



FAMILY VERSE

Dear  
friends,

LET US

*Love*

ONE ANOTHER,

for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been  
born of God and knows God.

**WHOEVER**

does not love does not know  
God, because God is love.

1 John 4:7–8

# GOD'S WORD Week 1

## GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS LOVE

### SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4:19

*"We love because he first loved us."—1 John 4:19*

**Love is one of the central themes found throughout Scripture.** The message of Christianity is the story of God's love given to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. One of the most popular verses in all of the Bible is "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Almost everything must have a cause. The Oxford dictionary defines *cause* as "a person or thing that gives rise to an action, a phenomenon, or condition." For example, a person got a cavity because he did not brush his teeth, or school got cancelled because it snowed 15 inches last night. **The apostle John desires us to see that even our love has a cause.** The love that we have for ourselves, others, and most importantly, God, does not come from one's self. This love comes as a product of God loving us first.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the gospel is not that we chose to love God, but that He first chose to love us. Despite the fact that He knew we would be broken, sinful, even unfaithful, He chose to love us. **The ultimate proof or confirmation of this love is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** The apostle Paul once wrote "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As a result, we have been given the freedom to love God, others, and ourselves as a response. We are given the ability to see others and ourselves in the way that God does.

## DISCUSSION

In what ways have you seen God's love for you and your family play out in your life? In what ways have you been able to love God, others, and yourself as a result of God's love for you?

*by Tim Shepherd, Pastor of Student Ministries*

# GOD'S WORD Week 3

## GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS LOVE

### SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4:8-9

*"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."—1 John 4:8-9*

The word *love* has meant many different things through the years. Today, we may say we love our brother or sister, just like we would say we love pizza, and, with minimal description attached to those statements, they sound the same. Here in 1 John, we read "God is love," and this love is *agape* love (Greek), which is the highest form of love possible, a perfect fatherly love God has for us as His children. What an extravagant **LOVE!**

God has lavished His love on us; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God's love is neverending, unending—it's perfect. Earlier in 1 John 2:6 we're encouraged to "live as Jesus did," and Jesus lived a life of love. Because we are instructed to be

imitators of God, we must love like God, serving others, forgiving generously, showing compassion and kindness. One of my favorite characteristics of God is that He gives to us generously and there is no greater gift than His Son, Jesus.

As Mother Teresa said, "Intense love does not measure, it just gives."

The way Mother Teresa loved was extravagant; she must have known God well because Scripture tells us that "whoever does not love does not know God." God wants you to know Him and walk in love, being imitators of God.

## DISCUSSION

How have you seen *agape* love in your life? Is there a way you can show *agape* love to your siblings or parents?

*by Leah Tisthammer, Women's Admin Assistant and Family Ministry Event Coordinator*

# GOD'S WORD Week 2

**GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS LOVE**  
**SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4:7-9**

*"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."—1 John 4:7*

**One might argue that the greatest apologetic or defense for the Christian faith is not a theological construct. It is not church, an act of service, or a religious idea.** The greatest defense for the Christian faith is revealed in the believers' ability to love one another.

In an attempt to test Jesus, a teacher of the religious law asked, "Teacher, which is the great 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 neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-39).** Jesus understands that one of the greatest difficulties in life is to love another like one loves oneself. Loving other people doesn't always come naturally. In fact, it can be very difficult.

However, this is the criteria by which John says one is a follower of Jesus. He says that "everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). Love requires patience, kindness, humility, and a host of other things—all of which are signposts to a life lived in relationship with Jesus.

In Jesus's final words to His disciples, He states: **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).** The bedrock of a life surrendered to Jesus is one's ability to love others the same way that God has loved us. By this the world will see who really is Lord of one's life.

## DISCUSSION

Who would you or your family define as your neighbor? Is there any person you think might not fit into that category? In what ways can you love the person or people you dislike the most?

*by Tim Shepherd, Pastor of Student Ministries*

# GOD'S WORD Week 4

**GOD STATEMENT: GOD IS LOVE**  
**SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4:17-18**

*"This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 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."—1 John 4:17-18*

The Oxford dictionary defines *fear* as "an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat."

The first time we encounter fear in the Bible is directly after Adam and Eve disobeyed God. That initial act of disobedience resulted in fear, shame, and separation from God. Fear is among the most powerful of the negative emotions we experience. It draws us away from whatever—or whomever—we determine to be a threat.

Fear is mentioned more than 300 times in the Bible. One of the most common uses is the fear of God. Now, this month we've been learning that God is love. If this is true (which it is), then how can we love Someone we fear?

