

# Life Together

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, if you'll please take your Bibles and join me in Book of First John. There's Courtney Matheson here today. Is she in here? Courtney in here. Would you mind standing up, Courtney, just for a moment?

So Courtney leaves for Bolivia this week, and in the afternoon service, you'll be seated. Courtney, in the afternoon service, we'll have a special time of prayer with her and a presentation. We're so proud of her, and she's finally going.

For the last year or so, every time I saw her, I said, I thought you were going to Bolivia. She said, I've got to do a few things first. So apparently she's got everything done, needed, and she'll head to Bolivia this weekend. We'll have a special time of prayer with her this afternoon, and if you're able to join us.

The Book of First John is a very special book. Typically, when we're going through a book, you have more context of what's going on because we've been studying it. Since we don't have that here in First John, when I've already read to you, the first verse said that we needed to be brought back into remembrance of the message that we first received.

I don't think there's a book that has any greater opening than the book of First John. It says in verse number one, it says, that which was from the beginning, which you have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled the word of life.

[ 1 : 12 ] Testimony here of John of seeing Jesus firsthand, experiencing life together with Jesus. And then it goes on and says in verse number three, that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And so this message that we're being brought back to in verse number one was one that was experienced of life together with Jesus. And then what was the outflow of getting to be around Jesus?

What did relationships look like because people had spent time with Jesus? And first John answers many questions for us, but that's one thing that we will see that we look at today.

Three questions are answered in the same way. How do you know that you have passed from death unto life? How do you know that you're living in the truth? And how do you know that He abideth in you, that the Spirit abides in you?

All three of those are very important questions to you individually, but as a church. As a church, how do we know that you and I have been passed from death unto life? Because if we're not a meeting of people that are assembled together, of people that have went from death unto life, then we're not even a church at all.

[ 2 : 27 ] Because a church can only be made up of people that are believers, that have passed from death unto life. That's why we refer to ourselves as a living organism, that God has made us alive.

Next, we would say, what if we're not leading in the truth? How do we know if we're not doing that? How do we know that we are not leading the next generation towards error as opposed to truth?

This will same answer to three questions. Then lastly, how are we going to know if we're being guided by the Holy Spirit? Because if we're not, any of our plans or vision casting or thoughts or the things we're doing this afternoon, there'll be a group down in Roswell at the movie theater.

And so thankful to see Ms. Ledford here today from the Ledford Fund that we established to help see churches helped in Atlanta and areas that is coming from that today.

And how do we know that we're going to make any difference in the community at all? How do we know that we're going to be empowered by the Holy Spirit? That's an important question we'd ask individually. But as a church on our 16th anniversary, I want us to ask those questions and answer them.

[ 3 : 30 ] Verse number 14 says, we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. We know that we have passed from death to life.

If so, we will love the brethren. How do you know if you pass from death to life? Do you have a love for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Ephesians 2.10 tells us that at our new walk, when we become new creatures, when we're born again, that we have now been created new, and we have a walk to make.

But that walk that we have is not one that is alone. The contrast here seems to be pretty strong. I'm like, I'm reading, like, well, that really escalated. I mean, we're going to have an example of a person who's not loving.

Let's go to Cain, you know? And so, we go to Cain, the only proper name, noun given here in this book, and he is the example. And so, I look at that and I'm thinking, why Cain?

Of all the examples of somebody who was not loving, why do we have to go to the first murderer in the Bible? Why do we have to go to something that is so extreme? Verse 12, not as Cain, who was that wicked one, and slew his brother, and wherefore slew he him, because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous.

[ 4 : 40 ] Cain relates to the unloving. Verse 15 tells us, if you hate your brother, it's as murder. He that hath no murder hath eternal life abiding in him.

People that have hatred in their heart are people that do not have eternal life abiding in them. People that have hatred in their heart are not people that have passed from death unto life.

Cain, we know what he did, but you know, he's not presented in the Bible as an atheist or as an evil man. We first know Cain as a religious man. Same parents as Cain and Abel, raised in the same home, same influences in his life, called upon the same God to offer a sacrifice to them.

