

SESSION 2

GOD IS LOVE

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
WE CAN ONLY TRULY
KNOW LOVE BY
KNOWING GOD.

1 JOHN 4:7-19

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 atoning sacrifice, for our sins.

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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 made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of 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 made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we 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 is not complete in love.

¹⁹ **We love because he first loved us.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Love (v. 7)—John encouraged an agape-type love; (v. 7) an exhortation to love, (v. 11) a statement of the duty to love, and (v. 12) a condition of God's presence within the believer.

"... Seen God" (v. 12)—No person at any time has ever seen God in His unveiled essence, glory, and majesty. The love of

God in offering His Son, is one of the greatest pictures of the fullness of God that we can see in this lifetime.

Given His Spirit (v. 13)—At the moment of salvation, God permanently places His Spirit in believers. If anyone does not have the Spirit of God, he does not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9).

WHY IS EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE VITAL TO LOVING OTHERS?

In 1974, Dolly Parton wrote the chart-topping country hit, *"I Will Always Love You."* The iconic love song reached its crowning moment when Whitney Houston recorded it for the soundtrack to the 1992 film *The Bodyguard*. Houston's version of the song reached No. 1 in over twelve countries, won many awards, and has over 1.7 billion views on YouTube. Years later, the world is still full of love songs. Some are shallow, some are vulgar, some are sweet. Most of them are easily forgettable because most of them ignore the source of real love, God Himself.

Two thousand years before Whitney Houston, the apostle John wrote the short letter of 1 John. In five chapters, John used a variation of the word love more than twenty-five times, more than any other book in the New Testament. And what John says about love is more than a soulful declaration of love.

Love Comes from God //

1 John 4:7-10

R & B music has plenty of love songs. In 1992, Mary J. Blige made a name for herself with the song "Real Love." The title itself tells us a lot about the human condition. People for all of time have

been looking for real love. Unfortunately, the devil has been working since the garden of Eden to get human beings to look for love anywhere and everywhere other than God. And those are all the wrong places!

The apostle John tried to clear it up for us in these verses. Love is from God, and if you love, you've been born of God. This doesn't mean only Christians are capable of loving. Sadly, it sometimes seems like people outside the church do a better job showing love than Christians do. John was acknowledging that everyone is made in the image of God and that, when we express genuine love, we are exhibiting God's nature. However, a person can be created in God's image and still not know God. Any expression of love that doesn't acknowledge God as the source of love—and that His love was revealed when He sent His Son into the world—is woefully incomplete. Knowing God means knowing that God sent Jesus into the world so we might live through Him.

Verse 8 could be (or maybe should be) alarming for anyone who holds on to anger or hatred toward someone else: "The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Let's face it. There are some people who are hard to love:



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people who have hurt you, lied to you, or betrayed your trust; people who, for one reason or another, just rub you the wrong way. Was John really saying that if we don't love them, we don't know God?

In a word, yes. Think of how unlovely you were in your sin. Think how often you've grieved the heart of God or failed to keep a promise you've made to Him. And yet God has never withdrawn His love from you! He sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for your sin. If, despite all the love and forgiveness God has shown you, you still cling to anger and hatred toward a brother or sister, you truly need to evaluate whether you actually know God. Daniel Akin described the apostle John's logic in a beautiful way:

- God is love.
- Those who have been born of God and know God are God's children.
- God's children have God's nature.
- Therefore, God's children will love.²

That makes it sound so easy! Thankfully, God doesn't leave us to do it on our own. Don't miss the beautiful promise of verse 9. God sent Jesus so we might live through Him. If you are having a hard time loving someone, remember you live through Christ. Ask Jesus to remind you that He loves that person, and that your life is lived through Jesus. You have the capacity to love that person because it is Christ in you doing the loving.

One more thing: We often hear individuals say, "I'm a Christian because I love God." Verse 10 shows that salvation is found "not that we loved God" but in the reality that God loves us and sent His Son for us. In our find-your-own-truth culture, it's crucial to realize that "God is love" and "love is God" are not the same thing. That's the heresy of pantheism—the idea that God is in all things, therefore all things are God. It isn't love, loving feelings, or loving actions that define God. God is the One—the only One—who defines love.

HOW DOES GOD'S DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE IN CHRIST HELP DEFINE WHAT LOVE REALLY IS?

God's Love is Made Complete in Us //

1 John 4:11-15

The revelation of love in films often touches viewers deeply. Certain movie scenes can resonate deeply because many of us have felt that longing for something missing in our lives. It's a reminder of the profound connections we seek and cherish.



