



Great Lent Giveaway 2017 Life!

Youth Group Session 3 – God's Unconditional Love

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(Originally created for GLG 2013 modified by the Office of Youth Ministry
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Leader Packet

Objective:

- Lead youth to the understanding of what exactly God's unconditional love is and how it manifests itself through Jesus Christ His son. Participants should leave with a solid understanding of how God's love is ultimately revealed through Pascha.

Time Note: This session may be completed as one full session or broken into two sessions. As a full session it may take 1 hour 15 minutes. It is suggested to split the session

Needed Items:

- Craft Sticks (you may purchase 300 sticks for \$5 at Walmart)
- Pens/markers
- White board and markers
- Copies of Participant Sheets
- Plastic bottle of honey
- scissors
- glue, small sized poster board or construction paper

Before the Session

- Write the quotes provided in the opening activity on the craft sticks. As notated, each word of the quote on a separate stick. Place each completed set of sticks in a ziplock bags for distribution.

Beginning the Session

Open in prayer.

Opening prayer - Recite together

Prayer Before Reading Holy Scripture

O Master Who loves mankind, illuminate our hearts with the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our mind to understand the teachings of Your Gospel. Instill in us also the fear of Your blessed commandments, that we may overcome all carnal desires, entering upon a spiritual life and understanding and acting in all things according to Your holy will. For You are the enlightenment of our souls and bodies, O Christ God, and to You we give glory together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, gracious and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Conduct this simple activity that helps to illustrate what God's unconditional love means. This activity was provided from the blog, *Confessions of a Sunday School Teacher*. Holding the bottle of honey in your hand ask your class what it is, and what comes out of it. Most everyone will know it is, of course, honey comes out of a honey bottle.

Throwing the bottle on the ground again ask them what the bottle is. Call the bottle a mean name, and ask again what the bottle is. Finally, taking the scissors cut gashes in the bottle. Ask the class again what this bottle is. Then ask them what comes out of the bottle.

Finish off by saying, "Today we have kicked, been mean to, and hurt this little bottle of honey, but despite all that what still comes out of it?", the answer if you haven't guessed is honey lol, "God is the same we can call Him names, break His rules, and even turn our back on Him, but He loves us anyway. His love for us is unconditional. Meaning, there is nothing we can do to make God love us. He has always loved us, because God is love. He may not love the choices we make, but He still loves us. So, just like this bottle, even though we've hurt it, honey still comes out. The same is true with God, even though we often hurt Him, nothing but love still comes out toward us."

For older youth and teenagers:

Now let's learn a bit more about God's love and our love.

As a warm up activity have the students put "quote puzzles" together. The materials needed will be craft sticks (the wide ones are best) and a marker. Use the following quotes from the bible putting only one word on each stick. Have the students try to put the sticks (words) in the correct order. (Keep quotes together – baggies.) This could work in small groups, partners, as a whole group (if you're not too great in number), or even individually.

Quotes to utilize:

Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself (Mark 12:31)

Forgive them Father for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)

Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1John 3:18)

Let the children come to Me (Matthew 19:14)

Love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34)

My help comes from the Lord (Psalm 120:2)

After everyone has had time to complete their puzzles and share their quote with the group. Indicate that you (and/or the other youth workers present) also have a quote but you will reveal yours a little later. Have them glue the completed quotes on the poster board/construction paper, When all of the groups are ready to present their quotes, pass out the participant sheets.

Ask the groups to underline the action word or verb in *their quote* –

Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself (Mark 12:31)

Forgive them Father for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)

Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1John 3:18) (This one is tricky!)

Let the children come to Me (Matthew 19:14)

Love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34)

My help comes from the Lord (Psalm 120:2)

Now ask each group to discuss what their quote means and point out their action words.

What do these action words tell the reader?

