

Love This

Small group curriculum based on, “Love This: Learning to make it a way of life, not just a word,” by Andy Brander.

[Get the book on Amazon](#)

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Chapter 1

The World's Motive

Hook

Discussion:

- What is love?
- What's the difference between loving people and loving a car?
- How many different kinds of love are there?

Book

Read Luke 10:29-37

Look

In the NT, Samaritans were a combination of Assyrian and Jewish races. They were less favored than women and dogs. Their rule: Jews never mingled with Samaritans EVER.

How this story applies to us today:

The modern day traveler

The ditch is a real place where many people lie, longing for someone to notice and help them. In teenage years, the ditch may take the form of

- Depression
- Identity crisis
- Traumatic relationship with mother or father
- What else?

In adult years, the ditch may take the form of

- Homelessness
- Prostitution
- Addiction
- What else?

The modern day priest – People who walk right by the injured travelers

If they encounter someone who looks different, smells different or talks different, their first instinct is to quickly walk to the other side of the road.

It's human nature to judge. We all do it. We leave people stranded in the ditch. [Leader, share a personal story of when you've been guilty of this and why you were wrong.]

The Christian life isn't about singing hymns and going to church. It's about climbing down into ditches in order to pull people out. Sometimes it's messy work.

The modern day Levite

Some Christians walk the road of life ready for a fight. When they hear a word like homosexual they prepare themselves for a spiritual battle.

Read 1 Peter 3:15. "...but do this with gentleness and respect." We forget this part sometimes.

Like the busy Levite, we're often too busy for the world's hurting people.

Took

Helping people isn't always easy. Sometimes you have to face hard decisions, risk your own reputation, lose friends, but it's time for Christians to stop walking past people who are suffering.

What if you looked at the world through new eyes? What if you had the opportunity to visit people lying in the ditch? Would you take any action or would you walk by?

There's a lot of people lying in ditches. They're crying out or suffering silently.

Discuss:

- Have you guys ever been the one in the ditch? If so, when?
- Who helped you?
- When have you helped someone else who was in the ditch?
- Do you know of anyone you can help right now? Who comes to mind?

Chapter 2

God's Motive – Love

Hook

Discuss: (questions based on "[The Youth Workers Big Book of Case Studies](#)," by Steven Case, page 109)

- Have you ever experienced racism? Tell us about it.
- When have you had a racist attitude or done something racist?
- How prevalent is racism in your school? Bullying?
- What do you think feeds racism and causes people to hate just based on differences?

Book

Read John 4:1-26

Look

Racism

Notice that Jesus went through Samaria, something Jews never did. (Review the Jewish/Samaritan relationship from the last lesson.) When he took time to sit with an "impure" lineage he brought attention to the absurdity of racism. He didn't see skin color or nationality or even personal differences. He just saw someone who needed love.

Gender lines

In the NT, women were considered servants. So when Jesus sits and actually initiates a conversation with a Samaritan woman, his attitude was revolutionary.

Forgiveness

Jesus knew about her adultery and mistakes even before he talked with her, but that didn't stop him from reaching out. Jesus didn't judge or criticize her, just accepted her and challenged her with the truth.

Jesus motive was love.

If we're serious about following Jesus' example, we need to learn how to show love to others in a meaningful way.

Story time

Leader, share a personal story or two of when you've helped an "outcast" that was in need. Or maybe a time when you know you should've helped someone but didn't.

Do any students have stories to share, too?

Took

At football games people identify themselves with a team by wearing hats, jerseys, waving flags or holding signs. Along those same lines, there are banners that brand

Christians as “fans” or followers of Christ. Certain truths need to be evident in our lives for everyone to see.

Banner #1: God’s love is lavish

Read 1 John 3:1

Your very existence is due to God’s lavish love! He created you for a relationship, for you experience His love and for you to respond to him by loving him back. But God didn’t do that only for you – he did that also for the kid sitting alone in the cafeteria, for the guy who’s addicted to drugs, for the girl you frown upon for being a “slut.”

If we want to imitate Christ, we have to look at his character and motive and do likewise. He loves us for who we are and longs for us to know him personally. We need to love others for who they are and long to introduce them to Christ.

Banner #2: God’s love culminated in Jesus’ life

Read John 15:9-13

Jesus showed genuine love and compassion to all people by healing, casting out demons, and building relationships with unbelievers. He did this for sinners. He didn’t require that they become holy first before they could receive his help.

