JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

KNOWING AND BELIEVING THE LOVE OF GOD

Why Doing Flows from Believing

> You will never muster up enough love for God to earn His approval. When you come to know and to believe the love God has for you, His love is perfected with you, gives you confidence, and starts to flow out of you to other people.

MAIN TEXT
1 John 4:7-21

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SERIES
Our Father, Week 3 of 4

BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Love is what the Bible says love is, not what our own paradigms make it. The bookends of the passage, verses 7-8 and verses 20-21, are the should do of the text.
2. The love of God is not our love for God but that He sent His Son as the propitiation for our sins. God is already fully satisfied with anyone in Christ and needs nothing else.
3. You will never muster up enough. There are a lot of oughts and you are incapable of doing them, because doing flows from believing.
4. You can know you are saved because you have the Holy Spirit. Confession seals you, and there is no change in status. 1 John was written so believers would know, not so they would get saved.
5. Knowing a thing and believing it are two different experiences. Beliefs shape experiences more than experiences shape beliefs, so you need both to know it and believe it.
6. When you know and believe the love God has for you, love is perfected with us, not in us, which produces confidence on the day of judgment.



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READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/knowing-and-believing-the-love-of-god

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is the third message in a four-week series inside the larger series on the Lord's Prayer, focused on "Our Father." Week 1 taught that insight and revelation into the grace of God determine the physical manifestation of grace we experience. Week 2 taught that obedience to the Law does not produce; we are beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the finished work of Christ with unveiled faces. This week: **doing flows from believing.** Next week puts practical handles on all three.

Open by praying the Lord's Prayer together, as the series does every week.

The passage is preached in sections, out of order on purpose. Read the bookends first (verses 7-8 and 20-21), then work through the middle (verses 9-19), which tells you where that love comes from. Keep coming back to one line: **doing flows from believing.**

One reading key carries the whole message: what Paul calls grace, John often calls love.

Introduction

Recite the Lord's Prayer together (Matthew 6:9-13).

Recap the series. In the first week we saw that revelation of grace brings physical manifestation. Last week we saw that obedience to the Law does not produce, but as we behold the finished work of Jesus, we are being transformed into His image.

Title: **Doing Flows from Believing.**

A word on the verses we skip. 1 John 4:1-6 opens much the way 2 Corinthians 3 opened last week, with a defense of the ministry. John is saying, in effect, "You need to listen to what I'm telling you. I knew Jesus personally." Then he moves into the section we will study.

1. The Bookends: What We Ought to Do

> **1 JOHN 4:7-8 ESV**
>
> [7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Stop right here. Everybody in the room has a paradigm for what love is. But love is what the Bible says love is. Love isn't you and your sweetie, you and your kids, you and your mamaw, or you and your football team. It is never what the world's paradigm says it is.

Now jump to the other end of the passage.

> **1 JOHN 4:20-21** ESV
>
> [20] If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

These two passages are the bookends of what we are about to read, and you will find this pattern throughout 1 John. This is the **should do** of the text: the godly behavior we ought to see in our lives as followers of Christ.

Be honest: it sounds a lot like the Law. "If you don't love other people, you don't love God." That seems to drive in a different direction from what we have said for weeks, that it is not what you do that matters, but what Jesus has done on your behalf.

So investigate the text. These bookends wrap the section of 1 John that tells you exactly where that love comes from. And remember the reading key: **what Paul calls grace, John often calls love.**

2. The Love of God Is That He Sent His Son

> **1 JOHN 4:9-10** ESV
>
> [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

What is the love of God? Verse 9 defines it: God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. **The love of God is that He sent Jesus Christ for you and for me.**

Verse 10: "not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). We talk about loving God all the time. Many churches have the mission statement "Love God, love people." But this verse says love is not that we have loved God.

Propitiation means satisfaction. Everything God needs in order to be satisfied with you, He already has in His Son. He doesn't need anything else. If you are in Jesus Christ, God is fully satisfied with you. He loves you, He receives you, He accepts you, and He is working on you in His own time.

You will never muster up enough. You will never muster up a godly enough walk to get God's approval. You will never love God enough, love people enough, or do good enough. If we judged everyone in the room by the standard, none of us would be close.

That is why we need grace. You don't need grace because you almost made it and need help getting over the line. You need grace because you weren't even close. We need someone to make up for the whole thing we didn't get right.

So it is not about our love for God. It is about God's love for us.

Illustration: "God, You love me." In the late 2000s, at a church in San Antonio, I was leading worship on a Wednesday night with the worship pastor and the senior pastor both away. In the middle of worship I told the room, "Point your finger toward heaven and say, 'God, You love me.'" I had never done it before and haven't done it since. When the people said it, it was like firecrackers went off. The glory broke out and the power of God began to move. It was one of the most powerful moments in worship I have ever experienced, and all we did was put our attention on God's love for us.

God's love is LOVE. Your love is meh. But God's love is LOVE. It defines love.

