YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

FRIENDSHIP · DATING · BOUNDARIES



WEEK 1 OF 4

Love Is a Verb

Theme: Love that shows up · Main text: 1 John 3:16–18

REAL LOVE.

Real love looks like Jesus.

Inside: 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

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WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

Love Is a Verb

Theme: Love that shows up · Main text: 1 John 3:16–18 · Memory verse: 1 John 3:18

THE BIG IDEA

Real love is something you do, not just something you feel. Jesus showed us what it looks like.

The question to carry all night

"What does real love look like?"

By the end, students will…

- See that the Bible measures love by what you *do*, not just what you say
- Learn that Jesus is the clearest picture of real love
- Pick one real deed for one real person and start My Love Code

NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

SEGMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	45 MIN	60 MIN	75 MIN
Welcome	Greet new students by name and grade; your announcements	—	—	5
Game 1	Pick from the Activity Menu (next page)	8	10	10
Game 2	A second game from the menu (optional)	—	—	10
Hook + Message	"The Card or the Ride" · 1 John 3:16–18	10	12	12
Response Activity	The Show-Up List + My One Step	10	12	12
Small Group Talk	Pick 3–4 questions	—	8	10
Joys & Concerns	"I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer."	10	10	10
Pastoral Prayer	Leader prays over what was shared + send-off	5	5	5

Supplies

- My Love Code cards: copy the card on student page 2 onto cardstock
- Game cards: Love in Action cards, Sappy Card lines, Need Next Door scenarios (see games)
- Scissors, pens, markers, a phone timer
- Optional: one cheesy greeting card for the hook
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read 1 John 3:11–24 and John 13:1–17
- Practice "The Card or the Ride" hook out loud once
- Think of a time someone showed up for *you* as a teenager with a deed, not just words
- Pray for each student by name, especially anyone who feels unloved right now

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CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four quiet ones and a visitor. Every game here is about friends, family, and everyday kindness, never about pairing anyone up. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Love Without Words Silent charades of everyday loving deeds, then real stories	High	Action cards, 5 min	Students need to move and laugh; you want everyone talking	10
B. Sappy Card Showdown Teams turn cheesy card lines into real proof	Medium	Card lines, paper, pens	You want laughs and the strongest link to the message	10–12
C. Love Verb Shuffle Two circles rotate; every round is a new verb and a new partner	Medium	None	Lots of new students; zero prep time	8–10
D. The Need Next Door Trios plan a real deed for an everyday need	Low	Scenario cards	Small or quiet group; a mix of older and younger students	8–10
E. The Show-Up List Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Love Code cards	Every night: this is the heart of the week and starts My Love Code	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Love Without Words → B. Sappy Card Showdown → Message → E. The Show-Up List

Small group (4–6)

D. The Need Next Door (whole group) → Message → E. The Show-Up List in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

C. Love Verb Shuffle → A. Love Without Words → Message → E. The Show-Up List (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

B. Sappy Card Showdown → Message → E. The Show-Up List → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. No teasing about crushes or "who likes who," tonight or any week. If a game ever starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

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A. Love Without Words

10 min · High energy

Purpose: Fast, silly charades where every card is an everyday way to show love, acted out with zero words. It's literally love without words. After each guess, everyone turns to a neighbor and tells a quick true story about that deed. Students move, laugh, and learn who in their lives has shown up for them.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into two or three teams. Actors can go solo or in pairs (pairs are easier for new or shy students).
2. The actor draws a **Love in Action** card and acts it out for their own team. **No words, no sounds, no pointing at objects in the room.**
3. The team has 60 seconds to guess. A correct guess is 1 point. If time runs out, any team can steal.
4. After every card, the leader reads the **talk question**. Everyone turns to the person next to them and answers (about 30 seconds each).
5. Rotate teams and actors. Play 8–10 cards, then finish with the Bridge card.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This is Love Without Words. It's charades, but every card is a way somebody shows love. Not a hug, not 'I love you.' An actual thing you do. You can't talk, you can't make sounds, and you can't point at stuff in the room. You can go solo or bring a buddy up with you. Your team has sixty seconds."
>
> "And here's the twist. After every card, turn to the person next to you and tell them about a time somebody did that for you, or you did it for somebody. Quick stories. Who wants to act first?"

