

Welcome

In our wedding vows, Amanda promised never to make me run a 5k.

Which is strange, unless you had run the 5k we did when we were dating. I should preface this by saying I know we have some runners in here. A couple of marathoners, even. I am not one of you. I have tried to be. I did Couch to 5K. I have run 2 5Ks in my life. I just never get to that place where running is fun. I've never experienced the fabled 'runner's high'. Only the runner's "Dear God I can't feel my legs, please merciful death come swiftly for me."

So anyway. Amanda and I ran a 5K.

It was bad.

Not for Amanda. She was great. In fact, given that she stayed with me the whole time, I think it was pretty easy for her.

About $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through the race, I wasn't running anymore. I was moving at the pace of a shambling zombie, but I was still moving *like* I was running. Does that make sense? No, but all of my brainpower was dedicated to keeping me from falling over.

A power walker passed us, and commented on my pathetic form. Which didn't help.

And I'm sure you already know this, but I got a participation medal. Which felt a little insulting. But I finished that 5K. It took me 45 minutes (which I seriously think is slower than a walking pace). But I finished.

I share that story because today marks the end of our Journey to Love experience. We've spent two months considering what love is and how we live lives that are more full of love. For some of us, that comes pretty easily. This has been an exciting, energizing series.

But others of us come to love sort of like I come to running. It's brutal. We want to be better, but it's a struggle. Maybe to be honest with ourselves or honest with other people or honest with God.

But here's the thing: a journey to love is a lot like me running a 5K: you don't have to go fast. You don't have to run. It can be as ugly as it needs to be. We just have to keep going.

We'll find when we do that God is with us, giving us the strength to take the next step and then the next one and then the one after that.

Message

Welcome to Journey to Love. This is the end of our 40-day quest to live lives that are more full of love. We've been gathering here in this group and also in our small groups to answer together some of the most basic questions we ask as humans:

How do we love well?

And how do we *receive* love well?

We began with our friend Matt Mikalatos, the author of the book we're using as a guide in our journey. Matt invited us to prepare to set out. He invited us simply to 'show up', to agree to participate in this journey. We saw how to spot love, and also how to spot what love is not. Then we shifted to how we can be more loving - love's power to overcome fear, barriers we erect to love and, last week, love's ability to change the world.

Today, at the end of our series, I want to ask how we can find the strength to pursue this journey. After all, while a lot of what we've explored together during this series is pretty simple, it's far from easy.

I can tell you that, in our C-Group, our conversations have been deep and challenging. We've recognized God's call to love better, to be loved better and it's hard. It asks a lot of us to risk opening ourselves up to receive love. It asks a lot of us to risk showing others love.

Turn with us to [1 John 3](#).

We've spent a lot of time in 1 John throughout this series. We've encountered it as a simple, straightforward letter aimed to help us encounter God's love more fully. Today, I want to work through the third chapter together, letting John's words guide us through a lot of the themes we've encountered throughout this series and then ask where we find the strength to love and be loved.

I've mentioned before that 1 John is a really simple letter, written in really easy Greek. One of the key words John uses is the Greek word *meno*, which means "to remain, stay or abide". It gets rendered a bunch of different ways in translation, so as we read, I'm going to highlight the various places it shows up.

Behold the greatness of the love shown to us by our Father the Great Spirit that he would call us his children! And so we are! The ones who belong to the ways of this world do not know the Giver of Life, so they do not see us in this way. Much-loved friends, we are now Creator's children. It is not yet clear what we will be. But we know that when the Chosen One appears, we will be like him, for we will see him as he truly is. All who through him have this hope will keep themselves pure, in the same way that he is pure. -- 1 John 3:1-3 (FNV)

John packs so much into this short series of verses. He begins by grounding our identity in God's love for us. God adopted us. God *chose* us to be God's own children. And he goes on from there to acknowledge the precarious nature of our reality: we don't know the future. We don't have a blueprint or roadmap for navigating this world that so often does *not* know God or God's ways.

What we do know is that God is not done with us, that as a loving parent, God is going to finish the work God started in Jesus.

That's important: our identity is grounded in the reality that *God* chooses us. It begins with God's work. And it ends with God's work. This is what *God* is up to.

So... what are we supposed to?

We're supposed to *meno*. Remain. Abide. Stay.

All who walk in broken ways are trampling over the law of *the Chosen One*, for all broken ways go against his law. You know that he came to do away with bad hearts and broken ways and that in him there are no broken ways. The ones who **remain** in harmony with him do not walk in broken ways. Those who walk in broken ways have not truly seen or known him. -- [1 John 3:4–6](#) (FNV)

I love that the First Nations Version translates the word 'sin' as 'broken ways'. It captures the ongoing, participatory nature of sin. It's not just a bad thing we did. It's the patterns, habits and structures that surround us. 'Broken ways' encompass both our individual choices *and* the systems, patterns and habits we walk in.

