them?
- Read Luke 15:1-2 to see the occasion for this story. Jesus was practicing his love for people by sharing in relationship with them. What would make this so hard for other religious leaders to understand?
- Nobody in this whole scene acts in such a way that they can say they "deserve" love. Why do you think we get so attached to what we deserve or what we have earned?
- Jesus tells this story to give people a new imagination of the character of God's love. If you were going to give this story a new title, based on the love of the Father instead of the behavior of the son, what would you call it?
- This story ends with the spotlight on the older brother. We are left to wonder if he will come inside and join the feast or not. Do you think the older brother understood the father's love for him? Why or why not? What difference does that make?

The Bible's most well known verse is a verse about God's love, but this passage says more than most people realize. Read the story in John 3:1-21.

- The highlight verse in John 3:16 begins "For God so loved the world..." but "so" here means "in this way" and not merely "so much." Where or how does Jesus say we see a picture of God's love?
- We learned in the message today that Jesus' death is not only the picture of God's love but also the picture of true humanity (John 19:5, "Behold the human."). This is a contrast with Nicodemus' diminished humanity (John 2:24-3:1). What do you think of the idea that we are rehumanized by love, that we are more human the more we know and show the love of God?

John's witness to the love of God was described in his Gospel story of Jesus' life, but then it was also communicated in the later letters of John (which may have been written by later students of John under his name.)

- Read 1 John 3:16-18. How is this similar to the picture of love we saw in the previous section on John 3? What does this passage add to the picture?
- Read 1 John 4:10-12. Where does love start?
- According to John's witness, how will people learn to see God?

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

As a group, recall last week's soul training exercise (reflecting on God's generosity in Psalm 23). Did you learn or experience anything you'd like to share with your group? Now, look at the soul training exercises on the front of this study guide and get ready to practice them this week. Is there a particular time of day or some other specific commitment that would help you succeed in doing these exercises?

PRAY

Share your prayer concerns with one another. Also, in your prayers today, reflect on God's love for us in Jesus. Ask God to help you receive his unconditional love and pray for God's love to be shown in our communities.