

**Back to Basics**  
**Refined by Love**  
**1 John 4:7-21**

**Introduction**

Our message today comes from what is probably the most profound passage in this letter of 1 John. In Chapter 4, John writes about increasing your capacity to receive God's love. Verse 7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." (1 John 4:7-8 NKJV)

The theme of this passage is: God wills that we are perfected in love. John doesn't mean that we are to become sinless. Perfected means that we are complete, fully developed, and mature in Christ. It's like starting out as an apprentice and finally becoming a journeyman. It's the difference between a novice and a craftsman or expert. But God's craftsmanship is not plumbing or electrical, or fine furniture or engineering. God created us to become expertly skilled in our ability to love.

Jesus puts it this way, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

So what kind of progress are you making in your ability to love? Would you say you are better at loving others than you were a year ago? - Because that's God's test of your true spirituality. John says that unless our answer is "yes," we don't actually love God, no matter what we tell ourselves and others. God defines real spiritual success as how well you love and care for others.

You can amass great wealth, be physically fit, be on the fast track of career advancement, you can be popular, even famous, and have all the comforts of life; but if you are not becoming more skillful in sharing God's love, you are failing in the classroom of life.

The only interest God has in the resources on this planet is the human resource. It is imperative that we become better husbands, better wives, better children, better neighbors, better coworkers, and better friends. How do you view the poor, the sick, or the mentally challenged - what about the gifted, the rich, or your enemies? Are you succeeding or failing in the classroom of life? If I genuinely love and value the people God brings into my life, I am succeeding in life!

Since God is the source of all true love, we must increase our capacity to receive God's love and give it away to others. That is the point of verse 19, "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19 NKJV)

But we also need to share God's love with others to increase our capacity to receive God's love. Verse 12 says, "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one

another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us." (1 John 4:12 NKJV)

Being perfected in love develops both sequentially and simultaneously. Let's take a look at how to develop our ability to receive and then grow in God's love. John breaks this into two parts. Initially, we allow God to indwell us with His love, and then we continually draw upon God's love.

## **I. God's Indwelling Love (4:9-15)**

You can't give to others what you don't have yourself. Before you can give God's love to others, you must be indwelt by God's love yourself.

John explains how to do this in verses 9-15, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." (1 John 4:9-13 NKJV)

It is so simple that many people skip right over it—so listen carefully! To be indwelt by God's love, you must first understand how much God loves you. God loved us so much that He gave us the ultimate gift of His Son. Jesus paid the ultimate price by laying down his life to pay for our sins, even though he knew we were completely undeserving.

If you were the only human who ever needed saving, God loves you so much that he would have sent Jesus to die just for you. You may think, "This is too good to be true," but it is true. But God does love you this way, and he wants to experience His love.

To be indwelt by God's love, you need to personally agree with God that Jesus is indeed your Savior. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." (1 John 4:15 NKJV)

"Confess" means saying the same thing as or agreeing from the heart. To confess that Jesus is the Son of God is to tell God in your own words that you agree with him when he says that you need a Savior and that Jesus is that Savior. You can do this silently; others do this by talking to God aloud. Some people do this alone; others do it in the presence of others. Some people use their own words; others pray a written prayer. What matters is that you personally reach out to God and tell Him you know that you need a Savior and that you accept Jesus as your Savior.

When you confess Jesus is your Savior, he sends his Spirit to indwell you so you can experience his love. Verse 13 says, "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." (1 John 4:13 NKJV)

God becomes your heavenly Father, and you become his child, and his Spirit causes you to feel God's love for you. People who receive Christ are dramatically changed and excited about their new life as a Christian. We have experienced the most incredible thing possible for a person to experience; to know God loves us!

Do you remember when you asked Jesus to be your Savior? If you haven't done that, today would be a good day to settle it.

## **II. God's Continual Love (4:16-19)**

We also need to experience a continual flow of God's love. It's great to know that God loves you. But we also need to draw continually upon God's love.

To develop a godly love of others, you must continually draw upon the love of God that dwells within you. John explains how to do this in verse 16, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4:16-17 NKJV)

Notice the two ways he says we do this. First, "We know... the love God has for us." Our understanding and appreciation of God's love for us should always be fresh and continually increasing. Someone described God's love as a fine diamond, a multi-faceted wonder of brilliance, depth, and clarity. We should keep discovering new facets of God's love and the greater depths of each aspect. We grow in our knowledge of God's love by reflecting on what the scriptures teach us about God's love.

When you read your bible, ask God to open the eyes of your heart to his love and grace. The Apostle Paul's prayer for us is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

As you read the scriptures, look for what it teaches about God's love. Look for how God says He loves you. When a passage speaks to you, say it back to God and tell him how much His love and wisdom have impacted you. Try singing choruses and spiritual songs that focus on God's love. Refresh your heart with God's love, and let it build a growing and deepening foundation of God's love in you.

Learn to rely on the love God has for you. As you learn more about how God loves you, he will provide you with many other personal and practical ways to rely on his

love. And as you rely on God's love, your experience with God will expand, and your confidence in his love will increase.

When you choose to talk to God rather than avoid Him, you are learning to rely upon His love. In verse 18, John says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:18-19)

We all have a tendency to think it is our performance that gives us the right to come into God's presence. God says we are never worthy to come into his presence on the basis of what we have done for him. We are only worthy to come into his presence based on what Jesus has done for us. No one is ever good enough to be in God's presence. God does not love us based on our performance but our relationship with Jesus Christ, His Son.

We can also learn to rely on God's love by choosing to let other believers love us rather than isolating ourselves or remaining aloof and self-sufficient.

Sometimes drawing near to God is not an easy thing to do. Often we need to let another believer help us bear the burden we carry. When we take the courage to open up and share our situation with another mature and trustworthy believer, we feel strengthened and empowered to overcome. And then the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and comforts our hearts through God's great love. Have you ever considered getting together with a few other believers for bible study, prayer, or fellowship?

Another meaningful way we learn to rely on God's love is by choosing to thank God for his goodness and love. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Thank God for the love and good things he has brought into your life rather than resorting to grumbling and complaining. Resentment and bitterness over life's situations will destroy your hope and future.

Jesus said in Matthew 12, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good things, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:33-37)

Chronic grumbling and complaining reveal your circumstances' negative effect on you.

When we know that God loves us, we can't wait until we feel thankful again so we can express our thanks. Something we need to do on a regular basis is to take ourselves in hand and name how God blessed us and personally thank him for these blessings.

What would you say your complaining-to-thankfulness ratio has been lately?

## **Conclusion**

As we learn to rely on God's love to strengthen and guide us on our journey in faith; we also learn to share God's love with others.

How many people do you know right now that need God's supernatural love in their life? Do you know someone who might be in need and feeling inadequate to overcome the problem?

God's love is revealed in a very practical way when we see the need in someone else's life and respond to that need in some meaningful way. As we reach out to others with the love of Christ, God pours His love back into our lives in an even greater measure. You will never be able to outgive God.

If we withhold God's love from others, it could indicate that we don't trust God's love for us. When we do that, it shrinks our capacity to receive God's love. Habitually, selfish Christians are never excited about God's love. But when we trust God's love for us and learn to give His love to others, God's love refreshes our souls as it pours through us—and our capacity to receive and appreciate God's love grows.

Is your relationship with Christ growing? Do you regularly rely on God's love? How have you recently chosen to rely on God's love? Is your walk with Christ causing you to be refined by God's love?