

Title: **The Love of God Made Manifest**  
Text: **1 John 4:8-11**  
Date: **December 18, 2022**

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## Big Idea

Our culture makes a big deal of love, but we have no idea what it really is. We define it in terms of affection, action, or allegiance, but our notions of it are always reductionistic and even distorted. The Bible, on the other hand, defines love ultimately as a person. And he's the one who's come down to us at Christmas. Jesus is the love of God made manifest!

I recently heard R.C. Sproul say: "I don't think there is any word in the English language that's been stripped of the depth of meaning such as [this] word 'love.'" And he likened our dealings with it to the way a kid plays with a kaleidoscope. You have those little colored stones at the end of the tumbler there and you look into the eye piece and it makes a pattern. Then you turn it a bit and it makes a completely new design and you couldn't really get back to the first one even if you wanted to. It's always changing. Well, that's, to some degree, our culture's approach to love. We don't exactly know what it is, we just know that we want it, and we're always trying to find it. So we keep turning the tumbler and trying to make sense of it for ourselves.

### 1. What Is It?

So far as our culture is concerned, it seems to me that there are various lanes our definitions tend to track in in one way or another. We never really end up at a full understanding of it. Instead we have these personal emphases that then lead to a certain reduction in our perception of love.

*Emphasis #1: Affection*

*Emphasis #2: Action*

*Emphasis #3: Allegiance*

The Bible is going to say that love is not one of these things or the other, it's all of these things and more. Love, according to the Bible, is not first an idea, nor is it first affection, or action, or allegiance, or any of these things. No, in the Scriptures, we see that love is first and foremost . . . a *person*. Or to put it in the words of 1 John 4:8b: "God is love." And as such, it must be said, and should be expected, that we cannot properly understand nor experience love apart from this God who himself is love. Whatever love is, it has its origin in him. All of our efforts to find it outside of him are doomed to fail.

### 2. Where Do We Find It?

Jesus is the love of God made manifest. Christmas is the God who is love breaking into human history, breaking into humanity itself, that he might manifest that love to us, that he might invite us into the dance of our triune God. Here is where the kaleidoscope becomes the telescope, as it were, and something that once seemed so distant and far off is brought near and made crystal clear.

The great reformer Martin Luther famously said: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it." God doesn't love you *because you are* loveable. He loves you *so that you might become* loveable. He doesn't invite you to the dance *because you are* beautiful. He invites you to the dance *so that he can make you* beautiful. He loves you back to life. But how does he do it? By giving himself up to death.

### 3. How Does It Change Us?

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). Those who have been so loved, will in a similar manner, start to love others.



### Reflection Questions

- What is love? Before listening to this sermon, how would you have defined it? Which of the three emphases would you have been most prone to? Why do you think?
- What do you think the Bible means when it says that God *is* love? How does this help you understand what love truly is?
- Read the quote from Luther above once more. How does this minister to you personally?

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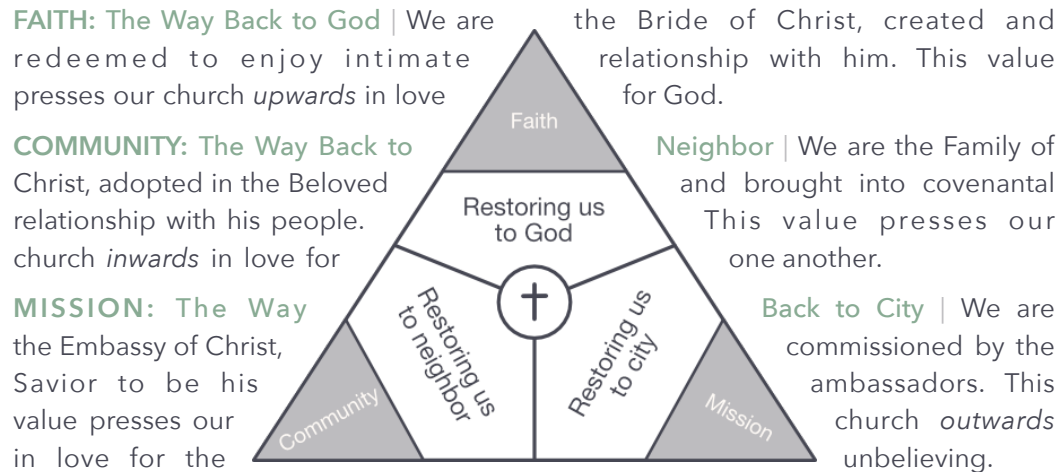


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## Our Mission & Values

*Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.*



## Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



**Mail:** PO Box 23806, San Jose, CA 95153  
**Phone:** (408) 320-7080  
**Email:** [info@mercyhillchurch.org](mailto:info@mercyhillchurch.org)  
**Web:** [mercyhillchurch.org](https://mercyhillchurch.org)



Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.  
We are so glad you've joined us today!

## Announcement Spotlight

### Christmas @ Mercy Hill!

Christmas falls on a Sunday this year. You may be wondering what we are planning. Well, in one sense, we'll keep things rolling as usual. The service will be at 10:00am that morning like normal. But . . . of course we're going to do it up special for Christmas! It will be a shorter family service (no Mercy Hill Kids ministry) so all our kids can participate (if you're worried, we'll be handing out an activity pack on the way in that your littles can engage with during the service to keep them occupied if needed). We'll sing carols, spend some time reflecting on the wonder of Christmas, and enjoy sweet treats together! Please mark your calendars and invite your family and friends!

If you're interested in bringing some Christmas cookies or other treats to share, scan the QR code below to find a link to sign up!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at [info@mercyhillchurch.org](mailto:info@mercyhillchurch.org).

### Care to Carol?!

We know this is last minute, but in an attempt to creatively reach people for Jesus, a few in our congregation thought it might be fun to sing carols in the neighborhoods around the church after the service today from 1:00-2:00pm. We'd need at least a small group to make it work. If you're interested, please plan to join! Who knows what God may do?

For more information, please contact Chris Keener at [cmkeener2@gmail.com](mailto:cmkeener2@gmail.com).

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