

The Social Test — Love One Another

1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18, 23; 4:7-21 (NIV)

Icebreaker: What's a small, unexpected act of kindness someone did for you that you still remember?

Key Verse: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." — 1 John 3:18 (NIV)

1 John 2:7-8 (NIV): "Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."

1. John calls the command to love both 'old' and 'new.' Why might that dual framing matter for men who've heard 'love one another' so many times it barely registers?

1 John 2:9-11 (NIV): "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them."

2. This passage says hating a brother, while claiming to be in the light, actually proves you're still in darkness — regardless of your stated beliefs. What does 'hatred' realistically look like among men in everyday relationships — church, work, family?

1 John 3:11-12 (NIV): "For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."

3. John uses Cain and Abel as the negative example — worship without love toward a brother, ending in violence. What's the connection John draws between the state of someone's actions and their capacity to love?

1 John 3:16 (NIV): "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."

4. This verse grounds the definition of love in Christ's self-sacrifice. How does this raise the bar above cultural definitions of love as mainly a feeling or attraction?

1 John 3:17 (NIV): "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

5. John gets very concrete here — seeing a brother in need and having no pity on him. Why does John move from Christ's ultimate sacrifice (v. 16) straight to something as ordinary as material generosity?

1 John 3:18 (NIV): "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

6. This is the key verse for this whole theme. Where are men (in general, or you specifically) most likely to substitute words for action when it comes to love?

1 John 4:11-12 (NIV): "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

7. Since 'no one has ever seen God,' our love for each other is literally how His presence becomes visible to others. What does that mean for how this specific group treats each other — is our love for one another something an outsider could actually observe and be affected by?

1 John 4:18 (NIV): "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

8. What fear (of vulnerability, of rejection, of looking weak) keeps men from loving each other — or their families — with real depth rather than surface-level friendliness?

1 John 4:20 (NIV): "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."

9. John bluntly says you can't claim to love God while hating a brother you can see. Is there someone right now — in this group, your family, or elsewhere — where your love in 'deed and truth' has been missing?

10. What's one specific, concrete act of love — not just a kind word — you can do for someone this week, modeled on 3:16-18?