

1 John 4:7-12

1. Restored love for God
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3. Restored love for self

West Valley Church
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Restored:
Love
1 John 4:7-12

It's an NYC year. Every four years, thousands of teens and youth leaders from our USA/Canada region travel to major cities in the US for Nazarene Youth Conference, and this July we are taking 17 of our youth to Phoenix, Arizona. Are you guys excited? How many of you are lucky enough to be double dippers and will have gone twice? Nice, keep your hands raised. How many of you are NYC alum? How many of you have been to a Christian conference, summer camp, retreat or worship concert? Now think of those experiences and imagine how you felt during those events.

One thing I hear often about these events is how we feel so filled with the Holy Spirit, it's like we are on fire. The love we experienced from God and for God was so intense that it burns within us and it's like we're on fire. We have a burning love for God. Now, times that intense love of God by the biggest number you can think of and THAT is how much God loves you and all of creation.

God's love for us is an unquenchable burning fire. God's love cannot be put out. There is no fire hose large enough or powerful enough to quench God's love for us. There just isn't. What an amazing, awesome, and quite humbling thing that is.

Since Easter Sunday we've been discussing in church and in our small groups how our souls, minds and strength can be restored as we participate in the new life of Christ. As we've been discussing what it means to have a restored soul, a restored mind and a restored strength, we've been learning and practicing how to live into the commandment Jesus proclaimed in Mark 12:30 is the greatest: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."*

As we've focused on how to live into this commandment as God's restored people—with a restored soul, mind and strength—this morning we are finishing the series and focusing on restored love: what it is and how we can love as God's restored people. But to love as God's restored people, we need to understand God's love for us, accept that love for us, and love out of the overflow of God's love that pours into our hearts.

While the whole Bible is full of narratives, proclamations and testimonies about who God is, the passage we are going to sit with today is 1 John 4: 7-12, in which God's love is proclaimed. In fact, the whole letter of 1 John speaks of God's love for us and what God's people are called to do with that love.

As we prepare to hear the Word of the Lord today, let us come before God humbly in prayer.

O Lord, we humbly come before your throne and sit at your feet. Help us to cast off anything that keeps us from hearing what you have to speak to us today. May the words we

hear encourage us, convict us and transform us into greater likeness of you. It is through you and in you we pray, amen.

The Word of the Lord: 1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

God's love for us

On Easter Sunday, we began this restored series, and we learned the word "restored" means to be put back in an original condition, place or position. We also learned what it means to have restored life, which consists of having an unhindered relationship with God and having healthy relationships with each other and creation. To be restored means to be restored in the condition God had first created us, in the image of God, and in our passage of 1 John 4, verses seven and eight explain who God is and who we are to pattern our lives after.

These two verses reveal that the very nature of God is love, as John writes, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is **born** of God and **knows** God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."

In sum, John is saying that all love comes from God. God is love. Those who love are born of God and know God. So to love, we must be born of God *and* know God. Why? Because, God is love.

As we know that God is love, John again helps us understand what this love looks like in the next verse, verse nine. John writes, "*God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.*"

God sending his only Son, Jesus Christ to this world is quite remarkable for two reasons. For one, biblical commentators have noted that the common Greek philosophy of the time distinguished the spiritual realm from the material realm which was considered "inherently evil."¹ For a deity to become human would be unthinkable. Deities were too worthy to become human; what a lowly thing it would be for a deity to come to this earth, to live with humans, let alone become a human and take on sinful flesh. It would have been laughable that there were people who believed Jesus to be not only fully divine, but also fully human. But this love God had was exemplified through Jesus Christ, God's holy Son being sent to this earth as a baby, fully divine *AND* fully human, taking on our flesh, our sin, and dying a death that enabled all humanity to be redeemed and restored to God.

Secondly, the act of God sending Jesus Christ into this world is remarkable. When looking at the Greek text, the verb, "sent," appears in the perfect tense, which communicates that this

¹ Rick Williamson, *1, 2, & 3 John: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), 41.

action is a continuous action. So not only did God send Jesus Christ to redeem and reconcile, but God continues to send the Son through the Holy Spirit presently, “continuing the effects of the incarnation.”² God’s love is presently with us through Jesus Christ, and God’s love is one that God keeps giving. God’s love is unquenchable.

But, not only is God’s love unquenchable, God’s love for us, brothers and sisters, is a love that is unconditional. Verse 10 says *“In this is love, **not that we have loved God** but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

This is the good news beloved. God loved us and was willing to die for us while we were sinners, while we were not a friend of God, while we were enemies of God, while we were living lives unworthy of such a love as this. God loves us SO much that God’s love is without condition, willing to go to any length and depth to enable us to be restored back to right relationship, to an unhindered relationship, with Him through Jesus Christ. God’s love is unconditional and is unquenchable. There is nothing we can do to stop God from loving us or to make God love us. We are loved, but we must choose whether we will accept God’s grace and restorative love or believe the lies that tell us we’re unworthy of God’s grace and restorative love.

