

## Small Group Guide: "Cracking the Code" - Live to Love

Pastor Todd began a new seven-week series called "Cracking the Code" focused on the church's mission, vision, and values. He emphasized that love is the foundational mark of true followers of Jesus, drawing from John 13:34-35 where Jesus gives the "new commandment" to love one another as He loved us. Todd explained that this love goes beyond loving neighbors as ourselves (Old Testament standard) to loving sacrificially as Jesus did - even unto death. He warns against spiritual complacency and drift, emphasizing that when love drifts, mission drifts, but when love is restored, clarity and mission return. The message challenged us to examine what people actually experience when they encounter Christians, calling for love that removes barriers and creates space for transformation.

Intro Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we gather together today to study Your Word and grow in our understanding of Your love, we ask that You would open our hearts and minds to what You want to teach us. Help us to set aside any distractions, preconceived notions, or barriers that might prevent us from receiving what You have for us today. Lord, we know that You are the source of all love, and we pray that through our time together, You would reveal to each of us how we can better love like Jesus loved. Make us receptive to Your Holy Spirit's leading and give us the courage to apply what we learn to our daily lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

### Ice Breaker

What is one simple act of kindness that someone showed you recently that made your day better?

### Key Verses

- John 13:34-35
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 2:4
- Leviticus 19:18

### Questions

- Jesus called His commandment to love "new." How is loving "as Jesus loved" different from loving our neighbors as ourselves?
- Pastor Todd mentioned that "activity doesn't determine accomplishment." How can we ensure our church activities are motivated by love rather than just checking boxes?
- What do you think people actually experience when they encounter you as a Christian? Is love the recognizable "brand" they see?
- The message mentioned that we tend to love "selectively." What biases or barriers might prevent us from loving like Jesus loved?
- How does God's kindness lead to repentance, and how should this influence the way we show love to others?
- Pastor Todd asked, "Are we helping people move towards Jesus or making it harder?" Can you think of examples of each in your own experience?
- What does it mean practically to "remove barriers" in our relationships with people who are far from God?
- How can past spiritual successes or personal comfort lead to complacency in our mission to love others?

## Life Application

This week, identify one specific barrier that prevents you from loving someone in your life like Jesus loves. It might be judgment, assumptions, past hurts, or personal bias. Pray about this barrier and take one concrete step to remove it. Then, choose one person in your circle of influence who may be far from God and intentionally show them Christ's love through a specific act of kindness or genuine engagement. Remember, you don't need to clean people up to love them - love them as they are so Jesus can change their trajectory.

## Key Takeaways

- Love is the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Jesus - it's how the world will know we are His disciples
- Jesus set a new standard for love: not just loving neighbors as ourselves, but loving sacrificially as He loved us, even unto death
- When love drifts in our lives and churches, mission drifts; but when love is restored, clarity and mission return
- Love removes barriers and creates space for people to experience transformation through God's kindness
- We must receive Jesus' love fully ourselves before we can effectively love others, removing shame and guilt that hinder our witness

## Ending Prayer

Father God, thank You for the reminder today that love is not just a nice idea, but the very mark of our identity as Your followers. We confess that we don't always love like Jesus loved - sometimes we love selectively, conditionally, or not at all. Forgive us for the barriers we've created and the times we've made it harder for people to experience Your love. Help us to receive Your love more fully so that we can give it more freely. Give us courage to remove the barriers in our hearts and lives that prevent us from loving sacrificially. Show us the one person You want us to love intentionally this week, and help us to be Your hands and feet in their life. May our love be so genuine and Christ-like that it draws people to You rather than pushing them away. Transform us into a people marked by love, for Your glory and for the sake of those who desperately need to know You. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.