

Small Group Guide – Fearless

The Real Thing – Week 8

1 John 4:7-21

Before You Meet

Encourage group members to read 1 John 4:7-21 before gathering. Ask them to come prepared to share one thing from the passage that stood out to them personally.

Overview

In this passage, the Apostle John returns to one of the central themes of his letter: love. In 15 verses, John uses some form of the word love 27 times. His purpose is clear. He wants believers to understand that genuine Christianity is not simply a set of facts we confess, but a transforming reality we receive, rest in, and reflect to others. John also addresses one of the most practical struggles in the Christian life, the fear of God's judgment, and shows us that God's perfect love, demonstrated through Jesus Christ, is the only thing that can truly drive that fear out.

Key Takeaways

- 1. God's love changes who we are.** Love is not something we generate on our own. It originates in God. Because we have been born of God, His love begins to become visible in how we treat others. Love does not earn our relationship with God, but it reveals that we have one.
 - 2. God's love replaces fear with confidence.** Those who belong to Christ do not have to live in terror of God's judgment. Jesus bore the punishment our sin deserved. Our confidence before God is not based on our performance but on what Christ has already accomplished on our behalf.
 - 3. God's love changes how we love others.** The love we have received from God is not meant to stop with us. It is meant to flow through us. Our love for God must become visible in the way we treat the people He has placed around us.
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Discussion Questions

Opening Question Take a few minutes to get the conversation started.

- When you hear the phrase "God loves you," what is your gut reaction? Does it bring comfort, or do you find it difficult to fully believe? Why do you think that is?
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Section 1: God's Love Changes Who We Are (1 John 4:7-12)

The sermon made the point that love does not earn a relationship with God, but love reveals that we have a relationship with God.

- In your own words, what is the difference between loving others in order to earn God's acceptance and loving others because you already belong to Him? Why does that distinction matter?
 - John says in verse 8 that the one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. The sermon described this as a hard statement. Why do you think John uses such direct language here? What is he confronting?
 - The sermon said, "The cross does more than show us that we are loved. The cross also shows us how we are to love." What does it look like practically to love others the way Christ loved us, sacrificially and even when it is difficult?
 - John says in verse 12 that when believers genuinely love one another, the unseen God makes His love visible through His people. Can you think of a time when you witnessed God's love made visible through another person? How did it affect you?
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Section 2: God's Love Replaces Fear with Confidence (1 John 4:13-18)

The sermon drew a distinction between the reverent fear of God that Scripture calls us to and the terrifying fear of condemnation that Christ has removed for those who belong to Him.

- The pastor said, "It is possible to know the facts about God's love without fully resting in that love." Do you relate to that? What does it look like in daily life when someone knows about God's love but is not truly resting in it?
- John says in verse 17 that we can have confidence in the day of judgment. The sermon explained that this confidence is not based on our good deeds or perfect

living, but on what Jesus has already done. How does this truth change the way you think about your standing before God?

- The sermon stated that "perfect love drives out fear" refers specifically to the fear of standing condemned before a holy God, not the general anxieties of life. Have you ever struggled with the fear that God might ultimately reject you? How does the gospel speak to that fear?
- The pastor said, "The more deeply we understand the gospel, the less we live wondering whether God will finally reject us." What habits or practices help you return to the gospel when fear or doubt creeps back in?

Section 3: God's Love Changes How We Love (1 John 4:19-21)

The sermon emphasized that our love for others is always a response to the love God has already shown us, and that genuine love for God cannot be separated from love for the people around us.

- John writes in verse 19, "We love because He first loved us." The sermon said the answer to a cold or unforgiving heart is not simply to try harder, but to return to the gospel. What does it look like to return to the gospel when you are struggling to love someone?
 - The sermon acknowledged that forgiveness is not always immediate, and that working through deep hurt takes time. How do you hold together the reality that forgiveness is commanded and the reality that it is often a process? What has helped you in that process?
 - John says in verse 20 that a person who claims to love God while hating a brother or sister is a liar. That is strong language. Why do you think John connects our love for God so directly to our love for people? What does one reveal about the other?
 - Is there a relationship in your life right now where God's love is calling you to take a step, whether that is offering forgiveness, pursuing reconciliation, or simply extending patience? You do not have to share details, but take a moment to sit with that question honestly.
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Practical Applications

The sermon closed with several action steps. Use these as a launching point for personal reflection and group accountability.

Receive God's love. If you are still trying to make yourself worthy of God's love, stop and simply receive what Christ has already done. This applies not only to those who have never trusted Christ, but also to believers who still struggle to believe that God truly loves them.

Rest in God's love. When fear of judgment returns, preach the gospel to yourself. Remind yourself that Jesus took your place, paid for your sin, rose from the grave, and that your confidence rests not in how firmly you hold on to God but in how securely He holds on to you.

Reflect God's love. Identify one person this week that God is calling you to love more faithfully. This may mean offering forgiveness, serving someone sacrificially, letting go of bitterness, or taking the first step toward a difficult conversation.

Closing Challenge

The sermon stated: "Genuine Christianity is not merely knowing facts about God's love. It is receiving His love, resting in His love, and reflecting His love."

As a group, take a moment to pray together. Ask God to make His love real in each of your hearts, to replace fear with confidence, and to help each of you become a visible reflection of His love to the people He has placed around you.

Memory Verse for the Week

1 John 4:19 — John describes the foundation of all Christian love: we love because God loved us first. Meditate on this verse throughout the week and allow it to reorient your heart whenever loving others feels difficult.