

The Way Of Love: God's Love Shown In Our Love

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[0 : 00] Thank you for coming. If it's your first time with us, I'm Jesse, one of the pastors here at Havelock One Harbor. And we are in 1 John. We've been in there for quite a few weeks now.

This is our second to last week. We've been pushing through. And so what this is, is looking at 1 John. 1 John is this letter. It's this letter written by the Apostle John, written to the church. And it was a church community that was in danger of becoming rather unlike Jesus. And so even though they did lots of good things outwardly, they weren't doing the things that they were supposed to be doing, right? And so John is, he's giving them the gospel. He's reminding them of some of the fundamentals of Christianity, right? It's that idea of like, man, it's so important to always be refining the fundamentals, as I heard one Marine sergeant put it one day. And that's important for us, right? Refining the fundamentals, getting understanding and knowing the basics of Christianity. It's great. It's not being immature. It's actually, man, the more I grow in Christ, the more I realize that's what maturity is about. It's actually remembering the basics, remembering the fundamentals, and growing in those things, and making sure we're growing in those things as our roots in our faith grow deeper and deeper and deeper. And so that's huge, and that's important. That's what John is writing to them about, that they need to be rooted in their relationship with God, right? Our faith in God isn't just a mental ascent. It's not facts to be known. It's not principles to be able to quote and respond to. It's a relationship. It's a person to dwell in and to love. It's about knowing God and obeying him and most of all, receiving God's love, right? Living in that reality of not just receiving his love one time, but receiving his love regularly on a consistent basis so that we can turn around and be a people of God's love to others. And in this passage, John goes back to that main theme. He says that some of the most profound and important things in the whole Bible about what love is and about who God is and what God is like. And so we're in 1 John 4, 7 to 21, and it begins this way. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. 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. And this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 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 has made complete or is perfected in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us.

[2 : 48] He has given us his spirit. And we have seen and testify that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment. And whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. This is God's word. And so we see this amazing statement, right? You've probably, if you've been to weddings, you've probably heard this passage quoted or portions of this passage quoted. And honestly, it's one of those things like we could just read it and we can drop the mic and go home. It's like that good and that clear. I don't know if I have too much to add to it, but you know what? Give me a chance. Give me a chance. So what John is doing, he's making

his, this plea to his fellow brothers and sisters in

Christ, fellow Christians, fellow believers. And he's saying this, guys, we need to be loving one another. That's what, that's what it means to be a Christian. It's that we're loving one another, not just on the rare occasion. Don't let it be the rare occasion that's like, hey, you know, in the past year I had this one great moment where I loved my neighbor or I loved my fellow brother in Christ or sister in Christ. Now, it's not just the rare occasion. This actually thing of loving one another, this should be defining our life. See, it's loving is not just what we should be doing.

It's actually who we are, right? We're a people of love. We're a people who have been loved and we are a people of love. And why is that? Well, it's because it is who God is. We love because love is who God is.

1 John 4, 7 to 8, he starts this thing by saying, beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. So he's saying, man, God isn't just loving, right? God does loving things. He does loving acts. We see that. But God is not just loving. God is love. It isn't something he has to do.

[5 : 29] Love isn't just something that God does sometimes. Love is the essence of who he is. And so every single one of his actions, every single one of the things that he does is a part of who he is, and it's actually a loving act. And it means it's who he is all the time. It means that his love will never run out. It is unchanging. It's without measure. And if you think about who God is, we realize that, man, it kind of makes sense that he is a God who is love, just not a God who is loving. Because in Christianity, our faith, what do we believe about God? We believe he's one God, but he's three persons. We call this the Trinity, right? He's one God, three persons. He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's a God who has existed as a community of love eternally. He's never not existed that way. And you see that in this passage. You see John talking about God, and he refers to him as the Father. And then he refers to the Son, Jesus Christ, and he refers to the Spirit. And all these three are God as individual persons, and yet they're one God. And this is why God is love. See, as the Trinity, for eternity, he has always been giving and receiving love within himself.

