

# Lesson 6 | April 7, 2024

## Be Made Complete in Love

**Study Text:** 1 John 4:7–21; 2 John 4–6

**Central Truth:** Christians demonstrate their love for God by loving others.

**Key Verse: 1 John 4:7**

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

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God.

Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God (NLT).

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will realize their love for God is most evident in their love for others.
- Students will intentionally demonstrate God’s love to the people He has placed in their lives.
- Students will depend on the love of God and be ready to face Him with confidence on the Day of Judgment.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** We encounter the love of God in a myriad of ways. His faithfulness is seen in every sunrise. His provision is experienced with every meal. His care is felt in the shelter of our homes. God often uses the people in our lives to reveal His love to us in an ongoing way.

**Opening Activity—Recognizing God’s Love**

**Ask:** *Would someone tell us about a time when another person demonstrated their love for you in a meaningful way?* After one or two students share, provide thank-you notes so students can express their gratitude (even if it is impossible to send the note).

**Say:** Do we always understand that the love shown to us by other believers is actually the love of God? John tells us “love comes from God” (1 John 4:7, NLT). As we recognize God’s lovingkindness in our lives, we should express our gratitude to Him and to the people He uses to care for us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Many believers mistakenly think their love for God is revealed only in religious activities, like attending church, paying tithes, or reading the Bible. However, John is quite clear in these passages of Scripture: Our love for God is seen most clearly in our interactions with others. The opposite is also true: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?” (1 John 4:20, NLT). If we truly know and love God, His love will be demonstrated in the way we treat others.

# Part 1—Love Others as God Loves Us

## God’s Love for Us

1 John 4:7–10

**Say:** The apostle John again addresses his readers as “beloved” (1 John 4:7, KJV) or “dear friends” (NLT). His pastoral tone demonstrates a righteous desire that his readers would truly love one another. In 1 John 4:7–10, the apostle shares important truths about God, His love for us, and our love for one another:

1. God is the source of love (verses 7–8).
2. God truly loves us (verses 9–10). He expressed His love by sending His Son so we could have eternal life through Him.
3. Real love is seen in self-sacrificing actions (verse 10).
4. We are to love one another in the same way God loves us (verses 7,10).

(Share your highlights from the following text.)

Very few people would argue love isn’t important, but some might define love in a shallow, self-focused way. Many think of love as a feeling. More specifically, they believe it is whatever makes them feel good.

This understanding of love negatively impacts many outcomes in our society. Spouses who love this way quickly “fall out of love” and may be unfaithful to their marriage vows when they no longer experience the thrill they once felt. Parents who love this way may neglect their children when they feel parenting has become a burden. Friends who love this way are nowhere to be seen when difficulties arise, because they don’t feel like investing their time or resources. Church members who love this way are quick to criticize and stir up dissension when they don’t get their way.

Thankfully, God’s love is far from shallow and self-focused. It is generous, extravagant, and self-sacrificing. In fact, His love for us is not based on our worthiness or even our response, but on His goodness. “This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins” (1 John 4:10, NLT). Before we could respond to His love, God sent His Son to die for our sins. He made a way for us to experience forgiveness and enjoy relationship with Him. Because of God’s unflinching, sacrificial love, we can love others in the same extravagant way.

### **Discuss**

? What are the pitfalls of love that is self-centered? What are the benefits of love that is self-sacrificing?

? How should experiencing God’s love impact our responses to one another?

? Read John 3:16 and 1 John 4:7–10 aloud. How does John expand on the truth of John 3:16 in 1 John 4:7–10?

## **Our Love for One Another Reflects His Love**

1 John 4:11–12

**Say:** “No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us” (1 John 4:12, NLT). In other words, people see and experience God’s love as we love one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We experience and enjoy God’s love through every provision and every kindness. He wants us to reveal His love in the same way. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus illustrated this truth in a very sobering way, describing the final judgment, when everyone will be gathered into His presence. He will separate the righteous—the sheep—from the unrighteous—the goats. He will welcome His righteous followers to inherit the Kingdom, saying “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world” (verse 34, NLT). Then He will explain that when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger (possibly homeless), naked, and in prison, they provided for His needs. When they question Him about this, the King will tell them, “I tell you the truth, when you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me” (verse 40, NLT).

Then King Jesus will say to the unrighteous ones, “Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons” (verse 41, NLT). Then He will explain that when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger (possibly homeless), naked, and in prison, they ignored Him and did not provide for His needs. When they question Him about this, the King will answer, “I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life” (verse 45, NLT).

Jesus’ message is clear: The way we treat Him is reflected in the way we treat other people. Either He is telling us, “If you love others as I love you, you will be welcome into My kingdom,” or “If you don’t love others the way I love you, you will be destined for eternal punishment.” When we truly recognize and receive God’s love for us, the natural response is for us to love others. The way we treat others is how His love is brought to full expression in and through us (1 John 4:11–12).

### ***Discuss***

? How have you experienced God’s love through a friend or family member?

? How can we help others to know God by loving them?

### **Resource Packet Item 1: God’s Love Expressed through Us**

Distribute the worksheet and give students time to list names and a few action steps.

Encourage them to take the worksheet home and finalize plans to reveal God’s love in meaningful ways to specific people in the coming months.

