

LEADER

Meaning of Service

Living in Love

REVISED EDITION



To Know, To Live,
To Grow

Series Overview

To Know, To Live, To Grow

To Know, To Live, To Grow is a holistic approach to confirmation. With Christian education as a key component, this material

helps youth integrate their faith with their families and into their congregational lives.



This curriculum is designed for groups of up to 10 youth participants and one leader. The leader

engages youth in their personal faith searches—walking with them, staying in dialogue with them, and encouraging them to be open about their questions and concerns. Leadership can come from young adults, parents, lay leaders, or clergy.

In addition to serving as confirmation curriculum, this series can be adapted for use with retreats, camp experiences, service opportunities, and other small-group activities.

Foundations

1. Confirmation is a ministry rather than religious education. This ministry is a joint effort of confirmands, parents, lay leaders, and church staff.
2. Confirmation ministry is Christ-centered, a place for people who need a Savior.
3. Confirmation ministry is not only about gaining knowledge but also about creating experiences in Christian community and serving others.
4. Confirmands exist within a family community. The family bears the primary responsibility for the faith development of the confirmand.
5. It is essential to meet young people's needs for acceptance, self-worth, and community as they prepare for the adult world by testing boundaries and questioning values while learning the message of the gospel.

To Know

Confirmands:

- understand how to read and interpret the Bible.
- learn about important people and events in the Bible.
- learn the central teachings of the Lutheran church.
- discuss the Scriptures and faith-related topics in small groups.
- complete in-class and homework assignments.

To Live

Confirmands:

- see the relevance of biblical events in their lives today.
- understand the church as the body of Christ, which functions by helping people.
- discover appropriate service opportunities in the church and the community.
- accept responsibility for serving God.
- express a willingness to confess the Christian faith.

To Grow

Confirmands:

- discover that Christian growth is a lifelong process.
- understand that Christian growth takes place through worship, prayer, education, and service.
- integrate the Bible and the Christian traditions into their daily lives.
- see how faith affects personal decision-making and the way we treat others.

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To the Leader . . .

Format

The To Know, To Live, To Grow confirmation curriculum is designed for use in a small group setting with up to 10 participants and one adult leader.

This material is intended for use over several sessions, with each session lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The flexible format allows you to make adjustments to fit your situation.

Many of the session activities can work during your time together as a group or as homework assignments between sessions.

The questions within each session often promote discussion rather than finding a specific answer. Some sessions may require more direction than others. Be prepared to spend extra time on topics of particular interest to your group.

Materials

Each participant should have a Participant book, writing materials, and a Bible. This curriculum uses the NRSV translation.

The Participant books follow the same format as this Leader guide—but with writing space instead of answers and without many of the margin notes that appear here.

Some activities may suggest additional items, such as maps, videos, or outside reading materials. Review upcoming sessions in advance to see what you will need.

May God bless you in your ministry!



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Session 1

Serving Others

Leader's Note

While studying *Meaning of Service: Living in Love*, your group could assist with a service project in your community or in your congregation.

Places to assist in your community:

- adopt-a-highway program
- food shelf
- homeless shelter
- nursing home

Places to assist in your congregation:

- church grounds cleanup
- church kitchen support
- church office support
- church nursery support
- assisting young grades in Sunday school or vacation Bible school
- caroling at Christmas

Open with prayer.

Team Builder

Materials small ball
dictionary or thesaurus

The participants should sit in a circle and take turns passing a small ball around the circle. Whoever is holding the ball should share what his or her favorite food is. Continue until everyone has had a chance.

Introduction

God loves us and created each of us with special talents and abilities. It is important to use our gifts to help others. In 1 John 4:12, the Bible says that “if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” Serving others is one way of putting our love into action.

These sessions will help us to discover ways that we can live our faith and share God’s love. As a part of this group:

1. You will discover more of what the Bible says about loving and serving.
2. You will learn more about how you can reach out and care for others.
3. You will put your love into action through hands-on service experiences.

As a group, define the word *servicing* and write your definitions in the space below. Use a dictionary and a thesaurus to get some ideas.

Serving is: _____

I am served by ...

I serve by ...

Instructions

In the box on the left, write or draw ways you have been served, loved, or cared for by others.

In the box on the right, write or draw ways you serve, love, or care for others.

