

## Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we offer You this day, and everything within it; the good which inspires us, and the more difficult things that challenge us. Work through all we do and everything that happens to us to bring about peace and harmony in our lives, in the lives of others around us, and in the wider community we serve. Then, may we enjoy peace and harmony with You, our Lord and Saviour: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Church Unity

*Pray today for local churches who seek to work together to make their witness for Christ more visible to the local community. Pray for those who meet to pray for their churches.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the Holy Spirit and His work of renewal within you
- Pray for God's blessing on our endeavours to reduce waste
- Pray that people will perceive how God is at work within world events

## Meditation

Hear us, Lord Jesus, hear us:

We confess our faith so You will save us;  
and we confess our sins so You will heal us.

We confess;

our faith in Jesus Christ who has died for us,  
and our failure to trust in the love of the Lord.

We confess;

the Glory of God's Creation which surrounds us,  
and our pollution of the planet on which we live.

We confess;

the healing presence of the Holy Spirit within,  
and our doubts which tempt us to leave Your side.

We confess;

our gratitude for those who have led us to faith,  
and our lack of zeal for mission and evangelism.

Hear us, Lord Jesus; hear us.

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## Bible Study - 1 John 4:7-12

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how the love of God was revealed among us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the means of forgiveness for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, if God has loved us like this, then we should surely love one another. <sup>12</sup> God has never been seen by anyone; yet if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been made perfect in us.

## Review

This reading lies at the very heart of John's first letter, and it is one of only two places in the whole Bible where we read the phrase 'God is love' (4:8 – and the other quote is a few verses further on in 1 John 4:16). These powerful words have etched themselves into the consciousness of generations of Christians not simply because they are found here in scripture, for few people can quote them as from '1 John 4:8', but because they sum up perfectly the truth of our faith. Indeed, the closer we look into this passage, the more

we find that it is one of those precious scriptures where the Gospel is set out with stunning simplicity. On the one hand, this reading is mere words, and not very many of them; on the other hand, it conveys immense truths of incalculable significance. Through John, God has given us a glimpse into His very image and nature, and as we read and take hold of what he wrote, we find ourselves unlocking doors to an understanding not just of God, but of ourselves, of other people, of the past, the present and the future, and of much more besides!

In his letter, John set out to teach the truth about the life of the church (e.g. 2:1-6), about what Jesus has done to save people from sin (e.g. 1:5-10), and about false teaching that prevents the growth of the church (e.g. 2:18f). However, just beneath the surface of everything John has said has been the subject of love, and especially, the command of Jesus to 'love one another' (4:23, and see also John 13:34, 15:12f.). John himself is described in the Bible as the disciple whom 'Jesus loved' (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:7,20), and conscious of the special quality of his relationship with the Lord, it may well have been John's divine mission as an apostle to leave us the gift of this singular and stunning insight into the character of God; 'God is love'.

Throughout the Old Testament, we read of the love of God. He did this in choosing to make a covenant with Abraham (Gen 12f.), in making the people of Israel into a nation under Him (Exodus 12f.), and in leading His people through perilous times to bring renewal under priests and prophets (see priests such as Ezra and prophets such as Jeremiah and Isaiah). The word 'love' is never far from the stories of the Old Testament, and one of the most frequent descriptions of God is that He is a God of 'steadfast love' (e.g. Psalms 40:10, 117:2, and Isaiah 55:3). In addition, in calling His people to be like Him, God calls Israel to 'love the Lord your God ...' (Deut 6:4) and 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). So it was, that with this history of knowing about God's love, John saw His dear friend Jesus, the divine Son of God, die on a Cross; and he was not reduced to mortal shame and dishonour in death, but elevated by His supreme self sacrifice of love (see John 19:25f. where Jesus cares for His mother from the Cross).

So here in his letter, John said 'God is love', and summed up everything said by Scriptures about the nature and being of God. This means that love is not one of God's characteristics, and it is not a property of the Father or of the Son or the Holy Spirit; but 'God is love'. God and love are one and the same, and we see love in Jesus because God is love; we see beauty in Creation because God is love and we find love in each other because we are made in the image of God!

In these famous few verses, John also says that our connection with God is through love, and if we will not love, then we cannot claim to know Him (4:8). The rest of the passage goes on to explain that God's love has come into the world through Jesus, and the relationship we have with the Father is primarily dependent upon His love, not ours. By saying this, John did not abandon all the commandments of the Old Testament or of Jesus Himself that we 'love God' and 'love one another', rather, he explained that no one can do these things unless touched first by the love of God. Without the prior love of God, we are nothing, but with love, we have life; without the love of God we cannot love one another, but when touched by His love, we can fulfil this great commission!

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. How do you know that God is a God of love? Share your experiences of God's love within your group
2. What else does this passage tell us about the love of God, and how this works through Jesus Christ for our benefit today?
3. How can we show the love of God through the things we do? Share your ideas with one another and encourage each other to show the love of God.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*There is so much more for us to discover in this great text; I have found it hard to write just this! The more we meditate and think about what it means to say 'God is love', the more powerful the message becomes. This is not a casual comment, but a truth inspired by the Holy Spirit that sums up the entire Gospel in three words, for this indeed is 'good news'. So many people believe that God is not love; because of the trouble they see in the world, they say 'I can't believe in a god who does that ...' without pausing to consider that the things they see are an aberration of the perfection God created, and the consequence of the fall from grace of humanity. It is of prime importance that the church declares that God is love, in the fullest meaning of that word, both human and divine.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Look back over recent months and try to remember whether you have been tempted to be angry with God or doubt His love. It would be surprising if you had not suffered such temptation at some time! Yet how have you dealt with this? Think carefully about how you deal with your doubts and fears about God, and whether you do indeed believe that 'God is love'.*
- *Pray against the works of satan which destroy peoples trust in God or question people's faith that He is a God of love. Pray that God's people will stand against such temptations, firm in their faith that 'God is love'.*

### **Final Prayer**

Dear Lord Jesus, may we be completely filled with Your love; we need more and more of Your love to do more and more of Your work in the world, and without this love, we are nothing. May we be seen as people of love; not just of sentiment or passion, but of mercy and truth, so that we may witness to You faithfully within Your world: AMEN

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