

Northwestern Ohio Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

2026

THE WAY OF LOVE

1 JOHN 4:19



Bible Study

“ —

| We Love because

He first loved us. |

— ”

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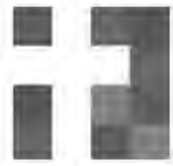
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“—

| We Love because he first loved us. |

1 John 4:19

—”



Dear Friends in Christ,

The 2026 theme for the Northwestern Ohio Synod is the Way of Love, which is the Way of Jesus. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus shares the Greatest Commandment. ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*** Many of us remember learning this beautiful teaching of Jesus in Sunday School or catechism class. Many of us have committed these words to memory. But learning and quoting the words of love is not the same as living the Way of Love.

The love that Jesus calls us to is unconditional. This is a love that is not based on our worth or our ability to reciprocate. This is a love that shows up in deeds and not simply words. *“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action”* (1 John 3:18). The way of love is enduring. St. Paul reminds us, *“Love never ends”* (1 Corinthians 13:8a). Finally, the way of love is transformative, and calls us to reflect God’s love with and for the neighbor, the community, and the world. This is a love that when mobilized has the power to change the world.

The way of love always begins with God. Here is God’s self-giving love, fully revealed in Jesus, poured into us by the Holy Spirit, and lived out in our lives for the sake of the other. As we read in the 2026 Way of Love Memory Verse, *“We love because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). 1 John provides a beautiful glimpse into the Way of Love, which is a love that we are called to share with the world.

What follows is a five-session Bible resource created by the Northwestern Ohio Synod staff that invites you into the Way of Love. Open (or turn on) your Bible, gather with a group of friends, get outside the four walls of the congregation, and together, learn to love as God loves. Ever mindful that, *“We love because he first loved us”*.

Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin

We love because He first loved us
1 John 4:19



LEADER TIPS

You said “yes.” Thank you for your willingness to lead this Bible study and to walk alongside others in exploring The Way of Love. If this is new for you, there is no need to worry. As God once said to the Apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you...”—and that promise still holds true. You are not leading alone. God’s grace will guide you, and love will lead the way.

This Bible study contains five lessons created by synod staff, with each lesson focusing on one chapter from the book of 1 John. As you prepare, it may be helpful to review the 1 John Scripture Resource to better understand the history, structure, and message of the letter—especially its emphasis on love as the heart of the Christian life. Additionally, this study is designed with the assumption that you and participants have read the whole chapter before leading that week’s lesson.

These lessons are designed to be simple, flexible, and grounded in love. They can be used in a variety of settings: congregational study groups, lunch gatherings with coworkers, conversations with friends at a coffee shop, or other everyday spaces where faith and life meet. As you lead, consider how this study might move beyond the walls of the church building and into the places where people live, work, and gather. The Way of Love is meant to be lived publicly and shared freely. You never know who might be watching, listening, or longing to belong.

Each study is intended to last about 60–75 minutes. You will notice that each lesson includes an opening and closing prayer, a bible passage, a reflection, and discussion questions. This bible study is meant to encourage a reading of the whole chapter; however, each study will only focus on several passages from the chapter. The goal is not to cover everything, but to create space for meaningful reflection, honest conversation, and deeper connection with God and one another.

Remember, you do not need to be a Bible scholar to lead. These lessons are not meant for lecturing but for facilitating conversation rooted in love, curiosity, and shared discovery. Below are a few suggestions to support you as you guide others along The Way of Love.

“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
1 John 4:19 — ”

LEADER TIPS

Before the Study

1. Pray. Pray that God would guide you to lead faithfully. Pray for the participants (by name) who will gather for conversation and discussion. Ask God to open your heart and mind to hear God's Word that it may motivate you to a new way of thinking and being.
2. Read and then slowly re-read the assigned Bible passage. Write down particular and peculiar words and phrases. Use the notes from a Study Bible or a Bible Dictionary for insight. See page 7 for a list of resources.
3. Carefully work through the lesson. Take time to meditate and reflect on each question. Write your responses in the space provided.
4. Consider ways to apply the assigned Bible passage to your life. Those who are gathered for study will follow your lead. They will not go any deeper than you.

