



Sermon Growth Guide

July 18, 2021

What Great Love – Love Makes a Difference

1 John 3:1-10

Key Verse: 1 John 3:1a “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

Big Idea: God’s love makes a difference, transforming us into our Christ-like selves.

Foundations

Last week we came across the theme of justification. Justification means that you are “justified” before the Father, fully and forever forgiven by trusting solely in Jesus. This week, we come across the word sanctification. Now that you trust Jesus, you begin to feel His love for you more and more. God’s love makes a difference in your life, transforming you more and more into the very likeness of Christ!

Pastor Tim offers the analogy of a flower to help us understand what sanctification is like. It’s hard to watch a flower grow by just staring at the flower. Yet, with the right soil, sunlight and water, flowers grow and bloom into their intended purpose. For the believer, the soil is biblical community, the sunlight is the presence of God, and the water is our personal pursuit of the Living Christ. Before long, we can look back on the last several years of our lives and exclaim, “Hey! I’m more like Jesus today than I was 10 years ago. Praise God!”

The world offers numbness to the real matters of your heart, but God offers transformation, sanctification. Every brother or sister walking life with you desires to see you grow. You are not alone in this! Pray that God will guide and guard your Life Group, growing you each this week by God’s Great Love into an even purer reflection of the beloved Son.

Understanding God’s Word

Our text opens with one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture, 1 John 3:1. Take time to memorize it as a group.

Verse two goes even deeper in revealing where we are headed. What kind of hope does your future give you for today?

Verse three calls believers to “purify themselves.” Discuss what this means and your experience with this call. Conclude this time by linking verses one through three together and talking about the doctrine of sanctification.

Applying God’s Word

Verse one gives the Christian her identity. Verse two provides the believer with his purpose. And verse three offers practical application. Host a discussion that links verses one to three together and identify a specific area of your life that you would like to grow in by God’s grace and power.

Witnessing God’s Word

Pastor Tim concludes his message this week by calling us to love those around us by seeing how the great love of God can reach in and completely change someone for the better. Identify and pray for those that God is inviting you to extend God’s transformative love to this week.

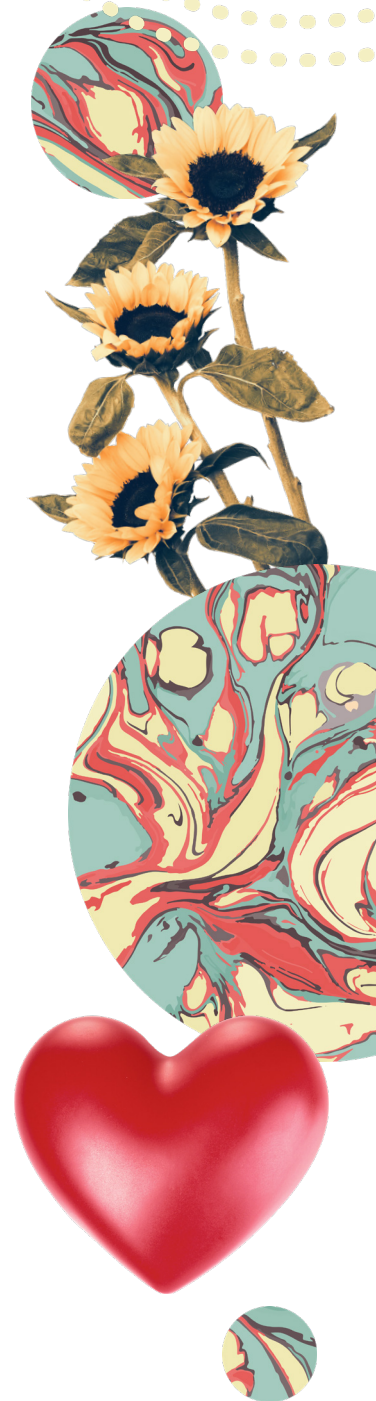
This week, First Pres put on the biggest, boldest Vacation Bible School we have seen in decades, or maybe ever. I can't say enough about our volunteers, leaders, staff, everybody who played a part. We hosted 400 kids. We maxed it out, folks. And they were all quiet, well-behaved, orderly ... Not exactly! I do want to say a special thank you to all the volunteers who made this happen. You know the Worship Center has sound proofing on the walls. Hundreds of kids singing, jumping, laughing and screaming ... It didn't work. It was outmatched. I don't even know what decibels we hit! But do you know what they were shouting? "You are treasured!" Let's say it together. "You are treasured!" That was the message all week long. God knows you; you are treasured. God hears you; you are treasured. God loves you; you are treasured! Every one of those kids got the message. There is a God in heaven who loves you so much, so much He sent His Son Jesus Christ to be your Savior. That love is right here—**What Great Love!**

