

## Get into the Study



5 MINUTES

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 58 of the PSG: “How have you seen love demonstrated lately?”



### ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):

**In advance,** bring a box of encouragement cards or note cards. Distribute to group members and ask members to write an encouraging note to someone of the same gender in the group. Then exchange cards.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 59 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of demonstrating God’s love by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

## SESSION 5

# Sure of God’s Love

### THE POINT

God’s love is seen when we love others as He has loved us.

### LIFE CONNECTION

One of the most overused and abused sentences in the English language is “I love you.” It is often used to describe an emotional rush a person may feel in the moment, but that “love” is often nothing more than words or a feeling. God’s love is different. He put His love on display in Jesus, and we experience that love as we trust Him. The reality of that love is also seen in the way God transforms us to love others even as He does.

### THE PASSAGES

1 John 4:7-13,19-21

### THE SETTING

Perhaps more than any other New Testament book, 1 John focuses on assurance (1 John 5:13). John presented a series of tests to give confidence to believers that they were Christians and to prove the false teachers were not Christians. John had previously established that any real relationship to God (knowing God, remaining in Him, being born of God) involves obedience to His commands—God’s all-inclusive commands are that we love Him totally and love one another.

## 1 JOHN 4:7-10

**7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.**

**8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.**

**9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.**

**10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

**1** ▶ *Verse 7.* The fact God sent Jesus shows His love for us. John demonstrated that loving one another is a command genuine Christians follow. The New Testament contains at least two grand statements on love: Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13 and John's statement in 1 John 4:7-14. John related love to these concepts:

1. The true light that already shines (1 John 2:8-10)
2. The demonstration of eternal life (3:14-15)
3. God's loving nature and activity in Christ and in Christians (4:7-12)

In 2:7-11, John argued that love is a new and an old commandment. In 3:11-18, he stressed love is evidence we possess eternal life and are in the light. Now in 4:7-12, John emphasized that love is a duty. He supplied four reasons:

1. Love comes from God (as revealed to us in Jesus Christ as sacrificial love, v. 7)
2. God Himself is love (v. 8)
3. God loved us in Christ (vv.10-11)
4. God continues to love in and through us (v.12)

John again addressed his audience as **Beloved**. The Greek verb rendered **let us love** is used ten times in 1 John (3:11,14,18,23; 4:7,10,12,19; 5:2 [twice]). John began his command to **love one another** by stating that love has its origin in God. Our English translation unfortunately conveys less force by adding the word **let**. John was not merely giving permission or expressing a wish but stating God's command; this is not apparent in English. The beginning of love can be found in the love shown by God. The true nature of love can be found by considering what love means in the activity of God. The statement "God is love" (v. 8) reveals that all His activity is loving activity; whatever actions God takes, He does so in love. When

**RECAP:** Some people may wonder where God is in all the chaos. Others are tempted to question God's goodness. The presence of human hatred and violence, however, in no way negates God's goodness and love. Moreover, the world's concept of love cannot compare with God's love. I am referring to God's love that was on display when He gave His One and only Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world. We can do nothing to deserve His love, but He loves us anyway. God's love abides forever, and He wants us to be sure of His love for us.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to "The Point" on page 59 of the PSG: "God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us."

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God to help the group understand the love of God. Thank Him for demonstrating love for us so that we can love others.

## Study the Bible

### 1 John 4:7-10



10 MINUTES

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 4:7-10 on page 60 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **1** on pages 61-63 to help explain how God's love was revealed among us.

**RECAP:** John had already spoken twice on the theme of love in this epistle (1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18). Now he was dealing with the topic for the third time. When Scripture addresses a matter even once, it is important, but when God inspired the biblical writers to address a topic repeatedly, we should really sit up and take notice.

Love is the very nature of God. The apostle John wrote, "Love is of God," and love comes from God "for God is love." Love is not just another attribute among many; rather, it is God's very nature from which all other attributes proceed.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 60 of the PSG: "How do you know God loves you?"

*Alternate: How would you explain to someone that God is love?*

believers express God's love, it signifies (1) we have been **born of God** and (2) we know God and act like Him.

**Verse 8.** John emphasized his point about love by stating the opposite: those who don't love are the exact opposite of those addressed in verse 7. This is the third time John has described those who don't love:

- ▶ They are not of God (3:10).
- ▶ They remain in death (3:14).
- ▶ They don't know God (4:8).

The absence of love is the proof that although one may claim knowledge of God, that apparent knowledge is not real. Jobes wrote: "The failure to love is not simply an ethical failing, but means that one remains in the darkness of sin, apart from salvation."<sup>1</sup> One cannot come into a real relationship with a loving God without being transformed into a loving person.