It's an amazing thing to think about. And what happens is God creates us, and he created us to bring us into that community of love so we could experience that love and know that love and be a part of that love. And we rebelled against him, and we failed, and we fell out of that community. And that's what the redemption story, the thing, the beautiful thing we believe about of faith in Jesus Christ is that through him, we're actually, by faith in him, we're restored into that community of love so that we could experience that love again. And to be saved by God, what John refers to here, to be saved by God is to be born of God, right? He says that. Whoever is born of God knows God and loves God because he is love. And so, as Christians, that's what we believe. We're born of God. He becomes our Father. He says, you are my kids. I am your Father. I'm your Father who loves you. And God's grace, by his grace, when he saves us, he makes us a new creation. He makes us a new person with a new heart that bears this fruit, his fruits of love in us and through us. And John's argument here isn't that by loving others we're saved. That's not what he's saying. Rather, that the person saved by God, the person that has been born of God, will love others like God has loved him. Because God's love changes us.

It is something that when we experience God's love, it's something that totally transforms us from the inside out. But here's the danger, though. We can know God, and we can even know about his love without being changed by it. See, there's a different kind of knowing. Let's say there's two types of knowing that can happen when we think about God's love. See, and I want to present it to you this way, these two types of knowing. You and I can read books about fire. And through that reading, we can come to know about fire and what it can do and its capabilities and its power, right? And in some sense, we would have a knowledge of what fire is. But the one who's been touched by the flame has a much deeper and truer knowledge of the power of fire, right? They've experienced it.

It's not just head knowledge to them. It's, hey, I've been marked by this flame. And one can also learn about the sweetness of honey. We can hear it from other people who have tasted it.

You could be told about it and yet have never tasted it yourself. And you can kind of get an idea of what honey might be like. But until honey has sat on your tongue, until you've tasted its sweetness and experienced its delights, man, you really can't say that you really know what honey is. See, the person that has tasted honey has a real true, deep knowledge of what honey is. A person that has

experienced fire and been touched by fire, they really have a good understanding of knowing what the power of fire is truly like. And so likewise, in the same way, man, we can hear about the power of God's love. We can hear about the sweetness of God's love without ever, ever having experienced it and been changed by it. And that's what this knowing God, that's what this knowing of God's love is about, right? Until God's love is experienced, until he brings you into that love and you know it and taste it and feel its power, you can't be forever changed. And when this happens, but when this happens, when God's love does come to us, when we do experience that love that transforms us, man, we do truly know it. And that's what happens at our conversion, man. It's when we experience that. God goes from this head knowledge, right, to this reality. I can remember growing up as a kid, my dad was a pastor. I grew up learning about Jesus Christ, learning about the cross, knowing all those true stories and how good God was.

[10:43] But it wasn't until I was eight years old at a church kids camp that knowing God became a reality. He went from being this person to learn about to this person to dwell in. Where I experienced his love, he poured his love into me at that young, tender age of eight. And I could, without a shadow of a doubt, I was like, oh my goodness, God is real. He's not just stories. My parents have been telling me he is real and I can't deny it. And my response was, you know what, this love is so amazing.

Lord, I believe in you, but I also want to live for you. I also want to give my life to you. I also want to sacrifice whatever it takes to honor and glorify you. It absolutely changed and transformed me. And probably many of us in this room have a similar experience in our lives where that has happened. And our prayer for those of you here today where you could say, man, I've never experienced that before. Our prayer for you today is, man, God will do something today to you where you experience his love and that amazing change will take place. See, God, he saves us by his perfect love and he saves us for perfect love. Abiding in God, dwelling in this person is an environment that we get to experience and know, this environment of perfect love. And at the very center of what it means to be a Christian is to be loved by God. At the center of what it means to be a Christian is to be loved, to know this unchanging, secure relationship of love of our Father, Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ in fellowship with the Spirit. But it's not only to be in love and dwell in love, it's also to love others. It's also to pour out God's love and let God's love pour into us and out through us to others because that's who our God is. And God is a God who gives us amazing love. So, we're meant to be a people who love others and have God's love pour out and through us. But what does that actually look like, right? What does it mean to love like God? We wouldn't know what it means that God is love unless we had some real concrete demonstration of that love. And what John tells us is, don't worry, guys, that is exactly what you and I have because God made his love known when he sent Jesus.

Jesus. Verses 9 to 10 say this, in this is love. You want to know what love is like? In this is love. The love of God was made manifest among us. God showed us what his love was like because he sent his son, his only son, into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation or the atoning sacrifice for our sins. So, what he's saying is when we look at Jesus's life and when we look at his death, we learn what God's love is like. In these short verses, what we see is we see some interesting characteristics, very true characteristics of God's love. So, let's pull some of them out.

