

It's All About Relationship

by
Mark Phillips

Discussion Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help *begin* discussions among people who are studying the book.

Hopefully, you will walk away with the following:

1. New, revitalized relationships *with the other members of the group*.
2. Encouragement to strengthen your relationships with people *outside of the group*.
3. A stronger relationship with *God*.
4. Tools to use to make the world better by loving the unlovable.
5. A better understanding of God, Love, Creation, and your place in it.

Let me explain:

1. Don't be a collection of anonymous students. Use the time together to strengthen the bond between members of the group. Be open to making new friends, not just finishing a project. Use the icebreakers included at the end of this guide to help. The world needs more **Relationship**, and this is an excellent place to start.
2. The relationships built within these sessions will help you strengthen your other relationships in your lives. Take the challenges of **accountability** seriously.
3. God IS **love**. God IS **relationship**. Grow in those, and you will grow closer to their source.
4. As people who care, we need to use our newfound support and strength to go out of our comfort zones and start fixing the mess of the world we live in.
5. If the only thing you get from this study is a different, philosophical understanding of the being we call "God," I honestly believe you will have wasted your time.

NOTES

What do you hope to accomplish with this book study?
(When you are finished, come back and read this answer)

Usually, one person becomes the facilitator, either by design or by personality.

NOTES FOR THE MODERATOR

It is important to **let the conversation go where the Spirit and the other readers take it**. Some of those directions might be beyond the scope of this book and study. Some might be beyond the knowledge of everyone in the room.

That's okay.

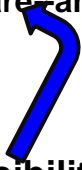
Talk it out, and maybe be comfortable with "*We don't know. Let's find out.*" Find answers to your questions. Feel free to give additional homework between sessions--to research and find deeper answers. Begin your next session with *that* discussion.

It is also important that the moderator enforces a **spirit of support and compassion**. Do not allow anyone to be belittled or their beliefs dismissed as foolish, childish, or heretical. Part of growing in God's love is learning to understand others--instead of judging them.

Try not to allow anyone to take over and "preach". This is a journey that you are taking together. Certainly, the range of knowledge and depth of faith will vary greatly among members of your group. However, this should not become a class where one person is the teacher and the rest are merely silent students. The Holy Spirit works best through open and honest discussions. Insights can come from anyone--even the *least* among us.

Feel free to open up the discussion at the end of each session to "**ANYTHING folks want to talk about.**"

Some details that help group studies go smoothly:

- Start on time
 - End on time
 - Allow time for socializing afterward, but give everyone the opportunity to make a graceful exit when the “learning” is done.
 - Serve finger foods and drinks (or meet somewhere that does)
 - Delegate this to a different person each week so the host doesn't have to pay for it all the time.
 - If serving alcohol, make certain that will not make anyone uncomfortable. Booze can make your sessions more enjoyable, but it can also be a stumbling block--if it is, **GO DRY**.
 - Find a comfortable place to meet
 - Living room (not a dining room--too formal)
 - Church basement (not the sanctuary--too structured)
 - Bar (not a dance hall--too loud)
 - Cafe (not a restaurant--too expensive and takes too long)
 - **Be sure everyone is given the opportunity to share--and the opportunity to decline sharing--each week.**
 - **This is the moderator's main responsibility**
- 

NOTES

MODERATOR: How do you plan to achieve the goals set out for this group?

NON-MODERATOR: How do YOU plan to help achieve the goals for this group?

Before you begin each session, pray together something similar to this:

God of Infinite Love, we delight in the fact that You are greater than we can ever hope to fully understand. Thank you for blessing us with brains and hearts that continue to grow in understanding and faith. Holy Spirit, guide this time together so that your Truth settles in us and draws us closer to the source of all Life and Love. Open our minds so that we can learn more about you; open our hearts so that we can welcome more of You into our lives.

End each session with a prayer; perhaps something like this:

God of Infinite Love, thank you for this time together, growing closer to each other and to You. Help us this week bring your Love to each of our relationships: family, friends, work, and strangers. Help us to share more of You with the world.