He also showed love to those inside his close circle of friends and modeled what it takes to see beyond yourself and into the needs and hearts of others.

Jesus said,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

If these are the two most important instructions Jesus has for us, we need to evaluate every decision, every action and every thought in light of them.

If I am to love my neighbor as myself, then we need to determine who our neighbor is.

Ask: “According to the Parable of the Good Samaritan in our last lesson, who is our neighbor?” (The Samaritan is our neighbor, i.e. everyone, even the people we don’t like.)

Banner #3: God love neighbors

Review the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand from Matthew 14:13-21.

Jesus probably rolled his eyes at the disciples' lack of vision and faith before he instructed them to bring him the bread and fish. Jesus quickly multiplies the food until everyone in the crowd had their fill and even had leftovers!

Jesus wasn't concerned about the finances of his ministry. He didn't collect expenses from people for his services or perform with strings attached. He loved his neighbors and just wanted to serve them.

It's not your job to discriminate who will receive God's love through you and who won't. Sometimes God puts people in your life who are hard to love, but you still have to love them. Jesus didn't randomly decide who would receive his grace and who wouldn't. Your job is to love everyone.

Discuss:

- Why is it so hard to love people who are labeled as "different?"
- Who is YOUR neighbor?
- How can you love that person this week?
- How can you introduce them to the love of Jesus who will be their key to the gates of heaven?

Write down each student's plan to love their neighbor this week and tell them that you'll follow-up with it next week to hear what happened.

Chapter 3

Loving The Homeless

Story Time

Follow-up from last week's lesson. Have students tell their plan to reach out and love their neighbor from last week and share what happened. Debrief about anything they can learn from each story.

Hook

Discuss:

- What's the first thing that comes to mind when you see someone on a street corner holding a sign, "Will work for food?" What assumptions and judgments do you make?
- Have you ever given a homeless person money? Food? Clothes? Anything at all?
- Discuss this statement (from "[To what extent should I help the homeless](#)" blog post by Tim Schmoyer):

These homeless people may take my money and go spend it on drugs and alcohol, but that's not an excuse I can use to justify whether or not I should be generous. God commands us to give and help those in need. What they decide to do with my generosity is between them and God, not me. I'm responsible to God, not to what I think they'll do with the money.

Book

Read Luke 19:1-10.

Look

- Zacchaeus was a crooked chief tax collector. The tax collectors in their time charged many times above the actual amount required by the government and pocketed the change for themselves. Zacchaeus, their boss, then did the same to the tax collectors, collecting much more from them than what was required, thereby driving up tax prices even more for commoners, forcing many into poverty. So, Zacchaeus was a man despised by society. Everyone hated him.
- Imagine being Zacchaeus. There's crowds around Jesus and all you want is to get a good view of what's going on. You've heard that Jesus offers hope to people, but you know your chances of catching his attention are slim to none. Such is the fate of a short outcast of society. So you climb the tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus and then he singles you out and calls you by name. He tells you he wants to spend time with you and even invites himself over to your house for the day. Imagine your excitement! The crowd is quick to complain about Jesus' choice and wonder why Jesus would consent to being the guest of a sinner, but Jesus doesn't let their short-sightedness stop him.

- Jesus knew what Zacchaeus needed and gave it to him even though everyone else criticized it.

Story Time

- When have you gone out of your way to reach out to someone that needed it despite the criticism you might receive? Tell us about it. [Leader, share a personal story here.]
- When have you passed up an opportunity to reach out to someone when you know you should've helped them? [Leader, share another personal story here.]
- Tell us about a time when you've helped a homeless person.
- Why do you think churches aren't filled with homeless people? Is it because members object to the smell of the homeless? Does it have to do with their clothes or hair or scraggly beards? Have we convinced ourselves that church is a place for people who dress right and act right?

Read Matthew 23:27-28

- Jesus saw the Pharisees parading around in their religious attire, saying the right words and acting the right way. But he knew they were dead inside. They didn't care about people. They cared only about their position in society and their position in heaven.

Took

If you really want to develop the proper mindset for ministering to the homeless, take a minute to think about what God did for us.

- He left his exalted position in heaven to come to our place of dwelling.
- He left the angels who offered him nonstop praise and adoration
- He set aside his power and glory to die on a cross for us.
- That's how much he loves us.

I wonder...

