



THE BIGGER STORY **FOLLOW**

Session 3

Love and Be Loved
week starting May 8



Despite our human efforts to define love in all its forms, the perfect definition of love is God himself (see the book of 1 John). We are invited by Jesus, just as Peter and the disciples were, to follow his new command and love in the manner that he loves. But we struggle to love even those closest to us, much less our neighbors or enemies, with a self-sacrificial love. Peter witnessed Jesus' supernatural capacity to love. He was known by Jesus and invited to know him, forgiven by Jesus and invited to forgive, loved by Jesus and invited to love. Such love is not something that we can muster up ourselves, but is a byproduct of God's continual work in our lives.

GETTING STARTED

- How was your Prayer of Examen time?
- Describe something that you "love" and why. (For Example... I love Pizza... or Hawaii...)

READ & DISCUSS

1. Peter's adventure walking on the water is often perceived as a failure of faith on Peter's part and an act of power on the part of Jesus. Read Matt 14:22–31. Jesus uses every occasion to demonstrate the character of the Father, even when our attempts to follow him fall short. What elements in this story help us see Jesus' love for Peter?
2. When have you felt like you were struggling and called out to God? How did He respond? Is it easy or difficult for you to trust Him at times like this?
3. Read John 13:1–17 and 34–35. How did Peter respond to Jesus, and why? What holds you back from fully receiving His love (John 13:1)?
4. 1 John 4:7–21 is challenging because none of us loves perfectly. Where does perfect love come from and what does it look like? What do you need the perfect love of God to change in your life? How and whom do you want to love more like Jesus loves?

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34–35

PRAY

Jesus, Thank you for loving me perfectly. Help me love as you love. Cast out any fear that hinders your perfect love from flowing freely in and through my life. Amen.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE *Life Mapping* (do on your own before the next meeting)

A life map is a tool that will help you consider how God uses events and people to shape your character. The family you were born into, people you've met, and circumstances you encountered affect how you engage with God, others, and the world. Set aside at least an hour or more to reflectively create your life map using the instructions below. Use the times below as guidelines.



SHEPHERD
OF THE VALLEY

Instructions

- (20 minutes) Brainstorm people, events, places, experiences, or relationships that have significantly impacted or shaped who you are today on a post-it note. (ex. Hard time you've suffered and how those times changed you, high times you've enjoyed, hereditary influence, heroes who have impacted you) Don't monitor or edit yourself—just write as many as you can think of.
- (10 minutes) Rewrite these items on another sheet of paper in chronological order, leaving space to make additional notes. More than one page may be needed.
- (5 minutes) Circle items you feel were difficult or negative. Box items you feel were positive.
- (5 minutes) Draw a symbol next to items that you felt AT THE TIME that God was not present. Do the same using a different symbol for items where you felt AT THE TIME like God was actively engaging you.
- (10 minutes) Look for themes that emerge. Write these themes next to items on your timeline. Examples- Foundations of faith, wandering away from God, God's active presence or silence in your life, pits of despair, acting out, second chances, themes of rejection, etc.
- (10 minutes) Give a title to --5 seasons in your life. (ex. Growing up, the cancer years, traumatic relationship, dating, loss, making my faith my own)

Reflection

Go to a place where you can be alone. Spend 20–30 minutes considering your story and how God is using it to shape you, and journaling your thoughts. Feel free to walk if you need to, sit if you would like or lie down if you feel tired. Do not talk with others during this time.

Use the following questions to guide you:

- What parts of your story would you like to thank God for?
- When was God near to you? When have you distanced yourself from God?
- What do you see missing from your story?
- Ask God to show you pieces of your story that you may have forgotten.
- Are you surprised by God's presence with you in any part of your story?
- What do you feel as you look at your story?
- Is there any piece of your story that you did not feel comfortable writing down?

Invite God to speak to you in the silence in whatever way that He sees fit. Listen to what He brings up and pray and write about these things. Try not to judge what comes up and be gentle with yourself.