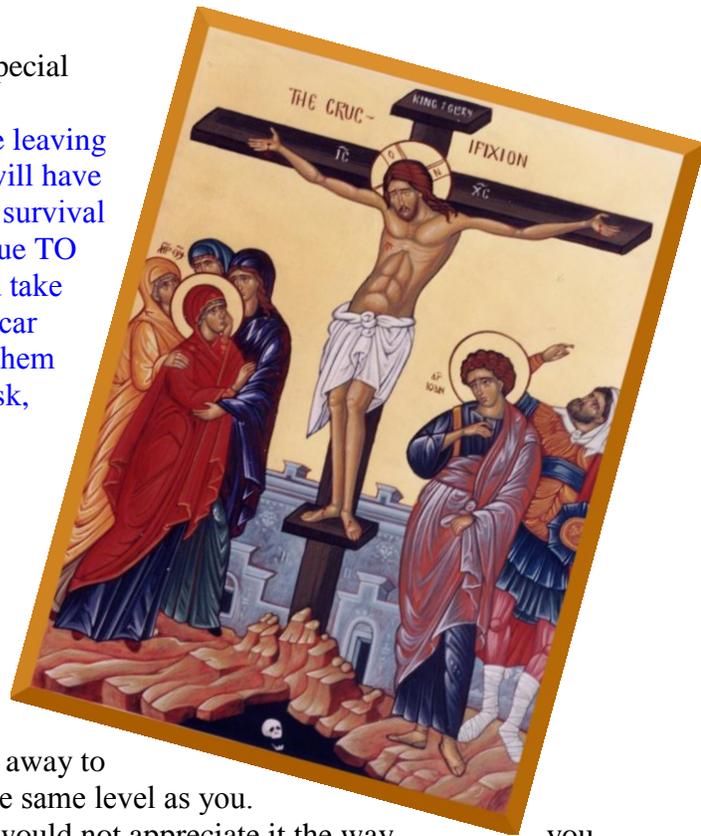
Who is the speaker in the quotes? **God/Jesus** Who is being called to action? **US**

For God so **L**oved the world,
that he gave his **O**nly begotten Son,
that whosoever belie**V**eth in him should not perish,
but have ev**E**lasting life.

Take a moment and consider one of your most important or special “things”, a really precious item. Write that thing or item here: They can even think of it in terms of the scenario that they are leaving their house today to go live somewhere new. The new place will have all the basics: clothes, food, TV, computer, etc. – so it’s not a survival item they need to bring, but instead something of extreme value TO THEM. (If blank stares ensue give some examples – “I would take my phone because it’s got all my contacts” “I would take my car because I’ve worked so hard to customize it” Try not to lead them to things like taking their dog, or parents – however, if they ask, “May I take my dog?” then of course you answer in the affirmative.

Why did you choose that item?

Take time to share each item/idea with the group. Allow the students to justify why they chose that item. Make a list of the items on the board to look for similarities after everyone has shared.



Now, imagine giving your item, your most prized possession, away to some complete strangers that for sure can’t appreciate it on the same level as you. Would this be hard? How would you feel knowing that they would not appreciate it the way you do?

Reveal to them the quote you’ve put together with craft sticks “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (You may want to break your quote into several words on a stick.) Locate the action words in this quote. We are looking for “loved” and “gave”. Say to the group, “First lets look at the second verb in my quote, “gave”. Let’s assume that God’s “must have” item – His most prized possession is His son. Now let’s compare this quote and your “must have” list.”

Now, compare the list of “must have” items on the board (that the students “gave away”) to the must have item that God gave away. Remind the group that God did not just give His Son to us; in “giving” him to us He allowed man to destroy His gift through humiliation, physical punishment and ultimately death. *Imagine giving your most prized possession to a group of people and watching them destroy, punish and kill it.*

How would you react if they had actually given away your most prized possession to a group of people who not only underappreciated it but also destroyed it? (Possibly write down a few key words from responses to show similarities among group responses.)

Now – what is the first action verb in the quote? “Loved”! What is the adverb? “so” What does that mean? “so Loved”? Allow time for discussion.

The use of “so” is important because it shows an emphasis on how much love God has for us – an overabundance of love!

Why is this verb, “love” used in the first part of the sentence? We are looking for the answer, “As the reason as to why God would “give” His most prized possession”.

“What does this say about God’s Love? - Think back to last week’s (or the previous) session. We are looking for “it is unconditional”. Why would you call his love – unconditional? Because – he gave us something special, something irreplaceable even though He knew we would not respect it.



