

Discussion Guide for Using *Love in a Time of Fear* in Groups

Notes to Facilitators:

Welcome! Thank you for joining me in taking a deeper dive into the stories and questions of *Love in a Time of Fear*. Below you will find a simple discussion guide to be used along with the *Love in a Time of Fear* book and films as a combined toolkit to invite a group of your friends and neighbors into the work with you.

Here are some things to think about as you begin.

Who

This guide can be used with small groups in faith communities, neighborhood groups, and/or a group of friends or families who want to engage these topics together.

Length

Sessions are designed to be 60-90 min. each. As you engage the notes and questions for each session, designate for yourself how much time you want to allot for each based on your group's session length.

And this study is designed to be 6-10 sessions long. Some groups may choose to spend only one session per chapter. Other groups may decide to dig in a little deeper for chapters 2-5 spending two sessions each. Still other groups may need more time for one or two of the chapters/topics but not as much for others. The key is to pay attention to what is going on within you and within your group. Take the pace and the time that you need to honor the stories in the text, films, and your group.

Environment

A lot of the hard work is done in how you create the environment for your discussion. Think about what environment and tone you want to create based on who your group is and what you may need.

Space/Setting: What vibe or overall feel do you want for this group?

Do you want this series to feel like a workshop for expanded learning and taking action? If so, consider a classroom type setting with whiteboards and/or flip charts to help gather your reflections. Do you want this series to feel like a group of concerned friends/neighbors able to process together stories and reflections and think organically about what it means for their lives and actions? If so, consider meeting in an environment more "home-like," whether it is someone's actual home or a community space that is comfortable and hospitable.

Physical Comfort

Some of the topics in *Love in a Time of Fear* may be uncomfortable for some members of your group (or even yourself). Taking a few key steps ahead of time can maximize the possibility of physical comfort even in the midst of discussing potentially uncomfortable things. Think of basic needs that might cause distractions. Do your group members need child-care? Are you meeting in a place where you can hear each other well and also don't have to worry about others listening in to potentially personal stories? Is there a bathroom nearby and does everyone know where it is? What food might be needed? If your session is over a meal-time, perhaps eat together as a part of your gathering. Or, even if it is not over a meal-time, providing some kind of snacks (set in a place where anyone can help themselves whenever they need to) helps to create a more communal environment and also sometimes provides something that people can focus their attention on for a moment if they need a break.

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Roles/Ownership

Who will have “ownership” over this group discussion? Are one or two people the “hosts” who have invited others who they care about to join them and others simply come as they are? Is the host also the facilitator of the discussion or do they have a partner to do that job? Is this a more mutually “owned” group? Do different people have different roles to play, for example: a host, discussion facilitator, timekeeper, food-bringer, clean-up crew, someone to bring an opening reflection, someone to bring a closing reflection? Are these consistent roles or do they rotate? Do you want to establish them ahead of time or is it okay to see how it goes? You can be formal or informal, but decide who has the capacity to do what to make your group both manageable and for people to be able to participate fully.

Tone/Ground Rules

Your group may be an already established group that has been meeting regularly for some time. Or, you may be coming together for the first time for this work. Either way, it might be useful to establish some basic ground rules for the tone of the discussion. You may consider the tools offered in *Love in a Time of Fear* on p. 144-146 as a starting place. Or you can come up with your own agreements together as a group when meeting for the first time. How will you talk with one another? How will you keep focus and respect? How will you honor the stories in the text and in the room? Consider making those reminders a regular part of your opening.

Preparation

Identify someone for whom communication is a strength and assign them the task to make sure everyone knows what they need for the next session. What pages are we to read? Do we watch the film ahead of time? What materials do we need to bring (book, paper or electronic device for notes, snacks, etc.)? Do I have any other responsibility (bringing snacks, providing an opening thought, etc.)? People can enter into the conversation more fully when they feel prepared and have what they need.

Rhythms

You'll notice that the sessions below follow a similar pattern with an opener and closer to somewhat bracket the time and some similar categories in the discussion from week to week. This is to establish a rhythm or skeleton to help your group process the work and enable you to get deeper together. Follow your discernment with your group on how you want to approach the questions from week to week honoring the stories in the text, films, and in the room. And follow the needs of your group regarding if they need steady structure or some variety.

Finally, what is your goal?

You will notice that the book is helping us toward taking thoughtful, informed, and authentic action. The discussion guide is also designed to dig deeper while moving toward discerning next steps together at the end. Much of that discernment will be up to you as a group. It should be at the back of your mind throughout the work, but be mindful that it does not override your ability to be present and to listen deeply throughout your discussions. Only from that deep listening will the best actions emerge.

