

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, July 1, 2020! My goodness, it's hard to believe July is already here, time is flying! But thank you so much for tuning in today, for taking this time to focus on God and on your faith.

Through the course of these last few months, I think we have all discovered that there are many ways in which we are spiritually fed. Our spirits are fed in prayer, in worship, in gratitude, by reaching out and connecting with one another, with learning and listening, and with reading and dwelling in the Scriptures, the living Word of God. Though we've had to adapt so much, it's also kind of exciting to see where God is working and the Spirit is moving in our world, and we can be sure that this is certainly happening, even from a physical distance.

But there are also moments where all the newness can feel a little overwhelming, that we can get caught up in all the adapting and start to struggle to get our bearings. So although learning new things and adapting and bravely going forth in faith to do new things is super important and rewarding and exciting, there are also times where we need *Selah*, that we need moments to just pause and center ourselves and take care of ourselves in healthy and familiar ways so that we can then go forth and continue in our pursuits of adapting and newness.

So our devotion today is sort of a back to foundations devotion for me. The Word today is healthy and familiar and these reminders will serve all of us in taking good care of ourselves. Today's devotion will be on one of my absolute favorite chapters in the whole bible, and I hope that these words of God are as life-giving and sustaining for you and your spirit as they are for me. This chapter is 1 John 4, and our topic today is God is love.

So as we dive into this beautiful, anchoring topic, please join me in a word of prayer:

*God our creator and sustainer, you provide us with perfect love, and for that we give you thanks. You yourself are love, embodied by your Son Jesus, and for his death and resurrection we give you unending thanks. Lord, help us to feel this perfect love of yours, when we are struggling, anxious, depressed, grieving, or not sure where to turn. Help us to know that your perfect love casts out fear, that your love is always within us, and may we live in a way that uplifts your perfect love for us and all creation. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

I will begin today by reading from the scriptures, this is 1 John 4:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. 4 Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to*

*them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

*7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

*13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.*

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*

The Word of the Lord.

God is love. What an absolutely beautiful and life-giving and soul-comforting thought. God is love.

I also kind of love that this powerful, beautiful reflection comes in the middle of an obscure epistle, or letter, towards the end of the New Testament. No one knows for sure who wrote this letter, but it's named 1 John because the authors were clearly inspired by the words of John's Gospel. It's a wonderful melding of human experience and Gospel inspiration. We can certainly find great beauty in unexpected places.

But the main question after reading this chapter then arises - "what is love?". And yes, the dance song from the 90s is in my head with that phrase too. But here is what I know about what love is - love means you never give up on what or whom you love. You never give up.

In this chapter, and other places through the Bible, God's love is described as "perfect love". And that perfect love is the fact that God has chosen us, God has chosen humanity, God will be our God, we will be God's people, and that love will never end or fail us. God will always choose

us, choose humanity. And God shows this perfect love to us in a number of ways, from the initial promises and covenants to the Hebrew people in leading them out of slavery into freedom and most crucially, in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the embodiment of God's love. Jesus is both fully human (who God loves) and divine (who is God). God is literally willing to go to and beyond the limits of human life capability, death itself, to show God's promises to love us. Jesus' death was out of great love for us, to save us from the power of sin and death and fear and know that we are forgiven and held tenderly in gracious love, no matter what we do. In making this sacrifice of painful, horrible death, for all of us humans, God shows us just how powerful that perfect love is. Not even that horrible death will stop God's loving us. God will raise us up beyond the confines of death and sin and fear and give us new life. This is the hope in the promises of the resurrection, that God's perfect love will cast out fear and we get to live in the new life and freedom of being endlessly, deeply, loved.

The verse that is particularly sticking with me these days is that God's perfect love casts out fear. I connect this with the first few verses in this chapter, about questioning the spirits that do not listen to God and are spirits of error. For me, this speaks highly of what it is to be anxious. We are certainly living in an anxious time, with lots of questions and unknowns that make our minds spin. And often once our minds start spinning, it gets even harder to determine which are these spirits of God and which are the spirits that lead us from God. But here's the fundamental truth - God is love. God's love is perfect and casts out fear. And what is anxiety at its root but simply energetic fear?

So knowing that God is love, and that love is within us helps in sorting through that anxiety. What is rooted in love is the spirit of God. What is loving towards ourselves and the brothers and sisters around us is the spirit of God. Not giving up on ourselves is not only loving ourselves but in fact loving God and listening to the spirit of God, love, which is within us. The spirits that lead us to love God and love our neighbors, are truly the spirits of God at work within and around us, and will never give up on us.

As we are reminded that God is love, and of the great love we have woven into our inmost beings, I invite you this week to take some time and really dwell in this reality of love. Take some moments to meditate on the verses in this scripture, and keep it in your mind for intentional prayer. One of my favorite ways to do this is to pick one verse or phrase, lately it's been "perfect love casts out fear", and find a rhythm with your breath to remind yourself of these holy words. Breathe in "God is perfect love", breathe out "which casts out fear". I pray that your bodies, minds, and spirits may be nourished with this meditative practice.

And please, dear friends, if you have any chapters or verses in scripture that have this kind of deep meaning for you, that have guided you in challenging times or served as a foundation for you, as you feel called, please write what those verses are in the comments on today's video, or you can email them to me at [pastor@mtzionhudson.com](mailto:pastor@mtzionhudson.com) if you'd like that to be more private. You may just hear a devotion or two inspired by these favorite and foundational verses in upcoming weeks.

So now as we close our time together, please join me in the words our Lord Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.*

Thank you so much again for tuning in today! Have a beautiful rest of your day. Go in peace dear friends, Amen.