

REDISCOVERING OUR PLACE IN GOD'S STORY



ACT 5 BIBLE STUDY

OPENING QUESTIONS

- 1) When you think of the word "church", what thoughts and experiences come to mind? Are your thoughts primarily positive, negative, or a mix of both? Why?
- 2) Can someone be a Christian (or follower of Jesus) without being a part of a church or other community of faith? Why or why not?
- 3) How do you define the word, "love"? What is it? How is it shown?
- 4) Has there been a time when you were acutely aware of God's love for you? What happened, and how did He show His love for you?

SCRIPTURE

Read 1 John 4:7-21.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- 1) Is there something in this passage that stands out to you—something challenging, confusing, or encouraging?
- 2) What are several characteristics of God’s love, as John describes it? How do these differ from how our culture often thinks of and defines “love”?
- 3) Why do you think John devoted so much space in his letter to this topic? Why does he think the expression of love between brothers and sisters in Christ is so essential?
- 4) John describes the Incarnation and the cross as the ultimate expressions of God’s love. What role does the church now play in the biblical story according to John?
- 5) What does it mean to love your brother or sister? What does it mean to hate your brother or sister? Give examples of each.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- 1) How does this passage define our role in God’s story today? What does it look like to intentionally love your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- 2) Describe an example of the church loving well that you’ve either experienced personally or seen from afar. How did it impact you and your understanding of God?
- 3) Read the following two quotes about the purpose of Christian community:

“I have come to realize that aiming for community is a bit like aiming for happiness. It’s not a goal in itself. We find happiness as an incidental by-product of pursuing love, justice, hospitality, and generosity. When you aim for happiness, you are bound to miss it. Likewise with community. It’s not our goal. It emerges as a by-product of pursuing something else. Those who love community destroy it, but those who love people build community.” *(Michael Frost, Exiles)*

“The church doesn’t exist in order to provide a place where people can pursue their private spiritual agendas and develop their own spiritual potential. Nor does it exist in order to provide a safe haven in which people can hide from the wicked world and ensure that they themselves arrive safely at an otherworldly destination. Private spiritual growth and ultimate salvation come rather as the by-products of the main, central, overarching purpose for which God has called and is calling us. This purpose is clearly stated in various places in the New Testament: that through the church God will announce to the wider world that he is indeed its wise, loving, and just creator; that through Jesus he has defeated the powers that corrupt and enslave it; and that by his Spirit he is at work to heal and renew it.” *(N. T. Wright, Simply Christian)*

If someone were to say, “I don’t go to church/Chi Alpha/Life Group/_____ because I don’t see the point. It’s boring. I can just listen to a sermon or podcast at home.” How would you respond? Why is being part of a community of faith essential for fulfilling our part in God’s story today?

- 4) Why do you think Chi Alpha puts so much emphasis on being a part of a Life Group? How does this passage from 1 John affect your understanding of the purpose and mission of Life Group?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Do two or three acts of intentional love towards a brother or sister this week - acts of kindness or generosity. For example: Take someone’s car keys and wash their car. Shovel your neighbor’s driveway. Be intentional in a conversation, inviting people to talk about their lives. Clean up your house or apartment without being asked. Pay for the person behind you at a drive-in. Intentionally go to a business or restaurant in a part of town that is struggling economically. Let others go ahead of you in line. After demonstrating God’s love in a practical way, spend some time praying for that person - that they would experience your act of love as proof that God is real, good, and present in their life.