



In a 2018 opinion piece, a man by the name of Clay Routledge brought out that the death by suicide rate has increased by 25% since 1999. Routledge, a professor of social psychology at North Dakota State University, sought to ask *why* this is the case and then also how to answer this tragedy. He says, **“As a behavioral scientist who studies basic psychological needs, including the need for meaning, I am convinced that our nation’s suicide crisis is in part a crisis of meaningless”** (see *Jesus and Gender*, pp. 65-66).

He goes on to say that a life without meaning makes people “psychologically vulnerable,” and it results in substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and suicide. He goes on to state that those who endure stress, trauma or experience loss, and who have a sense of purpose, are those who cope and recover best. At this point, you might say, “Ok, that makes sense.” We need to have a sense of purpose. But then Routledge does something that might seem a little surprising. In moving to an answer for purpose, he argues that human beings find purpose in their relationships with people where they feel valued. He article continues on to state that “America is experiencing decreasing interaction with neighbors and decreasing family size. Likewise, . . . young adults are less likely to identify with a religious faith and community. All this combines to foster a sense of meaninglessness and a loss of purpose” (paraphrase quot. in *Jesus and Gender*, p. 66).

I think Routledge is on to something. While not making biblical arguments, he is making statements that the Bible teaches are essential. God has created humanity with purpose, and he has created us to need one another. And, especially in this broken world, God is restoring his purpose in everyone who has turned from their sins and trusted in Jesus. What I mean is that Jesus sets people free to glory in and glorify God, and because of Jesus, everyone who has trusted in him for forgiveness and life is now brought into a unique relationship with God and one another. We have purpose and we have community.

But as I say this, you might be thinking, “Easier said than done!” You’re sitting here and maybe you’re feeling depressed. Maybe you don’t feel welcomed in a community of Christians. Maybe you feel more welcomed by non-Christians and those are the bulk of your friends. But then, maybe this runs even deeper. Maybe you don’t feel right with God. And, as a result, you have lost any sense of purpose because you feel a distance between you and God. That could be because of sin in your life, but it could simply be a phase like the psalmists have experienced before and said, “Why are you so downcast, O my soul?”

These twin realities of needing meaning and also needing to be connected with a community surrounded around the same purpose have been essential needs for humanity since its inception. Sadly, as Routledge brings up, when people lose these, they turn to other things in order to try to numb them or help them feel something. We turn to immediate and unhealthy “highs” that end up binding us.

Whether drunkenness, drugs, sex, violence or even death by suicide. But even though humans turn to these things, they most-of-the-times know deep down inside that none of those are the lasting answer. I imagine you know that, too.

But what do you do when you feel God is distant and you don't feel connected to community? Do you turn to immediate highs? Or, maybe you just try to suppress this or ignore it. Neither response is the answer. Instead, the apostle John gives us the answer in the two verses we're looking at today.

Remember the problems of the recipients of this letter? They were a unified group of professing Christians, and then there arose a group of people who were teaching "new truths" about Jesus and trying to change the essential message of Christianity. These were probably friends. They functioned like family, and when the Christians refused to listen, those people ended up leaving. There must have been feelings of hurt and confusion – maybe even betrayal.

We know there was confusion because in this letter, John writes from the beginning to give them assurance that they are forgiven and reconciled with God. They wondered if they really were right with God. Why does this matter? Well, if they're not right with God, what's their purpose? They've lost it. So, John reminds them of the solidity of their relationship with God. And here in chapter 4, and even earlier chapters, John reminds them of the need for community with each other. Yes, people came in and hurt and tried to deceive them. But that doesn't mean they should run from Christians and build protective walls so they'd never be hurt again. They need to continue to love. They need one another. So, John, in chapter 4, exhorts the Christians to not stop loving. He shares that they can do this and they must do this. Then last week, Jonathan emphasized *how* they are supposed to love and *how* they can love. They are to love like God has loved them, and they can do this because God has given them the Spirit to live this out.

The same is all true for us. If you feel broken down, confused, hurt. If you are wondering about your purpose or your connection with fellow Christians here, all of John's words apply to you, Christian. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have purpose. God has forgiven you and graced you. And, God has given you the Spirit to empower you to actually love. Notice that John doesn't say that if you feel these ways, that means God has given up on you and you can point your fingers at everybody else for what they're not doing. Instead, he emphasizes each of our individual responsibilities. Why? Because we weren't created ultimately to receive love from other people. **We were created to receive God's love and then give his love to others.**

But this may seem too high of a calling. How can you do this? How do you know you *will* continue in love. Being hurt and feeling purposeless can be exhausting and powerful. And, if we are left to ourselves, we know we would resort to all sorts of other things to give us meaning and temporary highs. How do we know we won't go backwards and end up giving up on God and his community? This is the hope John brings in 4:15-16. So, I'm not going to give a main idea today as much as the primary question we need to answer. The question is this: **How do I know I will continue in God's love?** John gives three reasons that provide assurance that we'll grow in God's love.