- If we smell funny to him
- If our clothes look shabby compared to heavenly attire
- How much of an inconvenience it was for the King of the universe to be born in a lowly cattle trough.

Of course, none of that mattered to Jesus. All that mattered to him is that we needed help and we had nowhere else to turn. That's what brought him to a place where the people were considerably less appealing than the ones he was used to and where the surroundings were much less pleasant. He reached out to us so that we could know him and enjoy the life he offers.

Shouldn't we do the same for our friends living on the street? Here's how we can accomplish the task:

1. Find the homeless in our community.

The only way you can help the homeless is to first find them. Call shelters, Salvation Army, Red Cross, etc, and ask how you can help.

2. Figure out the need and meet it.

Some people need food, others need water. Some people need shelter, others clothes. Some need money, others just need a friend. Zacchaeus needed a friend and Jesus met his need. He went to Zacchaeus' house and, by being a friend, helped him see his need for forgiveness. You can do the same.

3. Feed people the Spirit.

Jesus met people's physical needs and then followed up with spiritual wisdom. People don't respond to tracts and spiritual booklets anymore, but if you address their physical needs, you might have an opportunity to answer their question, "Why are you doing this?"

Challenge this week: Find someone in need and sacrifice your time and money to show that person how much God loves him or her. Remember what Jesus said: "Whatever you did for the least of these...you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Chapter 4

Loving The Homosexual

Story Time

Follow-up from last week's lesson. Have students tell about the person in need they sacrificed to reach with God's love. Debrief about anything they can learn from each story.

Hook

Discuss:

- Do you know anyone who is a homosexual? Tell us about him/her. What is your impression of them? How do you feel when you're around them? Etc...
- What usually comes to mind when you see a homosexual on TV or even a same-sex couple holding hands? How do you react?
- What would you do if your closest friend told you he/she was gay? Would that change your friendship? Why/why not? What would you say to your friend?
- Do you think homosexuality is a sin?
- Why do Christians treat people sinning in homosexuality differently than people with a lying or stealing problem?
- Are some sins worse than others?

Book

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Look

The Bible doesn't rank sins from 1 to 10 according to how bad they are. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Homosexuals and heterosexuals fall into the same category of being destined for hell apart from God's grace and mercy of reconciliation.

So maybe we should reexamine the way we respond to people's sins. How can we love people who live openly in a way God doesn't approve of? Here are some principles to consider:

1. Homosexuals are people

Christians need to stop treating homosexuality like the plague. Most homosexuals think Christians are repulsive because we've done a terrible time figuring out how to love the gay community. Some Christians look at homosexuality and say, "Ugh, that's disgusting!"

Few Christians would reject a man who admitted to checking out women he wasn't married to on a Hooters billboard, so why do we treat homosexuals as though they're suffering from an incurable disease? Why can't we see them as people who struggle with sin just as we do?

God doesn't hate gays, he hates sin. He hates that we lie, that we're selfish, that we ignore His Word, but he doesn't hate people. He hates the sin, but loves the sinner.

2. Homosexuals need acceptance

One of the most difficult aspects of homosexuality is the fact that so many people who are struggling with their sexual identity don't understand what's going on inside their heads. Many homosexuals experience a lack of acceptance, but before and after they "come out."

Many homosexuals become that way because they're not accepted by people. They're teased and made fun of for stupid little reasons of liking art, theater and fashion. The only people who accept them are homosexuals who don't care about their differences. The security they find in that community makes them run from others and join the lifestyle of those who accept them.

Your "innocent" teasing at school may have a much bigger impact than you realize!

3. Homosexuals are on the same journey we're on

Imagine you and I are hiking up a mountain in Colorado. It's a hot day, so on the way up you take sip after sip from your water bottle. A couple hours into the hike, you put your bottle to your lips only discover it's empty. You have nothing to drink and no way to refill your bottle for several hours. Your throat is dry and you start having trouble swallowing. You're thirstier than you've ever been in your life. You look at me and notice my water bottle is full. I pull it out and start chugging water so fast that it runs out the sides of my mouth and down my shirt. When I've had my fill, I pour the rest over my head, all the while taking about how refreshed I feel.

What would you think of me in that situation? You'd think I was jerk, right? If I had surplus of something you really needed but kept it to yourself, you would have every right to call me a jerk.

Likewise, some Christians act like spiritual jerks in the way we relate (or don't relate) to the homosexual community. We have the wellspring of life inside us, but we neglect to share it with those who are most needy.