The passage today reminds us that fear has to do with punishment. Our sin deserves punishment. And if God is just (which He is), He should make us pay for our sins. However, sinful people can't get rid of sin on their own. And everyone in the world is guilty before God. But because God is love, He took the punishment for our sin on Himself. Jesus paid the price by becoming sin for us and then giving us His righteousness. What an awesome exchange! Now, God's love can be poured out to us and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are filled with reverence and awe for God, who has no equal! If God is for us, who can be against us? God is not only with us; His loving presence is in us to help us love others. God's Holy Spirit living in us produces the fruit of love. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us."

## DISCUSSION

How does knowing almighty God, your loving heavenly Father, is *for* you and always *with* you change the way you think about fearful circumstances? What is one way you can show God's love to others this week?

*by Jill Nardini, Family Ministries North Elementary Teacher*

# SHEPHERD'S PIE

In honor of St. Patrick's day, enjoy this classic Irish dish as a family. Traditionally, the Irish use ground lamb. We chose to use the English version with ground beef. This shepherd's pie is filled with lots of veggies and a thick layer of smooth potatoes—a yummy comfort food perfect for March!

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 3 pounds russet potatoes (4 or 5 large), peeled and diced
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 cup whole or 2% milk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 lbs lean ground beef
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 (10 ounce) bag frozen vegetable medley
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Heat the oven to 400° F and place the rack in the middle of the oven. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes in a large (3- to 4-quart) pot with 2 quarts of water and 1 teaspoon of salt, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until the potatoes are tender (15 to 18 minutes). As the potatoes are cooking, prepare the filling. Heat the oil in a large oven-safe skillet. Brown the meat over medium-high heat until meat is thoroughly cooked (about 10 minutes). Add the vegetables, water, flour, ketchup, onion powder, and garlic powder. Cook, stirring occasionally for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat and allow the sauce to thicken while you mash the potatoes. Drain the potatoes and return them to the pot. Add the milk, butter, and remaining 1 teaspoon salt and mash to a smooth consistency. Stir in the egg yolk. Top beef mixture with the mashed potatoes using a large spoon to smooth as an even layer. Bake in the oven for 25 to 30 minutes or until potatoes begin to brown and filling is bubbling. Cool for 10 minutes before serving.



*Easy Comfort*

## ST. PATRICK'S Day TREATS

Whether you always celebrate St. Patrick's Day or just leave the celebrating to the Irish, some green treats can add a fun flair to the end of a long winter. Your kids will enjoy making these with you!

### Green Milkshake

#### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1/2 cup milk
- 3/4 cup frozen vanilla yogurt or ice cream
- 1/8 teaspoon green Kool-Aid mix of choice

#### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Blend ingredients in blender until smooth. Serve immediately. Makes one milkshake.



### Dipped Oreos

#### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- double-stuffed Oreos (or regular)
- green and white melting chocolate/candy melts
- green and white sprinkles
- wax or parchment paper

#### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Melt chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl (check and stir it every 30 seconds to make sure it doesn't overcook). You can buy green candy melts or just add food coloring to white chocolate. Dip each Oreo halfway into the chocolate and lay it on a sheet of parchment or wax paper. Shake the sprinkles onto each cookie while the chocolate is still warm. Let them sit and harden for 20 minutes.

### Jello Rollups

#### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 small package green Jell-O
- 1/2 cup boiling water
- 1 cup small marshmallows

#### WHAT YOU'LL DO

In a microwave-safe bowl, mix together Jell-O mix and boiling water. Stir until dissolved. Add the marshmallows and microwave for 30 seconds. Mix together until the marshmallows are completely melted. Pour mixture into a greased 8" x 8" pan and refrigerate for at least an hour. Use a knife to cut around the edges of the pan to release the Jell-O. Roll the Jell-O as tightly as you can. Cut 1" wide pieces using a sharp, thin knife.



# POTATO *Leek* SOUP

This soup is simple to make but tastes like you have been in the kitchen for hours. The warm potatoes and crisp bacon will make the pickiest eater happy. Serve with an Irish cornbread.



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 slices bacon, chopped
- 2 large leeks (the white and light green part only), chopped
- 2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 sprigs thyme or  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon dried thyme
- freshly cracked pepper and salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup white wine
- 1 cup heavy cream
- crushed red pepper (optional)

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Melt butter in a heavy pot over medium heat. Add bacon and cook until crisp. Leave bacon fat in the pot and add chopped leeks and potatoes; cook until the leeks are soft. Stir in white wine to deglaze the pot. Add stock, bay leaves, and thyme and season generously with salt and pepper. Simmer until the potatoes are very soft. Blend the soup with an immersion blender until creamy with just a few chunks. Remove from heat and cool slightly before adding the cream. Taste and season with additional salt and pepper or a sprinkle of crushed red pepper. The soup will thicken as it cools.