Share what you put in your boxes with the group.

As Christians, we have a relationship with God, as well as with other people. As part of our response to God’s love, we put our faith into action in the way we relate to others and through acts of service. Helping others adds an exciting dimension to our faith that we can’t learn any other way.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you feel about serving and giving to others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I don’t like helping anyone.

I look for ways to help others.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how often do you want to help others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all.

Every day.

Web Sites

Worth Checking Out

Compassion International

www.compassion.org

Samaritan's Purse

www.samaritanspurse.org

World Vision

www.worldvision.org

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

www.elca.org

Which of these statements are true for you?

___ I'd like to do more for others but don't feel like I have much to offer.

___ I think I have a whole lot to give, and I feel good when I can help others.

___ I really don't think much about helping others.

___ I feel overwhelmed when I think of the world's problems, and I don't even know where to start.

___ I think someone should help out, but not me.

___ I think it's up to adults to make a difference. Most people don't think teenagers can do anything.

___ I would like to learn more about how I can help others.

___ I wish I had more opportunities to be of service.

___ God gave me a lot. I want to give to God through my service.

Read aloud each of the following verses in which God describes an aspect of serving. Discuss these verses and write down key ideas or phrases from each of them.

Matthew 10:42

Anything you do for others in God's name is significant.

Matthew 20:26-28

The greatest kind of person is a servant.

Romans 12:9-13

Be devoted to others, even over yourself. Tell God about people in need.

1 John 3:18

Show love through actions.

1 John 4:19-20

We love others because God first loved us. If we say we love God, who is unseen, but do not love others who we can see, we are liars.

Read Mark 6:30-44 and answer the questions that follow.

How did the disciples view the crowd? How did Jesus view the crowd?

The disciples considered the crowd a burden. Jesus saw the crowd as people in need.

Why do you think Jesus wanted to feed them? What does this tell us about how Jesus views us when we are in need?

Jesus knew he had to attend to physical needs before spiritual needs. Jesus wants us to help each other when we are in need.

The disciples were tired and had no food when Jesus asked them to feed more than 5,000 people. How would you have felt if you had been a disciple?

Individual answers.

How do you think the disciples felt after the whole crowd was fed?

Individual answers.

Did the disciples focus on what they lacked or on what they had? Where was Jesus' focus?

The disciples saw only the lack of food. Jesus also trusted God to provide.

Where do you think Jesus wants us to focus in similar situations today? Where do most people usually focus? What about you?

Jesus showed that our focus should be on God. God can help us find ways through any situations. Most people let their human limits keep them from seeing the potential to improve things when times are tough.

Why did Jesus ask the disciples to see how much food was available?

Place a check mark beside all answers you think apply.

- He wanted to encourage them to start with what they had.
- He wanted to know if someone had a huge stash.
- He was asking them to trust his plan.
- He wanted them to stop thinking of their own self-interests.
- He wanted them to experience the authority of Christ.
- He didn't want to send the people away hungry.

What do you think God wants us to do when we feel unable to meet a need?

Look to God for help.

The Gospel of John says that the loaves and fishes came from the lunch of one boy (John 6:1-14). What would you have done if you had been the young boy and were asked to give up your lunch to feed 5,000 people?

Individual answers.

How do you think the boy might have felt when Jesus used his lunch to feed the 5,000 people?

Proud, cheerful, excited, grateful.

Leader's Note

The participants could make strong arguments in favor of any or all of these possibilities. Encourage discussion.

As a group, think of some ways that Jesus can use you to help others.
Brainstorm a list of ideas.

Leader's Note

After doing this activity,
place SERVANT words and
phrases on tag board and
hang them in the room.

Keeping in mind what you have read and talked about, think of a word or phrase to illustrate each letter of the word *servant*.

S _____
E _____
R _____
V _____
A _____
N _____
T _____

Challenge

List seven ways you can serve, love, or care for others in your daily life. Do one of these things each day for the next week. They don't need to be big things. Sometimes the simplest things are the most meaningful. The important thing is that you write down things you will actually do.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

A Word on Stewardship

Part of living what we believe involves the way we spend or donate our money. Think about and discuss what might work for your group in the area of stewardship.

Close with prayer.

Session 2

Love the Lord Your God

Open with prayer.

