

BELOVED



A GUIDE TO EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD MORE DEEPLY

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THEME VERSE



“See what great love
the Father has
lavished on us, that
we should be called
children of God, And
that is what we are!”
1 John 3:1



FROM THE EDITOR

LifeGroup Leaders,

This year, our spiritual theme is Beloved, based on 1 John 3:1: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

At the center of this theme is the truth that we are children of God. Our identity is not something we have to earn through grades, relationships, leadership positions, spiritual lives, or accomplishments. God calls us His children because He loves us. Before we do anything for Him, we already belong to Him.

That truth is also important to what we want LifeGroups to be. College can be a place where it is easy to feel like you have to find where you fit in.

LifeGroups gives us an opportunity to create communities where students can build real relationships, talk honestly about life and faith, study Scripture together, and know that they have people around them who care.

Throughout this curriculum, your group will talk about what being a child of God means in everyday life. You will discuss things like performance, shame, failure, fear, honesty, belonging, and how knowing we are loved by God changes the way we treat other people. The goal is not just for students to know that God loves them, but to think about what their lives might look like if they actually believed it.

As a leader, you do not need to have all the answers. Your role is to help start meaningful conversations, point your group back to Scripture, listen well, and create an environment where people feel comfortable participating. Some weeks may lead to deeper conversations than others, and that is okay. Don't feel like you have to get through every question if your group is already having a meaningful discussion.

Thank you for choosing to lead and for being willing to invest in your group this year. We hope these conversations help you and your LifeGroup better understand what it means to live as God's beloved children.

Gwen Loney

LIFEGROUP EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR
Designed by Chaplain Manuel Gomez





WEEK 1:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GOD'S CHILD?

For many of us, the phrase child of God has become so familiar that we've stopped fully remembering what it means. We use it in prayers, sermons, songs, and as comfort without realizing the depth of the statement. John could have written that we are God's servants, followers, disciples, and creation, because all of those things would have been true. Instead, John uses a word that shows up all across the Bible as one of the closest, most wonderful relationships possible: children.

Children don't earn their place in a family. They were wanted, prayed over, and chosen before they even came into this world. Children don't receive love from their parents because they put away all their toys at the end of the day, or made their parents breakfast in bed, or got A's on their spelling bees. They belong because they are the sons and daughters of their parents, who wanted them in this world before they existed. In the same way, God's love for us is not based on our usefulness or achievements. He calls us His children because that is who He has chosen us to be.

Being God's child also means that we reflect our Father. Children grow up and begin to resemble their parents in appearances, actions, values, and morals. God isn't interested in producing people who merely know facts about Him, who are just fans of Him. He wants a family, a team, that learns to live like Him. He wants us to resemble Him in our actions, to show His love to whoever we encounter in our days, to share the Gospel to nonbelievers the way His Son did. Today, we are going to read a few verses and then jump into discussion questions as we unpack more of what it looks like to be a child of God.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Romans 8:14-17
- John 1:12-13

Reflection:

- What words or phrases stood out to you from these passages?
- What do these verses teach us about God's character?
- What do they teach us about our identity?
- When you hear the phrase "child of God," what comes to mind?
- Why do you think the Bible often uses language that relates to family?
- What labels do you tend to think of yourself as before "child of God?"
- What name do you normally think of God by? Examples could be Father, Friend, King, Judge, etc. Why do you think you relate to that name the most?



WEEK 2:

BEFORE YOU PERFORM

College has a way of asking a few questions over and over again: “What’s your major?” “What internships have you had?” “What’s your plan for after graduation?” Our introductions between one another often revolve around what we do instead of who we are. In some cases, you might feel that those things are interchangeable. You might feel that who you are is, at the core, what you do.

Achievement isn’t wrong. God created us as humans to work, create, learn, lead, and steward our gifts well. The danger comes when we begin believing that our value rises and falls with how well we’re performing. We start building our identity on things that were never designed to carry that weight. Performance-based living doesn’t stay inside a classroom or a workplace. It can end up shaping the way we relate to God. Sometimes, we unknowingly approach God as if He were another professor evaluating our work. We imagine He’s only pleased with us when we read our Bible consistently, that He only loves us when we resist temptation. Conversely, we may think His affection for us fades when we fail or become distracted by worldly things.