During the Study

1. Be sure that everyone in your group has the necessary materials: Bible, bible study guide, pen, or pencil. It will be helpful to have a Study Bible and Bible Dictionary available for the group gathering.
2. As you gather for the first time, share with the participants that these studies are meant to be conversations, not lectures. Encourage everyone to participate. Refrain from putting pressure on those who may be hesitant to share, especially during the initial gatherings.
3. Begin each study on time and by reading the memory verse aloud.
4. Ask for prayer requests and then lead an opening prayer. Pray for the concerns mentioned by the participants and ask God to help the group to understand and apply the Bible passage. A prayer is provided for your use.

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— ”

LEADER TIPS

5. Take a moment to review some of the highlights from last week's lesson.
6. Have a group member read the Bible passage(s) to be studied aloud. One effective method is for one participant to read the passage at normal speed followed by another participant re-reading the passage at a slower speed. It is good to hear different voices. Invite listeners to make notes of repeated phrases or words that stand out.
7. Invite another group member to read the story. These are personal stories from the writers, shared to help create a real-life connection to the Bible passage.
8. Next, you will read and contemplate the bible reflection. This is a reflection from the writer on the bible passage.
9. Spend a good amount of time working through the discussion questions as a group. Take note of any questions that arise from participants, so that you can dig deeper and bring an answer next time.
10. Tips for Leading Discussion
 - Avoid answering your own questions. When the leader does most of the talking, other participants may become passive and silent.
 - Don't fear the silence. Some folks need time to think through a question before responding. Moments of quiet are ok. Learn to savor them.

“ —
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1 John 4:19

LEADER TIPS

- Encourage multiple answers. Ask, “What do the rest of you think?” or “Does anyone have anything else to share?”
- Try to be affirming. Especially affirm participation. Never shut someone down. If an answer is clearly off the mark, simply ask, “Which verse led you to that response?” Or “What do the rest of you think?”
- During the initial sessions most answers will be directed to the leader (you). As participants become more comfortable, they will begin to interact with one another. This interaction is the mark of a healthy group. Cultivate it.
- Don’t shy away from controversy or conflict. It is one of the ways we grow. If an issue cannot be resolved, don’t become frustrated. Explain that the group will move on and that God may enlighten all of you by the time you meet again.
- Periodically pause to summarize what the participants have said about the passage. This helps bring together various ideas and gives continuity to the study. The goal is that folks will leave with 1 or 2 “nuggets” from the study to apply in their daily lives.

11. Conclude your time together by asking a participant to pray the prayer at the end of each lesson. This is another great way to cultivate confidence and raise up new leaders.

12. End on time.



These tips have been adapted from Bible Studies for Everyone by N.T. Wright.

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1 John 4:19

RESOURCES

Study Bibles

Lutheran Study Bible - NRSVUE (2025) Published by Augsburg Fortress

Harper Collins Study Bible – NRSV (2006) Published by Harper One

NIV Zondervan Study Bible – NIV (2024) Published by Zondervan

ESV Study Bible – ESV (2008) Published by Crossway.

Bible Dictionary / Handbook

Harper Collins Bible Dictionary (2009) Published by Harper One

Halley's Bible Handbook (2014) Published by Zondervan

Bible Atlases

Oxford Bible Atlas (2009) Published by Oxford University Press

The Student Bible Atlas (2005) Published by Augsburg Fortress

Zondervan Atlas of the Bible (2010) Published by Zondervan

Other

Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps and Timelines (2015) Published by Rose

Luther's Small Catechism (2016) Published by Augsburg Fortress

Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (2017) Published by Concordia

The Bible Project; <https://bibleproject.com/guides/books-of-1-3-john/>

2026 The Way of Love Resources

You can find many different themed resources at the link below or by scanning the QR code below.



