

# Simple Sundays

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**What is Love?**



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### Main Idea

God has come to us, setting up a binding relationship called a covenant. God has also called us to live out the same kind of covenant relationships with one another.

### Faith Statement

The Holy Spirit . . . sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

### You Will Need

Bibles, ball (soft, squishy), newsprint and markers, paper and pencils

## Background

The story begins with Saul, the first king of Israel, who betrayed the power God entrusted to him. And so it was that God chose the young boy named David to become king when Saul died. Saul and David's relationship began when the young David was brought in to play the lyre for Saul, but their relationship became strained after David used his slingshot to slay Goliath. David continued to play the lyre to soothe Saul, but sometimes it only inflamed the jealousy and hatred that Saul was beginning to feel for David. When Saul's daughter fell in love with David, Saul devised a test for David, thinking it would bring David's life to an end. When David survived, Saul relented and allowed the marriage to take place. But this did not end his hatred, and he continued to plot to have David killed.

Yet amid the hatred, the most amazing thing happened: Jonathan, Saul's son, became friends with David. Surely it was a friendship that made no sense. How could friendship grow during such hatred? How could Jonathan see the worth of David, despite his father's hatred? And how could David trust Jonathan, when Jonathan's father had proved so untrustworthy?

Yet the friendship Jonathan and David felt for each other grew to the point where Jonathan and David made a covenant, declaring that they would be there for each other no matter what. This covenant proved to be strong, for nothing that happened altered their friendship or weakened the bond between them. Jonathan and David stood as friends until Jonathan

finally had to help David escape Saul's household. Jonathan declared to David, "'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" (1 Samuel 20:42). Their friendship stands as an example to us of the love God wants us to share, even within an atmosphere of evil.

## You and Your Youth

For young people, love of enemy is best understood as loving even in the worst of circumstances. When Jesus instructs us to love our enemies, he is telling us that love is possible no matter what the circumstances. Begin your preparations for this first session by praying for each youth by name. As you look at the Background section, you will notice that David and Jonathan's friendship is defined as a covenant; they are bound together by love. The hope is that youth will see the possibilities for love in their own circumstances. God intends love for your life as well. Be open for the ways God might be connecting you to the young people placed in your care.

 **Enter**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

**Name Game***Ball*

- Gather in a circle. Toss a ball to another person in the circle, calling out that person's name.
- Ask that person who has the ball to toss the ball to someone else and call out the name of that person. Continue until all have received the ball, so that the last person will call out your name and return the ball to you.
- Repeat this activity, tossing the ball in the same order and calling out the same names. Repeat.
- Reverse the process by tossing to the person who called your name and thus around the circle. Repeat.

**Opening Prayer**

Eternal God, in your loving wisdom you set us beside the fountain of life, like a tree planted by running streams. Fill us with your love, that we may bear fruit in the beauty of holiness. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible***Bibles*

- Introduce the story of Jonathan and David by paraphrasing the information from the Background section.
- Read 1 Samuel 20:1–33, 42 aloud. Then read the passage a second time, picking one word (or phrase) that draws your attention.
- After a moment, share the phrase and comment on why it stands out.
- Close with a moment of silence, raising to God the concerns and joy that may have arisen.

**Friendship Explored**

- Divide into two groups. Give each group the following instructions:

List specific behaviors to show friendship and love to a friend. An example might be an offer to help with homework or a pat on the back in time of need.

- Each group should present their responses. Compare and discuss the answers given.
- Form a circle. Love motivates us to express love in ways that are proper and helpful to others. What specific action do you need to take to show love to someone else?
- We need to learn to express our needs. What would you like to ask someone else to do for you? Where do teens look for answers to their pressing questions? Despite reports that they are interested only in who is going out with whom and what's on television, teens do want answers to their hard questions. And the place most [young people] look first for answers is the home.

 **Express**

*These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.*

**Youth Issue**

You tend to be more introverted than extroverted. It takes a lot of energy on your part to come and mix with a group of youths. And here you are being asked to throw a ball, call out names, share personal information, and pray aloud. What could you do to feel more comfortable in groups like this? How could you adapt the session to help other more introverted young people fit in?

