

**Sunday Bible Study Notes
February 19, 2018**

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**SERIES: Making True Disciples
SERMON: Following the Discipleship Course, Part 3
TEXT: 1 John 4:7-21**

“From Trusting To Loving”

Central Message:

Discipleship flourishes where relationships are fostered. Just look at Jesus. “Follow Me” wasn’t a catch-phrase for Jesus. It was a specific invitation to an authentic relationship. Jesus had much to teach his ragged crew of 12 men... But they were lessons you can’t teach in a classroom. “Come spend your life with me, out in the real world,” Jesus essentially told them, “I’ll be fully transparent. I’ll be fully available. And in the end, you’ll be ready to do for others what I have done for you.”

As we approach launching small groups in our church, we have been asking the question: “How can I have an authentic, meaningful relationship with other believers?” If discipleship can only happen when real relationships are fostered, then it is crucial to establish a framework for how we conduct our relationships.

Our current series, “Making True Disciples,” has been our attempt to answer this question. Establishing real relationships involves a fourstep “stair step” process that begins with knowing Christ. It begins with accepting Christ as our personal Savior and develops in the four progressive and iterative steps previously mentioned. We first have to know Christ...not know about Him but know Him intimately and personally. After we begin to know Christ, we can begin to trust Him, and the more we trust Him, the more we will love Him. Once we know Him and trust Him and love Him, the more likely we will obey Him.

This week’s lesson focuses on the third step: “Loving Christ and Others.” Our text is 1 John 4:7-21. This passage defines what real love by looking to the sacrificial love of Christ. When we know and trust his love, we are able to love Him and others in return. The “Main Thing” we’ll see this text is this: ***In order to love Christ and others, we have to experience His love personally (4:7-11) and abide in His love daily (4:12-21).***

KEY #1: Experience His Love Personally (1 John 4:7-11)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8 NASB)

When it comes to “love,” our culture has much to say. Movie screens, iTunes playlists, and Facebook feeds are flooded with messages about the blissful fantasy (and gutwrenching pain) that “love” has to offer. Imagine, for a moment, some o being from outerspace visiting planet earth, silently observing our various cultures. If he had to define “love,” based *only* on what he heard and observed, what would he say love is? I suspect he would explain it in terms of its emotion, the rapturous joys and passion that people *feel*. It’s an emotion that takes control of our will, forcing us to conform to its urges and desires. As Elvis once sang, “Wise men say only fools rush in...But I can't help falling in love with you.”

The Bible, however, describes love much differently.

1. Love Defined (1 John 4:7-)

Our passage begins with John passionately urging his readers, “Let us love one another, for love is from God.” (1 John 4:7) If love is from God, why is a godless world its greatest advocate? The reason lies in the meaning of the word itself. We need to define what John means by “love.”

In John’s day, there were three different words he could have used for love. *Eros* describes a romantic love, fueled by romance and attraction. *Phileo* describes a kinship type of love, field by mutual admiration and respect. These are not the words that John chooses. Neither describes the kind of love he has in mind. Instead John chooses a different word: “agape.”

This wasn’t the kind of love Elvis was singing about. *Agape* is a different kind of love, not based on attraction or blissful admiration. It’s not the kind of love Elvis was singing about. In fact, it’s not a “heart-fluttery” type of love afeelings” at all. Rather, *agape* re By the time of Jesus, this had become a rarely used word in Greco-Roman culture. But it became the word of choice for Christians, because it gave greater precision to the true meaning of love, especially as demonstrated in the person of Christ.

Agape love (the kind John is writing about) is a different. It isn’t dependent upon feelings of attraction. It isn’t conditional, given if you act (or don’t act) a certain way. It isn’t a shared-feelings kind of love, where both parties share some kind of “connection.” It is a one way kind of love, where one party chooses to love the other,

irregardless of their actions, attractiveness, or abilities. Agape love happens when a person chooses to set their affection upon another, resolving to be *utterly committed to them, regardless of how much it will cost. This type of love is unconditional, unearned, unmerited, and uncommon.* You could even say its unworldly. “This is Love (*agape*)”, John says, “Not that we loved God, but that God Loved Us. God *is* love” (1 John 4:8) That’s pretty one-sided. That’s *agape*.

“God *is* love,” John says. If we want to love others well in relationships, we must look to the One who defines what love is.

2. Love Displayed (1 John 4:9-10)

But what does agape love actually look like? If authentic relationships are marked by agape love, how do you actually show it? John gives us the answer by means of direct example: If you want to know what love (*agape*) is, look no further than the Cross. Behold the Lamb, slain for you.

