



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

This Is Real Love / Week 1

SERIES OVERVIEW

SERIES SUMMARY

A 3-week series about what Jesus did to demonstrate His love at Easter.

SERIES BOTTOM LINE

What Jesus said and did to show us real love.

WEEKLY BOTTOM LINES

WEEK 1: Jesus shows us what real love is.

WEEK 2: Jesus treats everyone like they are important.

WEEK 3: Jesus offers everyone forgiveness.

SCRIPTURE

This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (1 John 4:10 NLT).

NOTES FOR THIS WEEK

THINK ABOUT THIS

Keep in mind that the things we talk about at Easter—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—can feel abstract or distant to your middle schoolers. That can make them hard to understand, hard to believe, and hard to see how they matter for their lives today. Be prepared for some doubts, questions, and uncertainties to arise as you lead this week. Of course, your job isn't to answer all questions, prove all points, or change all minds. Rather, it's to create a safe space for students to process. Learning to ask questions and think for themselves is a part of growing and maturing, not just in faith but in life. So, if your students express any uncertainties about Jesus' death and resurrection in particular this week, don't feel defeated. Instead, see it as a chance to point them toward discovering more about their faith and have potentially life-changing conversations with your group as they do.

INTERACTIVE 1: EASTER BUNNY PHOTO FAILS

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll display funny pictures of kids looking terrified while sitting with the Easter Bunny.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- 3-4 funny photos of scared kids posing with the Easter Bunny (Bonus points if you can show a photo of yourself or other adult leaders from your ministry.)
- A way to display the photos for your audience

INTERACTIVE 2: PERSONALIZE IT!

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll help students personalize the truth found in 1 John 4:9-10 by displaying the provided slide, reading the Scripture aloud, and asking students to insert their names when prompted.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- The provided digital slide with 1 John 4:9-10
- A way to display the slide for your whole audience

TEACHING OUTLINE

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).

INTRODUCTION

- There's a lot to love about Easter season!
- *[Ask students to tell someone what they love about Easter.]*
- There's one big thing that makes Easter stand out: What Jesus said and did to show us real love.

TENSION

- What was the last thing you said you loved? *[Ask students to shout it out. Comment on a few of their responses.]*
- The word, "love," can describe how we feel about the things and people in our lives. *[Give relevant examples.]*
- We use the word, "love," so often that it can make us wonder what real love truly is.
- We hear that Jesus loves us with the biggest, greatest love of all.
 - For some of us, we feel that real love in real ways.
 - Others might feel like real love isn't available to us. We think God is angry, disappointed, or distant because God knows all of the not-so-great things we've done.
- No matter where we're at with our faith, one thing is true: No one has ever shown us real love better than Jesus.
- What we celebrate at Easter is proof that Jesus loves us in the realest way possible.

TRUTH

- John was Jewish and grew up studying the Scriptures during Jesus' time. The Jewish people had been waiting hundreds and hundreds of years for the Savior who was promised to the world—for real love to arrive!
- Because of all this waiting, John may have wondered if God was angry, disappointed, or had abandoned and forgotten them.
- But then God's Son, Jesus, came to the world.
- John became one of Jesus' closest friends and followers.
- John witnessed miracles Jesus performed, how He treated people, what He preached, and what it meant to love others.
- Despite everything Jesus said and did, His followers still struggled to understand His teachings, and they had questions and doubts (much like we often do today!).

- Then, the resurrection happened, and it changed everything.
- At Easter, we remember when Jesus died on a cross and was buried in a tomb. We celebrate that He was resurrected—that He came back to life!
- While He was alive, Jesus said He would rise from the dead, so that means that Jesus' followers could trust everything else Jesus said during His life, too.
- The people who studied the Scriptures knew death was a consequence of sin and that it caused separation from God. Since no one could live a perfect life, God sent Jesus to sacrifice Himself. Jesus paid the price for our sins, and when He came back to life, He overcame death. Jesus made a way for us to live with God forever.
- *God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).*
- Because of Jesus, we can experience real love.
- Easter reminds us what real love is.

APPLICATION

- We can remember that the love Jesus gives us is real love by . . .
 - a. Reading 1 John 4:9-10 and personalizing it.
 - b. Sharing God's real love with someone else, like a parent, friend, family member, teammate, etc.
- Easter shows us what real love is.

LANDING

- No matter if you're hearing this for the first time today or if you're hearing it in a new way, your small group is a great place to process, ask questions, and talk about the real love Jesus gives each of us.
- As you head to group, think about this question: How have you experienced Jesus' real love in your life?

