



Sermon Title: LIT Part 11: The Power of Love

IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. What is your all-time favorite love song or romantic movie?
2. How would you say the world defines love?

UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

3. Review the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:2-8). Read 1 John 3:11-12.

Why are we tempted to hang on to our anger? How does suppressed anger leak out? What are healthy ways to express anger?

4. Read Luke 6:27-28. What does Jesus say our attitude should be toward the people who are our enemies (those we like the least or avoid the most)?
5. What is John's definition of love (1 John 3:16-18)? How can love be expressed so that differences do not become divisions?

OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

6. "Love is giving yourself for the good of others, even for those with whom you have differences" – Bryan Wilkerson

In his sermon, Pastor Henry taught what it looks like to have a heart of blessing toward someone: "If it were in your power to help that person prosper enormously, in their career, their finances, in their relationships, or be admired by thousands, would you do it?"

Ask God to bring someone to mind and take a moment to silently pray and bless them.

UP – IN – OUT reflects a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

For Personal Reflection/Prayer:

What further steps is God asking you to take from question 6?

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THE WORD (NIV)

1 John 3:11-24

More on Love and Hatred

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

1 John 4:8-10

⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Other Bible references: Gen 4; Hebrews 11:4; Matt 5:21; Eph 4:26; 1 Peter 4:10; Romans 5:8; Luke 6:32; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Rom 8:1



The Power of Love is Part 11 of the continuing series in 1 John, a letter written by the Apostle John in part to address false teaching in the early church about what it meant to be a Christian. Some believers were confused and lacked assurance whether they were Christians at all. John spelled out what it means to be an authentic follower of Christ: to believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man; lived, taught truth and performed miracles; died on the cross and rose again three days later, appearing to his disciples and to more than 500 people at the same time. Christ followers don't just believe things **about** Jesus, they believe **in** Jesus: to seek a growing friendship and, with others in His church, **to live** like Jesus did. John emphasizes that true Christians also seek **to love** like Jesus, 1 John 3:11-24. He is not saying we have to achieve this list, but it is evidence that the passion and direction of our life is to love and live like Jesus. There is no greater longing in the heart than to love and be loved. Many of the songs we sing and movies we watch focus on the pursuit of love and/or the heartbreak of losing love. Christians believe we have this longing because we are created in the image of God, Gen 1:26, and God is Love. It is His very nature and character. People are, and always have been, confused about what love is. And as long as they ignore God and the Bible, they will continue to be so.

John focuses on two themes: **A) the Essence of love** (what love is) and, **B) the Effect of love** (what love does, the impact it has). English has only one word for love; so we can say we love our spouse, and we love chocolate - in the same sentence. The original language of the New Testament is more helpful — Greek has several words for 'love': *Storge* — love for family; *Eros* — sexual, romantic love; and *Philea* — friendship love between the closest of friends. Each describes feelings of love for another person that cannot be forced or commanded. However, when John says, "We should love one another" (v.11), he is using yet another word — *Agape*. Godly love, or *agape*, is a decision to love even when we don't like that person, or feel that the person deserves to be loved. John illustrates what this *agape* is, but first he makes clear what it is not, using the story of Cain and Abel, Genesis 4. Sons of Adam and Eve, growing up together, taught the same values, both knowing God. Coming to worship God, each brought an offering. Abel's offering was brought in faith and accepted. Cain's was not, implying that he did not bring his offering as God had asked — coming to worship on his terms, not God's, Hebrews 11:4. Cain was the first to devise his own religion instead of worshiping the God who is. Something in Abel led God to approve his offering, and something in Cain led God to disapprove of Cain's offering. Note that God does not compare Cain to Abel. God speaks to Cain about the state of his heart (Gen 4:6) to tell him that restoration of the relationship is possible, but Cain would have to decide to do it. Cain was very angry and caved in to his pride and the deceptive voice of the devil. Cain killed his brother Abel. John asks, why? (v.12). Cain murdered his brother not because Abel was bad, but because he was good. He then adds an aside (v.13) to the reader: Do not be surprised. . . if the world hates you. William Barclay writes: "An evil man will instinctively hate a good man." Ray Stedman says that most likely Cain was not aware he hated his brother to the point of killing him, or that by not dealing with his anger he was giving permission to Satan to take control and turn his anger and hate into murderous rage toward Abel. It happened to Judas the night he betrayed Jesus; and the same thing can happen to us.

