ARE YOU FOR REAL? · SMALL GROUP STUDY · 1 JOHN 4:7-21

I'm Not Afraid Anymore

From Pastor Nate Crew's sermon at Citylight Church Falls Church, November 15, 2026. Watch the sermon.

THE BIG IDEA

When you know you are loved by God, and that God is love, perfect love casts out fear. Then you have nothing left to fear and something amazing to share.

OPEN Getting started

Pastor Nate began with the scene from *Home Alone* where Kevin McCallister, scared of the guy with the shovel, runs back inside, then finally goes outside and yells, *"I'm not afraid anymore"*. Pastor Nate said that is what he wants for all of us: an experience of God's love that overcomes fear.

What were you afraid of as a kid? What helped you stop being afraid, or what do you wish had?

READ 1 John 4:7-21 (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. 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.
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.
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. 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. 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. 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. 19 We love because he first loved
us. 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.

1 John 4:7-21, English Standard Version.

DISCUSS Questions

OBSERVE · What does it say?

1. **Look at verses 9, 10 and 14. What exactly did God do to show his love?**

   LEADER He sent his Son into the world (1 John 4:9), as the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10), to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). Each one is something that happened. Pastor Nate: *"The love of God is not a feeling, it's not a vibe, it's not a worldview, it's not a philosophy, it's not a religious system, it's a historical fact."*

2. **Verse 10 begins, "In this is love." According to John, what is love not, and what is it?**

   LEADER "Not that we have loved God but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). Pastor Nate put it this way: *"true love is not you loving God, it's God loving you."* He admitted *"the whole book is about you should love God"*, yet true love is measured by how much God loves us. Think about that, and you end up loving God more.

3. **In verses 17-18, what does God's love give us, and what does it drive out? What does John tie fear to?**

   LEADER Confidence for the day of judgment (1 John 4:17). Perfect love casts out fear, and "fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18). *"When love comes in, it pushes fear out."*

INTERPRET · What does it mean?

4. **Verse 10 calls Jesus "the propitiation for our sins." What does that word mean, and why does it make God's love merciful?**

   LEADER Pastor Nate called it *"the wrath absorber"*: God's wrath was coming toward us, and Jesus stepped in and took the blow, like the bird that flew in front of Randy Johnson's pitch. God loves us fully aware of every sin. *"And if you came in here feeling like a wretched, nasty sinner, then you're in a great place to receive God's love."*

5. **Where do you tend to look for proof that God loves you? Why did Pastor Nate call our feelings, circumstances and answered prayers *"bad evaluators"*?**

   LEADER *"You know God loves you by looking backwards to the cross, at an event that already happened, at something God has already proven, and looking at the empty grave to prove it."* The choice he gave: *"You can look at your pain or you can look at the cross."* (1 John 4:9-10)

6. **Verses 8 and 16 both say "God is love." What difference does it make that love is who God is? What did Pastor Nate mean by turning it around?**

   LEADER *"Love is not something God does, it's something God is"*, so he will never change his mind about you. Then: *"God is love, yes and amen, but love is not God."* Love is defined by God and shown at the cross. Our culture flips it: love becomes its god, and it demands that others worship however it defines love. Keep the discussion on his general point.

APPLY · How do we live it?

7 **Pastor Nate said, *"And if I won't be afraid on the most important day of my life, then I should not be afraid on these lesser days on earth."* Where are you afraid on the "lesser days" right now?**

> **LEADER** He borrowed a phrase he loves: to be afraid is to be *"deficient in love"*. Fear is a symptom, the way thirst means you are short on water, and the antidote is receiving God's love, not more courage. So *"the answer isn't to love more or to do better, it's to be loved more"*. It is gradual: *"it doesn't mean I'm going to wake up tomorrow completely unafraid"*. When people name their fears, point them to God's love. Don't scold them (1 John 4:18).

8 **Read verses 11 and 19-21. Who is hard for you to love right now? What would it look like to love them as a response to God's love instead of by willpower?**

> **LEADER** *"love is reactive, not proactive"* (1 John 4:19). *"Love isn't an act of your willpower. Love is a response to God's love for you."* Verses 20-21 still matter: love for others is a sign that we have received God's love. Someone who lives loved is *"not needy or greedy, but secure"*, *"ready to love and not offended when I don't get love"*.

LIVE This week

Morning and night, start with his love. Pastor Nate said *"the thing I should be thinking about every morning is man, God loves me"*. Each morning and each night this week, read 1 John 4:9-10 and say out loud, *"I am not afraid anymore because I am loved by God."*

When fear shows up, look at the cross before you look at the circumstance. Then love one person God puts in front of you, out of what you have received, not to earn anything (1 John 4:19).

PRAY Closing prayer

Pastor Nate closed by saying, *"I am loved by God. I want you to sit on that for a minute."* Take a quiet minute together, then pray along the lines of his prayer:

- Ask the Father to reveal his love to each of you, the love he showed when he sent his Son (1 John 4:9-10).
- Ask that each person would know, *"in the midst of their sin that they are loved by God"*.
- Ask God to cast out the fear of judgment, the fear of life's circumstances and the fear of the future, and to replace it with his love (1 John 4:18).
- Ask him to make your group a people who love others because you are full of his love for you (1 John 4:11 and 1 John 4:19).

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