<https://nwos-elca.church/wayoflove2026/>



“ —
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— ”
1 John 4:19

WEEK ONE

1 John 1

By: Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin

2026

**THE WAY
OF LOVE**

1 JOHN 4:19



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

Week One: 1 John 1

Memory Verse (repeat aloud together)

1 John 4:19: *We love because He first loved us.*

Opening Prayer

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me." — *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Scripture Passage: 1 John 1:1-10

Please read 1 John 1:1-10 slowly. As you listen, note the repetition of certain words such as light, fellowship, sin, confess, and truth.



Reflection

When I was a boy, I spent much of the summer with my grandparents in Paradise, Michigan, a small Upper Peninsula town on the shores of Whitefish Bay. We spent many afternoons and evenings up at Whitefish Point. Swimming in the frigid 50-degree waters. Running past the dilapidated buildings of the Whitefish Point Coast Guard Station. Searching through piles and piles of pebbles and rocks to find the elusive agates. And as evening closed in upon us, we often gazed in awe and

“ —
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1 John 4:19 — ”

Reflection Continued

wonder at the dancing Northern Lights. I always thought that I could reach up and touch them. But they were always and ever above and beyond my reach. My Grandmother Julia encouraged us to take time to look carefully at the Northern Lights. “This is not something we get to see every day. This is special. So, let’s savor it. Let’s not take these lights for granted”. To this day, when I see the Northern Lights, I can hear the waves of Lake Superior rolling in, I can feel the damp sand between my toes, I can see where the border of the starry night meets the enchanting dance of the aurora, and I can still feel the powerful presence of my grandmother’s love. She loved me deeply and she loved me fully.

In the opening prologue of 1 John 1:1-4, we hear echoes of Genesis 1 (In the beginning...) and the Gospel of John 1:1-18 (In the beginning...). Here the author of 1 John hearkens back to the very beginning when the promise of God’s love for you and for all of creation first begins and is embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And it appears that there may be folks who are still living, who directly experienced Jesus, the Son of God (1:3). We have heard, we have seen, we have touched... God in the flesh.

In 1 John 1:5, the author declares that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. Followers of Jesus are called to walk in the light and to reflect the light of God. Walking in the light of God does not lead us to moral perfection. It means living honestly with our brokenness and our capacity to forgive and be forgiven. In the Lutheran tradition we believe in *simul justus et peccator*: we are at the same time both saint and sinner. And we are invited to walk in the light, not because we are perfect, but to receive and to share God’s perfect grace.

Finally, in 1 John 1:8-9, the author calls us to the gift of confession and absolution. These two verses may be familiar to you. They are a part of the Brief Order of Confession and Forgiveness from the Lutheran Book of Worship (green hymnal). These are powerful words that remind us of our great capacity for sin, and God’s great capacity to forgive. It wasn’t until I was older that I learned that these words of

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Reflection Continued

confession and absolution are recorded in Scripture, right here in 1 John 1:8-9. I wish these verses were included in Evangelical Lutheran Worship (red hymnal), because these words from 1 John 1:8-9, foster deep reflection and promise complete liberation. Through the gift of Jesus Christ, our sins are fully forgiven.

Catechetical Moment

I also love what Martin Luther writes about confession in the Small Catechism in question-and-answer form.

What is confession? Confession has two parts. First, we confess our sins, and second, we receive absolution, that is forgiveness, from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess? Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?

Discussion Questions

1. Is there a special place / space where you experience the presence of God's light and love? Describe that sacred space to your study group.

Discussion Questions

2. Re-read 1 John 1:1-4

- a. In 1 John 1:1, the author emphasizes what we have heard, seen, and touched. Why is the incarnation of God in Jesus so important to our Christian faith? Why do you think God chose to come to us in human form?
- b. In 1 John 1:3-4, the author emphasizes fellowship and joy. Share a story about a time that you experienced joy in Christian community?