John interrupts our instincts to think in that way almost immediately. Before he tells us how to obey, he asks us to stop and simply “see what great love the Father has lavished on us.” The word see is an invitation to marvel at the truth of those words, because then John says, “that we ARE the children of God!” John is reminding us of our identity that has already been given through Christ. Before you ever obeyed, served, succeeded, or failed, God had already chosen to call you His child. When we start to truly see the meaning behind being one of God’s children, obedience stops becoming an attempt to prove that you deserve God’s love and becomes instead a joyful response to the love we have already received from Him.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Luke 15:11-32
- Zephaniah 3:17

Reflection:

- What words or phrases stood out to you from these passages?
- Where do you experience the greatest pressure to perform in your daily life?
- Have you ever found yourself treating your relationship with God like something you had to maintain through good behavior?
- Where do you experience the greatest pressure to perform in your daily life?
- What’s the difference between obeying because you’re afraid of losing God’s love and obeying because you already have it?
- If someone watched your life for a week, would they conclude that you believe God’s love is earned or freely given? Why?

WEEK 3

WHAT IF GOD IS SAFER THAN YOU THINK?



One of the greatest barriers to a close relationship with God is a fear of being fully known. Many of us spend our lives managing impressions. We learn early that acceptance often depends on what people see. We hide our weaknesses, edit our stories, and choose which parts of ourselves others are allowed to know very carefully. We assume that if people saw everything that went on in our lives, they would leave. Without realizing it, we often bring that same thought into our relationship with God.

We hide disappointment, anger, doubt, avoid difficult questions, and pray polished prayers because somewhere along the way we've come to believe that God is safer with a filtered version of ourselves than with the real one. Psalm 139 begins by saying God has already searched us and knows us completely. He knows every word before we speak it and every thought before we think them. There has never been a moment when God has been surprised by us. David doesn't describe a God who searches our background to condemn us,

but One who knows us completely and remains lovingly present. This pattern shows up throughout Scripture: Adam and Eve hide, God comes looking; Hagar runs into the wilderness, God finds her; the Samaritan woman expects shame, Jesus offers living water. Again and again, God's response to brokenness is pursuit. As we begin to believe that God is compassionate rather than disappointed, we discover that spiritual maturity is all about learning that nothing about us can make God love us less, and therefore nothing has to remain hidden from Him.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Psalm 139:1-12
- John 4:1-30

Reflection:

- What words or phrases stood out to you from these passages?
- Where do you experience the greatest pressure to perform in your daily life?
- Have you ever found yourself treating your relationship with God like something you had to maintain through good behavior?
- Where do you experience the greatest pressure to perform in your daily life?
- What's the difference between obeying because you're afraid of losing God's love and obeying because you already have it?
- In the story of the prodigal son, why do you think the father runs before the son can finish his apology?
- If someone watched your life for a week, would they conclude that you believe God's love is earned or freely given? Why?

WEEK 4

SEEN WITHOUT SHAME



One of the greatest consequences of sin wasn't guilt, it was shame. Guilt tells us that we've done something wrong, but shame tells us that there's something wrong with us. While guilt points to our actions, shame begins to shape who we believe we are. It convinces us that if anyone, including God, truly saw every part of us, we would no longer be worthy of love, acceptance, or belonging.

This is what makes Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman so remarkable. Before she ever confesses her story, Jesus already knows it. He knows about her broken relationships, the disappointment, the loneliness, and the questions she has about her future and life. Even though Jesus knows all about her past, He doesn't embarrass her in front of a crowd or use her past to define where her future would go. Instead, He reveals Himself to her as the Messiah and offers her living water.



