

**How Great is God's Love**

1 John 4:13-16

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Do you love me? That was the question a Jewish husband asked his wife after 25 years of marriage. His name was Tevye and his wife Golde. They lived in a little village in 1905 in Tsarist Russia. They had 5 daughters and the oldest 3 were now at marrying age. Tradition dictated that Tevye would arrange their marriages in consultation with other fathers in the village who had sons of marrying age. But the girls rejected this approach. The oldest still sought her father's permission but wanted to marry someone he did not choose. The second asked only for her father's blessing not his permission. They were going to go ahead with marriage with or without his permission. The third wanted to marry outside the faith. Love became the central criteria for consideration of marriage according to the girls. Tevye and Golde's marriage had been arranged.

So with all he's learning from his daughters, Tevye wonders if his wife actually loves him. Let's see what happens.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_y9F5St4j0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_y9F5St4j0)

Tevye explains these events to an astonished Golde. "Love", he says, "it's the new style." Tevye asks Golde, despite their own arranged marriage, "Do You Love Me?" After dismissing Tevye's question as foolish, she eventually admits that, after 25 years of living and struggling together and raising five daughters, she does. You might recognize this story from the play "Fiddler on the Roof" that was produced as this movie back in 1971.

Do you love me? That might be a question we ask someone in our lives. Or "do you still love me?" Or we might ask that question without using words. We may ask it in a pleading look. We may ask it with a shrug of our shoulders. We may wonder it by shedding tears. Now it's one thing to ask this question of another human.

It's another to ask it of God. Does God love me? Hopefully, there are many times we answer that with a confident yes. But there might be times we wonder about it. Last week we saw John declare "God is love." But what if you don't believe that? What if something happens that shakes this conviction to your very core?

You might look at your life or things that have happened recently and ask "How can God say that He loves me when this happened?" Life, work, family, health, child or relationship. Well today, I want to show you where John acknowledges the reality that we are on a journey to know and believe that God loves us. There might be times we doubt this. Yet he will provide more evidence of God's love. And John gently invites us to continue on the journey of

discovering and living in God's love. Greater assurance of God's love; encouraged to continue on the journey of learning to trust in God and His love.

### 1 John 4:13-16 – English Standard Version

**13** By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. **16** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

### 1 John 4:13-16 (New Living Translation)

13 And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. 14 Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. 16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

2 weeks ago in 1 John 4:1-6, we saw John warn believers of their need to test the messages they heard for the spirits behind them. Last week we saw John *urge* his readers to love one another. He talked about God Himself being love. So an unloving Christian is a contradiction in terms. By loving others we live out our identity and respond to God's great love for us. In both of those paragraphs, John urges, commands and exhorts them to respond.

But in verses 13-16 John takes a different approach. Instead of urging and exhorting, he moves to simple affirmation or description. It's like he assumes that the things he has just talked about are a reality. Then he draws conclusions from them.

Think for a moment about the effect of this. If someone just keeps telling you what to do, you might eventually tune them out. But if they describe how things would be better when you do what they tell you to do, you might listen. It's one thing to tell a person they should receive God's love. It's another to describe God's love and what lives look like that have accepted it.

So John describes how God has offered His great love. **God shows us His love by giving us His Spirit.** Verse 13 – “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” The presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within Christians proves God lives in us and we live in God. When you sense the Holy Spirit's leading or are filled by the Holy Spirit or sense Him guiding your prayers, you're experiencing God's presence in you.

But what does this have to do with God's love? It is through the Holy Spirit that God's love flowed into us.

*Romans 5:5 – God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* God showed his

love by sending Jesus to die for us. God sent His messengers to tell us of His love for us. But God also put His love into us by the Holy Spirit. So God and His love are present with us all the time – day by day through the ups and downs of life.

It's kind of like the difference between doing something loving on Valentine's Day compared to showing love every other day of the year. You can buy a Valentine's Day gift for someone. You can write "I love you" in a card or say "I love you" on Valentine's Day. That is important. But it's much more important and loving to live out love day by day through the grind of life.

God did the massive work of love through the cross. God says He loves us through His Word and the Spirit. Those are like God's big Valentine's gifts to us. But God also dwells in us by His Spirit all the time. He is with us to daily show and affirm His love for us. God loved us and poured His love into us by the Holy Spirit.

John goes on to point out another way God showed us His great love. **He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. (14)** *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.* We reflected last week on what it might have been like for God the Father to send His one and only Son into the world. Last week in 1 John 4:9 we saw God send His son into the world so that we might live through Him. Then in verse 10 we saw God love us by sending His Son as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins. Now God sends his son as Savior of the world.

