

EXTREME LOVE

Discussion Questions for Week 1: Extreme Need

1. “Extreme sports” attract larger and larger audiences every year. Why do you think such death-defying challenges have become so popular?
2. The story of God’s plan to rescue us from sin and Satan, hell and death is “*extreme*”; like like extreme rock climbing or motocross, it was perilous, uncertain, and very difficult. Do you agree? Explain.
3. On page 7 of *Extreme Love*, the author asserts: *Nobody sins anymore—we just “mess up.”* What evidence do you see in the culture or individuals around you that people tend to excuse or deny their wrongdoing or try to soften its seriousness rather than taking responsibility for it? When are you most likely to do this?
4. Do you see your need for the Savior “*extreme*”? Why or why not?
 - What makes our “*extreme*” need hard to believe sometimes?
 - When did you first recognize your own “*extreme*” need for a Savior—if you have? In what way(s) is your need for Jesus still “*extreme*”?
 - What hope does Jesus’ extreme love give you as you learn to see your extreme need more and more clearly?
5. Those who know and trust in Jesus live in his extreme salvation even now. Life is full of challenges and problems, but we can move ahead in confidence because we know our Savior’s extreme love. What difference could that make for you as you plan for this coming week and as you encounter unexpected challenges in it?
6. Which devotion this week or comment in our discussion just now spoke in an especially powerful or encouraging or meaningful way to your heart? Tell more about that.



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Discussion Questions for Week 2: Extreme Commitment

1. Paradoxes stand our normal way of reasoning on its head. The princess must kiss the frog to meet Prince Charming. The doctor must make us sicker before we get well. The way out of a problem is to burrow further into it. Paradoxes combine truth in an unexpected or seemingly contradictory way. “How can this be right?” we ask. But it is. Truth is often paradoxical.

Think about the movies you’ve seen, the novels you’ve read, or the life experiences you’ve had. What examples of paradox have you come across?

2. Read Mark 8:27–35. What paradoxes do you find in this text? (For example, the idea that Jesus Christ, who is God from all eternity—without beginning or end—would suffer and die!)
3. Which paradox connected with God’s plan of salvation astonishes, puzzles, or encourages you most? Explain.
4. How would you explain Jesus’ “extreme commitment” to someone who did not know about it or believe it?
5. The devotion on page 15 points out that Peter put himself at great risk by calling Jesus the Messiah, the Christ. If he had made this confession within earshot of the religious authorities in Jerusalem, he could have been stoned to death for blasphemy. What risks have you taken in answering Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” When do you most often tend to avoid those risks? How do you decide when to risk and when not to risk?
6. You are “God’s workmanship,” his “poem” or “masterpiece,” as page 22 puts it. What is God trying to say to others through your life? Does knowing you are reflecting God’s glory to the world make you want to live differently? How? Why?
7. What devotion or comment we’ve shared right now was especially meaningful to you? Explain.



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Discussion Questions for Week 3: Extreme Sacrifice

1. Writers write. Musicians practice and perform. Athletes take themselves to the gym. Gourmet chefs cook and serve. They can't help it. Those things we know about ourselves—deep down—greatly influence what we do. Those things that bring deep personal satisfaction and meaning can't help but imbed themselves in our lives. Identity influences behavior.
 - When has “knowing who you were” propelled you into “doing what you do,” even when the doing was hard?
 - What difference does it make to know who you are and where you've come from?
2. John 13:1–5 stresses what Jesus knew and shows how that knowledge catapulted him into action.
 - How does what Jesus knew about who he was contrast with what he did—at least, from a human perspective?
 - In what way(s) did Jesus' knowledge and his actions align perfectly—at least, from heaven's perspective?
3. Jesus washed the disciples' feet. But his service for them (and for us!) didn't stop there. On page 26, the author reminds us, “Plainly put, the cross was—and is—Jesus' glory. His readiness to give us eternal life was, and is, Jesus' glory.”
 - Remember that a paradox is something that's the opposite of what we expect. In what way is the cross a paradox?
 - Washing feet isn't very glorious. Dying on a cross certainly isn't either! But the cross—and the extreme love that held Jesus there—was and is his eternal identity and his greatest glory! How does this paradox influence you as you think about living your life to glorify God?
4. Human beings have always told stories of heroic self-sacrifice. Sometimes these stories strike us as naive or silly. Even so, we continue to read the novels and watch the movies. Why do you think this is?
5. Jesus had it all, but he set it all aside so he could serve you. This is not fiction. It's not a novel or a movie. It's God's truth! Jesus left his home in heaven. He walked away from the angels who had worshiped him from the beginning of the creation. He let sinful human beings ridicule him, then beat and crucify him. His life has changed the lives of millions of people. What makes his extreme sacrifice so life-changing? How has his sacrifice changed your life?



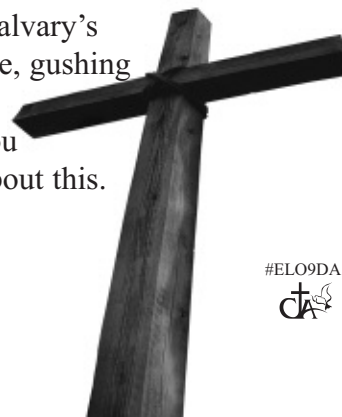
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Discussion Questions for Week 4: Extreme Mercy

- Mercy* means kindness or compassion shown to someone who deserves just the opposite. Most often those who show mercy to another person have power over that person. A judge sentences a convict to six months in jail when the sentence could have been six years in the state prison. An employer continues to pay the worker during the weeks he spends in a drug treatment facility. A wife lets her adulterous husband return home so that together they can reconstruct their marriage.

