

**“This Is Life”:** Signs of Life  
11.11.18  
1 John 4:7-21



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“Today, if Jesus asked you the same question that he asked Peter (“Do you love me?”), how would you respond? What is the importance of having loving actions which accompany our loving declarations?”*

*“Can you share with others a time(s) in your life when you God used another person to love you well for him? Share about a time(s) when God used you to demonstrate his love to another.”*

*“How is the receiving component of love critical to our ability to extend love to others?”*

*“If I loved others the way that I have been loved (instead of the way that Jesus has loved me), what would be the health of the community in which I would live?”*

*“How can you tell if your actions are motivated by fear? What are some of the qualities of your actions when they are motivated by love?”*

*“Are there things that you do which seem to flow out of an ease of God’s love for you? Are there places where your fear of not being loved is hindering your ability to love another well?”*

*“If I really knew love, perhaps I could stop being afraid of \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“Where in your life do you need to hear God say, ‘You have nothing more to fear’?”*

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### **Teaching Notes...**

Only when I am convinced that:  
My doubts won’t exclude me from faith.

Life is not about awakening each day to a new list of God-chores that I have to do before I can go outside.

Despite my inconsistencies and best efforts, I still belong--- to God and with you...

...will love secure me enough to face God, to face myself and to face you in hopes of something less demanding--- but that demands more of me!

**There is a “gospel logic” that looks something like this: Love of God leads to trust in God, which results in rest in God, and offers itself in uncomplicated obedience to God.**

God can have your obedience without your love, but obedience has never been a compliance issue. It's a trust issue. God knows that in area of your life where you are assimilating love, he will have your attention and your heart.

*“I love you.”*

it is either the deepest expression of selfless commitment or the perfect cover for self-gratification.

*“Do you love me?”*

A statement that signals our inability to receive love; to believe that we can be loved. It is a statement that suggests something has happened to cause you to question the validity of another's claims. We're suspicious of it. We are not secure in it.

Interestingly, no one who ever spent significant time with Jesus asked him that question. They didn't need to. Curiously, Jesus asked the question of another... Peter (John 21). *Was it because of Jesus' delicate psyche? Was Jesus so fragile and insecure in his messiahship that he was desperate for the validation?*

That question would not only wound him deeply, but would also become the source of his healing. Jesus' inquiry was meant to re-direct Peter's thoughts and re-calibrate his life in love.

With few exceptions, when the biblical narrative addresses the idea of God's love, it is not directing us toward becoming more competent at loving God, but about learning how to better receive his love for us.

*“May the Lord lead your hearts (remove any hindrances) into a full understanding and expression of the love of God...”* 2 Thessalonians 3:5

In light of that, I would suggest that a more appropriate prayer than, **“God help me to love you more!”**, might be, **“God, help me to better experience and respond to your love for me”**.

“*This is real love*”. “*God is love*”. John gets our attention with such emphatic statements. In a cultural context where there is so much ambiguity and “fog”, it’s almost refreshing to hear someone make such claims with such confidence, yet with such humility.

“***This is love***” [stop: grammatically, the ‘colon’ (: ) is a point of emphasis. It signals that what you are about to read is an explanation of the previous statement.] It means that you are being challenged to understand this love in contrast to all the movements/advances/claims of others under the same pretense.

Interestingly, John puts the discussion of love in the context of **atonement (make reconciliation; to forgive)**. This idea of atonement carries at least these (3) defining points of emphasis:

~ It is self-initiated. It is based on the goodness and faithfulness of the one making the promises. It always precedes any consideration of our behavior.

~ It demands a response. “*Wait a minute!*” You might contest that statement and believe that love can’t be commanded. God can say, “***This is the kind of response that is appropriate to those identified as ‘my people’ . This is the way that I have loved you. You should love like this.***” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Let’s face it: simply loving others the way that we have been loved is not always wholesome and beneficial.

~ Because it is unprovoked, it means that the covenant (the relationship being formed) is already stronger (more durable) than the wrongs committed against it, which creates an atmosphere of “security”. It says, “*I choose you and I am stubbornly committed to you and I will not be content until you learn to live “rest-fully” in that love. You have nothing more to fear.*”

### **Not being loved. It’s the one primal fear.**

Fear is what always fills that vacuum in us where love has been deficient. Anywhere in our experiences where there is a breach of love, we adopt a *false persona (false self)*. We have to, because the person that we really are is presumed to be un-loveable; un-acceptable. Un-worthy.

Any area of your life that demands that you perform develops within you a personality that is shaped by fear and shame and a firm commitment to self-protection.

**Because of the reality and mystery of the new creation (new heart), the potential for the life that we desire already resides in us through the Holy Spirit. We need not feel pressured to change in order to obtain the love for which our hearts are longing, because such love secures us enough to risk transformation.**

### **Love is to be our explanation. It is the only way of rightly measuring our progress.**

“God is love.” *How does he validate such a claim of authenticity? Through us.*

*“By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”* John 13:35

The litmus test of our experience of God: ***“Is your faith making you more loving?”***

*“No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God’s lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.”* 1 John 4:12

God’s love is made complete/completed in us. It doesn’t mean that our love is flawless in its expression, but it is fulfilling its purpose. God’s love toward and in us is producing profound measures of security and rest which is, in turn, manifesting itself in significant demonstrations of selflessness and sacrifice.

**The most “politically correct” (‘polis’, Gr. ‘of the city’) thing that we as God’s people can do is to live with and among others in ways that distinguish us and God... being holy (distinct) without being distanced and disconnected.**

Our lives together are the tangible evidence of the lingering presence of Jesus in and with us and for the world.

I think our world is desperate for transformed people. Not simply people who “know their bible”, or who can “defend the truth”, but who “know God”. Who “know love”. Whose intimate-interactions with him are producing significant expressions of love which are overcoming evil through good (Romans 12).

**If our lives are “coming together” (integrating belief and lifestyle), others will be able to look to us to see God; if not, they’ll simply look past us and dismiss him accordingly.**

We currently find ourselves right in the middle of a world that God loves and is in the process of rebuilding, renewing and restoring, one broken life at a time.

Love is intricate and demanding and messy and glorious. It is never abstract. It is never impersonal. It is never simply being able to produce the right answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” In fact, love never asks that question as a means of avoiding the practical display of goodness, but uses it as a way of broadening the possibilities for love.

**Living in the co-mission with Jesus (Matthew 28) is our response to grace (redemption). The quality of our lives is characterized by how that grace is transforming our social interactions---the ways we are ‘with’ one another.**

If we are to fulfill the “law of love” (“royal law”, James 2:8), we must be aiming for something higher than simply keeping the rules. When you are compelled by love, you will find yourself becoming the kind of people from whom the expectations of the law naturally flow.

*“How can you tell you are living in love? Living without fear?”*

**You are “spacious”.** Your life is making room for others. You are willing to let yourself out and let others in, therefore, your relationships have depth to them.

**You are less controlled by the assessment of others.** You are able to receive from another without obligation. You’re able to give to another without obligating them. You can celebrate another even when you think you deserved it. You can be compassionate toward another, instead of thinking they deserved it.

**Your experience of love prevents you from keeping lists and setting limits to your generosity.**

You are able to carry the wounds you have experienced and refuse to use those wounds as an excuse to wound others and withhold love.

**You have plenty of “emotional-capital”.** Life is less of a risk. You are free to explore, within the boundaries of “the worthy life”.