You're ready! Now, let's begin.

Introduction and Chapter 1: On Love and Fear

Open in a way that makes sense for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Our Stories

Get in pairs and tell a story of a time when you were afraid. Of what were you afraid? Why? Reflect on what was going on in your body and mind in that moment. Reflect on what is going on in your body and mind as you remember it and tell the story. Be sure to leave time to switch so both partners can share and reflect.

Then, in the same pairs, tell a story of a time when you felt loved. What is it that communicated to you that you were loved? How did you know it when you felt it? Reflect on what was going on in your body and mind in that moment. Reflect on what is going on in your body and mind as you remember and tell the story. Be sure to leave time to switch so both partners can share and reflect.

Take a few minutes to report out to the whole group. What sticks out to you in this experience and in hearing about others' experiences?

The Text: Engage the book in whole group discussion, smaller groups, some individual reflection and/or a combination depending on the needs of your group

What stuck out to you most in the introduction and Chapter 1? Why that?

Chapter 1 names some of the divisions in our country right now. What divisions do you most experience? How do those impact your life? How might those impact how you approach these discussions?

Chapter 1 also names some of the categories of fear impacting us in our time. Which of the categories do you think you experience most often? Why? Are there any fears that are impacting you or your community that aren't listed in this chapter or that you would say differently? What are they? How do they impact your life or your community?

And Chapter 1 also begins to talk about love. What resonated with you about the definition that Trentaz gives? How is this understanding of love similar or different from how it is usually talked about in your family and/or community?

A Way Forward

Over the next several sessions, we will be hearing from four communities often in the news today—immigrants, Muslim Americans, LGBTQ+ people, and young African American men—and their responses to what their lives are like right now and what feels like love and what does not to them. What is one thing you hope to get out of the next few weeks' study? What is one thing you're nervous about? Take a few minutes to think. Write down your responses. And share with a partner or with the whole group.

Close in a way that is fitting for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Chapter 2: On the Experiences of our Immigrant Neighbors

Open in a way that makes sense for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Our Stories

Using the “Model for Guided Group Conversations Regarding Difficult Topics” on p. 145-146 in the book, in smaller groups or as a whole, invite the group to tell their own stories of immigration. Where does the topic of immigration intersect with your life?

The Text and Film: Engage the book and film in whole group discussion, smaller groups, some individual reflection and/or a combination depending on the needs of your group

What stuck out to you most in this chapter or Victor’s film? Why that?

What was new to you in this chapter or film?

What was most energizing in this chapter or film for you? Why was it energizing?

What was most challenging in this chapter or film for you? Why was it challenging?

How does what you read in this chapter and heard in this film connect with or differ from what you hear about immigrants in your neighborhood and/or faith communities? What accounts for any differences?

Wanting More?

If your group has more time and/or is interested in digging deeper into some of the history and policy regarding immigration, assign that research for the next session. Consider asking group members to research a variety of perspectives—academic and more “popular” sources, media sources that lean more “liberal” and those that lean more “conservative.” Be mindful that the point is not to have a debate for the sake of a debate, but to keep focused on learning what life is like for our immigrant neighbors and to better understand what it means to be a neighbor to them. What are you noticing in your research (or in hearing others’ research) that helps us to understand immigrants’ experiences in our country (or world) today? What does it look like to offer care to our immigrant neighbors that they will receive as care? And, what might be a role that our particular neighborhood and/or faith community can play?

A Way Forward

Re-read “A Way Forward” beginning with p. 48. Take a few moments to individually think about what is said in that section and what you have heard in your group’s discussion. What are the major “take-aways” and lasting questions that you are carrying with you from this section? Write them down. Then write down one or two ideas that are sticking out to you as potential areas of action or practical love that you, your family, and/or your neighborhood or faith community group can show. Share your take-aways, questions, and action ideas with a partner, group of 3, or with the whole group.

Close in a way that is fitting for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Chapter 3: On the Experiences of our Muslim Neighbors

Open in a way that makes sense for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Our Stories

Using the “Model for Guided Group Conversations Regarding Difficult Topics” on p. 145-146 in the book, in smaller groups or as a whole, invite the group to tell their own stories of being or engaging the “religious other.” [A “religious other” is someone who is of a different religion than the majority or dominant group in a time or place.] Where does the topic of religious diversity intersect your own life? Then, tell your stories of engaging with Islam. How do our Muslim neighbors intersect with your life?

The Text and Film: Engage the book and film in whole group discussion, smaller groups, some individual reflection and/or a combination depending on the needs of your group

What stuck out to you most in this chapter or Sameya’s film? Why that?