But how does this show love to us? Well notice the terms Father and Son. They communicate the intimate love God the Father and the God the Son share. But the Father and Son's love was not of the clutching kind that refused to share with others. The Father would send to the Son to be savior. Saving implies someone is in trouble. Someone needs outside help for rescue.

That someone is the world –all mankind lost in sin and hostile to God. So this saving enterprise was not directed towards people who were already the Father and Son's friends. It was offered to those who rebelled against them and may even have refused to admit their need for salvation. But God sent Jesus anyway out of love. You and I were once part of the world. If you're a Christian here, you also once needed saving. God sent His Son to save you in a great act of self-sacrificing love.

Once upon a time, there was a man named John. He was the father of an 8-year-old boy during the 20's and 30's. John was very fortunate during those times, because he had job. John loved his son very much. He was the apple of

his eye. John's son was a normal little boy who constantly wanted to go to work with his father. John decided he would take his boy to work with him one day. John was bridge conductor across the Mississippi River in charge of raising and lowering the bridge so that boats could get through and trains could pass. John's son was so amazed at the gears and all the things that went along with his father's job. They had brought their lunch to work with them that day and decided to eat their lunch on the bank of the river. John and his son was eating lunch and John had realized that in about 3 minutes the Memphis Belle carrying 300 passengers was getting ready to cross the bridge, but the bridge was not lowered.

John didn't want to alarm his son so he patted him on the shoulder and told him to sit right there and he would be right back. John hustled up the stairs, he grabbed the lever to lower the bridge and he had realized that somehow his son had climbed to the bridge and had fallen in between the gears of the bridge. John could hear the train coming carrying the 300 passengers. In his mind he started going over ways he could get his son from the gears and still lower the bridge, but he knew he had to make a choice. John lowered the bridge just in time for the train to pass crushing his son in between the gears. John looked at the train passing by and saw a man reading his newspaper a woman drinking her tea and another talking to his wife. John screamed at the top of his lungs "Hey, Don't you know what I've just done for you" they didn't hear him so he screamed again "Hey, Don't you know what I've just done for you" But again they just went along with their lives not ever realizing what John had done for them. God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Jesus died a terrible death so that we could spend eternity with God. This was a great act of love by God the Father.

But who is a Christian? John slips in another test for authentic Christianity. Verse 15 – Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God." So we saw John set up a test for the spirits (4:2) – every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. So the true Christian acknowledges that God the Son became a human in flesh. It called for an affirmation of Jesus' humanity. Here the test goes the other way. You must confess that Jesus the man is in fact the Son of God. So this is an affirmation of Jesus' divinity. If someone confesses this, John says God abides or lives in him and he in God. This is another way God shows his love to us. **God lives in us and we in him.**

So let's take a moment to ponder what it actually means to have God live in us and we live in God? John mentions the idea that God abides or dwells in someone more than 36 times in the Gospel of John. He often uses it to

describe the relationship between the persons of the Triune God. So God's Spirit descended and "remained" on Jesus at His baptism. (John 1:32,33). The Spirit was Jesus' constant companion. The Father was the source of the very words Jesus spoke and he "remained" continually in the Father's love (15:10b). God the Father remained or abided with Jesus during his earthly days. (14:10). So abiding in, living in and dwelling in one another describes how the persons of the Trinity relate to each other.

Now John talks about God abiding in us invites us to experience how the persons of the Trinity relate to one another. Abiding or living in each other invites us to experience the way the 3 persons of the Trinity relate to each other. Robert Yarborough writes this. *Abiding describes a reality involving Father, Son and Spirit. . To "remain or abide" in Jesus' teaching is to be his true disciple (8:31). A disciple will be informed and steered by all that Jesus commanded and taught. Abiding in God and Him in us. It is a privilege as rich and fruitful as enjoying the constant companionship of Christ himself, God's Son. It is this rich prospect that John holds before his readers in 1 John 4:15. But it is a promise that assumes a condition, a confession that "Jesus is the Son of God."* Are you living in God? Is He living in you? How do you know or do that?

My friends, I have been a Christian for 42 years. I am still learning about abiding or living in Christ and Christ living in me. When I have lived in Christ and Christ lived in me, my life is saturated with God's Word, guided by the Spirit, instructed by Jesus and walking with Jesus. That does not mean that I am conscious of Jesus all the time. But God has grown in me an increasing awareness of Jesus' presence and the need to listen to Jesus often. So I will pray "help us figure out our schedule with the multiple demands on our time." Lord, I am struggling with this passage or Scripture. Open my eyes and mind so I can at least have some morsel of bread for the people on Sunday. Lord, should I buy anything at this store today.

