



FEBRUARY'S THEME

PERFORM

SCRIPTURE John 18:12-27

BOTTOM LINE God's love is unconditional



•Tonight we will be in the choir format and we will have communion.

MY GOAL FOR THE NIGHT:



Tonight is the second night of our topical series called "Captives." Our speaker is from the Emily Program, a program that serves people struggling with disordered eating and negative body image. The population of people who are affected by eating disorders and negative body image continues to grow each year due to a variety of factors. As a result, this is not a "far off" issue affecting 'people you know.' It is something that affects nearly 40% of all people, including students, parents, and leaders here at StuMin. The good news is that through the work of the Emily Program and positive, life-affirming communities like this one, the captivity created by these issues does not have to be permanent.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Connect

Highs/Lows and Prayer Requests - Share your "highs" and "lows" with the group and then gather prayer requests to distribute to the group for prayer throughout the next week.

Message

The small group material for the message tonight is provided by The Emily Program. It is in your bin.

Devotional: John 18:12-27

I'm not sure why I feel this way, but sometimes I get to thinking that if the people that loved me kept score of how many times I've not loved them with my whole heart, they would leave. I know that is being hard on myself, but it seems obvious to me that I don't always love people in the way that they love me. My parents, my siblings, my friends, my wife... Yet, they keep on loving me. They keep pursuing me. They keep calling me son, brother, friend, and husband. It makes no sense, but I'm sure glad that it is what they do!

Sometimes I think that we think about God that way. We've heard about all of the things that God has done for us. We've heard about how God put breath in our lungs, gave us the gifts and skills that make us who we are, and makes a way for us to live forever in heaven. So, when we don't return that love back to God, or when we simply deny knowing God like Peter does in our reading for today, it seems incredible that God would continue to love us. Yet that is what God does.



This isn't the end of Jesus' relationship with Peter. It continues after Jesus' resurrection on the shore of a lake. Peter and his buddies are out fishing and Jesus comes to the lakeshore and calls Peter over to him. Peter strips naked, jumps in the water, and swims over--sort of like a fishy baptism. Shortly after we overhear the two of them having a conversation about what love is and what it looks like.

This story isn't a story about the way that we desert God. It is a story about the way that God loves us. Jesus told the disciples that they would desert him as they were working their way through the Judean countryside. Who we are is no surprise to God, so who God is should be no surprise to us. God is the one that calls us child, beloved, and fearfully and wonderfully made. So today, remember your baptism, your dying and rising to new life. You are a child of God and there is nothing you can do, nowhere you can go, and no way to revoke it!

- How often do you feel like love or friendship are conditional? How so?
- How does it change a relationship to know that it isn't?
- What do you think that caring for people in an unconditional way would look like for you?
- Do you think that God should keep or withhold love from some people? Is there something that you think should disqualify you from being loved by God? Why?
- This story is often told on it's own, without the second part where Jesus and Peter connect again on the lakeshore. In other words, we usually only see the brokenness and not the redemption. That is true in our lives. We see things get broken, but can only trust that they can get repaired in the future. How do you think our limited perspective affects how we love people in difficult situations?

EXTRAS

March Madness

What You Need: Paper, pens

What you Do: In just a couple of weeks we'll all be putting together a bracket for the NCAA Basketball Tournament. Some lucky team is going to make their way to the Final Four and then the National Championship. You can be sure that all of these teams will give it everything they've got to cut down the nets. In a similar way, there are many things that are after your heart and attention that want to dominate in a similar way: social relationships, school, beauty, and a whole host of other things. Sometime the things competing in the tournament of our hearts are good--and that's great! But, other times, they tend to bend us out of shape. Using your paper, create a bracket with four or eight lines for "teams." On each of those lines, place something that is after your heart. What do you notice about your list? Are there things missing that should be there? are there things on your list that shouldn't be? Is there a clear winner? It is always important to be aware of what has our heart.

JUST FOR FUN

NCAA Tournament Brackets

What You Need: Brackets and Pens

What You Do: Fill out a bracket and put your name by it for a chance to win a \$20 gift card to Chick-Fil-A! Put brackets in the leader bin.