THIS MEANS LOVE

BIBLE STUDY
FOR WOMEN WHO WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
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SESSION 1:
Nothing Without Love...

Theme Verse

“If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Leader Prep
You’ll be showing a scene from the movie *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Have a copy of the DVD ready, or search for it online. You’ll want scenes 10 and 11 (47:12–55:25) on the DVD, starting with the scene titled “Holiday Cheermeister.” The Mayor is just getting ready to present the cheermeister award. You can stop the scene right after the Grinch takes the stage with the mistletoe. You’ll want to have it ready before your meeting.

Connecting With Each Other
It’s your first week of gathering together to see what the Bible says about serving God and others. Take a few minutes to share your vision for this group and to hear from others why they’ve joined this conversation. Be sure everyone introduces themselves so you know each other’s names. Then continue getting to know each other better with this discussion.
We all serve a variety of people in our everyday lives. And we have various motives for doing so. Introduce yourselves to each other, and discuss these questions:

- Where are you already serving on a regular basis? All service counts! Consider how you serve your family, your boss and co-workers, organizations where you volunteer, your church, maybe even a pet you feed every day.

- What motivates you to serve in these ways?

**Connecting With God**

Let’s dig into those motives—the things that move us to action in service. Why, exactly, do we serve others?

Someone in your group can read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 aloud:

> If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.

This Scripture passage makes a strong point about the importance of doing what we do with love. It says that without love, even the best deeds are empty and meaningless.

Discuss these questions with your entire group. Jot your own thoughts in the spaces provided:

- Can you think of any examples when doing impressive or sacrificial deeds might come across to others as “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”? Give examples.

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
• What are other motives people might have for acts of service?

_________________________________________________________
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Let’s consider an entertaining example of not-so-helpful service. In the movie How the Grinch Stole Christmas (the year-2000 version with Jim Carrey), little Cindy Lou Who tries to address her dissatisfaction with Christmas and mend the rift between the Whos and the Grinch by nominating the Grinch for the “Holiday Cheermeister” award. This award typically goes to the mayor of Whoville, but this year she convinces the townspeople to “honor” the Grinch with it because he is in need of holiday cheer. Watch to see how the town’s efforts to honor the cheermeister affect the Grinch, who has been living in isolation for years after feeling rejected as a child.

Watch the “Holiday Cheermeister” scene from How the Grinch Stole Christmas, and then discuss the following questions:

• How did the Grinch seem to feel about this dubious honor?

• What sort of response do you think the people of Whoville were hoping for?

• Did anyone seem to benefit from this “act of service” toward the Grinch? Explain your opinion.

A different person from your group can read John 13:1-17 aloud:

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray
Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.”

“No,” Peter protested, “you will never ever wash my feet!”

Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.”

Simon Peter exclaimed, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!”

Jesus replied, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.” For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.”
Let’s consider these thoughts from the IVP New Testament Commentary on John:

“A Jewish text says this is something a Gentile slave could be required to do, but not a Jewish slave. On the other hand, footwashing is something wives did for their husbands, children for their parents, and disciples for their teachers. A level of intimacy is involved in these cases, unlike when Gentile slaves would do the washing. In Jesus’ case, there is an obvious reversal of roles with his disciples. The one into whose hands the Father had given all now takes his disciples’ feet into his hands to wash them.” (Rodney A. Whitacre, IVP Academic, 2010)

- What do you think motivated Jesus to wash his disciples’ feet?
- What might he have intended to communicate through this act of service?
- Jesus told his disciples to follow his example. Do you think he meant for us to follow that example too? If so, how?

Later that evening, after the foot washing, Jesus told his disciples, “So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (John 13:34-35).

- What does Christian love look like when we act on it?
- Do our motives always change the type of response we get from the people we serve?
- Why would love motivate us to serve strangers? What kind of love is this?

Christian love shows itself in acts of service, just as Jesus set the example for us by washing his disciples’ feet.
Connecting to Life

Spend a few minutes thinking about your noisy gongs and clanging symbols—ways you have served without love. Maybe you begrudgingly volunteer in your kids’ school so people will think you’re a good parent. Perhaps you have helped a friend or neighbor in the hope that he or she would do the same for you in the future. Or maybe you ask your friends how things are going just to provide an excuse to talk about yourself.

In the space provided below and on the next page, write some of these empty acts of service, and pray silently, confessing your unloving motives and asking God to fill you with his love for the acts of service he is calling you to.

As a group, close in prayer, asking God to call you to specific acts of service done in love and expecting nothing in return.

Thank your friends for joining this group, and be sure everyone knows when you’ll be meeting next—whether it’s for the next session of the Bible study or to participate in a service project together.
Help the Homeless

Collect donations of bread or other food from local merchants. Offer to pick up and deliver the food on a regular basis to a shelter.

Remember the shelter when you have something to donate; most likely they can use it (or their residents can). For example, after a 50th anniversary party, one woman had three extra sheet cakes. She called the city mission, and they were happy to take the cakes to share with their clients.