

activate

THE
BUILDING
BLOCKS
OF FAITH

What we want students to learn: That your students would understand that God's unfailing love is an essential aspect of His character.

What we want them to do with what they've learned: To consider how this understanding changes how they relate to God.

Scripture Focus: Psalm 86:1-5, 1 John 4:7-8, Psalm 33:4-5, Psalm 143:7-8

Overview: Part of the richness of God is that He has so many aspects of His character through which He relates to us and the world. But love is arguably God's most essential characteristic. God's love is at the heart of who He is. His love is the impetus for wanting a relationship with us, and for sending His Son to make a way for us to be in relationship with Him. As John says, God literally is love! In this first lesson on God's love, your students will see how Scripture establishes God as love and how this love changes how they look at their relationship with God. It will also set the stage for Lesson 12 where we see Christ as the fullest expression of God's love.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **Activate** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **God's Love** lesson 11 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 11, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The **Bible Background** is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.
- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

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THE DETAILS

Who wrote these Books?

Many of the psalms include the name of the author, as is the case with the 86th psalm. The writer is identified as David, the second king of Israel, who wrote 73 of the 150 psalms. John the Apostle is the author of 1 John. Along with Peter and James, John formed the "inner three" of Jesus' group of twelve disciples. Peter, James, and John were Jesus' closest followers. Psalm 33 and Psalm 143 are both among the many psalms where the author is unknown.

When were the Books written?

Psalm 86 was written sometime during David's lifetime, which most scholars believe was between 1030 BC and 962 BC. 1 John was probably written sometime in the period after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but probably no later than 90 AD. Since the author of the psalm is unknown, it's hard to date its writing, though there is some scholarly study that points to it possibly being used as part of Israel's autumn festival worship, or even as part of a new year worship ceremony. Psalm 143 is virtually impossible to date with very much accuracy.

What was the purpose for writing these Books?

Psalms 86

Psalm 86 is one of only five psalms titled as a prayer. Even though the words written by David reflect an attitude of prayer, this passage would have also been put to music and used as an expression of worship.

1 John

John was calling his audience to a faith that was doctrinally sound and application oriented. He reminded his readers of the teachings of Christ and urged them to put them into practice.

Psalm 33

The ESV Study Bible does a nice job of summing up the purpose of this psalm: "This is a hymn of praise to the God who made all things, who rules all things for his own purposes, and who has chosen a people to be his own for the sake of the whole world."

Psalm 143

This is the last of a collection of what are called the "Songs of Ascents." This psalm is considered a "liturgical hymn," and even though it's short, it has two distinct parts: a call to worship and a benediction.

THE MAIN POINT

These verses serve to paint a very clear picture of God's love. Psalms 86 and 1 John work together to establish that love is an essential part of who God is. Of course, in 1 John we get the beautiful description of God as love. These verses set the stage for Psalm 33 and Psalm 143, which serve to define the nature of God's love.

The word "unfailing" is used to describe God's love all throughout the Bible, especially the Old Testament. The unfailing, unwavering, never-ceasing love of God motivates so much of who God is and how He interacts with us and with His creation. It's a wonderful lesson that should generate a lot of valuable conversation and feedback.

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LESSON PLAN

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: An introductory activity called **The Lead In**; the Bible study section called **The Main Event**; an application-focused segment called **The Last Word**.

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** Using the clues given, students will name the object being described.
- **Set-Up:** You may also want to consider providing either the actual objects you are going to have students guess or pictures of them.

FIRST, explain to students that you're going to play a game to see who can name a variety of "things" based on very simple clues. Explain to students that the object can be a person, place, or thing. Explain that you will give clues one at a time, pausing to allow time for an answer between each. When a student thinks he or she knows the thing you're describing, he or she is to stand up quickly. Allow the first student to stand to answer. If the student guesses incorrectly, he or she may not guess again that round. Continue the clues until someone guesses correctly. You may consider having a small prize for each student who guesses correctly.

(Below you'll see five basic things listed. Out beside each element, you'll notice three clues that progressively go from hard to easy. Feel free to use these objects or incorporate your own. If you plan on playing more than a few minutes, you may want to supplement your list with additional objects and clues.)

