

**Sermon Response Guide: February 11, 2024**  
**1 John 4:7-21 "This Is Love"**  
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**Sermon Overview:**

In 1 John 4:7-21, the word love (agape) shows up 27 times in 15 verses. This gives us a pretty good clue about the predominant theme. John is teaching us about love. This is helpful, for love is also the predominant theme of our lives. We have a persistent longing to be loved and to have meaningful relationships. We experience pain and hardship when love is missing in our life.

In the sermon this week, we explore three themes — the nature of the love, the source of love, and the impact of love.

**1. The Nature of Love**

We often use the word love as a noun, when it is primarily meant to be used as a verb. Andy Stanley writes, "We speak of love as something we fall into (like a pool) or fall out of (like a high chair), when it is supposed to be a verb, an action."

This is what John describes in our text today. In vs 9-10 we read, "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." John says the nature of love is to actively and sacrificially put the needs of others above our own. Commenting on this text, Constantine Campbell writes, "Sacrificial love is love in action. It is not mere sentiment or emotional attachment. It is love that considers the need of another and seeks to meet it, even if at great personal cost."

**2. The Source Of Love**

We can probably all agree that true love should be active, sacrificial, and other centered. The problem is that we struggle to live into this vision. Perhaps some of you feel this pretty acutely right now. Perhaps you are struggling with parenting, or with your marriage relationship. You want to be a caring, sacrificial person, but you are bumping into your own human limitations and shortcomings.

The good news in our text is that Jesus does not just give us a model that we need to try and emulate. Jesus also provides the source or the power that enables us to mature into loving people. Our text points us beyond our human limitations and reminds us that our capacity to love others well comes from God. In vs 7 we read, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." In vs 19 we read, "We love because he first loved us."

Many of our relational patterns are shaped by our family of origin. You've probably found yourself saying or doing something your parents did, that you swore you'd never do! Some of the patterns of relating that we've inherited are not healthy. We have sometimes experienced neglect and abuse. As the old adage goes— hurt people end up hurting people.

The good news is that the opposite reality is also true. John is saying that loved people love people. A sustained encounter with sacrificial caring love of God shapes us into sacrificial caring people. John is telling us that when we become a Christ follower, we are adopted into a new family of origin. John uses, familial language here — “Everyone who loves is born of God.”

We cannot simply just try really hard to be a loving person. We probably won't make it very far into our week before the old patterns and habits begin to creep back in. We may not even make it home from church! Instead, John is telling us that we need to tap into a deeper source of love. It is as we abide in Christ that we will, over time, mature into people of love. Love is not the fruit of human striving, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### **3. The impact of Love**

Constantine Campbell, writes, “The nature of this radical, sacrificial love is affective and effective. That is, we receive it with joyful gratitude (it affects us), and it causes us to love others (it effects love).”

Indeed, 1 John 4, gives us a picture about how our encounter with God's love affects us and effects those around us.

When we encounter the sacrificial love of God, it provides an antidote to the deep longing to be loved. 1 John 4 says that when God's love matures or is perfected within us, it casts out our fear. This fear is defined as a fear of judgment or punishment. I think we all live with a persistent fear that we aren't enough, that we are a failure, that we will be judged, or that we haven't done enough to compensate for our mistakes.

When that fear and anxiety crops up within us, it reveals that God's love still needs to do some more work in our hearts. It means that God's love hasn't been perfected within us. This isn't something we should be ashamed of. Theresa of Avila says that God's love will not be perfected within us this side of eternity. We will struggle with fear and anxiety. However the persistence of prayer does remind us what we need and what we ought to turn to when we are fearful and anxious. Our tendency is to overcome our feelings of fear by turning to the idols of this world. John reminds us that we find a true rest for our souls in the God's love.

This love, in turn, effects those around us. It is not just our own well-being at stake here. God's love within us is meant for the common good.

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon today?
2. Do you use the word love more as a noun than a verb? How might this shift in understanding love as a verb impact your close relationships?
3. Are there any relational habits you've maintained from your family of origin?
4. How has your relationship affected you and effected those around you?