

Relating to the Congregation

By John D. Wilsey

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to 1 John 3:12 in the section **It's in the Book**. Also read Genesis 4:1–8. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How would you describe Cain's feelings toward his brother?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to 1 John 3:13–14 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Why should you not be surprised if the world hates you, even if you are a nice person?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to 1 John 3:16 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What is love?

Scripture to Memorize

"Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth." 1 John 3:18

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the meaning of both love and hate and be able to express love to others, including members of the congregation.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

You are a member of a congregation. You either know, or at least recognize, most people in your church. But they drive you crazy sometimes! Sometimes you just don't want to go to church because you struggle with the people in your church. How do you love the people in your congregation biblically?

Read 1 John 3:11–19 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 11. this is the message. In 1 John 4:8 John wrote, "God is love." From the beginning of this letter, he repeated Christ's command to love one another because God is love. The command to love was always at the heart of John's teaching, hearkening back to Jesus's command: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34–35).

Verse 12. not ... like Cain. Cain was a hypocrite. That was his problem. His hypocrisy was demonstrated in his grain offering, which was not an offering he made in sincerity. When God accepted Abel's offering, Cain was consumed with jealousy, and he killed his own brother. Cain feigned love for both God and Abel. He loved himself above all.

Ultimately, Cain did not want to come into the Light because his **deeds were evil**, just as Christ had described in John 3:19–20.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on Cain's feelings for his brother.

Discussion Question

Part of the reason John wrote this letter was to guide his readers into knowing how they could have assurance of salvation. Based on this passage, how can we have assurance of salvation?

On Your Own

Examine your attitudes toward people in your church. Is your love for them sincere, and without hypocrisy? In the space below, write some evidences of your sincere love for others in your church.

Studying the Passage

Verse 13. the world hates you. The natural reaction when someone hates you is to return the favor. As a disciple, you are going to invite the world's anger as long as you are not ashamed to live for Christ.

Verse 14. We know that we have passed out of death. The evidence of your salvation will be in your love, even when people hate you. If you do not sincerely and consistently love other believers in particular, you should examine your own spirituality carefully. Are you truly saved if you refuse to love your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Verse 15. hates his brother. Hatred of other Christians—fueled by pride, jealousy, anger, etc.—is evidence of an unregenerate, unsaved person. This verse is one of the most arresting and convicting verses in all of Scripture.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on why you should not be surprised if the world hates you, no matter how delightful you are.

Discussion Questions

To review some of Jesus's teaching, read Matthew 5:21–22 out loud. How can anger lead to hatred. How can we deal with anger with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and stop it before it turns destructive?

On Your Own

With whom in the congregation are you angry? Whom do you need to forgive? Read Jesus' instructions in Matthew 5:23–26. In the space below, write how you could apply these teachings to your relationship with the person with whom you are angry.

Studying the Passage

Verse 16. He laid down His life. Do you want to know what love is? Here is a great definition and a powerful one. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, even while we were still sinners (see Romans 5:8). When we love biblically, we follow Christ's example.

Verse 17. closes his heart. It's one thing to talk about denial of self. The proof is in the doing. When we see a brother or sister in need and we have the means of meeting that need, our natural response as believers in Christ ought to be to immediately and instinctively help that person. Verse 17 provides a negative example, helping us know what love is not—selfishly turning away one who is in need.

Verses 19. By this we shall know. Later in this letter, John wrote, "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 5:13). How do you know you're saved? The nature of your love will be a sure guide.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now discuss the nature of love from 1 John 3:16–19.

Discussion Question

First John 1:9 gives us assurance of forgiveness of sins when we confess them to Christ. How does our forgiving of others demonstrate sincere love? How does unforgiveness demonstrate hatred? Can we expect to be forgiven if we withhold forgiveness?

On Your Own

Nobody loves with perfect sincerity except Jesus Himself. After your study of the passages above, how are you motivated to grow in your love for members of the congregation?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** at the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

First John 3:11–19 is one of the most powerfully convicting passages in all of Scripture. Here in this passage, we are told in no uncertain terms that if we do not love with sincerity, we do not have evidence we are saved.

But wait—don't we only have to confess that Jesus is God's Son and believe that He died on the cross for us to be saved? Yes, certainly. But from that confession—if it is a faithful and true confession—flows obedience to Christ's chief command to love God with all one's being and to love one's neighbor as oneself.

There is no more certain litmus test for love than in the church. In the church we gather with other believers to worship and serve the triune God. If we do not love those with whom we share the most important common bond imaginable, how can we truly say we believe in Jesus in a way that leads to our salvation? The apostle John, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says we can't.

Nevertheless, if we do love with sincerity, our love is a demonstration that our salvation is real. The good news about John's convicting words is that they give us assurance of our salvation.

But wait, you say. I don't love perfectly. Sometimes I do lash out at my brother or sister in Christ. So do we all. But what is your response to that sin in your actions and attitudes? Is it to confess it and repent from it? Or is your heart hardened, and do you refuse to repent? If the former, then that is further evidence of the work of God's Spirit in you as He makes you more and more into the image of His Son.

Follow up Question

Does your love for the congregation give evidence that you are a child of God?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.