

Loving Brothers *and* Sisters



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 12:28–31; John 14:15; James 2:15, 16; 1 John 3:11–24; 4:7–5:4.*

Memory Text: “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (*1 John 4:21, NKJV*).

A pastor was visited by a woman full of hatred toward her husband. Not only did she want to divorce him, she wanted to cause him as much pain as possible. The pastor suggested that she go home and act as if she really loved him. She was to tell him how much he meant to her and to be as kind as she could. After having convinced him of her undying love, she would then inform him about wanting a divorce. That would all but guarantee hurting him as much as possible.

With revenge in her eyes, she did just that, lavishing love on him for a few months as she never had done before. Then the pastor called her and asked about her divorce.

“No way!” she replied. “I discovered I really do love him.”

Love is able to change our world, our churches, our families, and our marriages. This week we’ll see a little of what John says about this crucial topic and how love is to be manifested by those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

The Week at a Glance: What does John teach about the importance of love? How is Christian love manifested? How does the plan of salvation reveal the true meaning of love? How can we, as sinners, have the assurance of salvation? How are Christians to manifest love?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.*

The Two Passages on Love *(1 John 3:11–24, 4:7–5:4)*

The passage we investigated last week ended with saying that children of God are recognizable by doing what is right and by loving their brothers and sisters in the Lord (*1 John 3:10*). That verse builds a bridge to the discussion of love that appears in the rest of the epistle.

What are some of the similarities between 1 John 3:11–24 and 1 John 4:7–5:4?

The two passages are remarkably similar. Both contain the phrase “love one another” repeatedly (*1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12*). Both stress that the objects of love are primarily other believers, and both warn us against hating our brothers and sisters. Both passages also emphasize God’s love for us.

First John 3:11–24 focuses on love to one another and uses the variants of the phrase “to love” eight times; the second passage employs it more than thirty times and enlarges the topic: We are called to love not only the children of God but also God Himself. On the other hand, God loved us first and still loves us.

First John 4:7–5:4 must also be understood in the context of the antichrists, who were wrong in their ideas about Jesus. The passage says that Jesus is the Son of God (*1 John 4:15*) and the Christ (*1 John 5:1*) and became the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the Savior of the world. Only through Him and what He did for us can the love of God be understood in a deeper sense. That is, only as we understand what happened at the cross and how Christ bore in Himself the punishment for our sins can we come to love God as we should.

Read again the passages for today’s lesson. What specific point, or points, jump out at you, talk to you, convict you the most? How well are you doing in regard to what John says here? How well do you reflect toward others the love that God has toward you? What changes do you need to make in order to better show that love?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 John 3:11–24*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that God’s love compels us to love our brothers and sisters.

Feel: Experience freedom from doubt and guilt, which can damage our relationships.

Do: Put God’s love into practice in relationships within our spiritual family.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: A Loveless Life Is Not an Option

A The saying goes, “Love makes the world go round,” but a glance at the news headlines shows a distinct lack of love. How does this stack up with the transforming love of God?

B The Cross is a filter that helps put things in the right perspective. How does it help us understand the nature of God’s love and help us to return that love?

C Define “love” by using biblical examples to show what it is and what it is not.

II. Feel: Freedom to Love

A If we experience and are filled with God’s love, how will this be demonstrated in our relationships?

B Hate and negative feelings can limit our capacity to love. How can we deal with them?

III. Do: Practical Love

What difference would it make to our church if every member showed true love in the home and in the church? What can you do to contribute to making this a reality?

► **Summary:** The plan of salvation demonstrates God’s love for sinners. We have a responsibility to show that love to others.

The Definition of Love (1 John 3:11–16, 4:7–16)

Though John talks a lot about love in these verses, how does he define and explain love? 1 John 3:12–16; 1 John 4:7–10, 16.

Interestingly enough, John does not set out to give a lexical definition of love. Rather, he starts out using the example of Cain as showing what love is not.

How does that example help make John's point?

The negative example is followed by a positive one. Jesus laid down His life for us. The Father sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice. He sent Him to be the Savior of the world. This is the deepest meaning of love. Love means to do whatever is necessary to help others, even if it includes self-sacrifice. Hence, what a contrast to what Cain did to his brother. Love also means to forgive and to forget the past. In Jesus' case, it meant complete self-denial for the good of others.