LOVE IN ACTION CARDS + TALK QUESTIONS

CARD (ACT IT OUT)	TALK QUESTION (AFTER THE GUESS)
Carrying someone's heavy bags	"Who's the most helpful person in your family?"
Saving a seat for someone	"Where do you usually sit at lunch?"
Making breakfast for your family	"What's the best breakfast someone ever made you?"
Sharing your fries	"What food would you never share? Be honest."
Shoveling a neighbor's driveway	"Snow day: sled, sleep, or video games?"
Cheering at a friend's game or concert	"What's something you've done where someone came to cheer for you?"
Lending your phone charger	"What's your phone battery at right now? Are you a 1% person?"
Teaching a little kid to ride a bike	"Who taught you something you still use?"
Helping a friend study for a test	"What's your hardest class right now?"

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Walking someone's dog when they're sick	"Dog person, cat person, or 'no pets, thank you'?"
Bridge card: Sitting with someone who's sad (no fixing, just staying)	"Has anyone ever just stayed with you on a bad day?" Lead into the debrief.

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one team. Each person acts once while everyone else guesses, then go around the circle for the talk question.
- **Student cards:** After a few rounds, each team writes one Love in Action card for the other team.
- **Speed round:** 30 seconds per card and no stealing. Great when energy is high.

LEADER NOTE *Never pick an actor; ask for volunteers and let anyone bring a buddy. If a student freezes up front, jump in as their "assistant." Keep every card about friends, family, and neighbors, never romance.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "You just guessed ten kinds of love, and nobody said a single word. That's kind of the point. We say 'I love you' and 'love you, bro' and 'I love this song' all the time. But you knew every one of those cards was love, just by what people did. We're starting a series called Real Love, about friendship, dating, and boundaries. And the question for all four weeks is: **what does real love look like?**"

B. Sappy Card Showdown

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Teams hear a super cheesy greeting card line and have to "prove it" with three real actions, the kind of things a person would actually do. Every teammate adds one action from real life, so students hear what makes each other feel cared for. It sets up the message perfectly: John says love is not just words; it's deeds.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into teams of 3–4. Mix it up: "Find people you haven't talked to yet tonight." Each team gets paper and a pen.
2. The leader reads a **Sappy Card** line in their most dramatic voice and says who the card is for.
3. Teams have 90 seconds to write **3 Proofs**: three real things you could do that would prove the card is true. Every person adds at least one, with a reason from real life ("My mom does this for me").
4. Teams read their proofs out loud. The group cheers for the most "real" proof list (cheer for teams, never for a person).
5. Before the next card, each team answers the talk question together. Play 6–8 cards, then finish with the Jesus card.

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LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Get in teams of three or four. I'm about to read you some of the sappiest greeting cards ever written. Your job is to prove them. Write three things a person could actually *do* that would show the card is true. Not more nice words. Things you can see. And every person on your team adds at least one from real life. Ninety seconds. Ready?"
>
> (*Read the first card dramatically.*) "'You are the wind beneath my wings!' To: a best friend. Go!"

SAPPY CARDS + TALK QUESTIONS

CARD LINE · WHO IT'S FOR	TALK QUESTION (AFTER PROOFS)
"You are the wind beneath my wings!" · a best friend	"What's something a friend did that you still remember?"
"World's Greatest Mom!" · a mom or someone who mothers you	"What's one thing an adult at home does that nobody thanks them for?"
"Grandparents are the best!" · a grandparent or older relative	"What's a tradition an older person in your life taught you?"
"Teammates for life!" · a teammate	"Best team, club, or group you've ever been part of?"
"Best sibling ever (most days)" · a brother or sister	"Oldest, middle, youngest, or only? What's the best part?"
"Welcome! We're SO glad you're here!" · a new student	"What helped you most on a first day somewhere?"
"Thanks for everything, Coach!" · a coach or teacher	"Who's a teacher or coach who believed in you?"
"Get well soon!!!" · a friend who's sick	"When you're sick, what makes it better?"
"Thinking of you on your birthday!" · a neighbor	"What's the best birthday you've ever had?"
Jesus card: "I love you." · from Jesus, to the world	"What did Jesus actually *do* to prove it?" Lead into the debrief.