John makes an audacious claim: the way we avoid sin, the way we avoid walking in broken ways, is by remaining in God. The word picture is profound: if we follow Jesus, we'll always be walking in wholesome ways.

In fact, John goes on to say exactly that:

*My much-loved children, do not let anyone take you down the wrong path. The Chosen One always did what was right. So the ones who keep walking his right ways show that they are in good standing with him. The ones who stay with walking in broken ways are following the evil trickster, for he has been walking in broken ways from the beginning. The reason Creator's Son appeared was to bring an end to the ways of the evil trickster. Those who have been born from the Great Spirit do not keep walking in broken ways. They are not able to, for Creator is their Father and he has **planted** his message deep within them to stay.*

*There is a clear difference between Creator's children and the children of the evil trickster. The ones who do not walk in a good way do not belong to Creator, nor do those who do not love the sacred family. The message you heard from the beginning was that we should love each other. Do not be like Spear Maker Cain, who gave himself to the ways of the evil trickster and killed his *own* brother. Why did he kill him? Because what he was doing was wrong, and what his brother was doing was right. So then, my much-loved family members, do not be surprised if the world hates you. -- [1 John 3:7–13](#) (FNV)*

Jesus always walks the right path. So if we continually follow him, we will walk in faith.

I want to pause here because this can sound like a pat answer. In all the ambiguity and chaos of the world, just love Jesus and everything will be okay!

But the reality is that we all know people who go to church a lot and claim to love Jesus who are not actually very loving. So is John just wrong here?

No - but we have to hear his words as an invitation and challenge, not just an easy answer. Remaining is an ongoing activity. In fact, the FNV has rendered another appearance of *meno* as 'planted'. We're a garden. A long-term project.

So we do our best to follow Jesus. We imitate him as best we can. But guess what? We're not perfect. Our perspectives are limited. We're going to get things wrong.

So what do we do? We *meno*. We stay. We keep following. We read the Gospels. And read them again. And read them again. We remain in prayer, inviting Jesus to change us and help us know him better. We remain in a church family, where we ask these questions together. You help me see Jesus more clearly and I help you. As we *remain* together, we grow together. We get better and better at following Jesus.

John reminds us that the difference between the Chosen One and the Evil One are obvious. The way of Jesus is grounded in self-giving love. The way of the devil is grounded in selfishness, hatred and death. So as we remain, as we grow, we watch for these fruits. They help us navigate the fraught world of learning love better, to love well. It is this fruit that proves we are God's children.

Again, I can imagine us getting caught there - are we saying that God's love for us depends on our ability to love well? That our relationship with God depends on how well we behave?

No... that's actually backwards, according to John:

We know that we have crossed over from death to life, because we love each other. The ones who do not love **remain** under the power of death. All who hate others have murder in their hearts, and you know that murderers do not have the life of the world to come that never fades away, **remaining** in them.

The Chosen One laid down his life for us. This is how we know what love is. In the same way, we should lay our lives down for each other. If someone who has many possessions sees another in need and shows no pity, how can Creator's love **remain** in that person? *My much-loved children*, our love must not be empty words on our tongues but deeds done in truth. This is how we can be sure we belong to the way of truth. Whenever our hearts make us feel guilty, we can still have peace when we stand before him. For Creator is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

My much-loved friends, if our hearts are free from guilt, this gives us the courage to stand boldly before Creator. He will give us whatever we ask of him because we keep his instructions and do the things that make his heart glad. -- 1 John 3:14–22 (FNV)

Our behavior, our fruits, don't come first. Remaining is first. Abiding is first. *Meno* is first. Because it's only by remaining close to Jesus that we see how he lives and loves us. It's from him we learn to love the world around us.

And here's the most mind-blowing part for me: When we feel guilty, the best solution is to *remain*. Because God already knows us. God knows our actions. God knows those things we did that are the source of our guilt.

And guess what? God loves us anyway.

This bears repeating: God knows everything we've done and God loves us. God chooses us to be God's children.

We don't have to work to earn God's love. God loves us, and we love *because we remain in God's love for us*.

If we can learn this, we can, as John says, have "courage to stand boldly before Creator."

Sparrow story

Friends, we've spent the last eight weeks asking what it takes for us to have more love in our lives. And it all comes down to this: are we willing to remain with God, to trust God to shape us into a people who is love because we are loved?

Communion + Examen

Jesus invites us to remain with him.

When have I remained in Jesus in the last week?

When have I strayed from Jesus in the last week?

Why might I stray from Jesus in the week ahead?

How can I remain with Jesus this week?

Assignment + Blessing

Spiritual practices!

This is his instruction to us, that we trust in the name of his Son, Creator Sets Free Jesus the Chosen One, and love each other as he taught us to do. The ones who follow these instructions **remain** in him, and he remains in them. We know that he **remains** in us by the Spirit he has gifted to us. -- 1 John 3:23–24 (FNV)