John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Laying down our lives doesn't necessarily mean dying for our friends. In some cases it might mean laying down pride for them, or laying down our misconceptions. It might mean extending compassion, even if it's not popular.

Took

Your neighbors aren't necessarily the people you sit next to on a Sunday morning. Sometime they're people with different opinions, experiences, and outlooks on life.

You don't have to compromise your standards or change your beliefs to condone their sin, but it does mean you should look deep into your heart at the sins you struggle with on a daily basis. That way, instead of condemning them, you can have the love and compassion Jesus commands you to give.

1 Corinthians 13:13, "And now these remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Discuss:

[Preface this question by reassuring students that it's okay to struggle and it's very healthy to talk through these things rather than stress about it on their own. Reinforce the fact that your opinion and love for them will never change based on sexual tendencies.]

- Have any of you ever struggled with homosexual thoughts? Have any of you ever been confused about whether you're attracted more to the same sex more than to the opposite sex?

[Just start the conversation. Don't attempt to give counsel outside your range of expertise or try to "fix" anything. Just let them share. Be a caring adult who listens and supports them.]

Chapter 5

Loving The Addicted

Story Time

Share about your weeks and any of their continuing thoughts they might have from last week's discussion on homosexuality.

Hook

Discuss:

- What do you think are some of the most common addictions for teenagers? Why are those things attractive in the first place? What makes them addicting? (NOTE: take note of these answers and remember them for the end of the meeting.)
- Are all addictions wrong or is an addiction okay as long as there are no negative consequences?
- Besides being addicted to Christ, is there any addiction that does NOT have a negative consequence?

Additions are scary – scary for the addict and scary for those around the addict.

- It literally controls the person.
- It causes the person to do things they normally wouldn't do.
- It causes them to act in ways they normally wouldn't act.

Discus: What causes some people to get hooked on different addictions anyway?

Possible Answers:

- Coping method, often to escape hurts, pain and reality (drugs, cutting, alcohol, porn, TV, food, video games, etc).
- It looks fun (shopping).
- Pressure/influence of someone else.
- Personal insecurity.
- The need for acceptance and community.
- Curiosity.

Book

Read Matthew 3:7 and Matthew 23:27.

Look

Jesus called the religious leaders of his day a "brood of vipers" and "white-washed tombs," but he have his time and compassion to tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus earthly mission was to meet the need of people.

- People are looking for assurance.
- People are looking for satisfaction.
- People are trying to fill deep voids in their lives.

Jesus offered the only remedy that could fulfill every craving in the human soul: his love.

Took

Here are three things you can do to help. You may never have any idea how your simple actions will steer someone in the right direction for the rest of their life.

1. Reach Out

- Reach out to the kid sitting by himself at lunch.
- Reach out the girl trying to hide her dependency on weed.
- Reach out to the drug addict who was taken to the hospital after another overdose.
- Befriend the girl who seems to be isolated and always wears long sleeves to cover her wrists.

Take a little time to relate to kids you know who are interested in doing drugs. Don't run from them. Don't avoid them. You'll likely have to step out of your comfort zone, but you might save someone from a fatal car wreck, a future broken marriage or a wasted life.

Addicts need to know God's love like you know God's love. They need an opportunity to break free. They need to know someone loves them and cares about their well-being. You can and should be that person. You may be surprised how far a little love and attention will go.

Story Time

Share about a time when someone's attention made a big difference in your life.

2. Consult Professional Help

Many addicts are unable to overcome their addictions on their own. You can offer love and support, but be careful about giving advice. Talk to a youth leader or a school counselor about how you can help a friend get professional help. Sometimes just encouraging your friend to seek professional help is enough to start the ball rolling.

3. Don't forget about them

After you've reached out to someone and helped them find professional help, your job is not done. In fact, the biggest part is just beginning. Be a friend and a support to them as they battle the inner drive to seek out drugs, porn or whatever. These things do not go away on their own overnight. Stay in contact with the person and maintain a friendship.

If your friend experiences a setback or lapses, don't judge them, criticize them or treat it like a failure. Keep cheering them on. Sometimes the difference between success and failure is when the support proves to be consistent from an encouraging friend.

The Jesus Model

We all long for emptiness in life to be filled and we all try to fill it with different things, but don't forget that only Jesus can truly satisfy. If your friend doesn't know Christ, share Him frequently. Model Christ's love in their lives.

