



Discussion Guide

Date: 10/11/2026

Sermon Title: How do I love those who I want to hate?

Scripture: 1 John 4:16b-21

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we come before you aware of how easy it is to love the people who love us, understand us, and agree with us. But you have called us to a deeper love. Open our hearts today to your Word. Show us where fear, anger, resentment, or judgment have taken root in us. Help us remember that we are people who have first been loved by you. Give us the courage to be honest about the people we struggle to love. Give us wisdom to know what love looks like in those relationships. And give us the grace to love; not because people always deserve it, but because you have loved us first. Teach us to lead with love. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

OPENING

It is hard to ignore how divided things feel right now. We can feel the pull to sort people into “us” and “them,” to write people off, or to decide that certain people simply aren't worth our time, attention, or love. But the Christian life gives us a different way. Jesus calls us to love because God first loved us. The question isn't whether Christians are called to love. The question is: How do I love someone I really don't like or even someone I want to hate?

OPENING QUESTION:

1. What is something from your childhood, a tradition, a team, a community, that still feels deeply embedded in who you are? How does that sense of belonging shape the way you see people who are different from you?

BEFORE WE READ THE TEXT TOGETHER: Use these questions to discuss when love is hard.

1. Who are the easiest people to love? Why?
2. Who are the hardest people to love? You don't have to name them out loud.
3. What makes loving someone difficult for you to love is it disagreement, hurt, betrayal, personality differences, politics, their behavior, fear, or something else?

A HELPFUL DISTINCTION:

Christian love doesn't necessarily mean approving someone's behavior, agreeing with their beliefs, trusting someone who has broken trust, allowing someone to continue hurting you, avoiding accountability, or pretending everything is okay. Love asks us to seek another person's good while remaining committed to truth, justice, wisdom, and appropriate boundaries.

READ 1 JOHN 4:16b-21 THEN DISCUSS THE TEXT TOGETHER:

Use these questions to unpack the scripture together.

1. What do you think John means by saying that God is love in verse 16?
2. How is this different from simply saying, "God loves people"?
3. If God's very nature is love, what does that tell us about the kind of people God is forming us to become?
4. How does knowing that God loves you change the way you might approach someone you don't love very much?
5. 1 John 4:17 says that love is made complete in us so that we may have confidence. What do you think it means for God's love to be "made complete" in us? What would it look like for God's love to become more complete in you?
6. Why might becoming a loving person give us greater confidence before God? Where do you see evidence that you are becoming more loving than you once were?

WESLEYAN CONNECTION:

For Wesley, salvation isn't merely about having our sins forgiven. God's grace continues transforming us until the love of God fills our hearts and increasingly shapes how we live. Wesley described Christian maturity in terms of perfect love; not perfection in the sense of never making a mistake, but a heart increasingly freed from selfishness and filled with love for God and neighbor. Wesley connected this directly to loving even difficult people. In his sermon *Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, he wrote about loving one's neighbor as oneself and described love as patient, kind, and unwilling to hastily condemn others.

7. If Christian maturity is becoming more loving, what might be one sign that God is changing us?

In 1 John 4:17 we find one of the most powerful statements in the passage: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." John connects fear and love.

8. What kinds of fear can make it difficult to love another person? How might fear cause us to divide people into "us" and "them"?
9. When you are afraid of someone; or afraid of what they represent; how does that affect the way you see them? What happens when fear becomes the lens through which we interpret everything someone does?
10. How might God's love change the way we respond to someone who makes us angry, uncomfortable, or afraid?

1 John 4:18 may be the central verse for the entire discussion: "We love because he first loved us."

11. Why is this an important order: God loves us → therefore we love? What happens when we try to love others without first receiving God's love ourselves?
12. Is there someone you find yourself thinking, "I could never love that person"? What might it mean to begin simply by praying, "God, help me see this person as someone you love"?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Allison describes how human brains are wired to organize into in-groups and out-groups -- in what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to resist this tendency, and how has it affected your relationships?

2. The Greek word for love used in 1 John 4 is agape, described in the sermon as "undeserved, unearned, limitless." How does that definition challenge the way you typically think about who deserves your love or patience?
3. The sermon points to Jesus on the cross praying for forgiveness for those crucifying him as the ultimate example of agape love in action. What does it mean practically for us to live with that same posture toward people we find it hard to love?
4. 1 John states plainly that those who claim to love God while hating a brother or sister are liars. How does that land with you? Is there anyone in your life, or any group of people, toward whom you have been holding something that looks more like hatred than love?
5. The sermon draws a distinction between valuing all people and validating all opinions. How does that distinction help you navigate disagreements, especially in politically or socially charged conversations?
6. The sermon references the idea that our "primary loyalty" as Christians is to the love God has offered us, not to any political party, ideology, or team. What does it look like to hold that loyalty first, especially when other loyalties feel urgent or identity-defining?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION:

1. The sermon suggests creating personal "rules of engagement" for conflict and difficult conversations. What are one or two rules you would put at the top of your own list? What would you want to guide the way you handle disagreement with someone you love, or someone you find difficult?
2. The memory verse offered was 1 John 4:19, which captures the truth that our love for others flows from God having loved us first. How does grounding your love in God's love rather than your own emotional capacity change the way you approach hard relationships?
3. Is there a specific person or group of people in your life right now toward whom God might be calling you to take a step of love this week? What would that step look like?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God of love, you loved us when we were easy to love and when we were difficult to love. And you call us to love others in the same way. Remind us that your grace is bigger than the gaps between us. Help us see people as you see them. Make us people who don't simply talk about love but practice it. Help us lead with love. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Write your rules of engagement. Before your next group meeting, take time to write down your personal rules for how you will handle conflict and difficult conversations.
2. Replace reaction with prayer. Think of specific triggers in your daily life, a news headline, a political sign, a social media post, and commit to responding with a brief prayer for the person or people involved rather than reacting in frustration or contempt.
3. Choose a conversation over the comment section. If there is someone in your life with whom you have been disagreeing at a distance, online or otherwise, reach out this week and have a real conversation with them instead.
4. Memorize 1 John 4:19. Commit this verse to memory and return to it when you feel your patience or grace running thin. Let it remind you that you are not the source of the love you are called to give.