

“Missional Love: Perfectly Fearless”

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-21

Graphics: heart, Olympics, competition

Big Truth: The love of God for the world was shown through the sacrifice of Jesus. That’s the first half of the gospel. The second half of the gospel is the faithful followers of Jesus loving others with God’s love. That love is boldly active and perfectly fearless. It’s God that gives us the boldness to love in truth and action. It’s God that perfects that love and makes us fearless to love others. This short series will help the people of Panama UMC do a deep dive into the mission of love we are called to have and show.

Focus Phrase: The missional love of God is perfectly fearless.

1. Introduction

- A. Last week, we began this two-week series called Missional Love by proclaiming that The Missional love of God is **boldly active**. If you missed that message, let me recap:
 - i. The Olympic Games may or may not be held this year, but the Olympic athletes are trained and active to be at the top of their individual sport. The mission they're on is to put themselves on the podium to get a medal.
 - ii. The mission of each disciple of Jesus Christ - our mission - is not to put ourselves on any podium, but to put JESUS on His podium - to bring glory to Him by boldly and actively loving each other and those outside the church.
 - iii. That love is bold because it comes from God, through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. We are emboldened to love obediently.
 - iv. That missional love is active because it isn’t just something we say with our mouths that we do. It’s actions that prove to each other and to the world that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.
 - v. We were called to abide in Jesus, grow in boldness, and be active everywhere we go. And I KNOW that you had the opportunity to put all that in practice this week as you went about your life, whether you knew it or not.
- B. Yet, if getting spiritually bolder and staying faithfully active in our loving has a lot to do with training and learning, then the second part of this series is where we deal with some of the barriers that we encounter when we start loving like Jesus did...like God loves US.
- C. An Olympic athlete trains and trains and trains for years - decades - in order to compete on the international stage for a few minutes. Some sports, like ski jumping, are over in seconds. The economy of time is very lopsided - hundreds of jumps and rides up the mountain in training, for three jumps in competition.

- D. The intensity of that moment, right before she pushes off from the bench to begin the downhill ski in those two deep tracks that you can't get out of and from a height of hundreds of meters above the ground...that intensity must produce fear. And that fear can stop her from even trying. Yet, because of her training and her desire to win a medal, she overcomes fear and jumps...and once she leaves the ramp, she free falls for many, many seconds. And lands safely on the slope below to an eruption of cheers (or winces if she crashes)!
- E. Being a disciple of Jesus who's made the decision to love, simply because God told you to, and because you are loved with a sacrificial love of Jesus causes fear. Not when you're loving those in the church, most of the time, although that's sometimes hard. But, loving people inside AND outside the church makes us anxious...and I'll bet we sometimes don't even know that we're avoiding loving others inside and outside the church because we're avoiding the hard work it takes to allow God to love others through us.
- F. Today, here's where we're headed: **The missional love of God is perfectly fearless.**
- G. We aren't the ones who perfect it...but we are the ones who are filled with it in order to fearlessly love others - all of them.
- H. Let's Pray...and then we'll keep going in 1 John.
- I. **PRAY!**
- J. Let's get those bibles out and start today in 1 John 4, verse 7. The missional love of God is perfectly fearless...

2. Scripture

A. READ 1 John 4:7-12

- i. One of my character flaws is that I tend toward being a perfectionist. In fact, my personality profile indicates that I'm a creative perfectionist. Basically, I think up lots of things and expect that when they come to fruition, they are exactly like I envisioned. You can see how this sometimes causes me disappointment!
- ii. Perfectionism is mostly focused on what I want, or what I envision. And, if the perfectionist isn't careful, everything becomes personal and we try to make it perfect on our own if it isn't.
- iii. One of the criticisms of a scripture like Matthew 5:48, which says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." is that it's preposterous to think that we can be perfect in anything, let alone perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.
- iv. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement believed that we can be perfected IN LOVE in this lifetime. But it has very little to do with how hard one tries. And it has everything to do with Christ that IS perfect,

living IN us to perfect us in love. Being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect is about LOVE and not the lack of mistakes or even temptation or sin, although those things decrease as Christ increases in your life.

- v. So, for the author of 1 John to talk about perfection or completeness (as it says in the NRSV), he's getting at the heart of it.
- vi. Perfection comes through Jesus. And Perfect Love is what Jesus does IN us 100% because of his death on the cross and desire to live in us.
- vii. The author again reaches back to John 3:16 and reminds his readers that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Remember, though, that when the author says that God 'so loved' the world, it isn't really that God loved the world to such an extent, as much as the fact that He loved the world IN SUCH A WAY that He gave His Son, so that when we believe in Him and God's love for us, we will have everlasting life.
- viii. Completeness - perfection - of love IN US is all because of God's complete love for us through the sacrifice of Jesus.
- ix. And BECAUSE of God's love for us through Jesus, we have no good choice BUT to love others...like God loves them. Anything else would be to reject the love of God for us because that love is active.
- x. Love is perfected or completed in US through faith in Jesus and God's love that was shown on the cross.
- xi. When the disciple of Jesus stops to consider the incredible love that God has shown you - to spare your life because of sin and gift you everlasting life - it should drive us to our knees in gratitude.
- xii. And when we love, it's the perfect love of God complete in us that's doing the loving, and not anything even the perfectionist can make happen.
- xiii. Easy, right? Just let Jesus love through us and then we're good.
- xiv. And YET (!) YET...why then is it sometimes so hard to do even the most simple loving things that we're called to do...and even with each other right here in this room?
- xv. Well, it comes down to fear...and fear creates a void in our lives and we lose sight of acting in the ways that God has shown us and commanded us.
- xvi. Let's read the next section to find out more...