TEACHING SLIDES

All bolded words and phrases in the Teaching Script are also provided as teaching slides for Premium Tier subscribers.



TEACHING SCRIPT

This Is Real Love / Week 1

BOTTOM LINE

JESUS SHOWS US WHAT REAL LOVE IS.

INTRODUCTION

2 MINUTES

Hey friends! Welcome to the Easter season! My name is _____, and I'm so excited to be here with you. I don't know about you, but there are certain things about this time of year that I really look forward to! One of my favorites? Pictures with the Easter Bunny! To be clear, I'm not talking about *me* sitting for a picture with a person in a bunny suit. That would be weird! I'm talking about pictures of adorable little kids with the Easter Bunny!

Parents put their kids in their best outfits, hoping for that lock-screen-worthy, Instagram-able picture that captures just how adorable this holiday season is. Their expectations are high! But the reality? Well, it looks more like this...

INTERACTIVE: Easter Bunny Photo Fails

This is where you'll display funny pictures of kids looking terrified while sitting with the Easter Bunny.

I mean, look at those faces! That is pure terror, and honestly, I get it! What little kid wouldn't be kind of freaked out by sitting with a stranger in a giant bunny costume?!

The good news is this isn't all there is to love about Easter! Turn and tell somebody around you what you love about Easter. *[Pause to give students time to share their answers.]*

While all that stuff is great, I think there's one thing that makes Easter stand out: What Jesus said and did to show us real love! In fact, that's so important we're going to spend the next three weeks talking about it together in our series called *This is Real Love*.

TENSION

2 MINUTES

Let's talk about love for a minute! It's a word that gets used a lot! For example, what was the last thing you said you loved? Shout it out! *[Comment on a few responses.]*

We use the word, "love," to describe how we feel about both the things and the people in our lives.

We love the *Barbie* movie [or another movie relevant to your students], and we love our parents.
We love Christmas, and we love our best friend.
We love our new sneakers, and we love our sibling (most of the time!).
We love a good pizza, and we love our teammates.

We toss "love" around so often and toward so many things that it can start to make you wonder: ***What is real love . . . really?***

It's a pretty big question, right? One with about a million possible answers! From TV shows and movies, to your family and friends, to dating and relationships, you've probably seen or experienced "real love" in all kinds of different ways. What makes it even more complicated? The way we talk about and experience Jesus' love, too!

Think about it! You come to church and hear about how Jesus loves you with the biggest, greatest, realest love of all. For some of us, we feel that real love in real ways! But for others of us, it might not always feel true.

Maybe it's easier to believe God is angry, disappointed, or distant from us. Because if God is this big, all-knowing God, then that means God knows the things we've done, for better or for worse. God knows we've cheated on tests, or lied to our parents, or shown up at that party we knew we weren't supposed to be at. God knows the way we've treated other people or the things we've tried to keep secret. And because of all that, it can make it almost impossible to believe that God could love us every day, no matter what.

Well, wherever you are with your faith today, here's one thing I want you to know: **No one has ever shown us real love better than Jesus!** In fact, what we celebrate at Easter is proof that Jesus loves us in the realest way possible.

TRUTH

5 MINUTES

In the coming weeks, we'll talk about this a lot, but today, let's start by looking at the experience and words of a guy named **John**.

Quick backstory: John was Jewish, so he grew up studying the Scriptures (what we now call the Old Testament). Those Scriptures tell the story of God and the history of the Jewish people. Like many Jewish people at the time, John was waiting for God to send the Savior who was promised to the world. It had been a long, long time waiting for God to fulfill that promise. I'm talking hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of years waiting for real love to arrive!

Now, I don't know about you, but when I have to wait, and wait, and wait on someone, I start to wonder if something is up. So, I think it's fair to assume that John might have wondered the same thing. Maybe he wondered if God was disappointed or angry with them. Maybe he wondered if God had abandoned and forgotten about them. John might've even questioned whether or not the God he learned about when he was growing up was really a good, loving God at all.

But then, something really big happened: **God's Son, Jesus, came to the world.** As we see in the beginning of the second part of the Bible (called the New Testament), John became one of Jesus' closest friends and followers while He was on Earth.

Being that up close and personal with Jesus, John witnessed it all. He saw how Jesus treated people, heard the powerful sermons Jesus preached, and listened to all the stuff Jesus taught about what it means to love others. Because of that, John obviously figured out exactly what real love is, right?