 - What examples of mercy have you seen—either in your own life or in the news?
 - Why do people sometimes show others mercy? Brainstorm all the reasons you can; include reasons you consider “unwise” as well as “reasonable.”
 - Do you see mercy as a sign of goodness or of weakness and naiveté? Explain.
- Skim back over pages 35–36. Barabbas was actually guilty of treason and inciting rebellion—the very crimes the religious authorities charged Jesus of committing when they hauled him before the Roman Governor, Pilate. Jesus was innocent of all charges; Barabbas was anything but innocent. In what ways are we like Barabbas? Name as many similarities as you can.
- God shows his grace in giving us his love and favor despite the fact we do not deserve it. He shows us his mercy by refusing to give us what we do deserve—punishment now and eternal death after life here on earth ends. In what ways are grace and mercy mirror images of each other? What makes both God’s grace and God’s mercy “extreme”?
- Is God weak and naive in showing us his mercy or good and holy? Explain.
- Jesus *willingly* laid down his life for you in submission to God’s plan to save you. (See page 37.)

 - How does knowing that Jesus *willingly* and *intentionally* died in your place change the way you see his death on the cross?
 - When are you most likely to forget or overlook his extreme mercy?
 - Have you ever sinned against his mercy by choosing to do something wrong, telling yourself, “God will forgive me”? What makes this so dangerous?
- The author of the last devotion for Week 4 writes, “As Christ hung dying on Calvary’s cross, the fountains the fountains of God’s mercy burst open and mercy flowed free, gushing up from a aquifer of love infinitely deep, infinitely wide. That fountain has never stopped flowing.” How could that picture of unstoppable mercy affect the ways you think and act in the week ahead? Pray together with the members of your group about this.



EXTREME LOVE

Discussion Questions for Week 5: Extreme Glory

1. Competing in the 2008 Summer Olympics, Michael Phelps became “the winningest athlete in Olympic history,” as several online news organizations put it. No one had ever won as many medals as Phelps. He embodied glory—in the extreme! What does “glory” in this sense mean?
2. Think back to this past week’s devotions and to their focus on Christ’s extreme glory. Jesus embodied glory—in the extreme! How does the glory he earned compare and contrast with glory as our world defines it in sports, politics, business, entertainment, and other achievements people in our world consider “glorious”?
3. In what ways is the cross Christ’s throne? In what ways is his crucifixion his hour of extreme glory?
4. The Gentiles who came to Philip asked to “see Jesus.” Where would you like to “see Jesus” at work in your life? (Refer to the devotion on page 45.)
5. This week’s devotions talk about the glory of the Savior. You read about glory in the expanding kingdom (page 45), glory in loss (page 47), glory in service (page 49), glory in victory (page 50), and glory in light (page 51).
 - Which of these most encouraged you in Jesus’ love? Explain.
 - Which of them do you find hardest to believe or apply to your own life right now? Say more about that.
 - Which would those in our world who don’t know Christ most likely not understand or buy into? What lies behind their skepticism? How might you share Jesus’ extreme love with them anyway?
6. Think back over the devotions. Where have you seen God’s glory in a fresh or deeper way? Which devotion or comment from today’s conversation made the most difference for you? Explain.



EXTREME LOVE

Discussion Questions for Week 6: Extreme Love

1. Sports teams choose names and mascots designed to intimidate their rivals: Trojans. Wildcats.
 - What other examples can you name? What would keep a major league franchise from calling itself the “Lambs”?
 - The Bible calls Jesus the “Lion of Judah”; see for example Revelation 5:5. What does this name communicate about our Savior?
 - Scripture also calls Jesus the “Lamb of God”; see for example John 1:29. What does this name communicate?
 - Instead of roaring in outrage at the injustice, Jesus bowed his head and went silently into death for us. What does this tell you about his extreme love? (See the devotion on pages 55–56.)
2. Read the middle paragraph on page 56 (“The mob, caught up in the frenzy . . .”).
 - How do you account for the peace Jesus experienced as opposed to the frenzy, fury, panic, and fear everyone else seems to have experienced on that first Good Friday?
 - When are you most likely to lose your peace—to get caught up in a frenzy, to find your heart flooding with fear or overwhelmed by fury at what is happening to you?
 - How might remembering Jesus’ extreme love help you in times like that?
3. Look back at the devotion “Love—Dead and Buried” on page 60.
 - Our culture goes to the extreme in its attempts to deny the reality of death and to keep from having to confront it. Why might that be?
 - As you think about your own death, what feelings do you experience? Explain.
 - What does it mean for you right now that Jesus “died your death and slept in your grave”? How does it help as you consider the inevitability of death and the grave?
4. The truth about Jesus’ death and resurrection is filled with “Wows!” What “wows” have you experienced lately as you have contemplated Jesus’ extreme love for you?
5. Those “wows” can’t just lie dormant in our hearts. They can’t help but change us! The “wows” lead to “nows”—to changes in our lives! In light of Jesus’ extreme love for you, what “nows” will you risk—what love will you show, what commitments will you make, what changes will others see in you?
6. Which devotion or conversation over these past several weeks spoke in an especially powerful way to your heart? Tell about that.