[13:56] First, it says God sent his only son. Not that God sent one of many sons, right? It's not like God's up in heaven. I don't know if you saw this Monty Python sketch from way back in the day, but this dad comes home and he's like 40 kids, you know? He's like in the 1800s and he's like, oh, you know what?

Man, I just got laid off. We can't afford you anymore. Sorry, guys. We're going to have to sell some of you to science, you know, so we could maintain and live and some of us won't starve. No, it's not like God had this huge cache of kids to pull from and say like, hey, I'm going to send you one of my sons.

Hey, he's going to die. No big deal. I got a ton of other ones. I'm back up here. No. He sent his only son. And what does that show us? It shows us that, man, God's love gives its best. God's love is lavish.

God's love is so lavish. It doesn't hold back. It doesn't withhold and keep stuff to itself. And that's the nature of love. Love doesn't think, man, what is the least I can do? You know?

Loving my wife, I don't wake up and say, man, what's the least I can get away with with loving my wife today? You know? Love doesn't do that. No, love wakes up and it says, man, what is the best I can give? How can I love lavishly? How can I be a good friend and be a lavish friend and love them well? How can I be a husband or a wife and lavish love upon my spouse well? Godly love, it goes above and beyond. It gives lavishly. It doesn't give the leftovers, right? It's kind of like if you think about this, I mean, this would be really silly, right? When a guy, he wants to ask a girl to marry him, right? What does he do? Does he go out and buy a \$4,000 suit and then spend a hundred bucks on an engagement ring, show up and, you know, he's all fancied out and then he gets on one knee and he pulls out some plastic thing he pulled out of, you know, the gumball machine? It's like, man, that would be a little weird, wouldn't it? He spent all the money on himself and he's not giving lavishly to this person that he loves or is claiming to love. No, we oftentimes, us single guys, we show up with looking rather haggard and we try our best and, but we spent a ton of money on the engagement ring because we're showing the person we want to marry how much we value them and how much they mean to us.

[16:17] And the second thing it says here, so in one sense, man, we give lavishly. We don't give our leftovers. That's what God's love does. And the second thing it says in here, and this is love, not that we love God, but that God loved us. So the second thing we learn about God's love is that God's love initiates. And this is a huge thing. This is a tough thing. God's love initiates. He didn't wait for us to go after him. He didn't wait for us to start pursuing him. He didn't wait for us to get it together. No, God made the first move and God always makes the first move. God's love always makes the first move and it pushes us to do that as well. God's love, it's a pursuing love. God's love is an initiating love. And this is a tough one. Man, it is so much easier to reciprocate love than to kind of walk out on a limb and to initiate love, especially in conflict. Think about that. It's way more natural to wait for the other person to make the first move. When me and my wife get in arguments, I know it's hard to believe. I know it's hard to believe. But when me and my wife, we get into arguments, we retreat into our corners, right? It's the natural thing we want to do. And we sit there and we, I don't know about her, but I stew over what's happened. I think about all the ways she's been wrong, right? And I'm just waiting for her to come and say, oh, Jess, man, I just realized