Restored Love for God

When we believe God loves us and we accept God’s love, our lives become restored and transformed. All love comes from God, so in order for us to truly love, we have to allow God’s love to pour into our hearts. Not only do we have the capacity to love as God loves, but we have the **ability and responsibility** to love as God loves. What this looks like consists of three things. First is a...

1. Restored love for God

To have a restored love for God means that we no longer walk in darkness while walking a life of faith. John states earlier in his letter, in chapter one verse six, *“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”* In other words, if we say we have relationship with God but live a totally different way of life, we lie to God, lie to others and lie to ourselves. Lying is not loving; lying is not a characteristic of God. Having a restored love for God means that our walk with Christ is genuine. We don’t just talk the talk but we walk the talk. What this looks like comes in different shapes and sizes, including, but not limited to coming to God daily in prayer; reading God’s inspired Word in the Bible; fasting something to lean more on God; singing songs of praise to God as we have done this morning; tithing; giving to Faith Promise to make sure that the Word of God continues to be preached and heard all over the world; caring for others, caring for our community, caring for ourselves and caring for all of God’s creation.

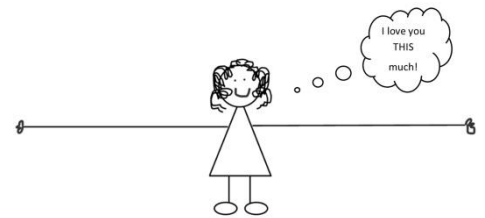
Having a restored love for God also looks like keeping God’s commandments. 1 John 2: 4 says, *“Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”*

² Ibid., 144.

The commands referred to here consist of the greatest commandment we read earlier from Mark 12:30—to love God with all heart, soul, mind and strength—and the second greatest commandment—to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). While this all may sound overwhelming—loving God, others and ourselves—when we know and believe that love comes from God, and we accept God’s love for us and allow it to transform our hearts, souls, minds and strength, we are equipped to love and ***we can love***.

Two weeks ago Pastor Jason preached on restored strength and reminded us that it is God’s strength not our strength we can rely on. Relying upon God for strength to love when it’s hard and for the ability to love with every ounce of our being is made less overwhelming, especially when we think about who we are commanded to love. Loving God alone is such a huge thing; we have such an amazing, awesome, powerful and majestic God that it seems impossible to love God as God loves. Add on loving others and loving ourselves, it’s like our love tank is maxed out.

Have you ever seen stick figure drawings of people with their arms stretched out like Mrs. Incredible and a little air bubble with the words, “I love you this much?” In an attempt to communicate love, my mom would often draw these little stick figures and stick them in my lunch box. Maybe you have participated in such stick drawings as well. Sometimes we may even do it in person, but in an attempt to show Dan just how much I love him, my arms are already maxed out. I can try to stretch my arms more to include you all, but I can’t stretch them anymore to show how much I love God too. My arms don’t go nearly far out enough. I don’t think Mrs. Incredible could even do that. But stretching my arms out as far as they can go, what symbol am I making?



That of the cross, and we remember that it is only through Jesus Christ that we can be restored and have a restored love that keeps on loving and never runs out. The unquenchable, never-ending, love of God has been poured into our hearts, enabling us to continue to love, continue to perfect in love. Our love tank doesn’t become depleted, it overflows abundantly, and we keep growing in love, we keep growing in Christian perfection as our love continues to increase.

Restored Love for Others

As we’ve made our way through verses 7 and 10 of our passage this morning, and discussed how God loves us and how we can in turn love, we now come across verse 11, which reminds us for a second time in this passage that we are to love one another. John writes, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

As our love for God continues to grow, we will naturally have a...

2. Restored love for others

The love of God that is so abundantly poured into our hearts spills out of our love tank and overflows, extending to others.

To put it another way, restored love for others is NOT loving whenever we feel like it or whenever we think or feel it has been earned or is necessary; restored love for others loves at all times and loves out of the overflow of God's love for us. Such a love loves those who are not only family or friends, but those who have offended us, those who are strangers. Such a love for others is hospitable to others. Our small groups are a really great example of loving each other as each small group encourages one another, helps one another out, helps the community by volunteering in places like the Union Gospel Mission and our two elementary schools we partner with—Wide Hollow and Mountainview. Upwards Soccer is another way not only we individually love our community as we coach teams, cheer on teams, grill burgers and hot dogs for our soccer kids and families, but collectively as we participate as a church.

