

INTRODUCTION

I have never received any military training, but I always have high regard toward soldiers. When deployed to a foreign country, soldiers may need assistance from the local people. Nabi Mohammadi is an Afghan who served as an interpreter for the American troops. Besides getting paid, there is also an incentive to apply for U.S. citizenship. Mohammadi developed friendship with a company of officers from Iowa whom he helped for 10 years. They traveled together to some mountain regions near the Afghanistan and Pakistan border. That is where some of the Taliban terrorists were active. Mohammadi put himself at risk for helping the Americans. It is not unusual for interpreters to get killed for doing their job. Mohammadi later submitted his citizenship application. There was a long delay for background check. His army friends tried to help him. They wrote letters and made phone calls to the Congress. A sergeant of the Iowa company said: “If we trusted him enough to follow us around in combat, I don’t know what more you need to trust him with.” Finally, on March 1 of this year the family sworn-in as American citizens. Those men cared for each other. Mohammadi went the extra mile to protect his American friends. In return, the soldiers supported Mohammadi’s family to come to U.S. Mutual love between good friends involves sacrifice. Jesus is the friend of sinners. He sacrificed everything for us. The apostle John told us that as Christians we have the same love in us. We must nurture love because we have God’s nature to love.

EXPLANATION

1. 愛的啟動 Activation of Love

First of all, John shared about the activation of love. If you have an eternal relationship with God, you will have the ability to love. John said in **verse 7**: Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. A person who “has been born of God” is a believer. Such a person also “knows God.” It is a deep knowledge built on relationship. It is like you know your spouse, family members or good friends better than anyone because you spend time with them. A Christian should know God more than just head knowledge like God is a Trinity God, Jesus came as a baby, etc. We have to ask ourselves: “Do I know God’s characters and want to be more like Him?” and “Do I know God’s plans for my life and have a desire to fulfill them?” Those who have love activated inside them have been born of God and know God. The reverse is also true. Look at **verse 8**: Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. Some of you may argue: “I know a lot of non-believers who are full of love too. They are very eager to help others.” That is true. We Cantonese have a slang: don’t call every man who has a mustache “dad.” Even though your father has a mustache, it does not mean that every man who has beard is your dad. Similarly, not every person who has love is a child of God. However, if someone claims to be a Christian but shows no love, then he/she needs to examine if there is any eternal relationship with God. When we studied chapter 2 of the book, we saw the three categories of sin. They are lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life – those are things we enjoy with our senses, things we like to look at and things we can boast about. The common characteristics of the three is self-

centeredness. When we express love, we switch our attention from only caring for ourselves to care for others. We should ask ourselves: “Do I have an urge to do something when seeing a person in need? Do I take it as an opportunity to show God’s love, or do I just think nah, someone else will do it?” John told us that when God’s love is activated in us there will be a positive side-effect. Read **verses 17-18**: 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. The phrases “made complete” and “made perfect” are from the same Greek word, which can be understood as “fulfilling the purpose.” When God’s love is activated in us, it will exercise its function to give us confidence to face God’s judgment. What kind of judgment was John talking about? The New Testament describes two kinds of judgment. In Revelation 20 there is the great white throne judgment. It will be like a heavenly court to declare eternal condemnation for those who do not accept Jesus. But here, John referred to a second kind of judgment. A better description for it should be an award ceremony for believers. Some companies have a bonus system. Every employee will get a base salary, but those who have a better performance will get a bonus. Similarly, every believer will go to heaven, but our eternal reward depends on how faithful we are in living out a Christian life. The Bible never tells us what reward we will get. But if God is willing to give us the best gift of all in this life, namely, Jesus, then God will not disappoint us in heaven. If Jesus comes back tomorrow, those who long for His return will rejoice. But some believers may feel ashamed. They feel sorry that they wasted all the gifts, talents and opportunities God gave them, and they did not share the gospel with their loved ones. Which group of people do you belong to? Do you have love for others? Do you long for Jesus’ return? Ask God to re-activate His love in you. Commit yourself to Him again and allow Him to fire up His love in you.

2. 愛的推動 Motivation to Love

God does not only activate His love in us, He also motivates us to love others. He does so by displaying what true love is. Look at **verses 9-10**: 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The Heavenly Father loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to provide the only way of salvation for us. Jesus Christ loved us by dying on the cross for our sins. He did so while we did not have the slightest interest in the truth. Paul put it this way in **Romans 5:7-8**: 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. There may be little distinction between “a righteous man” and “a good man.” The point is that it is unthinkable for a person to die for someone. A person may sacrifice his/her life for a family member or a best friend. But Jesus did not die for noble people. He sacrificed Himself while we still did not know Him and even hated Him. That is the ultimate expression of love. That is the example we should imitate. John added in **verse 19**: We love because he first loved us. Let us unpack this verse a little bit. God loved us first before we know how to love Him back. We know how to love others by following His example. He also gives us the ability to love the most unlovable people. When we take the initiative to love others it may inspire others to do the same thing. Recently, I watched a TV commercial for an insurance company. A little boy saw a few young men painting graffiti at a street corner. He wanted to do something to correct the