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one group. The leader reads a card, and everyone gives one proof from their own life, around the circle.
- **Write your own:** Teams write the sappiest card line they can, then another team has to prove it.
- **Real cards:** Bring a few cheap greeting cards and read them straight from the card. It's funnier.

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LEADER NOTE *Some students don't have a mom, a dad, a grandparent, or a sibling in their lives. Say once, casually: "If the card doesn't fit your life, swap in anybody who's like that for you." Keep it light and move on.*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"Cards are nice. I like cards. But you noticed: the card isn't the proof. The proof is what somebody does. Tonight we're reading a short passage that says exactly that. And the last card was the biggest one. Jesus didn't just say 'I love you.' He proved it. So here's our question: **what does real love look like?**"

C. Love Verb Shuffle

8–10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Zero prep and lots of talking. Students stand in two circles, one inside the other, and face a partner. The leader calls out a love verb (help, listen, include), and partners tell a quick true story about it. Then the outside circle shuffles and everyone gets a new partner. Nobody has to find a partner on their own, so it's easy for new students.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Make two circles: an inner circle facing out and an outer circle facing in. Everyone should be facing a partner. If the numbers are odd, a leader joins in, or one spot becomes a trio.
2. The leader calls a **Love Verb** and its prompt. Each partner gets about 45 seconds to answer.
3. The leader calls **"Shuffle!"** The outer circle takes two steps to the left. New partner.
4. Add a fun move to each shuffle if you want: hop, moonwalk, slow motion.
5. Play 8–10 rounds. Always end with the Bridge verb.

LEADER SCRIPT

SAY

"Inside circle, face out. Outside circle, face in. Say hi to the person in front of you. Tell them your name if you don't know each other. I'm going to call out a verb, an action word, that's one way people show love. You'll each tell a quick story about it. When I yell 'Shuffle,' outside circle moves two spots to the left. First verb: *help*. Tell your partner about a time someone helped you when you really needed it. Go!"

LOVE VERBS (ONE PER ROUND)

- **Help:** A time someone helped you when you really needed it
- **Listen:** Who's the best listener you know? What makes them good at it?
- **Include:** A time someone invited you in when you were new
- **Share:** Something you'd share with anyone, and something you wouldn't
- **Teach:** Something someone patiently taught you
- **Make:** Something someone made for you (food, a gift, a playlist)
- **Encourage:** The best thing anyone ever said before a game, test, or show
- **Forgive:** Is it easier for you to say sorry or to forgive? Why?

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- **Show up:** A time someone came to something just for you
- **Bridge · Give:** What's one thing Jesus gave up to show love?

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Skip the circles. Sit together, call a verb, and go around so everyone answers. Let students call the next verb.
- **Act it first:** Before talking, partners have five seconds to act out the verb. Then they tell the story.
- **Limited space:** Two straight lines facing each other work just as well. One line slides down one spot.

LEADER NOTE *The circles do the pairing, so nobody has to go find a partner. Stand in the outer circle yourself if numbers are odd, and keep an eye on any pair that's stuck. Toss them an easier version of the question.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Every word I called out tonight was a verb. Help, listen, include, show up. Not one of them was a feeling. That doesn't mean feelings don't matter. They do. But everything you just remembered was something somebody *did*. Tonight's question is: **what does real love look like?**"