3. Re-read 1 John 1:5-7

- a. What does light reveal? What does light expose? Where do you see God's light at work in your life or in the life of your parish?
- b. What might walking in the darkness look like today (personally or collectively)? What are some ways that we rationalize or hide the darkness?

4. Re-read 1 John 1:8-10

- a. Why is it important for us to acknowledge our sin before God? Or before someone we have sinned against?
- b. What does it mean that forgiveness is grounded in God's faithfulness and not our own faithfulness? How might this be pure Gospel and complete Good News?

5. Re-read Martin Luther's catechetical instruction on Confession and Forgiveness. Is there a particular teaching that caught your attention? Please share with your group.

6. How might 1 John Chapter 1 shape how we approach conflict in our families, congregations, communities, and world?

7. What is one thing that you will be taking away from today's study?

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Closing Prayer

Speak or sing this hymn from Evangelical Lutheran Worship #815

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light



1 I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to
2 I want to see . . . the bright-ness of God. I want to
3 I'm look - ing for . . . the com - ing of Christ. I want to



fol - low Je - sus, God set the stars to give
look at Je - sus, Clear Sun of righ - teous - ness,
be with Je - sus. When we have run . . . with



light to the world. The star of my life is Je - sus,
shine on my path, and show me the way to the Fa - ther.
pa - tience the race, we shall know the joy of Je - sus.

Refrain



In him there is no dark-ness at all. The night and the



day are both a - like. The Lamb is the light of the



cit - y of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Je - sus.

Text: Kathleen Thomerson, b. 1934

Music: HOUSTON, Kathleen Thomerson

Text and music © 1970, 1975 Celebration

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WEEK TWO

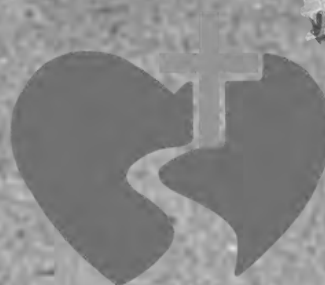
1 John 2

By: Calla Gilson Burns

2026

THE WAY
OF LOVE

1 JOHN 4:19



“ —
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— ”

Week Two: 1 John 2

Memory Verse (repeat aloud together)

1 John 4:19: *We love because He first loved us.*



Opening Prayer

"Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise; your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. And so we, who are a part of your creation, long to praise you - we also carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud. You awaken us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our hearts are restless until we rest in you." - *Augustine, Confessions Book 1, Chapter 1*

Scripture Passage: 1 John 2:1-20

Please read 1 John 2:1-20 slowly. As you listen, note the repetition of certain words or phrases throughout the passage.

Reflection

"The body of Christ given for you, and for **everyone**."

When I heard those words, it was a revelation. But it wasn't new—it wasn't news, it wasn't a development in the teachings of the church, it wasn't a new commandment. Rather, the words of the woman distributing communion that Sunday morning continued to echo in my mind, long after I had left the stained-glass windows and smooth wooden pews for my long walk home. As I passed faces on the sidewalk and watched the rhythms of life in the busy city swirl around me, I continued to hear her words. "The body of Christ given for you, and for everyone." In the reframing of those simple words spoken as she placed bread into my hand, I was drawn back into the original story—the original command to take the body and the blood—and enter into the living gift of salvation that is for all people. Not something to clutch and hold for myself, but a gift to mobilize all of us into a life of love so wide.

“ —
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— ”
1 John 4:19





Reflection Continued

As we read in 1 John 1, the Elder grounds his opening message in the stuff of life—that which was seen, touched, heard from Jesus in his life—not spiritual elements, but the stuff of bodies, and the experience of a savior who walked among us here on Earth. The whole story, from birth to resurrection, is told in the embodied language of introductory verses that summarize Christ who was human and God. It's critical information as the Elder is writing to address the fragment of believers caught up in controversy over the nature of Jesus—a conversation that is drawing dissenters away from the universal church, and into a breakout movement. It's an argument that is literally separating the embodied experience of Jesus, and God's call to be deeply involved in loving neighbors here in the earthly walk we share—and that causes concern for the Elder. For if our savior's life, death and resurrection are disembodied, then what reason do we have as Christians to care for the universal experience of our neighbors who live in bodies right here, and right now? It changes the call, which changes the church, because it changes what love towards the needs of others looks like .

