

T O K N O W T H I S L O V E

Total:
60 min.

SESSION ONE:

FINDING THE CENTER

Small
Groups
10 min.

Start Here

1. Think back to your childhood and teenage years. There were many circles in your life (both literal and symbolic). For example: a circle of special friends, your first steering wheel, your family circle, your favorite bike. What were the circles that had a significant place in your life?
2. Select one or two of the significant circles in your past, and try to determine what the center of those circles was. It could have been an idea, a cause, a person, a real point on the pavement, etc.

5 min.
Small
Groups

Visualize

Needed: Pencil, string about 4-6 inches long, piece of paper.
Directions: Create the best circle you can with these materials.

5 min.
Small
Groups

Discuss

1. What are the essential things in creating a circle?
2. Why isn't it possible to create an original circle (untraced) without a center?

3 min.
Small or
Large
Group

Take Turns Reading

CONSIDER THE CIRCLE

We all begin life as a solid circle, or sphere, and our inherent relationship to this unique geometric shape just keeps getting bigger and deeper.

The circle is an endless path—a line whose constituent points enjoy an equal relationship to the center from which they originated. The circle is a visual expression of the eternal relationship—All to the One, and One to all.

The circle symbolizes “oneness”, and is the geometric source of all other shapes. It is the most challenging shape to draw free-hand, and represents the most profound idea in Scripture: Oneness—the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Mark 12:28, 29

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. EPHESIANS 3:19



T O K N O W T H I S L O V E

In a sinful world separation/division/individuality is easy to grasp, but oneness/unity/union is far less familiar.

The circle creates an inside and an outside, and is the most economic shape—the most enclosure with the least exposure. It is the essence of maximized efficiency. It's the only shape that can't fall into its own hole.

Yet, the circle can't exist without a center. The source of life and love is inherently "central" in nature.

The circle transcends time and space.

It is practical and theoretical, visible and invisible, limited and unlimited, concrete and abstract, spirit and truth, finite and infinite, all and each.

All circles are identical in shape, but vary in magnitude.

Scripture contains several "central" concepts and images:

- "the circle of the earth" *Isaiah 40:22*
- "Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations..." *Ezekiel 5:5*
- "the sanctuary will be in the center of it" *Ezekiel 48:8*
- "the temple sanctuary will be in the center of them." *Ezekiel 48:21*
- "...In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures..." *Rev. 4:6*
- "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders." *Rev. 5:6*
- "...the Lamb at the center of the throne..." *Rev. 7:17*

Small
Groups
5 min.

Discussion

1. What spiritual realities do you see expressed in a circle?

5 min.
Small or
Large
Group

Take Turns Reading

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN?

"God is love." Beyond all our church doctrines, this is perhaps the one belief we personally cherish above all others. Often, this simple statement of faith sums up our entire childhood, teenage, young adult, and adult religious experience. For many of us it's our bottom line. And yet, at the same time, it's the greatest challenge to comprehend and apply in our lives.



T O K N O W T H I S L O V E

Sometimes we are awakened to the reality that God's love is not the central driving force in our lives. Sometimes we find that our belief system is a network of factual, but as yet, unconnected "truths". God's love has not yet become the synthesizing force in our faith. We seek for personal meaning in an attempt to identify the center and source of our faith. We want to be able to identify the basic principles. We earnestly want our church to objectively face the prejudices and preferences that have gradually displaced some biblical principles in our church culture.

We want to perceive our belief system as a natural extension of God's love. We want it all to be personally meaningful.

Sometimes we find that our spiritual inheritance (what has been handed down to us) consists mostly of specific applications (behaviors) of principles, but without a clear understanding of the underlying principle.

It is these principles that explain *why* we do or believe certain things. The applications demonstrate *how* principles are lived. Thus, without a clear understanding of the "why's", we may find ourselves in a never-ending controversy over the "how's". This is, in essence, involuntary legalism. This is why we must study to identify and comprehend scriptural principles. If we don't, we will find ourselves doing things for no good reason. But we wouldn't be the first.

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! Mark 7:5-9

One of our greatest individual and corporate challenges is to rediscover the framework of biblical principles that radiate from the center/source of God's love. Once clearly understood, these principles can be freely applied (with the Spirit's guidance) in our lives without fear of legalism or lawlessness in our homes and churches.

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Small
Groups
10 min.

Discussion

1. Is there an experience you've had that typifies how your faith (in God's love) works in your life? What happened in that experience? Inside you? Inside God?
2. Do you believe there is a center within the circle of beliefs you value?

8 min.
Small
Groups

Take Turns Reading

THE CENTER OF ADVENTISM

The source of all we call "Adventism", or "Truth", or "the message of Scripture" is the cross. This isn't just a polite gesture out of respect for the death of Christ, it is an intellectual and practical reality as well. Notice the force behind these pointed statements.

- *Let the cross of Christ be made the science of all education, the center of all teaching and all study. The Signs of the Times, 10-17-06, "Worth of Obedience"*
- *The cross of Christ is to be the great center round which everything must revolve. The Signs of the Times, 8-17-91, "Missionary Work"*
- *"The cross of Calvary is the great center of the plan of salvation . . ." Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 6-22-05, "The Need of Home Religion"*
- *The atoning sacrifice, the righteousness of Christ, is to us the vital center of all truth. Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 9-29-91, "Missionary Work"*
- *The source of all true wisdom is found in the cross of Calvary. 2SAT, 308*

This central concept of grace is to be the source of all our understanding. There is a logic, a sequence of reasoning, a "truth" about God that begins here, at the cross. And the significance of this understanding has far-reaching consequences.

- *Those only who realize that the cross is the center of hope for the human family can understand the gospel that Christ taught. Testimonies for the Church, Volume Eight, p. 206*



T O K N O W T H I S L O V E

Why is the cross such a singularly revealing phenomena? Because, when the sinful heart is confronted by the declaration “God is love”, it asks “How do you know?”, “What do you mean?”. We go through life having some understanding of what love is, but perhaps never quite getting the life-changing perspective of Scripture. Scripture asserts that:

“love comes from God” (1 John 4:7).

Is this the way you have always understood it?
Scripture gives us a very singular perspective:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. “ 1 John 3:16

As a matter of fact, this demonstration of true love (the cross) was the focus of heaven’s efforts throughout the Old Testament. It was meant to be the decisive explanation for all time. It was meant to be the force that sustained Israel. It is meant to be the energy that revives the remnant. It is meant to be the central concept of universal existence throughout eternity. It is meant to be life for us.

Love is not something, but Someone. Love is the character of Someone. It is the one-word descriptor of that Someone’s way—their manner, what they’re like, who they really are. This is the biblical perspective of God.

God’s Love had never been challenged until the most glorious created being did so, and rejected it. For the first time, the source of all love was strategically identified. It is no surprise then, to learn that all the love on earth has also come from somewhere else. And that Source has graciously provided a demonstration beyond anyone’s misunderstanding as to who and what love really is:

- *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8*
 - *“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” 1 John 4:9*
- ... Jesus knew that the time had come... he now showed them the full extent of his love.” John 13:1*

What Jesus did upon the cross is not “part” of the gospel, it is the source of everything we reference as “Christian”. It was at the

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