

All You Need Is Love (Week 1) - God Is Love
Yesterday's Sermon Summary



1. So what's your "elevator pitch" about Christian love? If you only had 90 seconds to describe it, where would you start? The letter of 1st John, especially chapter 4 ([4.7-21](#) to be specific) would tell you to start in what might be a surprising place, namely not with our love, not even at its best.

2. 1st John 4 would tell us that all good conversations about Christian love start with this simple yet crucial assertion - "God is love" (4.8, 16). Richard of St. Victor, one of Christianity's great theologians from the 1100s CE, wrote, "God is the highest form of love, far beyond even our own imagination." Presbyterian theologian Shirley Guthrie puts that this way: "God is loving every time to everyone in everything." Because God is love, then love has no beginning or end, and therefore is the only thing in the whole universe that will never fail, so proclaimed Martin Luther King Jr.

3. Thus, the belief that "God is love" is one of Christianity's so-called "first principles": it is the starting place for all we think and do, it is the lens by which we understand everything else, and there is no idea of greater importance. Because God is love, love is woven into the very fabric of the cosmos and always has been, and love guides history forward. We were created by love for love.

4. And much of what we believe and do falls apart without this bedrock claim. Theologian Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, in his book *The Love that is God*, "If God is real but is not love...then the divine forces at work in the world are simply out for themselves, unconcerned with our human wellbeing; then there is no reason to believe that the universe is being guided to a favorable end, and history is merely a slaughterhouse in which the happiness and virtue of people will only be victimized; and then the best we human beings can manage is rivalry and violence as we seek to protect our own finite lives in a meaningless universe."

5. So how does 1st John 4.7-21 describe God's love? First, the God who is love wants to be known, enough so that God sent Christ to reveal divine love to us ([1st John 4.9](#)). So when we want to understand what God's love is like, we need to look first and foremost at Jesus.

6. And don't miss the second part of that verse - God wants His love to be known in the person of Jesus "so that we might have life through Him." In so many words, love - and certainly God's love - is always life-giving. Divine love wants us to experience life as God intends it to be, and life in full ([John 10.10](#)). Or, as St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "To say that God is love is to say that God seeks my good."

7. The writer of 1st John also says that God's love wants to "abide" with us, and wants us to "abide" with it ([1st John 4.16b](#)). That word "abide" means "to remain" or "be at home with." So God is saying that we can make the choice to be at home in God's love. As German Christian philosopher Josef Pieper put it, "God is glad we exist; God always welcomes us home."

8. Last and maybe most remarkably [1st John 4.17-18](#) tells us that God's love should remove our fear of judgment and punishment, even in the life to come after we die. Interpreting these verses, New Testament scholar David Resenberger writes that God's love "expels our fear and having no use of it, crumples it up and throws it away like trash into a rubbish bin." We know that we're relating to God in a misguided or misdirected way when we are operating more from fear of God than appreciation for God's unshakeable love.

9. So let's revisit that elevator pitch about Christian love. Maybe we'd start this way? Christian love starts with God because God is love. We can only love - giving, receiving, and appreciating it - because God is love. And now God calls us to love each other the way that God loves us.

10. Sister Ilia Delio, a Franciscan nun who is chair of the theology department at Villanova, describes the centrality of God's love in our lives and universe like this: "We must learn to realize that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good. To know God's will is at root to awaken to God's love within us and around us. It is to realize that we are created out of love, we exist in love, and we are destined for love. If all the creation flows out of love and toward love, then the only reason for our existence is to love...Without the God of love we would not exist and we must be ready to encounter that love, accept it, and respond to it. The meaning of our lives can only be found in God's love for us, for deep in God's love lies our happiness, our peace, our hope, and our fullness."

A Prayer for the Week

Adapted from Ephesians 3.17-19:

Lord God, I pray that You would make Your home in my heart today as I trust in You. May I be deeply rooted and securely grounded in Your unshakable love, so that Your love may be My source of strength.

Grant me the sight to perceive, along with all of Your people, the vast breadth, length, height, and depth of Your incomparable love that surpasses our human imagination so that I may be filled to the brim with it, amen and amen.

More about God's Love this Week

- Spend some time in 1st John this week, reading and mulling what it says about love:
- [1 John 2.7-11 NRSVUE](#)
- [1 John 3.1-3 NRSVUE](#)
- [1 John 3.11-24 NRSVUE](#)
- [1 John 4.7-21 NRSVUE](#)

- Here's a neat journaling exercise for the week. Because "God is love," take the famous text about love in [1st Corinthians 13.1-8](#) and make it about God. So not "Love is patient, love is kind..." but "GOD is patient, GOD is kind..." You can rewrite or paraphrase all eight verses like this...It's a really poignant way to get your head around what God's love is really like.

- Here are a few resources on God's love:
- A devotional with reflection questions entitled "Three Strikes - and You're Still Loved": [Three Strikes and You Are...Still Loved](#)
- Some daily reflections from The Center for Action and Contemplation on God's love:
- [Living in the Light of God's Love](#)
- [God's Passionate Love](#)
- [God's Universal Love](#)
- A great selection of short quotes about God's love from across church history, as well as verses about it: [Infinite love, endless grace: Quotes about the depth of God's love](#)