



## Theme: The Gospel on Broadway “Phantom of the Opera – Light and Love”


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### Weekly Memory Verse:

***<sup>5</sup>This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. – 1 John 1:5***

### **Meditation Moments for Monday, April 27 – Read **1 John 1:5-7** and **1 John 4:7-12**.**

1 John outlines God’s way of salvation which is shaped by two core beliefs. 1 John 1:5 tell us, “God is light.” 1 John 4:8 proclaims, “God is love.” The important idea is the GOD initiates this light and love. Light and love depend on the nature of the lover and the giver of light, rather than those who receive the light and love that is offered. Jesus loved because he was a loving person, not because he found attractive qualities in those he loved. His followers are to be loving people, not simply to be drawn to attractive people. Jesus modeled that giving light and love to others with no strings attached is what can bring meaning and purpose and joy to our lives.

 Scholar N.T. Wright wrote in his commentary, *Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, “That love-filled God-life... is available for all who ‘walk in the light’... When we consciously turn to the light – when we face up to what’s gone wrong in the past and don’t try to hide it, and when we are determined to live that way from now on... we find that Jesus’ blood somehow makes us clean, pure and fresh inside... All because of Jesus.” How does God’s forgiving, cleansing light brighten your life? What practical difference has Jesus’ love made in your relationships?

 The phrase in 1 John 4:12, “No one has ever seen God,” set up the next line: “If we love each other, God remains **in us**.” Amazingly, when we’re getting it right, people can see God in us despite our remaining flaws. Gordon Jensen put it this

way in a song, "You're the only Jesus some will ever see." As your capacity grows to take in God's love, to see yourself as lovable in God's sight, how is this changing the way you see and relate to others?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, let your light shine out through me in such a way that your love changes others for the better just by having seen you in me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 28** – Read **1 John 2: 22-23** and **1 John 3:7-11**. "Make sure no one deceives you," wasn't a vague warning. The first reading from today made it clear that specific teachers who had belonged to the Christian family were now actively chipping away at that group's central belief in Jesus. That was not a fussy argument about some minor verbal technicality. Believing the false teachers led people to believe that sin was no big deal, or even that everything they did was automatically right. Holding fast to trust in Jesus produced lives that "practiced" living in God's way.


🏰 "They can't sin," was not about failing at times but the overall way of life. N.T. Wright wrote in *Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, "John knows that Christians do still sin from time to time; there is a remedy for that in 1 John 2:1. What he is talking about here is life's whole habit... sinning as the regular mode in which we live. We should be doing our best to avoid all kinds of sin, all the time, though we shall surely fail; but the failures must take place within a settled habit of life in which sin is no longer setting the tone." How is God's loving light altering your habits for good?

🏰 No one in New Testament times had our specific knowledge of human DNA. Robert Wall notes in *The CEB Study Bible*, "The Greek term *sperma* can refer to 'genetic character' and is used here as a metaphor for the divine nature. We also find this word in 2 Peter 1:3 and Genesis 4:1 and 25." How is the Holy Spirit's power moving you in the direction of living "in the same way that Jesus is righteous"?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, thank you for your grace that forgives and preserves me when I do sin. And thank you for your powerful Spirit who breaks the power of sin to bind and dominate my life. Amen.*


**Wednesday, April 29** – Read **1 John 3:13-17**. In a letter rooted in "love," "light" and "life," these verses offer a stark contrast with words like "hates," "death," and "murderers." Other passages also showed the contrast between God's Kingdom and the world as it is, such as John 15:18-19 and Galatians 5:17-23. While these antonyms seem obvious in writing, it can be harder in our day-to-day life to fully recognize and "know love," which we read in verse 16. Scholar N.T. Wright states in his commentary *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone* that the best way to distinguish between "life" and "death" is to "listen carefully and sift and weigh what you hear."


🏰 In doing this vital listening, Wright continues, "Sometimes all a Christian can do... is to cling on to the bald and basic statement that, so far as we can tell, the meaning of the word 'God' is actually defined in relation to the Jesus who, we believe, came from this God and became flesh in our midst." Which stories about Jesus most clearly reveal His love to you?

 Verse 16 highlighted Jesus' self-sacrificing demonstration of love. Our response as followers of Jesus is a call to imitate this sacrificial love. Most of the time, this is not as drastic as going to a cross, but it is meant to change how we live in our relationships. How can you daily accept this challenge to prioritize the needs of the people around you?