What was new to you in this chapter or film?

What was most energizing in this chapter or film for you? Why was it energizing?

What was most challenging in this chapter or film for you? Why was it challenging?

How does what you read in this chapter and heard in this film connect with or differ from what you hear about Muslims in your neighborhood and/or faith communities? What accounts for any differences?

Wanting More?

If your group has more time and is interested in digging deeper into some of the history and policy regarding religious diversity in general and/or Islam in particular, assign that research for the next session. Consider asking group members to research a variety of perspectives—academic and more “popular” sources, media sources that lean more “liberal” and those that lean more “conservative.” Be mindful that the point is to keep focused on learning what life is like for our Muslim neighbors and to better understand what it means to be a neighbor to them. What are you noticing in your research (or in hearing others’ research) that helps us to understand Muslim people’s experiences in our country (or world) today? What does it look like to offer care to our Muslim neighbors that they will receive as care? And, what might be a role that our particular neighborhood and/or faith community can play?

A Way Forward

Re-read “A Way Forward” beginning with p. 79. Take a few moments to individually think about what is said in that section and what you have heard in your group’s discussion. What are the major “take-aways” and lasting questions that you are carrying with you from this section? Write them down. Then write down one or two ideas that are sticking out to you as potential areas of action or practical love that you, your family, and/or your neighborhood or faith community group can show. Share your take-aways, questions, and action ideas with a partner, group of 3, or with the whole group.

Close in a way that is fitting for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Chapter 4: On the Experiences of our LGBTQ+ Neighbors

Open in a way that makes sense for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Our Stories

Using the “Model for Guided Group Conversations Regarding Difficult Topics” on p. 145-146 in the book, in smaller groups or as a whole, invite the group to tell their own stories of engaging the LGBTQ+ community. Where does the LGBTQ+ community intersect with your life?

The Text and Film: Engage the book and film in whole group discussion, smaller groups, some individual reflection and/or a combination depending on the needs of your group

What stuck out to you most in this chapter or Sarah’s film? Why that?

What was new to you in this chapter or film?

What was most energizing in this chapter or film for you? Why was it energizing?

What was most challenging in this chapter or film for you? Why was it challenging?

How does what you read in this chapter and/or heard in this film connect with or differ from what you hear about LGBTQ+ people in your neighborhood and/or faith communities? What accounts for any differences?

Wanting More?

If your group has more time and/or is interested in digging deeper into some of the history and policy regarding LGBTQ+ concerns, assign that research for the next session. Consider asking group members to research a variety of perspectives—academic and more “popular” sources, media sources that lean more “liberal” and those that lean more “conservative.” Be mindful that the point is not to have a debate for the sake of a debate, but to keep focused on learning what life is like for our LGBTQ+ identifying neighbors and to better understand what it means to be a neighbor to them. What are you noticing in your research (or in hearing others’ research) that helps us to understand LGBTQ+ people’s experiences in our country (or world) today? What does it look like to offer care to our LGBTQ+ neighbors that they will receive as care? And, what might be a role that our particular neighborhood and/or faith community can play?

A Way Forward

Re-read “A Way Forward” beginning with p. 101. Take a few moments to individually think about what is said in that section and what you have heard in your group’s discussion. What are the major “take-aways” and lasting questions that you are carrying with you from this section? Write them down. Then write down one or two ideas that are sticking out to you as potential areas of action or practical love that you, your family, and/or your neighborhood or faith community group can show. Share your take-aways, questions, and action ideas with a partner, group of 3, or with the whole group.

Close in a way that is fitting for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Chapter 5: On the Experiences of our Young Neighbors of Color

Open in a way that makes sense for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Our Stories

Using the “Model for Guided Group Conversations Regarding Difficult Topics” on p. 145-146 in the book, in smaller groups or as a whole, invite the group to tell their own stories of race dynamics and awareness. Where does the topic of racial discrimination intersect with your own life?

The Text and Film: Engage the book and film in whole group discussion, smaller groups, some individual reflection and/or a combination depending on the needs of your group

What stuck out to you most in this chapter or Hakeem’s film? Why that?

What was new to you in this chapter or film?

What was most energizing in this chapter or film for you? Why was it energizing?

What was most challenging in this chapter or film for you? Why was it challenging?

How does what you read in this chapter and/or heard in this film connect with or differ from what you hear about people of color (and particularly young African American men) in your neighborhood and/or faith communities? What accounts for any differences?

Wanting More?