Well, not exactly. See, the stories in the Gospels—which are the four books that detail Jesus' life on Earth—show us time and again how Jesus' followers struggled to understand His teachings. They heard what Jesus said and saw what He did, but they still had questions. They had doubts. They didn't always get it. Honestly, they were just like us in that way!

Until something happened that we celebrate every year at Easter. Something that changed everything.

It was **the resurrection**.

Now, this is where things get really interesting.

To *resurrect* something means to bring it back to life. At Easter, we remember when Jesus died on a cross and was buried in a tomb. Then, we celebrate the fact that He walked out of that tomb three days later. In other words, He *came back to life*, which is what we call the resurrection.

Why is this a big deal? Well, for starters, Jesus said lots of things while He was alive, including that He would rise from the dead. And Jesus DID come back to life, just like He said He would. That meant Jesus' followers could trust that everything else He said during His life was true, too.

Before Jesus came to Earth, people studied the Scriptures and heard about Adam and Eve way back in Genesis. Because of that, they believed that death was a consequence of breaking God's rule, something we know as "sin." For them, physically dying would also mean separation from God forever. Since no one could live a perfect, sinless life, God had to step in so that we could be rescued from this fate.

That's where Jesus came in! **God sent Jesus to Earth to take our place.** In doing so, Jesus lived the perfect life we couldn't. When Jesus died, He made it possible for our sins to be forgiven and made sure we no longer have to carry the weight of what we've done wrong. And when Jesus came back to life, it meant that death didn't have any power anymore. Even though we will physically die, Jesus made a way for that not to be the end of the story. If we believe in Jesus, then we get to know that we'll live with Him forever. That's something worth celebrating!

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross changed so much for so many of us, including John! John didn't need to wonder if God had given up on keeping His promise. The resurrection showed him that God did really love him. And it also showed him that God loves people who aren't like him, too!

God loves every person so much that God sent Jesus to die on the cross.

God loves every person so much that God defeated death.

God loves every person so much that God made a way for John (and for all of us!) to be in a relationship with God that will last forever!

That is real love!

So, **Easter shows us what real love is like.**

But you don't have to take my word for it! Later in his life, John reflected on his experiences and wrote this in a letter to other believers:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).

John was there when this all happened. He walked with Jesus every day for three years, watched Him get crucified on a cross, and saw Him alive again three days later. When John wrote about this love that God has for all of us, he knew what he was talking about because he got to experience God's real love for himself.

The same is true for us! Because of Jesus, we can experience real love. And **Easter reminds us what real love is!**

APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

All this stuff John wrote about that showed him what real love looks like? That same stuff applies to our lives, too. This week, try doing these two things to help you remember that the love Jesus gives us is real love.

First, let's look at this passage again. But this time, read it in a different way!

INTERACTIVE: Personalize It!

This is where you'll help students personalize the truth found in 1 John 4:9-10 by displaying the provided slide, reading the Scripture aloud, and asking students to insert their name when prompted.

Take a moment and read this Scripture aloud along with me. When we get to a blank, say your name! Let's give it a try.

[Display the provided slide and read the Scripture aloud slowly with your students. When you get to the blanks, point to the audience or aim your mic in their direction.]

Personalizing a passage like this helps remind us of what we read in the Bible is true not just for the people who first read it, but for all of us today. That real love we're talking about today? It's true for you, and it's true for me! It's the event that changed everything for all of us. And that's something not just worth receiving, but also worth sharing.

So, the second thing you can do as you consider what God's real love means this Easter season, is this: **Take time to share about it with someone else!** This could be a friend, a parent, a family member, a teammate, even someone in your small group! Imagine how the world and the people in it might be changed for the better if we shared a little bit of God's real love with them!

Easter shows us what real love is.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

Maybe this is the first time you've heard some of this stuff today. Or maybe you're just hearing it in a new way that makes you want to lean in, learn a little more, and really believe that real love is available to you!

Listen, if you think you might want to know more about that or make a decision to follow Jesus today, your small group leader would love to chat with you more about that. In fact, your small group is one of the best places to have those sorts of conversations. We meet in these groups every week so we can have a safe place to process what we're feeling or thinking when it comes to our faith. It's also an opportunity to share with your small group leader when you have questions or want to take big steps in your faith. If that's where you are in your faith journey, I encourage you to open up about that today.

Now, as you head to group, I want you to think about this question: **How have you experienced Jesus' real love in your life?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
