

Be Loved Faith Study

Session 1: Be Loved, Be



Welcome to the Be Loved faith study and to your small group!

Our starting place is our relationship with God – being beloved by God and living into God's unconditional, steadfast love. Being in relationship with others and part of a larger community all begins with our identity as beloved children of God. Beloved children who can simply be who we truly are. Beloved children who can simply be present and rest in God's love.

Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- Share your name and any background or stories that you know about your name. Or, share a family member's name and how their name came about.
- What is your favorite way to spend a Sunday or another day for rest and renewal?
- What intrigues you about the theme *Be Loved: Being in Relationships, Being in Community*?

Opening Prayer & Responsive Reading

Begin with a few minutes of silence. Ask God to care for all that has been on your heart and mind today.

One: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.

All: Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

One: Beloved, since God loved us so much,

All: We also ought to love one another.

One: If we love one another, God lives in us.

All: And God's love is perfected in us.

One: Amen.

What Does the Bible Say?

John's gospel reminds us that Christ, God's Word, was present at creation. God loved the whole creation so much that God became a human and dwelt among us to bring God's light and love into the world. This is the good news for us because the light that Christ brought into the world lives in us. God calls each of us "Beloved" throughout our lives.

John 1:1-9, 14 (NIV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world...

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Think About...

(optional, depending on time)

- What word or phrase speaks to you today?
- Jesus is described in many ways in this text. Share with one another the descriptive words or phrases you hear. Which of these is most meaningful to you?
- What are some of the characteristics of "light"? Which of these add meaning to who God and Jesus are for you?
- What does "The Word" mean to you? Why do you think Jesus is represented as "The Word"?

The Word Became Flesh Illumination

(optional - use as a group or individually)

Explore the text from a different perspective by using an illumination (artwork) of the text from *The Saint John's Bible*.

View the Illumination for John 1 and walk through the questions guide.

Available at:

www.incarnationmn.org/be-loved/

What Do Others Say?

I went to college eleven hours away from home. At the end of each semester, after a week of late nights studying or finishing papers, I would arrive home with a car full of dirty laundry, exhausted and strung out. There is something comforting about resting and falling asleep in the house you grew up in. After an intense 15-week semester of always working to prove myself to my professors, coaches, or friends, coming home meant rest. I could let my guard down. My achievements—and my failures—made no difference to how much my parents and siblings loved me. Of course, my parents celebrated when I did well in a class and were disappointed—even frustrated—when I didn't do so well. They were thrilled when I was accepted into seminary and overcome with joy when Amanda and I got engaged and married. But home,

whether here in Minnesota, or at my parents' house in Michigan, is a place where I can simply be. Home is where I experience love, through deep conversations, dancing with my kids, playing card games with my family or working on a puzzle. Where is that for you? Where are you able to let your guard down and simply be? Where do you find it easiest to rest?

When I think of being a beloved child of God, I think of practicing the Sabbath. Jesus reminds us that, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27, NRSV) Quite literally in Greek, Jesus says: "The Sabbath was *established* for humankind..." That's a little different than "being made" or "created." The word "established" means to give space for something to take place, because it is so very important and valuable, because *you* are so important and valuable. Perhaps a better way to think about it is to think of the Sabbath as the *gift of time*. Think of it—a whole day when you don't have to prove your self-worth—a whole day to be reminded that you are enough! This is not because of all the things you got done the week before, but simply because the Creator of the universe calls you, "My beloved child."

At the dawn of creation, we are told that God took a break from creating and rested. In Genesis 2 we read, "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he *rested* on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God *rested* from all the work that he had done in creation." (Genesis 2:2-3, NRSV) In Hebrew the word "rested" is similar to "sitting down" or "dwelling." Can you imagine God *sitting down*? I wonder what kind of chair God would sit in? A La-Z-Boy? Or would God lounge around on a sectional? Maybe better questions to consider are: What does this story reveal to us about the true nature of God? What does the story tell us about what God wants for us?

Perhaps it shows that the fullness of who God is, goes beyond creating and forming and working. We find the nature of God in creation, and we find the nature of God in rest, in sitting down, in dwelling. The Incarnation, as spoken about in John 1, reminds us of the fullness of God coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. The Gospel writer describes that in-breaking of God this way: "The Word of God became flesh and made his *dwelling* among us." (John 1:14, NIV) It is mind-blowing to think that the God of the Universe would be so humble as to take on the form of a human, come to earth in the most vulnerable way, and let God's guard down to be taken care of by a teenage mother and father. What's more, this same child would later take on sin and death and be raised to new life, for you, for me, for all people! This tells us how much God loves us and how closely God wants to be in relationship with us!

Being a beloved child of God means there is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. Being a

beloved child of God invites you to regularly sit down, dwell with God and simply be. Being a beloved child of God is foundational to all the other relationships we have, from relationships with close friends and family members to relationships in our wider community, reminding us that we belong to one another. It includes relationships that provide support and encouragement in those moments of disappointment or challenges and it includes relationships in which we get a chance to bless the others around us. Knowing that we are already beloved children of God grounds us in our identity and opens us up to the opportunity for future relationships.

As we begin the new year together, carve out some time each week to take a Sabbath. This could be a whole day, or it could be little times of Sabbath each day. The amount of time isn't as important as remembering that Sabbath time is meant to remind you that you are already good enough. You don't need to strive, compete or be productive to receive God's love. God gives that love freely, and in response to that love we are given the gift to simply be in God's presence.

--Reflection by Pastor Joel Vander Wal

Think About (select one or more questions)

Be Loved

- When I think of being a beloved child of God, I think of... How would you finish this sentence? When or where do you feel beloved? What brings that about for you?
- "Being a beloved child of God, means there is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less." Talk about how this sentence could be transformative.
- What are some practical, do-able ways to remind yourself each day that you are God's beloved? What are some practical ways to tell others they are beloved on simple, ordinary days?
- How does being a beloved child of God change your relationships with others?
- What's the relationship between being beloved and Sabbath living?

Be • Sabbath

- Tell about a time and/or place where you truly felt you were able to "sit down, dwell with God and simply be." When and where do you find it easiest to rest?
- Sabbath can be tough to live into. What gets in the way? What would you need to do ahead of time to prepare?
- How do you spend your Sabbath? How would you like to spend your Sabbath?

*"You are beloved by God.
You are invited to be love in
the world." -Pastor Kai Nilsen*

- How could you carve out time even a small amount of time for Sabbath rest in a day or a week or a month? What do you think might happen if you did?
- What are some ways we can help other people in our life to take a break for Sabbath rest?

Connecting Faith with Daily Life

(for individual reflection & action)

- Visit the Incarnation Chapel and view the illumination for John 1 in The Saint John's Bible. How does this image enhance your understanding of the text and of the mission of this community called "Incarnation"?
- Think of a word or image that reminds you that you are a beloved child of God and carry that with you as you go about your week. You could also choose an object (small cross, pebble...) to carry with you as a reminder.
- Read about God's unconditional and unending love for you in Romans 8:31-39. As you read, replace the word "us" with your own name.

Closing Prayer

Spend time in silence, surrounded by God's love, as the leader (or someone from the group) reads a selection from Psalm 46.

As we prepare to leave this time together, let's quiet ourselves as we dwell in God's presence. Think about a time or place where you have felt especially beloved or simply rest in God's presence and love.

Silence

Be still and know that I am God. *Silence*

Be still and know. *Silence*

Be still. *Silence*

Be. *Silence*

Amen.

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