God, he knew that God was the creator God. He was the only God that they would have, that he would be worshiping. Outward ritual, outward religion is no proof that as a person is born of God.

Cain failed the test of love. It's clear that even though he's not an atheist, even though he was worshiping the true God, he was worshiping him in a wrong way, and he was worshiping him with a wicked heart.

[ 5 : 45 ] The real test of Cain's true religion wasn't just the sacrifice, but it was another test that wasn't completed. You could say, well, we see here that he didn't get what was right, and it was a works-based religion, but it's worse than that.

He despised the man who was obedient to God. He despised the man that was truly righteous. When John 13, 35 says, Cain not only does it bring the right sacrifice, but he doesn't love the one who did.

Cain had no love in his heart for his brother. That is the person that has not been delivered from death unto life. The Bible gives two clear proofs here, 1 John, of what it would be to go from death unto life.

Verse 10, 1 John, we see that Jesus comes, that he overcomes the evil one.

And now the spirit inside of us, the seed inside of us says there's now no place inside of us for sin. I use this example often that in my home, there is a place for my mother-in-law to come and visit.

[ 7 : 07 ] All right? She can visit, but there is no mother-in-law suite, okay? She is not indwelling this home, okay? She can stop by for a little bit, and she can visit, but I'm not establishing any residence in my home for her to live full-time.

I know some of your mother-in-laws in here, and your son-in-law told me he does not feel the same way, all right? I love my mother-in-law. I do. I really do. And, but that's the same in here, is that when you read 1 John, it just says that there is no dwelling place for sin, that when sin comes, when you're overtaken in a fault, there is a war that will take place inside of your heart, because you're now indwelt by the spirit of God, and it makes war with your sin.

And so, life together is one where we call each other to repentance, but it's also a life lived together rejoicing. And so, this new life gets to be together. And the baptistry, raise the walk in newness of life, but not to raise the walk alone, but to walk together.

And doesn't Jesus model this for us? He's with the great multitudes, the tens of thousands. But then last week, not only is he around tens of thousands, but he turns and he looks to his little flock, and he shares with them.

He has the seven, he has the twelve, he has the three, and then even at the Last Supper, John the Beloved lays his head upon his chest, always spending time. Even when Jesus goes to be alone, he takes people with him.

[ 8 : 25 ] Paul in Acts 17, 15, being kicked out, he says, will you send Silas and Timotheus to me and have them come quickly to me? Paul wants to do ministry together with people.

Not just Paul, but the entire church, Acts 2, 46, they continue daily in one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house. They did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

There is a life together that is presented in the Bible of loving one another. And it's evidently clear, not just these people, but every one of us, the commands that are given to us.

We're told that we were made one in Romans 12, 5, we're one body in Christ, members of one another. We're told to be affectionate in Romans 12, 10 towards one another with brotherly love, that we're to show each other honor, preferring one another over each other, Romans 12, 10.

We're supposed to build each other up. That is a responsibility that I have to you and you to me. Romans 15, 14 says we are to instruct one another. Yesterday, coming back from a youth retreat with the kids and just having a great time, and then they would say, we got some questions that we wrote down in the Bible.

[ 9 : 36 ] After a couple of them, like, okay, no more questions. All right. These kids had some difficult questions as we were driving down the road, but just to hear them singing together, not talking about Bruno together.

I don't know what that's about. You know, as they were doing all these things in that van, I just thought, man, I just love this. I love that representatives of different families in the church are just going down the road, singing together, asking questions.

But those young people aren't just called the same together, but they instruct one another. They care for each other equally. 1 Corinthians 12, 25, that we're supposed to have one to another, the same care one for another, that there's a liberty that we may be found in serving one another.

With the liberty that I have been found in Christ, that I'm supposed to use that liberty to serve. Yes, I can do something. Oh, no, you can't do that. I'm going to use my liberty to serve you.

We're called to bear one another's burdens. We're told to do so patiently, Ephesians 4, 2. We're told to submit one to another with the fear of the Lord. And we're told to fight for the good of one another.

[ 10 : 39 ] 1 Thessalonians 5, 15. See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but every follow that which is good, both among yourselves and all men. And those are just verses from Paul.

