

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH
1 JOHN: THE FATHER HEART OF GOD
KNOWING GOD THROUGH LOVE
1 JOHN 4:7-12
03/19/2017



MAIN POINT

By nature, God is love. This love is demonstrated in His sending Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one food that you would say you “love”?

What’s your best memory of eating that particular food?

Why do you love it? Is your love related to the ingredients? Nutrients? Health?

We live in a culture that is in love with being in love. We use the same word to describe the way we feel about food, sports, pets, celebrities, a spouse or significant other, family members—even God. But generally what we mean when we say we “love” something is that we enjoy the way that something makes us feel. The love of God, however, is very different. Rather than loving based on some feeling or personal benefit, God’s love flows from His very nature and has been demonstrated for us through the death of Jesus.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 4:7-10.

John explained that not only is God the source and standard of love; He is love. Love originates with God, and He is consistent and perfect in expressing love and supplying to us the love we are to show others. Through the cross of Christ, we see God’s passionate pursuit of us, His love on display.

Based on these verses, what is the biblical meaning of love?

God showed His love for us by sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. What insight does this give us into how God expects us to show love to others?

What happens to our efforts to love each other if those efforts aren’t connected to Jesus’ love for us?

How willing are you to make loving sacrifices in your relationships with others right now? What does your willingness to do so show about the way you see and define love?

What is the difference between claiming that “God is loving,” and claiming that “God is love”? Why is the second more meaningful than the first?

How does God’s love for us transform the way we see other people?

When we fail to love others, what does it reveal about our own relationship with God?

Love is the language of God to His children because it is His very essence. But God did more than shout down from heaven, “I love you!” to the people on earth. He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross. That’s the nature of love—it’s more than mere emotion or sentiment. True love is intentional and action-oriented. When we understand more and more the depth of Jesus’ love for us, we will find ourselves freed to love each other in that same sacrificial and intentional kind of way.

Why is it important that we find the definition of love in the cross rather than somewhere else?

What is the danger in defining or quantifying God’s love based on your circumstances rather than the cross?

Is there any situation in your life right now that is causing you to question the love of God?

Based on these verses, how would you counter those doubts?

God has defined and proven His love for us not through our comfort, but through the suffering and death of His Son. Because of that, we not only are saved and sent to love others; we are ultimately satisfied by His love. When we encounter seasons of pain and difficulty, we can remind ourselves of God’s love by looking again and again to the cross to see the answer to our questions.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 4:11-12.

Why does it matter that no one has ever seen God? What relevance does that fact have to John’s words about love?

Does verse 12 indicate that God’s love is somehow imperfect or incomplete? Why or why not?

What, then, does it mean that God’s love is made complete or perfected when we love one another?

There is no deficiency in the love of God. In fact, as John has already said, we find the very definition of love in the nature of God displayed through the cross of Jesus. As we love one another, that love of God becomes visible to those around us through the tangible and sacrificial expressions of love. In this way, the love of God is made complete, for it becomes visible when we love each other.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Do you find yourself more loving or more critical and judgmental of others right now? If the latter, how are you going to reconnect with the love of God in Christ this week?

How can we pray for each other if we are questioning the love of God due to a specific circumstance right now?

What opportunities are there for our group to make visible the love of God this week?

PRAY

Pray and thank God that He deals with us, His children, in the language of love. Thank Him for defining love through Jesus, and pray that we would love each other in the same practical and tangible ways He has loved us.

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 4:7-12

John's exhortation is for Christians to love Christians, although the importance of loving non-Christians is not to be excluded. The basis for this love is God and His love; in fact, it is because love is from God. Love flows from or out of God and has God as its spring or source. Not only is this true of God, but all who love have been born of God. In other words, inasmuch as anyone has even the smallest capacity to love, this comes by the grace of God. John is referring to a particular kind of love that is found only in those who have been regenerated by Christ. The perfect tense of "born" would include the initial rebirth of Christians and the continuing effects this would have in their life, and the present tense of "know" emphasizes that Christians are continuing to grow in knowledge of God. In other words, it is not the Christian's ability to love that causes the new birth, but his ability to love flows from his regeneration in Christ.

John turns from the positive expression of truth to its negative expression. He adds emphasis to the point in v. 7 by now stating the converse. Those who do not love do not know God. The absence of love in the life of an individual proves that he does not know God. The reason this is true is because God is love. John has already stated that God is Spirit (John 4:24) and that God is light (1 John 1:5), and now he gives one more encompassing statement regarding the nature of God.

Because His very nature is love, mercy and goodness flow from God like a beautiful river, as sunlight radiates from the sun. It is not an abstract concept but concrete action, as John will now explain. John states that believers are to love, first, because love is the very nature of the God (v. 8) to whom they belong and of whom they are partakers and, second (v. 9), because of the incredible manner in which God's love was displayed.

The purpose in sending the Son is not the incarnation but the atonement—God sent His Son to die. Further, God's love is primary, not ours. Our act was to sin. God's was to love and send. Man in his natural condition does not love God nor His Son whom He sent. But clearly and amazingly, God "loved us." And what incredible and unfathomable love it is: He sent His Son, and He sent Him to die for us.

John now builds on his original admonition to love one another (v. 7). For the sixth time He uses this compassionate and affectionate greeting "Dear friends" to exhort his readers. John is not so much introducing a new subject as he is adding to his prior discussion. Once one begins to understand the incredible price paid for sin and the magnitude of personal sin, he will understand the love of God and demonstrate it himself (John 13:31-35). The love God has shown becomes the motive for our responding to others properly. Since God has loved us in this way, we have no option but to do the same.

No man has seen God in his unveiled essence, glory, and majesty. Indeed, we are incapable as finite sinful creatures of looking on God. It would certainly be our death. He can be seen, however, in the lives of those who demonstrate His love to others. A person loves because God has come to dwell within him. This is how the love of God is brought

to its goal. The source for this kind of love is a personal and permanent union between God and the believer secured at the cross of Calvary.