In 1 John 2:2, the Elder uses the Greek term ἱλασμός hilasmos to refer to the way that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus embodies forgiveness of sins for the whole world. It is in the humanity of Jesus that this was accomplished, and it is in our humanity that we live into the freedom of what fellowship with a whole world that God loves really looks like. If we're honest about our call to love our neighbor, there simply is not room for in group / out group divisions within the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. All are welcomed into the great love of God. The passage explores our very human ability to make mistakes, and God's very faithful love to welcome us back to the light—because Jesus understands our humanness, just as we are.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident who wrote about what it looked like for Jesus to abide with humanity, and how humans could respond to the gift of Jesus as our righteous lord and advocate:



“ —
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Reflection Continued

“In the body of Jesus Christ, God is united with humankind, all humanity is accepted by God, and the world is reconciled to God. In the body of Jesus Christ, God took on the sin of all the world and bore it. There is no part of the world, no matter how lost, no matter how godless, that has not been accepted by God in Jesus Christ and reconciled to God.”

“God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, namely, real human beings, the real world, this is for God the ground of unfathomable love. God establishes a most intimate unity with this. God becomes human, a real human being. While we exert ourselves to grow beyond our humanity, to leave the human behind us, God becomes human; and we must recognize that God wills that we be human, real human beings. While we distinguish between pious and godless, good and evil, noble and base, God loves real people without distinction. God has no patience with our dividing the world and humanity according to our standards and imposing ourselves as judges over them.” (Bonhoeffer / Ethics p. 66-68, 84-85)

With Jesus as our advocate, knowing us in all of our human-ness, the Elder reminds us that we are welcomed into a walk just as Jesus walked (1 John 2:5-6). This is a call to love-in-action for the whole of humanity. When we know and love God, we are called into community and companionship with the world God knows and loves. There is no room for hatred here.

“The body of Christ given for you, and for **everyone**.”

The love of Jesus has feet. That day standing at the alter and receiving the body of Jesus was just a stop on the long walk out into the world. The remembrances of body and blood, the words of both responsibility and commission, gave me the gift to imagine the ways in which our walk with Jesus takes us beyond the communion railing. Walking out of the brick building and out into the sunshine, each step felt meaningful, treading lightly on the earth that God loves.

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Reflection Continued

The passing faces reflected the image of God, each person a masterpiece that God loves. As I smelled the magnolia trees overhead and felt the wind against my skin propel me forward, I continued down the street and into the world that God loves .

If you would like to go deeper and learn more about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, check out this great study from our colleagues at the Lutheran Advocacy Office in Pennsylvania: *Lessons from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a House Divided and a World on Fire*. This is an excellent exploration of lessons at the intersection of faith and civic life. A facilitator's guide, participant workbook and slides for each week of the study can be found on the website for [ELCA Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania](#).

Discussion Questions

1. Share the story of a moment or an experience that helped you to see your faith, and your connection to this old, old story, in a new way. Perhaps it's a story of the sacramental presence changing your view. Perhaps it's a meaningful conversation or a chance encounter. Share with the group.
2. In verses 12-14, the Elder writes to three specific groups: little children, fathers and young people. These are statements of encouragement. If you were going to see yourself and your own identity in these pages, what would you hope to read? Ex: I am writing to you, exhausted mothers...."
3. Getting to know the writer of this text, The Elder, makes me think of the elders in my life who have seen many years, and gained great wisdom. Often it seems to me that these folks can just see beyond whatever divisions of the day spring up. They've seen and experienced enough to know that whatever group we box ourselves into, Jesus is always on the other side. The Elder doesn't spend a great deal of time railing against the dissenters of his age, rather, he makes an argument for a more inclusive fellowship, rooted in the love and salvation of Jesus— "for the whole world." Who are the elders that have guided you into a wider, more inclusive vision of this world that God loves?
4. Living into "love-in-action" for the whole world that God loves, how might our daily life look different? What is one action that you might commit to this week to love the world that God loves?

