

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Abiding in Love: A Journey Through 1 John 4

Day 1: The Origin of Love

Reading: *1 John 4:11-13; John 3:16; Galatians 5:22-23*

Devotional: Love is not a feeling we conjure on our own. It flows from God himself, and it is the foundation upon which every other fruit of the Spirit is built. John makes clear that because God loved us with such extraordinary depth, we are called to reflect that love outward toward one another. Without love as the root, joy, peace, patience, and all the rest cannot fully flourish. Ask yourself today: Is the love of God truly the starting point of how you treat the people around you, or have you been trying to bear fruit from a rootless branch?

Day 2: Love as Witness

Reading: *1 John 4:14-16; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 22:35-40*

Devotional: The apostles were eyewitnesses to something the world had never seen and will never see again: God in human flesh, walking among men. Their testimony is the bedrock of our faith. The Holy Spirit now carries that witness into our hearts, confirming its truth. But witness is not only something spoken from a pulpit or written on a page. It is lived out in how we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and how we love our neighbors as ourselves. Your life is a living testimony. What does it say to the people watching you today?

Day 3: Love That Casts Out Fear

Reading: *1 John 4:17-18; Romans 8:1; Galatians 5:1*

Devotional: Fear and love cannot occupy the same space. Where perfect love takes hold, fear loses its grip. For the believer, this means that the dread of judgment, the weight of past failures, and the anxiety of an uncertain future are all swallowed up in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Fear is the chain that keeps us from deeper faith and bolder love. God's love, made complete in us through the Holy Spirit, is the key that breaks that chain. Identify

one fear you have been carrying. Surrender it today to the love of God that is greater than any guilt or dread.

Day 4: Love That Comes First

Reading: 1 John 4:19; Romans 5:8; Romans 12:1

Devotional: We did not initiate this relationship. God did. Long before any of us drew a first breath, He moved toward us in love. That reality should shake us to our core and drive us to our knees. Paul calls us in light of God's mercy to present ourselves as living sacrifices, describing it as our reasonable service. Reasonable. Given what God has done, our love and obedience are simply the fitting response. Spend time today meditating on the fact that God loved you first. Let that truth move from your mind into your chest, and let it change how you move through your day.

Day 5: Love Made Visible

Reading: 1 John 4:20-21; Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 4:7

Devotional: It is easy to say the words. It costs very little to sing them or to post them. But John draws a hard line: if we claim to love God whom we cannot see, and yet fail to love the brother or sister standing right in front of us, we are not telling the truth. The Good Samaritan did not love in words. He loved in action, at personal cost, without expectation of return. The most direct path to honoring an invisible God is to care for His very visible children. Who in your life needs you to stop talking about love and start showing it?

Small Group Guide

"All Things by the Holy Spirit" | 1 John 4:11-21

Before You Begin

Open your time together in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and help each member move from hearing the Word to living it out. Encourage everyone to have their Bible open to 1 John 4:11-21 throughout your time together.

Key Takeaways

1. Love is the foundation of the fruits of the Spirit. The pastor made the case that none of the other fruits of the Spirit can be fully exercised without first abiding in the love of God. Love is not just one item on a list -- it is the starting point for everything else.
2. The apostolic witness is the anchor of our faith. The "we" in 1 John 4:14 refers to the original eyewitnesses of Jesus. Their testimony, carried forward by the Holy Spirit, is the trustworthy foundation on which our confidence in God's love rests.
3. Abiding in God requires a confession of faith. John uses the word "abide" repeatedly and intentionally. We cannot claim to live in something we have not first committed to believing.
4. Perfect love removes fear. For the Christian, the love of God -- when allowed to mature and deepen in us -- eliminates the fear of judgment. Love, joy, and peace cannot coexist with fear.
5. We love God by loving the people we can see. The most practical and honest test of our relationship with God is not how we treat those who agree with us, but how we treat those who challenge or confront us.
6. God loved us first. Everything flows from this reality. Our ability to love others is not self-generated -- it is a response to what God has already done.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Choose One)

Think of someone in your life who loved you without expecting anything in return. What did that feel like, and how did it affect you?

When you hear the word "love" used in a church context, what is your first reaction? Does it feel like something real and actionable, or does it sometimes feel like a concept that is hard to pin down?

Going Deeper

- **On Love as the Foundation**

The pastor said he firmly believes that none of the other fruits of the Spirit can be fully exercised without first abiding in the love of God. Do you agree with that? What happens in a person's life when they try to practice patience, kindness, or self-control without love as the foundation?

The sermon described love not as an emotional attachment but as a deliberate choice to treat others with respect and concern, placing their needs on the same level as your own. How does that definition challenge or expand the way you normally think about love?

