

REAL LOVE

God is love, as seen in His character, His saving activity in the world, and in His people.



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➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

A case could be made that in all the English language, *love* is one of the most casually used words. For example, people say they love their cars, their favorite dessert, their vacation destination, their hobby, or delightful weather. While love certainly involves emotional attachment and excitement, there's much more to it than that. Although contemporary society sends mixed messages about its meaning, John reminded Christians that God is the standard for and source of love.

All of John's writings in the New Testament convey the significance of love, particularly God's love for people (see John 3:16; 1 John 3:16), Jesus' love for His disciples (see John 15:9-13), and people's love for God (see 14:15,21). In his three epistles John used some form of the word *love* approximately 50 times (over 40 times in 1 John alone). Love is the chief theme of 1 John 4:7-21, just as it was a dominant component of two other sections in 1 John (see 2:7-11; 3:11-24). John emphasized that authentic love comes from God, because God is love. John testified that all three Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—demonstrate love. These various expressions of God's love are to be emulated by God's people in obedience to and reverence for Christ (see John 13:34-35).

Without love for other believers, our relationship with God is called into serious question. God's love for us makes possible the ability to demonstrate selfless love toward others. God's love at work in our lives transforms us, replacing sinful selfishness with Christlikeness, which is to be displayed in our words and actions. God's love isn't a fleeting emotion but a life-changing reality, allowing us to live without fear of judgment and enabling us to love others. God's love is transformational, and the demonstration of God's love toward others validates our profession of faith in Him.

"IN ANY MOMENT OF
DECISION THE BEST THING
YOU CAN DO IS THE RIGHT
THING. ... THE WORST
THING YOU CAN DO
IS NOTHING."

—Theodore Roosevelt

➤ 1 JOHN 4:7-21

Think About It

Circle words that indicate a Christ follower's motivation for loving God and others.

Underline the results when Christians practice God's love in their relationships with others.

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. **10** Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and His love is perfected in us. **13** This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given assurance to us from His Spirit. **14** And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent His Son as the world's Savior. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. **16** And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. **17** In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, for we are as He is in this world. **18** There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love. **19** We love because He first loved us. **20** If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. **21** And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother.



➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

SEEN IN THE SON (1 John 4:7-11)

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Once again expressing his affection for his readers with endearing terms, John used this section of his epistle to challenge his readers to love others. Three times in this chapter, John used the phrase “love one another” as an instruction of Christian duty and God’s ideal for all believers. John wasn’t just exhorting Christians to love fellow Christians but to demonstrate love for all people, including unbelievers. The basis for John’s teaching here is that authentic, selfless love comes from God. This passage doesn’t teach that anyone who loves is a child of God; rather, only those who have been born of God—those who have been made new by Christ—are capable of loving as God does.

In what ways is God’s demonstration of love in Jesus Christ different from human emotions associated with love?

⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ Love consists in

this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

God's love isn't an abstract concept but was manifested in His Son, Jesus Christ. John described the uniqueness of Jesus as God's "One and Only Son" (v. 9), a phrase John used to refer exclusively to Jesus. John affirmed that God sent Jesus into the world to give His life in order to bring lost sinners back to God (see John 3:16; 1 John 3:16). Spiritual death was the result of man's fall in the garden of Eden, and all humans have inherited this condition ever since. Through Jesus' submission and sacrificial death, people can be made aware of real love. John reemphasized that God's love as demonstrated through Christ is the motivation for Christ followers to love others.

Describe the connection between loving God and loving others.

PERFECTED BY THE SPIRIT **(1 John 4:12-15)**

¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and His love is perfected in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given assurance to us from His Spirit.

Jesus taught that whoever had seen Him had seen the Father, which meant that the Son made the Father clearly known (see John 1:18; 14:9). But John was referring to a person's seeing God in His unveiled splendor, majesty, and glory. No human is able to behold God in such a way, even though God revealed Himself to some Old Testament persons through theophanies, or revelations of Himself to the human eye (see Ex. 33:23; Isa. 6:1).