And we look at Hebrews, which may still be Paul for some of you. Hebrews 10, 24 says, And let us consider one another and provoke one another to love and the good works.

That's what I love about church announcements. You know that I never let them go, right? I'm supposed to stop doing them, but I can't because I just love them so much because it's my opportunity to provoke you and encourage you towards good works.

James adds this, And then we're told that we should confess our sins one to another, helping, bringing healing into each other's life.

And then Peter adds in 1 Peter 4, 9, that we should use hospitality one to another. I've never done this before, and I'm sure my wife's going to tell me that I should never do it again.

[ 11 : 44 ] But would you look to the person beside you, the brother and sister beside you, and say this? You with me? We have... You're not doing it, people. All right. I know I've never done it. Look to the person beside you here and say, We have...

We have... A high-maintenance relationship. A high-maintenance relationship. You most certainly do. All right? You have a high-maintenance relationship one to another.

I see why people don't want to do that. You didn't know what I was going to say next. All right? We have a high-maintenance relationship. I mean, did you just see what we went through? I was just... And there's so many more verses.

And so we talk about not wanting to be high-maintenance. You don't have an option. I'm high-maintenance, and you're high-maintenance. If I'm drifting in the sand, you need to call me back into it. If I'm not...

If I'm weeping, you need to weep with me. If I'm rejoicing, you need to rejoice with me. My life is going to affect your life in this covenant that we have made as a church. Your life is going to affect my life.

[ 12 : 40 ] And you are my high-maintenance friends. And I am your high-maintenance friends. And it's wonderful. But don't worry if you say, I don't seem to have enough. I don't have enough capacity for this.

God has created in us a greater capacity so we can live out what He has called us to do as a church. D.J. Bonhoeffer in his book, Life Together, one of my favorite books, says this.

So, between the death of Christ and the last day, it is only by gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in invisible fellowship with other Christians.

You may wonder, what does he mean by invisible fellowship? It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in the world to share God's Word.

Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered, lonely, the proclaimers of the gospel, and heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing.

[ 13 : 37 ] He knows that what we're getting to do today is a... It's just a blessing. I mean, it's in our name, right? The church is an assembly and we get together. But it talks about people because of sickness or the mission that God has called them in or being imprisoned in.

They miss that fellowship one to another. So, he knew that and he talked about that. But what is your opinion upon it? We might have one extreme, which is the person here that says, You know, I'm not looking for any kind of real friendship here.

I'll see you next Sunday. Maybe. All right? That's one extreme in here. And another extreme in here is that I'm so desperate for friendship and it's your job to create programs that make that happen for me.

That's another extreme. And I'm going to constantly be disappointing both of you because I can't solve the problem for one and I'm not leaving you alone. All right? And so, I can't solve those problems.

But here it says that both extremes need to discover what real love is. Why God designed us to give it and to receive it from one another. Life together is how God designed us to live and worship Him.

[ 14 : 42 ] 1 Peter 2.5 is speaking about us here. Ye also, as lively stones, are built upon a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Our lives are built together. Our lives were made to live together with our high-maintenance friends, but with an even greater capacity to love given to us by God.

The next thing that we would want to know, not have we passed from death into life, ask that individually in here. Do you have a love for the brothers and sisters in Christ? If you don't, you should wonder, has the love of the Father ever taken place in your heart?

But also here, do you belong to the truth? If so, we will love our brother. In verse 19, and hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him.

Christians can have this basic assurance that we are participating experientially in this truth. 17 and 18 tells us some ways. But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother hath need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him.

[ 15 : 44 ] And how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. The high school class today, they were talking about many things.

One of the things they talked about was the verse from James on the back of our church sign, when you leave. When you leave here every Sunday and every Thursday, when you come, the question is, did you just come to hear the word or are you going to really live it out?

And so here it is, the living out of there, that not deceiving yourself. Is that do you really love your brother and sister? Are you caring for them? Do you turn a cold shoulder to them?

When you see somebody in need, are you moved with a love for them to do something? Belonging to the truth allows us to have what the Bible calls fervent love.

1 Peter 1.22, Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfamed love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently.