We'll take this point by point, but I want to share how John tries to bolster our assurance of salvation. Remember that John said from the beginning that he wants us to be assured of our salvation. Please keep in mind that being saved and being assured that your saved are not one in the same. You can doubt your salvation and be saved. John's intent is to bolster assurance. How does he do it? He gives different tests that when put together should bolster a Christian's assurance. John actually, in this

section gives three primary means of assurance. He says that **the Spirit bears witness to Jesus through us (3:24; 4:13), Our confession of Christ (4:15), and Abiding in love (4:16) are means of assurance.** You can't simply look at one of these. You have to put them all together. These means of assurance are kind of like a 3-legged stool. You will not be able to sit with one leg or even two of the legs. You need all three. And when those three are all in place, your assurance can grow and increase. Jonathan already mentioned the first one last week, but I don't want to ignore it this week. Look at verses 13-14: By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.<sup>1</sup>

**1. God the Spirit testifies to us that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (vv. 13-14).**

The Triune God is at work in you! The Spirit reminds you over and over and over again that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. What a glorious reminder, right? I remember my dad, years ago, saying that he knows some Christians who seem to communicate like this: I know Jesus died for me, but what has he done for me lately? Really?! The fact that Jesus died for you has astronomical, eternal, cosmic ramifications! And to know the Triune Creator God loves you and sent his Son for you means that you are eternally secured and granted eternal hope. You also have God's grace and mercy with you every moment of every day! Having the Triune God in you and having the Spirit continually bearing witness with us of God's love for us in sending his Son for us, is a continual means of increasing our assurance!

Now, we can move to the other two legs in the stool of assurance. So, how do we know we will continue in God's love? Second point,

**2. I confess Jesus is the Son of God (v. 15).**

Let's read verse 15: Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.<sup>2</sup>

Notice that John starts with "whoever." This can be understood as *anyone* or even *everyone*. It's an all-encompassing word. Whoever confesses! But let's remind ourselves of what "confess" means. It doesn't simply mean that anyone who says these words abide in God. That's a very Islamic view of faith. In Islam, all you have to do is state the shahada: There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God. In a religion like Islam, Allah is not personal with humans. There's no relationship. Just state the words and do what he says.

But that's not reality. God created us as being needing relationship. Everything in this world is broken because Adam and Eve broke with God. We as humans have sought our own way. The only way to return to God is to confess. To confess is to actually agree with this statement with your whole being – your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do you confess Jesus is the Son of God?

Before saying yes, let's ask what it means that Jesus is the Son of God. First, the name "Jesus" means that God the Son came in human flesh. This is what John emphasized earlier in this chapter in verse 2:

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:13–14.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:15.

every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. . . .<sup>3</sup> The Son came into time and space and human flesh, and his name is Jesus because he would take away the sins of people!

Do you confess Jesus came in the flesh? But John moves on and says Jesus is the Son of God. This phrase Son of God is used throughout Scripture, but I want to read a few passages. First from Psalm 2: **7 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."**<sup>4</sup> **10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**<sup>5</sup> In this Old Testament psalm, King David reveals that the whole earth seeks to rule on their own terms and they kick against God and his standards. In the midst of this psalm, we get this intriguing character that shows up: the Son. It's the Son of God. He's begotten (or sent out from God's very essence), thus being God himself. And we're told that all should give worship to him. If you turn to the Son in humility, you're blessed. Who is this Son? Do you remember the story of Jesus walking on water? His disciples were out on a boat. There was a storm. The disciples are afraid. Then they look out on the water and they see someone walking on the water. The first conclusion of who this is comes from Peter. He asks, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."<sup>29</sup> He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus."<sup>6</sup> Peter becomes overwhelmed with the storm and begins to sink and then cries out for Jesus to rescue him and Jesus' hand raises him up. When Jesus and Peter enter the boat, the storm stops. Can you imagine watching all of this? Major storm, panicked, Jesus *and* Peter are walking on water. Jesus rescues Peter. Storm is still going. They enter the boat, storm stops. What were they thinking? Well, we know: **when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.**<sup>33</sup> **And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**<sup>7</sup> They worshipped Jesus and declared him to be the Son of God. By the way, to worship anything other than God is sin and idolatry. The Son of God is God and he receives the worship. Why? Because he's the Son of Psalm 2 that everyone is to pay homage to!

By the way, the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God was the reason the religious leaders used to crucify him. In Matthew 26, we read this about Jesus' trial: **the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."**<sup>64</sup> **Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."**<sup>65</sup> **Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy."**<sup>8</sup> Jesus affirms he is the Son of God, the Christ. And then Jesus adds that he's the Son of Man, too. The result was the high priest said he's blasphemous. The sin of blasphemy referred to speaking profanely of the sacred or divine. The high priest knew Jesus was declaring he is God.

To confess that Jesus is the Son of God is to believe with your heart, soul, mind, and strength that the Eternal God the Son came in the flesh. But at this point, you could say, "Is that all people need to believe? Can they just believe God the Son came in the flesh? What about the fact that he died in the place of sinners? Do people have to confess that or does that matter at all?" Well, let's not forget that these verses are part of a larger letter. John gives multiple statements about Jesus in this letter, and when we put them all together, this is the full confession about Jesus: **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of**

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:2.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 2:7.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 2:10–12.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 14:28–29.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 14:32–33.