Many of us believe God loves an edited version of us. We assume He is patient with the version we present on Sabbath morning but disappointed by the parts of our lives no one else sees. The gospel tells a different story. In Christ, we discover that we are fully known and still fully loved. The invitation of Jesus is not to pretend we have it all together but to bring our whole, entire selves into His presence, trusting that His grace is greater than our shame.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- John 4:1-30
- Hebrews 4:14-16

Reflection:

- What stands out to you about the way Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman?
- Why do you think shame causes us to hide instead of seeking help?
- What is the difference between conviction from the Holy Spirit and shame?
- Hebrews says we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence." What keeps us from actually doing that?
- What areas of your life are easiest to bring before God? Which areas are hardest?
- How would your relationship with God change if you believed He already knew everything about you and still welcomed you into His presence?

WEEK 5

LOVED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MESS



Failure has a way of making us question things we never asked before. We begin wondering if we've disappointed God beyond repair, if we've gone too far, or if we've somehow become the exception to His grace. We don't stop believing in God's love altogether, but we begin believing it applies more easily to everyone else than it does to us. We assume that before God draws near again, we need to fix ourselves, prove we've changed, or earn back His trust. Peter likely knew that feeling well. After boldly declaring he would never abandon Jesus, he denied even knowing Him three times. The disciple who had walked on water, witnessed miracles, and promised unwavering loyalty now had the weight of public failure. Yet when the resurrected Jesus comes looking for Peter, He doesn't begin with a lecture for Peter's mistake. Instead, He makes breakfast and invites him to sit down and eat. Before Jesus restores Peter's calling, He restores the relationship between them.

This is often the opposite of how we imagine God responding to our failures. Throughout Scripture, God's grace consistently moves toward people in their weakness rather than away from them because His love was never dependent on their perfection to begin with. As beloved children of God, we don't have to clean ourselves up before coming back to the Father.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Isaiah 43:1-4
- John 21:1-19

Reflection:

- What details stand out to you about Jesus' interaction with Peter in John 21?
- Before Jesus asks Peter any questions, what does He do first? Why does that matter?
- Have you ever felt like your mistakes changed the way God saw you?
- Why do you think our instinct after failure is to withdraw rather than draw closer to God?
- What does the image of Jesus preparing breakfast reveal about God's character?
- What's the difference between believing God forgives you and believing He still delights in you?
- Is there an area of your life where you've been keeping your distance from God because of guilt, failure, or disappointment?
- What would it look like this week to simply accept Jesus' invitation to "come and have breakfast," to spend time with Him first and foremost without trying to prove anything to Him?

WEEK 6

FEAR CANNOT HEAL YOU

Most meaningful relationships in our lives are shaped by one of two motivations: fear or love. We might obey someone because we're afraid of disappointing them, losing their approval, or facing the consequences. Or we might obey someone because we trust them, love them, and desire to respond to the relationship we've already been given. While both motivations can produce outward obedience, they lead to very different kinds of people.

Many Christians unknowingly build their relationship with God on fear. We might fear that we are failing spiritually or somehow drifting out of God's grace. However, John offers a different perspective. He writes that perfect love drives out fear, because fear can never accomplish what love was designed to do. Fear might produce compliance, but it cannot produce a true, intimate relationship. Throughout Jesus' ministry, people were drawn toward Him because of His love.

Tax collectors, outcasts, and sinners found themselves moving toward Jesus because they experienced the true, honest, love of God through Him. As beloved children of God, our spiritual growth is not fueled by fear of losing His love but by the security and safety of already having it. The more we experience God's love, the more our hearts begin to change.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- 1 John 4:7-21
- Luke 19:1-10



Reflection:

- What stands out to you about the way Jesus interacts with Zacchaeus?
- When you think about your relationship with God, what motivates you more: love, fear, guilt, obligation, or gratitude?
- Have you ever obeyed God primarily because you were afraid of any consequences? What did that produce in your life?
- Why do you think we often assume fear is a better motivator than love, even though Scripture teaches the opposite?
- Jesus never tells Zacchaeus to give away half of his possessions. Why do you think generosity flowed from that encounter?
- How would your spiritual life look different if you truly believed you could never lose the Father's love?

