"The New Community People"

John 13:34-35

STRENGTH for the Journey with Joe Stowell
Part of the RBC family of Ministries

Group Study Introduction

Use the following questions and exercises as your group time allows. Feel free to skip one or more questions in each section as necessary. If you have less then thirty minutes for group discussion, we recommend skipping the "Getting Started" section. Be sure to save time for prayer at the end of your meeting, using the "Strength through Prayer" section.

Getting Started:

Joe Stowell states that God never intended that we live in isolation, but rather that we be part of His church and that the church be a close-knit team.

- What is the most close-knit team (a sports team or otherwise) you have been a part of?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you feel that your church is a team, a body working together?

Strength through Scripture:

Open your Bibles to John 13 and have a volunteer read verses 34–35 out loud.

1. What is the significance of the reality that love is a choice, not a feeling?

2. Do you generally take the initiative to reach out in love to fellow believers, or do you rely on others to make the first move?

3. How much do you identify with Joe when he says, "Agape love will get you out of the swamp of yourself"?

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Notes:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

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4. How intentionally do you plan ahead to do acts of love?

5. Would God say that your love for others is more reciprocal (loving to get something in return) or nonreciprocal?

Digging Deeper:

If your group has enough time (i.e., you've listened to the audio on your own), answer one or more of these optional questions.

1. Read Romans 5:6–8. How does it make you feel to know that God's love was a choice He made in eternity past to take the resources of His own Son and to meet the need of your lost, hopeless condition outside of Jesus Christ? How does that act of love draw us into relationship and fellowship not only with God but also with one another?

2. How does my making a choice to meet others' needs bring glory to God and show the world what God's love is really like?

3. How difficult is it, even for Christians, to love others unconditionally? Why is this true, and what could you do to leap this barrier and love regardless?

Strength through Sharing:

1. Can you recall a fellow believer showing you sacrificial love—love beyond the edge of convenience and comfort? Can you recall demonstrating sacrificial love to another person? Share you stories with each other. If you don't have a story, plan to show love in a significant way this week so you can share a story the next time you get together.

2. Decide as a group whether you will do the exercise in the "Call to Action" now or during the week on your own.

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Strength through Prayer:

Spend a few moments as a group in silent, personal prayer. Thank God for all the ways He loves us. Make a commitment to love others—whether you feel like it or not.

You may want to begin your prayer with these words:

"I praise You, Father, that Your love for me is unconditional: It doesn't rise or fall on my performance. Thank You for taking the initiative; I can love You because You first loved me. Empower me to have Your kind of love for others—choosing to love regardless of my feelings and expressing a love that is nonreciprocal, intentional, sacrificial, unconditional, and others-focused."

When you are finished with this time for silent, personal prayer, you may want to move into a time of group prayer, praying for one another.

Closing Call to Action:

Get a piece of paper and on the top of the sheet write: Love . . .

Then write this list of seven phrases:
Is a choice
Is nonreciprocal
Takes the initiative
Is intentional
Is sacrificial
Is unconditional
Is others-focused

This is how Jesus loves us—and then asks us to turn around and love others in the same way. Choose at least three of these phrases and next to each write the name of someone with whom you could share this kind of love this week. Then make a plan as to how you could accomplish each act of love.

When you do the above, some people in your world will know that Jesus loves them, because you have been there for them.

Notes:

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