Why should we love? John revealed the reason: because **God is love**. These three words cannot be reversed to read "love is God." Jesus defined biblical love as loving God completely and loving others as you love yourself (Matt. 22:37-39). Jesus said these two commands sum up the Law and Prophets (our Old Testament). Yarbrough wrote: "Loving other people and knowing God are components of one inseparable whole: 'Love alone opens access to all God's words and works, and whoever lacks love is blind to God.'"<sup>2</sup> John revealed three great expressions of the nature of God.

1. God is light (1 John 1:5).
2. God is love (4:8).
3. God is Spirit (John 4:24).

**Verse 9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us:** the coming of Jesus is the supreme example of love; it demonstrates God's own love *to us* and *for us*. Further, it is the visible revelation of our experience of God's love. Jesus' coming is the means by which we can see God's love, a love that stretches back into time past and forward into eternity. John expressed the uniqueness of God's relationship to Jesus: **God sent his only begotten Son into the world**. In one sense, all Christians are God's sons or daughters because of their being born from God (1 John 3:1). But John described Jesus' relationship as **only begotten** or "unique." Christianity is exclusive in that the Bible reveals there

is only one way to God. Jesus said: “I am the way ...” (John 14:6). John further expressed Jesus’ action as for the benefit of others: **that we might live through him**. As Christians, we know we are loved because God sent Jesus to show us love by providing what only He can provide: salvation. When we are saved through God’s love expressed in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we live through Him.

**Verse 10.** John revealed the nature of God’s love. There is no explanation or definition of true love that does not start with God’s love. This deep kind of love involves sacrifice. The term **propitiation** (see discussion of 1 John 2:2 in the first session of this study) reflects God’s forgiveness of sin. Love begins not with us but with God. We know we are loved because God sent Jesus. ◀

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## 1 JOHN 4:11-13

**11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.**

**12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.**

**13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.**

**2▶ Verse 11.** God’s love is evident when we love others as He has loved us. Verses 11-13 assure us of God’s love and indicate how our love for Him should result in our love for others. While verses 7-10 focus more on the nature of God, verses 11-12 call attention to our knowledge of God and our resulting behavior. Verse 13 focuses on assurance of salvation.

Each time in 1 John the writer used **beloved** as an address, he revealed a spiritual truth. (See session 4, 1 John 4:1, for a fuller discussion of this.) The literary structure of verse 11 helps us understand its meaning. This is a conditional sentence, usually translated into English as an “if ... then” statement (although sometimes, as in this verse, the “then” is absent in English). In this case, if the first part of the sentence is true, the second part must also be true. Because John had no doubts about the truth of the first part of the verse, a better way to translate it into English is *since* **God so loved us**.

**RECAP:** God’s children have no reason to be uncertain regarding God’s love for them, especially when that love was displayed so clearly on the cross. We can’t receive salvation without putting our faith and trust in Christ; we cannot put our trust in Him without knowing what He did for us on the cross; and we can’t appreciate what Christ did for us on the cross without also seeing God’s sacrificial love for us. Since God loved us in this way, we know He withholds no good thing from us as His adopted children. You can be sure of God’s love.

**TRANSITION:** We know we are loved because God sent Jesus. In the next verses, we see that we must love others.

## Study the Bible

### 1 John 4:11-13



10 MINUTES

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 4:11-13 on page 62 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** We have already seen in verse 7 the command to “love one another.” John repeated it twice more in verses 11-12. With this call to love comes great responsibility. We are to love others as God has loved us. God has loved us with a changeless, self-sacrificing love. God still loves us in the same way today, and He seeks to display that love through us.

As we saw in verses 8-9, God revealed His love when His Son, Jesus, became the sacrifice for our sins. He took away our sin, but He didn't just take away the bad; He gave to us as well: He gave us life, “that we might live through him” (v. 9). We are to live in Him and through Him, which means we are to allow others to see His love in and through us. To love with God's love gives evidence that we have a relationship with the One who displays His love through us. To state that negatively: “He that loveth not knoweth not God” (v. 8).

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **2** on pages 63-65 to help explain the result of loving God.

In the remainder of this verse John drove his point home: since God has loved us, **we ought also to love one another**. Believers cannot experience God's love and remain unmoved by the obligation to love other people in the same way God loves us. The basis for our love for one another is God's love for us (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:19). In other words, since God demonstrated His love for us in Jesus, the consequences for Christians are unavoidable: we are expected to love one another. John expressed this truth as a requirement, not an option as many people today misunderstand it.

This requirement might remind us of Jesus' command: “Freely ye have received; freely give” (Matt. 10:8). This requirement could also be presented in a three-part formula in which each truth builds on the previous ones:

1. God's love led to Jesus' actions.
2. Jesus' actions resulted in believers' salvation.
3. Believers' salvation is revealed in our love for one another.

