



THE NEXT STEP
September 20, 2015 –Stephen Mason

Note to Leaders: Every small group is different, so please choose the questions that relate best to your particular group.

Connect

1. Share with the group about a time when you either: 1) felt warmly welcomed in a new environment or 2) experienced a cold and unappreciative welcome in a particular setting. What was the impact of the positive or negative welcome you received?
2. Toward what area of need do you feel most drawn to make a difference? Is there anything that holds you back from serving in that way that you feel most drawn to serve? Please share.

Engage

1. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7
 - God calls his people to be *all in*. Imagine yourself saying to God, "God, I'm all in!" What area of your life flashes into your mind's eye...that area where you would need to make changes so that your life was more truly aligned with your words to God.
2. Read Psalm 78:2-7
 - What does the Psalmist instruct the believer to do? What is the intended purpose for these instructions?
3. Most of us long to develop lasting relationships with other people. God made us with a need for connection. We can connect intellectually and emotionally with just about anyone, but a *spiritual* connection requires that both people have a strong and growing relationship with God. When we connect with someone around our work or hobbies. It feels different from when we connect around our deepest beliefs, values and longings, rooted in our relationship with God himself. Moreover, the more securely we know God as the lover of our souls - the one whose passion and commitment never falter, no matter what - the more we will be able to sustain close connections with other humans, whose love will naturally be imperfect.
 - If you have trouble experiencing God's love, what do you think gets in the way?
4. The bottom line of connecting is love. But love is a word easily tossed around in songs, books and movies. In Jesus Christ we find the definition of and the motivation for love. We don't love others out of a compulsive need to be needed, fear of being alone, or a sense of guilt that we're not doing enough. We don't automatically have enough love in ourselves to

love the unlovely. We love because we have been loved. We love to the degree that we are truly convinced we are loved. We give the kind of love we ourselves have received.

- **Read 1 John 4:7-12**

- Three times in this passage John says to "love one another." He really means it. What do you think "love one another" looks like in a church that is 'Deep and Wide'?

Apply

1. What do you think could help you become a more loving person?

STUDY NOTES

Let us love. Greek *agapomen* - a verb form of *agape* that says, "He, do this! I mean it!" John wants to convince believers emphatically to join him in loving others as a result of the power of the gospel message. The gospel is a compelling story of ultimate love that motivates the believer to love others. We connect with others because God has first connected with us. *Agape* love is not sentimental love or even just warm friendship, but passionate, active, sacrificial love for others. The best definition of the word is to look at Jesus' life and death.

Knows God. The Greek verb *ginosko* refers to a knowledge that is attained by experience in the context of relationship. We come to know God and find him to be a loving God. We experience his love in real and powerful ways. We then love others with the same kind of love.

Loving and knowing are inextricably tied together. You can't *agape* love others if you don't have a personal relationship with God (a *ginosko* kind of knowledge). The stronger your relationship with God, the more you will be able to love others.