When anger wells up in us, we need to see it as a warning light. Jesus shows us 2 ways sinful anger can get a foothold and then escalate, Matt 5:21,22. The **first alarm** is when we suppress it and pretend that all is well rather than letting it die through confession. It hurts us more than it does the person you are angry with. Sinful anger keeps us focused on the hurt, rather than the hope and healing we have in Jesus, Ephesians 4:26. The **second alarm** is when we express our anger in a sinful way. 'Raca' means 'empty' and relies on tone of voice for impact, much like our word 'stupid' or 'idiot', while 'fool' is from 'morae' — translated as 'moron' — and used to cast doubt on a person's value & moral character. Jesus warns us that, if we don't deal with anger as God calls us to, it will leak out, leading to hostility, division and disunity. Neither Jesus nor John is saying that anger is murder. They are saying it is murder in the heart, which Satan's influence can escalate into much worse, even actual murder. Murder starts in the heart, not with the hands. Nursing anger is as displeasing to God as murder is. Hatred in the heart also shows that you have not understood or embraced the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. To be clear, when we are hurt or angry, we may all walk in darkness, but we don't stay there. We humble ourselves and make things right with God, to be set free from it. We don't follow the way of Cain; we go in the way of Christ, 1 John 3:16. *Agape* is not a warm, fuzzy feeling: *agape* love is a decision to take action despite feelings. God demonstrated His love for us, 1 John 4:9-10, by giving up what was precious to Him — His only Son Jesus.

Bryan Wilkerson defines love this way: "Love is giving of yourself for the good of others, even those with whom you have differences." **First**, it is giving of yourself, something personal and precious: God gave his Son; Jesus gave his life. John gives a practical example in meeting the legitimate needs of those of our local church, 1 John 3:17; acting on it, taking a risk. **Second**, it is for the good of others. Jesus laid down his life **for us, to pay for our sins**, 1 John 4:10. We put the needs of others ahead of ourselves. Love is not about ourselves, to relieve our guilt or show others how compassionate we are. In the story of the Good Samaritan, did the religious leaders ask, "What will helping this man cost me?" and the Samaritan ask, "If I don't stop and help this man, what will it cost him?" CS Lewis writes, "It is easier to [love] humanity with a capital H than it is to love individual[s] . . . Loving everyone in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular." Loving like this can be overwhelming, but we can start by taking small practical steps and serving others, 1 Peter 4:10, and grow into it with God's help. **Third**, it is even for those with whom you have differences. God extends His love and grace even to those who want nothing to do with Him, Roman 5:8. We don't get to choose whom we love, Luke 6:32-36. We would like to think that we have no enemies, but how would we treat them? Would you treat them how you would want them to treat your loved ones? Seek to understand them when their point of view and convictions are contrary to yours? Godly love allows for disagreement, but not division. The Bible is clear that we must have unity, (John 17, Gal 3:28, Col 3:11). In other matters not central to our faith, we have liberty and extend love and grace to one another. One thing we can and must agree on — that Jesus Christ is Lord!

John finishes Chapter 3 by talking about the **Effect** of love, and two ways loving others impacts us. **First**, when we exercise *agape* love, it proves that we are children of God; that Christ resides in us. In John's words, our hearts condemn us, v.20. How can we be assured that we are true Christians? By reminding ourselves that we are justified by our faith in Jesus: what he accomplished for us (not our works). That is why WE ARE IN CHRIST and He is in us and "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus", Romans 8. This is the gospel. John also adds in v.14, v.18, 19 we can be assured of our faith: When we love from the heart, the way we are loved by Christ, we can know that we are His. It is a clear reminder that you are a child of God. **Second**, those whose heart does not condemn them have confidence before God, v.21. They look at God's greatness, are dependent on Him, walk with Him each day, and able to receive anything they ask — essentially what prayer is. We have the daily faith adventure of seeing Him do things in us, through us, and in the lives of others when we invite God to do life with us. When we make love our highest aim, we can ask God for anything in line with His Kingdom purposes and expect to receive it. But don't take this out of context, James 4:3. John is not saying that you will receive everything, but you will receive all that will help you love the way Christ loves you. Therefore, commit anew to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength **AND** our neighbours as ourselves.