

SERMON GUIDES

Talking through the message during the week helps you and your group turn what God is saying to you into action steps. Begin with the key questions, add in any optional scriptures and questions if needed, then wrap up by deciding on your next steps.

BE LOVE – Openhearted Love | WEEK # 4

01.

INTRODUCTION

This week, take a deeper look at the letter “O” in our BE LOVE series, as we talked about “Openheartedness”. Everything changes when you get to know someone. Barriers are broken down, things that are divided go away, when you actually take the time to get to know a person. Even if you think that person is very different from you.

02.

OPENING GROUP ACTIVITY (optional – 10 minutes)

Ask:

- What is a historic site or museum you've visited that made an emotional impact on you, and why?

Explain: Tom Berlin begins Chapter 4 by talking about the emotional impact visiting Frederick Douglass's home had on him. This session is about turning emotional impact into practical action that helps us grow in our love for our neighbors and for God.

03.

BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS (15-20 minutes)

Read **2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

1. What character traits and qualifications are important for being a good ambassador? How are they like and/or unlike what is needed to be a good ambassador for Christ?
2. What does reconciliation with God mean (**verse 20**)? What does it look like in a practical, everyday ways? What's the connection between being reconciled to God and our neighbor?
3. Berlin considers Christ's appeal for reconciliation in the context of our society's need for racial reconciliation. How does racial reconciliation demonstrate “the righteousness of God” (**verse 21**)?
4. In what other areas of society, in addition to race, is reconciliation needed? What are you doing to be Christ's ambassador in those areas?

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04.

BOOK STUDY QUESTIONS (from "RECKLESS LOVE", 15-20 minutes)

1. According to Berlin, overcoming bias and prejudice about gender and race is "foundational" in fulfilling the command to love God and neighbor. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Berlin relates an incident from his mission trip to Mexico that challenged a stereotype about Mexicans. Talk about a time when your ideas about a group of people were challenged. How did you respond? How does that incident influence your attitudes and actions today?
3. "Throughout my lifetime," writes Berlin, "America has been a place of tension and conflict over issues of race and racial justice." How have you experienced America's racial tension and conflict: Closely? At a distance? As a victim of prejudice? As a beneficiary of historic patterns of racial advantage? Would you say racial conflict has gotten better or worse in America in your lifetime? Why?
4. Berlin spends much of chapter 4 discussing his attempts to understand racism in his home state of Virginia and his efforts to come to terms with prejudice in his family's and his own past. How has prejudice been a part of your family's story? How has it been a part of your personal past? What steps, if any, have you taken to address prejudice's presence in your past and its continuing effects?
5. Berlin calls Frederick Douglass an "agitator" because Douglass worked 'to cleanse the soul of the nation from the stains of slavery and inequality to bring the beauty of justice to the fabric of our society.' What other Americans, present or past, would you call "agitators" in the same sense? When, if ever, have you been an 'agitator' like this?

05.

SERMON GUIDE QUESTIONS (15-20 minutes)

Read 1 John 2:7-11

1. Pastor Gordon opens this week's sermon with a story about the VH1 Hit Show, "Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party". What were some of the notable achievements of this show? Why would some people consider the success of this show surprising? And what can we, the church, learn from Martha & Snoop's time together?
2. Pastor Gordon began the discussion of our scripture readings with some basic facts about the disciple, John. Discuss as many as you can recall from the sermon.
3. Look again at **1 John 2:9-11**. Pastor Gordon said that here John wants us to remember that we were called to love one another. It was a commandment, not an option. When you see John's words, and think about them as Pastor

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Gordon described, how do those verses speak to you? Does one hate, but still call themselves a Christian? Why does that happen and how can it be changed?

Read John 4:3-4, John 8:40

4. Pastor Gordon told a story about Fairgrounds Rd in Goochland County that was built to circle an African-American neighborhood, instead of driving straight through it... just like the Jews who circled Samaria instead of walking a direct path through it. Why would someone make this choice? What could be done differently? Have you, or someone you know, experienced a closed heart in this way – please share.
5. Jesus does the exact opposite – by going directly through Samaria, engaging with a Samaritan woman, staying in Samaria two days.... Consider Jesus' twelve disciples. How would they have felt about Jesus's choice and the situation Jesus put them in? Discuss the reasons you think Jesus decided to go through Samaria, and what role did the disciples play in Jesus' reasoning.
6. Have you ever assumed you knew someone, only to find out, once you got to know them, they were nothing like you assumed - that there was something beautiful underneath, once you took the time to get to know them? If you are willing, please share your story.
7. Pastor Gordon closed the sermon by showing a video of two political candidates in Vermont and their debate closer that stunned a town (and nation). Why did such a simple act surprise so many? Someone said "this is what the world longs for"... what are your thoughts?



CLOSING GROUP ACTIVITY (optional – 5 minutes)

Materials can be found in your Leader Packet

Distribute scrap paper to members. Remind members of the four spiritual practices Berlin discusses as Chapter 4 ends:

- Intentionality
- Vulnerability
- Confession
- Acts of Reconciliation.

Explain: Tom Berlin pictures these spiritual practices as the fins of a washing machine's agitator. Think about these four "fins" and write on your paper one practical way you will engage in that spiritual practice before the next session.

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07.

NEXT STEPS

1. Intentionally reach out to someone who is different than you.
2. Ask questions.
3. Listen and learn their story.

08.

TAKE HOME ACTIVITY (optional)

Distribute Week 5 handout from Leader packet to your group members.

Tom Berlin lists these women whom the Hebrew Bible presents positively: Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Jael and the woman in Proverbs 31. Explain these women's significance in a few sentences. How could each of these biblical women be considered an "agitator," as Berlin uses the term in chapter 4? Use a Bible concordance, commentary, or other reference for information as necessary