

Sermon Growth Guide

August 1, 2021

What Great Love - God is Love

1 John 4:7-21

Key Verse: 1 John 4:16 “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.”

Big Idea: If you miss the love that Jesus has for you and others, you miss Jesus.



Foundations

With one week remaining in our current series, we continue to memorize and internalize our memory verse, 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!”

This week, the second half of 1 John 4 challenges us to go even deeper into understanding the majesty and meaning of the love of God – and how this great love becomes the foundation we rest on each day.

Pastor Tim looks at five concentric circles of love to help us better understand and live out of the love of God. First, the Triune God is chiefly characterized by the sacrificial, joyful love of God. Second, that love meets us and rescues us at the cross, claiming us as children of God. Third, we find ourselves in the community of God’s people where we are called to love one another. Fourth, the love of God continues to overflow across the cosmos through the love of neighbor. Finally, the people of God, by the Spirit of God, carry the love of God to the ends of the earth, filled with joy over the lost being found and unafraid since “there is no fear in love,” (verse 18).

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

How is love defined in verse ten of our text this week? How does this definition compare to how modern culture defines love?

What is the command found in verse 11?

What is the model for love found in verse 19?

Applying God’s Word

If you miss the love that Jesus has for you and others, you miss Jesus. Exercising healthy vulnerability, express to one another how you are doing this year at living every hour out of the heart-knowledge that God is love and God loves you. How can your circle pray for you and encourage you to keep pressing forward in living out of the love of God?

Witnessing God’s Word

Pastor Tim concludes his message this week proclaiming this good news, “The wave of love wells up in you. It comes from God. It reaches you. Then it pours out into the church, toward the neighbor, into the world, to the glory of God. God who is love.” Are you spending enough time with the Lord for His love to well up in you? To whom or toward what group of people is the Lord inviting you to “pour out” God’s love onto this week? Pray for one another, that God’s love will indeed be poured out through each of you as you walk the Kingdom life, the life centered in the very love of God.

Can anybody guess what the theme of this passage is? You got it, “love.” The word love appears twenty-six times in fifteen verses! Anytime you get one word appearing almost twice per verse, that’s the key word. We are continuing our series on 1 John called **What Great Love**, with this memory verse, “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 changes us. We don’t just want to know it; we want to feel it. We feel what we know. And when we do, it changes who we are. We understand that love is not just a feeling, it is a call to action. So when we love one another, it’s not just a test of our emotional state, it’s a commitment to act in self-sacrificial love. And love isn’t just about emotions, and it definitely isn’t just about sex or attraction. We know what love is when we look to Jesus. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (1 John 3:16) Now we come to one of the boldest statements in all of Holy Scriptures, one of the boldest claims in all religion or philosophy: **God Is Love.**

Here is the main idea: Love is so central to God’s character, so defining of God’s purposes toward us, so essential to understanding the purpose of life in the cosmos God made, John is bold to say, and even repeat, “God is Love.” When you throw a rock into a calm lake, it makes ripples. When you make a claim like “God is love,” it makes cosmic blast waves through space! I want us to explore five concentric circles, five blast waves emanating from this claim. They are all about love. **(1) Love within God; (2) Love in us; (3) Love in the church; (4) Love for neighbor; and (5) Love for the world. They all originate in the claim, God is love.**

(1) Love within God. “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” (1 John 4:7) **Let**

us love one another. Love is our chief ethic. Love is the defining characteristic of our relationships. Love rules and governs our decisions, motivations, values and outcomes. Let us love one another. **For love comes from God.** What is at the very root of the universe? What is at the base of existence? What is life built upon, its existential fabric? I grew up in the era of serial horror movies. Part Two, Part Three, Part Fifteen! These movies frightened you with the notion, the horror, that something evil was threatening the otherwise good and normal world. The dystopian fantasies of today are different. They terrorize you with a greater horror. What if there is nothing good at the center of the universe? What if there is no existential fabric holding things together? What if, at the very center of it all, there is just nothing. Nihilism. What if? What this is saying is that there is something at the very base of life, at the very center of the existential fabric. That something is God. And that God is love.

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 John 4:8) God is love. This is different from saying love is God. I’m just going to have to say this and let it sit: The world says “love is God,” then the world equates love with sex, meaning, ultimately that sex is god which is idolatry—devotion to a false god. Much of what we are living out today in our society is the product of the confusion and spiritual darkness of that idolatry. Not “love is God,” but “God is love.” That’s our claim. There is a God, and that God is love. Think about the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. For love to exist, there must be one who loves and one who is loved. For divine love to exist, that love has to be perfect. The one who loves is perfect and loves perfectly. The one who is loved is perfectly lovable and rightly to be loved. The Father loves and the Son is the Beloved. The love between them is perfect too! This is the Holy Spirit. Everything we know about God at the core is that God is a community of perfect love, a happy, fully satisfied, perfect community of divine



love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That's God. That's what is at the center of the universe, the base layer of the cosmos—God's love. Like a finger stirring a pool of water, love emanates from the core. Love within God.