D. The Need Next Door

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, story-based game for small or quiet groups. Trios get an everyday situation where someone needs love, then plan one real deed a teenager could actually do this week with what they already have. Each person shares if someone has ever shown up for them like that. Older students help younger ones, and everyone learns something true about each other.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into trios. If you can, mix older and younger students in each trio.
2. Each trio draws a **Need Next Door** card (or picks from the list).
3. Trios plan **one real deed**, using only what a teenager actually has: time, two hands, a phone, a snack, a hoodie, a ride from a parent who says yes.
4. Each person in the trio answers: "Has someone ever shown up for me like that?" Passing is fine.
5. Trios read their card and their deed to the group. The group gives a "That's real!" cheer for every plan. Draw again if you have time.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Get in groups of three. Each group gets a card with a situation where somebody needs some love. Your job is to come up with one thing a teenager could really do this week. No money, no superpowers, no 'buy them a car.' Just what you actually have. Then tell each other if anybody's ever shown up for you like that. I'll do an example: 'Your friend's dog just died.' Our deed: make a card with their favorite dog picture and sit with them at lunch."

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NEED NEXT DOOR CARDS

- A new student has eaten lunch alone all week
- A friend forgot their lunch and has no money
- Your little brother or sister is stuck on homework
- A friend's grandparent is in the hospital
- An older neighbor's driveway is covered in snow
- A teammate didn't make the team
- Someone in your class had a really embarrassing moment
- A friend is stressed about a huge test
- The adult who takes care of you has had a long week
- A friend just moved away and feels lonely

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Work through 3–4 cards together as one group. Then pick one deed you could do *as a group* next week.
- **Lightning round:** Skip planning. The leader reads a card and each person says one deed out loud, fast.

LEADER NOTE *Keep the cards general and never use a real student's situation. If a student shares a hard story ("Nobody showed up for me"), thank them for being honest and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Notice what you didn't need for any of those: a lot of money or perfect words. You just needed eyes to see the need and a willingness to do something. Tonight we'll read a verse that says almost exactly that. Keep this question in your head: **what does real love look like?**"

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Hook: "The Card or the Ride"

2 min

SAY

(*Hold up a cheesy greeting card if you have one.*) "Okay. You have to pick one friend for the whole year. Friend Number One gives you the most amazing birthday card ever. Glitter. A poem. 'You're my best friend in the whole universe.' And then… that's it. They never text back. They never show up."

"Friend Number Two never writes you a card. Not once. But when your phone dies after practice and you're stuck, they show up. They save you a seat. They remember your test was today and ask how it went. Which friend do you want? Shout it out." (*Let students answer.*)

"Yeah. Everybody picks Friend Number Two. Which tells us something. Deep down, we already know love is more than words. For the next four weeks we're doing a series called Real Love, about friendship, dating, and boundaries. And the question is: **what does real love look like?**"

Message: Love You Can See

10 min

1. We use the word "love" for everything

SAY

"Think about how many times you say 'love' in a day. I love pizza. I love this song. I love my dog. Love you, bro. We even say it about people we've never met. So it's kind of confusing. Is love a feeling? A crush? A text with a heart on it? Movies and songs mostly say love is a feeling that happens to you. Tonight we're going to see what God says, because he's the one who made love in the first place."

LEADER NOTE *If you have a short, honest story about someone who showed you love with a deed when you were a teenager (a ride, a meal, a person who stayed), tell it here. Thirty seconds is plenty. Students trust leaders who go first.*

2. Read the passage

SAY

"This is from a letter written by John. He was one of Jesus' closest friends. He'd spent three years watching Jesus up close, and when he was old, he wrote to churches about what love really is. When he says 'brothers,' he means the whole family of people who follow Jesus. Listen."

16 By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, then closes his heart of compassion against him, how does God's love remain in him? 18 My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.

1 JOHN 3:16–18 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

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3. Jesus is what love looks like

SAY

"Look at the very first line: 'By this we know love.' John doesn't say, 'This is how love feels.' He points to something Jesus did. 'He laid down his life for us.' If you ever wonder what real love looks like, look at Jesus. He didn't just say he loved people. He touched people nobody would touch. He ate with people nobody would eat with. And then he gave his life on the cross. Jesus said it himself the night before he died:"

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

JOHN 15:13 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"Here's the good news before anything else: you don't earn that love. Jesus showed up for you first. Everything we do starts there."

