

Apostles Houston  
Life Group Study: John 15:9-17

## **Love and Laughter**

### Creating a Sacred Space

Welcome→ Embrace→ Refresh

## **Remembering Our Purpose**

### Why Do We Do Life Groups? (*feel free to communicate this in your own words*)

In Acts 2, we read how early Christ followers devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. In Life Groups we follow their example with the hope of becoming more like Jesus, the goal of our salvation.

## **Being Known**

### Story Telling

We believe that loving God and others begins by being known.

*In 5-7 minutes, what do you want us to know about yourself (~5Hs)?*

### Pray and Celebrate

Be sure to honor whatever is good or beautiful about their story, and ask one or two people to pray over those who just shared.

## **Following Up**

### Responding to God's Word

In our last meeting, we were encouraged to discern between hearing the voice of God versus competing voices. How have you engaged that this week?

## Hearing the Word

Hearing: (Read "Context" and then John 15:9-17. Then pray for God's grace to understand.)

- Before we dive in, what are some big themes that stand out to you as significant in this passage? Or from the sermon this past weekend?
- In v 9, Jesus invites us to "abide" in his love. One could translate this as "make your dwelling in my love." Jesus' own identity is as the beloved Son of God. Now, he confers on us the identity as his beloved disciples and friends. What does it mean for us to have our identities framed by his love? How does that frame our self-image? What does God feel when he thinks about us?
- Our identities as God's beloved require our participation. Just as for someone being a musician means that they actually play music, so too does our new identity mean participating in God's love. Abiding in God's love means following his commandments, especially his commandments to love. How does this impact your understanding of obedience in the Christian life? How does it influence your motivation for obedience?
- In vv 14-15, Jesus draws a distinction between being his friends and his servants. Servants do not know why they follow orders, but friends have knowledge of God's purposes. How does our knowledge of Jesus and the gospel help us to obey him? How does it help us to love others?
- In v 13, Jesus describes the extent to which he loves us and that we are to love others—the point of laying down one's life. Note, this is not just a willingness to give one's life but the very doing of it. While we may not all be called to be martyrs we are called to radical acts of love. What are some practical ways you can love others? How can we practice this radical love as a life group?

Obeying (application):

- This week spend time in prayer considering your identity as beloved of God and Christ. Reflect on the Spirit's invitation to radical acts of love and ask Spirit to show you how you may participate. Come next week ready to share at least one action you have taken as a result.

## Soul Care

### Prayer Requests

This week, break up into groups of MEN and WOMEN for prayer. Along with sharing prayer needs, create some space for confession. Pray for God's grace to repent and be healed.

**Announcements:** No Announcements

## Teacher's Notes

### Context

This week's passage comes within the context of Jesus' final speech to his disciples before his passing. In the immediate verses before our passage, Jesus had used the language of himself as a vine. In our passage for this week, Jesus is elaborating on that imagery by describing what it looks like for us to belong to him as his branches. As we read this week, pay attention to the identity that Jesus calls us into and the actions that this new calling entails. While the language may be lofty, invite Spirit to speak into your own life and pierce your heart.

### Specific Insights

- The Greek word for abide is similar to its English corollary. It has a sense of staying in place and waiting. But it also has a sense of dwelling and lodging in a location. Commentators have drawn connections between this latter sense of the word with how God's love constitutes our identities. Throughout John's Gospel, we catch glimpses of the Son's intimate love for and obedience of the Father. Here, Jesus now includes us into this dance by our imitation of him. As Jesus obeyed the Father, so we obey Jesus. As Jesus loved us, so we love others.
- Protestants especially have a tendency to think of obedience as discrete acts of relinquishing our (sometimes sinful) will to God's will. Another way to think about obedience is through the prism of character. We aren't just called to just specific instances of obedience but to become obedient people. That is, we are called not just to *do* but to *be*. We are shaped with the character of Christ when we are aided by Spirit to practice obedience day in and day out.
- The sentence in verse 14 sounds like it would be a conditional statement, "if you do the things I command, then you are my friends." Yet, such a strong causal connection is absent from the original Greek. We are called friends *first*, without condition. Nevertheless, like any friendship, we still cooperate with one another to further develop our friendship with one another. In the case with Jesus, who is not just our friend, but our King, that cooperation *looks like* obedience to all he has taught and commanded.
- We can often overly spiritualize Jesus' commandments and apply them only to our intentions so much that we miss the radical discipleship we are called into. Just because not all of us are called to actually die for others does not mean we do not likewise give up our *possession* of our lives. The radical love we are called to us is inconvenient, it is not normal, it is sometimes not even fun. Sometimes we don't want to love others in this way—it hurts. If we do not experience discomfort in our love of others then we are probably not loving to the extent of giving up our lives for them.