

SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY - BIBLE STUDY

FACILITATORS NOTES



ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

(depending on how well your group knows each other, you may want to use one or more of these questions)

1. Where is somewhere you feel safe? (e.g. with a particular friend, at home, curled up under your duvet)
2. Where is somewhere you feel free? (e.g. out on your bike, camping, running,)
3. Would you rather be safe or free?
4. Can you describe a time when you saw/experienced love in action?

Pray Invite God to be with you as you study the Scriptures.

READ THE BIBLE PASSAGE TOGETHER

When meeting as a group there are a number of different ways this could be done:

- read it more than once, from different versions of the Bible as used by different members of the group
- allow everyone in the group to take a turn at reading, each reading just one sentence before the next person takes over
- read slowly and meditatively
- read the passage and then allow a time of silence during which people can reflect, before reading the passage for a second time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The material provided on the other page should be used flexibly to suit the needs of your group. The central element of each session is the Bible reading with the related questions underneath, enabling people to reflect on the passage and make decisions about its application. The additional material in boxes can be drawn on in an order dependent on the direction of the discussion. Some of it will be useful as background information for the facilitator, and all will be useful as further reading and to prompt reflection and prayer for those who wish to go deeper after the session. This means that there is no need to try to cover everything, but there is space for the conversation to take a number of different directions.

PRAYER TIME

Bring before God your conversations, thoughts, ideas, and unresolved questions.

Hold space to bring concerns, laments, and intercessions to God, waiting for God's presence, comfort, conviction and strength.

Offer further prayer for anyone who would like it, as appropriate for your group.

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READ: 1 JOHN 3:16-24

BACKGROUND TO THE PASSAGE

The author of this letter (and also the two following, 2 John and 3 John) writes to a Christian community he knows well, referring to them with affection as 'my little children' (e.g. 1 John 2:1) and 'beloved' (e.g. 1 John 3:2). The community has been rocked by members leaving to follow false teachings, and John writes to reassure them of the truth which they already know, so that they can be confident in their faith and can be in fellowship with other believers and God. The thread which runs throughout, and is unpacked by, this letter is that walking in God's light and truth entails obeying Christ's command; his command is to love, and therefore failing to love (which equates to hate) equals walking in darkness, living a life of sin, and being out of step with God.

This letter uses stark contrasts: either we love or we hate, either we live in light or in darkness, either we obey or we disobey, either we are children of God or we are children of the devil. There is no middle ground. What do you find reassuring about this? What do you find challenging?

While there is no middle ground, confessing our sin means that we are forgiven and cleansed, and can start again. What might your church need to confess in relation to its approach to safeguarding? – for example, have there been occasions when it has been mentioned with rolled eyes or the collective sigh which suggests that it is not taken seriously? Have there been occasions when procedures (e.g. training) are followed in order to tick boxes rather than to protect from harm?



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QUESTIONS ABOUT 1 JOHN 3:16-24

1. As you read this passage, what do you notice?
2. What stands out for you?
3. What might it mean to 'lay down our lives for one another' (v16)?
4. In what ways have you seen this put into practice?
5. What might be the difference between love in word, and love in action (v18)?
6. Why does John emphasise action above words?
7. Why is truth also important here?
8. What might 'love in action' look like when it involves laying down our lives for one another in a safeguarding context?
9. John suggests that loving in truth and action means that we can know we are following God and can be confident in coming to God (v19-22).
What are your reflections on this?
10. How does thinking of love as a command (v23-24) impact how you understand love?

CHANGING THE CULTURE

Desmond Tutu is quoted as saying: *"There comes a point when we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in."*

1. How does this quote encourage us to ensure we have good policies and practice around safeguarding?
2. How is this supported by the Bible passage in this study? How does the teaching of John to put love into action encourage action to prevent harm?
3. We may have particular categories in mind when we think of people who are vulnerable, but anyone can be vulnerable at certain points in their lives, for example when experiencing bereavement, redundancy or illness. What might love in truth and action look like in order to safeguard those who are vulnerable in the short-term due to specific circumstances?
4. What steps could you take to ensure that being a safer church is embedded in your church culture, so that people won't 'fall into the river'?

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WELCOMING DIFFERENCE

People who have experienced abuse or other harm can carry the effects of this throughout life.

Some routine practices in worship can be triggering. Examples are the language we use (e.g. speaking of God intimately or as 'Father'), expectations of eye contact (e.g. when receiving communion) or physical contact (e.g. hugs on arrival or during The Peace), and posture (e.g. kneeling before the person administering communion).

Any of these examples can also be difficult for others, for example those who are neurodivergent.

1. How can your church demonstrate love in action by ensuring that difference is welcomed?

SAFEGUARDING AS MISSION

Three of the Five Marks of Mission* are relevant in thinking about safeguarding:

- Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- Respond to human need by loving service.
- Seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.

1. In what ways might you start to fulfil each of these as you look at safeguarding attitudes and practice in your local church?
2. What difference might it make to your church to understand safeguarding as a missional activity? What might be God's mission in the area of safeguarding, and how can you join in?

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LAMENT

The book of Psalms provides us with hymns, liturgy and prayers which give us a window into the worship of the people of God. This worship includes thanks, praise and requests. It also includes lament: expressing grief, regret and sorrow.

ACTiON:

Play some instrumental music and read Psalm 13, 42, or write your own psalm of lament.

When people have been hurt by abuse, it can feel as though their grief, hurt, anger and questions must be left at the church door.

CoNSiDER:

1. How could your church show that it is ok – and good! – to lament?
2. How can you find space to lament in your worship?
3. What opportunities could be provided in your church for people to lament together?
4. What opportunities or support could be provided for individual lament?
5. How can you ensure that people are safe to express pain as well as praise?
6. How might this be seen as an example of truth and love in action?