Pointing us to Jesus, John reminds us that Jesus was sent into the world “*so that we might live through Him.*” (1 John 4:9) This echoes what the Bible tells us elsewhere: sin isn’t a minor issue, its a major problem. It causes us to be spiritually dead, without any kind of spiritual life or spiritual desire to follow God. A dead man CANT follow God; he can’t do much of anything. What he needs is a resurrection. He needs to be made alive. Additionally, our sin leaves us in serious conflict with a God who is demands righteousness. Because of our sin, the Bible calls us “objects of His wrath,” guilty before the judge who is about the slam down the gavel of eternal judgement.

In order to grasp what love in relationships look like, you **MUST** go back to the Gospel and personalize this for yourself. This is especially true if you have been a Christian for a long time. We sing, “I am a friend of God...” But what makes that song remarkable is when you remember that you **USED** to be his enemy. (Eph 2) Have you forgotten that? Have you owned that? When’s the last time that you were overwhelmed by the fact that you were God’s enemy, and now you’re his friend? When’s the last time you recalled that you used to be a Child of the Devil (1 John 3:10), but because of Jesus you’ve been adopted into His family as a Child of God?

And **NOW** we can really begin to see what love looks like: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.” That word “propitiation” points to a sacrificial substitute, just like the ones outlined in Leviticus. The essential function of a sacrifice is to turn away God’s wrath through the

removal of sins. When the sacrificial substitute dies, the demands of God's justice are satisfied. Someone's got to pay. Can you pay it?

There's only one substitute that can take your place: Jesus Christ. And THIS, John has been saying, is love: God's love for us is so great that he was willing to do whatever was necessary to save us. What was necessary was the death of his Son...for you. Completely undeserved, completely unearned, completely unconditional, completely one-sided. That agape. That's love.

If you're finding it difficult to love someone right now, check the mirror. Take a look at yourself. Instead of thinking about how messed up so-and-so is, or how much someone wronged you, take a look at yourself and ask the question: How was I with God? Was I any different? How am I with God *even now*? Do I still mess up? Do I still wrong him, run from him, ignore him, put him at the bottom of my priority list? (The answer is YES... and if you don't agree with that, then [just like the Pharisees] you apparently don't need Jesus at all...) Now ask yourself: How does God respond to me? What did He do for me? How does He feel about me?

Go back to the cross. Behold the slaughtered Lamb, bleeding and dying for YOU. You put him there. You were the cause. You should be hanging there. But look at His response: Love. The Creator of the Universe became flesh, lived the life you should have lived, died the death you should have died "so that we might live through Him."

Now THATS Love.

Do you see?

If you have not experienced this love personally and DEEPLY, then you cannot love others. You have no idea how to love someone who doesn't deserve it until you've experienced it for yourself. That's what John has been saying all along. You cannot love me in an authentic relationship unless you've experienced this kind of agape love for yourself.

So then, the first step towards authentic relationships marked by love: You **MUST** go back to the cross. When's the last time you were absolutely overwhelmed by the Cross? When's the last time it brought you to tears, or made you break into song, or explode with humbled joy, experiencing once again just how loved you are despite your messed up self? Has it been a while?

You've got to go back to the Cross. Do it now. Experience it for yourself, whether its for the first time or the hundreth time. Go back. Learn again what true love is.

KEY #2: Abide In His Love Daily (1 John 4:12-21)

After you go back to the Cross, the next step is to STAY THERE. Or, as John puts it, "Abide".

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him

Notice the order: First, you have to KNOW this kind of love that God has for you, personally and experientially. Do you know it? Not in your head as a fact, but in your soul as your very life? Second, you have to "believe" this love that God has for you. That word is the same word in the Bible's original language for "trust, rely, have faith in". Once you know His love, you can Trust his love. You can lean on it when the going gets tough, when the nights are dark and the walls seem to be caving in. You can lean on it when you are unloved or rejected or mistreated. You can confidently stand on it when the Enemy tries to whisper that you're a failure, that you've made God angry or that He's turned away from you. "We have come to know and trust in His love," John says.

What should I do after knowing and trusting? After going back to the Cross and experiencing it for myself, and trusting in God's utter and complete love for me, what should I do next?

Stay there. Do not move. "Abide," John says. "Abide in love." (1 John 4:16) The word is an agricultural term, the key image being the roots of a tree sinking deep down into the soil. A strong tree can't be budged when it abides deeply in rich soil.

And so it must be of you: In order to love others, you MUST experience His love personally, and abide in His love daily. Go back to the cross, and stay there. Then, and ONLY then, will you be able to love others in authentic relationships. "We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 12:21)