“Why? Again is the question. Why would God do this? Let’s look at the last part of the quote.”

“... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Up until the point of Christ’s birth there was no possibility for eternal life – salvation. There was only the Jewish hope of the messiah. Humanity was separated from its Creator. Because of God’s great love for His creation, He gives us His greatest gift so that we may have the ultimate “must have” – eternal life! Salvation! Isn’t that incredible? God love us, even when we mess up – even messing up to the extent of crucifying His Son! He gives us the opportunity for redemption, for forgiveness and ultimately for salvation – to be reunited with Him. Wow – what do you think about that? [Allow time for discussion.](#)

Have you ever questioned God’s love for you? After our discussion – How do you feel about God’s love in your life?

Now – there is one more aspect about this we need to discuss. We understand, that God gives and God loves but this is not all one sided... there is another action verb in the last quote.... What is it? [“Believes”](#) (Suggested place to split session if desired.)

We must respond to God’s actions of giving and loving

with BELIEVING! What must we believe in? [Looking for the answer of, “Jesus”, “Christ’s resurrection”, “God’s Love”.](#)

If we believe in these things what are we told we will receive? [“Eternal life”.](#) That sounds like the ultimate “must have”.

So how do we show God that we believe? Let’s read the following to see if we can answer that question!
[Now read: \(Have the students read these aloud.\)](#)

Matthew 8:20-22 “And Jesus said to him, ‘foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’. Then another of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own.’”

Mathew 19:21-22 “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and com, follow Me’ But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Luke 14:16-20 “Then He said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore cannot come.’”

What do all these scenarios have in common? – Remember, we have been discussing actions! [After discussions lead them to the answer of, “Christ is calling them in the action to *come* or *follow* Him. What is the response to the call to action? – We are looking for the answer, “Excuses”.](#)

Each of these stories has accounts of people giving excuses as to why they cannot follow Christ, live as He has asked us to live, or attend His Liturgical banquet. Even though God has given us His greatest possession, shown His unconditional love and told us what we will receive for our belief ... we still struggle with giving up our earthly possessions and desires for Him.

With the closing days of Great Lent upon us, let us remember the words of St. John Chrysostom, “For the Master is gracious and receives the last even as the first; He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, just as to him who has labored from the first. He has mercy upon the last and cares for the first; to the one He gives, and to the other He is gracious.” In these final days of Great Lent, let us think of something we can give up for God because He has given up so much for us.

Could this be the sweater that our sister has her eye on and we don't really wear but we don't want to give it to her just because? Or is it time in the fasting season to give up meat for the rest of Lent, or for the rest of the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent? Perhaps it's time to only use the computer for school purposes and stay off Facebook and Twitter for the remainder of Lent. Which excuse will you give to God when He asks you to follow Him? What have you/can you give up for His sake?

How can we live as Christ – as Unconditional Love in the days leading up to Pascha? During Holy Week – accept God's call to action – *give* love, *believe* in His resurrection, *follow* Him through the journey of Holy Week and most especially His Glorious Resurrection and *live* each day experiencing the Love of God and revealing that Love to all!

[Spend some time in discussion concerning your project for the Great Lent Giveaway and ZOE for Life. Discuss the project in light of this week's session of God's Unconditional Love.](#)

[Also, allow time for the participants to add ways that they can live out the scripture verses from the popsicle stick activity. They may write their ideas on the poster boards or they can take time to illuminate\(decorate\) the verses. Take a photo of the completed verses and text/email/facebook them to the youth and their parents to use at home. They can also be hung in your parish hall to inspire the parish to contemplate God's unconditional love.](#)

[For younger children: Choose one or two of the quotes provided in the popsicle stick activity. Have each quote printed on a piece of poster board. Simply explain the quote and ask the children how the quote may show God's love or how we can show love. Write their answers on the boards. Allow time for the children to illuminate/decorate the verses. They may also color the God's Love Honeybear sheet - to take home as a reminder of what they learned. Attach a few honey sticks to the sheet.](#)

[Send home a note to the parents briefly explaining today's session. Send home some honey sticks for the family to use and remind them of God's unconditional love.](#)

[End the session in prayer or by attending a Lenten service.](#)