“ —
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Closing Prayer

In the name of the divine Trinity,
Let us pray.

God, you have called us into being
through love.

You have joined us to one another
In love.

How good and pleasant it is
When your people dwell together in unity.

Shine your light upon your people
That we may see the glory of eternal life.
Grant us the strength
To carry your blessing from this place to the next.

May we be at home in any land,
For all the earth is yours.
And, with our hopes set on your coming glory in the world,
live also as alien in all lands.
May the lamp of your word
Guide our feet on the unsure paths of life.

Our lives are but a breath,
But our breaths are drawn from your divine Spirit.
You have created us as walking paradoxes.
Specs of dust and divine-image bearers.
We are constantly restless,
Until we rest in you .

Go in the peace of Christ to love and serve the Lord,
All: Thanks be to God! Amen.

*Based on the Common Prayer for Ordinary Radicals (Occasional Prayers)
Commissioning / Sending*



WEEK THREE

1 John 3

By: Deacon Sherry Krieger

2026
**THE WAY
OF LOVE**
1 JOHN 4:19



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

Week Three: 1 John 3

Memory Verse (repeat aloud together)

1 John 4:19: *We love because He first loved us.*

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, you came into this world and lived among us – sinless, holy and so very loving. You came to bring God’s awesome love into this broken world, into our broken lives, to show us what love is. We get it and then we don’t. Come now into our conversation so that we might feel your presence, know your deep love, and respond to your call for us to share your light and love in this world you have gifted us with in this time and space. Amen.

Scripture Passage: 1 John 3:1-24

Please read 1 John 3:1-24 slowly. As you listen, note the repetition of certain words or phrases throughout the passage.

Reflection & Discussion

Woven into this chapter of 1 John 3, is the continued theme of God’s deep love for us even as we live in a liminal state of “saint” (the moments we make Godly, loving decisions) and “sinner” (when we falter and do harm). Martin Luther asserted that we are in need of forgiveness daily. But Luther also believed with great certainty that we could improve every day in our ability to love God, love our neighbor, and live with deep trust in God’s freeing forgiveness. That is the emphasis of this study.

Today, we’re going to focus on this chapter’s messages:

1. We are children of God.
2. God’s amazing Love is most fully known through Jesus.

WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD

1 John 3:1 *What great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

1 John 4:19

Reflection & Discussion Continued

For the first 3 years of our married life, my husband Andy and I cared for foster children in our home. During that time, we cared for little ones and teenagers, all of whom were either reunited with their families or aged out of the system. Fostering children is a special opportunity to engage and build deep relationships for a period of time. For those months, these young people were “our children;” we cared for their well-being, worked through some hard stuff together, and developed a deep love with each one of them. But the parenting relationship didn’t last. These intense relationships ended as life moved in different directions for all of us.

But that is not what God does with and for us. God doesn’t allow life to move on without us. God is with us now and forever. We are not only fostered, we are **adopted**; we have a parent who loves us forever. In Baptism, we become God’s own; we become deeply loved children of the creator of the universe.

Here’s a thought to ponder: THE creator of all that is – the vast universe, the stars, the sun, the moon, the rivers, the oceans, the land, the mountains, the valleys and everything in it; that Creator thought the world needed YOU and gifted YOU to the rest of us. God loves YOU and says ‘YOU are my child.’

For 2 minutes, quietly reflect on what that means.

Discussion Time:

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, God claims us as God’s very own. We ARE children of God.

Share with your study group what you may know about your own Baptism

1. Who was present? Pastor? God parents? Family? Friends?
2. When & where were you baptized?
3. Do you have any special mementos from that day? Photos? Certificate? Baptismal cloth? Baptismal gown? Something else?