WEEK 7

TRUTH-TELLING



Sometimes, we mistake faithfulness for positivity. We assume that trusting God means quickly finding the good in a difficult situation, pushing aside uncomfortable emotions, or responding to pain with phrases like "God has a plan" or "I just need to have more faith." Those statements might contain truth, but Scripture gives us a much more honest picture of faith.

Lamentations does not rush past grief to get to hope. Instead, the writer openly acknowledges pain, loneliness, and disappointment while still declaring that God's mercies are new every morning. This shows us that grief and gratitude, doubt and trust, sadness and hope do not always have to cancel each other out.

As beloved children of God, we are secure enough in the Father's love to tell Him the truth about what we are experiencing, even when that truth is messy or uncomfortable. God does not ask His children to pretend. He invites us to bring our whole selves to Him and discover that His faithfulness is steady and big enough to hold both our hope and our hurt.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Lamentations 3:19-26
- Psalm 13:1-6

Reflection:

- What emotions do you notice in Lamentations 3 and Psalm 13? Are any of them surprising to find in Scripture?
- When someone asks, "How are you?" how easy it is for you to give an honest answer rather than the answer you think you're supposed to give?
- Why do you think Christians sometimes feel like negative emotions are evidence of weak faith?
- Psalm 13 begins with "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?" and ends with trust in God's unfailing love. What does that teach us about the difference between questioning God and abandoning faith in God?
- How does knowing that you are already God's beloved child change the way you can approach Him when you're angry, disappointed, confused, or hurting?
- What can happen when we use spiritual truths to avoid dealing honestly with pain rather than allowing those truths to meet us within our pain?



WEEK 8

BELONGING CHANGES US

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Ephesians 2:17-22
- Romans 8:14-17

Reflection:

- What words or phrases about belonging or family stand out to you in these passages?
- Romans 8 contrasts a “spirit of slavery” that leads to fear with a “Spirit of adoption.” What differences do you see between those two ways of relating to God?
- Think about a place where you genuinely feel like you belong. What makes that environment different?
- When you feel unsure about whether you belong, how are you tempted to change or perform for the people around you?
- How might knowing that your place in God’s family is secure change the way you respond to comparison, jealousy, exclusion, or insecurity?
- If everyone around you is also someone God desires to welcome into His family, how should that change the way you notice and treat people who are easily overlooked?

There is a difference between being included and truly belonging. You can be invited into a room and know everyone’s names, but still quietly wonder whether you actually have a place there. That uncertainty often makes us perform and change who we are and how we act until we can finally convince ourselves that we’ve earned acceptance. Romans 8 gives us a radically different picture of our relationship with God by describing us as adopted sons and daughters who can call him “Father.”

Adoption means we are not standing outside God’s family hoping to prove we deserve to come in; through Christ, we have been welcomed into it. When we begin living from that security, belonging changes more than how we see ourselves, it also begins to change how we see the people who surround us. People who know there is room for them at the Father’s table don’t have to compete for their place, and they can begin making room for others.



WEEK 9

LIVING LIKE THE BELOVED



There is a difference between being understanding that you are loved and living like you are loved. We can understand God's love intellectually, quote verses about it, and explain it to someone else while still living as though our worth depends on achievement, approval, or getting everything right.

This might be why Paul doesn't simply tell the Ephesians to understand God's love; he prays that the Holy Spirit would give them the power to grasp just how wide, long, high, and deep the love of Christ really is. God's love is so much greater than our instincts about ourselves that we need His help learning to receive it.

As the Spirit makes God's love increasingly real to us, that security begins reshaping the way we handle failure, comparison, relationships, uncertainty, and even the way we see ourselves.