Team Builder

In our world, love is defined in dozens of different ways. Many people are confused as to what love really means. List some ways that the word *love* is used or defined in our world today. Then write how you think God would define love.

The word *love* often is defined this way:

Individual answers.

I think God would define *love* this way:

Individual answers.

Love the Lord Your God

In Luke 10:27-28, one of the teachers of the law asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself ... do this, and you will live."

- Does that seem like a strange answer?

To receive eternal life, Jesus asks us to love God with our heart, soul, strength, and mind. What does it mean to love God with our heart, soul, strength, and mind?

Loving God with our heart means loving God more than our family members and friends. It means praying to God on a regular basis.

Loving God with our soul means thinking about God every day.

Loving God with all our strength means making a point to helping others.

Loving God with our minds means following God's intentions in our plans and decisions.

Jesus reminds us that if we have God in all areas of our lives, we will also love our neighbors and extend this love to them.

Leader's Note

Bring six to eight pictures that show the concept of love. These can be your own photos or pictures from magazines.

Here are some examples:

- a married couple
- a parent and a child
- someone helping another person with a task
- someone helping another person who is ill

Ask participants which picture best describes love to them.

Read John 15:9-17 and answer the questions that follow.

What do these verses say about God's intentions for us?

These verses describe love as the only way to receive true joy in life and as the only thing that is lasting in our world. God would like us to experience the true joy and love that come only from God.

How do we know God loves us? Is it only because God says so?

God expresses love in many ways: by sharing Jesus with us, by sharing a beautiful world with us, and by giving us the capability to love one another. We know God loves us through faith.

How do we show that we love God?

By trusting in God's words, living by God's commands, and loving others.

How do we know when others love us?

When people do kind things for us, care for us, or help us in times of need.

How do others know when we love them?

When we go out of our way to be with them when they are hurt or troubled. By listening to others. Love involves more than saying, "I love you."

In 1 John 4:20-21, the Bible says, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

God's definition of love has two parts. One part involves our relationship with God, and the other part involves our relationship with other people. Both parts must be in place for us to lead the lives God wants for us. Jesus tells us to love others as he loves us. How can we follow his example and demonstrate our love for others?

Look for specific examples, like actively listening to a friend in need.

Leader's Note

Help the participants understand that love also involves showing kindness toward others when they are not in trouble.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, the apostle Paul defined love the following way: “**Love** is patient; **love** is kind; **love** is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. **It** does not insist on its own way; **it** is not irritable or resentful; **it** does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. **It** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 again, but this time substitute Jesus’ name every time you see a word in **bold**. Now read it one more time substituting your own name. Which of these qualities apply to you?

Individual answers.

According to Paul’s definition and Jesus’ command, what are some areas that need work in your life?

We don’t need to be perfect to love. These verses remind us to move beyond our imperfections and develop better qualities in ourselves.

In groups of three or four, rewrite 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 in your own words. Then come back together and share what you have created.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says:

Encourage participants to write in their own style. Allow for creativity.

Challenge

Since God’s love has two parts, this challenge has two parts as well.

The first part is to find some time each day this week to be with God. Talk with God, be still with God, and listen to music that reminds you of God’s definition of love.

The second part is to share this love with others. Choose one quality of love (from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7) to focus on improving in the coming week. Find people at home, at school, and in the community with whom you can live out that quality of love.

Close with prayer.

Session 3

Noticing and Reaching Out

Open with prayer.

Team Builder

Pick one of the questions below and guess how the person to your right would answer that question. Then have the person give the correct answer and explain why. Go around the group twice.

1. If you could visit anywhere in the world, where would you go?
2. What is your favorite fast food restaurant?
3. What is your favorite TV show?
4. How many pets have you had in your life?
5. What is your favorite sport?
6. Would you eat a pizza topped with olives and green peppers?
7. If you had \$1 million, what would you do with it?
8. What do you like most to do when you have free time?
9. What job would you like to have when you are an adult?
10. Would you prefer to mow the lawn, weed the garden, practice the piano, vacuum the house, or paint the kitchen? Why?
11. What does your mom/dad do for a living?
12. What is your favorite movie?
13. In what state were you born?
14. Would you rather learn to juggle, play the harmonica, surf, or drive a truck?
15. What did you eat for lunch today?
16. What musical instrument(s) do you play?
17. If you could be any animal, what would you be?
18. How many people are in your immediate family? Which family members are closest to you?
19. What are two ways to have fun that don't cost money?
20. Are you a morning person or a night person? Why?