We must love one another. But what if we don't? John was quite clear in his expectation with these words: **if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another**.

**Verse 12.** How do we know if we love one another? John's answer is: God's love is seen in our love. John's statement **No man hath seen God at any time** is certainly true in a physical sense. Moses only saw God's back, and even that had such an impact on his physical appearance he had to wear a veil because God's glory shone in his face (2 Cor. 3:13). However, when people see us loving one another, they *do* see God, at least in a spiritual sense. Only when believers love their fellow Christians do they more fully experience the love of God in their own hearts and know the presence of God within them. This does not mean Christian duty is summed up in merely loving one another, but loving one another is indispensable for true believers. True religion, Christianity, comes only through believing in Jesus Christ and practicing His command to love one another. John revealed this: when we love others, God's love for us extends its full effect in our lives and our love for God reaches its full expression.

What is the result of loving others? John gave two answers in verse 12:

1. **God dwelleth in us.**
2. **His love is perfected in us.**



First, as previously discussed, the truth that God abides in us (and we in Him) is highly significant in 1 John as evidenced by the frequency John used this expression. In chapter 2 (especially in vv. 24-27), John wrote that the false prophets had left the church; genuine believers remained in the church. The permanent relationship between God and believers is repeatedly stressed in the New Testament. Second, by loving one another, God's love is **perfected** within His people. The word translated *perfected* refers to being mature or bringing something to the desired end. Jesus used a related word in His victory cry on the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30), referring to having completed or brought to the desired end the sacrifice necessary for our salvation. While our actions can't complete the act of salvation (Jesus did that on the cross), our actions reflect whether we are saved or not. We must love one another. "The expression of God's love among believers is important because it renders visible the God who in himself cannot be seen (4:12)." <sup>3</sup>

**Verse 13.** John stated that the reason for assurance is our reception of the Holy Spirit. John reminded believers that the Holy Spirit's presence is a gift that can't be earned by getting rid of all the sin in our lives or doing certain activities, just as we don't earn salvation; rather it is **given** to us. The Holy Spirit is the assurance of both God's living in us and our living in God as John expressed in this way: **we dwell in him, and he in us.** ◀

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## 1 JOHN 4:19-21

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

**20** If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

**21** And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

**3 ▶ Verse 19.** We know we are loved because God sent Jesus (1 John 4:7-10). God's love is evident in many ways; most of all God's love was demonstrated in what Jesus Christ did on the cross, dying for us so that we might live for Him. Because Jesus loved us, His indwelling presence in our lives changes us and helps us become like Him. As

**RECAP:** Our love for others is proof of God's love in us. Love is the fruit of His indwelling Spirit. God is perfect in His love; He lacks nothing. But God's "love is perfected" only when that love flows through us. He has chosen to use His people as channels of His love. We are to present ourselves to Him daily as instruments of His self-sacrificing, continual love. Therefore, when we love others, we cooperate with God's redemptive plan for the world so that others can be sure of God's love for them.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 64 of the PSG: "**How does God's love help us love others?**"

*Alternate: When have you seen love really make a difference?*

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that we must not hate.

## Study the Bible

1 John 4:19-21



15 MINUTES

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 4:19-21 on page 64 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **3** on pages 65-67 to help explain the background for John's command to love.

**RECAP:** John left no gray areas, nor did he sugarcoat his words. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." A true Christian will not be filled with selfish hatred toward another brother or sister in Christ. To believe otherwise completely contradicts the gospel. A true Christian cannot hate another believer because God's Spirit abides in him. It is an utter impossibility. To claim faith in Christ while harboring hate is a complete insult to the character of God. God is love.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 66 of the PSG: "Where do you see evidence of hate on display in our culture?"

a result of the changes in our lives, we must love one another (vv. 11-13). In that way, God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us. Since our new birth from above results in our loving one another, logically then, we also must not hate (vv. 19-21). These actions assure us of God's love—to us, in us, and through us. These verses in 1 John 4 remind us we can be sure of God's love. They also remind us that we do not have to depend upon ourselves for the love that helps us become more like God. The indwelling presence of Jesus in our lives and the anointing of His Holy Spirit lead us, equip us, and empower us to demonstrate God's love to others. The more we realize how much God loves us, the more we will realize our obligation to love Him in return.

At the beginning of verse 19 John wrote **we love**. Later, some scribes who copied John's letter added an object to that statement. Some scribes added "God"; others added "Him." Still others, considering the context of the verse and what follows, added "one another" or "others" to John's original. Based on his writing style, scholars recognize that John characteristically left the meaning open—so it can mean both "we love God" and "we love others" at the same time. John probably had both understandings in mind.