I had this huge wake-up call. I was, I am so sorry. I repent, right? But that's what we wait to do. And so because, and when no one's willing to initiate, what happens is the conflict never resolves. And oftentimes, unfortunately, especially in Christian marriages, this shouldn't happen. What happens is because no one is willing to make the first move, to put themselves in the place of weakness. The conflict never gets resolved. And it actually, conflict just doesn't like silently go away. It stews and it builds. And it becomes septic in our hearts and our souls. Man, but God's love shows us that actually, man, in our relationships, whether you're married or our friendships, whatever it may be, when there's conflict, man, be the initiator. Don't wait. Stop and think, okay, what did I do to cause this problem? How can I own up to it? And then you go and you initiate and you go and you repent to the person. Initiating is, isn't easy. It's awkward. I'm, I prepared this sermon, right? I was done Friday. And Saturday, we are at the pool. My, my son was having a birthday party and his friends were splashing around. And we were living in this complex with this community pool. And there's these guys, these, these British guys, they're out down here coaching some, some soccer teams. And so me and Hales have been like, man, it would be so cool to make friends with them and get to know them. And so we're sitting poolside and I'm, you know, thinking about stuff. And Hales is like, man, you know, we're going to have some pizza. Why don't we go and like invite them to have some pizza with us and all that. And I'm just like, I don't want to. And, and thankful my wife's prodding. I got the pizza and it just worked out. It was actually cheaper to get like more pizza than it was like, instead of buying three mediums, it was cheaper to get four mediums. And so we had enough to go around and we invited the guys over and that's it. But the thing that I didn't want to do it is when I was lazy, I just wanted to sit poolside and check out and not be bothered by people. And the other thing is like, I thought it would be awkward. I'm thinking like, gosh, I'm going to go up to these guys and say like, Hey, you want to, you want to join us for food? There was a little part of me that was insecure. So like, man, what if they said no, this would be a really awkward conversation, right? So I didn't want to, I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to initiate, but thankfully it happened. And we had this great time with them and we got to build this like friendship with them, this, this bridge and, and who knows where that's going to go. But that's what love does. Man, love initiates. It doesn't step back.

[20 : 21] It doesn't keep people at a distance. It moves towards them and initiates. So we see that one God's, we see in this passage one, God's love is absolutely lavish. It gives its best. God's love, it initiates. It's willing to make the first move. And the third and third and final thing we see here is that God's love is sacrificial, right? Jesus, it says it, he came to be the propitiation, the sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. God's love does whatever it takes. It removes every obstacle out of the way for reconciliation.

Jesus came to sacrifice himself for us. He's the propitiation for our sins, right? It says he's, he's the atoning sacrifice. He's a sacrifice of atonement, right? And to atone, you need to put those, to atone is two words, at one. So this sacrifice, what, what he is on about, he sacrificed himself for us so that we could be at one with him. See, the goal of love is always oneness. The goal of love is always reconciliation. The goal of love is always relational restoration. And we get to be one with God, and that's what Jesus was on about. Just like the Trinity is one, he wanted to call us back into that oneness. And because our sins kept us from being in that relationship and living in that reality, Jesus came and sacrificed himself. He sacrificed himself to remove our sin so we could be reconciled to God. And so we see God's love so clearly in the life and death of Jesus, right? And imagine what that would look like if we lived in that reality. If we lived that perfectly, God's love that, man, we were giving our best, and that we were initiating, and that we were removing every obstacle, we're doing whatever it takes to restore and be in relationship with one another. What if life looked like that? And everybody did that? Man, that would be a beautiful picture, wouldn't it? That would be a beautiful thing. They would, you would, people would look and say, man, these are people who are at joy and at peace and are one with one another. There's no conflict. That's crazy. Now, while that's the target we should be aiming for and hope for and want, I mean, probably all of you are thinking the same thing I am.

Like, that's never going to happen, dude. Like, you know, we fall well short of that. But this shouldn't lead us to give up. It shouldn't lead us to just say, you know what, we'll never attain that perfection, so we're going to just stop trying.

Because the truth is, is that, man, God is patiently and slowly perfecting his love in us. God is perfecting his love in us. Verses 16 to 18 say this, so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, or God's love is made complete among us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because he is, because as he is, also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. So we see from the get-go that the Father's love comes to us by faith in Jesus. But we also spend our lives here on earth growing in that love, or being perfected in that love, or seeing that love come to completion in us over time. And this isn't a slide on God's love. It's not like God saves us and put his love into us, and it's kind of an imperfect love that he has to refine and get right. No, God's love never changes. It's perfect. It doesn't need to change. Rather, rather, what's happening is our understanding and our experiencing of God's love is changing.

[24 : 19] We're understanding it more. We're experiencing more. We're growing in it more. Its measure of it is growing in us more. And so one of the ways God's love is referred to throughout the Bible is it's called steadfast, right? God's love is often called steadfast. It's a steadfast love, which is to say, man, it's faithful. It's unchanging. It's never ending. It's not going to stop. Faithful is an attribute of his love, but it's an attribute that we rarely see in our own lives. Faithful love is a rare thing between people. Proverbs has that saying, a faithful man is hard to find, right? That's true.