Don't sit around and make fun of potheads and the town drunks, as if you lack the capacity to someday be where they are. Instead, know that they are just like you and don't miss the opportunity to love them as Christ does. Don't underestimate the healing power of being a friend to someone.

Address the addictions in your small group

(Don't close the meeting without opening up for some discussion about various addictions students in your group might have. Take the initiative to model vulnerability by sharing a bit about your own struggles, but remember, these are students, not professional counselors. Please be wise in what you share and how deep you go.

When you asked the very first question, "What do you think are some of the most common addictions for teenagers?" chances are some of the answers came to mind immediately for students because they either struggle with it themselves or know someone who does. Bring up some of those issues and lovingly and sincerely ask the kids how they're doing in those areas. Tell them how much you love them and that you would love for this group to become a place of encouragement and healing as they deal with this struggle. As appropriate, ask about:

- Eating disorders
- Pornography
- Masturbation
- Alcohol
- Drugs
- Sex
- Shopping
- Overeating
- TV
- Video games
- Cutting

Remember, there are often deeper issues below the surface that express themselves in these addictions, whether it be insecurity, need for acceptance, escape reality, feelings of inferiority, whatever. You're not a professional counselor; just know that some of these elements may be involved with the students' stories.)

Chapter 6

Loving The Sick

Story Time

Share about your weeks and any of their continuing thoughts they might have from last week's discussion on loving the addicted.

Hook

Read the story aloud on pages 97-100. Skip the last paragraph on page 99 and the first paragraph on page 100. Read the second paragraph on page 100 and stop at "Lingering Doubts."

Discuss:

- Have you ever known someone who was so sick or injured that there seemed to be no hope for recovery? Tell us about him/her. [Leader, share a personal story of your own, too.]
- When you pray someone like that, do you usually expect that your prayers will make a difference?

Book

Give a little background about the passage you're about to read together:

This is a story about a paralyzed man whose friends couldn't carry him into the house where Jesus was because the crowd was too big. So they cut a hole in the roof and lowered their friend to Jesus. Luke 5:20-26 picks up the story:

Read Luke 5:20-26

Look

Discuss:

- Does Jesus still heal people like he did back then?

Finish Greg's story. Start reading at the last paragraph on page 101 and read up to "Seth's Story" on page 103.

If you have a personal story of yourself or someone you know, discuss that here. Otherwise, share "Seth's Story" on pages 103-107 in your own words. Or, have your apprentice plan ahead of time to share that part.

Took

The Lord continues to love the sick. He's still in the business of healing those he chooses to heal. That doesn't mean we can expect him to heal everyone we pray for. Still, he wants us to ask.

Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 15:16).

Jesus didn't necessarily mean that if we ask him for a new car he's going to give it to us.

The apostle John said, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: what if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15).

I don't know why God chose to heal Greg and Seth, but I do know it is my responsibility to pray for the sick. It's your responsibility to pray for the sick, too. I believe if we ask for God's intervention, knowing it is by his power alone that people are healed, he sometimes chooses to show us his power.

Discuss:

- Who do you know right now who is sick? Let's love that person enough together to pray for him/her.

Close by spending quality time in prayer for the sick people they know.

BONUS IDEA: Maybe talk about the possibility of visiting someone who is sick this week together as a small group. Or maybe set a time to visit the hospital and pray for people there.

Chapter 7

Loving The Elderly

Hook

Discuss:

- How many elderly people do you know that you would consider to be a friend? A good friend? A best friend?
- Do you usually avoid conversations with elderly people, seek them out or are you indifferent toward them? Why?
- What have you learned from an elderly person?

Read the story (or have a student read it) about Devon and Mr. Johnston on pages 111-114. Stop at the question, "What would you say to Devon? What would you have done in his situation?" and answer it together.

Look

Sometimes loving your neighbor means reaching out to people of another generation – people much older than you. Sometimes it involves providing physical care or companionship for someone in the last chapter of life's adventure. But the question is, how?

Discuss:

- How can you show genuine, heartfelt love to someone you have nothing in common with?
- How can you initiate a meaningful relationship with someone old enough to be your grandparent?

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

1. Have no fear

One of the biggest obstacles to creating relationships with grandmas and grandpas of the world is fear. If you're not used to being around senior citizens, you may have anxiety about the way you look, the way they move, the way they smell, the way they talk. You may be afraid of saying the wrong thing or having to listen to stories about the "good old days." Do any of you feel that way?

