

November 16, 2025

Group Study: The God of Love (1 John 4:7-19)

1. What does John mean when he says, “God is love”? How is this more than a slogan?
2. What does it mean for love to “cast out fear”?
3. How does the divine initiative (God loving us first) shape the way we love others?
4. Where might our churches still operate from fear rather than love?
5. How can hospitality serve as a tangible expression of God’s love?
6. What would it look like for our community to be known first and foremost for love?

Good Faith Bible Study

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“The God of Love”

Focal Text: 1 John 4:7-19

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“God is love.” It’s one of the most fundamental statements that we find in scripture.

But for such a simple statement, there’s a lot to be interpreted, especially when we add to it the command, “abide in love.” What does it mean to “abide” in love? The author of 1 John suggests that “abiding in love”—our natural response to our God who is love—is to live in such a way that the presence of God becomes visible through us and how we live our lives. God’s love becomes the hallmark of our communities and our relationships.

If someone were to ask you: “How do you know that God is present in your church or in your small group or in your neighborhood?” what would you say? You might simply say that God promises it. But what evidence do you see of God’s presence? Well, we might mention worship or prayer or acts of service. But John reminds us: One of the clearest indicators of God’s presence is love. Love that is visible and resilient.

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In chapter 4 verse 12, our author writes, “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is perfected in us.”

So let’s take some time to talk about how love becomes visible and how our communities can become places where God’s invisible nature finds expression through abiding love.

The first thing to notice is that in this passage, love is not simply one of God’s attributes. Love is central to God’s being. “God is love.” That means that when genuine love is practiced, the very nature of God is being revealed among us.

John says that when we see believers loving well, we can know that God abides in them. The presence of God becomes visible.

It seems that the marker of God’s presence, then, isn’t a building or a program or even what a person might call “correct” theology. God’s presence is seen in how we treat one another and how we show up for one another, especially when life is hard.

Think about a gathering of Christians. What would you see or hear or feel in the middle of those people if God was present? Maybe you would hear laughter and tears. And wouldn’t it be wonderful to hear trust instead of suspicion? Maybe you’d see people from different backgrounds doing life together. These sorts of experiences give us a clue that something deep is at work.

In your experience, what are those visible signs that God is present in a faith community? Where have you seen love lived out in such a way that it made you think, “This is God’s presence among us.”

In this passage, we hear the word “abide” repeated again and again. This word means to dwell or to remain or to stay rooted. Love in this passage is not a one-off gesture. It’s a way of life.

1 John 4:13 says, “By this we know that we abide in God and that God abides in us, because God has given us of God’s Spirit.”

This verse tells us two things. First of all, love is enabled by God’s Spirit. We don’t love in our own strength alone. And secondly, when we love, we embody the presence of God, because God dwells in that love and in our community. Our community is meant to be the visible home of the invisible God. Love among believers displays God, not just in what we believe but in how we live.

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This week, think of one place in your church or in your local community where you see love in action. And of course, it's not going to be perfect love—but love that's visible in people's words and actions. And then when you think of an example, peel back the layers a little bit. Ask some questions or maybe do some research. What are the qualities that make that place work? And then, here is your point of action: How could you help that example of love grow even brighter?

Here's an example I've seen in my own community. In Kansas City, the nonprofit Stitching Change brings refugee women together to learn sewing and business skills, to learn and practice English, to market their products, and really to build a safe and thriving community. I've gotten to know the founder of Stitching Change over the last two years. Rakmi is an extraordinary woman with a clear vision of what it means to abide in the love of God. Stitching Change is about so much more than sewing: It's about belonging and creativity. It's about economic dignity and mutual cares across cultures. A lot of the women that gather to sew there don't speak the same language. And yet they still manage to communicate.

In an interview with a local news station, Rakmi described the community that was developed at Stitching Change. And she said: "The most beautiful thing ... is that the women will just sit here and talk and then they just laugh out loud ... they just come together..." And even after their shop was severely damaged by a tornado in 2024, Stitching Change persevered. The community that they had loved rallied around them. The women have found a new location, and God's love abides there still.

The ministry of Stitching Change speaks to John's theology: It creates a community where love is visible, where people of different backgrounds gather, where skills are shared, where dignity is restored, and where the presence of God can be seen in everyday relationships.

What lessons from Stitching Change's model of community could apply in your context? What might it look like for your group or your church to invite and welcome and equip and empower people who might be overlooked or marginalized?

John's letter doesn't treat love as a sentiment. The love that John talks about is dynamic. It acts. It transforms fear into confidence.

John writes in 4:18, "There is no fear in love." Instead, "perfect love casts out fear."

In practice, this means that our communities shouldn't be built on fear—fear of difference or failure or rejection. Instead, they should be built on foundational love—a love that invites and welcomes and empowers and restores.

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Hospitality, inclusion, social justice: these aren't optional extras in the Christian life. These are signs that love is thriving and that our communities embody the divine presence. A faith community that treats love as central will look different. It will prioritize people over programs, and relationships over reputation.

In a recent podcast, I asked you to think about “unwritten rules” that you might see in your community. These habits often sneak in under the radar—they find a foothold and they grow stronger and stronger, often without even being noticed. This week, think again about “unwritten rules” in your faith community. And this time, consider: What is it in your community's culture that might hinder the visible presence of love? And then imagine: What if we treated “love one another” as the very essence of God and of our community—how could that reshape our practice?

As we come to a close, I'll leave you with this reflection: Because God is love, wherever real love dwells, God is present. Your community—not just the building, but the people, the relationships, the everyday, common acts of care—these are living signs of the invisible God.

How will you abide in love this week?

Not just in words, but in action. And not just in church, but across the boundaries of cultures and economics and generations. Not just when it's convenient, but even when it's costly ... which is often when it's the most necessary.

This week, may you and your community become a place where love rules, and may the divine presence become visible as we seek to abide in God's love.