

BIG IDEA

Fear shrinks your soul; love expands it.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO KNOW?

Describe the most recent time you remember being really afraid. What happened?

Read 1 John 4:7-16. How does this passage deepen your understanding of love?

It may be helpful to recall some of Cal's main points from the message this weekend regarding this passage:

- Love comes from God.
- The more you love, the more you are like God.
- God IS Love.
- We love because God first loved us.
- True love always sacrifices.
- God set the example of love for us.

Compare and contrast John's understanding of love with the way our culture understands love.

Our culture thinks about love in mostly romantic or physical terms; love is something you can fall into or out of—and tends to center around how someone else makes us feel. John tells us that love comes from God, that it is expressed through sacrifice and initiated without regard to our “worthiness.”

Read 1 John 4:18-19. How does John challenge the way you think about God and the concept of punishment?

The scriptures are clear that God is to be feared in the sense that we revere him, and are in awe of him (Psalm 33:8). This kind of fear is not in conflict with the fear that John addresses in this passage. God's children can be confident that God is not a “punisher.” He disciplines his children out of love, but he isn't sitting in the clouds ready to hurl a lightning bolt at us when we make a mistake (Hebrews 12:5-6). We don't have to be afraid of what God will do to us when we are convinced of his great love for us (John 3:16-17).

WHAT IS MY INITIAL REACTION?

Do you feel more loved by God or afraid of God? Why?



Respond to Cal's statement from this week's message: *You can't love someone you are afraid of.*

Some people may be less willing to admit that they have “fears” about other people or people groups. Don't hesitate to frame this question in a different light to help engage these people in the conversation. Perhaps someone or some situation “makes them uncomfortable.” Maybe they have “concerns” about certain issues. These may be more palatable ways to talk about fear.

Be honest. Is your soul shrinking or expanding? Explain your answer.

What person or people group do you have the most difficulty loving? Who is easiest for you to love? Why the difference?

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

Read 1 John 4:20-21 and reflect on the last week. How do you treat the flesh-and-blood people Jesus has placed in your life? How is Jesus leading you to repentance?

How much risk are you willing to take in order to truly love others? How is that demonstrated in your everyday life?

Sometimes, when we decide to love someone, we unknowingly create expectations for that person in the context of our relationship; we expect that person to respond in a certain way (reciprocate that love, be appreciative, get better, etc). When the people we love don't respond the way we expect, we may feel slighted or betrayed. We are upset that they didn't keep a promise—even though it was a promise they never made.

Are we willing to take the risk of loving someone without expecting anything in return?

Is there an area of your life where fear has distorted reality? How will you keep your eyes fixed on the truth in the midst of uncertain times?

What bold steps of love can you make to affect change in the lives of those around you?