# BLUEBERRY LEMON CREAM BARS

When a young person is learning to cook, it's important to find yummy recipes that will be a guaranteed success. This warm, melt-in-your-mouth dessert has only a few ingredients with very little mess and clean up. Older children can follow this recipe with little to no direction and contribute to the family night meal. Serve with vanilla ice cream.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 package Krusteaz Meyer Lemon Bar mix
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- powdered sugar (optional)

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

Preheat oven to 350° F. Lightly grease an 8" x 8" pan. Evenly spread the package of crust into the bottom of the pan and press firmly. Bake the crust for 8 minutes. The crust will be pale. While the crust is baking, add the filling pouch, whipping cream, and eggs to a medium-sized bowl and whisk together until well combined. Stir in the blueberries. When the crust is done baking, pour the filling over the hot crust. Bake 34 to 36 minutes or until center does not jiggle and the top begins to brown. Sprinkle with powdered sugar.

*Adapted from Krusteaz*





# Simple Reminders

**Every school year, our children bring home report cards stamped with letter grades.** Our hope is that each child brings home a report card with all As. In some schools, the back side of the report card states nonacademic achievements in the form of character traits such as “shows respect to others” and “exhibits kindness toward others.” As parents, we can tend to focus on the letter grades more than the character achievements on the back of the report card. An educator once stated, “You can make all As and still flunk life.”

In today’s treacherous culture, it is important to focus more on character and less on the academic achievement or sports performance. The recent current events show us that we (Christians) have some work to do in teaching our children how to love everyone and show respect to ALL people.

We cannot force our children to give love and show respect. **It is a heart issue that begins with an attitude.** Children need to have an understanding of why it is important to give love and show respect to others. March’s God’s Word dives into the biblical understanding of love and respect. After reading the devotionals, practice these character traits in your home.

As a family, discuss what it means to show love and respect to others. How can kids show love and respect to their parents, and how can parent show love and respect to their kids?

## CRAFT: LOVE AND RESPECT FAMILY STATEMENTS

### WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- sheet of paper or poster board
- markers, pens, or crayons
- picture frame (optional)

### WHAT YOU’LL DO

Write your ideas from your family discussion on a piece of paper or poster board. If you would prefer a more permanent display, print your ideas on a piece of paper to place in a picture frame.

Display your poster on the refrigerator or on a table as a reminder of how you will choose to show love and respect to others.

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*by Shannon Baer, North Director of Operations and Strategic Systems*



# I LOVE *and* RESPECT

*Love*

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 2 sheets cardstock, any color
- 1 sheet red paper (or another color on hand)
- 1 sheet lavender paper (or another other color on hand)
- 1 brass fastener
- glue
- scissors



## BEFORE YOU PLAY

**Create the game board:** Cut a wide arrow from one sheet of your cardstock for your spinner and fasten it to the middle of your other sheet of cardstock using your brass fastener. Cut 4 red circles and 4 lavender circles, and glue the circles onto your cardstock, alternating red and lavender, in a circle around the spinner. Make one WILD space by cutting one red and one lavender circle in half and putting them together to form one space. Cut about 20 red and lavender squares to use as your cards.

**Before you begin, talk with the group about how they would identify someone who loves and respects God and others.** Share the biblical definition of love and respect, referring to the following Scripture passages. Discuss how God first poured out His love on us through the death and resurrection of Christ and how the community of believers can respond by loving and respecting one another.

### LOVE

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).*

### RESPECT

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).*

## TIME TO PLAY!

- Each red card and red spot on the game board represents RESPECT.
- Each lavender card and lavender spot on the game board represents LOVE.
- Mix up the 40 red and lavender cards and place them in the middle of the table.
- Have each player take one card from the pile.
- The first player will spin the spinner. If the spinner lands on a red (RESPECT) spot, the player has to tell the other players with a matching red card what she respects about them. If the spinner lands on a lavender (LOVE) spot the player has to tell the players with a lavender card what she loves about them.
- Once the player's turn is over, players set their cards aside and draw new ones from the pile.
- The game is over when everyone has had a turn or until you run out of cards.

# RESPONDING

## WITH LOVE & RESPECT



**Sometimes, the people we love most are the ones we treat the worst.** We may snap at our spouses or push our siblings; those actions have long-lasting effects on others.