But love is not a mere spectacle to be observed. It must have an impact on others' lives. If someone would jump in the water and drown just to prove his or her love, it would mean nothing. But if the person who jumped in lost his life in order to save someone else, that is love.

The best definition of *love* is the character and work of the Godhead as revealed in the plan of salvation, with Jesus giving Himself for us.

Christian love has its source in the love of God. To abide in love means to enjoy an intimate relationship with God. There is no love in the biblical sense that ultimately does not come from God (1 John 4:7). However, the statement that "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (NKJV) in the same verse could be misunderstood. It has to be interpreted in the context of 1 John. According to 1 John 3:23, faith (true belief) and love belong together; according to 1 John 5:2, love and keeping the commandments do too. Anyone can say that he or she loves God; John shows us how that love is to be revealed.

What are some examples of this kind of love that you have seen manifested among others? Who manifested this love, what did they do, and what did you learn from them about the true meaning of love?

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: We show that we know Jesus by the love we show to others.

Just for Teachers: This lesson continues the study of John’s admonitions to church members with a focus on how we are to love each other in the light of God’s love for us. This introduction will give your class an opportunity to examine various ways we express love and how individual preferences can guide us in our efforts to meet one another’s needs.

In his book *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1995), Gary Chapman describes the importance of expressing love in ways that others recognize and need. To introduce these languages, give your class the following quiz:

When I am feeling alone, I most appreciate:

- (1) a hug
- (2) something special in the mail
- (3) eating out with someone
- (4) a call expressing appreciation
- (5) assistance with something that needs to be done

I long most for:

- (1) recognition for something I’ve done
- (2) help with the chores
- (3) someone taking time to listen
- (4) a surprise gift every once in a while
- (5) a pat or touch of care and concern

My favorite way of expressing care and love for someone else usually involves:

- (1) offering words of appreciation
- (2) reaching out with a touch
- (3) doing things that help him or her
- (4) taking quality time to be with this person
- (5) giving small presents

CONTINUED 

A Crisis of Assurance

Read 1 John 3:19–21. What point is John making? What is he saying to us? Who hasn't at some point experienced the feelings that John is talking about here?

Read also 1 John 4:17, 18. What problem is he addressing here, as well? Again, who hasn't experienced this concern?

What Christians at some point, looking at themselves, at their weaknesses, at their lack of love, at their shortcomings, have not felt condemned, guilty, even lost? How important to remember that God is greater than we are, greater than our guilt, greater than our hearts. How crucial that we realize, day by day, that our hope of salvation must rest on Jesus and His work in our behalf. Only by leaning on Him, on His merits and not on our own, can we have confidence and assurance.

Confidence is emphasized several times in 1 John. John wants believers to be confident when they approach God in prayer (*1 John 3:21, 22*), confident before the reality of Christ's coming (*1 John 2:28*), and confident about the divine judgment (*1 John 4:17*). God means well for us, His children. Being grounded in His love drives away all fear.

"Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

"In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 316.

What hope can you take for yourself from these inspired words?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Make five signs identifying these love languages: quality time, receiving gifts, physical touch, acts of service, and words of affirmation. Place these signs in five separate areas of the room. Invite your class members to seat themselves near the sign that best describes their preferences. Lead a short discussion on experiences that various members have had in expressing concern or being cared for that have special meaning.

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The following study on love utilizes the perspectives on various ways of expressing love gained from the introductory exercise, so ask everyone to stay in their groups. If any of the five love languages was not chosen by anyone, ask if there are any persons in other groups who identify well enough with those languages to represent them for the class.


Bible Commentary

I. What Is Love, and What Is It not? (Review 1 John 3:11–24 and 1 John 4:7–12, 19–21 with the class.)

The anger and hatred of Cain toward his brother is contrasted with the love that Christ has for His brothers and sisters. Ask each group to use the perspective that their love language offers to describe how hate is expressed (and love withheld) in the family and between church members. For example, the opposite of loving physical touch (or other body language) could include angry, scornful, or indifferent glances; pushing, slapping, or forceful grabbing.