Faithful man is very hard to find. Don't look up here. I wish I could be that. By God's grace, he's making me more faithful, but I'm not there yet. Faithful love is a rare thing. It's a rare thing between people. Divorce rates prove this. I'm not here to shame you if you've been divorced. Man, God's grace can redeem that and cover that. But man's kind love, it's fickle, right? As creatures, we have to realize our love is very imperfect. It's fickle, and it is changing. It's not like God's love that's faithful. And we need to realize that as we look around and we live life and we see all around us not steadfast love, not faithful love, but rather unfaithful love, inconsistent love. When we look around that, we need to realize that takes a toll on our soul. It takes a toll on our minds.

See, when we are constantly experiencing the fickle, unfaithful love of mankind, it leads us to want to run from love. And when we run from love, what we do is we retreat into fear. That's what happens to us.

We get cynical. But this passage points out the more real God's faithful love is to us, the more we abide in his faithful love, the more full we are of it, the more that fear is driven out.

See, I want you to picture this glass of muddy water, right? Like, we can be tainted with fear, this fear of love. And this glass of muddy water, how do you get the mud out, you know?

[26 : 34] Well, you just keep pouring pure water into it. And the more pure water that gets poured into it, the more the mud overflows and filters out of the glass until all that's left is pure water.

And in the same way, God pours his pure love into us and pushes out the muddiness of fear in our hearts. Is it a big deal that we do this? Is it a big deal to be free of fear to love? Well, I think it is. And here's why. See, fear is a primal motivator in us. Man, it drives us to two things.

It drives us to punish ourselves or it drives to punish others. And here's what I mean by that. Check this out. So fear, when we think about the fear of punishing ourselves, when we make mistakes, when there's an issue, there's a problem, we say, I'm the problem.

I'm the issue here. And so what we do as Christians is when we sin, we hold on to guilt and shame as a way of punishing ourselves and saying we're not worthy of being forgiven. And we begin to hate ourselves and we devalue ourselves. We don't see ourselves as made in the image of God, loved by him.

And so what that can lead to is that can lead to us running and hiding, just like Adam and Eve did, in their guilt and their shame. They ran away from God and hid from him. And we run and hide from him and we run and hide from community. We put ourselves into isolation. And it also leads to a lot of things and hating ourselves. As a pastor, I've seen horrible things, people cutting themselves as a way of saying, I'm unworthy. I'm not able to be loved. I'm hating myself. I'm inflicting punishment on myself for the things I've done. People become addicted to various substances as a way of punishing themselves.

[28 : 22] And of course, the worst is when they can't take it anymore, they just check out and take their own lives. And that's one aspect of fear, what it does. It drives us to punish ourselves. And the other way, that fear, what it does, it drives us to punish others. We see them as the problem. Other people, other problem, not us. And so we begin to hate others. And we begin to blame them for the problems that we're experiencing and for the pain and the hurt in our lives. And so we begin to act out against them. We begin to want to punish them for what they're doing to us, what we perceive what they're doing to us. And so in some ways, we try to take control measures to make sure they can't hurt us anymore or to get what we want. And usually that works itself out in our relationships. We use manipulation or we use might. Okay? Manipulation. One of the things that we could do, we could be withholding. Right? Oh, you want to act that way? Okay. I'm just going to distance myself from you.

I'm going to cut you off emotionally. That's one way that could happen. Another way is verbal and emotional abuse. We go into tirades. We tear people down with our words. We accuse them of things or we gossip about them and slander, slander their names. I want to ask us, whether if you're in a relationship, you're a friend or a parent or a spouse, whatever it may be, here's the way we can tear people down with our words. You are a...what comes next?

Are you going to belittle them? Are you going to tear them down? Are you going to speak a life-giving word over them? Or are you going to speak something harsh and mean over their lives? Or we say things like, man, what were you thinking? There's a good shaming phrase, you know? What were you thinking?

Which is really saying, like, man, if you only thought like I thought, you wouldn't be so stupid. Or why do you always dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot? Or why would you even think about blah, blah, blah, blah, blah?

Fill in the blank. Finish that phrase. These are horrible things that come out of our mouths that don't bring life. They don't push people to the love of God. They don't...our kids don't hear those things and be like, yeah, man, dad, that was really good wisdom. Thank you for calling me an idiot.

