

**Introduction:**

- Advent 4th candle is the Candle of Love. Jesus made Hallmark famous! His arrival is the greatest love story ever told! If not for the Father sending Jesus, Hallmark would not exist. His arrival is the greatest love story ever told!
- I want to talk to us this morning about experiencing the love of God.
  - How many of you know that you can experience the love of God?
  - How many of you have experienced the love of God?
  - How many of you would like to experience more of the love of God?
- With all my heart, I believe we can! And believe we should! And I believe we will!
- The Christmas announcement of "great joy" in Jesus has everything to do with God's love for us and our love for others.

**I. What Is It To Experience the Love of God?**

- A. First it is to assess your spiritual condition. Usually you are not assessing, you are experiencing life and constantly running into emptiness. [Before Christ language/before born again]
  1. Empty - living without a purpose, living life without meaning, working hard to get somewhere but knowing you will not be satisfied when you arrive. You feel insignificant.
  2. Lost/spiritually dead "*The wages of sin is death*" Ro. 6:23 Death is what we deserve.
  3. Hopeless. Eph 2:12 "*no hope and without God in the world.*"
  4. Selfish and not caring about the interest of others.
  5. Living guilty knowing that you are hurting people, hurting yourself, with your words and actions.
  6. It is here, with all these characteristics that we, by the grace of God come to our senses. And let me add believers can go back to this place any time they want. Just neglect your relationship with God. When you are there you are living in darkness.
- B. You experience the love of God when you are Forgiven - forgiveness is so awesome to receive. It is debt elimination!!!
  1. He who is forgiven much loves much Lk 7:47
  2. And the one who has revelation of that love, loves much
  3. Mt 18 the parable of the unforgiving servant because he did not love is turned over to tormentors. When you walk with unforgiveness you are subject to tormentors.
- C. You experience the love of God cleansed
  1. Washed by the word Eph 5:26
  2. Filled with the living water John 4 woman at the well
- D. You experience the love of God when you are accepted for who you are. Now you are significant.
- E. You experience the love of God when you realize He loved first.
  1. You are wanted and desired by God.
  2. It came at a time when you were an enemy of the Christ.
- F. The love of God is your first love-not anything else like it...because it is new: new feelings, new emotions, new experiences. It is the first time you see a future with another person.
- G. God's love leaves an imprint on your heart

- II. How Can I Experience His Love?** This love is meant to be experienced not just acknowledged. What I am about to give you, you have to go for it. You have to seek it! You have to live in pursuit of this love.
- A. Realize God has poured it out. *"and hope does not put us to shame, because **God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**"* (Romans 5:5, ESV)
1. This experience is supernaturally done by God through the Holy Spirit. People cannot make this experience happen. It comes by faith in Christ. IE. John Wesley said that when he believed his *"heart was strangely warmed."*
  2. When you are born again, His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Romans 8:16
  3. When we are born again God's Spirit 'quickens' our spirit man and he comes alive! Born again!
- B. Understand God is pouring it out his love. *"but **God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**"* (Romans 5:8, ESV)
1. God's love has been poured out [past tense] Ro 5:5 yet in Romans 5:8 God demonstrates/ shows His love for us while we were still sinners.
  2. Please understand Paul did not write God demonstrated [past tense] He demonstrates! Present tense.
  3. So if He is demonstrating His love, [we have to see] this glorious love by faith through knowledge of Christ. So I hear the Gospel, read the Gospel and believe because I am amazed at His wondrous love.
- C. Know That Holy Spirit is doing this work.
1. The Holy Spirit is a person....a person that God means for us to experience. *"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."* (Romans 8:9, ESV)
  2. Because the Holy Spirit is in all of us we all experience Him in different measures. Everyone has some measure but not all experience Him in the same measure.
  3. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the eyes and understanding of the human heart towards Jesus. When that happens we see the glorious beauty of the love of God in His Son Christ Jesus, our Lord!!! Our hearts get moved toward Him. When I say moved I mean that we now cherish, and long for Him like never before!
  4. *"May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you."* (Jude 2, ESV) Multiply, to increase, to fullest measure. If it is multiplied it has to be in greater measure. You can experience more love!
- D. Trust that the Lord is directing your heart. *"May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ."* (2 Thessalonians 3:5, ESV)
1. Now that is good thought! God is directing my heart to His love and the steadfastness of Christ.
  2. The heart can be moved in different direction but one direction for sure is towards God's love! Toward that which will be most edifying and enlightening. IE. "Amazing love, how can it be that thou my God would die for me!"

3. Back to Ro 5:8 God Demonstrates His Love Towards Us. (Notice how God directs hearts in the Christmas story. Shepherds, Wise men, Mary, Joseph...your heart)
- E. God manifests His love to us. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit **be with you all**."* (2 Corinthians 13:14, ESV)
  1. Paul's prayer is that the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit be with you all.
  2. In other words, MANIFEST YOURSELF TO YOUR PEOPLE! John Piper writes, *"even though the love of God is always present with believers, we do not always experience the love of God as present. Therefore, we want God to make his love more manifestly known."*<sup>1</sup>
- F. Paul's incredible love prayer for the Saints. *"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—**that you, being rooted and grounded in love**, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:14-19, ESV)
  1. Rooted and grounded imply increase love in one's life. Ever increasing love! Greater heights of His love. Greater depths of His love.
  2. He want us to do this with all the Saints...comprehend the size of this love. As we speak of it we cause one another's capacity to love to increase.
- G. Loving Others will cause you to experience the love of God.

### Conclusion:

- Years ago Mike Bickle from IHOP KC shared in an interview how to experience the love of God.
  - Know the truth and engage with it. *"and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:32, ESV)
  - Study the subject of the love of God.
  - Turn that information into dialogue with God.
- He called these three things the ARK experience:
  - **A**gree with the Lord - Read His word, believe it.
  - **R**evelation - God reveal your love to me.
  - **K**eeep it – Walk it, make it your treasure.

### First love:

- First love is the person who you first see a future with and want to last.
- First love is powerful because it is a new experience.
- First love leaves an imprint upon the heart.
- First loves is never misplaced (lost), it is replaced.

<sup>1</sup> John Piper, Revive My First Love