

This sermon was preached by Dr. Wilson at the Oakmont Presbyterian Church on Father's Day 2006.

Your Photo Album

1 John 4:7-12

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

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My family pictures include

A professional picture of my father in a pose that is reflective & distinguished.

More significant to me is private picture of my dad sitting on bench swing with my step mother and our young boys. My father has on a pair of shorts, but no shirt. It is a picture of a man who is old enough to want to be comfortable, and comfortable enough to have his picture taken without a shirt.

The snapshots I remember most of my father are the pictures in my mind:

Sitting at the kitchen table planning a home improvement project,

Standing in front of his wood lathe, turning walnut spindles for a headboard,

Joining with other men from his church as they painted homes for some neighboring poor people.

I see him:

attending my college choir concerts,

presenting me with pride for ordination as a pastor,

I remember the:

joy on his face when we arrived for a visit and his sadness when we were leaving.

One picture that lives in my mind includes me sitting on a stool in the basement. My father has electric clippers in his hand and he is giving me a buzz hair cut.

My father not only cut my hair and he shaped my life.

Many of the things he enjoyed, I now enjoy: humor, laughing, fishing, singing.

Along with moms, dads give their children life and many life values.

On Father's Day we go beyond acknowledging Dads to affirming that Dads help shape kids and their families.

This is a scary thought because we realize our imperfections are part of the shaping process.

Yes we learn some lessons from our fathers that we would do our best to unlearn as we seek to grow, but that does not diminish the role of fathers in the lives of sons and daughters.

So it was, even for John.

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The early images we have from John are not model behavior.

Jesus nicknamed him and his brother James "sons of thunder"¹ and thunder John did.

A man who was not a follower with Jesus' disciples was driving out demons. John wanted to stop him because he was not a part of the twelve.²

When traveling through Samaria and the people refused to give shelter to Jesus, and his followers, John wanted to command fire from heaven to consume the townspeople.³

These images of John are aggressive, but the later images we get, in this letter for example, are vastly different.

Listen to John's care and humility here:

"we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete [in you]."⁴

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."⁵

And from our reading today, this proclamation from a former son of thunder: "everyone who is loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."⁶

¹ Mark 3:17

² Luke 9:50

³ Matthew 20:20-28

⁴ 1 John 1:4

⁵ 1 John 1:8

What accounts for this change from booming thunder to such tender whispers of love?

He gives us the clue when we read “Beloved, since God loved us so much...”⁷

In the photo album of John’s memory was the image of his heavenly father persevering with his prodigal children, and sending the Son into the world in love who in time goes to Jerusalem, to his arrest, and to his death on the cross – in itself an act of love by which our sins are forgiven and given a fresh start.

John’s heavenly father taught him: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁸

John’s callous spirit was made supple with God’s love.

When we grow weary of loving others we likely need to remember God’s second-mile loving with us.

Let’s be clear that love has many shapes that go beyond acceptance, forgiveness and patience.

In love Dad’s help establish respect for one another and the expectation of responsibility for one’s actions. Dad’s model hard work and tender caring. And Dad’s also rightly model accountability for our behaviors by acknowledging our errors and accepting the consequences for our actions.

For the Christian dad, there is much more to loving.

John affirms that “...if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us”.⁹

The negative is perhaps the easy explanation: aggression and pride, bitterness and resentment, stubborn perseverance in our sins... all of these block God from our lives, but if we love....

If we love God is there and God’s love is *perfected* in us. The word “perfected” means more than the absence of flaw; it means that God’s love is completed within us.¹⁰

Its as if our heavenly father does not rest until that divine love flows. Like water finding its way down a slope, God’s love seeks its way in and through our lives.

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⁶ 1 John 4:7b-8

⁷ 1 John 4:11

⁸ John 3:16

⁹ 1 John 4:12

¹⁰ See 1 John 4:12 in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* – “...But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love!”

So picture now your family album – either the one in your cabinet or the one in your mind?

What are the images of your family loving one another?

How do you love one another?

Celebrate those ways of loving and continue in them.

Because of this great promise of God living in us and God's love being perfected in us we want to GROW in our loving.

Here are some ways that others have grown in their love:

- a) Men have sought a better balance between work and family. They have made their family a daily priority and sought to love their family every day in some concrete way. This means saving enough energy during the day that they have had something to give at night.
- b) Others have led their family in loving beyond their home. They have chosen some ministry for their family like delivering the food to the food bank, or adopting someone at Presbyterian SeniorCare, or working at the animal shelter. Loving others together says clearly “this is who we are and how we live”.

At whatever age or stage of life you are, your family album is not yet complete; there are blank pages waiting to be filled.

So love one another. God is longing to live more fully in you and to grow love through you.

Picture that!

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