As a family, observe two apples and talk about how they both look alike. Take one of the apples and pass it around to each family member. Take turns saying unkind words to the apple, such as “You are ugly” and “You are stupid.” Toss the apple on the floor and hit it on the table or counter several times.

Now, take the second apple, pass it around gently, and use kind words, such as “You are beautiful” and “I love your red color.”

When you are all done, cut both apples open and look at their differences. Notice that the apple you were unkind to probably has bruising on the inside while the other apple is unblemished. Talk about how our words and actions can hurt others, even when we can't see it from the outside.

Take some time to pray as a family. Use the weekly prompts to guide your discussion and prayer time.

Week  
**1**

“We love because He first loved us.” How do we respond to God's love? What specific ways can we love and respect others?

Week  
**2**

What is the greatest commandment? (To love God and to love others.) How can we show our love to God? How can we show love to others this week?

Week  
**3**

God disciplines us because He loves us. God's kindness leads us to repentance. What helpful discipline have you experienced in your life?

Week  
**4**

When we are rooted in God, He produces the fruit of the Spirit in us. How can you use a particular fruit of the Spirit to love others this week? (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control)

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)*

# SERVE JAR

**Growing up in a household of all girls with varying personalities often made it hard to work together.** But I noticed that when we all had a common goal, we tended to work together better. Whether helping one another do extra chores around the house to get money to go to Skate City, or concocting a plan to talk our mom into getting us McDonalds, we each played a role to reach the end goal. All parents want their kids to get along, but, as Christians, we also want our kids to learn to serve others out of Christ's love (1 Peter 4:10). This month's Serve project will challenge each member of your family to work together as one body to help those in need.

Take a glass jar and label it "The Serve Jar" by using a dry erase marker or by simply taping a piece of paper to the jar. Then take some time as a family to think of a nonprofit organization (homeless shelter, food pantry, missions organization) that needs supplies. **Once you choose an organization to help, have everyone in the family start putting extra money in the jar during the month of March.** Consider raising money by doing extra chores around the house, shoveling snow for neighbors, or giving a portion of the money you've earned from a job. Place the jar in a visible area of the house (the kitchen is usually a great option). At the end of the month take the money collected and go shopping as a family to pick up the supplies needed (maybe blankets, towels, and socks for a homeless shelter or canned/boxed food products for a food pantry). If possible, deliver the supplies to the organization, and then celebrate as a family what God has done through your hard work and serving others.

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*by Rayshawne Hayes, Friday Night Elementary Coordinator*



*Serve as  
a family*

## BLESSING

# Bless with Your Words

**A BLESSING CAN BE A PRAYER OF COMMISSION, A BIBLE PASSAGE, OR WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT. BLESSINGS CAN BE SPOKEN OVER A CHILD FOR THE PURPOSE OF DECLARING GOD'S PROTECTION, JOY, AND WISDOM OVER HIM.**

### Week 1

1 John 4:19

**(Child's name), may you know that the Father loves you.** May you know that God's love for you is not based on your accolades, your achievements, or your accomplishments. Rest in the truth that while you and I were sinners, Christ died for us. May the cross be the ultimate representation that no matter where you find yourself today, you are seen, known, and radically loved by God. May you carry the love you have received from Christ to your friends, to your family, and to your community. May His love remain richly in you so that you may extravagantly display God's heart in your words, your actions, and your thoughts.

### Week 2

1 John 4:7-9

**(Child's name), may you know that the Holy Spirit has empowered you to love God, to love yourself, and to love your neighbor.** Remain confident that your ability to love is not dependent on you but on Christ inside of you. May you never try to give what you have not first received. May your love shine like a bright light in a dark and hurting world. Let the light of Christ's love shine radiantly wherever you go and with whomever you talk to.

### Week 3

1 John 4:8-9;  
Romans 8:38-39

**(Child's name), may you know that nothing can separate you from the love of God.** Receive the truth that no height, no depth, no power, no principality, no future, no past, and no person can take you away from the love of Jesus. May you always remember that God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and overflowing with genuine love for you. Live in the freedom and the confidence that on your best days and on your worst days, the love of Christ toward you is steadfast and faithful.

### Week 4

1 John 4:17-18

**(Child's name), may you know that the love of Christ is stronger than all fear.** May the perfect love of Christ replace shame, guilt, insecurity, comparison, and anxiety. May this day, this week, this month, and this year be full of moments where you are made perfect in the love of God. May your roots grow deep in the love of God so that no lie of the enemy can convince you that you are unloved. May the truth of God's love define you, encourage you, and lead you into a secure identity in Him.

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by Victor Mendoza, Associate Pastor of Students

# JOURNAL

remember and celebrate

prayer

thankfulness and praise