Living as the beloved doesn't mean we will never struggle with insecurity again; it means we are learning to return again and again to what is already true: we are children of God, deeply loved by the Father, and we can live from that love instead of spending our lives searching for it.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- John 15:9-12

Reflection:

- What words or phrases stand out to you in Paul's prayer in Ephesians?
- What is the difference between knowing intellectually that God loves you and actually living like you believe it?
- What other places do you tend to look for the love, worth, or affirmation that God has already given you?
- Can you think of a time when knowing you were deeply loved by someone changed the way you acted or responded to a situation?
- Why might receiving God's love require the work of the Holy Spirit instead of simply trying harder to believe it?
- What is one area of your life where you need to stop living for love and begin living from love? What could that look like practically for you in the upcoming weeks?

WEEK 10

FROM BELOVED TO NEIGHBOR

Being beloved by God is personal, but it was never meant to become private. Micah speaks to people who were highly religious yet had allowed their devotion to God to become disconnected from the way they treated other people, particularly those who were vulnerable or had less power. When Micah says, “He has shown you what is good,” the order matters: before God asks His people to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly, He has already shown them these qualities through His own character and actions.

God liberated His people from oppression, sustained them when they were vulnerable, showed them mercy when they failed, and remained faithful when they wandered. In the same way, our identity as God’s beloved children should shape the way we move through the world. Because we have received mercy, we become merciful, and because we have experienced God’s love, we learn to notice and care about the needs of our neighbors. Belovedness gives us an invitation to turn outward and become people through whom others can experience something of the Father’s heart.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Micah 6:6-8
- Luke 10:25-37

Reflection:

- What words or phrases stand out to you in Micah?
- Why do you think Micah contrasts religious offerings with doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God?
- What are some ways our spiritual lives can become disconnected from the way we treat people?
- In the story of the Good Samaritan, several people see the injured man, but only one stops. What do you think makes the difference between noticing someone’s need and actually allowing it to interrupt our daily flow of life?
- How might knowing that your identity and worth are already secure in God’s love make it easier to put someone else’s needs before your own?
- If someone only observed the way you treated other people, but never heard you talk about your faith, what do you think they would conclude about the God you believe in?
- Who is one “neighbor” God might be inviting you to notice differently this week? What would justice, mercy, or humility look like toward that person in a practical, everyday way?



WEEK 11

NOTHING CAN SEPARATE YOU

Life is full of transitions that we cannot control. Relationships and friendships change, plans fall apart, seasons end, people go their different ways, opportunities come and go, and sometimes the future looks nothing like we expected. In the middle of all of our worldly uncertainty, it can be easy to let our circumstances determine how secure we feel in God's love. Romans 8 gives us something more concrete. Paul doesn't promise that God's children will avoid grief, uncertainty, failure, or change; instead, he declares that none of those things will have the power to separate us from the love of God.

Our belovedness, then, is not fragile. It does not disappear when life becomes difficult, nor does it become stronger when life is going well. As children of God, we can step into unknown seasons without knowing exactly what will happen because we know something far more important: wherever we go and whatever comes next, we remain deeply and securely loved by the Father.

Read:

- 1 John 3:1-3
- Romans 8:31-39
- Psalm 139:7-12



Reflection:

- What words or phrases stand out to you in Romans 8?
- Which is easier for you to believe: that God loves you when life is going well or that He loves you just as deeply when you feel uncertain about life? Why?
- Have you ever interpreted a difficult situation as evidence that God was distant from you? What shaped that assumption?
- What is the difference between believing God will prevent difficult things from happening and believing nothing that happens can separate us from God?
- Looking back over the conversations we've had about being beloved, which truth about God's love has been the most difficult for you to actually believe or live out?
- Think about something in your life that might be changing or uncertain. What would it look like to enter that situation believing, "Whatever happens next, I am still God's beloved child?"

NEXT STEPS: LIVING AS THE BELOVED



As you lead your LifeGroup, remember that the invitation is simple: to live each day rooted in the love of God and help others do the same. Throughout these conversations, you and your group will explore what it means to be God's beloved children and how that identity changes the way we see ourselves, our relationship with God, and the way we treat others. Our hope is that your LifeGroup becomes place where students can build meaningful relationships, grow in their faith, and know that they belong.