**Action Steps**

One of the purposes of the session is to open our eyes to love that exists even in atmospheres of animosity, violence, and betrayal. The goal for the week is to be on the lookout for love, in the hallways at school, in your own families, or in a song, TV show, or movie. Next week's session will begin with an exercise in which you will have an opportunity to explain where they have seen the presence of love.

 **Exit****Closing Prayer**

Close with the following prayer:

Mighty God, by your power you created us, and by your goodness you call us to be your people. Accept the offering of our worship that every race and nation may enter your courts, praising you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



### Main Idea

Barriers rise up amid our relationships, separating us from one another. Barriers cause relationships to crumble and love to die.

### Faith Statement

The Holy Spirit . . . sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

### You Will Need

Bibles, two or more balls (like the one used last session), markers (about ten), large strips of newsprint, masking tape

## Background

King Saul and his son Jonathan both died as they battled the Philistines, so the story of Jonathan now moves to his only son, a five-year-old child named Mephibosheth. When news of Jonathan's death reached home, Mephibosheth's nurse picked him up and fled, and in her haste, Mephibosheth fell and injured both feet. He escaped with his life, but was forced to live in hiding, injured, and feeling cursed.

David grieved for his friend Jonathan, then moved to assume his power as the new king. He became the king of Judah and later defeated the last son of Saul, before becoming the king of Israel and uniting the two kingdoms.

What must Mephibosheth have thought? Could he trust the man who had defeated his uncle? Could he trust the man who had taken over the throne, rightfully belonging to Mephibosheth? What stories did his remaining relatives tell him? Would they remember the hatred Saul had for David? Would any know of Jonathan's love for David? The Bible doesn't tell us, but we can tell from later stories that Mephibosheth's caretaker was less than scrupulous, and we know that Mephibosheth grew up with a certain fear of David.

Jonathan was dead and his only son Mephibosheth was in exile. Surely those around Mephibosheth grew bitter as they remembered their days of opulence in the court of the king. Surely, there is a sense of dejection, of victimization, of hopelessness, of despair.

Had the covenant of love failed? Since David was unaware that there was a descendant of Jonathan, he was left alone to mourn the death of his friendship. With Mephibosheth unaware that David's love would transcend generations, he was left alone to grow bitter and hopeless.

God has in mind for us a love that will cross any barriers. God has shown that love can cross the barrier of death, the barrier of exile, and the barriers of bitterness, hopelessness, and despair. God's love is eternal and will survive no matter how desperate the circumstances.

## You and Your Youth

The Background section focuses on the difficulty that comes with the death of a friend, the death of a father, as well as an accident that changes life entirely for one person. Surely the youth in your group will know difficulties. Begin your preparations by praying for each youth by name. As you lead the session, be willing to give them the time and space to talk with one another. God is amid our gatherings, and you can trust God to work in the conversations young people have with one another, as surely as you can pray for God to speak through you this day. Your best strategy for the day would be to prepare to say, "Yes! Great! Good for you! You can do it!"

Amid difficult discussions, words of affirmation are especially helpful. Those words also apply to yourself. Surely God is standing on the side, shouting to you, "Yes! Great! Good for you! You can do it!"



## Engage

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

### Name Game

*Ball (soft, squishy)*

- Repeat the ball game from the earlier session, calling out names and tossing the ball. After you have tossed the first ball around the circle, wait a few seconds, then toss a second ball in the same order.
- Pass the balls until they both make it all the way around the circle. How many times around the circle can you keep both balls going? Add a third or fourth ball.

### Name Love

- Describe a place where you have seen love in the past week, encouraging everyone to share their stories.
- Discuss the following: Could any of the examples be described as a covenant relationship? Were any directly related to church or church activities? Did any involve God? Did anyone tell a personal story? Why or why not?

### Opening Prayer

○ God, source of deliverance and help, do not let our hearts be troubled, but fill us with confidence and joy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Explore

### Study the Bible

*Bibles*

- Introduce the story of Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, by paraphrasing the information from the Background section.
- Read 2 Samuel 4:4 aloud, picking one word (or phrase) that draws your attention.
- After a moment, say the phrase that drew your attention and explain why it stands out.
- Close with a moment of silence, raising to God the concerns and joy that may have arisen.

