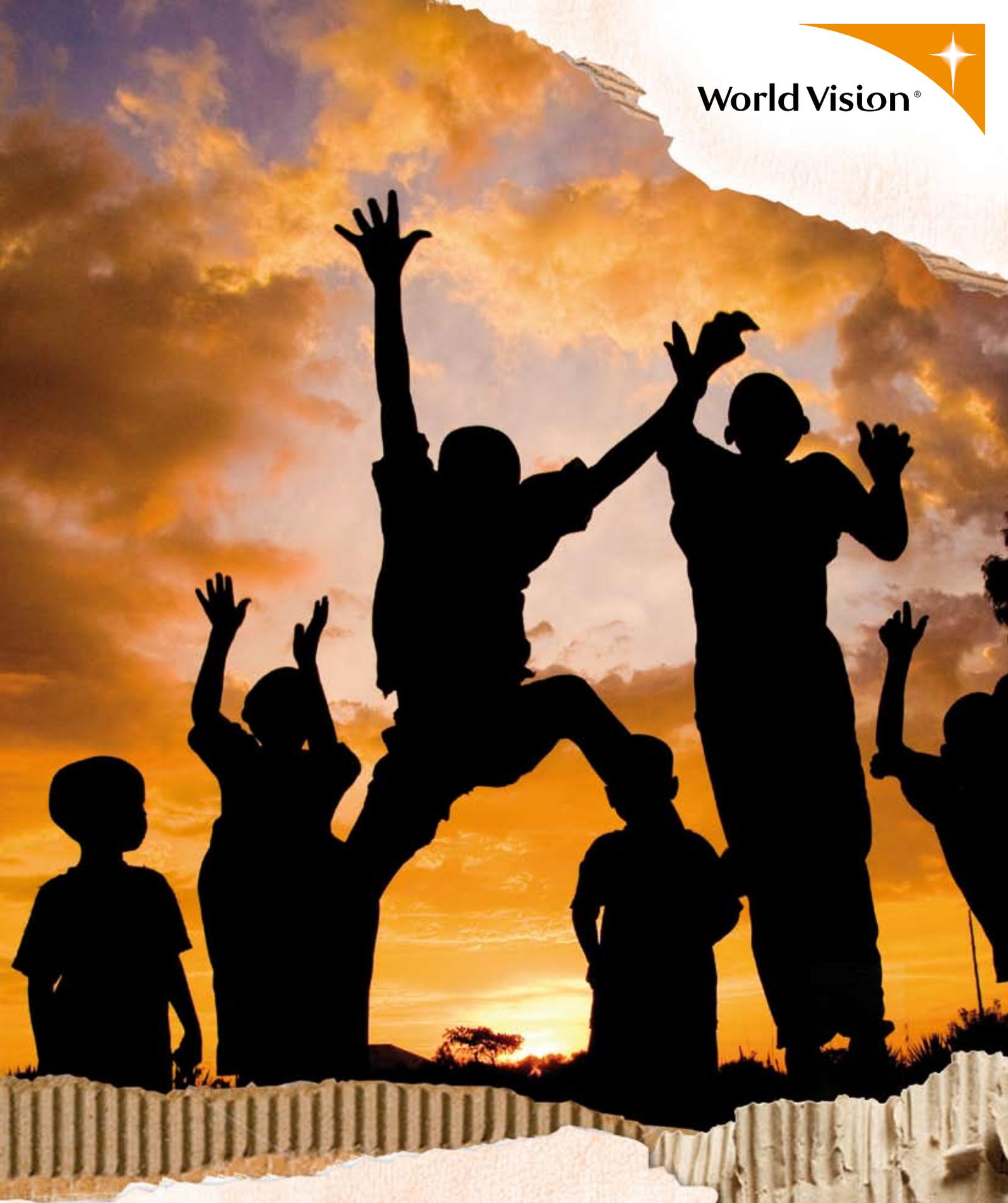




World Vision®



small group bible study

**channels of
hope**

CHURCH RESOURCES

small group bible study

key concepts

God is love. God lives in relationship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are invited to live like God in healthy relationships and in unity with him and our community.

Deuteronomy 6:4 says:
Hear O Israel, The Lord Our God,
The Lord is one.

In Hebrew this is written, Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloyhenu Adonai Echad. The word 'Echad' means one in terms of unity, like one bundle of sticks or one bunch of grapes. God's relationship with Son and Spirit demonstrates a perfect community of love.

key passage

choose your preferred translation

1 John 4:7-18 (The message)

God is love

⁷⁻¹⁰ My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love – so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about – not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God.

¹¹⁻¹² My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us – perfect love!

¹³⁻¹⁶ This is how we know we're living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He's given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we've seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God's Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.

to love, to be loved

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.

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1 John 4:7-18 (New Living Translation)

loving one another

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. ¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.

1 John 4:7-18 (New International Version)

God's love and ours

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son[a] into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for[b] our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

how to use

Run this as one complete study or in separate sections but please follow the order of the session as it is written. Read through the quote and *1 John 4: 7-18*. At the appropriate point in the session read through the **reflect** and **go deeper** sections and watch the **Channels of Hope** film as a group. Work through the **engage** and **getting personal** sections in pairs.

reflect

'There is no smaller package in the world than that of a person wrapped up in themselves. Love is the final measurement of our stature. The more we love the bigger we are.'

William Sloane Coffin, Clergyman, Civil Rights and Peace Activist

In *1 John 4: 7-18*, John takes his reader on a journey of understanding, from the initial assertion that God is love, to the deepest demonstration of this love, shown through Jesus' sacrifice and salvation from sin, and onwards, to the concluding command that God's children love one another.