B. READ 1 John 4:13-21

- i. Boldly active love that's perfected in Jesus is what God is asking us to show...at all times.
- ii. But the barrier that often pops up in our way is the fear of not being able to love...or letting our human emotions get in the way, often dismissing the other because we can't see a clear pathway to love them.

- iii. Yet, the author wrote that the love we think we have to share or not share doesn't even have its origin in us. Love is from God because God IS love.
- iv. The way that we get that love of God IN us to share is by having the Holy Spirit of Jesus in us when we abide in Him...when we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus.
- v. Then, and only then, is the love of God IN us and then shareable with others. And this isn't something we can fake, as far as God is concerned.
- vi. Verse 20 makes it pretty clear, "Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."
- vii. So what allows us to be fearless in love? Well, given the fact that love doesn't come from us...and love is something God created, then fearlessness in love comes into our lives when we each have truly digested Romans 8:38-39, where Paul wrote, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- viii. Because of that, the author of 1 John proclaims that those who have the Holy Spirit living in them, and are following Jesus, will stand before God when Christ returns and we will have boldness on that day. Boldness not in love, but in confidence that nothing can separate us from God's love.
- ix. And if nothing can separate us from God's love, even between now and then, then we have NOTHING to fear.
- x. Fearlessness comes because of everlasting life - who can do anything to us in this life? No one.
- xi. So, then, the call is to love. Verse 21 says, "The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."
- xii. Bold, active, perfectly fearless love of God.

3. Application

- A. The first half of the gospel (John 3:16) invites you to believe in the love of God as shown through Jesus, and be saved. The second half of the gospel (1 John 3:16) commands you to be sent out in boldly active, perfectly fearless love SO THAT others can know the first and second halves of the gospel.
- B. To grow in perfectly fearless love:
 - i. Start by **loving others, even if imperfectly**.
 - a. The moment you take on the name of Jesus and He fills you with His Holy Spirit, you have the power to love.

- b. Just like the athlete, it takes time and practice to find ways to get better.
 - c. One of the incredible things about the church is that there are a hundred people here today that want to be loved by you. Isn't that cool?
 - d. Our fear is that we should know that person, or she's too cool for me, or I'm not into that group, or I can't talk to him because I wouldn't know what to say. All fair.
 - e. But in order to be perfected in fearless love for those out there, we need to make sure THIS community is overflowing with love for each other. We aren't a random group of people that happen to show up this morning. We are a body, with arms and legs and eyes and ears. We are a body that's called to work together.
 - f. We have the opportunity to get good at loving right here. And let me challenge you this morning to love someone new or that you don't know or like. It'll be a little awkward, but fun too!
- C. Then, be **fearless in loving** since nothing ultimately bad can happen to you - Jesus has your back.
- i. It's Him loving others, anyway, right?
 - ii. It all comes down to this question. Am I fearless in my love for others? Or is there something holding me back? Or am I not aware that I'm not loving others like Jesus would want?
 - iii. Self-preservation is part of our human condition. So, when we sense that someone is scary or not receptive to love, then we tend to not try to love that person unless we have to.
 - iv. We may fear that we'll be rejected or the person will not care for us back or even respond.
 - v. Sometimes, this plays itself out when we don't know the people around us, even in the church. Us introverts have to work at this harder than the extraverts in the congregation. Knowing names is critical to being able to love...and with new faces and new people, part of loving is knowing who we are.
 - vi. The Spirit will give you the POWER to love...even if it's not perfect in YOUR eyes, you don't know what Jesus is up to.
- D. There is nothing in this world more important than the missional love of God. The world is desperate to be loved in a winsome, inviting, boldly active and perfectly fearless way.
- E. Let's make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by lovingly giving every person in our church and community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus. Our mission. and Our vision.

4. Conclusion

- A. John Wesley said, “One cause of a thousand mistakes is this: ...not considering deeply enough that love is the highest gift of God; humble, gentle, patient love; that all visions, revelations, or manifestations whatever, are little things compared to love; and that all other gifts...are either the same with or infinitely inferior to it. You should be thoroughly aware of this - the heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, “Have you received this or that blessing?” if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them on a false scent. Settle is then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more but more of that love described in the 13th chapter of Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham’s bosom.” (A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, John Wesley)
- B. Be real about BOTH halves of the gospel...about being saved BY love and being sent out IN love.
- C. Let that start right here in this room before you leave. Make a point to know the name of one or two people you don’t know and with whom you worship as your first act of perfectly fearless, boldly active love. Just walk up and say, “Hi, I’m Steve. I love you.” Trust it’s weird, so it’ll be effective!
- D. Then, every time we worship or serve together, that relationship grows and you can both walk with Jesus together.
- E. From here, it’s up to the Spirit and you. Where will God take us as we love each other fiercely and then turn that to our region and world?
- F. I don’t know for sure, but God does.
- G. Missional Love is boldly active and perfectly fearless. Nothing can stop the love of God. Nothing.
- H. Let’s pray and then we’ll spend some time at the Table that Jesus has set before us. This table is not only a bold statement about the active love Jesus has for us, but it’s also a place where we can lay down our fear and be perfected in love. These kneelers are open for you to come, if you’d like. We’ll take our time this morning to reflect on God’s word and look with hope to the future.
- I. Pray!
- J. Communion...