## Barriers

*Markers, large strips of newsprint, and masking tape*

- Divide into at least two teams. Each group should have markers, large strips of newsprint, and masking tape.
- Identify the barriers that you erect to separate yourself from others and from God, such as racism or fear of being rejected. As you think of a barrier, write the word or draw a symbol for the idea on one of the strips of newsprint.
- Assemble the strips of newsprint in such a way that they form a barrier between yourself and the other group. You could use chairs or door frames, walls, or rolled tubes of paper.
- When they have finished their project, ask the groups to switch places, so that they each can go into the space created by the other. In this new place, they are to talk with one another about similarities and differences in the barrier that is put up, and the words and symbols that have been used in the process.
- Gather and then discuss these questions: What seem to be the biggest barriers we erect to love? How did it feel being isolated or set apart? Do our barriers sometimes grow into walls that keep us apart? How guilty are we of the barriers that were named?
- Keep the barriers as they are, for they will be used again in the next session.



## Express

*These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.*

## Youth Issue

You know some of these issues up close. Your friend's parent has died. Several of your friends live in families of divorce. You know people who have been injured. It's one thing to name the barriers, but how about your feelings? What can help you express them? Perhaps a few words to your leader after the session? Talking to a friend? Praying to God?

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### **Action Steps**

One of the purposes of the session is to help us identify barriers that we place between ourselves and those that we love. The goal for the week ahead is to be on the lookout for barriers people erect, in a TV show, in the hallways at school, in your own families.



### **Exit**

#### **Closing Prayer**

Close with the following prayer:

Remember us, gracious God, when we cannot see your way and purpose, and renew in us the joy of your kingdom of light and life. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.



### Main Idea

Barriers rise up and separate us. The only thing that can remove the barriers is taking the risk of loving, repeatedly and again.

### Faith Statement

The Holy Spirit . . . sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

### You Will Need

Bibles, balls from the earlier session, markers (about ten), small strips of 8 ½" x 11" paper (cut in strips small enough to attach to the balls), masking tape

## Background

When King David inquired one day if any of Saul's family were left, an old servant of Saul's remembered Mephibosheth. David asked, "Where is he?" (2 Samuel 9:4). It was the first time in years that anyone had asked this question. Where is he? Who had cared? So, into that court came Mephibosheth, still unaware that there was anyone who cared what became of him. Mephibosheth arrived and bowed, and David called him by name and said, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always" (2 Samuel 9:7).

Mephibosheth could not believe it, and in his response, you can hear the pathetic way he had been made to feel all his life: "What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?" (2 Samuel 9:8).

The powerful, covenantal love Jonathan had shown David now shone forth in David's life, and David was able to love Jonathan's son with that same powerful love. And there was Mephibosheth, not a dead dog, but a live human being, loved, redeemed, and restored to all the possessions that were rightfully his. When Jesus says, "Love your enemies," he has in mind a love that will cross any barrier. But it always involves a risk. It was risky for David to seek an heir of Saul, and risky for Mephibosheth, who did not know what David felt in his heart. But as the risks were taken, the barriers began to fall, and David and Jonathan's son stood together again with a covenant of love defining the best in life.

## You and Your Youth

David wanted to continue to honor the covenant of love he had with Jonathan by searching out Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, and bringing him into his own home. Surely there was a risk for David in loving, even when it was the right thing to do. The risk was no less for Mephibosheth, who knew so little about love, trusting, and a home. This story presents a good opportunity for helping young people look at the risks they need to take.

Begin your preparations by praying for each youth by name. The session calls for the young people to name the risks that need to be taken, and to try a risky game of throwing a ball and breaking through barriers. What if something is broken? What if someone accidentally gets hit by a ball. It is even a risk for you to teach and lead young people. There are few immediate rewards. But don't underestimate your impact. The risk you take in being with the young people will pay off in their lives—even in yours.





## Engage

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

### Name Game

*Balls (soft, squishy)*

- Repeat the ball game from the earlier session, calling out names and tossing the ball in one direction. Then toss the ball in the reverse order, again calling out names.
- Once the ball has successfully made it in order around the circle, forward and backward, wait a few seconds and then toss a second ball in the reverse order. Soon you will have one ball going one direction as the other ball is returning.

### Barriers Revisited

- Talk about a barrier you saw put up this week.
- Discuss: What was the strongest barrier? Did you see any barriers put up by people you know from church? Did any youth talk about a barrier they found themselves putting up?

