

BIG TRUTH: GOD IS LOVE

Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 36:7; 1 John 4:10; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4-5

BIBLE VERSE: 1 JOHN 4:16B

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in Him."

BIG IDEAS

- God's love is not dependent upon our obedience.
- God's love is put on display through Jesus' sacrificial death in our place.
- God's love changes our hearts.

BIBLE PASSAGE: LUKE 15:11-32**FOUNDATION: GOD IS**

"God is" means that there is only one god in the universe. He alone is Lord over everything that exists, and He alone is worthy of our worship. This also means that every good thing that exists comes from God. All good things come from Him because goodness is a part of who He is as the one true God. It is a part of His nature and character to be good, and everything that comes from God is good. Thankfully God has not chosen to withhold His goodness from His creation, but instead gives it freely to us.

SERIES AIMS**Every student should know that...**

- There is only one true God, and He is good.
- We can know God because He has made Himself known through creation and Word.
- God alone is our source of life and joy.

**Every student should feel...**

- Loved by God, and thankful for His love for us.
- Broken over the depth of our sin against God.
- Joy in Jesus, the only Son of God who came to save us.

**Every student should strive to...**

- Memorize the Bible verse each week about who God is.
- Pray that God would open their hearts and minds to know Him more.
- Tell someone else about the God who is.

**Every student should ask God to...**

- Learn more about the God who has made Himself known.
- Repent of their sin and of the lies they believe about God.
- Cling to God as the source of truth.

GUIDES AND WORKOUTS

The Guide provides a commentary page on each week's Bible verse and on each Big Idea that unpacks the Big Truth. Each week also includes a Student Workout as a resource to help the student pursue spiritual disciplines on their own. Additionally, each week has a Family Workout that helps equip parents and guardians to have spiritual conversations with their student.



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BIBLE VERSE: 1 JOHN 4:16B

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in Him."

God is love.

God is love...

- Love isn't outside of God. It comes from Him.
- Love is found in God and the way He interacts with the world.
- All the decisions He makes and the way He acts in the world are an example of real love.
- God love for us comes from His very nature. He knows what is best for us and He works in our lives to bring about the best for us according to His will.
- His love is shown in different forms and ways that might not make sense to us, but He is always loving.

We know what love is because God shows us love.

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God..."

- Love originates with God because He is the beginning of all things. He is before anything else because He is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He is the first to show love and He is the reason we know what love is.
- God shows His love to us in creating us, providing all that we need, and making a way for us to be forgiven for our sin. We can love others and understand what love is because God first showed us love.

God's love is perfect.

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in Him."

- God is perfect in every way. His love is perfect.
- All that God does is right and perfect. His love is not conditional, nor does it change or end.
- He does not manipulate or use His love as a way to cause us to act in a certain way.
- His love for us is not dependent upon our loving Him.

BIG IDEA #1: GOD'S LOVE IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON OUR OBEDIENCE.¹**[THIS]**

God is holy. This means He is without blemish or spot. There is nothing unclean about Him. He has no wrong motives or acts in any unholy way. He is pure. Everything about Him is perfect. He loves perfectly. His love is unconditional, loving people regardless of what they do or don't do. He loves all people as John 3:16 tells us. He sent His Son to the world because He loved the world. God shows His love for all people through the common graces He gives to the world. Everyone has air to breathe and a planet that provides for their daily needs. We all enjoy the warmth and provision of the sun. These examples of God's love are not dependent upon our actions. He freely shows His love in this way to all of the world. It is an example to us of what true love looks like. In Luke 15:11-32, we get a glimpse of God's unconditional love by the way the father loves both of his sons. One son remains faithful to the father, while the younger one rejects him and leaves home to pursue his own desires. The father's love remains regardless of the actions of his sons.

[THEREFORE]

Since God is love, how does knowing God help you understand what love is?

All people can have an idea of what love is because God has shown the world His love through common grace, but we cannot truly understand love and share love without knowing God personally. 1 John 4:7, 8, and 16 teach us that without a personal relationship with God, our love will fall short. Because God is love and it comes from Him, knowing the source of love is the only way to truly understand it.

[THIS]

In Luke 15:11-32, the father's love did not change when his younger son left home. Even when his younger son remained away, wasting the inheritance that the father had given him, the father's love did not change. God's love does not change based upon our actions. He does not withhold His love from us even if we are disobedient. He shows love to all people regardless of their heart condition. God's love isn't dependent upon our obedience because He loves us by choice. He doesn't need to show His love; He chooses to do so. Just as the father in the story of the prodigal son didn't have to continue loving his son, he did so because he chose to do so. God chooses to lavish His perfect love upon us by His choice and not by anything we do. We cannot earn His love or manipulate Him into loving us. His love for us is solely dependent upon His choice to love us and He always chooses to love.

[THEREFORE]

What are some of the false ideas you've had about God's love for people?

Because our love is not perfect and often it is conditional, we can mistakenly think God loves like we do. We can think His love is dependent upon our actions and if we obey His Word, but it is not. 1 John 4:18, Jeremiah 31:3, and Luke 6:27 all teach us that God's love does not produce fear, is steadfast, and loves those who oppose Him. God loves all people with an unchanging and steadfast love.

Why is it important to recognize that God loves unconditionally?

It is important for us to understand that God loves without condition. This means that there is nothing we can do to earn His love. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that God's salvation to us is a gift and not because of our works. When we understand that God's love isn't conditional, we can understand what it means to be saved and reconciled to God.