We are in a series in 1 John called **What Great Love**. Our theme verse, our memory verse, is 1 John 3:1, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). God's love makes a difference. It has an impact. If you feel it, it will change you. If you feel it. Last week in chapter one, we saw that there is something that keeps us from feeling God's love. His love never changes. God's love for you is constant and full. But sometimes, as we pray in our liturgy from time to time, sometimes "God's face is hidden from us by our sins." It isn't that God goes away, or stops loving, or turns His back. It's that we allow impurities into our lives that keep us from experiencing the fullness of His presence, that keep us in the dark instead of in the light, that keep us away from the light and the life found in God and in the darkness, in the numbness, the emotionless stupor of separation

from God. That's what this world offers. Anesthetic. Numbness. Zombie life. Risk feeling something. Risk feeling the love of God. It will change you. God's love makes a difference.

When sin separates us from God, and it does, we confess and appeal to God for forgiveness on the grounds of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Jesus paid the debt. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). The problem has been solved in Jesus; the chasm has been bridged. God has resolved to draw you into His love. Will you let Him? So, that part, last week, that's what we call justification. Having been separated from God by our sins, through Jesus, we are reunited, forgiven, and made righteous—not through our merits, but through the blood of Christ shed on our behalf. Saved. Redeemed. Justified. Now something else happens. We call it sanctification. Now the impact of the love of God, the presence of the Spirit of God within us, the relationship we have with God, it makes a change. It makes a difference.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). We don't just want to know the love of God; we want to feel the love of God. We feel what we know. Do you see what happens here? How do you experience God's love? How do you feel what you know is true? John shows us. How? John shows us here, because that's what John is doing here. The letter stops and there is this interruption, this exclamation: "O what great love!" John is just trucking along, teaching, explaining, arguing even, here's how it works, and here's what forgiveness is, and here's what you do. Then, right in the middle of it all, he stops and shouts, "What great love!" John is feeling it right here. We can



feel it with him. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)

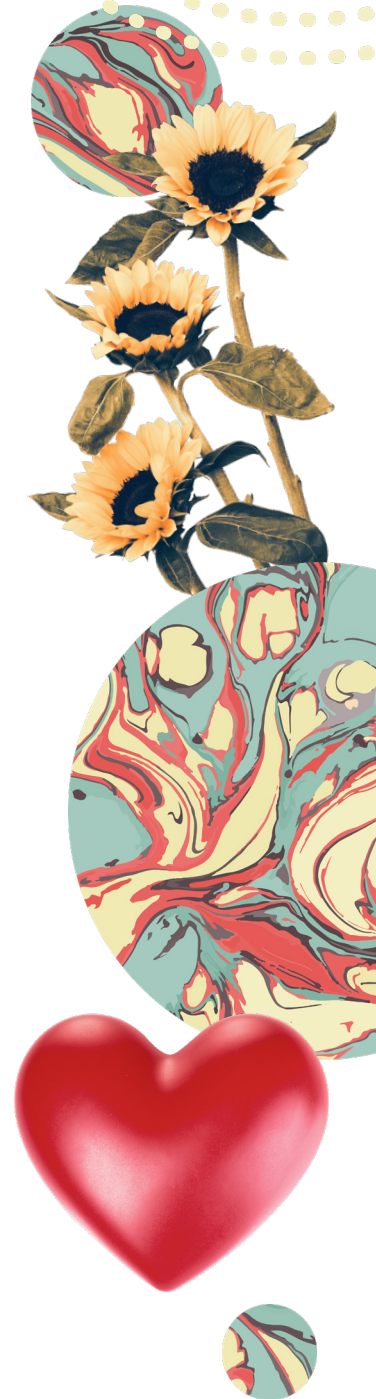
What is John feeling? It’s that same thing that caused him to only refer to himself in his Gospel, the Gospel of John, as “the beloved disciple.” John is struck to the core, knocked out of his chair, with the reality that God, the creator God, this great cosmic being, the source of all things, the eternal, almighty God—God loves him. God’s love makes a difference. The love is manifest in the adoption. “That we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” Remember, what God speaks happens. This is the God who said, “Let light shine in the darkness” and there was light. This is the God who spoke the world into existence. When God says it, it is. It happens. God’s word creates reality. God says you’re a child, then you’re a child. You are in the family. Forever forgiven, forever redeemed, forever in the arms of the Father. Forever the beloved.