Ask each group to examine and discuss with the rest of the groups what happened at Christ's arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection in the context of their particular love language (see *Matthew 26–28 and John 18–20*). How was Christ treated physically? What kinds of words were used toward Him? Describe the acts of service (and disservice) that were offered Him. What love language was reflected in Christ's requests in the Garden before His arrest? What gifts were given to Christ (and what gifts were taken from Him)?

Turn the attention of your class to the acts of service, words of affirmation, physical touch, gifts, and quality time that Christ and the Father offered at the Crucifixion.

CONTINUED 

Love in Practice *(1 John 3:17, 18; 4:19–21)*

John is not content to theorize about love. He lets us know that God wants us to put love into practice. Therefore he states that hate is incompatible with a loving attitude, and it is even a form of murder (*1 John 3:15*). He says, too, that we should not love with words alone but with actions (*vs. 18*).

John, of course, isn't against us speaking kind and encouraging words to each other. Words are an important part of sharing love. How would spouses, children, relatives, and friends feel if they never received verbal affirmations from us? Even John himself used words to share God's love with others.

However, John is opposed to a superficial declaration of love with no strings attached. In *1 John 3:17* he describes a situation similar to the one found in *James 2:15, 16*. A church member is in need. Others have the means to help him or her but do not do anything other than say some nice things to that person. That's not enough. God not only informed us that He loves us, He sent His Son to die in our place. People who love much do much, because real love is active.

Read 1 John 3:16 and 17. Which command is the harder one to follow, and why?

It's not likely that any of us will be called to die for another believer. But we most likely will be called to demonstrate love for someone in need. We may have the means to provide jobs, food, clothes, a Christian education, a place of refuge, whatever. Instead, though, we prefer to live our own comfortable lives. Early Christians shared their financial means. To love others is a challenge, especially because it demands sacrifice on our part.

Of all the places that love must be manifested, no place is more important than in the home. There are endless ways we can show our love to family members. Sometimes even the littlest things can send a powerful message of love and acceptance: extra help around the house, a nice dinner, a special family outing together, whatever. There are many ways we can manifest love. Love thinks first about others; more so, it will act on those thoughts.

Imagine what it would be like living in a home in which true love was manifested. What changes should you make that can help bring that ideal closer to reality in your home?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Discuss: What other times in the world’s history has God spoken in a variety of love languages? Give time for each group to share how God has used their particular love language.

II. Love Gives Us Confidence *(Review 1 John 3:19–21; 4:17, 18 with the class.)*

The SDA Bible Commentary gives this paraphrase of 1 John 3:19–21: “By genuinely loving our brother we may know that we are children of the truth, or of God. This knowledge will enable us to stand confidently in the presence of God, for even though our heart condemns us, since we are still sinners, we know that God is greater than our heart, His knowledge and understanding far surpass our own, and He is able to perceive our sincerity and to allow for the mistakes into which we fall.”—Vol. 7, page 656.

Consider This: We can have assurance of God’s mercy in judgment if we know we genuinely love our brothers and sisters. But how do we know our love is genuine? *(See The Message paraphrase of 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:18; and 1 John 4:17, 18.)*

III. God Commands Us to Love *(Review 1 John 3:22–24, 4:21 with the class.)*

In the progression of reasoning from 1 John 3:18 through 1 John 4:21, God loves us. When we respond to God with love, we also love our brothers and sisters. In loving God and loving our brothers and sisters, we are fulfilling God’s commandments. This love results in confidence in our relationship with God and no fear of judgment.

Discuss: How does loving others fulfill God’s commandments? Why is love a fulfillment of His holy law?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This section will help your class put into practical perspective the lessons about loving brothers and sisters just covered in their study of the Bible. They will need paper and pens or pencils.

A Visual Aid: Ask each group to illustrate the progression of reasoning in 1 John 3:18 through 1 John 4:21 by means of a picture or diagram.

