

1 John 4:7-12

Our series on marriage makes a stop in the first letter of John the apostle. It's a great place to stop because one of John's favourite words is "remain", like "remain committed to each other", or "remain in God's love and God will remain in you".

John is all about the love of God and the love we are called to live. His favourite word for his fellow followers of Jesus is "beloved". (3:21, 4:1, 4:7)

John says nothing specifically about marriage. And, to apply what he says only to marriage is to reduce the application in a very narrow way. So, we won't do that either. But if you are here with marriage on your mind, your own, your parents', your children's or a friend's, John has much that is helpful.

Let's start by reviewing what the word 'love' means. Or, to use a baking metaphor, let's review the ingredients of God's love.

The main ingredient of God's love is what the Old Testament writers call "**love and faithfulness**". It is love day after day after day.

The love God has for us is kindness that never quits.

**Accept.** God welcomes you and me with open arms. He thinks of us by our names and not by any labels we use for ourselves or that anyone uses on us. God accepts us. Not even our sin, our guilt, our shame is a barrier to God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

The love of God has within it '**high value**' or 'esteem'.

God esteems us or holds us in high value.

Some people think we're great. Others have no use for us. They don't think we will ever add up to much. But we are precious to God. We matter to God.

**Concern.** To be concerned about someone is to notice what they are going through and in some way to take part of their burden or struggle into your heart and take action to help them. God's love means that God is concerned about you and me. Our lives, our hurts, our struggles and battles and fears matter to him.

**Favour.** God favours you and me. Favour is special love, particular love. It is an act of gracious kindness.

**Respect.** Real love has in it the quality of respect. Someone might tell us they love us, but they are trying to control us, or manipulate us. We might do the same, even with good intentions. God does not force us to love or to trust, even as he works to persuade us that he will always love us.

**Honour.** It is like the honour of a retired bricklayer who can take guests past St. Albert Place in its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year and say, "I helped lay those bricks". God honours us by calling us, us of all people to belong to him and to be his partners in his mission in the world.

God's love is flavoured with '**cherish**'. Cherish is a love song kind of word.

To treat with tenderness and affection; to nurture with care; to protect and aid; To hold dear; to embrace with interest; to indulge; to encourage; to foster;  
(google definition)

God cherishes you and me.

So when we hear or read the word 'love' in the Bible, think of these ideas, these flavours, these ingredients or contents. Meditate on them.

Love and faithfulness, accept, high value, concern, favour, respect, honour, cherish.

I've come up with a handy little mnemonic device to help us all remember these ingredients of the love of God.

I tested it this week, and it does work. Here it is:

"Louise and Fred, a high voltage couple, foster really happy children."

Love and faithfulness, acceptance, high value, concern, favour, respect, honour, cherish.

Great ideas. But left as ideas they don't do anyone any good.

Love without action is useless.

God knows that. He could never be content with having loving feelings and not acting on them. Jesus Christ is God's love come to life.

Here is where John is going. He wants us to put our love, to take these concepts and live them.

God put his love into action by sending his son Jesus.

4:9 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. That we might have life through Jesus.

4:10 In this is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Literally, Jesus Christ gave up his last breath for us.

In each of these, what stares us in the face is that God **loves us first**. His is the love that dares to make the first move. Maybe you remember when you were dating and you realized that this relationship was different and special and you wanted to spend your life with this person. And you wanted to say, "I love you". But at the very same time you did not dare because what if you said that and there was a long pause, or this person said anything else but, "I love you too". And if it was any other answer but, "I love you too", you would be devastated.

God loves us first. "while we are sinners". While we are not even interested in him a bit, He says to us, "I love you". "I will show you how much I love you. This is my son, my one and only Son, he will teach you, he will suffer for you, he will die for you, and he will rise for you. He will give you his Spirit so that you can follow him."

We may resist his love, we may protest that we are not worthy, we may think, deep down that we still have to do something to earn his favour.

But we might as well give up. God is crazy about you and me.  
Imagine that!

Now.....

Since God loved us in this way....

Taking the first step,

While we were sinners,

Laying down his life for us.

Giving us his life so we might live through him....

We ought to love one another.

We ought to take the **first step**,

We ought to lay down our lives for each other. (3:16)

And, just like God's love for us, this will **always** mean something practical.

3:17 "If anyone has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

If anyone has a warm and caring circle of friends, and sees someone who is lonely and does not invite her in to the circle, how does the love of God abide in her?

If anyone knows that "Louise and Fred, a high voltage couple, foster really happy children".

And does not share that good news of the love of God in whichever way God opens up, how does the love of God abide in him?

Or, in other words, God has poured out his love into us through Jesus Christ. God used someone to tell us, someone to show us, someone to help us with our questions and our fears and our doubts. We need to share that good news of Jesus Christ, the one who laid down his life for us with our community.

How can we do that? How can we invite our friends into a life of meaning where we get to serve Jesus by serving others?

And, specifically within our marriages...

On a Friday night a few weeks ago a small crowd of us watched the movie Fireproof. The message and what we saw lived out in it could change our marriages.

A husband, with divorce looming, is challenged by his father not to quit, but to dare to be the first one to make his love for his wife real. Being a guy, he responds to a challenge.

But he hates the whole thought of it. He goes through the motions, does the minimum, he's half-hearted. He tries to do it without the love of Jesus. But once he opens his own heart to Jesus, he begins to love in a different way, because he is responding not to his wife who has given up on him, but to Jesus who dared to love him first.

Does it have a happy ending? Yup.

Will all our stories and marriages, have happy endings?

We don't know. Living by faith always means that we don't know how it's going to turn out. Some of us here could stand up and tell us all that nothing is impossible with God.

There is the heart of it. Love your spouse after the pattern of Jesus, because Jesus has loved you **first**.

On most days, it will be a joy. Some days it will be hard work.

So on the good days, ask each other, "how do you experience that you are loved?" What is it that I can do for you that makes you sure that I love you?

Listen closely for the answer. And don't assume that you know it already.

Ask the question in different rooms in your home. You might get different answers in different rooms.

We need to conclude where John does. He makes this amazing claim.

“No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, in the church community, in our families, in our marriages... then **God remains in us.**

*Verse 16 helps us to understand this phrase,*

*“God is love, and the one remaining in love in God remains and God in him remains.”*

In some of our Bibles it says that God’s love is made perfect or perfected in us.

“Complete” is a better way to go. The word used here has the sense of something that arrives at its goal. God’s love is ‘completed’ in us. It has achieved its purpose.

Remember those ‘ingredients’ of the word ‘love’. (Louise and Fred.....

“Love and Faithfulness, acceptance, high value, concern, favour, respect, honour, cherish” At our Bible study this week, we said that it’s like those ingredients of the love of God for us have been stirred in a bowl and blended and set to rise and baked and become a wonderful loaf of bread, that nourishes the lives of children, neighbours, friends and even enemies.

May the Lord be gracious to you. May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God’s people said, Amen.