

SESSION 1 THE GOAL OF LIFE

By the time I finished college, I knew I wanted to live my life for Jesus Christ and nothing else. Nothing could compare to knowing and loving him. Todd had made the same commitment. This shared commitment seemed like the foundation for a happy marriage, so we took the plunge. It wasn't long, though, before reality rolled in like a tidal wave. We were mad at each other all the time! He had his way of doing things, and I had mine. Everything was a power struggle. We both loved Jesus and were even serving him full-time as our vocation. But there was one thing we'd overlooked: we had no idea how to love one another. We had built our house on a solid foundation, but the walls were flimsy and the roof was sagging.

Once this began to dawn on us, we set about learning to love. Day after day, year after year, we struggled but pressed on. We learned to put our own agendas aside, to believe in each other, to see each other as more important than ourselves. As I looked with new eyes at the extent of God's love for me, this understanding slowly transformed my heart toward Todd. Our marriage is still a work in progress, but God is teaching us how to build a house of love.

Learning to love has been a theme in all our relationships—with friends, coworkers, and even strangers. It's often easier to love God privately than to love the flawed people around us. But at the heart of God's purposes for us is his longing that we will learn to give and receive love as richly as he does.

—Denise



CONNECTING WITH GOD'S FAMILY

20 min.

Doing Life together begins with simply getting to know one another. A great way to do this is to tell something of your life story. In this session you'll begin on a lighthearted note by playing a game called "Two Truths and a Lie."

1. The leader goes first. Tell the group three things about yourself. Two of these things must be true, and one must be something you've made up. Then each group member gets to guess



which of the three statements is false. After everyone has guessed, the leader reveals which statement was the lie. Each person who guessed right gets one point. The leader gets three points if no one guesses correctly.

Continue around the circle until everyone has told two truths and a lie. Then add up your points and give a round of applause to the winner.

2. It's important for every group to agree on a set of shared values. If your group doesn't already have an agreement (sometimes called a covenant), turn to page 00. Even if you've been together for some time and your values are clear, the Purpose-Driven Group Agreement can help your group achieve greater health and balance. We recommend that you especially consider rotating group leadership, setting up spiritual partners, and introducing purpose teams into the group. Simply go over the values and expectations listed in the agreement to be sure everyone in the group understands and accepts them. Make any necessary decisions about such issues as refreshments and child care.



GROWING TO BE LIKE CHRIST

30 min.

What's the point of life here on earth? Why does life together even matter? In a few brief sentences, Jesus sketches what's important in life:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

—Matthew 22:34–40

3. Jesus says that loving God and loving our neighbors should be our two top life goals. Why do you suppose he chose these two goals instead of others? (For instance, why isn't self-fulfillment on his list? Why doesn't he cite a longer set of rules?)

4. *Love* is an abstract idea. On a practical level, how does a person go about loving God?

5. Share some examples of how people you know have loved a neighbor (family member, coworker, and the like) well. What does love look like in action?

6. Do you think it's possible to love God without loving our neighbors? Explain your reasoning.

7. What do you think happens when someone tries to love others without loving God?

Not long after this incident with the Pharisees, Jesus knew he was about to be arrested and killed. He gave his followers another command to add to the first two:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
—John 13:34–35

8. How is this new command like the two earlier ones?

How is it different?

9. What’s your reaction to the idea that the Christian life boils down to relationships—love for God and love for others?

10. In what situation this week will it be challenging for you to love God or others?

Loving God and others can't really be separated. Life together with God means life together with others, and vice versa. In the next five sessions of this study, you'll learn about five steps along a path toward learning to love God and others well. *Learning to love*—that's the point of life on earth.



SHARING YOUR LIFE MISSION EVERY DAY

10 min.

God is so full of love that he created humans so that he could love and be loved by us. He sent Jesus to draw us into his family of love. Love isn't meant to be hoarded; it's meant to be given away! You've now tasted a loving connection with each other in this group. The beginning of a group is a wonderful time to welcome a few new people into your circle.

11. Do you know anyone who would benefit from a group like this? Who would that person be? Think about family members, friends, neighbors, parents of your kids' friends, church members, coworkers, and the people who share your hobbies. Take a moment now to prayerfully list one or two names, and then share the names with your group.

_____ NAME

_____ NAME

12. Pull an open chair into the circle of your group. This chair represents someone you could invite to join your group. Take a moment to pray together for the people whose names you wrote down.

Commit to

- making the call this week. Why not?—over 50 percent of those invited to a small group say yes! You may even want to invite him or her to ride with you.
- calling your church office to get the names of new members, and inviting new members who live near you to visit your group.
- serving your group by praying for and welcoming new people to your group.



SURRENDERING YOUR LIFE FOR GOD'S PLEASURE 15–30 min.

13. Gather into circles of three or four people so that everyone has time to share and pray. Allow everyone to answer this question: “How can we pray for you this week?” You can write down prayer requests in the Prayer and Praise Report on page 00.

Take some time to pray for these requests. Ask God to empower you with love for the people on your hearts. Anyone who isn't used to praying aloud should feel free to offer prayers in silence. Or, if you're new to prayer and you're feeling brave, try praying just one sentence: “God, please help me to love _____.”

STUDY NOTES

An expert in the Jewish law. The law is the teaching laid down in the first five books of the Bible—the very part of the Bible that Jesus quotes in this passage. The goal of life has been laid down from the beginning and hasn't changed.

Heart . . . soul . . . mind. These words overlapped in Jewish usage. The heart, for example, was regarded as the source of one's deepest beliefs, motives, desires, and feelings. It didn't signify merely the emotions. The point of using all these words was to emphasize the call to love God with *every* part of us—emotions, reasoning, imagination, passion, will, energy, and actions. Loving God is not just an emotion, nor is it just a belief. It also involves our will. We put our soul into it and do something to make love a reality.

Neighbor. The Jews debated who was and wasn't a "neighbor" who deserved love. Jesus expanded the word to include *everyone* who crosses our path (Luke 10:29–37). Today people who live on the other side of the planet are our neighbors, because our lives are linked with theirs.

For further study on this topic, read *Leviticus* 19:9–18; *Deuteronomy* 6:4–5; 10:12–13; *Proverbs* 4:23; *1 John* 3:16–18; 4:7–12, 20–21.

The Purpose-Driven Life Reading Plan: Day 00