Now, this, if you experience this, if you allow this love to touch you, this will change you. Radically. Fundamentally. You will be different. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). You are about to start changing, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. What does that mean? Do we all shift into one form, one personality, a great oneness of all things? No. You don’t stop being you. But as you grow more into the likeness of Jesus, into your likeness of Jesus, you actually become more of who you were always meant to be. You become more you, not less you. You become more you. I’ll say more in a minute. But the change sets in. God’s love makes a difference. Suddenly you want different things. “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). You want

a different class of stuff in your life, a different type of experience. You start to realize that purity, goodness, integrity—that’s what you really want. Peace. Light. Beauty. Goodness. Truth. Once you realize that you can actually have these things, your heart begins to long for them more and more. But not all at once.

The next part can be very confusing. John needs to explain, there is a difference between sin and righteousness. There is a difference between good and bad, pure and impure, right and wrong. But it starts to sound like if we know Jesus, we will never sin again. I had a guy come to Christ years ago listening to a series of sermons I had preached. He and his wife came across the series I preached on the Happy Church, a series that eventually became a book. They listened to the first one, then the second, the third, and stayed up late into the night listening to seven messages. They prayed that night and gave their lives to Christ. Soon they came to church. After a few months, the husband came to me and said, “I don’t think it worked.” “What do you mean?” I asked. “Well, I gave my life to Christ, and I felt forgiven, redeemed, I feel His presence, but I still sin.” I still sin. “Yeah,” I said. “It’s a process from here.” Sanctification is a process. Sometimes it moves along quickly, but usually it is painfully slow. My daughter has gotten into plants lately. I love plants too. You never see a plant grow. You can’t sit there and watch and say, “Ooh, there, see that?” But good soil, regular water, sunlight, over time it has an effect. Before you know it you’re looking for a bigger pot. It takes time, but it is also steady on.

What John is getting at here is, well, understand it as streams, tendencies of the heart. This Scripture is helping us understand, yes, even for the forgiven, even for the redeemed, even for the Christ-follower, adopted and justified, there is still a steady battery of choices you will make every day, every hour, and



each one of those choices is dipping into a stream. One is a stream that runs counter to Christ, anti-Christ. John just uses that word “sin” for shorthand. Sin. The other is righteousness. Choices that dip into a stream that runs with Christ, for Christ, in a life-giving and Christ-ward direction. In a Native American proverb, a grandson asks his grandfather about the conflict in his heart. The grandfather says there are two wolves at war within your soul; one is good and one is evil. The young man asks, which one will win? The grandfather replies, “The one you feed.” John isn’t saying you will have no sin in your life the minute you come to Christ. That would be inconsistent with what he said just a few paragraphs back, that when we sin, we come to confess and we are forgiven. John knows we will still sin. But do you know what the difference is? I still sin, but I don’t want to. I don’t desire it. I am repulsed by it, where before I took it in stride as part of life. I react inside to the rot and residue, the corrosion, so that every time I sin, I repent. I turn around. I confess. I don’t want to go that way anymore. That’s the difference. And like a plant I grow toward the sun, at times by imperceptible measure. But I grow. Thank God. I grow. You do too. God’s love makes a difference.

Yes, God is at work changing you. His love shines unceasingly over you like the sun, and you are growing under it day by day. It’s so fundamental and radical, John says it’s like we are children again. We are just as much God’s little children as our VBS kids this week. They say adults are like cement, all mixed up and set for life. Not us. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). What you will be has not yet fully been made known, but you are in a process of becoming, becoming your true likeness of Jesus. What will you be when you grow up?

Let me give you four applications for this as we close. **(1) You are becoming.** You are not finished. God is making you who you were meant to be, and who you were meant to be is the you who best reflects the character of Jesus Christ. How many ways do we try to find ourselves, to define ourselves, to locate our true identity and character? The you that is truly and eternally you is the you that you can see reflected back in the eyes of Jesus Christ. Look to Jesus to find you. **(2) Love the You you are becoming.** When you are frustrated with yourself, when you have a hard time believing that you are the beloved child of God, when you have a hard time loving yourself, remember, you are not finished yet. The eternal and perfect you is there in the eyes of Jesus. Love that person you are becoming in Him.

(3) Others are becoming. Our passage closes with a pretty sharp summation. “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister” (1 John 3:10). How are you doing at loving your brother and sister? How are you doing at loving your neighbor? I think one of the things that hinders us in this effort is the way we pigeonhole people and assume that they can never change. Every person you meet is on a journey and in the process of changing. Remember that they are not done yet, and grow in grace and love for them. Which leads to the fourth point of application, **(4) Love what others may be becoming.** Did you know that some people are hard to love? It’s true. When you are struggling to find a root of love to share with the person in front of you, try to imagine what they will be once Christ has a full hold on them. Love them for that. Love them as that. Love them, if I may say, love them into that. God’s love. It makes a difference. What great love.

