

GROUP ACTIVITY for Expressing Love to One's Neighbors

Introduction

Scripture often reminds us not only to *talk* about love, but to connect that talk with *action*. The activity described below is designed to help the participants learn new ways to actively express "love for neighbor." The handout ("Expressing Love for Neighbors") presents an overview of the concept of love. (As used here, the term "neighbor" can refer to anyone, not just someone living next door!)

Our goal: To encourage people to discover new ways to express "love for neighbor" ... and then do to it!

After introducing the topic, everyone should write down various suggestions of how a person can express love to his neighbor. When everyone is done, the results can be shared and discussed. Since there are a wide variety of ways that people can express love, and people tend to think of different ideas, each person can learn from the rest of the group. If desired, the results can be collated, and the results used in a follow-up study. (See: "Further things to do," below.)

Our results (when we did this activity)

The results given by five different people are shown in the "Individual Results," below.

I then grouped the suggestions into several basic categories and subcategories. At times, this included duplicate suggestions, if more than one person said the same thing. See the "Combined Results," below. (Note: During the initial activity, you can list basic categories on a chalk board or an overhead transparency. You may want to hand out a printed copy later.)

Though we didn't do it (because of the small number of participants), these results could have been reduced to a shorter list that grouped similar suggestions into generalized statements about "ways we can express love to neighbors."

Here are some observations I made about the suggestions that were made in our group. (The results in your group may vary.)

1. Some suggestions were rather general; others were very specific.
2. There were three general emphases: 1) giving something; 2) doing something; and 3) being with someone (interacting with them, talking to them, etc.).
3. Most of the suggestions focused on things we could do or give, etc. A few of them focused on *not* doing or *not* giving, etc. Though often overlooked, this second group is important to remember. Sometimes love is best expressed by what we *don't* do.
4. A few of the suggestions that were given could be potentially misguided (if not further qualified). But learning the right ways to express love is what this activity is all about!

Some items that could be discussed during (or after) this activity

1. Some aspects of love may be overlooked, especially if they are not popular ways to express it. Yet they are still a necessary part of love, and must be practiced when the situation requires it. (As a leader, keep your eyes open for such omissions, so you can point them out.)

Leaving a person to experience the painful consequences of his actions (especially when he keeps choosing to repeat them) might not be considered "love," by some people. Yet it *is* love, and is sometimes necessary. Examples: It would *not* be love to continually feed a person who is habitually lazy (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Also, Jesus frequently expressed love in ways that the religious leaders didn't appreciate - including warning them about their sins!

2. Some expressions of love could be misguided. Though the specific action could be potentially good in one situation, it could be wrong in another.

Example: Giving money to a drunk could enable him to buy more alcohol, instead of the nutritious meal he *claims* he wants to buy.

3. We need to be cautious when we give things to people, for it does not always solve the problem.

This does not mean that we *shouldn't* give things. But often the best expression of love will involve something that is more time-consuming.

4. There is a "hierarchy" in the expression of love; certain things have a greater emphasis or a priority over other things.

Example: We are to show love to all people, but should have a *greater* focus on fellow believers - our eternal family (Galatians 6:10).

5. Don't forget "love for God"! This is *never* to be ignored. Even our "love for neighbor" is to be done as an expression of "love for God." After all, it is God who *commanded* that we love our neighbor!

Normally these two focuses will not contradict each other. But if a contradiction did actually occur, then "love for God" would take precedence over "love for neighbor." Example: "Obedience to authority" (assuming it's a *legitimate* authority) is an expression of "love for neighbor." But if that authority tried to get you to disobey God, then "love for God" would take precedence over "obedience to authority" (Acts 5:29).

Further things to do:

The specific suggestions a group may give can be organized and further developed, and used for planning future group activities and events, or for encouraging personal expressions of love.

Take the generalizations and develop some *specific* plan from them.

Example: For the general idea of "Helping the elderly with repairs around their house," a specific plan might be something like, "Fix Mrs. Smith's broken window and leaking faucet." (Make sure you know what you are doing, so you don't turn your faucet project into a bigger plumbing disaster!)

Encourage creativity, both when the suggestions are being written down, and when they are being used to plan for the future. Also encourage wisdom (such as mentioned in the comments above), so that ideas don't accomplish the *opposite* of what you desire!

It is important that we encourage each other to "live-out" the love that we claim is inside us!

Individual Results

Person 1

- Paint a wall
- Mow grass for a person who has a bad back
- Pray for them
- Pick up trash; don't leave your own trash!
- Visit a sick person
- Write a letter of encouragement
- Teach someone a skill

Person 2

- Donate books to people who need them
- Donate clothes or food or anything that we don't want or need
- Try to pay attention to what others have to say
- Listen to your mom/guardian when he/she tells you to do something
- Don't rebel against what they have to say or do
- Earn money from a lemonade stand to help with any kind of disease
- Don't do things that can and will hurt others
- Don't do things that can and will hurt yourself

Person 3

- We can help people by donating to them
- Helping people to get through the downside and be on the happy side
- Help the homeless to become better in their environment
- Help others by doing nice things for them - and not wanting money (not wanting to be paid back) all the time
- You can always give a helping hand to the one who needs it

Person 4

- Giving money
- Giving clothes
- Go and help feed them
- Go and talk to them
- Tell them about God
- Sing to them
- Do things for them
- Put on a comedy show for them
- Give toys

Person 5

- Our time, maybe even our money
- Through what we say and do
- Our words and deeds
- Just listen, advice
- Giving away things to benefit others (example, of a personal "sacrifice")
- Missionary work
- Volunteer work
- Donations
- Make a friend
- Be a friend
- Bring a friend to Christ

Combined Results

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	SPECIFIC SUGGESTION
GENERAL	General	Our time, maybe even our money
		Through what we say and do
		Our words and deeds
INTERACT	Attention	Visit a sick person
		Try to pay attention to what others have to say
		Go and talk to them
		Just listen, advice
		Make a friend
		Be a friend
	Encourage	Pray for them
		Write a letter of encouragement
		Helping people to get through the downside and be on the happy side
		Sing to them
		Put on a comedy show for them
	Respect	Listen to your mom/guardian when he/she tells you to do something
		Don't rebel against what they have to say or do
	Build up	Teach someone a skill
		Don't do things that can and will hurt others
		Don't do things that can and will hurt yourself
Help homeless to become better in their environment		
DO ACTIVITIES	Do for	Paint a wall
		Mow grass for a person with a bad back
		Pick up trash; don't leave your own trash!
		Help others by doing nice things for them (& not wanting money <paid back> all the time)
		You can always give a helping hand to the one who needs it
	Do for (in general)	Do things for them
	Volunteer work	
GIVE THINGS	Give	Donate books to people who need them
		Donate clothes or food or anything that we don't want or need
		Giving clothes
		Go and help feed them
		Give toys
	Give (in general)	We can help people by donating to them
		Giving away things to benefit others - ex. Sacrifice
		Donations
	Give money	Earn money from a lemonade stand to help with any kind of disease
Giving money		
ULTIMATE LOVE	Evangelize	Tell them about God
		Missionary work
		Bring a friend to Christ