### Opening Prayer

Eternal God, your tortured Son felt abandoned, and cried out in anguish from the cross, yet you delivered him. He overcame the bonds of death and rose in triumph from the grave. Give us faith to believe in the triumph you have in mind for us, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.



## Explore

### Study the Bible

*Bibles*

- Introduce the story of David finding Mephibosheth by using the Background section.
- Read from 2 Samuel 9:1-13 aloud, picking one word (or phrase) that draws your attention.
- After a moment, say the word or phrase that has drawn your attention and explain why it stands out.
- Close with a moment of silence, raising to God the concerns and joy that may have arisen.

## Risky Business

*Markers, small strips of paper, masking tape, soft balls*

- Think about risks you may need to take to get past the barriers that were put up in the earlier session. The risks might be such things as talking to someone different or apologizing to someone.
- As you think of a risk worth taking, write a word or draw a symbol for the idea on one of the strips of paper and attach it to a ball.
- Gather behind one of the walls. One at a time, name a risk on one of the balls, then throw the ball through the barrier strips of paper from the last session. How difficult is it for the risks to smash through the barriers? Can all the barriers from the earlier session be broken down?
- Discuss these questions: How did it feel breaking through the barriers? Did you attach enough risks to the balls to begin with or did you have to make more? How hard would it really be to take risks to break through the barriers you find in front of you? Which risks do you think you need to take? Do you think you can follow through and take them?



## Express

*These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.*

### Youth Issue

You tend to be a risk taker. It's hard for you to imagine the difficulty people have in taking risks, because it seems so natural to you. In fact, some people label you as brash and strong, some even call you impulsive and out of control. What's the truth? Do you need to think more before you act? How might you help others who don't have your strength?

### Action Steps

One of the purposes of this session is to help us see the risks that people take to love. The goal for the week ahead is to look for risks that you see others taking—in a song on the radio, in a TV show, in the hallways at school, in your own families, in a movie. The next session will begin with sharing these risks.



**Exit**

## **Closing Prayer**

Close with the following prayer:

Almighty God, Creator of the universe, we are awed by your wondrous works and overwhelmed by your infinite wisdom. For all your majesty, we praise you; yet even more we rejoice that you do not forget us, that you want to know us, that you come to care for us, sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ. Amen.



### Main Idea

We are upheld by God and supported by the love of others. With this support and security, we can make the changes in our lives that God calls us to make. We can be changed by love.

### You Will Need

Bibles, balls (soft, squishy), copies of "What is a helpful, loving response?", pencils

### Faith Statement

The Holy Spirit . . . sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

## Background

We don't hear about Mephibosheth until late in David's life, when David, struggling to maintain the unity of the kingdom, is forced to leave Jerusalem as civil war rages. You can imagine the quandary facing Mephibosheth. Should he go with David, his benefactor? Or should he remain, hoping that the civil war might place him as the rightful heir to Saul on the throne? Is he even capable of fleeing the city?

When Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, leaves Jerusalem with David and says that Mephibosheth has betrayed him, without question, David accepts Ziba's story and decrees that all of Mephibosheth's land now belongs to Ziba. When David later returns to reclaim his throne, Mephibosheth comes to David and tells him how he could not flee. His clothes attest to his truthfulness, for he is ragged and dirty, looking as if he has been in distress, even in mourning.

How can David know whom to believe and what to do? Worn out by conflict and false claims, he divides the lands between the two of them. He neither reprimands nor questions them. He simply loves and recklessly lets the love fall where it may.

The love David shows is not only reckless, but it is also as strong and powerful as an unbreakable bond. It seems that Mephibosheth also recognizes this: "Let [Ziba] take it all, since my lord the king has arrived home safely." Mephibosheth truly knows where love is found—with David, in a home where he is loved. We are called to live our lives as Jonathan, David, and Mephibosheth did, with that same steady, persistent, and committed love.

## You and Your Youth

Begin your preparations for this last session by praying for each youth by name. As you look at the Background, notice that David decided to love even when he was not sure that love was deserved. The activities focus on discerning situations, acting on love, and feeling the love and forgiveness. You, too, are loved by God and are a part of God's covenant of love. You have helped the youth know and understand the bonds of love and friendship through these sessions. Look for love as you lead the youth through this session.