[Share a personal story of a time when you overcame intimidation to interact with an elderly person in some way. What did you learn through the experience?]

One of the greatest gifts you can offer someone is a genuine interest in his or her life. Many elderly people are especially grateful for the opportunity to pass on their personal history. If you come equipped with a sense of curiosity, a respectful attitude and a listening ear, you have nothing to fear when it comes to interacting with senior citizens. Listen to their stories and laugh at their jokes.

The need for love doesn't change once you reach 60 or 70 or 80. Just because elderly people have lived a long life doesn't mean they lack the feelings and emotions you feel from day to day. They want to be loved just like you.

Don't fear rejection. Don't fear embarrassment. Be confident and know that when you spend time with someone from an older generation, you are meeting one of his or her deepest needs.

2. Waste no time

Read the story about Pappy on pages 116-119. Stop after the first paragraph on page 119.

Discuss:

- Do you struggle with the idea of visiting nursing homes or hanging out with senior citizens?
- Do you feel like it's a waste of time? Why/why not?

Book

3. Offer a biblical response

Read James 1:27.

James refers to orphans and widows, but I wonder if he doesn't also mean to include all people who need someone else to help them to the end of life's journey. Orphans and widows need help because they lack someone to stand beside them through hard times. They need someone to provide for them. They need someone to love them. I think elderly fall into the same category.

Jesus gave us the model to follow. During his earthly ministry he recognized the needs of people – both young and old – and worked to meet those needs. You can do the same thing for elderly people in your area. If you're unsure about their needs, try putting yourself in their position. Look at life from their perspective.

4. Ignore social pressure

Discuss: What are some advantages of talking with people who have walked the road of life already?

- We can avoid certain pitfalls if we're humble enough to listen to the advice of older people.
- We've been trained to believe that life's value diminishes as we get older. Nothing is further from the truth.

Took

Imagine if we had the courage and commitment to spend quality time with the elderly. Imagine the impact we could have on our culture by going to nursing homes, visiting hospitals, or spending time helping the elderly.

[Talk about what each person in your group can do this week to reach out to an elderly person. They all have grandparents, so it shouldn't be too much to ask.]

Chapter 8

Loving Other Races

Story Time

Follow-up from last week's lesson on loving the elderly. "Did you follow-through with your plan to reach out and show love to an elderly person? How did it go? What happened? How did the elderly person respond? What did you learn?"

Hook

Discuss:

- Have any of you ever experienced racism against you?
- Have you ever done anything racist?
- How prevalent is racism at your school?
- Why are some people racist? What feeds racism?

Our reaction to people of different colors largely depends on our environment growing up. African Americans who are exposed to white people from an early age usually don't have a lot of problems relating to white people. Likewise, white people who are exposed to, say, Hispanics from an early age usually don't have issues with Hispanics.

The question is, how do we take our charge to love others to another level? How do we love those who don't look like us?

Book

Read Galatians 3:26-29.

Look

God doesn't see skin color; he sees souls. If we're committed to following him, we need to learn to have the same perspective.

Racism isn't going to end until you and your fellow believers start caring about people the way Jesus did.

Book

Read John 4:1-21.

Look

Usually Jewish travelers went out of their way, literally, to avoid Samaritan territory. But not Jesus, He decided to walk right through the middle of Samaria. He knew exactly what he was doing, of course. His mission was to begin dismantling the wall of racism that kept people apart. And he did it by striking up a conversation with one person.

Took

Discuss:

- Do you think a single conversation would have the same impact in the battle against racism in your school or community?
- Would you be willing to give it a shot?

Challenge students to find someone from a different race or someone the prevailing attitude at their school tells them to stay away from and strike up a conversation with them. Challenge them to show genuine interest in the person, to find out what makes him or her tick, and start a friendship.

Starting one conversation may seem like a small, insignificant gesture in the battle against racism, but don't underestimate the Lord's ability to do something grand and significant with it.

Chapter 9

Loving People from Foreign Countries

Story Time

Follow-up from the last lesson on loving people of different races. "Did you follow-through with your plan to reach out and show love to someone different than you? How did it go? What happened? How did the person respond? What did you learn?"

