

**Lesson 23: “Super-Practical Love”****1 John 4:18-21****Craig Crawshaw**

**1 John 4:18-21** *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.*

Thus far in chapter 4, John has given us great teaching on divine “agape” love. We have been taught that “God is love” by nature, and how that affects our love to God and our love to others. As chapter 4 concludes, John gives us a “final flourish” of practical teaching on love, which I am entitling “Super-Practical Love.”

**3 PRACTICAL TRUTHS**

1. Love dispels FEAR (v. 18)

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear”*

2. Love dispels HESITATION (v. 19)

*“We love, because He first loved us”*

3. Love dispels PRETENSE (v. 20-21)

*“If someone says ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar”*

**THEREFORE, WE CONCLUDE ...**

- 1. Love is CONFIDENT (not fearful)
- 2. Love INITIATES (not hesitant)
- 3. Love is GENUINE (not pretentious)

Confidence with God and confidence with others are linked

Initiation by God and initiation with others are linked

Honesty with God and honesty with others are linked

**HOW LOVE IS DEBILITATED** (weakened; rendered ineffective)

✓ FEAR debilitates

As we fear rejection or unpleasant consequence, our confidence wanes

✓ HESITATION debilitates

As we hesitate to love, we make excuses that the other should initiate

✓ PRETENSE debilitates

As we pretend to love, our reputation is compromised as hypocrisy is detected

Let us examine each of these practical points in turn.

**Super-practical love ...**

**1. ... relies on the assurance of God** that we will “*not come into judgment*” (John 5:24) and “*we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Romans 8:37). We love boldly and confidently with no phobia of inadequacy.

**Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses ...*

**John 5:24** *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

**Romans 8:15** *For we have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”*

**2 Timothy 1:7** *For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.*

### Super-practical love ...

**2. ... initiates in loving another**, because God has initiated in loving first. God’s example of initiating love is a prime motivator and example for me to take the first step of love.

**1 John 4:10** *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [full payment] for our sins.*

**Romans 5:8** *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Ephesians 5:25** *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*

**Philippians 2:3b** *Regard one another as more important than yourselves.*

### Super-practical love ...

**3. ... is genuine and fervent in love**, knowing that is a “win-win-win” – for me, for the other and for God

**1 Peter 4:8** *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*

**1 Peter 1:22** *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.*

## REFLECTIONS

### On being confident and not fearful ...

What is it that might cause me to fear loving another? Top of the list is my own inadequacy. I can easily fear that I will “put my foot in my mouth” or won’t know what to say. Second on the list would be consequence of some uncomfortable (or worse) reaction to my sharing.

The Greek work translated “fear” is “phobia.” And we all can relate to phobias, whether claustrophobia (fear of tight spaces), acrophobia (fear of heights) or in this case, krisisphobia (fear of crisis).

But God tells us, “*perfect love casts out fear.*” If my motive is purely to love another in the divine love of God, I will not fear inadequacy, for God will give me the words and the strength. He will love through me.

Verse 18 goes on to say that “*fear involves punishment*” – meaning some uncomfortable consequence of my action. The Greek word is literally “terror.” And I think some of us would say that we are truly terrorized by the thought of sharing our faith. But what does God say to that? He says, through John, that “*the one who fears is not perfected in love.*” “*Perfect love casts out fear.*” So the key is, by faith and trust, to allow God to love and speak through you.

My wife and I were recently watching the movie “We Bought A Zoo” where the lead character was scared to death to approach a girl and ask her for a date. His brother advised, “You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it.” Sometimes, with God’s help, we just need to screw up our courage to begin to love and share, and after that it goes better than we might have thought. Why, because God takes over through us!

Years ago I was in Soledad prison with my college-career choir, ministering in a chapel service. I remember being surprised that the inmates were allowed to wear all the tattoos and metallic jewelry

they wanted, which presented an intimidating first impression. We had been instructed that a former mass-murderer might be in attendance at this chapel, whose name I had read about in the newspapers. And sure enough, he came to our concert. After the concert he approached me from the back, rather suddenly and quickly, appearing to my eyes to be much taller, stronger and larger than I was, wearing an abundance of intimidating metal jewelry. I must confess my first inner reaction as he approached was to be intimidated – OK, scared! But in the moment, filled with the Spirit having just presented the gospel, I felt a supernatural love for him as he enveloped me in a large, strong embrace, stating how much the concert had touched his heart. I then learned this former mass-murderer had become a born-again Christian while in prison. Perfect love had miraculously cast out all fear, and we conversed and fellowshiped, pastor to former mass-murderer, now brother in Christ.

I would like to say that every time I see another I courageously share the love of the Lord. But I too need to remind myself that God said He would give me the boldness and the words to say, and that Jesus said to let my “light shine.” It is continually a choice to let God supernaturally love through me. That’s not to say that is a struggle, for the more we love in God’s love, the easier and more “natural” that supernatural act becomes.

### **On initiating, rather than hesitating ...**

I can easily convince myself that I will share love in response to the other initiating in some way, I will wait for “an open door.” How often are we at an impasse with someone – loved one, neighbor, or another. The walls have gone up and both “sides” wait for the other to be the first to forgive, or give in, or say something. God wants ME to initiate. Why? – because He first loved me – He first initiated love when I was unlovely.

God wants me to be the “bigger Christian” when there is a disagreement, and be the first to express love. Why? Because God expressed love to me when I was yet a sinner.

And husbands and wives should run to be the first to express love and forgiveness when there is an impasse. Why? Because God “rushed” to save me when there was a wall between me and Him.

Bill Hybels, founding and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, wrote a book that has been a strong influence on my and so many others: Just Walk Across The Room. It’s simple but profound premise is that taking ten courageous and intentional steps across a room to speak to someone about Christ could point someone toward faith and might just change the way *you* walk.

### **On being genuine, and not pretentious ...**

Pretending is a dangerous thing, for if you are good at it, lines blur between truth and fiction. And if you are especially good at it, you can fool yourself!

I mentioned earlier that it is a “win-win-win” when our love is genuine. It is a win for me, because I am not longer playing the role of “trying to love.” And I find that I am loving God as I purely love another. It is a win for the one I am loving, because they receive genuine love and not something fake. And most of the time they can tell the difference – can’t you? And hypocrisy is so ugly to us all. And it is a win for God, because He is able to love perfectly through me, His transparent and honest vessel. Triple play – triple win!

So remember ...

- 1. Love is CONFIDENT** (not fearful)
- 2. Love INITIATES** (not hesitant)
- 3. Love is GENUINE** (not pretentious)

THIS IS SUPER-PRACTICAL LOVE!