



Nurturing children to love God with all their hearts

LOVE OTHERS

“Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the final apologetic.”

— Francis Schaeffer

Imagine playing musical chairs, and always being the one who ends up without a place to sit. Imagine a playground where teams are selected, and always being the leftover who must keep score instead of playing the game. Imagine coming to a birthday party, and having your present ignored and, worse yet, your presence ignored.

Then imagine someone reaching out to you — to give you a chair, to draw you into the inner circle of the team, to value you and your gifts. **Imagine someone like Jesus. Then imagine yourself being that someone who reaches out to others like Jesus did, even those who are different than you are. You are envisioning community.**

This loving togetherness evidently doesn't come naturally to any of us. Based on how many times Scripture addresses relational issues, instruction is necessary. Scripture calls us to unity (John 17:23) as a reflection of the unity known between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scripture calls us to depend on one another's diverse gifts and roles (Romans 12:3-10) as a reflection of the different roles found within the Godhead.

Living out the unity and interdependency of the Trinity takes intentionality from us — and from the children we nurture. **We need to give thought and care to relational choices so that our lives reflect to others God's loving attitude and actions towards us. Our lives need to echo his voice to us: We're in this together.**

Living out the spiritual practice of community means that we exhibit 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10: “But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another. ... Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you to love them even more.”

“Because he first loved” (1 John 4:19) motivates us to demonstrate his inclusive love to others. And there are no exception clauses to “Love one another.” (1 John 3:11) Our love for others needs to reach from those who are like us, and close to us, all the way out to those far away and different from us. It needs to include those who are like us, but not close by. Perhaps most importantly, it needs to include those who are close to us, yet different from us. **We need to deeply know and be deeply known by others so that we will hear heavenly truth from others and be influenced by heavenly love for and from others.**

We can't generate that kind of love on our own. It has to come as a result of being soaked in the love of God ourselves. So we begin to nurture community in our children by first teaching them that God loves them completely and radically — and pointing out the many ways his love is evidenced. Then we model inclusive love in our own relationships. And also, we create environments where children can experience and enjoy sharing his love with others.

Living in Christian community, enjoying the togetherness of the household of God, is a recognition and celebration of Jesus turning away from his place in heaven so that I could have a place there, too. It's a chance to live out “on earth as it is in heaven.”



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LOVE OTHERS

INVITATIONS TO ENGAGE

Start the conversation with your child!

“Come and sit with me a minute. Let’s explore a wonderful gift from God — the gift of community. Here’s what I mean by that ...”

EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6 years old)

I’m going to read a very special message from God to you. It’s in the Bible, in 1 John 3:11: “Love one another.”

When is it easy to do that? What makes it hard to do that? God loves you when you are easy to love and when you are hard to love. He never stops loving you.

We want to show love to others like Jesus did. Let’s look for ideas for sharing God’s love in these “One Another” reminder cards based on the “one another” verses in the Bible. (See Recommended Resources below.)

ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10 years old)

Read 1 John 3:11 to me and tell me what you think God is saying to you. Now let’s read 1 John 4:19 to find out what helps us do what that verse said. **“We love each other because he loved us first.”**

God’s love is so big that it would be foolish not to pass it on to others. He tells us how to share his love with others and be part of Christian community in many places in the Bible.

Let’s sit quietly with God for a little while and ask him to help us as we pick one of the “one another” verses in the Bible and make a plan for doing it this week. (Use “One Another” reminder cards. See Recommended Resources below.)

PRETEEN/EARLY ADOLESCENT (10-14 years old)

Read John 13:34-35 to me. **“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”**

Take a minute of quiet to tell God when that is easy to do, and then tell him what makes it hard to do that. Now let’s ask God to help us as we choose one of the “one another” verses. Let’s ask him to give us ideas for how he wants us to do that even more than we have been. (Use the “One Another” reminder cards. Information below.)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

“One Another” reminder cards: Download at www.kidZathome.org

ColorFull: Celebrating the Colors God Gave Us, by Dorena Williamson (for ages 4–8)

God Made Me and You, by Shai Linne (for ages 8–12)

(Additionally, the book offers “6 Ways to Show Your Child God’s Design for Ethnic Diversity”)