Suggested sessions

For the purpose of study, the book is divided into FOUR separate sections. They are labeled Week 1-4, but your group can read it at whatever pace you choose.

WEEK 1 Read pp 2-22.

P. 4

- A. What is your answer to the Big Question, “Why are we here?”
- B. On a scale of 1 to 10, how essential is the Holy Trinity to your world view? When you try to make sense of the world around you, how much does the Trinity fit into that puzzle?

P.5 Speedbump #1

- C. Answer the questions in the Speed Bump. Discuss the importance of Question #3 if your answer is “No.”

P.11

- D. What do you know the *most* about? (What are you an expert in?) Think about how much deeper the depth of your knowledge is now than when you first started learning about that subject. Discuss.

P.13 Speedbump #2

- E. After thinking about Speedbump #2, discuss it. WHY do you believe what you believe?
- F. Do you cling to any of your beliefs because they are easy or convenient? (Accepting something else might be too challenging to your lifestyle?) Be honest with yourself even if you can't be honest with the group.
- G. Try to support your beliefs with facts or logic or examples. (If you CANNOT support your beliefs, that does NOT automatically mean they are wrong. Much about faith cannot be explained or supported.)

Use this week to pray and meditate about your beliefs. How strongly do you hold them? How confident are you that you are right?

P. 16

H. What is one way you can “*Think outside the box*” when it comes to God? What part of your picture of God are you open to adjusting?

P. 19 Speed Bump #3

I. Discuss what God *looks like* to you.

J. Discuss HOW you came up with that picture. Maybe talk about WHEN you developed it.

P. 21

K. Does God have to be “*He*” to you? Does the pronoun have to be “*god*”? Discuss your own preferences; discuss the author’s choice to use “*He*”. Will that be a distraction to you?

L. What is your favorite name for “*God*”? Explain why.

NOTES:

WEEK 2: Read pp 24-45.

P. 27

- A. Follow the instructions in the sidebar. Take some time to come up with a **complete** answer--a well thought out definition of "Love."
- B. Break into pairs. "Teach" your partner what "God is Love" means. Learn their explanation. Discuss the differences and similarities.

P. 33

- C. DRAW A PICTURE of "God is Love." Show the group and explain it.
- D. Explain what this statement means to you: "***Don't start with the One and try to make it into Three, but start with the Three and see this is the deepest nature of the One.***"

This will be addressed later in the book, but start thinking about this: If the supernatural being whom we call "God" is three entities AND the perfect relationship between them, where do you fit in?

P. 35

- E. Explain the "Spousal Analogy" in your own words and discuss it with the group.

P. 38

- F. Come up with your own analogy that demonstrates that God is not loving--GOD IS LOVE. What else is bound by its nature to behave in a certain way?

P. 40

- G. Discuss a time when you just HAD to tell someone about a thing or a person that you were "in love" with. Try to describe the feeling of overflowing or bursting that you felt.

P. 42

- H. Discuss the ramifications of “**Love is why everything exists.**” What does that mean to the way we should live our lives?

If you are **not** convinced that “*Love is why everything exists,*” be sure to discuss that. Argue against it. Use logic, scripture, and facts to support your viewpoint. Everyone in the group should be open-minded and civil when discussing this. It could lead to great epiphanies.

P 43

- I. Are there other “*Big Picture*” questions that can be answered with, “The whole point of US is Love”? Think of a few and share them. Does “Love” give an answer?

P. 44

- J. Discuss St. Augustine’s suggestion to “*Love, then do whatever you want.*”
If everything we do is motivated by love, is it possible for us to sin?
- K. If we think about God’s love as being a *constant* flow (that we can either accept or reject), how does that change how we approach the idea of “**forgiveness.**” “**repentance,**” “**reconciliation**”, and “**grace**”?

NOTES:

WEEK 3 Read pp.46-68

(Try the meditation exercise that begins on page 63.)