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 26:63–65.

**God, who came in the flesh as the Savior of the world and gave himself as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.**

Has the Spirit worked in you to believe this about Jesus? If so, then God's love abides in you and you in God. What that means is that you have a close and glorious relationship with the Creator God himself. You abide in him, and he abides in you! This doesn't just mean that God's close by. This means that God communes with you and you commune with him. Imagine that! You have unrestricted, completely, welcoming access to God, and he wants to fill you with more of himself. And, he loves to have you in his presence. This is mysteriously wonderful, isn't it? Do you confess this about Jesus? Then you get to commune with God and God has chosen to (and wants to) commune with you. Talk about relationship! Talk about purpose! So, we have two legs in the stool. The Spirit continually reminds you of God's love for you in Jesus. You confess with your whole being the reality of Jesus coming in the flesh as the Savior of the world and the atoning sacrifice. Now, we get to the final leg:

### **3. I believe and know God's love for me (v. 16).**

Read verse 16 with me: <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.<sup>9</sup>

Verse 16 starts with the word "So." It means "therefore." John then is saying that if your whole being confesses Jesus and who he is, that means we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us! This is an important connection John is making here because he is saying that believing the truth means it must affect you to the core of your being. To know and to believe are terms put together to speak of one reality. You are convinced in the core of who you are.

If you say you trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and you have prayed for forgiveness, but you aren't growing in knowing and growing in the love of God, then you don't really confess Jesus. To confess Jesus means that you have come to be convinced to the soul of God's love for you!

By the way, this doesn't mean that genuine Christians always are absolutely assured in God's love. We have plenty of examples of saints in the Scriptures who doubted. But with all of them, I think we can say that even if they doubted, there was at least an ember that still remained that was ready to be blown upon and reawakened. Once the Spirit sends his wind upon us, we are revived and reignited in God's love.

Are you convinced of God's love for you? Oh, what tremendous freedom the awareness of God's love for us brings. He never leaves nor forsakes – even when other friends and professing Christians do. He loves us even when we do not express our love for him. He loves us when we are unlovely. Are you convinced of God's love for you?

Maybe you say, "No, I'm not." Then I'd refer you back to verses 13-14. Is the Spirit reminding you of God's love in Christ? Or, look at verse 10: <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.<sup>10</sup> God's love expressed in Jesus' life and sacrifice is what reignites us again.

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<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:16.

<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:9–10.

So, as I said a few weeks ago, if you are here today and your love for God has grown cold, don't tolerate it anymore. Talk to someone today and ask them to pray for you. I'll remind you of the resources I shared a couple weeks ago that I've found helpful: The Gospel Primer and Valley of Vision. I also challenge you to listen to very gospel-emphasizing music. Fill your mind with God's love in the cross of Jesus and be amazed as he washes you with his love.

But God's design is not *only* to fill you with the awareness of his love for you. As I said at the beginning of the sermon, we were created to receive God's love and then to express it to others in community. If you are convinced of God's love for you, then John says, "whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."<sup>11</sup> We must be careful with this term love. John doesn't say, "Whoever abides in the world's definition of love abides in God." The world defines loves simply in terms of their communities. But since God is love, he's the definer of love, and we find in chapter 4 that **we see God's love through his sacrificial delight in us**. Therefore, to abide in love means that we delight in sacrificing for our fellow Christians. Why? Because that's what our God has done, and continues to do, for us! We abide in his love and his love abides in us, working through us to love the community of believers.

Purpose and community! Now, what does this all look like practically for us as a church family? I'll take principles from other portions of Scripture. In Romans 12:10, we're told to "Outdo one another in showing honor. That's how you should be towards the people here. We're told to "Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters" in Romans 12:10. Do you men treat the women as sisters? Women, do you treat the men as brothers? And do we treat each other as the family we are because of God's love for us as Father? We're told in Philippians 2:3 that we are to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves."

If you hear these words as just duties to do, then you've forgotten God's love. But when you know God's love, then you begin to *want* to grow in love with the people who are your community in Christ. If you have this three-legged stool, then you *must* abide in God's love and God's love must abide and work through you to others. So, I want to end today with two realities: 1) If you have the three-legged stool, rejoice! Your assurance should grow, and secondly 2) you will grow in love. Therefore, how are you expressing love with this people and this community? Are you seeking to serve and bless or are you more concerned with being served and blessed? How can you creatively outdo each other in showing honor? Isn't that a beautiful phrase? How can you beat me in serving others? How can I beat you in serving others? That's the heart of God! We love because he first loved us; now we want to first love others.

Oh Ventura, pray through this. Ponder the needs in our midst, and **as you savor God's love for you and then love others, discover how your sense of meaning and satisfaction grows in God's glory and for other's good. How do you know you'll do this? Our Triune God has convinced you of his love and you have genuinely trusted Jesus. God will not let you go.**

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<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:16.