If your group has more time and/or is interested in digging deeper into some of the history and policy regarding race-based discrimination and/or equity, assign that research for the next session. Consider asking group members to research a variety of perspectives—academic and more “popular” sources, media sources that lean more “liberal” and those that lean more “conservative.” Be mindful that the point is to keep focused on learning what life is like for our neighbors of color and to better understand what it means to be a neighbor to them. What are you noticing in your research (or in hearing others’ research) that helps us to understand the experiences of young African American men and women in our country (or world) today? What does it look like to offer care to our neighbors of color that they will receive as care? And, what might be a role that our particular neighborhood and/or faith community can play?

A Way Forward

Re-read “A Way Forward” beginning on p. 127. Take a few moments to individually think about what is said in that section and what you have heard in your group’s discussion. What are the major “take-aways” and lasting questions that you are carrying with you from this section? Write them down. Then write down one or two ideas that are sticking out to you as potential areas of action or practical love that you, your family, and/or your neighborhood or faith community group can show. Share your take-aways, questions, and action ideas with a partner, group of 3, or with the whole group.

Close in a way that is fitting for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Chapter 6: What Now?

Open in a way that makes sense for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

Our Stories

Take a few minutes at the beginning of this session, to reflect on the previous sessions and answer the question: what have been the pieces in this study overall that have most stuck with me or have most stirred me? Go around and share with the group.

The Text: Engage the book in whole group discussion, smaller groups, some individual reflection and/or a combination depending on the needs of your group

What stuck out to you most in this last chapter? Why that?

What was new to you in this chapter?

What was most energizing in this chapter for you? Why was it energizing?

What was most challenging in this chapter for you? Why was it challenging?

How does what you read in this chapter connect with or differ from what you typically hear about “taking action” in your neighborhood and/or faith communities? What accounts for any differences?

A Way Forward: Make a little more time for this section in this closing session

Take out the notes that you have been keeping regarding your ideas for potential action. How do they fit within the practices outlined in Chapter 6? Take a few minutes to identify the one or two that seems most urgent to you and jot down notes regarding what might be possible next steps, considering the process outlined in Chapter 6.

Share your ideas with the group. Listen for any commonalities. Decide together how to best take the next steps to continue your learning and begin or continue showing care to the neighbors to which you are drawn. Think about who else in your community is impacted by the stories and topics you’ve been engaging and are drawn to. Who do you need to listen to? Where might you be able to show up and learn more? Set times and an intention to check in with one another to encourage one another and process your experiences. Keep the practices in Chapter 6 in mind as you continue your journey.

Close in a way that is fitting for your group (for ideas, see p. 9 in this guide)

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Options for Opening and Closing

Consider how you want to begin and end each session. Yours might be a group where you want to mix it up from session to session. Or, you might want to establish a pattern to begin and end in a similar way. Either way, it is often useful to budget 3-5 minutes at the beginning and end to do an opener and closer to help people to be present and together for the discussion in the time between.

Here are some options to consider in thinking about an opener and/or closer.

Assign a group member to bring an opening thought and another to bring a closing thought.

Rotate responsibilities each week. These openers and closers could be something related to the particular theme for the week. Or they could be related more broadly to your faith community, your neighborhood, or the character of the group itself.

Opening and Closing “Check-Ins”

Invite everyone to say one word or phrase related to how they are doing/“how they are showing up” that day and/or how they are as the discussion closes. This isn’t a moment for commentary on these statements, but helps the group to know how everyone is doing as they begin discussion or as they end.

Prayer and/or Moment of Silence

Depending on the nature of the group, you could begin with simply a moment of silence to invite and allow everyone to get settled and in the right mind frame to begin and/or end the discussion together. Or you can invite someone to offer a prayer either from the heart or out of your faith tradition. You may change this from session to session or keep the same opener and/or closer for consistency.

Stretch

Take a couple of minutes to stand or sit and stretch. Especially if your group has been running all day with work and home life responsibilities, take a moment to take a few deep breaths and stretch (formally or informally) to shake out some accumulated stress or tension from the day.

Collective Thought to Close

At the end of the session, take the last couple of minutes to reflect on the session and then invite each member to say and complete the sentence, “I’m grateful for _____.” Then, pick someone to start and go around the room until everyone has participated. This can be made into a prayer as well by saying, “God, I’m grateful for _____.” Or, can be used as a collective statement of gratitude.

Lighthearted Icebreaker to Open

It might be useful sometimes to simply begin with something lighthearted—a quick story to a partner of something funny that happened that day, for example. Then take a couple of deep breaths to get into a posture of being fully present and begin.

Or, create what makes sense for you and your group.