The main purpose of the passage is to trace the relationship between God's love and human love. Through it John helps us to recognise that love is not just something God does, love is what God is (and always has been). This passage, along with John's other teachings remind us that love has existed since the beginning of time and the whole world was created out of it. As both the creator and the source of all love, God is committed to loving us perfectly. Perfect love can only flow from God.

John also makes it clear that God-born love has an incredible power. Because God is love, when we are in a relationship with him, love ripples from Him to us and out from us to others. Like electricity, love comes from one source and has the power to light up the world.

Tim Dearborn says:

The Gospel is about more than Jesus and me. It is about being open to love, accepting it, being changed by it and then being inspired by it to change our lives and the world.

engage

This passage leads the reader to three conclusions:

- God is the source of all love
- God sent Christ as a model of real love, in action
- God's people can be easily identified as those following the command to love one another

Find favourite biblical 'episodes,' which highlight one or all of these three conclusions and explain why you chose them.

A white sheet of paper with a hole-punch top edge and horizontal lines for writing, placed over the bottom right of the page.

go deeper

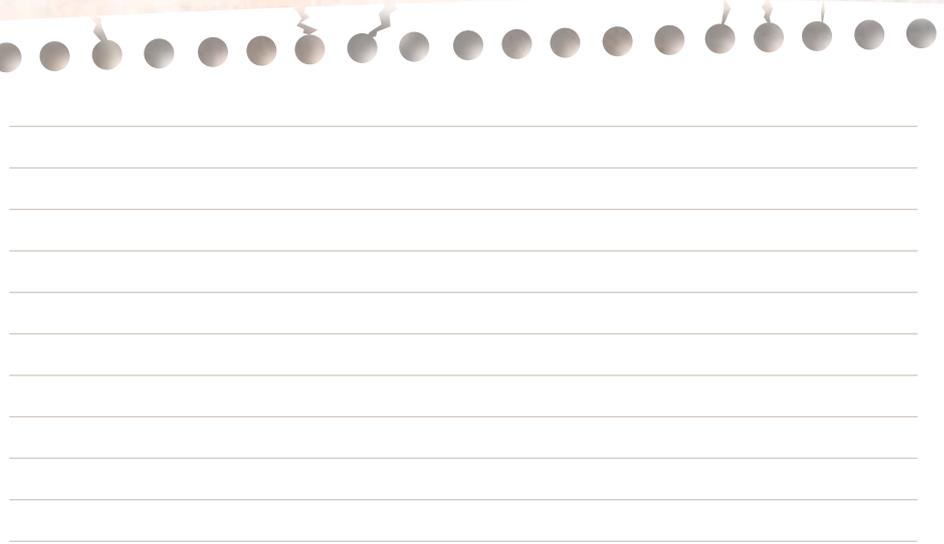
When John exhorts his readers, 'let us love one another', he is encouraging us to become conduits for the power of love. If 'God is love', then anyone who claims to be in relationship with God, to be 'born of God' or to 'know God,' must also be characterized by love. See also: *John 3:10 & 14*

The fact that John needs to remind us to love one another makes one thing pretty clear; whilst we might be plugged in to the divine source, loving others is probably going to be a fairly tricky business!

notes

Note down some of the things that might be preventing you from loving others, as well as some 'loving' characteristics that you might still need to work on:

For example: *I struggle to show an interest in my family when they never seem to have time for me. I need to work on being more generous with my time and less generous with my political rantings...*



Watch the Changing Communities film from the **Channels of Hope** DVD and discuss the different groups and individuals demonstrating the types of love mentioned opposite...

get personal

John goes on to show how God has provided us with a model for the way that we should love each other. Verses 9 and 10 of the passage show Christ's death on the cross as the ultimate act of sacrificial love, an act of love made by father, son and spirit in community. Atoning for human sin, we see, in the person of Jesus, what true love is:

- love that breaks down barriers
- love that endures rejection and misunderstanding
- love that overcomes obstacles to bring healing and reconciliation

And the command that we love each other in verse 11, challenges us to love in the same way that Jesus loved us; in an act of community that gives life to others. John makes it clear that those who belong to God and are reflecting God's activity in the world will be identifiable at a glance! See *John 13:35*

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wrap-up

So strong is John's confidence that the Christian community will fulfil the command to love like Christ that, in verse 12 he describes Christian love as the physical manifestation of the invisible God: *'No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us and his love has been brought to full expression in us.'*

Without being plugged in to the divine source of love, we have neither the incentive nor the power to love each other. But those who walk with God, who seeking to know real love and be transformed by it, receive this commandment with the knowledge that what is being asked of them is possible. God is not only made known to us through the love of the Father and the sacrifice of the son but also through the way that we demonstrate our love to one another. Love, flowing from believers to their neighbourhood, is God's intended goal. When the power of love is flowing things are as they should be and God's love is 'brought to full expression.'

take-away

love letter from God

Dear child,

I love you. I created this earth as a gift, as proof that my love is vast and perfect... and forever. So don't fill your life up with so much stuff that you forget to look around you. Everything that is good or beautiful in this world is yours. It's part of your inheritance. It's my way of showing that we belong together, that I will never forget you or abandon you. And that's why I gave you Jesus and salvation. I never had any intention of existing without you. It's only through you that my love can reach full expression.

So just remember, the only time that I am forced to keep my distance is when you shut me out. Keep close to me and nothing will be able to separate us.

From your Heavenly Father.

further reading

John 17: 15-23

Jesus prays for all believers

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.