DIGGING DEEPER THE LOVE OF GOD

God is love (1 John 4:8). This attribute that God fully embodies is eternally expressed through his giving. God's ultimate display of love was shown in giving his son, Jesus Christ, so that those who believe will have eternal life. What's interesting is that God's love is a communicable attribute. An attribute that is to be imitated in a believer's life. We imitate this attribute by loving God and by loving others the way God loves. In fact, the love believers share with each other is evidence that we are Jesus Christ's disciples (John 13:35). This is not your typical emotional or physical love; it is agape. This is the self-sacrificing love given to someone who needs love, not necessarily the one who is easy to love. As Jesus Christ's return approaches, the world is becoming deplete of love. What the world needs now is love. God's love. Believers are commanded to love the way God loves.

What does self-sacrificing love look like in your life?

The 17th century mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal described it as a God-shaped hole in the human heart. We try to fill up that hole with relationships, financial success, adrenaline rushes, substances, or even our own families, but nothing else fits. Pascal said, “none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God Himself.”³

The Greek language uses several different words that are translated love: *phileo*, which can be thought of as brotherly love (I see you over there, Philadelphia), *eros* for romantic (erotic) love, and then *storge*, or familial love. Which of those was the apostle John using when he wrote that “God remains in us and his love is made complete in us” (v. 12)? As it turns out, none of them. Instead, John used the word *agape*, which describes unconditional or sacrificial love. Like I said earlier, John used this word a lot.

Let’s drill down a little further. Verse 11 begins with the salutation “Dear friends.” In this form of *agape* (*agapetos*), John was reminding them that they were the recipients of Christ’s unconditional love. Next, he used the verb form of love (*agapao*). It appears in both past tense (“God loved us”) and present tense (“we also must love one another”).

Finally, John uses *agape* as a noun: “If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us” (v. 12). Suffice it to say, this little word is doing a lot of heavy lifting! You must love one another (*agapao*).



Does that mean God’s love is incomplete if it isn’t in us? Verse 12 helps us understand what John meant by this. Since no one has seen God, the only way for anyone to see Him is for them to see God in us. And the only way for them to see Him in us is for us to love one another. When we love one another, God’s love is made complete.

As Christians we can sometimes wonder where we stand with God. Is He really with us? Do we really belong to Him? How can we know if God really loves us?

John gave the answer in verses 13-14. We know God remains in us because God has given us His Holy Spirit. Not only is God with us, God is in us! Notice how all three Persons of the Trinity are referenced here: “He has given us of his Spirit,” who indwells us (v. 13). God the Father sent the Son who saves us (v. 14).

HOW DO WE REMAIN IN GOD’S LOVE AND WHAT RESULTS FROM REMAINING IN THAT LOVE?

We Love Because He First Loved Us // 1 John 4:16-19

The reality of God’s unconditional love is even more astounding when you contrast it with all the examples of conditional love we find in the world.

- “I love you if you’re pretty.”
- “I love you because you’re wealthy.”
- “I love you when you behave.”
- “I love you as long as we’re still having fun together.”

The companion of conditional love is fear. But God’s Word tells us, “There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear” (v. 18). So, the companion of unconditional love must be assurance. In verses 16–19, the apostle John gave us the following reasons why we can have assurance of God’s unconditional love for us.

We have the gospel. When John wrote, “We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us” (v. 16), he was virtually quoting what he recorded Simon Peter saying to Jesus in

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John 6:69: "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." John, along with the other three Gospel writers, provided proof after proof of how God's love was expressed through Jesus's earthly ministry. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus should remove any lingering doubts about the depth of God's love for us.

We have eternal life. In verse 17, John repeated what he said in verse 12—that God's "love is made complete with us." The word complete is the Greek word *teleioo*, which means to fulfill, finish, make perfect, accomplish, or consecrate. Jesus himself used a form of this word when he cried, "It is finished" from the cross (John 19:30). It's the finished, accomplished work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection three days later that gives us "confidence in the day of judgment." It's this confidence that makes perfect love drive out fear. Since fear has to do with punishment, if you are still afraid, that just means you haven't been made perfect in love.

HOW HAS GOD'S LOVE DRIVEN OUT FEAR IN YOUR LIFE?

A growing Christian is becoming more and more like God every day. It may be a slow process, but the very fact that He hasn't given up on us is proof of His unconditional love for us.