[ 16 : 45 ] Seeing that, another way to say that is since this has happened, since you have been born again, since your soul has been purified by the truth of the Spirit unto an unfamed love for the brother, now you can do this fervently.

The command is based upon a capacity, and since God has wrought that in you, that capacity to do it is fervently. You should know this. You should have seen this in your own life.

The Christian that I am the closest to is my wife, and I can testify that I've seen her capacity to grow year after year.

I have challenged her capacity to grow and love year after year. But time after time, I don't feel that we have the heart for it. But God allows our capacity to grow.

And I've seen that in you. I've seen this in this church. I've seen our capacity to love has grown to meet the challenges that He has called us to meet. God is not calling us to do in love what He has not given us the capacity to do.

[ 17 : 44 ] So this lay your life down for somebody, as it says, or to never turn a cold shoulder when they need you, and you just say, that just seems to be outrageous. I mean, how do I live my life and be one where I become a martyr for all these high-maintenance friends that I have?

I'll just give you a simple example. Aquila and Priscilla in the Bible, just a common couple. They let a guy named Apollos come over to their house. They prepare a meal for them. They help Paul on his journey.

They work alongside Paul. Their home seems to be open to people all the time. Romans 16, 4, it says, Who have for my life laid down their own necks, unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

They just lived. They just gave their life. A living sacrifice to those that are around them. Their capacity was able to meet the small demands and the big demands, and they risked their life for one another because they were just willing to give.

And they were able to do that because God had blessed them, had ministered to them. And so here we see a seemingly large demand. Ever seen a brother in need and ignored him?

[ 18 : 50 ] I have. Are you willing to lay down your life, as would say 1 John 3, 16? We perceive that we love because we lay down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. This is a very convicting thought for me.

But it's also, we see in the next verse, that greater grace is offered. And hereby we know in verse 19 that we are of the truth, shall assure our hearts before him. For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.

This can take you back. So you answer that question and you say, you know, there's been times that I have not been loving to my brother and sister. Like, I do love them. I do love the church. I do love my brothers and sisters in Christ.

That is what I want to live out. That is the truth, but there's just been times that I have not acted in a loving way. It takes me back to that time where Jesus asked Peter, lovest thou me? And he answers.

And Peter answers, and Peter and says, Lord, thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee. Peter wasn't saying, I have never failed thee. But he was just saying, you know my heart, Lord.

[ 19 : 51 ] I love you. I love you. You know that. In here today, as a believer, there is grace that is greater for the times that we have failed one another, the times that we have not acted loving, the times that we have not been sacrificial to one another.

But God, he knows our hearts, and there is grace that is there, and he knows that you want to live out that truth. And you know that as well. You know if that really abides in you.

We can come with confidence in prayer because of this. Though imperfect in our love for one another, we desire to live out this truth. God knows our love for him and one for another. Verse 21, beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do these things that are pleasing in his sight. Just a quick summary. As Christians actively engage in showing love one to another, we now have this boldness before God in prayer because we're living out the command that he has given us in life.

Have you passed from death into life? You're going to love the brothers. Have you, if you love one another, it also is going to show in your life here that you're walking in the truth that you've been called to live out.

[ 21 : 02 ] And then lastly, the question that we ask and answer is, does the Spirit abide in you? Does the Holy Spirit indwell you? If so, you will love the brethren.

Verse 24, John showed us this kind of life as a manifestation of the indwelling God.

As we went through that list, and I jokingly said we're high maintenance friends, how would we ever be empowered to live the life together that he has called us to do? In and of ourselves, we would never be able to.

But by the Holy Spirit, it's a one command. 1 John 3, 23, and this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment.

The first moment that I became the pastor last year, the first verse that I read to you, that was always in my heart to read to you, came from Matthew 22, 37, which tells us to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourself.

[ 22 : 08 ] Two commandments that are so intertwined, that here in this passage, they are as one. Two commandments here, whatever is, and we decided, covenanted together, that as a church, that whatever God would produce in our lives as a result of loving him and loving one another is all that we would ever ask of him to produce in and through us.

Whatever ministry that we produced from loving God and loving one another is the ministry in which that we would want God to have for us in the next 16 years or how many years God would have for us.

