



Small Group

Activities and questions for small groups

Love God

According to Chapman (2014), there are five 'Love Languages'¹ - different ways that we receive and express love.

These are:

- acts of service
- gift-giving
- physical touch
- quality time
- words of affirmation

Although it is not wholly possible to translate these into our relationship with God (we cannot physically touch him), it is worthwhile spending time discerning how our preferred love language affects our lives as Christians.

Reflect on the following questions:

- Which 'love language' is my preferred way of receiving love?
- Which is my preferred language for giving love?
- How can I use my preferred language to show love for God? to show love for others?
- How willing am I to use a love language that I am less comfortable with, because another/others are more comfortable with that language?

Activities for different love languages:

Quality time:

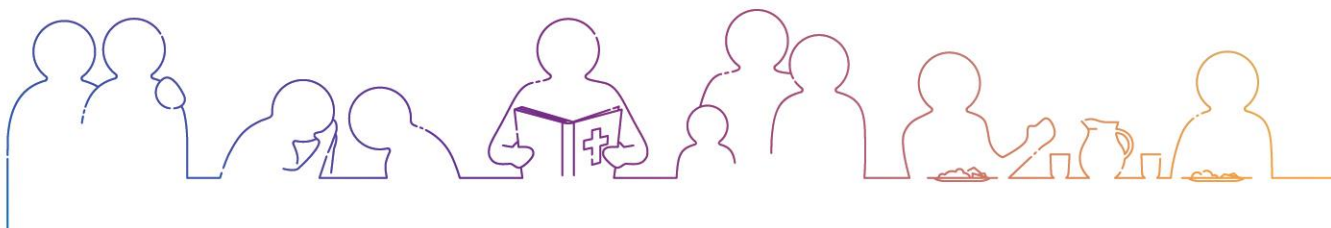
- Spend time with God. Sit in your favourite armchair, or go for a walk, and focus on being with God. This is not a time to come before him with a list of requests, but to concentrate upon being aware of his presence, listening to him and responding to him.

Gift-giving:

- Write a letter or a poem to God; if you are feeling creative, make him something (a picture? a cake? a dance?). The aim is not perfection, but to offer all that you are able. Remember that this is a performance piece for God, no one else.

Note: If you do make a cake, or something like that, it is perfectly fine to eat it, share it, or give it away afterwards. The worship is in doing the actual activity as much as in the finished product.

¹ Chapman, G. (2014) *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*. Chicago, Northfield Publishing.





Words of affirmation:

- Find songs or verses that speak of God's love; try to focus on those that speak of who God is, rather than just on what he has done for us, although this is not always easy because the two are linked. Read or sing these out to God.
- Create a love song to God - if you need inspiration and assistance in expressing emotions to God in a suitable manner, turn to the Psalms. Although it is good for a song to rhyme or to fit a tune, do not worry if it doesn't; what is more important is that it expresses the truth.

Physical Touch:

- In COVID times this love language has become difficult to express, but asking someone if they don't mind receiving a hug is possible. They may just have been longing for one!
- Perform a foot-washing ceremony as a way to be in contact safely and as a humble reminder of service to the other.

Acts of service:

- Spend time in prayer asking God how you can serve him today. Be attentive to the opportunities.
- Donate clothing or other goods to the church or a local charity.
- Think of someone who may benefit from your help at this time, either by offering to walk their dog, making dinner for them or helping them with the weekly shopping etc.

Love Others

Reflect upon the following, and then take action:

- What do you love doing?
- How could you share that love with others?

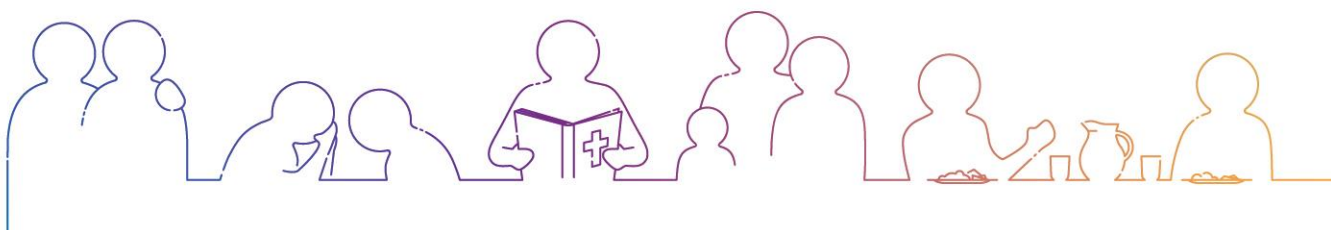
(For example:

- Love drinking coffee? How about inviting someone new over for a coffee? How about anonymously paying for the hot drink of the next person in the coffee queue?
- Love gardening? How about sharing the fruits, or vegetables, or flowers, of your labour, with someone else, for free? How about mowing your neighbour's lawn as well as your own? Probably better done when they are not at home, so they don't get disturbed, and it is a nice surprise for when they return!)



Love God
Love Others

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Love in Observation:

- Walk around your community, without focusing on your phone or reading material, and with your earplugs out.
- Walk with your eyes and ears open to what is going on around you.
- Smile at the people you can make eye contact with, and - if appropriate - say hello. (And if you are already past that stage, go on to 'how are you?')
- Especially look out for people who are different from you. You may be amazed how diverse your community is, when you begin to pay attention.

Prayer-walk:

- Either physically, or virtually (if you cannot leave home), prayer walk the streets around where you live, shop, work and worship.
- Pray for God's love to be seen in action. Pray for ways to connect with others, especially those on the margins of the community.

Love in Action:

- Are there any acts of service that you as an individual or as a group can do in the community?
- Are there any organisations or groups looking for committed short-term or long-term volunteers?