1. Psalm 52:8: God's love is steadfast and not dependent upon anything we do or don't do.

BIG IDEA #2: GOD'S LOVE IS PUT ON DISPLAY THROUGH JESUS' SACRIFICIAL DEATH.²**[THIS]**

No one deserves God's love. We are all sinful and we all go astray, rejecting God and His love for us. Instead, we follow our sin nature that leads us away from God and deeper into the broken and fallen world. In Luke 15:11-32, the younger son rejected his father's provision and care. He chose to leave his father's house and pursue his own desires. The older son also rejected the father's love. He was serving his father out of selfishness and to gain for himself, not out of unconditional love. We are all like both sons in our sinfulness. We pursue our own desires, thinking we know better than the God of the universe. We try to earn our salvation.

[THEREFORE]**How are you like the younger son in Luke 15:11-32?**

We are all sinful and we all rebel against God and His commands. Just like the younger son strayed away from his father, we stray from God. Isaiah 53:6 and 1 Peter 2:25 teach us that we all wander far from God. It is His great love that draws us to Himself.

How are you like the older son in Luke 15:11-32?

We are self-righteous. We often try to earn our salvation or God's favor. We make place to high a value upon our works and not rest in the salvation that is from God through Jesus, and we ignore that the gift of salvation is a relationship with God Himself.

[THIS]

God's perfect love is sacrificial. He willingly sent His only Son, Jesus to die in our place. He lowered Himself to be like us that He might save us. Jesus' death on the cross is God's love on display. He died for us when we did not deserve it. God didn't ask us to earn it or to make ourselves better in order to receive it. He loved us in spite of our sinfulness and rejection of Him. Just like the father received his younger son back with no conditions, God sacrificed for us without us having to do anything. Our sin was not too great that God could not save us. His love is perfect and greater than anything else.

[THEREFORE]**How does Jesus' death display God's love?**

We are all wretched, wicked people, yet God loves us. Romans 5:8 and John 3:16 both teach us that God loves us and that Jesus' death on the cross is God's love in action. God doesn't just say He loves us. He showed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us. This sacrifice is God's unconditional, steadfast love on display for the whole world to see.

What are some ways that our culture distorts what it means to "love others"?

1 Peter 4:8 teaches us that as believers, we are to love others deeply. The world distorts the idea of love, makes it about serving ourselves, and makes the way we love subjective. Scripture teaches that our love is sacrificial and that love is defined by God.

What are some of the obstacles you face to loving others like God loves?

Often, we love selfishly and conditionally. We love when others love us. Our pride can keep us from loving those who hurt us. 1 Peter 4:8 and Matthew 5:44 both teach us to love unconditionally and to forgive the offenses of others. In order to love like Jesus, we must forgive like God forgives. We must choose to love no matter what because that is what God has done for us.

2. John 15:13: God showed His great love by sacrificing His only Son for us.

BIG IDEA #3: GOD'S LOVE CHANGES OUR HEARTS.³**[THIS]**

Because of our sin, we cannot change our hearts. We can never be good enough. Even our good works are tainted by our sinful hearts. Our minds are set against God and we rebel against Him. In our sinful state, we are hopeless. When God draws us to Himself, opens our eyes to our condition, and leads us to salvation, He does so out of His love for us. God saves us for Himself, not because He needs us, but because He wants us. He has no need, nor does He lack anything. His offer of forgiveness to us is because He chooses to save us because He chooses to love us. The father in Luke 15:11-32 chose to forgive the younger son. He chose to love him and welcome him back into the fold, but he didn't have to. God chooses to draw us to Himself that we might be changed from sinners into saints. This allows us to be reconciled to Him forever.

[THEREFORE]

What are some ways that you have tried to change yourself? How has this not worked out like you planned?

We often try to practice a moral code that we write ourselves or that the world writes. We try to live a life that is mostly good and we mistakenly think if we are nice to people, then we'll achieve salvation. Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:10 tell us that nothing we do is good enough to save us. We may try to discipline ourselves or put off bad habits, but we cannot truly change ourselves. Only Jesus can transform our hearts.

[THIS]

When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, our hearts are changed. We are released from our sinfulness and set free to live for God. We are reconciled to Him and can enjoy a right relationship with Him forever. We become His children as He welcomes us into His family. When the younger son returned home seeking his father's forgiveness, he was welcomed home without question. The father rejoiced that his wayward son had returned to him. God rejoices when we are reconciled to Him because His love desires us to be His. God's love transforms us. It makes us new creations. Our minds and hearts are made new. We desire to know God and to obey Him. We can put off sinful attitudes and actions. We pursue holiness because God the Father commands us to. We love like God loves because we have been transformed.

[THEREFORE]

How has your heart been transformed by God's love?

When we fully experience God's love, our lives will be transformed. We will put off the works of the flesh, such as lying, hatred, bitterness, and unforgiveness. We will put on the fruit of the Spirit and follow after God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Galatians 2:20, and Colossians 3:9-10 teach us how our hearts are transformed after experiencing God's love.

What are some obstacles to believing in the transformative power of God's love that people face?

Often when we love the world and reject God, we face an obstacle to being transformed by God's love. 1 John 2:15-17 shows us that a love of the world leads us away from God. John 3:18-19 also speaks of people loving the darkness and choosing not to believe in Jesus. We often think we are too bad or we do not want to give up the things of the world that we love. We trade God's eternal love for temporal things.

3. 1 Corinthians 6:11: God's love cleanses us and makes us new creations.