

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Christian character 1: What is it?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This is the first of three sessions on what Christian character is, how it affects our relationships, and how God can change our characters to be more like Christ's.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What is love?

### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:



The “fruit of the Spirit” is the clearest summary of Jesus’ character. He is a person of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) Jesus was gentle and compassionate to the woman caught in adultery, but He was also sometimes angry and challenging - passionately opposed to injustice. How can we helpfully summarize all these Christlike qualities? “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” But this begs the question...What is love?

The Bible says, “This is how we know what love is...” The Bible offers four words (in the New Testament Greek) which we can compare to help us fully understand the nature of God’s love.

There is the kind of love that looks AT someone or something and finds them attractive in some way. (I love your hair/your car/your smile.) The Greek word for this is **storge**.

There is the kind of love that looks at life WITH someone, sharing friendship, a sense of purpose and values. (I love your opinions/outlook/the way you see life.) The Greek word for this is **philia**.

There is the kind of love that looks INTO someone – the love of intimacy, soul touching soul. The Greek word for this is **eros**.

But when the Bible defines the love of Christlike character it uses a different word. And it does not give us an abstract definition of this kind of love, but says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.” (1 John 3:16) The Greek word for love here is **agape** – and we see it demonstrated in Jesus dying for us. It is the kind of love that bears the cost of emptying itself on behalf of others.

**Agape is blind:** It is blind because it has nothing to do with ‘looking’ for qualities in other people.

**Agape sees:** Ultimately, agape is a choice at the centre of who we are to see other people as those who were worth Christ dying for. In terms of loving people, it is blind to their qualities but sees beyond those to view them through the lens of how God sees them. To do this is how the Bible defines love.

The cross is the greatest revelation of God’s character and agape love. The depth of love one has for a beloved can be measured by the sacrifice the lover is willing to make for the beloved. The cross is the fullest picture we have of the nature of God’s character and love which overflows to us. To become like Christ is to grow in this self-sacrificial agape, being willing to go as far in love towards others as He does. Paul says, “Be imitators of God. Live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us...” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

While Jesus’ death and resurrection was the fullest expression of God’s love and power, everything He did led up to it and was part of it. In every aspect of His life He brought in God’s kingdom and pushed against the way evil had warped the world with precisely the same kind of agape He demonstrated on the cross.

Distinctive Christian character is about cross-shaped agape for people - choosing to act for the good for others whether they can repay you or not. It is expressed most fully when we love our “enemies” – giving worth to them not because of what they do, but because of their true value as those Christ was willing to die for.

It is important to know that Jesus does not tell us to be passive in the face of evil. Rather, He shows us the most powerful way that evil can be truly resisted. Self-sacrificial agape is a ‘weapon’ because it stops us from becoming similarly evil and instead overcomes evil with good. It shows evil up for what it is, breaks the cycle of people hurting one another, and is the only way of creating the opportunity for genuine change.

Discuss: When have you experienced people loving their enemies?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Luke 6: 27-36 - Jesus’ teaching on love for enemies.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of God's self-giving love.



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

God's agape love was most fully revealed when Jesus went to the cross. But some might think this makes God too weak. From the beginning, Paul recognized that "...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..." A stumbling block because it is offensive to believe that a holy, powerful God could take on sinful flesh, let alone be crucified. Foolishness because in a world where power is so often about the ability to force your will on others, Jesus did precisely the opposite. Many people in the world today continue to find the idea of a human and crucified God offensive, or even foolish for the same kind of reasons.

But by becoming a crucified human being, God's love and power are not compromised, they are fully revealed. God does not reveal His loving essence by imposing His will on people – any 'god' can do that. God reveals the glory of His love by being willing to stoop to the furthest extreme of weakness possible. And God's power is not restricted by being crucified, but rather He overcomes evil in the only way truly possible - through self-sacrificial love.

Discuss: What is the deepest nature of God's power?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

My song is love unknown—  
my Saviour's love to me;  
love to the loveless shown,  
that they might lovely be.  
Oh, who am I, that for my sake  
my Lord should take frail flesh and die?  
A murderer they save;  
the Prince of Life they slay.  
Yet cheerful He to suff'ring goes,  
that He His foes from thence might free.





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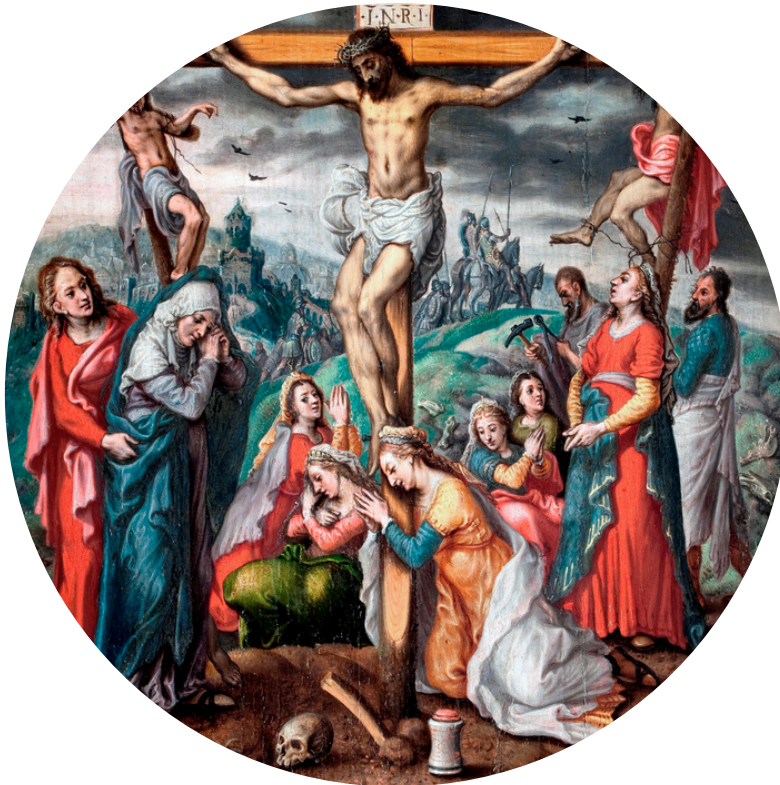
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## Additional notes:

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