Who Is My Neighbor?

The previous session looked at Luke 10:27-28: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and love “your neighbor as yourself. . . . do this, and you will live.” Verse 29 asks, “And who is my neighbor?”

When you think of the word *neighbor*, what pictures come to mind?

This means more than next-door neighbors. It can include other people at school, in your community, and even in other parts of the world.

When Jesus says to “love your neighbor,” who is he talking about?
How are we supposed to love our neighbors?

Jesus is being both specific and general. We are to demonstrate love for our neighbors. Specifically, we should help feed, clothe, and care for them.

Name some people who are easy to love. What makes them easy to love?

Possible answers: friends, family members, people who are like us.

Name some people who are difficult to love. What makes them hard to love?

People who have different views from us. People who dress differently from us or who speak another language. People with less/more money than us. People who have committed a crime.

Are *loving* and *liking* the same thing? Explain.

Loving, in Jesus’ terms, requires a sense of responsibility to care for someone else. Liking may be part of the picture, but it’s not always the first step.

Do you think Jesus really expects us to love everyone? Is that even possible?

Yes. Jesus asks us to love everyone, knowing that this is difficult to do. Ask participants to talking about what the world would be like if more people cared about each other.

Leader’s Note

There are times when we help people most by letting them do things on their own. For example, we should not “help” our friends by letting them copy our homework.

The Good Samaritan

When a man asked Jesus what was necessary to receive eternal life, Jesus answered by telling the parable of the good Samaritan.

Read Luke 10:25-37 and answer the questions that follow.

Was this the answer the expert in the law wanted to hear? Why or why not?

It appears that the teacher of the law was trying to trap Jesus with the law. Jesus outlines the intent of the law and avoids the trap.

What attitude did the characters in this story have toward the injured man?

Expert in the law: **He was simply an example in Jesus' story.**

Bandits: **He was a person who did not deserve their respect.**

Priest: **He was an unclean person, unworthy of the priest's attention.**

Levite: **He was an unclean person, unworthy of the Levite's attention.**

Innkeeper: **He was cared for because of the Samaritan's money.**

Samaritan: **As a person, he deserved care and love.**

Jesus: **As a person, he deserved care and love.**

Who reacted in the way you would have expected? Who did not?

The participants might be most surprised by the priest's attitude.

How do you think the injured man felt when the priest and the Levite passed him by?

He probably felt quite alone, and possibly angry at their neglect.

What reasons might they have had for passing him by?

They may have feared being made ceremonially unclean by touching a dead man, or they may have feared for their own safety on the road.

Why are people reluctant to reach out today?

Individual answers. Many of the reasons people don't help others today are similar to the reasons people didn't help others in the past.

The group known as Samaritans developed when Jewish people from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (whose capital was Samaria) intermarried with people from other areas. Many “pure” Jewish people (as people in the Southern Kingdom of Israel considered themselves to be) hated the “half-breed” Samaritans because they thought Samaritans had betrayed and weakened their people by intermarrying with other groups. Many Samaritans, in turn, hated the “pure” Jewish people. The bitterness was so strong that Jewish people from the Southern Kingdom often traveled many miles out of their way just to avoid passing through Samaritan territory.

Do you think the injured man expected help from the Samaritan?

If the beaten man was a “pure” Jewish person, he would not expect help from a Samaritan.

How do you think the injured man felt when the Samaritan did help him?

The beaten man may have felt surprise, relief, or even fear.

Why do you think the Samaritan stopped to help?

He believed in caring for anyone in need. He felt a responsibility to help.

What did the Samaritan risk in providing this help?

The beaten man was a stranger who could have been dangerous. He might have been a decoy to lure travelers into a surprise robbery.

What did the Samaritan gain by helping the injured man?

The Samaritan gained nothing in terms of money or possessions. He may have gained something spiritually from the experience.

Think again about everything the Samaritan did to help the injured man. Did he have to do so much? Couldn't he have helped without getting so involved? Couldn't he have just felt badly or prayed for the injured man? Think about God's definition of love. How did the Samaritan live it out?

Jesus wants us to help other people no matter what label or stereotype they carry.