DID YOU KNOW?

Our culture assumes that love is affection that tolerates and approves of any behavior based on the relationship. However, Biblical love is something completely different. According to the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, love is "unselfish, loyal, and benevolent intention and commitment toward another."⁴ Because God is love, He cannot do anything unloving. Every action on God's behalf toward us, is loving. Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the ultimate example of God's love to humanity. Because we are recipients of this love, we have a responsibility to extend that same love to others. In 1 John, we are challenged and reminded "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). Love, for the Christian, is not just something we say, but should be lived out in such a way that others experience God's love through us.

Biblical Truth: Love is the identifying characteristic of a Christ-follower.

Do your daily interactions with others demonstrate death or life?

LIVE IT

What evidence is there in your life that you are led by God's love?

Love has eyes. It sees a need and responds. Love has ears. It listens with intention and empathy. Love has hands. It helps those in need. Love has feet. It goes the extra mile to help. Love has a voice. It speaks truth and comforts. We can only truly know love by knowing God. Here are some practical ways to lean into that truth this week:

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- **Read.** Read a chapter of 1 John each day this week and take note of all the times he used the word love.
- **Meditate.** Instead of listening to songs about love, listen to some of the great hymns of our faith, such as "Amazing Grace," or "Blessed Assurance." Sing along, if you like!
- **Share.** Since love is expressed in relationship, find ways to show God's love to someone else this week, either inside your family or outside.

DAILY READINGS

1. GOT GOD, GOT LOVE! // 1 JOHN 4:7-11

God's love flows like a river through the heart of every believer, transforming us from within and overflowing into our relationships with others. When we truly grasp that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), we understand that knowing him intimately means experiencing love in its purest form. His sacrificial love, demonstrated through Christ, becomes the foundation for how we love one another. As we practice loving our neighbors, forgiving those who hurt us, and serving others selflessly, we discover more of God's character reflected in our own hearts. This divine love isn't merely an emotion but a way of being that draws us closer to our Creator.

When we choose love over fear and grace over condemnation, we walk in step with God's heart.

2. DIVINE CONNECTION // 1 JOHN 4:12-17

When we remain connected to God through prayer, worship, and his Word, his love becomes more than a doctrine—it becomes a living force that transforms us from the inside out. Like branches drawing life from the vine, we receive his love, and it flows through us into a broken world. This divine connection changes our perspective, softening our hearts toward others and empowering us to love beyond our natural capacity. As God's love works in us, we discover our true identity as his beloved children, finding purpose in reflecting his character. When we stay rooted in his presence, his love not only heals our wounds and insecurities but also equips us to be vessels of his grace.

"... you can do nothing without me" (John 15:5).

3. NO FEAR, LOVE IS HERE! // 1 JOHN 4:18-21

God's perfect love is actively working within you, driving out every trace of fear that seeks to grip your heart (1 John 4:18). This isn't a gradual process but a present reality—His love is perfecting itself in you right now, creating an unshakable foundation that no circumstance can destroy. When fear whispers lies about your

future, His love declares truth about your identity as His beloved child. When anxiety threatens to overwhelm, His perfect love reminds you that you are held securely in His hands. Walking in this fearless love reveals God's faithful character and your true worth, drawing you into deeper intimacy with the One who loves you perfectly.

Surrender your fears and allow His love to completely eliminate their power over you.

4. JUSTICE GOD // DEUTERONOMY 32:4

In a world where injustice seems to prevail, we find comfort in knowing that God is perfectly just—He sees every wrong, hears every cry, and will make all things right in His perfect timing. His justice isn't like human justice, flawed and incomplete, but is rooted in His holy character and infinite wisdom. When we face unfair treatment or witness suffering, we can trust that our God is both faithful to His promises and able to execute perfect judgment. This truth transforms how we respond to injustice—instead of seeking revenge, we entrust our hurt to the One who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:23).

Understanding God's justice helps us see ourselves honestly before Him.

5. JUST TELL THE TRUTH // 1 JOHN 1:10

When we speak truth, we align ourselves with God's very nature, for He is truth itself (John 14:6). Every honest word we speak affirms God's character and His Word, keeping us connected to Him. When we choose honesty over deception—even when it's difficult—we demonstrate that we value God's approval above human comfort or personal gain. This commitment to truth transforms us from within, shaping our character and deepening our relationship with the One who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Our words become instruments of His grace, bringing life and healing to those around us.

As we practice truthfulness in all matters, we reflect Christ and earn the trust of others.