[30 : 47] Dad is going to set me straight in this moment right now. It doesn't do that. All it does, it creates a scar and a wound in their hearts, right? And the same thing happens to all of us. So there's the emotional thing. And then the other thing is might, right? You're in a position of authority and you abuse your authority. Or your position of strength. You're stronger than the other person, so you abuse it.

You take what you want by strength. And that could be physical abuse. And none of those things are good. None of those things show godly love. It doesn't pull people into love. It doesn't pull us

into love.

Actually, they're just things motivated by fear. It just proves that we're fearful people who need to be poured into by the love of God to push those things out from us. And when we think about it, when we look about it, when we look at it, God isn't that way at all. God does not act that way.

God doesn't operate that way. God doesn't use measures of manipulation or control to change who we are. He doesn't overpower us with his might and punish us cruelly so that we become the children he wants us to be. Now, that doesn't mean God doesn't discipline us as his children. God does do that.

But he doesn't punish us. And there's a big difference there. God's discipline isn't God's punishment. God's discipline to his children isn't like his punishment. See, in his discipline, his motive is love. The environment of that discipline is patience, right? He's not expecting us to change overnight. The words he uses are grace-filled and gentle and kind. The Bible says his loving kindness leads us to repentance. And his goal is our long-term transformation.

[32 : 25] It's not his own immediate convenience. It's not like we do something wrong and God's embarrassed and he was like, and he lashes out at us, you know, which to be honest, we can do as parents sometimes.

Or for, man, I just need some peace and quiet. And so we yell at the kids, right? And God's not like that. He sees our long-term transformation. He sees the end goal in mind. That's what his loving discipline looks like. And that's how he loves us. These are very different motives.

than what we're driven by. So what's the remedy for fear? Well, I hope we've seen and understood this, that it's God's love, right? The remedy for fear in our hearts that causes us to do all kinds of bad things to one another. The remedy for fear is God's love. And the longer you and I remain in God's love and dwell in his love and know his love, the more it's light, the light of his love chases away the shadows of fear in our hearts. God's love, it frees us from fear in order to love him more and to love others more. It's a beautiful thing. See, fear makes us want to retreat, retreat from being fully known.

So we put up walls and barriers. We put distance between us and others. We make ourselves less available or even less emotionally available, less checked in. And from a distance, man, to be honest, from there, it's just so much easier to judge and hate and punish people. When we're not in their lives, when we keep them at arm's length. And all this does is we hate and judge people. It makes us want to retreat more. It just puts more fear in our hearts. But God's love is the opposite. It doesn't make us want to retreat. It makes us want to advance towards others. And when we live this way, we make God's known love in this world. And that's my fourth and final point here is I think what John is making is God makes his love known as we love others like Jesus did. The second part of verse 17, it says, because as he is, so also are we in this world. Another way of saying that is we're going to be like Jesus in this world. See, our best response to the world's unbelief is showing them a community that genuinely loves one another. Not a community that is living out fearful motives, but is living in God's love and living out God's love towards one another. See, plenty of people didn't believe in God before the theory of evolution came around, right? So here's the thing, having a response to every scientific or philosophical objection to the existence of God and the truth of his word, that's not what is going to bring revival and renewal in people's hearts. See, our love and our love for one another displaying God's love has always been the church's best apologetic. John 13 35 says this, by this all people will know that you are my disciples.

If you have love for one another, how are people going to know we're Jesus' disciples? How are they going to look at us and see like, man, I can see Jesus in those people? Is it by having all the right answers? It's by loving one another, loving one another like Jesus loved us, right?

[35 : 35] Now again, that's a nice sentiment to believe in. It's a hard one to live out. It's easy to love those that are like us, or it's easy to love those that we like. It's also easy to love those that love us, but it's not so easy when people don't like us or people are different to us or they're difficult.

But here's the thing. God's love doesn't run away from those people. God's love ran towards those people. God's love tells us to initiate, to pursue, to move towards those kind of people.

I just want to tell a story about myself, throw myself under the bus. Man, for many years of my life as a Christian, I'm not saying this bragging. I'm actually very ashamed of this. I had to repent many times. Many years of my life, I sat at a distance from LGBT people. Man, I judged them.

I dehumanized them. I sat back and said, you know what? Those people are the problem in this world. And it was easy to do that, to sit back and make them public enemy number one in my heart.

It made me feel better about myself, all right? The irony is I had a lot of sins in my own closet, so to speak. And I could sit back and judge them and feel a lot better about who I was.