Some Suggested Objects and Clues:

- **A Magazine: Spine, Published, Pages and ads**
- **The Beach: Castles, Water, Shells**
- **Nurse: Medicine, Scrubs, Assists Doctor**
- **School Bus: Students, Seats, Yellow**
- **An iPad: Button, Screen, apps**

NEXT, facilitate the game. After all of the things have been successfully identified, point out to students that everything, including people, has specific characteristics that make them identifiable. Lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

- **Think of the first athlete or celebrity that comes to mind. What is one of his or her identifiable characteristics?**
 - Answers will vary. (And if you teach junior high boys you might have to make sure they keep the discussion clean.)
- **What would you say is your identifiable characteristic? Is there something that you're known for?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Now, what is a characteristic that you wish you were recognized for?**
 - Try to keep this light. Maybe it's being able to dunk a basketball, being a good artist, running a 4.4 40-yard dash, or being a great singer.

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FINALLY, tell students that identifying people by certain traits is just something we do as people. It's almost something we do without even thinking about it. Transition into The Main Event. Say something like:

- **Just as each of us has some identifying characteristics, so does God. Throughout Scripture, we see different characteristics of God. There is one, however, that may very well stand out among all others – His love. Not only does the Bible tell us ways God shows His love for His people, it tells us that love is literally who He is! Let's take a closer look.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to understand that God's unfailing love is an essential aspect of His character.
- **Set-Up:** None needed

FIRST, explain to your students that you're going to be looking at four different passages of Scripture. This might be a different kind of Bible study than they're used to. Explain that instead of reading through a narrative passage, or looking intensely at one specific passage from one Book, you're more-or-less going to use Scripture to build and support a particular viewpoint.

THEN, set up your time of study by saying something similar to the following introduction. Say something like:

- **As we read the Bible, we see numerous ways God demonstrates His love for us. When we consider this because we're sinners who have a long track record of disobeying His commands, we recognize that we don't deserve His demonstrations of love. God gives His love because it is part of who He is. Let's see how Scripture treats this.**

Instruct your students to find Psalm 86 in their Bibles or on their Bible apps. While they are finding it, be prepared to briefly set the context for the passage using the "The Details" section of the Bible Background. You might choose to see how much they remember about David, just as a way of setting the context for the passage.

NEXT, read or have a student read Psalm 86:1-5. Once you've read the verse, lead students in a short discussion. Ask:

- **How would you describe David's mood or attitude here? What words give it away?**
 - Answer: David's not doing so hot! Words like "poor and needy," "guard my life," "save your servant," and "I cry out" sort of give away what he's going through.
- **In verse 4, David says that he lifts up his voice to God. And then in verse 5, we begin to get an idea of why David has chosen to bring his needs to God. How does David describe God in verse 5?**
 - Answer: Forgiving, good, and abounding in love.
- **OK, so, we're getting to the heart of the matter. Can anyone tell me what "abounding" means?**
 - Answer: Webster's dictionary defines abounding as being present in large numbers or great quantities.

Explain that David has effectively set the table for your journey into this concept. David said that God is full of a vast quantity of love! Tell students that this is an awesome look at how love is an essential part of who God is, but that there's one more passage that helps further connect the dots.

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THEN, instruct students to find 1 John in their Bibles or on their Bible apps. As always, briefly provide the context for this verse by referring to the "The Details" section of the Bible Background. Make sure students know who wrote 1 John, when it was written, and why. Then, read or have a student read 1 John 4:7-8. When you've read the verses, lead students in a short discussion. Ask:

- **These verses give us two huge takeaways as it pertains to the relationship between God and love. What are the two points John makes about God and love? (HINT: One is in verse 7, and one is in verse 8)**
 - Answer: First, John says that love comes from God. Then he says that God literally is love.
- **What is John saying here about the origin of love? In other words, where does John put the source of all love?**
 - Answer: John powerfully makes the point that love in all its forms has its beginnings in the person of God.

Explain that this should blow our minds. This should be hard for us to wrap our brains around. And make it clear that if it's not, they're not paying attention! Make the point by saying something similar to the following:

- **Don't miss what John is saying here. John is saying that love comes from God. All love. Love, that beautiful, wonderful, nothing-compares-to-it force of emotion was born in and of God. Anytime we see the beautiful side of love at work in the world? It came from God. (And when we see the broken, dark side of love? That's what love looks like in a world that is corrupted by sin. That's what love looks like after sin has twisted and destroyed it.) God is love. Love is wrapped up in God's identity.**

Allow students to respond to this line of thinking if they choose. Then, explain that you just established that love is part of who God is. Explain that you're about to learn how this love is most powerfully described.