P. 46

- A. **“Our good” is anything that draws us closer to God.** Discuss what that means on a practical level. How have you experienced God drawing you closer to Himself? Did you recognize that at the time?

P 47

- B. Discuss WHY you *worship*. Why do you go to church? How does that benefit God? How does that benefit YOU?
- C. Imagine you are sitting next to God when He sees someone sinning. What is God’s reaction? Why--do you think--did you imagine that reaction? What does that say about your understanding of--and relationship to--God?

P. 51

- D. Discuss the idea of “*True Self*” and “*False Self*.” Why is it so important that we see the difference? Why is it vital that we live as our “*True Self*,” especially when using our “*False Self*” is often so much easier?

P. 53

- E. Discuss the ramifications of the Holy Spirit being *INSIDE* of us.

Think about these ideas:

We are *connected* to God.

We are helped by God.

We have divine DNA; we are children of God.

P. 56

- F. How do YOU align your spirit with God’s? Explain this to the group. Perhaps someone needs to hear the process that helps you.

P. 61

- G. Discuss the things the author suggests to “*do*” to prepare yourself to allow God in. Is there anything missing? Which of these steps are helpful to you? Which have you struggled with?

How can members of the group help each other with those steps that cause the most struggling?

P. 63

H. ***ON YOUR OWN, try the meditation exercise.***

Discuss it with the group.

What did you experience?

Did you think it was “successful”? (What does “successful” mean to you?)

What was the greatest challenge?

Would you try it again? How could you make it more effective for you?

Suggestion: Be accountable to the group. Promise each other that you will try the meditation exercise (or something like it that works for you) a certain number of times before you meet again.

P. 67

I. Discuss the idea of getting yourself out of the way so God can connect with you.

What does that mean to you?

What does that feel like when you accomplish it?

What benefits do you see?

P. 68

J. AS A GROUP, try the meditation exercise on this page:

- Sit silently and take at least five deep, clearing breaths.
- Have one leader read each line.
- The group quietly repeats.
- Breathe.
- Continue until you can just “Be.”

Discuss.

Which line grabbed you the most?

Did you feel connected to the Holy Spirit? To each other?

NOTES:

WEEK 4: Read p 69-98

P. 70

A. When you talk to God, do you expect a response? Discuss.

P. 72

B. If you are reading this book with a group, it probably qualifies as a “church relationship.”

Do you see any of the people in this group outside of this book study?

Why not?

Discuss how you can nourish the relationships you are forming in this group.

Now, DO IT. Do something that builds up your relationship with others in this group.

Be accountable to each other.

C. Discuss how you can create and nourish other relationships within your church community.

What is keeping you from taking those actions?

P. 83

D. Discuss why *humility* is so important when loving others, especially loving those persons we don't like.

P. 85

E. Discuss your “Them” list.

What group of people do you have the hardest time loving?

What is your justification for not loving them?

What are some practical ways you can work on loving them?

F. Are there any *individuals* that you think you cannot love? Maybe you can't forgive them. If you can't discuss them with the group, try asking God for help to allow Love to flow through you to them. If you can discuss them, be sure to ask for others to pray for you.

P. 90

G. Discuss other ways we can bring Love to the world every day. What *realistic* and *practical* ways can we show God's Light when it would be easier to ignore the Darkness?

P. 91

H. BRIEFLY* discuss social media.

Do you use these platforms to spread Love or just to feel better about yourself and your opinions?

How **will** you be a positive influence on your corner of the social media world?

Be accountable to each other to bring Love and Light to the internet.

*--Be careful to avoid letting this become a gripe session of examples of negativity (i.e. posts that disagree with Us), fake news, online bullying, etc..

P. 93

I. “**Love** is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

Discuss how that affects the way you should treat people who are different--

Those who are part of:

other religions, other races, other sexual orientations, other...?

P. 96

J. Discuss how you will step out of your comfort zone this week and improve one of your relationships? (with God, with your family, with a stranger...)