## Engage

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

### Name Game

*Balls (soft, squishy)*

- Play the name game from earlier sessions. Decide what form and variations you would like.

### Risk Reviewed

Talk about a risk you saw taken this week, encouraging everyone to share their stories. Discuss these questions: Did the incidents described feel risky to the rest of the group? Is there anything the risk takers have in common?

### Opening Prayer

Ever-living God, the heavens were glad and the earth rejoiced when you sent Christ to dwell with us. Help us to proclaim your glory until the whole earth sings a new song to you now and forever. Amen.



## Explore

### Study the Bible

*Bibles*

- Introduce the story by using the Background section.
- Read 2 Samuel 16:1–4; 19:24–30 aloud, picking one word (or phrase) that draws your attention.
- After a moment, share the phrase and comment on why it stands out.
- Close with a moment of silence, raising to God the concerns and joy that may have arisen.

### Helpful Responses

*Copies of "What is a helpful, loving response?"*

- Divide into two teams, serving as a team yourself if you have less than four participants.
- Have one person read the statements and another to write the responses.
- Complete the following phrases:

### What is a helpful, loving response?

After the basketball game, Terry was crying because . . . The helpful, loving response might be to . . .

Juan never says hello in the hall between classes because . . . The helpful, loving response might be to . . .

Phil was beating his locker door after school because . . . The helpful, loving response might be to . . .

Chris was sitting on the front steps of the school with his head in his lap because . . . The helpful, loving response might be to . . .

Felicia was sitting in the back row of the sanctuary reading a book because . . . The helpful, loving response might be to . . .

- Each group should read their completed statements and responses. Compare these, then compare them with the actual situation and suggested response given below. Discuss: What does this say about our perceptions of others? What did you learn about each other?

Terry was so overjoyed her school had won the basketball championship.

*Response: Jump up and down, shout, and cry along with her.*

Juan is new at school and doesn't know anyone.

*Response: Introduce yourself and say hello every time you pass him.*

Phil got another detention and had to stay after school again.

*Response: Keep your distance and let him be angry.*

Chris felt like he was going to throw up.

*Response: Ask if he needs help or a ride home, or call a parent.*

Felicia was painfully shy and didn't know how to make friends.

*Response: Ask if you can sit beside her today and hear about the book she's reading.*

- When David didn't know whom to believe, Ziba or Mephibosheth, he chose to take the risk of loving anyway. Is it always worth the risk of trying to make a loving response? Can love change a situation or a person?



## Express

*These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.*

## Youth Issue

You tend to be the kind of person who can think about the right thing to do. You can read a situation and figure out the right response. But you have trouble acting on it. You find it difficult to take the first step, even when you know it is the right step to take. While it would be good to help give someone the kind of love needed to make a change, what you really need is a change inside you. How can you move from good intention to good action? Taking just one step and trusting that God will help you make the next step is action enough.

## Action Steps

- Introduce yourself to someone who is new to your team or class.
- Challenge yourself to get to know someone whom you don't know very well.
- Reflect on what you risked by showing that you care for individuals who are new to your class or team.
- Pay attention to the reactions of your friends when you take risks to show love to your neighbors.
- Remember that God is with you and can help you make the move from a good intention to a good action.



## Exit

### Closing Prayer

Gather in a circle facing inward, connected by hands on shoulders. Say the following:

Love feels like a circle in which we have our arms around one another. But sometimes things happen which remove us from love and one another. To show this, do the following things, remaining silent while we act them out.

- If you have ever felt that you have let someone else down, drop your arms.
- If you have ever said something that was less than loving, take a step backward.
- If you have ever said something that made another person feel left out, take a step backward.
- If you have ever not spoken the truth to someone, turn and face away from the center.
- If you have ever pretended not to see the needs of other people, close your eyes.
- Sometimes we do come through for someone else in need. If you have ever helped someone, turn back around.
- If you have ever taken the time to listen to a friend, take one step in toward the circle.
- If you have ever made someone feel welcome and included, open your eyes.
- If you have ever shared a way that you have failed someone and looked for forgiveness, take another step toward the circle.
- If you have ever forgiven someone, place your arms around the people beside you.
- Silence. Let's have a group hug.