4. Love has eyes, hands, and feet

SAY

"Then John gets really practical. 'Lay down our lives' sounds huge, but look at verse 17. It's about seeing someone in need and not shutting your heart. Most days, laying down your life looks small. You lay down your seat at lunch for the new kid. You lay down twenty minutes of your phone to help your little sister. You lay down being right so a friendship can be okay again. And then verse 18 sums it all up. It's our memory verse:"

My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.

1 JOHN 3:18 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"'In deed and truth.' Deed means you do something. Truth means it's real, not for show. That's true with friends, with family, and someday, if you date, it's true there too. Anybody can say 'I love you.' Real love shows up. It sees, it gives, it stays."

"So feelings are great, but feelings come and go. Love is a verb. You'll know it's real by what it does. Jesus already showed us. So here's the question again, and I want you to actually think about it: **what does real love look like?**"

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E. Response Activity: The Show-Up List

12 min

Purpose: Help students think honestly, privately, and without guilt about the people in their lives, and pick one real deed of love for one real person this week. Tonight they also start **My Love Code**: a small card they fill in one line per week. By Week 4 they'll have their own four-line code for real love, written by them, to keep in a wallet, a phone case, or a Bible.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Hold up a Love Code card. Explain: one line each week, four lines total, and it's theirs to keep. Nobody grades it.
2. **The Show-Up List:** On student page 1, students privately think of one person for each row (no names needed, initials are fine), write what that person might need right now, and one deed they could do.
3. Students circle the **one deed** they'll actually do this week.
4. **Deed pairs:** In pairs, each partner shares their deed without naming the person ("someone at home," "a friend"). The other prays one sentence: "God, help ___ show real love this week." Then switch.
5. **My Love Code · Line 1:** Students finish the sentence "Real love does ___." on their card.
6. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" and the private Show-Up Check box on student page 2.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (LOVE CODE)**
>
> "This is your Love Code. Every week of this series you'll add one line. It's not a list of rules from me. You write it. By the last week you'll have your own code for what real love looks like. Keep it somewhere you'll see it."
>
> **SAY (SHOW-UP LIST)**
>
> "On your first page, find The Show-Up List. For each row, think of one real person. You don't have to write their name, initials are fine. What do they need right now? Then what's one thing you could actually do? This is just between you and God. Nobody is going to see it, and nobody's grading it."
>
> **SAY (DEED PAIRS)**
>
> "Circle the one deed you'll really do this week. Now find a partner. Share your deed, but don't say who it's for. Just 'someone at home' or 'a friend.' Then your partner prays one sentence for you: 'God, help Jordan show real love this week.' That's it. One sentence."
>
> **SAY (LINE 1 + ONE STEP)**
>
> "Now grab your Love Code card. Line 1: 'Real love does ___.' Fill in a verb, or a few. Like: 'Real love does show up.' 'Real love does listen.' Then on page 2, write your one step for this week. Keep it small and real. Like: 'On Thursday, I'll sit with the new kid at lunch.'"

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"Real love does..." (read aloud if stuck)

- Show up
- Listen
- Include
- Help without being asked
- Tell the truth kindly
- Forgive
- Keep its promises
- Notice who's left out
- Share
- Stay on hard days

"Love you can see" step ideas

- Do one chore at home before anyone asks
- Sit with someone who's usually alone
- Text a friend who's had a hard week and ask how they're really doing
- Put my phone down and actually listen at dinner
- Read 1 John 3:18 every morning and ask, "Who can I love today?"

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Each person shares their deed (or passes) and prays one sentence for the person on their left.
- **Low-pressure option:** Skip the pairs. Students write Line 1 on their card, and the leader prays one prayer over everyone: "Jesus, you showed us real love. Help each of us show it to one person this week."
- **No cardstock?** Students cut the card from student page 2 or take a photo of it and save it as a lock screen.

LEADER NOTE *Never collect or look at student pages, and never ask anyone to name the person on their list. Keep extra Love Code cards for students who start in Week 2 or 3; they can begin with that week's line. If the list brings up something painful, like a hard home situation or a friendship that hurts, check in quietly afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"Look at that one line on your card. It's small. That's the point. You don't have to fix everybody's life this week. You just get to love one person in a way they can actually see. And you're not doing it to earn God's love. You already have it. Jesus showed up for you first. **What does real love look like?** This week, it might look like you."

Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group.

WARM UP

1. What's the most over-the-top "I love..." thing you've ever said? (I love tacos more than life itself.)
   Keep it light. It's a warm-up.
2. Think of someone who's always there for you. What's one thing they do that shows it?
   Follow-up: Have you ever told them?

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GO DEEPER

3. Movies and songs usually say love is a feeling. 1 John says love is something you do. Which one do you think most people your age believe?
   Can it be both?
4. John says, "By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us." What does Jesus' life show you about love that a movie never could?
5. Verse 17 talks about seeing someone in need and closing your heart. Why is it sometimes easier to look away?
   What helps you notice people?
6. Is it harder to love people in words or in deeds? Who's easiest for you to love, and who's hardest?
   No names needed. "Family," "a friend" is fine.

TAKE IT HOME

7. What's one deed of love you could do this week that nobody would even notice?
8. How would you finish the sentence on your Love Code: "Real love does ___"?

LEADER NOTE *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again. Don't push anyone to talk about crushes or dating; this week is about love that shows up everywhere.*

Joys & Concerns

10 min

Purpose: Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. It's often the moment new students realize this group actually cares about them. Tonight it fits the theme: listening and praying for each other is one of the first ways love shows up.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with "**I lift up ___ to God.**" Everyone responds together: "**Lord, hear our prayer.**"
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

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LEADER SCRIPT

SAY

"We just said that real love shows up. One of the simplest ways to show up for somebody is to listen and pray for them. So let's do that right now. What's something good you're thankful for? Or something you're carrying, for you, your family, or a friend?"

"When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God..." (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)

"I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- Someone showed up for me this week
- A good day with friends or family
- My team, club, or band had a good week
- Someone I love got good news

Concern starters

- A friendship that's going through a hard time
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- A friend who's going through something
- "I have an unspoken request."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.

LEADER NOTE *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." That includes no screenshots, posts, or texts about what someone shared. If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

God who loved us first,

Thank you for every person in this room, especially anyone here for the very first time tonight.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Maya's great game, for Chris's good news..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

And we bring you the things we're carrying. *[Name the concerns: "Be with Ethan's grandma. Give Sophia peace in her friendship this week..."]* And for the things that stayed in our hearts tonight and weren't spoken out loud, you already know them. Hold them too.

Jesus, you didn't just tell us you love us. You showed us. You saw people nobody else saw, you stayed when others left, and you laid down your life for us. We don't have to earn your love.

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Help us love like that. Open our eyes to the people around us who need someone to show up. Give us hands that help, ears that listen, and hearts that don't close up. Let our love be in deed and truth, not just in words, with our friends, our families, and everyone we meet.

For anyone who is new here, thank you for bringing them. Help them feel at home. And help each of us do one real thing of love this week, for one real person.

In Jesus' name, amen.

SEND-OFF

"Take your student pages home: a five-day devotional and a tracker for your one step. Keep your Love Code card somewhere you'll see it. Line 1 is done, and next week you'll add Line 2. Next time we're talking about crushes, dating, and timing. It's called **'Don't Rush It.'** And every week we'll keep asking: **what does real love look like?** See you then."

Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 by asking students to look at their One Step tracker and Love Code Line 1. "Did you get to do your deed? What happened? How did it feel?" Celebrate any try, even a small or awkward one, and share your own. Never ask who the deed was for. Have extra Love Code cards ready for new students.

Care Note for Leaders

A series on love can stir up real hurts. Watch for a student who seems lonely, is hurting after a breakup or lost friendship, or describes a relationship where someone controls them: checking their phone, deciding who they can see, jealousy, threats, put-downs, or pressure. Respond calmly, without shame, and never ask for details in front of others.