[36 : 49] man, I think of some of the things I said about those people. I think about some of the things I said to those people. And I grieve that. I'm ashamed of that. Now, by God's grace, I know he's forgiven me of those things. I've repented of those things. But man, I hurt people with my words. Worse than that, and this is where I really, I neglected to have opportunity to show those people God's love, to show those people that God loves them right where they're at. And I grieve because I wasn't pulling them towards God at all. I was actually pushing them away. I wasn't offering them hope in Jesus. I wasn't offering them unconditional love. I wasn't offering them friendship. I wasn't offering them a friendship that says, you know, I'll open my life to you. You could take a look and see what God's love has done for me and has done in me. I closed myself off to them. I was giving in to my own prejudice and judgment and condemnation. And so, we could do this with anybody. Reduce people to their mere desires and their actions, what they do in their life. We could sit back and look and be just not moved towards them in love.

But God's love doesn't do that. God's love teaches us, man, people are so much more than just their desires and their actions and what they do. We're complex creatures. We all have a life story. And that life story that we have, it's worth getting to know. Man, getting to know others takes time, but that's the way of love. It's going to be inconvenient, but that's the way of love.

It's going to be awkward at times. That's the way of love. God gives his best. God gives us his best. He initiated with us. He removed every obstacle. And he didn't just do it for a certain type of person. He did it for sinners, like you and I, every single one of us. By God's grace, you know what? Even though I was mean-hearted, prejudiced, cold, and hurt a lot of people, man, he's making me less and less like that person every single day. He's making me less and less like the person that wants to stand back and judge others based on what they do. He wants, he's working in me more and more this heart that says, you know what? Man, see them as made in God's image. See them as people to be loved and move towards them and show them my love. Man, open your heart to them.

[39 : 20] Invite them into your life because it's in our lives. As we open our lives to them, as we open our hearts to them, what they're able to do is they're able to see the love we have for one another and they'd be able to see what Jesus is like. That's our best apologetic, guys.

And if he can do it with me, he can do it with anyone. So here's the thing. If you're here in a Christian, I want to ask you, how does God make himself known? Well, God's an invisible God, but he chose to make himself visible through his church. People cannot see God, but they can see God in God's people. And I want to ask us, man, as a church, loving one another, how are we doing? What kind of image are we putting forward? What kind of picture of God are we painting to a watching world?

Are we loving like Jesus loved us? Are we full of God's love so that we're moving toward people, regardless of whether they're like us or not? Or are we retreating in fear and keeping people at a distance? See, the irony is that there's only one thing that we should be afraid of, and that was the punishment that Jesus faced on the cross. Because you and I were some screwed up people, right? And there's punishment waiting for sin. But if you've been saved, if you've been born of God, then that punishment has already been handed out. You don't have to experience what Jesus did. man, Jesus in the garden, he was afraid. I mean, he was praying and he was sweating drops of blood, he was so afraid. Because fear has to do with punishment. And he knew he was going to face the wrath of God, the unsurpassable punishment. And that is something anyone should fear who plans on facing it.

And I want you to hear me. If you're here and not a child of God, you wouldn't call yourself a believer. I want you to know this, and I don't mean this mean-hearted. You are God's enemy.

[41 : 29] And you have something to fear. But I also want you to hear this. Man, Jesus Christ loved you enough that while you were his enemy, he came and gave his life for you so that you could be his brother. So you could be a son of God loved by Heavenly Father.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you for your love. I thank you for your love that's a lavish love. I thank you for a love that didn't wait for us to get it together, but a love that initiated. You sent your only son, your most precious gift to this world to die on our behalf. And so, Heavenly Father, I pray for all of us here that are believers that are following you. Lord God, as we look to your love, as we look to the cross, that we would be reminded how amazing your love is. And as we look, that your love would pour into our hearts and fill us afresh and anew today, and we would be changed and

transformed by it so that we can go and love others. I pray for my friends here who came. Maybe they're skeptics.

They don't believe in you yet, Jesus, but they're searching, and they want to know. What the truth is, Heavenly Father, they would experience your love. They would experience your love right now. So they could respond to that love and believe and have faith in you and know the most amazing love there has ever been. That is never going to change. That is never going to run out. A steadfast, faithful, good love.