Be accountable to the group.

Suggestion: Meet as usual next week and discuss your experiences.

How did you connect with God?

How did you love others that you didn't like?

How did you bring Light instead of darkness?

How did others react?

How did you need help or support?

P. 100

Suggestion: Choose another book to read. It can be from this list, or it can another title.

Gather again to study that book. Continue to strengthen your faith, your relationships with each other, and your connection to Love.

I do hope this book has been of some benefit to you. I pray God has touched you in a special way that has opened your heart a little more to the wonders and freedom of Love. Please continue learning about the miracles of Creation and your place in it. It is an endless river of revelations that will amaze your mind and strengthen your heart.

God bless you in everything you do,

Mark.

NOTES

ICEBREAKERS

The first goal of this study guide is to build new relationships. Use these icebreakers to help that process to begin and grow. They can be used or adapted however you like.

Name Game with a Twist

Stand in a circle.

Person #1 says their name and makes some sort of gesture (This can be anything--two thumbs up, a karate kick, spin around once, hip wiggle, ANYTHING).

The next person in line (Person #2) says his/her own name, adding a new gesture, THEN says the name and does the gesture of Person #1.

Person #3 continues, repeating the name and gesture of Person #1 and Person #2.

Continue until everyone has a turn. Help each other!--this isn't a competition.

Have Person #1 try to name everyone and do all their gestures!

Two Truths and a Lie

Each person shares THREE facts about themselves, but one of them is FALSE. The group votes on which they think is a lie. The person reveals their falsehood and explains one of their truths.

Passions Tic Tac Toe

Each person is given a paper with a blank 3X3 grid and randomly fills in each of the nine spaces with a passion--something that is important to him/her.

Everyone walks around the room looking for others with shared passions. If two match, they sign the other's space.

The winner is the first person with THREE IN A ROW.

Line Up

The group has to line up in a particular order without speaking:

Height,

Eye color

Hair color

Birthday (pantomime might be necessary)

Have You Ever?

The moderator says an action. Everyone who has ever done that action stands up. A quick explanation might be in order.

Possible actions:

- Traveled outside the United States
- Lived in a different state
- Seen a crime being committed
- Saved someone's life
- Talked to a famous person
- Been in a movie or tv show
- Eaten something that was still alive
- Been suspended from school
- Slept outside under the stars
- Run away from home
- Made the winning play in a big game
- Made my own clothes

Rock Paper Scissors Tournament

Split into pairs. Play Rock-Paper Scissors.

Losers are done and should cheer the winners.

Winners find another opponent.

Play again.

Losers are done and should cheer the winners.

Continue until there is one winner.

Moderator should announce the winners' names each round

Candy Game

Pass around a bowl of colorful candy (M&Ms, Skittles, etc).

Ask people to take as many candy pieces as they like, but NOT to eat them.

Once the bowl of candy has been passed around, each person has to answer a question for each COLOR they took.

You can assign questions such as:

Red: What's your favorite book?

Orange: What's the best vacation spot you have ever been to?

Blue: What's your favorite kind of food?

Green: What TV show are you addicted to?

Brown: If you could have any superhero quality, what would it be?

Yellow: What's the best part of your work week?

Paper Airplanes

Pass out different colored sheets of paper to each person

Ask everyone to write an interesting fact about themselves on the piece of paper and fold it into a paper airplane.

Everyone launches their paper airplane to somewhere around the room.

Everyone retrieves one of the paper airplanes, reads the fact, and guesses whose paper airplane they got.

Year of the Coin

Put a collection of coins in a bowl (making sure none are too old).

Everyone picks a coin out of the bowl.

Each person shares something they were doing the year the coin was minted.

If you are interested in getting more copies of the book,
“It’s All About Relationship,”
more **FREE** copies of the *Discussion Guide*, or you want to check out some of Mark Phillips’ other books, visit:
www.TwelveTwoPublishing.com