**Prayer:** *Lord, Jesus, thank you for loving me to the point of self-sacrifice and being God's flesh in my life. Help me stand boldly in love and joyfully serve others even when the world tells me differently. Amen.*


**Thursday, April 30** – Read **Ephesians 5:1-33**. “Submit” is a loaded word today and often seen as having power over another. Paul makes it clear from the beginning of this chapter that submission is mutual and meant to imitate Christ in our most intimate relationships. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Ephesians for Everyone*, “Paul ... insists that the husband should take as his role model, not the typical bossy or bullying male of the modern, or indeed the ancient, stereotype, but Jesus himself... If husbands – not least Christian husbands! – had even attempted to live up to this wonderful ideal, there would be a lot less grumbling about bossy or bullying men in the world today.” Read as a whole, this passage set a high standard of mutual love and respect for both partners in any marriage, especially when you consider just before it, Paul talks about living in the Light and by the Spirit’s power.

 What do you believe it means for spouses to love each other, “just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”? “Love,” the Greek word *agape*, meant intentionally chosen attitudes and actions, not an emotional state that came and went. How does this image challenge spouses to act when their partner’s needs call for them to give up some of their own comfort or power?

 Although in spots the New Testament echoed some standard cultural language, it never spoke to only one partner in a relationship. Ephesians 5:21 said, “Submit to each other.” Submission” was mutual, not something only one gives while the other takes. The same was true for parents and children. How have you seen mutual “submission” work in healthy relationships?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you washed the feet of stubborn disciples. You asked God to forgive Roman soldiers executing you. Help me in all relationships, especially the closest ones, to be a person growing more like you each day. Amen.*

**Friday, May 1** – Read **1 John 3:18-23**. It is because our commitment to Jesus moves us away from the habitual practice of the negative behaviors known as “sin,” the moments when we fall short of that high ideal may shake our confidence. Do we really belong to Christ after all? Nearly all of us know of times when, as 1 John put it, “our hearts condemn us.” We can give thanks that at those times God has the answer to keep us from despair and utter defeat.

 In *The Message* paraphrase of 1 John 3:18-20 reads, “Let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality. It’s also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do

ourselves." In what ways can perfectionism spoil your trust? What has helped/is helping you learn to trust God's grace more than your self-criticism?



It's important to honestly acknowledge your failures as 1 John 1:8-10 encourages us to do. But severe self-criticism can lead us to the foolish belief that we have higher standards for ourselves than God has. When we doubt our relationship with God, God longs to cover our self-condemnation. This can happen through the community's selfless love for each other and obedience to God's commandments as we read about in James 1:5-8; 4:8-12 and Romans 8:1." Are you willing to let God's grace quiet your condemning heart?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, I want so much to live a life that pleases you. Thank you for reminding me, often, that self-condemnation is not your will for me, for overriding my tendencies to self-doubt and even self-hatred. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 25** – Read **1 John 4:15-21**. Some people think Christians are rigid, critical, and unloving. Sadly, that view is too often based on knowing people who claim to follow Jesus. But that's not what 1 John taught! John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, preached a sermon that quoted today's reading and invited all Christ-followers, "Let us provoke all [people], not to enmity and contention, but to love and good works; always remembering those deep words... 'God is love; and [all] that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in [them]!'"



The letter said, "Perfect love drives out fear," and went on to say, in 4:20, "Those who say, 'I love God' and hate their brothers or sisters are liars." Those thoughts were connected. Do you agree that it is often fear that leads us to hate other people? Why would hating others block any true love for God? Can you think of practical ways to let God's perfect love move you in the direction of acting in love toward "others," even if you think they deserve fear and distrust rather than love?



The words, "God is love" are meant to touch everything, from the individual mind and what we think, to all relationships. 1 John 4: 18 and 20 remind us that love and God go together; hate and God do not; fear and God do not. Have you ever experienced a situation in which, as you learned to love another person, your fear of that person decreased and even disappeared? In what ways has following Christ made you and your relationships more loving?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you embodied God's love for me. Now you call me to embody your love as I deal with other people, even people I may not like, may even fear. Grow your love in my heart. Amen.*