- **Pressure for photos or threats (sextortion):** They should tell a trusted adult right away, not pay or send anything more, and save the messages. Report to the NCMEC CyberTipline at **report.cybertip.org** or **1-800-843-5678**. NCMEC's Take It Down (**takeitdown.ncmec.org**) can help remove images. Make clear it is not their fault.
- **Any disclosure of abuse** (at home, in a relationship, or anywhere) means following mandatory reporting law and your church's safety policy, and telling your lead pastor, the same day. **Don't promise to keep secrets** if someone's safety is at risk.
- **Heartbreak and loneliness are real,** even if it seems small to an adult. **Connect them to trained help:** parents or guardians, a school counselor, or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Listen well, take it seriously, and connect them to the right people.

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THE FULL SERIES

REAL LOVE · 4 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the four weeks help students see what real love looks like: love that shows up, love that doesn't rush, love that respects, and the love of God that comes first. The question every week: *What does real love look like?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**Love Is a Verb** Love that shows up	1 John 3:16–18
2	**Don't Rush It** Crushes, dating, and timing	Song of Songs 2:7 and 8:6–7
3	**Respect Looks Like This** Respect and boundaries	Philippians 2:3–5
4	**Loved First** Heartbreak, waiting, and God's love	Romans 8:35–39

Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- A new line for My Love Code every week
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

Built for real youth groups

These weeks are written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games never single anyone out. Every activity has a small-group version. And every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time.

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Purchasers may photocopy and share the student pages and leader guide for use within their own church or ministry.
Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

Name: _____ Date: _____

TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA

Real love is something I do, not just something I feel. Jesus showed me what it looks like.

THE PASSAGE · 1 JOHN 3:16, 18

"By this we know love, because he laid down his _____ for us."

"Let's not love in _____ only, or with the tongue only, but in _____ and truth."

Love in **words** sounds like:

Love in **deeds** looks like:

THE SHOW-UP LIST

Private, just you and God. Think of one real person for each row (initials are fine). What might they need right now? What's one thing you could actually **do**? Then **circle** the one deed you'll do this week.

SOMEONE…	WHAT THEY MIGHT NEED	ONE DEED I COULD DO
At home		
Who's a good friend		
Who often gets left out		
Going through a hard time		
Who's hard for me to love		

LOVE IS… · 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

"Love is _____ and is _____. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud."

One way Jesus has shown *me* real love, not just in words:

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My One Step

MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

On _____ (a day or a time)

I will show real love to _____ by _____

Example: "On Thursday at lunch, I will show real love to the new kid by saving them a seat and asking about their day."

My Love Code · Line 1

Real love does

_____

Copy it onto your card below.

Show-Up Check (only you see this)

Someone who has shown up for me:

_____

One way I could thank them this week:

_____

MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you showed love with a deed, not just words.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR…	CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH…

MY LOVE CODE CARD

✂ Cut out along the dashed line and keep it in your wallet, phone case, or Bible. Add one line every week.

REAL LOVE

My Love Code

"My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth."

1 JOHN 3:18

1. Real love does _____

2. I'm not in a rush because _____

3. One boundary I'll keep: _____

4. Because God loved me first, I will _____

Signed: _____

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5 Days of Love You Can See

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

DAY 1 1 John 3:16 · Love has a shape

John says we know what love is by looking at Jesus. What's one thing Jesus did that shows you what real love looks like?

DAY 2 1 John 3:17 · Eyes open

Love starts by seeing someone in need. Who did you notice today who might need a little love? What could you do?

DAY 3 1 John 3:18 · Deed and truth

Is it easier for you to say loving things or to do them? What's one deed you can do today instead of just saying it?

DAY 4 John 13:34 · Just as I have loved you

Jesus says to love others the way he loves you. Who is hard for you to love right now? Ask God for help with one small step.

DAY 5 1 John 4:19 · He loved first

"We love him, because he first loved us." You don't have to earn God's love. How does knowing that change the way you love others?

A prayer you can pray this week

Jesus, thank you that you didn't just say you love me. You showed me. Open my eyes to the people around me who need love. Help me love in deed and truth, not just in words. And thank you that you loved me first. Amen.

Next week · Week 2: **Don't Rush It**

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