On the Witness of the Apostles 3. The pastor pointed out that no one alive today has seen the Lord, but the original apostles did -- and the Holy Spirit now bears witness to our hearts about the trustworthiness of their testimony. How does that truth affect the way you think about your confidence in Scripture?

The sermon referenced 2 Peter 1:16, where Peter says the apostles did not follow cleverly devised myths but were eyewitnesses to Christ's majesty. In a culture that often treats the Gospels as stories open to personal interpretation, how do you hold on to the weight of that eyewitness testimony?

On Fear and Perfect Love 5. The pastor said, "Fear is the chains of bondage that holds us back from deeper faith." Where do you see fear showing up most in your own walk with God - fear of judgment, fear of failure, fear of what others think, or something else?

Read 1 John 4:17-18 together. What does it look like practically for love to cast out fear in everyday life? Can you think of a time when you experienced that?

On Loving What We Can See 7. The pastor said, "The best way to love our unseen Lord and Savior is to care for and share in the burdens of those people we see around us every day." Who in your life right now might be waiting for you to show up in that way?

The sermon challenged the group with this question: Are we quick to be critical of fellow believers, quick to land on the first negative thought about someone, or slow to bear their burdens with them? How would you honestly answer that for yourself?

The pastor noted that Jesus expanded the definition of "neighbor" in the parable of the Good Samaritan to include even those who would hate or mistreat us. Is there someone in your life right now who falls into that category -- someone it feels unnatural or even costly to love? What would a first step toward loving them look like?

On "He Loved Us First" 10. The sermon described God's act of loving us first as something that should shake us to our core and drive us to our knees. When you sit with that reality -- that God chose to love you before you ever had the chance to respond -- what emotion does that stir in you?

Practical Applications

- **This Week, Choose at Least One:**

Identify one person in your life who is difficult to love and commit to one specific, tangible act of kindness toward them before the next time your group meets. Come prepared to share what you did and what it cost you.

Examine your words. The pastor warned that "I love you" can become an automatic response lacking conviction -- even toward God. For the next seven days, pay attention to how you express love in your closest relationships and ask whether your actions are backing up your words.

Pray through the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 each morning this week, beginning with love. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where each fruit is growing in your life and where it is being neglected.

Bear someone's burden. Reach out to a fellow believer who is going through a hard season and ask them a specific question about what they are carrying. Do not offer advice -- just listen and pray with them.

Reflect on fear. Write down one fear that has been keeping you from a deeper step of faith. Then write out 1 John 4:18 in your own words as a personal declaration over that fear.

Closing Thought

The pastor closed with this challenge: our faith in God is not based on the works we do, but God's incomparable and unmatched love for us should be the motivator to do good things. Let that be the posture your group carries out of this room -- not striving to earn love, but responding to the love that was already given.

Close your time in prayer, asking God to make His love so real in each member's life that it naturally overflows into every relationship they carry.

Group Discussion Questions

1 John 4:11-21

All Things by the Holy Spirit

1- John writes that if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us -- what does it look like in practical, everyday terms for God's love to be 'perfected' or made complete in a person's life?

2- The sermon describes love as the foundation from which all other fruits of the Spirit flow -- in what ways have you seen the absence of love undermine the expression of other spiritual qualities like patience, kindness, or gentleness in yourself or in a community?

3- Jesus expanded the definition of 'neighbor' far beyond what was culturally accepted in his day -- who are the people in your life that you find most difficult to include in that definition, and what might it cost you to love them as yourself?

4- The sermon draws a sharp distinction between the eyewitness testimony of the original apostles and the role of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to our hearts today -- how does understanding that distinction strengthen or challenge your confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture?

5- John states that perfect love casts out fear, and the sermon connects this to having confidence on the day of judgment -- in what areas of your spiritual life does fear still have a foothold, and what might it reveal about where your trust in God's love still needs to grow?

6- The parable of the prodigal son is offered as a picture of love without expectation or resentment -- how does the father's response challenge the way you tend to respond when someone who has wronged you seeks restoration?

7- The sermon warns that saying 'I love God' while harboring hatred toward a brother or sister makes a person a liar -- how do you personally examine the consistency between what you profess about God and how you actually treat the people around you?

8- Jonathan's sacrificial friendship with David is presented as an example of love that thrives without expectation of return, even at great personal cost -- what relationships in your own life call you to that kind of selfless, costly love, and what holds you back from fully embracing it?

9- The sermon suggests that getting out of step with God means moving ahead of God -- what does it look like to let God set the pace in your relationships rather than acting on your own instincts or emotions first?

10- Paul describes presenting ourselves as living sacrifices as our 'reasonable service' in light of God's mercy -- how does framing love for others as a reasonable and expected response to what God has already done for us change the way you think about the effort or sacrifice that love sometimes requires?