And it is a battle to live like this I think because we do not come by it naturally. We have a sinful nature that trained us and ruled over us to live life apart from God. We need to offer ourselves every day to be led by the Lord. We need to take up the fight to not conform to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. I'm sure many of you are a lot smarter than me and have figured this out. But the only way I know how to do some of this is to make myself and my life open to God. So I must invite Him to speak through His word. I must gather with other

Christians to pray. I must open my heart to the Holy Spirit's scrutiny constantly so He can expose any gathering darkness.

Friends, you've kind of heard this message for 8 years since I came. You're probably getting bored with it or sick of it. But I've just got to keep asking – how do you expect your life to change and God to work in your life if you don't spend any time in His Word? Or if we only pray in desperate circumstances, how do ever expect to gain a deeper relationship with God. Would you like it if the only time someone contacted you was when they needed something from you? As soon as you provide relief, they're gone? Sadly, sometimes the only time we will seek God is when we're at the bottom or we have nowhere else to turn. Then we might ask the question "how could a loving God allow this to happen to me?" Sometimes it's the love of God that brought us to that point so we would finally realize our desperate need for him.

Please note I said sometimes this is how God works. I am not saying that if you have suffered some tragedy or set back or death in the family, it's automatically because God wanted to get your attention. Suffering is incredibly complex and the whole book of Job speaks against offering simplistic answers to deep pain. But sometimes we will only listen when nothing we've tried is working. God the Father and the Son and the Spirit invite us to a life where they live in us and we live in them. They offer themselves as our constant companion, guide, leader and strength. God does not promise that living in Him fixes all our problems. But He does promise to never stop loving us and to never leave or forsake us through our challenges. You may be able to confess and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. But maybe you need to make much more deliberate choices to live in God and experience Him living in you.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we learn from Him, fellowship with Him, and obey everything He commands us.

God loved us by pouring His love into us through the Spirit. The Father loved us by sending His Son to be the savior of the world. God loves us by living in us and inviting us to live in Him.

Now we come to the place where John affirms the journey of knowing and trusting in God's love. Verse 16 – *So we have come to know and to believe the love God has for us.* – Present Tense - We can come to a place where we both know and believe that God loves us. We can journey towards a greater understanding of God's love for us and a deeper

belief that God loves us. This is vital when those times come when circumstances tempt us to conclude God has stopped loving us.

John's words reveal that he has arrived at this settled state. He longs for his readers and us today to arrive at the same place. But it was not easy for John to get there. Yes, John saw Jesus; talked to Him; traveled with Him; witnessed His power." Yet John struggled greatly in understanding Jesus and what it meant to abide with Him. John and his brother James originally saw Jesus as their ticket to power and fame. Remember how they asked for two key cabinet posts? They learned at home for their mother was pretty ambitious and brashly asked Jesus for the same thing. John seemed to be a pretty confident in his own abilities young man. Then he John failed Jesus big time in the Garden of Gethsemane. Oh we all know about Peter's denial. But Jesus asked Peter, James and John to watch and pray with Him at His greatest moment of need. They all fell asleep. How humiliating and discouraging that must have been.

John was part of a group that came to place full trust in Jesus' leadership (John 6:69). But they were helpless to save him in his hour of direst need (19:25-30). Yet they enjoyed a complete restoration to fellowship with Jesus at the end. Jesus had to work through all that with John until he came to the point that this kingdom and calling was on Jesus' terms and Lordship. Yet it was accompanied by a deep love demonstrated in the cross; death and restoration. So John had a journey to go through in reaching this settled state of knowledge and trust in God and His love.

We have to go through something similar. You may just be getting to know Jesus like the disciples were in the early chapters of the gospels. You need to continue to get to know Jesus as you grow in Him. Grow more confident in His love.

You may be quite used to tackling life yourself. You may think Jesus is for losers or weak people and the only time you'll really need him is when you die. If that describes you, then I would invite you to ponder God's sending of Jesus as Savior of the world. You are part of that world. You are in need of saving. But it's not just saving from hell on your death bed. It's saving from your sin today. Like we heard last week, "we have to see our sin for what it is." We have to recognize that acceptable suburban sins like some impurity, coarse jokes, strife, jealousy, rivalry, fits of anger and idolatry actually are heinous to send people to hell. If you think Jesus is just for the weak, you're right and you're one of them because you're too weak to overcome your sins on your own.

You may have had some jolt in life which has caused you to question God's love for you. Will you go back to these facts from history of God's love for you and go forward living in Him as He lives in you?

Does God love us? Yes – but we are all on a journey to come to know and to believe the love He has for us. Keep on going on your journey to discover and know God's deep love for you.