What groups of people are looked down upon in our society? In your school?

Individual answers.

Think about times when you have felt like you had been beaten up and needed someone to help you out. As a group, discuss what happened in some of these situations.

Part of being a servant means being aware of other people's needs and caring enough to reach out to help others. As our lives become busy, it's easy to stop noticing people around us who may need our care. Sometimes we simply don't want to be bothered or just assume that someone else will step in to help. Things weren't so different in Jesus' time. But Jesus was and is different.

Read Luke 19:1-10 and answer the questions that follow.

What did Zacchaeus do to get noticed by Jesus? **He climbed a tree.**

How did the other people react to Jesus' actions? **Shocked.**

What did Jesus risk in reaching out to Zacchaeus?

Jesus risked his reputation by helping a tax collector, someone who most people at the time disliked.

Why do you think Jesus did what he did?

Jesus was following God's plan that we help others.

How did Zacchaeus respond to Jesus' love?

He accepted Jesus and changed his own life.

People didn't always respond positively to Jesus' love. Do you think Jesus would have treated Zacchaeus differently if he hadn't promised to change?

Jesus would have treated Zacchaeus with respect either way.

What did Jesus expect from Zacchaeus?

Jesus wanted Zacchaeus to spend time with him and listen to him.

What are some things you can do to be noticed or to get attention?

Individual answers.

What do you think Jesus is telling us about how he will respond when we want his attention? Do you believe Jesus will respond this way to you?

Yes, Jesus will give us time and attention and love.

Who are some people or groups that others avoid or look down on?
How would Jesus want us to treat them?

Jesus would welcome all to be with him. He would invite us to do the same.

What holds us back from helping others? How can we avoid these roadblocks?

Individual answers.

Do you sometimes expect to be repaid for helping someone? If so, when?

Individual answers.

Read Colossians 3:12-17. Based on this verse, how does Jesus want us to live?

With compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

To be forgiving and loving. To live in harmony.

Challenge

Read through your local newspaper and identify needs in your community.
As a group, choose one of these needs to respond to this week.

On Your Own

This coming week, practice living what you have learned about serving, trying to notice people and their needs. Choose one person to whom you will give some extra attention during the coming week. Try to imagine how Jesus would treat this person. Think of ways you can let this person know you notice him or her, that he or she is important, and that you care. Plan to share your experiences in the next session.

Close with prayer.

Session 4

Forgiving Others

Open with prayer.

Team Builder

Share with one another your experience in giving extra care and attention to someone this past week, as described at the end of Session 3. Do you think that person felt your concern? How did you feel as you cared for this person?

Activity: Step 1

On a separate sheet of paper, write down one thing you are sorry you did. Keep your answer private—no one else should read it. (Step 2 is on page 17.)

Introduction

In 1 John 1:8-9, the Bible says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [God] who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

To live in love, we must learn to forgive. God loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us so that our sins might be forgiven. Because of God’s forgiveness, we have the opportunity to start clean, regardless of how many mistakes or poor choices we make. Jesus calls us to show this kindness toward others. We do this by looking past the faults of others, accepting them as they are, and offering them forgiveness.

Read Matthew 18:21-35 and answer the questions that follow.

In what ways are we sometimes like the unforgiving servant?

God has forgiven us of our sins, yet we often get mad at others for little things they have done wrong.

Have you ever had someone refuse to forgive you? How did you feel?

Individual answers.

Why is it often so hard to forgive people who hurt us?

Individual answers.

Write about a time that you had a hard time forgiving someone:

Individual answers.

God's forgiveness is perfect and complete. When we confess our sins we can count on the fact that God will indeed forgive us. What difference does it make in your life to know that God forgives you completely?

Individual answers.

Activity: Step 2

Gather all of the sheets of paper from the Step 1 activity on page 16. The leader will place the sheets of paper into a large envelope and destroy them.

Read Psalm 103:8-17 and answer the questions that follow.

What do you think God wants us to know about forgiveness?

Once God forgives us, our past sins are gone.

Write about a time that someone else forgave you. What did it feel like to be forgiven?

Individual answers.

Ephesians 4:1-2 tells us to live in a way worthy of those who have been chosen by God, to be humble and gentle, and to be patient with other people, making allowance for each other's faults. Living in love by forgiving others isn't always easy. Spend a moment thinking about all of the times God has forgiven you.