The remainder of verse 19 reveals the reason we love; **we love him, because he first loved us**. All of God's activity, from creation through Jesus' earthly ministry, continuing even to God's activity now, is motivated and demonstrated by His love for all His creation, especially human beings. That love was not an afterthought; it was not a "Plan B." It was His design to love from the very first. What an amazing truth: before creation began, God **first loved us**. What implications does this have for our lives?

**Verse 20.** Love for God not only expresses itself in confidence toward Him (v. 17), with no fear (v. 18), but it also expresses itself in loving concern for others (v. 19). The perfect love that drives out fear also drives out hatred (v. 20).

Part of John's purpose in writing 1 John was to refute the claims made by false teachers. To do this, John usually began referencing these false teachers with similar phrases such as: **if a man say**. John's letter gives a series of claims made by some of the false teachers attempting to mislead the church.

1. Claiming fellowship with God while walking in darkness is a lie, a *moral lie* (1:6; 2:4).
2. Claiming to know and possess the Father while denying the Son is a lie, a *doctrinal lie* (rejecting the deity of Jesus, 2:22-23).
3. Claiming to love God while hating others is a lie, a *social lie* (denying social responsibility for one another, 4:20).

What the false teachers of John's day claimed (and some false teachers today claim) is that love for God does not mean that Christians must love each other (much less their enemies, Matt. 5:44). God however, through His Holy Spirit inspired John to refute this false claim. **If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.** Further, John revealed the reasoning behind that statement: **for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?** If we can't love those whom we can see, how can we love God whom we can't see? *John's answer is that our love for God is revealed in and fulfilled by our loving relationships with others.* Verse 20 reflects verse 12 as it reveals the truth of John's logic. A genuine relationship with God is reflected by a believer's lifestyle; it *must* result in following God's commands (2:3-4; 5:3). We must not hate people.

**Verse 21.** To stress the importance of God's truth, John repeated God's command from verse 11, substituting **his brother** for "one another." The Greek New Testament frequently, as here, uses **brother** for Christians of both genders.

The kind of *love* for God that does not recognize the obligation to love others falls far short of being real love for Him, since it fails to obey His commands. John might have been referring to Jesus' command at the last supper: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35; see also 1 John 2:7-8). People who express outward devotion to God by word or ritual, yet fail to love others, are deluding themselves. We must not hate. God's love is demonstrated when we love others as He loved us. Therefore, we can be sure of God's love, His love *for* us, *in* us, and *through* us. What actions will you take this week to demonstrate God's perfect love in your relationships with others? ◀

1. Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 190.  
 2. Robert W. Yarbrough (quoting A. Schlatter), *1-3 John* in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 236.  
 3. *Ibid.*, 245.

**RECAP:** Love overcomes hate. With so much hate in the world today, it is paramount that Christians love one another. But our love should not stop with other Christians. Love must go out into the world and seek to win the lost to Christ. Christ came in human flesh because He loved us (John 3:16). He gave His life out of love for the lost, and we are to follow His example. We are to love the sinner. We are to love the downcast and broken. We are to love the weak and lonely. We are to love the sick and needy. We are to love "the least of these" (Matt. 25:45).

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 66 of the PSG: "**How has our group helped us learn to love better?**"

*Alternate: How did God demonstrate love through the life and ministry of Jesus?*

**DO:** Direct group members to complete "Engage" on page 66 of the PSG to help reinforce "The Point."



**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):**

Distribute paper, colored pencils, scissors, glue, glitter, and other art supplies to your group members. Ask everyone to create a visual representation of love—something that communicates the idea of God's love. Examples would be a cross or a heart. Then close with prayer, thanking God for His love.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to “The Point” for this session: **“God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us.”**

**ENGAGE**

**Use the space below to communicate what love looks like to you. Draw a symbol, tell a story, make a list, create a definition, and so on. If time allows, share your creation with others.**

## LIVE IT OUT

God's love is seen when we love others as He has loved us. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Examine your life.** Are there people in your life whom you have a difficult time loving? Make a list and begin to pray for them.
- ▶ **Align your life.** Following up on your prayer list, look for ways to demonstrate love by serving those individuals. Write an activity, a time, and a place. Then invite someone to hold you accountable for loving action.
- ▶ **Make a difference in someone's life.** Lead out this week in helping your group do something for someone in need. You could put together care packages for the homeless, volunteer at a local food pantry, or find a family in need and minister to them.

## Live It Out



5 MINUTES

**READ:** Direct group members to page 67 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

## Wrap It Up

**SUMMARIZE:** Read or restate this idea from page 66 of the PSG:

*Practice love like the Good Samaritan who willingly gave to meet the needs of a stranger (Luke 10:30-35). This kind of love changes the world. And let's help others be sure of God's love for them.*

**PRAY:** Thank God for His awesome love. Ask Him to help group members tell the story of that love to others.



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