3. There Are a Lot of Oughts

> **1 JOHN 4:11-12** ESV
>
> 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

This brings us back to the bookends. As you experience the love of God, love for other people ought to flow out of you.

But hear the word **ought**. You ought to come to church every Sunday. You ought to give ten percent of your income to the Lord. You ought to drive the speed limit. You ought to let football have a little less hold on you. There are a lot of oughts. (Optional, as preached: "I think you ought to bring me some lasagna.")

"Ought" is something we should see. It doesn't mean it is something you will see. Remember, you are incapable of doing a lot of it on your own, because **doing flows from believing.** It is hard to muster up strength. That is why we have to work on our belief system around the gospel.

4. By This We Know: Confession and the Seal

> **1 JOHN 4:13-15** ESV
>
> 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

"By this" looks forward. Always be mindful of what the text is doing. This "by this" is about to tell you how you know you abide in God, that you are in His approval, that He has accepted you.

Verse 14: John the eyewitness. John is establishing his authority. Both John and Peter do this at times: they bring attention back to the fact that they knew Jesus. You know Him, but they knew how He ate and what His hair looked like at six in the morning.

Verse 15: how to be saved. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. This mirrors Paul.

> **ROMANS 10:9** ESV
>
> [9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Over the last few decades some have attacked the salvation prayer, saying, "The sinner's prayer isn't in the Bible." The way we close a service with an invitation is relatively new. But John and Paul agree: if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe it in your heart, you will be saved. Whether that happens in a whisper in your bed at night, in a hospital bed with your last few breaths, or at a Billy Graham style altar call, if you confess that Jesus is Lord, God abides in you and you abide in Him.

WHY JOHN WRITES

John tells you why he writes. Why he wrote the Gospel of John:

> **JOHN 20:31** ESV
>
> [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The Gospel of John is evangelistic. That is why it has been printed and handed out, and even made into a film, more than Matthew, Mark or Luke: it was written so that you may believe and be saved.

Why he wrote 1 John:

> **1 JOHN 5:13** ESV
>
> [13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John was written to people who already responded to the gospel, so they would have confidence in their salvation. He already told you how to become a Christian. Now he wants to make sure you don't think it is slipping away from you.

NO CHANGE IN STATUS

John wants his readers to know they are born again. There has been **no change in status.** They haven't sinned their way out. They haven't selfish-ed their way out. They haven't stumbled their way out.

Pentecostal churches have often lived in "He loves me, He loves me not." I went to church: He loves me. I cussed my neighbor out: He loves me not. I gave in the offering: He loves me. And we hope we don't land on "He loves me not" right before we die or right before the rapture. People really ask: "If I say a cuss word and then I'm in a car wreck, will I go to heaven or hell?" John writes to say: you are saved. You abide in God, and He abides in you.

YOU'VE GOT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Back to verse 13. You can know you are saved for one direct reason: He has given you His Spirit. Have the congregation say, "I've got the Holy Ghost."

> **EPHESIANS 1:13** ESV
>
> [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

You may not be Spirit-led yet. You may not be Spirit-filled, healing the sick, or even bold. But the moment you confessed Jesus as Lord and put your faith in Him, a seal went on you.

Illustration: the blacklight stamp. It's an invisible stamp, like the one you get at the door that only shows under a blacklight. God sees it on you, and it reads, "Holy Spirit guaranteed." Paul calls the Spirit "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1:14).

The moment you were saved, you were sealed. As the "gospel according to Stevie Wonder" puts it: signed, sealed, delivered.

5. Knowing It and Believing It

> **1 JOHN 4:16** ESV
>
> [16] So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

"So we have come to **know** and to **believe** the love that God has for us." Those are two different experiences.

Illustration: "People aren't spreadsheets." I read a book this week that made that statement. You can have all the data in the world, but your life is not built on knowledge. It is built on belief. Your relationship with information, knowledge and truth is biased by what you have experienced and already believe. We like to think we come to believe what we know, but often we come to know what we already believe. **Your beliefs shape your experiences more than your experiences shape your beliefs.** Whatever you believe, you will ultimately find.

As preached, two quick examples:

- **Politics.** One group of Americans has come to find that one party is patriotic and the other is dangerous, and another group has found the exact opposite. Most of us didn't read seven or eight books before deciding how to vote. We grew up in a house that did it a certain way. That is belief shaping experience.
- **Jobs.** If you believe no jobs are available, you probably won't find one, not because there are none, but because you won't go after them.

What you believe will play a bigger role in what you have access to than what is actually available to you.

Illustration: the fever. In 1927, the Austrian psychiatrist Julius Wagner-Jauregg became the first psychiatrist to win the Nobel Prize in Medicine. He worked with patients suffering from neurosyphilis, syphilis that has spread to the brain, where it can resemble dementia or psychiatric illness. He learned that the infection struggled to survive when a patient ran a high fever, so he deliberately infected his patients with malaria. The malaria could then be treated with quinine, and many patients improved dramatically.