When we refuse to forgive others we are like the unforgiving servant in the story we read earlier. God's forgiveness is our example. God doesn't expect us to be able to forgive on our own. Forgiveness is a process. It is more than an attitude; it is an action that God will help us do.

Philippians 2:13 says that “it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Who or what do you find hardest to forgive? Give examples.

Individual answers.

How can God help you to forgive?

Individual answers.

Make a list of people you need God’s help to forgive.

Individual answers.

Challenge

Make an effort to be more forgiving during the week ahead. Choose one person from your list above and ask God to help you to forgive him or her. Write the person’s name down on a piece of paper and place it in your Bible. Each day this week, lift that situation to God in prayer. At the end of the week, throw out that sheet of paper.

Close with prayer.

Session 5

Giving Your Gifts Away

Open with prayer.

Team Builder

On a separate sheet of paper, each participant should write down two things that no one else in the group would know about him or her. For example: favorite musician or sports team; best/worst school subject. Put all the pieces of paper in the middle of your circle and take turns reading the slips of paper and guessing who wrote them until you have figured them all out. Then share with one another your forgiveness experience from last session.

Gifts from God

God has given each of us different combinations of talents and abilities. Everything that we have—money, possessions, talents, and abilities—is a gift from God. Sometimes it's easy to compare our gifts with other people's gifts, rather than appreciating and using what we have been given. But life would be pretty boring if we were all the same. Because we are all different, each of us is important and needed. You are the only person who can share your gifts and abilities. Today we are going to spend some time looking at ways we can serve by sharing our different gifts and abilities.

For each pair of words, choose the one that best fits you.

- Leader Follower
- Listener Talker
- Dreamer Realist
- Thinker Feeler
- Risk-taker Planner
- Indoor-type Outdoor-type

None of these characteristics is better or worse than the others. They are just different. Each is valuable. Each is important, and there are many more words to describe us. God didn't create us to be better or worse than one another, but instead to be unique, each with a purpose.

What are the benefits and the drawbacks of the words you chose?

Individual answers.

How do you feel about people who have gifts and abilities that are different from yours?

Individual answers.

How can we work together so our different gifts and abilities complement each other?

Individual answers.

Are we necessarily gifted in one way all the time? Can we change?

Individual answers.

Read Matthew 25:14-29 and answer the questions that follow.

Each of the servants was given something different. What did each of them do with what he was given?

The first and second servants multiplied them. The third servant buried it.

What was the third servant's excuse?

He was afraid.

How did the master respond to the third servant's lack of effort?

The master took the talents and gave them to the first servant.

What happened to the talents that were used?

The talents that were used were multiplied.

What happened to those that were not used?

The gifts that were buried were lost.

Optional Activity

Read a short book as a group, such as Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* or Angela Elwell Hunt's *The Tale of Three Trees*. Discuss the story and the questions below.

- God gives each of us different talents. How do we recognize our talents?
- What are some things that can hold us back from using what we have been given? What are some excuses that we can make for not using the talents we have?
- What happens to our talents when we use them? When we don't use them?

Our Gifts

Each of us has special gifts and talents. God gave us these gifts so we could use them to find joy, to benefit others, and to serve God. List some of the gifts and abilities that God gives to people.

Individual answers.

Read Romans 12:4-5 and answer the questions that follow.

What do these verses say about our gifts and the need to work with others?

We are all different and yet dependent on one another.

Our bodies are a great example of a variety of different parts all working together as a whole. List some of the functions that make our bodies work.

Some examples: breathing, blood flow, heartbeat.

Leader's Note

To serve God and help others, we also must take care of our health and own basic needs.

What happens when one of more parts of the body is hurting or not functioning properly? How does this affect the rest of the body?

Example: When you have the flu, a virus is affecting your immune system. As a result, you may have a fever and feel achy, tired, or nauseated. Your whole body is affected.

Give examples of times when a part of your body was hurting in some way. How did this affect the rest of your body?

Individual answers.

People need to work together to help make the body of Christ function. List some examples of people using their individual talents to work together.

An orchestra is a great example.

Choose one group from your list. What different kinds of people and gifts are needed in order for your group to work well together?

Individual answers.

What happens when we work together?