Suggested web links:

- [Loving our neighbour, wherever she or he lives](#)
- Loving our world [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

Our position

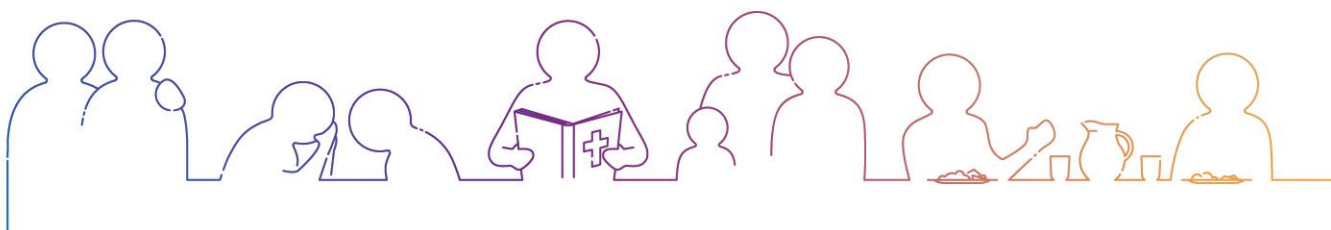
As a group, read up on The Salvation Army's Positional Statements relevant to these issues, and discuss what you think:

- [Caring for the Environment](#)
- [Racism](#)
- [Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#)

Racial Inclusion Working Group (RIWG) Interview

As a group, read through Linda McTurk's interview

- How does the RIWG support 'Being Together: Living in God's covenant'?
- How can your group support their work?
- Spend some time in prayer for the RIWG using their requests as prompts.





'Fake love' versus 'real deal'

Have you ever experienced 'fake love'? Have you been told 'I love you' but then found out that it was just words? Having such an experience might make you think about your own words of love towards God. We need to be very careful about the condition of our heart. That's because it is possible to keep all the contracts of this world by just 'doing' the right stuff; but to stay in covenant with Almighty God requires much more. He wants your heart, mind, soul and strength.

- Think about your 'fake love' experience and discuss how you found out that the proclaimed love was just empty words.
- Discuss how to avoid such behaviour in our own lives towards those whom we love. Make a list of practical things and steps of showing the 'real deal' love.
- How can we put these things into action in our relationship and our love to God? Can you find in the Bible any practical advice of how to love God?

In God's presence

'Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

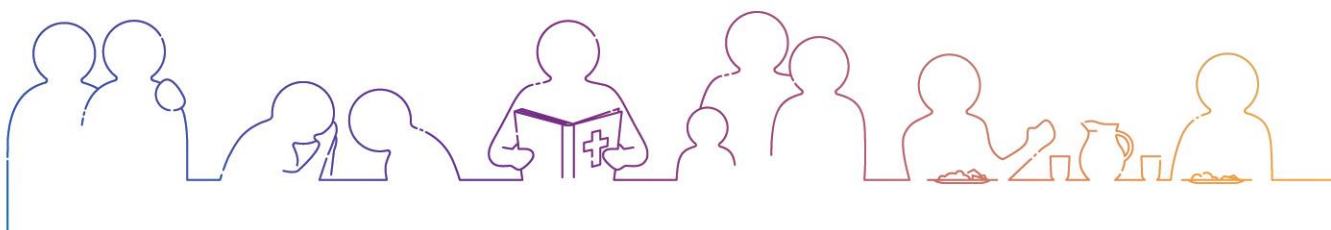
'Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'"

Matthew 22:34-40

One of the lessons we can learn from this is if that you want to TEST Jesus about anything, be prepared to be tested yourself. Here we see Pharisees testing Jesus, and his answer shows that the foundation and the meaning of our lives is in a RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE. First is our relationship with God himself, and then with each other. This must have been quite a surprise for them as they were focused on keeping the Law, much like the prophet said in Hosea 6:6: 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.'

Today this may sound slightly different. It might sound like 'I don't want you to stare at the screen for hours and listen to worship and preaching from churches around the globe, but rather come and meet with me in person any time and anywhere you are, and go out and meet with my children and show them your love by your deeds, your touch, your looks and your attitude'.

God is not satisfied with 20, 50 or even 95 per cent of your life. He wants your whole heart, soul, mind and strength. And even though our redemption and salvation is his free gift of love to us, to actually be in God's presence is sometimes quite hard work. We need to get rid of a lot of baggage - for example, as we read in Hebrew 12:1, '*let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles*' - and push ourselves out of our comfort zones. But to stand, at the end, in the presence of Almighty God is definitively a 'mountain top experience'.



BEING together LIVING IN GOD'S Covenant

Let's imagine for a moment that we want to climb up a beautiful hilltop with a stunning view. There are several things we need to do before we even step out of our home. (Some of these things should be done days before the trip.)

Discuss in your groups:

- How should we prepare for such a trip? Think of any practical things you would do and write them down.
- What would you take in your backpack and what would you leave at home? What are the important things for such a trip and what would be useless weight?
- What do you expect out of such a trip? Are there any particular goals you would like to achieve?

Now, when we have our answers, we will get back to our theme of 'Being together - Living in God's covenant'. As mentioned earlier, to get into God's presence sometimes means effort, leaving our comfort zone, and it sometimes leads to sweat and tears - just like our journey up to the mountain top.

Discuss in your groups:

- How can you use your previous responses as advice for your spiritual journey into the presence of God?

Here is an example:

To be well prepared for a trip in the mountains you need a good map; or even better would be an experienced guide. The same applies for our spiritual life. The Bible is our map and we need to know how to read it and how to understand it, how to apply it into our daily life. And the Holy Spirit is the best guide ever, because he is God and he is always leading us into God's presence.



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