

LIGHTHOUSE GROUP CURRICULUM

1 John 4:7-12

LEADER'S STUDY

The Reason for Love

1 John 4:7-12

What is happening?

Near the end of his life, the apostle John (son of Zebedee and brother of James) wrote this and two other letters. They're found near the end of our Bibles today, with the catchy titles of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. These should not be confused with the Gospel of John, the fourth book in our New Testament, although he did write that one as well. Many of the same themes thread throughout all his writings, including the theme of love. When he speaks of love, though, he isn't talking about sensual love, nor even the wholesome feel-good, fuzzy kind. He skips over the world's version and points us to God's higher perspective. John urges believers to understand, submit to, embrace, and demonstrate the kind of love that God has for all humanity. It's based on the reality of who God is. It's a self-forgetting, all-in kind of love in which God takes lives Christ has changed and uses them to change others'.

Where is the gospel?

Verses 9-10 put the gospel in a tiny nutshell: God sent His only Son into the world to pay for our sins. Some versions say He sent His Son to be "the propitiation" for our sins, but that's not a word commonly used today. Some other versions translate it as "atoning sacrifice," because that's essentially what *propitiation* means. It's the giving of a sacrifice in order to please an angry God. Our sin against God is so great, our debt to Him so overwhelming, that we are unable to pay it ourselves. It would be even more impossible for us to redeem ourselves from sin than it would be for a man in a homeless shelter to pay off the national debt.

Why would God do this for us? Because of His great love (John 3:16; Eph. 2:4-6). And because I am the undeserving beneficiary of this great love—which I in no way deserve—it's the natural response for me to share that same love with others. I don't love others because God requires it, but because God's love is too great for me to contain. It flows onto me, fills me, and overflows onto those who are around me. As the Holy Spirit shapes me more and more into Christ's likeness, others are able to see His love within me and will be drawn Him.

As you prepare for this week, ask yourself questions like these: Even among those who don't know God, what aspect of His character might they be most apt to recognize as being uniquely His? When I compare my own thoughts, words, motives, and actions with the perfect holiness of God, is it easy to see why He loves me? As one who has been redeemed by Christ's sacrifice, am I entitled to love only the people who I deem worthy of love? How is God calling me to depend on Him more? How does this change my perspective today? How is God calling me to respond based on this scripture?

Spend some time reading and meditating on these truths as you prepare for your meeting. Be willing to share this with your group and invite them to join you in sharing how God is asking them to respond to His word. Be willing to share areas that He is calling you to "follow Him" and make clear "I" statements about how you are going to align with Him.

Some helpful scriptures: John 3:16-18; Romans 5:8-10; 8:35-39; 1 John 2:3-6; 4:20-21. What other places in scripture speak this same truth?

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INTENTIONAL BIBLE READING

READ 1 John 4:7-12
and meditate on it.

Read in the ESV or similar word-for-word translation. Read it again in the NLT or other thought-for-thought version to get a different perspective.

Try to summarize this passage in your own words.

Consider the historical context:

1- In his gospel account, John referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). We know Jesus loved all the disciples, not just John, but perhaps John was more keenly aware of Jesus' love. Might this give him a good platform for teaching other believers about God's love?

2 – At the time John wrote, local persecution of Christians had been going on for decades. Might this have caused these early Christians to struggle with loving others?

3 – Is our human nature today significantly different from it was in John's

POTENTIAL STUDY QUESTIONS

These are just questions you might ask to help your group discussion. Don't feel like you need to answer all of these as a group

What seems to be the main point of this passage?

In v. 7, John addresses his remarks to people he calls "beloved." What does he mean by this?

Does v. 7 suggest that only those who know God are capable of love?

Does v. 8 teach that failure to love others means we're not saved?

In v. 9, what does it mean that God made his love "manifest" among us?

In all these verses, what is the standard of love?

What does it mean in v. 12 that no one has ever seen God? What does that have to do with loving others?

What do you learn about God from this passage?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Has my capacity to love others changed since I came to Christ by faith?

Is loving others a choice?

If I want to love others like Jesus does, but don't, and don't know how, how can that be remedied?

If I consistently refuse to love others and don't see why I should, what does that say about God's love toward me?

What is your "I will" statement?
(Encourage everyone to steer clear of "we" or "us" or "Christians" statements)

With whom are you going to share what you have learned?
(If we can share it with someone else it means we really understand it, it cements it in our own minds, it makes us accountable to the truth, and it blesses the one who hears it. Rom 10:17)

Based on this passage, how should we pray?