NEXT, have students turn to Psalm 33. Explain that these next two psalms are by anonymous authors, so there's not a lot of context to deal with. Read or have a student read Psalm 33:4-5, then ask:

- **How do these two verses describe God's love?**
 - Answer: God's love is unfailing.

Quickly read or have a student read Psalm 143:7-8. Ask:

- **OK, what's the common thread? How is God's love described in both of these passages?**
 - Answer: God's love is unfailing.
- **So, God is love. And one of the most common ways this love is described in the Bible is using this word: unfailing. In your own words, what does unfailing mean?**
 - Answer: Allow students to flesh out some descriptions of what they think unfailing means.
- **Why is this a profound way of describing love? What is significant about love that never fails?**
 - Answers will vary. But lead students to see that this is a love that is nothing like any other love we'll ever experience.
- **Think of our world: Where do we see examples of love that fails?**
 - Answer: There are prominent examples of this: divorce, infidelity, emotional and/or physical abuse, and so on. There are smaller examples: people being unkind to one another, people lying to each other, etc.

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FINALLY, close by asking students to think of the person who loves them more than anyone else in this world. Then, ask if they can honestly say that this person has loved them 100% unfailingly. Say something like: Even those people who love us in wonderful ways have had their love fail on us. Our loved ones lose their tempers with us. They let us down. They can act selfishly. And while they still love us, and we love them, their love is not an unfailing love. So the best love we can think of still can't hold a candle to the unfailing love of God. In spite of anything we do or don't do, no matter who we are or aren't, God's love for us never waivers.

Help students understand how important it is that we grasp the depth of this word, "unfailing." Explain that because God's love is unfailing, we can trust Him to do all He says He will do. We can depend on His love for us. Remind them that this is especially huge when it comes to saving us from the penalty our sin earns. God is love! And it's a love that is unable to fail at loving even sinful people like us.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to grasp how understanding the nature of God and His love changes how they relate to Him.
- **Set-Up:** Index cards, something to write with.

FIRST, explain to students that in this last part of the lesson, you're going to spend a few moments thinking about how their understanding of God and His love impacts their relationship with Him.

THEN, distribute an index card and pen to each student. As you are doing this, say something like:

- **Because God IS love, He made a way for us to have a relationship with Him. Romans 5:8 tells us that "God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." All of us are sinners. But in His love, God made a way for us to be saved from our sins. Take a moment to think of some of the ways you may have disobeyed God recently. Now, write down a word that describes the way you feel when you think about letting God down, especially in light of His great love.**

NEXT, instruct students to think about something they have done or thought recently that pleases God. Don't lead them too much here. Let them come up with their examples. When they have had time to think, ask something like:

- **Write one or two words on your index card that describe how you feel when you've had a good run of living your life as God desires for you too.**

THEN, instruct students to think about those areas in their life where they could be stronger in their faith, where they could be walking more in God's ways. When they've had a chance to think about it, ask:

- **How do you feel when you think of the difference you could be making for God if you could only sort of figure things out a little better? Write down a word that describes how you feel.**

After allowing them a moment, instruct them to look at their words. As they're looking at them, say something like:

- **Those words represent feelings that we like to attach as conditions to God's love. When we think about our sin, and the guilt and shame it makes us feel, we believe God couldn't possibly love us.**

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When we think about obeying God, we feel good, and we believe God must love us more. And when we think about all we could be doing with our lives, we feel like God must look at us and think we're screw-ups. That's how we feel. The amazing thing is that none of this has any effect on God's love for us. God's love isn't dependant on us. It's dependant on Him!

Remind students that, as you mentioned earlier, love is not merely a trait God has, it is who He is. It is His very nature. Challenge students to let this soak in: that God's love is such a constant force, nothing they do can affect it. Encourage them to think back on this truth as they go through their week. Explain to them that the more they begin to internalize this, the more it will dynamically change the way they relate to God.

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the **Social Media** guide to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.