Hook

Discuss:

- Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
- It's one thing to show love to someone in your neighborhood or community – someone you can interact with face-to-face, but how can you effectively love someone on the other side of the world?
- Read the story about Jamie Jo, starting at the top of page 138 through the third paragraph on page 139.
- Unfortunately, "out of sight, out of mind" is a real problem when it comes to Christian ministry overseas. Because we're not personally exposed to the conditions of suffering people in other parts of the world, their plights often seem abstract and incomprehensible to us. That's why it's important for us Christians to remind ourselves of certain truths and responsibilities.

Book

Read Matthew 25:31-46

Look

1. To whom much is given, much is expected

Discuss:

- Who's been out of the country before? Where do you go? What was it like? What did it make you appreciate about America?
- What do the rest of you appreciate about America that you hear isn't the case for those in other countries?
- God has richly blessed our country and because of that, we're held to a different standard than people in other countries.
- Luke 12:48 says, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded."
- The fact that the United States has been blessed abundantly with wealth and power means that we must lead in the way we care for the world's needy. If people are hungry, we're supposed to give them something to eat. We have a responsibility to look out for those who are less fortunate than we are – regardless of where they live.

2. God loves the world

- Ask someone to recite John 3:16.
- There is no exclusion or favoritism in that verse. God loves the WORLD. He didn't restrict himself to one population or people group. He demonstrated his love for the entire planet when he sent his Son to die on the cross.
- What does that say to you about the importance of missions, even short-term mission trips like the one we're taking to Belize this summer? (For those who are interested, the next Belize meeting is Sunday, January 27. Kevin, our host and leader for the trip, will be here with all his pictures and videos of what we'll be doing there.)

How can you jump on board with God's mission of loving the world? Here are a couple ideas:

1. Think "ONE"

Bono, Brad Pitt and other celebrities have jumped on this bandwagon of the ONE campaign. The idea is simple: It only takes ONE. One dollar a month from one person, when multiplied by the number of the entire population, translates into millions of dollars to assist the world's poor.

Just think, if the population of our church gave one dollar, we could probably make a sizeable monthly pledge to World Visions or Compassion International. One dollar a month.

If everyone at your school gave \$1 a week for the whole year, you could sponsor the drilling of a well for a community in Africa and provide drinking water in places where children are dying every second.

If everyone in our community donated \$1 a day, based on 500 homes with an average of 4 people in each home, that's \$2,000 a day! If we could keep it up, that's \$730,000 over the course of a year. Some international ministries need less than \$700,000 to run a 10-year program! Imagine the number of people we could help.

NOTE: On February 29 and March 1 the Sr. High are doing 30-Hour Famine to raise funds for World Vision. Have a student explain what 30-Hour Famine is or explain it yourself. Those who are interested should contact Sarah Wadi for more info and a packet to sign up sponsors.

2. Evaluate your needs

Discuss:

- How many of you have two pairs of tennis shoes?
- How many of you have more than five pairs?
- The average tennis shoes cost \$95. If each of us decided to go with only one pair, how much money would have been saved?
- We spend money on multiple pairs of shoes when there are kids living in orphanages around the world who need to hear about the love of Jesus.

- Tyler and Ana Rose are making plans to do missions work. Brainstorm ideas how you can reach other areas of the world through them. How can you support their efforts? Maybe find out what they need and come up with a way to provide it for them by going with less yourself.

It takes real commitment to reach out to love people you've never seen before. It takes real compassion to reach out to people you may never meet—the kind of commitment and compassion that Jesus showed.

Chapter 10

Loving Your Enemies

Hook

Discuss:

- Have you ever been the target of someone's ridicule, cruel laughter or bullying? Have you ever felt like the outcast? Tell us about it.
- LEADER: Share a time when you were made fun of, teased, and embarrassed at the brunt of someone's cruelty.
- Do any of you remember the Columbine shootings? What went through your mind when you first heard the news?
- Jesus said, "Love your enemies." If that happened at Jefferson High School, do you think you could ever love the killers?

Book

It's a tough question because our natural response is to lash out at those who take things from us. But that's not what God wants from us.

READ: Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 5:43-45

Look

Discuss:

- How do you handle life when enemies line up against you? When bullies make fun of your clothes or the zits on your face?
- Do you ever wonder why you, as a child of the almighty God, have to face such opposition?

Some Christians mistakenly believe that when they give their lives to the Lord, all things suddenly become good. But nowhere in the Bible does God promise a life of ease when you accept Jesus as your personal Savior. In fact, Jesus said the opposite.

