

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Christian character 2: Christlike relationships



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 second 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 kind of relationships in the church might attract people to Christ?

Understanding the information (25 minutes)

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



More than anything else, Jesus said people would come to see us as disciples when they see the love that we have for each other. He gave His final command to them at the Last Supper: "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) Practically speaking, growing in agape love might be expressed in many ways:

Including and welcoming. As we grow in Christ's agape love, like Him we will become the kind of people who notice and invite those who are at the bottom of the world's pile. Merton: "We have to love others for their own good, not for the good we get out of them."

Practically this might be expressed the more we can reach out to those who cannot repay us.

Not judging. The more God becomes king in our lives, the more we will let go of the right to judge others. Jesus is clear: "Do not judge..." (Matthew 7:1) The agape love of Christ on the cross gives us the most powerful way to stop judging others, because it reminds us to see ourselves as those who have been forgiven and accepted by God. Being realistic about ourselves is the first step away from a judgemental character. "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:4-5)

Practically this might mean first of all noticing when we are being judgemental of others, remembering God's grace to us, and choosing to see them as God sees them.

Honouring. To honour someone means affirming their God-given worth in such a way that we help draw out the goodness in them, to deliberately treat them as Christ. Agape love and honour are the foundations for the most intimate relationships of all. For example, a sexual relationship centred on agape and honour makes sex into something in which two people put the other first.

Practically this will mean that we love people in a Christlike way the more our first priority is to honour them by showing them what they are worth to God.

Forgiving. As hard as forgiving people can be (and it is often a journey we need to help each other with) Jesus said that there should be no limit on how much we forgive others. Jesus and Paul always link our ability to forgive others with knowing how much we have been forgiven. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4: 32)

Practically this will always mean when we are seeking to forgive others that we always start by looking at ourselves first.

Coming against things in the opposite spirit. In some forms of martial arts, the way you defeat your enemy is not by responding with greater aggression but acting in such a way (for example stepping aside at the right moment) that your opponent is brought down by the force of their own attack. In many ways this is a good picture of how agape love overcomes evil. By replying to an insult, not with another insult, but with silence, or even with blessing, the insult is robbed of its power. Time and again, we see this in the way Jesus demonstrated love. He refused to answer back, He said that if someone slaps you on one cheek offer them the other. He allowed evil to run its course on the cross, but ultimately triumphed. As we have seen, this was not a surrender to evil, but the way of truly defeating it.

No hierarchy or division. It is true that some roles in the church are more public than others. But in a community of agape love, no one will be more important than anyone else. Whereas outside the church community people might be divided up by being in this tribe, or in this social grouping, or in that gender, these distinctions no longer have relevance in a family in which the main thing about its members is that they are "in Christ". With this in mind, the essential qualification for those who want to lead is a desire to be downwardly mobile.

Offering my gifts. If there is a perceived division in the church between those at the front who are leading and the rest of the community, it can feel hard to build the equal family which Paul writes about in which each part of the body can share gifts. Yet it is clear that every disciple is given gifts to share. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) But there can be at least two reasons why this some don't use their gifts. We may not be aware of what the gifts God has given us or lack confidence. We can encourage each other by recognising and naming the gifts we see in each other. We might misunderstand humility. There can be a false humility (or even an upside-down pride: "I don't want to look stupid or fail") about not being able to offer my gifts. But true humility is not thinking of yourself too little, or too much. It is the freedom that comes from not having to think about ourselves at all.

Discuss: Including, not judging, forgiving, coming against things in the opposite spirit, no hierarchy or division, offering my gifts...which to you is most important right now and why?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Romans 12: 9-21 which describes love in community.

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?

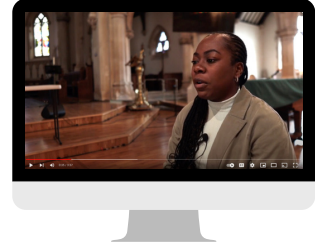


Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/oSwnL79HRJY>

What struck you as important in the video?



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)

Lord Jesus Christ,
who prayed for your disciples that they might be one,
even as you are one with the Father;
draw us to yourself,
that in common love and obedience to you
we may be united to one another,
in the fellowship of the one Spirit,
that the world may believe that you are Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.



Written by William Temple (1881-1944).



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