

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

“I love you”: a phrase that either celebrates the deepest level of selfless commitment we can offer or provides the perfect cover for loveless self-gratification.

“What has been your experience of love? How would you describe our culture’s understanding of love, as opposed to the God-love described in John’s writings?”

“Was love something that was offered to you or something you felt needed to be earned? How has your experience of love brought out the best in you?”

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved _____”. Think about the implications of that statement for us?”

“If you really knew me, you wouldn’t _____. ” What if God would make this statement; how do you think he would finish it? Why does John say that “if anyone keeps on sinning, he does not know God”? What is John saying that is missing from our understanding?”

“Are you convinced that you can’t be loved in your present condition? Can you imagine a transformative love of God so complete and so thorough that you could see yourself as the ‘beloved’ and not simply ‘damaged goods’?”

Teaching Notes...

In John’s brief letter, he has asks us to imagine...

... “life as we know it”, as opposed to “life as we could be experiencing it”, in relation to Jesus.

... a world where the life that belongs uniquely to him--- life, real and genuine --- is shared with us and through us to others.

... a ‘climate’ in which the prevalence of deception is so pervasive that you might reject or ignore the life being offered.

... a future in which evil is not the last word, love is and love always creates an environment of justice--- where we are set right and are now putting things back in their proper place/order.

John “pans out”, so to speak, and provides a “Google Earth” view of our faith-experience. He fixes us, immediately, in a world of unprovoked blessing, where we are meant to experience the tangible goodness of God and his good intentions for our lives, but before the “*ink dries*”, he acknowledges it to be an antagonistic world, as well.

All of these God-possibilities for life (love, friendship, marriage, sex, work, family, money) are being met with resistance from powers which **defy** God, **deface** his good world and seek to **degrade** humanity (lose who God is and who we are).

As followers of Jesus, we are all attempting to live “normally” in an “abnormal” world.

What if trusting God and living within the settled conviction of his consistent presence with and for us was actually normative?

That proceeds from a conviction that our story begins in Genesis 1, not Genesis 3. Our image-bearing status declares us “glorious” (valuable; more than) and as we wrestle, at present, with all of the ways that image has been distorted and marred, it has never been forfeited. It’s why God’s first response to sin (Adam and Eve’s devastating movement) was “pursuit”. To ensure that we knew that love was never in jeopardy.

None of us is presently “whole”.

Our pursuit of wholeness is not meant to serve as a reminder for all that we “aren’t”, but an image--- a vision--- for who God sees us becoming... of who we one day will be.

The gospel is, truly, only for the courageous.

It requires humility. It requires surrender; both of which are postures which challenge our self-reliant culture and resist the notion of self-sufficiency.

John utilizes a unique word for this “God-love” in order to distinguish it from the “knock-off” versions being offered. We were wired for love, but we only crave what we have experienced. When it comes to love, in many instances, we crave what we have not yet fully experienced, therefore, we are susceptible to harmful alternatives. “*Oh, this is love?!*” Not necessarily.

John says that “*God is love*”, meaning, whatever notion of love into which we attempt to live, it’s not really love if it can’t trace its source back to God.

God-love has these (2) distinguishing qualities:

It is ‘unprovoked’ and ‘pre-meditated’.

Jesus said it this way: “*You didn’t choose me, but I chose you*” (John 15:16).

It is meant to awaken within you a sense of value (we are valuable because

God-love assesses us as valuable). The quality of love transforms the be-loved.

The onus is always on the one offering the love.

How does love promote/accomplish such transformation?

“He will appear”

“We will see him as he is”

“We will be like him”

He will appear [revelation].

We begin as the “known”, not as presumptuous “knowers”.

“... as we draw near to him, he draws near to us” (James 4:8). My pursuit of God is only the result of his pursuit of me. Without the subliminal God-messages, we would find no motivation for pursuing him.

By his own account, and the conclusions of others, Jesus was the “revealer” of God. “If you have seen me, you’ve seen the Father” (John 14:9). He comes and makes us aware of what would have never, have figured out on our own.

We will see him as he is [knowledge; experience]

The Story requires us to deal with God as he reveals himself, not as we imagine him to be because without an accurate image of God, we will never offer our devotion and, in the absence of a God worthy of our devotion, we will be forced to look elsewhere for something/someone to which we might attach our hearts.

The narrative reveals God as “holy”. Holiness is *everything about God that distinguishes him and makes him worthy of our singular devotion*.

“**Holy**”- “other”; “marked off as distinctive”; “set apart”; “worthy of devotion”; “wholeness”.

“*Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.*” Ephesians 1:3-5

“For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son,...”
Romans 8:29

We'll be like him.

We see God as we are, but he sees us as we will be. John says there's the **who we are** and **who we will be**, and, sometimes we don't seem to look anything like that!

The choosing is to facilitate the becoming.

Our chosenness is not meant to provide a safe-haven/cover for our continued dysfunctionality. It is meant to be the secure confines from which we might risk transformation. So, holiness not only defines who God is but who he desires us to become.

“*predestined*” derives from the Greek noun ‘**boundary**’. Boundaries prevent us from attempting to find blessing where God has not declared or announced it.

I hear it: Calling us “holy” when we don’t particularly act appears to be some lame attempt at manipulative flattery. I think it’s what we call, ‘grace’. Loving us into who we were always meant to be.

We can only rightfully pursue holiness from a place of holiness.

Until we have had some experience of grace (of unprovoked love), we will be unable to hear the call to righteousness.

If you we start with “obedience” (becoming more compliant), you can only imagine how that contributes to the guilt and shame we are experiencing. It is crippling.

Test: *“How do you hear John’s exhortation: “If you continue in sin...”* Imagine offering a message of holiness to a gathering of people who are struggling with abandonment issues, and rejection, and abuse, and identity, and isolation... wondering if they can belong to God... belong with us, and doing so in a way that says doesn’t sound like a threat, but an invitation?

It doesn’t say, “*You have to be someone else*”, it says, “*You can become a new creation*”. God (Jesus) didn’t change people’s names because he wanted them to be someone else, he did it so that they could become who they were always meant to be, through a different vision and trajectory.

The objective--- the desired end--- is to “know” (experience, relate to and interact with) love
(Ephesians 3:19).

The holy life that God anticipated is never the primary objective. That seems paradoxical, doesn't it?

**Those who know God know love and know that they are not yet as they *will* be.
We can't see who we really are, but we are perpetually compelled to jettison
anything that competes with our image-bearing identity; anything that
encourages us to behave in ways that are disingenuous---
not as dearly loved children.**