Because God has demonstrated Himself in Christ to those who love Him, He rightfully expects His love to be revealed through those who bear His name. Christ followers are able to love when God's love is perfected in them.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7,13), and when a person opens his or her life to the Lord, God indwells that person by His Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit includes reminding believers of Jesus' teachings, convicting the world of sin, producing spiritual fruit in believers, and affirming believers' salvation. The Spirit of God enables believers to commune with God by His abiding presence and helps them show God's love to others.

14 And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent His Son as the world's Savior. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God.

Many of John's readers had never seen Jesus, but they had believed the apostolic message, primarily because of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables people to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. The Spirit also confirms the realities that God indwells believers and believers abide in God. The Holy Spirit is the source of empowerment for believers to exercise God's command to love one another. Because of God's Spirit, believers can have an abiding, continuous, and growing relationship with God in which they learn to submit to His authority and obey His commands.

How would you explain to someone the importance of the Holy Spirit's indwelling believers?

DEFINED BY THE FATHER (1 John 4:16-18)

16 And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

To describe God's love, John used the words *know* and *love* in the perfect tense, indicating that both knowledge and belief yield an abiding reality. As a person comes to know or experience God by faith, the result is more love for God. In love God inhabits His people, making it possible for them to love one another.

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Son

In His substitutionary death on the cross, Jesus provided for the redemption of people from sin.

BIBLE SKILL

Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.

John repeated the word *love* (forms of *agape* or *agapao* in the original Greek).

In your Bible (or on a printout of 1 John 4:7-21), mark all the times *love* appears. Distinguish between noun forms and verb forms. Consider what the repetition of the word *love* helped John communicate.

What can you learn about the source of love, the nature of love, and the expression of love?

List some ways God's love has affected your life.

¹⁷In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, for we are as He is in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love.

God's love is fully expressed, or perfected, in us when we confess Jesus as Lord and experience the mutual abiding in God and He in us. Christians have confidence to stand before Jesus based on His atonement for our sins, which enables us to be like Him in that we stand before God the same way as Christ. John affirmed that the reason believers should have no fear of judgment is that our relationship with God is based on love, and there's no fear in love. Love and fear can't coexist in a believer's life, because perfect love drives out fear.

In what ways does the reality of God's love affect the way you view His expectation that you obey Him?

IMITATED BY HIS PEOPLE

(1 John 4:19-21)

¹⁹We love because He first loved us.

We have no reason to doubt God's love, because His love for us was prior to our love for Him, making a relationship with Him possible. God proved His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us (see Rom. 5:8). Love for others is the proper response to God's unselfish love for us.

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. ²¹ And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother.

Heretics were claiming to love God without demonstrating love for others. John exposed the absurdity of such a claim. Love for God and love for others are mutually inclusive: to have one is to have the other. Because believers are being perfected by God's love, they can show the same kind of selfless love to others.

Anyone can profess love for God because God can't be seen, but the evidence of such a profession is demonstrated by the way we treat others. The visible evidence of an individual's love for God is manifested by love for people, who can be seen. Love for God and hatred for others can't coexist in the same heart, because they are completely incompatible.

What would you say to a Christ follower who claims to love God but not a fellow believer?



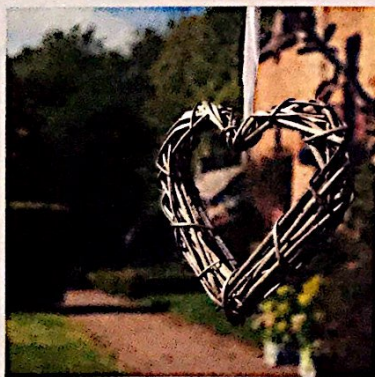
➤ OBEY THE TEXT

Originating in God, love transforms Christ followers from self-serving individuals to people who are concerned for the interests of others above their own. Christ followers are to demonstrate the same kind of love shown by God's Son. As they yield to the Spirit who lives in them, they demonstrate God's love in deed and witness. Christ followers can live in light of the assurance of God's love through faith in Jesus.

Discuss ways Christians can express God's love toward other believers and toward unbelievers. List ways you'll express love in the week ahead.

Reflect on ways God reveals His love for you. Record a prayer expressing your gratitude to God for His love.

Brainstorm ways your Bible-study group can express God's love corporately. Commit to implementing one of these actions as a group this week.



MEMORIZE

**"The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love."
1 John 4:8**

Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you will put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