When we work together, our total effort can be better, more beautiful, or more efficient than when we work alone. Even when we each do different tasks or individual projects, we can still work peacefully with others. This can be a form of cooperation.

What happens when one or more members don't do their part?

The whole does not function as well as it could. It might not function at all.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 and answer the questions that follow.

Are we always happy with the gifts we have been given? Why or why not?

Individual answers.

God created us with the freedom to make choices. As in many other areas of our lives, we can choose to use our gifts to glorify God and to benefit others, or we can decide to ignore our gifts. We can even use our gifts in harmful or negative ways. Lists some gifts and talents you think God wants you to use.

Individual answers.

Optional Activity

When the leader gives the signal, pass your copy of the *Meaning of Service: Living in Love* book to the person on your right. In the space below, write down a gift or talent you see in the person who just handed you this book. Continue passing the books around until each is returned to its owner.

Now add three more talents or gifts you see in yourself.

Write down three specific ways you can use your gifts.

1.

2.

3.

How can you develop and use these talents?

Individual answers.

What might keep us from developing and using our gifts to their fullest?

Individual answers.

How do you think this makes God feel?

Individual answers.

Challenge

Make a decision to do one of the things you listed in this session that would help you use your gifts and abilities to help others. Write your decision here.

Close with prayer.

Session 6

Living in Love

Open with prayer.

Team Builder

As a group, share with one another what kind of job you would like to have as an adult. Share with one another your experiences using your gifts last week.

In the World

We have spent the last few weeks learning about service, learning what it means to be a servant, how to be aware of one another's needs, how forgiveness is part of serving, and how to use our gifts and abilities. In our final study together, we'll look at guidelines for our lives that we can carry away from this group.

Read Matthew 22:37-40 and answer the questions that follow.

Sound familiar? Again, Jesus reminds us that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. This means we not only glorify God by serving one another, but also by taking good care of ourselves.

What does it mean for you to love God?

Individual answers.

What does it mean for you to love one another?

Individual answers.

What does it mean for you to love yourself?

Individual answers.

Optional Activity

Celebrate communion together or have the leader wash each of the participants' feet, sharing one thing the leader has appreciated about him or her during this class.

Look back at Session 3, "Noticing and Reaching Out" and review the needs you identified in your community on page 15.

- Now that you have a better understanding of your gifts, what are some ways you can tangibly impact those needs?
- As a group, discuss and answer the questions that follow.

How can we serve and show love for God?

How can we serve and show love for one another?

How can we care for and love ourselves?

Read John 13:1-17 and answer the questions that follow.

In Jesus' time, most of the people wore sandals. They walked on dirt roads that were filled with dust—and sometimes with mud. Sandals offered little protection against the dust and mud, and it was customary for servants to wash the feet of guests as they entered a home. The job of foot washing was a lowly position—the worst job a servant had to perform.

Describe the worst job that people have today.

Individual answers.

This story takes place on the night before Jesus is killed. Think about how difficult this night must have been for Jesus. He was sharing his last meal on earth with his friends. He knew that he would soon be faced with betrayal, humiliation, and excruciating pain. Yet Jesus spent this evening giving the disciples their final instructions. Jesus highlighted his lessons by his actions. In this story that meant washing the disciples' feet.

What lesson was Jesus showing the disciples?

The lesson was that Jesus had come to serve the world—and that Jesus' followers should serve the world as well.

In verse 8, what did Jesus mean when he said, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me"?

Individual answers.

Now read Philippians 2:5-11. Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet?

Individual answers.

Challenge

In the space below, write down a promise to God about how you plan to live in love with God, one another, and yourself. Make your promise something you are comfortable with, something that is realistic for you. Keep in mind the commands of Jesus that we have studied in this session. Sign your name at the end of your promise.

(signature)

Close with the following prayer.

Dear God,

Thank you for the gifts you have given me.

*Please accept my thoughts, words,
and actions as an offering to you.*

*Help me to praise you in all that
I think, say, and do.*

*Walk with me as I continue to serve,
forgive, share, and love.*

Thank you, God, for loving me.

Amen



To Know, To Live,
To Grow

Apostles' Creed
Building the Christian Church
Jesus of Nazareth
Lord's Prayer
Meaning of Service: Living in Love
My Faith
New Testament
Old Testament
Ten Commandments
What Is a Lutheran?

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