READ: John 15:18-19.

Jesus warned his disciples of people who would respond to their faith with anger and hatred. Should we expect things to be any different in our lives? Jesus' enemies hated him so much that they pounded nails in his hands and feet and hung him on a cross to die.

Chances are, your enemies will never threaten your life. They may never even physically attack you, but make no mistake: You will have enemies. Enemies are a part of life. Therefore, we have the responsibility to decide how we are going to respond to them when they show up.

1. Love Them?

READ: Matthew 5:46-48.

It's easy to love those who do good to us, but to be perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect, we must take another step toward love. We must love those who do harm to us. We have to love the Columbine shooters of this world. Their actions are inexcusable, but our response, according to scripture, should be to reach out and love them.

After September 11, 2001, our country was enraged against Al Qaeda. People openly expressed their hatred toward Osama Bin Laden and the violent extremists who planned and carried out the attacks.

Discuss:

- How did you feel on September 11?
- According to Matthew 5:43-45, God calls us to love even the vilest people on the planet. It's God's job to judge Osama Bin Laden. The man will certainly face the consequences of his actions when he dies.
- Make no mistake – we are not doormats. We don't advocate sitting by and watching people carry out their evil plans, so how do you balance that while loving them as God commands?

2. Give Them Something?

Jesus takes the command to love our enemies to a whole new level in Matthew 5:39-42.

READ: Matthew 5:39-42.

Chapter 12

Loving Those Who Mess Up

Hook

Discuss: (questions based on "[The Youth Workers Big Book of Case Studies](#)," by Steven Case, page 51)

- What happens when you try to hide something that could get you into trouble? Why?
- Tell of a time when you did something wrong then tried to hide it and things got worse.
- Have you ever "gotten away" with something bad? Any regrets about it or hiding it? Explain.
- When you do something wrong, do you usually come forward and admit it or are you tempted to cover it up and admit nothing?
- How does guilt work?
- If the Bible says, "Love does not keep a record of wrongs" and that "God is love" does that mean that you're in the clear if you do something wrong?
- What do you think of a life strategy of hiding bad things you do? What do you think God wants you to do when you do something wrong, or make mistakes that hurt people?
- When has someone done something against you and gotten away with it?

Book/Look

Here are some strategies for showing love to people who have messed up, including yourself:

1. Remember that we are all sinners

Read Romans 3:23.

We are all guilty of sin. That includes everyone from Billy Graham to the pregnant girl at your high school. However, some sins have bigger consequences and are more apparent than others.

If you walked around school and your home with a TV around your neck replaying all the sins you've ever committed in your life, you'd be humiliated. People, even Christians, would be quick to judge you, so don't be quick to judge others.

Read Matthew 7:15.

Judgment is an essential component of knowing right from wrong, but when we ostracize those who need love and forgiveness, we are in direct violation of the life Jesus called us to live.

2. Reach out to those who need you

All people on earth have a desire to be loved. Everyone wants to be encouraged, thought of well, and even admired to one degree or another. People who live in sin are no different. In fact, sin is often the vehicle they use to try to fill the emptiness and neediness inside them.

Often sin in someone's life is a clear indication that he or she needs your Christlike love. Think of the guy who parties every weekend trying to drown his problems in alcohol. Or the girl who gives herself to her boyfriend because the only time she feels loved is when they are in bed together. In their own way they are shouting, "Help me, please!"

They may never walk up to you and ask you to share Christ with them, so you have to take the initiative to look for people who need God's love. Most likely they're the ones being whispered about by other, less-than-helpful Christians. Let them know, through your words and actions, that you care more about their future than their past.

3. Run from the temptation to judge someone else

We shouldn't take sin lightly.

Read Romans 6:1-4.

Any sin is an extreme offence against God. And He's the only one who can judge someone for it. We're the ones who can help people put their lives back together in the midst of the consequences of their sin. And if we take that responsibility seriously, we can make an immediate impact, as well as an eternal one.

If you allow genuine love to supersede your desire to pass judgment on others, you'll find that your friendships will become stronger and deeper. Your reputation will improve as well. People will stop treating you like a holier-than-thou scolder and start turning to you for help and advice.

People are tired of Pharisee-like condemnation; they want Christlike love.

Took

- Who's messed up that you have a hard time loving or not judging?
- How can you change your attitude and show love to them this week?