We have known for a long time that a fever is one of the ways the body fights infection. We even say, "Let the fever run its course." Yet the minute we get a fever, we start knocking back Tylenol. Why? Because it is one thing to **know** the fever is helping. It is another to **believe** it when you are shivering, hot, cold and sore. You know the fever helps, yet you fight the fever because you don't believe it helps.

It is one thing to know the love of God. Everyone knows the most famous verse in the world:

> **JOHN 3:16** ESV
>
> [16] "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

But do you **believe** that God loves you? If you know God loves you, but you think every misstep puts you outside of His pleasure until you come back to the altar and cry, "Lord, have mercy!", it is hard to believe that He loves you.

Illustration: the divorce attorney. Imagine the dysfunction in my home if Ashleigh believed that every time she irritated me I was calling a divorce attorney. It isn't true, but if she believed it, she wouldn't live like she has a loving husband. I could tell her all day long, but if she doesn't believe I love her, our house will be a mess. In the same way, if you think, "I just have to keep God happy, I have to keep Him satisfied," remember propitiation. You don't have to keep God satisfied. He is fully satisfied in His Son, and when He sees you, He sees Jesus and the seal of the Holy Spirit.

How do you believe that God loves you? **Look to Jesus.**

> **1 JOHN 4:10** ESV
>
> [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Knowing plus believing is a revelation of grace. The more revelation of His grace you get, the more of His love toward you you realize, and something begins to happen.

You need both. In church, many people know it but struggle to believe it. Others believe without knowing: "God is just cool with everybody." No. God is cool with His Son. If your faith isn't lined up with Jesus Christ, you can believe God loves you all day long.

Illustration: Teddy Ruxpin. When I was a kid, the bad guy in the Teddy Ruxpin movie was green with a purple robe, and that is what I believed God looked like. Believing it didn't make it true. You have to know **and** believe.

6. Love Perfected With Us

> **1 JOHN 4:17** ESV
>
> [17] By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

This "by this" looks backward. Earlier, "by this" looked forward. Now it points back. By what? By knowing and believing the love that God has for us. This is the key to the whole message.

Notice: love is perfected **with** us, not just **in** us. You need external help to get the love of God perfected with you: hold on to Jesus Christ, to the Holy Spirit, to His Word, and to preaching that points to the finished work of Jesus.

So that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. I don't want you standing in line at the pearly gates thinking, "He loves me, He loves me not." John writes so that you would know. You can have confidence that you belong to Him, that God is pleased with you, and that you are blessed in the finished work of Jesus.

Because as He is, so also are we in this world. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you got His status and His access. God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3). Who is in the heavenly places? Jesus, seated at the right hand of God. And God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). As He is (blessed, healed, whole, sanctified, righteous, holy, accepted, with access), so also are we in this world.

Remember last week:

> **2 CORINTHIANS 3:18** ESV
>
> [18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

When I look in the mirror to focus on my love for God, it produces doubt. When I look in the mirror and see God's love for me, it gives me confidence. **When I look in the mirror, I don't see Jason Mayfield. I see the righteousness of God in Christ.**

Illustration: the hospital. Our youngest daughter was born at 24 weeks and spent three months in the hospital. We didn't think she was going to make it. The day she was born, once Ashleigh had recovered enough to get into a wheelchair, I wheeled her over to the little box they had our daughter in. I don't know where it came from, but I told Ashleigh, "We are the righteousness of God in Christ." You are going to go through things. It is just as easy to stand in a hospital and think, "What did I do for God to do this to me?" Where will your confidence be the day it happens?

Illustration: "I go to church all the time." A woman once came to meet with me before her brain surgery. She said, "I don't know why God would do this. I go to church all the time." I asked where. She said, "Here." I had been there since August; it was December, and I had seen her once. Imagine bringing that kind of confidence in your own record to a holy God. Even if you can make a good case ("I pray every day, I read

my Bible every day, my kids act right"), it still isn't anything. Our confidence on the day of judgment is this: as He is, so also are we in this world.

7. Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

> **1 JOHN 4:18** ESV
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> [18] There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

We know and believe the love God has for us, it produces confidence, and it drives out our fear. This has massive implications for living in every benefit God has provided in Christ.

People often say the opposite of fear is faith. But you can't fight fear with your own self-effort. **You fight fear with God's love for you.**

Conclusion

> **1 JOHN 4:19** ESV
>
> [19] We love because he first loved us.

Our love flows from His love for us. When you stumble into getting it right, when something bubbles up in you and you actually love people, it isn't you. It isn't because you mustered up the strength. It is because He first loved us.

By beholding the finished work of Jesus Christ, something begins to flow out of us, an almost effortless coming forth of behavior we can't explain except that God is good and somehow we are changing. Not by forcing ourselves, but because we have looked and seen His glory and His love for us.

Our doing flows from our knowing and believing that His great grace toward us is sufficient. You can try to force yourself to change for God, or you can let God love you right into effortless change.

Next week: practical handles. How to get a lasso around the grace of God and get it working in your life. Invite your friends and family.

Close in praise: if you are grateful for the gospel of the finished work of a living Savior, give God a big praise.



ABOUT

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Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

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