CONTINUED ►

Love and the Commandments *(1 John 3:22–24, 4:21–5:4)*

Both passages that we have studied this week end with a reference to the commandments. The term is used four times each in both sections. First John 5:2 (*NIV*) talks about carrying out the commandments. First John 3:22, 24, and 5:3 (*NIV*) emphasize obeying, or keeping (*KJV*), the commandments.

What do the passages teach about the commandments apart from that they should be kept?

1 John 3:22 _____

1 John 3:23 _____

1 John 3:24 _____

1 John 4:21 _____

1 John 5:2 _____

1 John 5:3 _____

John says that keeping God’s commandments and doing what pleases Him (*1 John 3:22*) give Christians confidence that God hears their prayers. God’s command is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. Keeping the commandments allows for mutual abiding—we in God and God in us. To love God includes keeping the commandments, and indeed, *they can be kept* because they are not burdensome.

When John talks about *commandment* in the singular, he mentions the commandment to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and to love one another. In chapter 4 the *commandment* is that we who love God should also love our brothers and sisters.

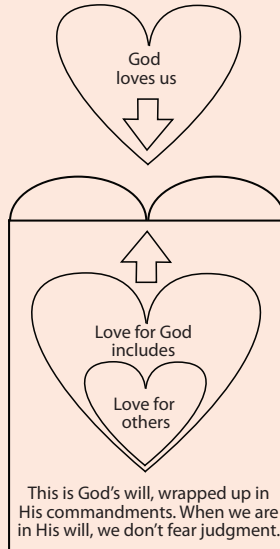
When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the most important, He responded by pointing to the commandment to love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (*Mark 12:28–31*). Yet, He stressed that those who love Him keep His commandments (*John 14:15*), and in the Sermon on the Mount He referred to a number of different commandments.

By switching from *the commandment* (singular) to *the commandments* (plural), John may have indicated that the one commandment of love expresses itself in a multiplicity of commandments.

How can we experience God’s commandments as something more than a set of rules? Is that all they are? Or are they something more?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

For example, see below. However, don't plan to share this example until the groups have had a chance to draw and share their own ideas.



Life-Application:

Insecurity in our relationship with God and mistrust of His love for us are the cause of deep pain and fear for the future. How would you counsel someone who expresses these feelings to you, based on our study of 1 John 3 and 4?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: This section gives your class an opportunity to express love to God and their brothers and sisters in their day-to-day activities.

Find passages in the psalms that express God's words of affirmation to you through nature. As you take a walk, offer words of praise to God about your favorite parts of His creation. Try the same technique with other love languages.

Further Study: Read 1 Corinthians 13; Ellen G. White, “A Faithful Witness,” p. 548, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart to him of the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God. All this is but a fulfillment of the principle of the law,—the principle that is illustrated in the story of the good Samaritan, and made manifest in the life of Jesus. His character reveals the true significance of the law, and shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God manifest mercy, kindness, and love toward all men, they also are witnessing to the character of the statutes of heaven. . . . The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 505.

“You should get rid of your cold, frozen formality as soon as possible. You need to cultivate feelings of tenderness and friendliness in your everyday life. You should exhibit true courtesy and Christian politeness. The heart that really loves Jesus loves those for whom He died. Just as truly as the needle points to the pole, so will the true follower of Christ, with a spirit of earnest labor, seek to save souls for whom Christ has given His life. Working for the salvation of sinners will keep the love of Christ warm in the heart and will give that love a proper growth and development.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 466.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 We tend to think of all the admonitions to love as a personal issue, one between God and ourselves. And though that is true, it certainly isn't limited to just us as individuals, is it? That is, what can your local church do, as a church body, to show love in ways that you as an individual can't? How well is your local church revealing the love of God to the community? What can you do to help it along in this important area?
- 2 In class, talk about various individuals who have displayed the kind of love talked about this week. What did they do? What kind of self-sacrifice was involved? What did their actions have in common that can help us better understand what true love is?
- 3 The Bible says that love is from God. Why must that be so? Think about it—where else could love come from? It's hard to imagine how pure matter and energy alone, the stuff of physics and atoms, could ever of itself create something like love. How does the reality of love help us better understand the reality of God? How does our expression of love reveal to others the existence of God? In what ways might the manifestation of love be the best evidence yet for God's existence?