problem. In the subsequent footage, there were people helping unknown strangers. Their kindness motivated others to pass on love. A lady saw a soccer player pulled up a teammate who fell down. In the next scene, she helped a man pick up papers he dropped accidentally when he got off a bus. Her kindness caught the attention of a passenger on the bus. When he was about to check out at a grocery store, he let the woman behind her with a baby go first. The chain-reaction went on. Toward the end of the commercial, the little boy was using paint to cover the graffiti. A few bystanders were scoffing at him, thinking that it would not help much. Then one after another person joined the effort. Everyone was holding a brush and a can of paint. God has loved us first, and He motivates us to love others. What happens in a commercial should happen in the church too. Will you be the first person who take action to help others? If God blesses you with material possessions, share it with those who are lacking. If you see other people needing help, share your time and effort by giving them a hand. Love has to come with sacrifice. Your love is selfless and sincere when you do not expect a word of thanks or any public recognition. In our human nature, we may grumble when the people we help do not show any trace of gratitude. That is okay. God will remember your kindness. Some of you play the game of secret Santa at Christmas time when you prepare a gift for someone, but the person does not know where the present comes from. You know what? We can play the same game from January to November too! When you see a little boy who can use a new pair of shoes or an elderly sister who may need a scarf, go buy the item and ask a third person to present the gift for you. Perhaps you may want to cheer up a stay-home mom or a hard-working Sunday school teacher. Prepare some home-cooked goodies or simply write a note and deliver it through another person. This is actually the best way to show God's love to someone of a different gender. You send love without including a wrong message to the recipient.

3. 愛的傳動 Cultivation of Love

God came into our lives to activate love in us. He also motivates us to love others by His example. Thirdly, we should cultivate love among us. Read **verse 12**: No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. When we show love to others, we prove that God is living in us. I often hear new-comers comment: "The people in this church are very friendly and loving." We have to retain this great tradition. We have the advantage of a smaller church. It is easier to spot it when we have new friends worshipping with us. Go say hi to them and shake their hands. Let people see that God's love is in you. You may have heard the saying: "I don't care how much you know, until I know how much you care." Seeker friends need to see the gospel lived out through our lives. Some of you may say: "But people may take advantage of our kindness!" But have we not taken advantage of God's grace all the time, even after we knew Him? In the previous church I served we did quite a bit of student ministries. Every summer we pick new students up from the airport, take them to buy grocery, and help them set up bank account and cellphone. Most of them may return a favor by showing up at the church welcoming event. But they soon disappear. They get busy when school begins. They either buy their own cars or they find someone who can give them rides. I encourage coworkers every summer that our effort is not in vain. We should have the heart of the Lord. He does not care about headcount or percentage. He cares about every person. God's heart is glad if there is one more new student hears the gospel, or one more person accepts Christ. Therefore, do not give up on showing your love to non-believers. Some of you invite your neighbors' kids to come to AWANA because their parents are busy at work. That is very good. They may only be

looking for a way to entertain their kids. However, as long as they can connect your kindness with the fact that you are a believer, then it is an effective testimony. In due time, God will allow the gospel seed to germinate and He will reap a good harvest. I am confident that many of you were saved because some Christians showed their love to you. Our love from God is a great evangelistic tool. But besides going beyond the four church walls, we should cultivate love among God's people too. John told us in **verses 19-20**: 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. John repeated what he said in the previous chapter that there should only be love, not hatred among believers. If we realize that God is living in us, but yet we return to our old self and harbor hatred in our hearts, then we are lying about our relationship with God. I understand that sometimes a brother or sister may do or say something that you do not like. I offend people like that too! Sometimes I may even say something dumb from the podium that I later regret. I am grateful for your patience and acceptance toward me. But that is never an excuse for sin. Therefore, please do let me know if I offend you so that I can beg you for your forgiveness. We are members in God's family. Do not let any minor conflict escalate to become hatred. Go to that person in-private and clarify the matter. Do so with love, gentleness and humility. Tell that person: "I was hurt that time when you said or did something." Then the other person should ask the Lord for courage to admit the fault even if it was a misunderstanding or an unintentional accident. A sincere apology should dissolve any grudge. If you try to defend yourself by saying: "Yeah, I am sorry, but..." then will the other person accept your confession? Spread love but do not hide any hatred in your heart.

CONCLUSION

John told us that we must nurture love because we have God's nature to love. We can love one another because God has activated love in us, He also motivated us to love by setting up a perfect example and He put us in a faith community to cultivate love. We began our message with a military story, and we will close with one too. Soldiers deserve great respect because they are committed to sacrifice themselves for others. An honorable way to recognize their great service is by presenting medals. A few years back, a SEAL team member received a Navy Cross for his bravery. For those who do not know, SEAL stands for sea, air and land. It is a special force of the U.S. Navy. They are usually assigned to the most secretive and highly dangerous missions. To ensure the safety of these specialized soldiers and their family members, their identities and their assignments are kept anonymous. Therefore, the award ceremonies are also held privately. This SEAL member was stationed in Afghanistan. His unit was under intense attack. A soldier was wounded. The SEAL dragged the injured officer to safety. Just then a grenade was dropped into the storage area for weapons. A fire broke out. A catastrophic explosion was imminent. But the SEAL made repeated trips to haul warheads with bare hands and dump them into a river. During the whole time the enemies kept shooting at him. His remarkable actions saved the lives of his comrades and civilians. He got a Navy Cross as a reward. Only a handful of people knew what he had done. Our Lord received a different cross. To the Jews and Romans, it was a sign of shame and death. Some people thought it was the end of Jesus' life. Little did they know that a gospel mission would be unveiled at Jesus' resurrection. Even today, we are called to share this good news through our love. Just like what the SEAL member did, perhaps few people notice your good work for the sake of God's Kingdom. But God will keep a record. He will reward your faithfulness when you get to heaven.