But do you see this? These two commandments are brought together as one, so intertwined. But isn't it amazing? Just like our God, that he would allow us to experience this as he has called upon us to love one another, he provides everything needed for us to have the capacity to do it.

He has called us to love one another. He's given us the ability now to do it. We enjoy this wonderful life together, and he is glorified from it. As our God is glorified, we have been so tremendously blessed by loving one another and being loved.

And so what we need as a church moving forward is a greater capacity to love one another. And I am so thankful today that it is something that I am not responsible to create or to program for you, but it came with your new life in Christ.

[ 23 : 35 ] He has already placed in your heart the ability to love when he calls upon you to love one another. If you're new to vision, I would love for you to know about this new life. The purpose of 1 John is stated in 5.13 is this, These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God.

If you're in here today, and you say, I don't know that I have eternal life, I don't know where I stand before my Creator, I don't understand this love that you're speaking about, I don't know if my understanding and definition of love is what it is you're talking about, I would love nothing more than to show you the love of Christ found in the pages of His Word.

And I would love to do that this afternoon with you. And you may have heard in here how that love by God will alter your eternity, and that is most certainly true. That is the first thing that people learn about the Gospel, but I can tell you it does more than that.

It alters everything. It alters every relationship you have. It will alter your day. It will alter the view of the problems that you have in your life. It includes the ability to give and receive love.

And so my brothers and sisters in here today, I tell you, I love you. And I do. I most certainly do. And that is because He took me from death into life, and I wouldn't have if He didn't.

[ 24 : 53 ] And if He didn't guide me by the Spirit, I wouldn't. And I would not walk in truth today if He wouldn't have not saved me and given me a new life in Him. But as He does, it has created a great love.

And I trust that you would have that for one another. And I would like to call upon you to move forward in your commitment one to another. Consider what your next step is. Maybe the most loving thing that you could do next is just to make the commitment to follow in baptism, which is to tell this church family that I worship that Jesus that you say that you love.

Maybe it's in here by joining today. That's something I rarely speak about. But maybe you'd want to covenant with our church today and say, I am committed to loving one another and serving in here.

But maybe it's just as simple as responding to the invitation of somebody in here and say, you know what? I've been meaning to get together with you. I've been meaning to make our lives come closer together. And I've been kind of distant.

But today I see that my love for you has given me a capacity to do more than I ever thought was possible. And you just need to recognize that this life together that I can get very emotional about, it's not just something that's sentimental.

[ 25 : 59 ] It's not just something that I love because it changed my life so much as a teenager. I'll tell you the story about my sister who bought the apple tree for my mom one time. And she called and she said, we're buying an apple tree for mom.

And I said, well, good. I didn't get her a Mother's Day gift. So can I get in on that apple tree purchase? You know, she goes to the nursery and the nursery, they said, you know what? Apple trees really need two of them. You can't just buy one apple tree.

You've got to have two apple trees. My sister calls and says, we're going to need to buy two apple trees. The guy here at the nursery says, you've got to buy them in pairs. And I said, it's his job to tell you to buy more apple trees.

All right. Let me Google this for a second. Because after you buy two, he's going to be like, they're really going to need three apple trees. All right. And that's to tell you that I'm not telling you the day to love one another because I work for an apple tree orchard because I'm a pastor of a church and you think that's what I'm supposed to say.

But God's word has told you that when he made you again to walk in newness of life, he didn't call upon you to walk alone. He called you to walk together. And it's wonderful.



[ 26 : 57 ] And sometimes you don't think you can forbear and you can deal with some of the differences that we have one to another, that the way we live our lives out or separately, we make separate decisions. I want you to know that your capacity to love will expand to meet what he has called you to do, that he has given us that ability to love one another.

And he's glorified through that. How wonderful is that? He calls us together, says, you don't need to be alone. These people need to love you and you need to love them. I'm going to give you the capacity to receive and give love. And in the process of that, all the universe will learn of the manifold wisdom of God and I will be glorified.

There's just nothing like it. There's just nothing like it in all of the world. And I'm so grateful for what the gospel creates in creating a church.