Looking a bit more closely at verse 11, John uses the word “beloved” for a second time, the first time was in verse seven, and it is the “Beloved” who John is writing to. The beloved consist of all those in the first century house churches around Ephesus that received John's letter. And while we assume that all those people in those churches have experienced restored life, that they have believed and accepted Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior, John is encouraging these people to love. But why? Shouldn't they be loving? Why is John so adamant about communicating this topic of love with *these* people? Shouldn't this be something John should be telling those who do not yet believe?

While John's words do act as an encouragement for his audience to keep on loving, John's word also functions as a reminder so that his audience may discern who are the false teachers of the day. His letter acts as both an encouragement and a reminder to help discern false teachers. Placing these words of John in our context today, these words not only act as an encouragement and reminder for us to continue loving but as a conviction for us who belong to the universal Church.

Unfortunately, the word, “church,” does not always bring positive thoughts or memories to people. As I served in Ireland, I heard from people how church was a ritualistic thing or a legalistic community. Church was not a loving community. In Kansas City, I had the opportunity to interview one of the leaders from the KC Atheist Coalition, and he told me that he used to be Christian and attend church, and even had received a call to be a missionary, but after a marital issue arose, his church and his family shunned him.

I apologized for that. I wasn't a part of that situation, but I am part of this Christian community that hasn't always been a community and fellowship of love. For any of you who have been hurt by a fellow Christian or a church community, I am sorry and do ask for your forgiveness.

Church, we are not called to have restored life or restored love individually, but communally. Restored love for others doesn't mean we go from this place and solely focus on loving as individuals, forgetting to love our fellow brothers and sisters in this place. Nor does it mean we only love each other in this place and not those on the outside walls of this church building. It takes every one of us in this church to be the West Valley Church that loves by participating in the mission we believe God has given us: to introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works and live as people with purpose. If we don't have love leading us in this mission, and if we are not united in love as we seek to live

out this mission, it's a failed mission. We must love one another and let love fill this place that it overflows into and onto our community and everyone who walks through those front doors.

Restored Love for Self

In the last verse of our passage, verse 12, John writes, *"No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."* In other words, though we do not see God, God is made manifest through us as we love, and God perfects our love as we abide in God and God in us.

While John says our love is perfected when we love others, there is one other thing we must love to have such a perfection of love and that is having a...

3. Restored love for self

To be perfectly loving, requires us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love others as ourselves. *We* are included in that. To love God and others and not love ourselves is missing the mark of Christian perfection or entire sanctification.

Entire sanctification is when we love God with our whole selves and desire the will of God and no longer the desires of our flesh. The desire God has is for everyone and all of creation to be redeemed and to be restored, which happens through accepting God's love for us and believing that God sent his one and only Son to die on the cross to redeem us of our sins and restore us back to right relationship with God, which consists of being restored to **love** as God is love. **Not loving ourselves is not the desire of God.** If we proclaim we are people of restored love, we proclaim that we desire the will of God and to love as God loves and love whom God loves. We are included in those whom God loves.

So how do we love ourselves? This might be one of the most difficult things to do. It seems easy for us to love God or love others, but loving ourselves can be hard when we know first and foremost all of our faults, failures, and weaknesses, but the love God has for us enables us to be free of these ways of thinking, renewing our minds, our hearts, our souls and our strength. In this renewal, in this restoration, we can have a restored love for self.

When we love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength God and others (creation and ourselves included), when we love as God loves, God's love in us is made complete, is made perfect, is made holy. But as we have heard this morning that God is an ever-present God, a God who continuously loves, loves with an unquenchable love, our perfection in love doesn't end. We keep on perfecting in love, growing in Christian perfection, entire sanctification until we are glorified with Christ at the time when God's mission is fulfilled.

This morning, don't let your own failures or weaknesses get you down. Don't let them stop you from fully loving God, others and yourself. Know that you can love entirely as you let Christ rule and dwell in your heart; the Christ who overcame the power of sin and death can reside inside of us all, empowering us all to love as He loves and live lives restored and perfected in heart, soul, mind and strength.

As we pray this morning, I invite you to commit or recommit your life to God. Perhaps you're ready to accept this love God has for you and start experiencing this restored love in

your life; perhaps you have committed your life to God but are ready to go a step further and commit your entire self to God, letting God transform your heart, soul, mind and strength; perhaps you want to reaffirm to God that I am saying yes to all of you and I will continue to say yes to you and live truthfully in this world and in this church by continuing to love as you love. However you are led to pray, know that God will be with you and will help you in this commitment, recommitment or reaffirmation.

Let us pray.