## **Part 2—Love Is the Distinctive of God’s People We Have Put Our Trust in His Love**

1 John 4:13–16

**Say:** God’s Spirit lives in us and enables us to love one another. Thankfully, we don’t have to rely on our own power to love people. Instead, we can depend on His love flowing through us. When we are struggling to love others the way He commands, we should pray and ask for His help. This is praying according to His will, since He longs to reveal His love to others and He chooses to use us to do so. We can trust this is a prayer He will answer. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We have never seen God, but the apostle John did see Jesus and even walked with Him throughout His earthly ministry (1 John 4:14). John witnessed Jesus’ teaching and miracles. He saw Jesus die. He raced to the empty tomb on Resurrection Sunday. He spent time with the risen Savior. He was there when Jesus ascended to the Father and when the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost. After experiencing all of this, John said, “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love” (verse 16, NLT). John experienced the intense, self-sacrificing love of Jesus firsthand. He knew without a doubt God’s love could be trusted. We too can know these truths as we read Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into understanding. Our knowledge of Christ will help us to trust God’s love for us.

John continued, “God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them” (verse 16, NLT). Rather than relying on our own ability to drum up feelings of love, we should allow God’s love to flow through us and reach other people. As Paul put it, “We know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:5, NLT).

### ***Discuss***

- ? How can we grow in our knowledge of God’s love?
- ? How does grasping His love help us trust Him?
- ? How should we pray when we encounter people who are difficult to love?

## **Perfect Love Expels Fear**

1 John 4:17–19

**Say:** A consistent theme throughout Scripture is God’s love for us. We know Him more as we spend time reading His Word and reflecting on His truth. The more we know Him, the more we recognize His love, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness at work in our lives. This growing knowledge of God and His love impacts the way we interact with others, helps us trust His love, and dispels our fear of judgment. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John explained, “As we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So, we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world” (1 John 4:17, NLT). If our lives are void of love and filled with fear, it means we have a limited understanding of God’s love for us. To combat this, we should pray for an ever-increasing grasp of His love and commit to reading His Word to know Him better.

In like manner, the apostle Paul prayed the Ephesians would grow in their knowledge of God's love.

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (Ephesians 3:17–19, NLT)

Understanding God's love is the key to a life that is strong, humble, confident, and compassionate.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Trust God's Great Love**

Distribute the worksheet to help students reflect on God's love and experience it more deeply during the upcoming week.

#### ***Discuss***

? How does a growing understanding of God's love affect the way believers react to difficult situations? the way we experience fear? the way we visualize standing before God on the Day of Judgment?

? How does Paul describe God's love in Ephesians 3:17–19? What does it mean for someone to have their "roots . . . grow down into God's love" (verse 17, NLT)?

## **Part 3—Walk in God's Love**

### **If We Truly Love God, We Will Love One Another**

1 John 4:20–21

**Say:** It is encouraging to know that our ability to love grows the longer we walk with Christ (1 John 4:17). While we may not love perfectly all the time, love is the evidence of life in Christ and growth in spiritual maturity. John is quite clear in his letters: If we truly love God, we will love one another. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God" (Philippians 1:9–11, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The mark of spiritual maturity is a greater capacity to love. When the apostle Paul wrote about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he transitioned to an in-depth description of love with this statement: "Now let me show you a way of life that is best of all" (verse 31, NLT).

Immature believers may think they only have to love someone as well as the other person loves them. Or they may think they only have to love people according to their

perceived worthiness. But 1 John tells us something so much deeper: Our choice to love says more about the quality of our relationship with God than it says about the lovability of someone else. We love other people for one reason: because God loves us.

### ***Discuss***

? Before studying 1 John, how would you have defined spiritual maturity? How would you define it now?

? In what ways might a believer's struggle to love other people send up red flags about his or her relationship with God?

## **Fulfill His Commands by Loving Others**

2 John 4–6

**Say:** In his second letter, John makes this simple statement: "Love means doing what God has commanded us" (2 John 6, NLT). In other words, when we do what God told us to do, we show we love Him. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, He answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37–40, NLT). According to Jesus, love fulfills all of God's commands. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

### **Resource Packet Item 3: How Love Fulfills God's Commands**

Distribute the worksheet and discuss how love for God and others (as described in John's epistles) affects a believer's ability to live out the principles found in the Ten Commandments.

When we love others the way God loves us, we will always act in their best interests. Spouses will put each other's needs above their own and remain faithful to their marriage vows. Parents will lay down their lives to make sure their children are well cared for. Adults will do whatever is necessary to care for their aging parents with dignity and honor. Friends will rejoice together without envy. Employees will work with integrity and diligence for employers whether or not it is noticed or appreciated. Love is always the best motivation for righteous living.

### ***Discuss***

? What are some differences between responses motivated by duty and responses motivated by love?

? How does love make us better spouses, parents, children, friends, neighbors, employees, or employers?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** We will grow in our ability to love the more we know and understand God's great love for us. We can trust God's love for us. He loves us so much He sent His Son to take away our sins and make a way for us to have a right relationship with Him. God will

take care of our every need and empower us to love others. As we love others the way God loves us, we can be assured our lives are pleasing to Him, for we are living like Christ here in this world. This is the greatest indication that we live in God and love Him—our love for one another.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Read Psalm 145 and think about God's great love for you as described by the psalmist David.
- Intentionally share God's love in a tangible way with three people you come in contact with this week.
- Take note of the way you interact with those you are closest to. Do your interactions reveal your love, honor, and respect for God? Remember, the way you treat your spouse, children, parents, coworkers, and neighbors is the way you are treating God.

### **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

God's Love for the Rejected.

Genesis 29:31–35

Tuesday:

God's Loving-Kindness.

Psalm 63:1–4

Wednesday:

God's Love Declared.

Psalm 103:1–12

Thursday:

God's Great Love.

John 3:14–18

Friday:

Love Proves Discipleship.

John 13:34–39

Saturday:

The Greatness of Love.

1 Corinthians 13:1–13