(2) Love in us. Into the perfect community of divine love, God invites you. God invites me, a lost lamb, a wayward sinner. Remember the first week, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete." (1 John 1:3-4) There is fellowship. God is resolved to pull you into the full joy of fellowship with Him, the fellowship, the love, that is enjoyed between the Father and the Son. The second wave is the love that you are pulled into, included in the outpouring of divine love. Back to our passage, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9) God resolved to pull you from death to life, to snatch you up into His love, to include you in divine love. It meant sending his Son, Jesus. Why? "... that we might live through him." We are not living people waiting to die; we are dying people to whom God sent a way to live. That way is Jesus, the Way, the Truth, the Life, extended toward us. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10) That is very specific. There is a specific problem requiring a specific solution; a specific poison needing specific antidote; a specific illness, a mortal disease, requiring a specific cure. If you don't understand what Jesus did for you on the cross, you won't understand the love of God. To know God's love, to know what love is, is to understand, and put your trust in, what Jesus did to die for your sins on the cross. Atonement. The paying of a debt in your relationship with God. That's how you and I get included in love, in God's perfect love.

(3) Love in the church. "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:11-12) God wants us to love sideways, to love those around us. How does John address his audience? Brothers. Sisters. Friends. Fellow children of God. It is family language. Most of John's energy is about what happens inside the community of faith, in the family of God. Look at how often he uses the phrase "one another." That's a church phrase. That's an "us" phrase. We, brothers, we, sisters, we ought to love one another. There is a remarkable love found in the church unique to the world. I'm sure you have had good and bad experiences with church, but there is no community like it, nothing to compare. God establishes a community of supernatural love in the church. The church is the Body of Christ. As God was once present through the incarnation of His Son, now the presence of God is conveyed through the church, His body. And it is conveyed and becomes evident by the character of our love for one another.

This is what Jesus said right after he washed the disciples' feet: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) How we love one another matters. It is part of the mission, the next circle of God's love. The caliber and quality of our love for one another puts Christ on display in the world. Now, this is an important place to say, love is not a doormat, and love in Christian community takes on more dimensions that simple, rewarding acceptance. Love in Christian community includes challenge, correction, even discipline and mutual accountability to the table manners of the people of God. But the world will see Jesus in how you and I learn to love one another. John Stott wrote, "God is love in his essential being, and has revealed his love in the gift



of his Son to live and die for us. Now he calls us to be a community of love, loving each other in the intimacy of his family—especially across the barriers of age and sex, race and rank—and loving the world he loves in its alienation, hunger, poverty and pain. It is through the quality of our loving that God makes himself visible today.” They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. They will know we are Christians by our love.

(4) Love for neighbor. While John gives most of his energy to telling the church to love one another within the community of faith, it is always with the neighbor in view. Neighbor love, as we talked about last week, is one of the keys to the Christian faith. No greater command than these: Love God; Love neighbor. The cosmic waves of God’s love emanate from the Trinity itself, into individual hearts of believers, into the church and out into, or at least up against, our neighbors. The word here is “witness,” or as we find it in our passage, “testify.” “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” (1 John 4:14) A witness testifies to what they saw and heard and experienced. If you saw and heard and experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ, testify. Testify to your neighbor. The love doesn’t stop at the church doors.

(5) Love for the world. Finally, the love spills all the way out into the world God made, the disobedient, broken, confused, angry, hostile world. If you study John’s writings, you see how he usually uses the word “world” to talk about a force that is hostile to Christianity. If the world hates you, that just makes sense because the world is awful, the world hates God, the

world loves darkness, the world killed Jesus, the world is terrible! That’s why it is so surprising that you also get under John’s pen by the Holy Spirit some of the most memorable, powerful statements about how much God loves the world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) The waves of God’s love overflow into the world. So, John says, in your relationship with “the world,” be like Jesus. “This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:17-18)

That’s a scary thought. An angry and broken world is a scary place to be like Jesus. You don’t have to be afraid. There is really nothing to fear. Ann Voskamp said, “All fear is but the notion that God’s love ends.” There is nothing truly to fear. God’s love never ends. He has proven his love in his Son Jesus Christ. No matter how hard things get, no matter how mixed up the world seems, at the root and center of all that exists is this truth: God is love. You don’t have to be afraid. As we step to this table, we receive, from the very source, from the community of divine love, from God, we receive love, as we take bread, as we drink cup. This is love poured out in Jesus. The wave of love wells up in you. It comes from God. It reaches you. Then it pours out into the church, toward the neighbor, into the world, to the glory of God. God who is love.

