

Bible Study on Living In God's Love

(a study on Ephesians 3:14-19 "Live Full Lives")

Begin by reading the following scripture:

"My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God".

Ephesians 3:14-19 (taken from "The Message", Eugene Peterson, Navpress)

Context to Paul's Prayer:

Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus. We read in Revelation 2:4 that the church here had forsaken its first love. The first three chapters focus on the Ephesians need to become more aware of God's love. God's glory will be revealed as they imitate this love. The final three chapters provide us with specific examples of how we can love one another in the light of this love.

Paul's Prayer (Eph 3:14-19):

Paul prays for us to experience God's love. This is not an intellectual response which we are often so good at! It is a living together in love which we are to experience. It is no easy thing. Paul intends us to feel with our heart, our minds and our intuition the many, varied and incredible dimensions of Christ's love. Paul challenges us to consider the breadth of God's love – reaching out to every nation, colour and people group. He dwells on the length of this love – a love which is from everlasting to everlasting. Christ's love extends into the depths – where we are lost and helpless without Him. Christ's love rises to the heights, where we can journey upwards in God's love and be filled with His goodness. Paul's intention is that we weave this love into the very fabric of our daily lives.

However, there are many things which block us from embracing the reality of God's love for us - such as hopelessness, guilt, shame, hurt, fear, resentment and disappointment. We all at times experience degrees of these negative things.

Paul knows that our understanding as an individual is limited and that it is only as we see this love worked out in the building together of the body of Christ that we have any hope of experiencing this love. It is

such a remarkable love that the only way we can possibly touch some of its incredible dimensions is with others.

Let us now consider a way in which we can respond together to this love:-

Response - Back Graffiti

You'll need the following resources for this exercise:-

1. plenty of pencils
2. A4 paper or card
3. sellotape
4. Laptop to play "Live Full Lives" instrumental (or other suitable music) available here:

http://www.prayerscapes.com/instrumental_music_loops_free_mp3.html

Often the roots of the things which stop us experiencing God's love are those of negative experiences in relationships. In this following exercise we seek to affirm and encourage one another. We often fear what others might be really thinking about us "behind our backs". But our church family relationships should be a place of healing and restoration. Having used this exercise on a number of occasions we are constantly surprised by the dramatic impact of speaking out God's love and affirmation over each other.

1. stick a blank piece of A4 paper on the back of each group member
2. form a circle and explain the nature of the exercise. There is no formula. It is important that people express and write down what they see about each. For example, what positive things does this person bring to the church? What is God's heart for this person? What might God have in store for them, or want them to experience more of? What would you like to thank them for? The possibilities are endless and there is no right or wrong way to approach this.
3. Play the music and turn to the person on your right, and begin to write on the paper taped to the back of the person, when you feel inspired to do so. It is inspired chaos after this. We've experienced times when the exercise has looked like a bizarre game of twister! The most important thing is that everybody writes on everybody's back.
4. At the end of the exercise, remove the paper from your back, and encourage everyone to sit and read their paper.
5. It is sometimes good to pray a covering prayer over your group at the end, and encourage them to share what's been written with their close friends.

Our backs represent the areas where we are most vulnerable.

Stories from our group

One of the group members expressed that this exercise had made them feel more secure in church. Another member afterwards shared the dramatic impact the exercise had made on how they felt in the workplace knowing that the church was standing with them. For some it healed the wounds left from schools days and memories of dealing with insults and bullying.

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