“ —
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Reflection & Discussion Continued

Discuss the following questions:

1. How does it feel knowing God loves you and desires for you to be in the world at this place and time?
2. How does knowing you are God's child affect your sense of self?
3. How does being a Child of God affect your relationship to/with others?

GOD'S AMAZING LOVE IS MOST FULLY KNOWN THROUGH JESUS

1 John 3:16-19 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

During my high school and college years, I was a rather rambunctious "PK" (preacher's kid). I rebelled against the 'good girl' image I felt I was supposed to live up to. I did some regrettable and hurtful things and faced some difficult consequences. I knew God and my parents loved me and forgave me for the mistakes they knew about, but I couldn't share everything with my parents because I felt my sins were too deep to lay upon them. My older sister had died 15 years before and now I was a screw-up...it would be too much for them. But in seminary, I found a mentor who changed my life and helped me to see myself as God's forgiven child. His name was Rev. Dr. Rudolph R Featherstone. He was an African American pastor, theologian and teacher whose deep faith was born through many difficult experiences – like losing his brother in the Civil Rights Movement. God's love and his faith was evident in his smile, the care he expressed for others and the songs he sang or whistled as he walked the halls of Trinity Lutheran Seminary. One could hear him coming from quite a distance away, his presence was that big and profound. Rudolph was rooted in the cross and community, meaning he lived like a forgiven sinner in the light of a loving God, and that light and love overflowed easily to others. Through lots of conversation, he helped me see Jesus' life, death and resurrection as God's expression of love and forgiveness differently than I had ever experienced it before....it was a personal act for ME. Even with all of my 'fallenness,' Jesus died for ME...my sins were already laid upon him in God's love incarnate; THAT is life changing!!!

“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

1 John 4:19

Reflection & Discussion Continued

But, not long after I finally “got it” and this revelation sunk in, he asked me, “So what, Sherry?”

Basically, he wanted to know what difference this newfound understanding of God’s love would make in and for my life. What would I do with this great gift of grace? Would I be different? Would I act differently? I had decisions to make. To help me internalize God’s amazing love and figure all this out, he challenged me to take the following two steps that I still use today and have passed it on to my children; I now offer it to you:

Step #1: Understand with your whole being that God’s got you no matter what, and as God’s child you are deeply loved. Everyday...Look at yourself in the mirror and repeat the following:

I am someone because God made me someone and made me good.

God loves me, yes even me.

I can be anything I want if it is being faithful to God.

Step #2: Understand that the impact of scripture, the impact of Jesus is most powerful when it changes behaviors. So now, answer the “So What?” question. How does Jesus’ most powerful act of love change our behaviors? The world can only know we are followers of Christ if and when it makes a difference in how we act! 1 John 3: 18 *Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

Take some time to reflect and discuss the following questions:

1. How do we know God loves us?
2. How do we, as followers of Jesus, show that the love of God is in us?
3. How can we show God’s love to those we find difficult to be in relationship with?
4. Play the following game:
 - a. Go around the group and invite each person to finish the sentence as quickly as possible: “Love is...” (For example: Love is helping with the dishes, Love is my partner/spouse/child praying with me at night, Love is mowing the grass for our neighbor who can’t do it)

“ —
| We Love because He first loved us. |
— ”

Reflection & Discussion Continued

2. Collect all of the suggestions shared that describe a way to show love in action.
3. Write down the number of “love is” actions identified, then note a couple that resonate with you and make a plan to put them into practice.

Final Thoughts:

In the end, even if you make the right choice, even if your actions are loving, even if you believe you are a child of God...YOU ARE FORGIVEN. On our best days, what matters most is not what we do or fail to do but that Jesus died for each and every one of us. When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we always see the reflection of a sinner redeemed by God; because God looks at us through Jesus, and our sin is covered with Christ’s own righteousness.

Martin Luther puts it this way:

In short, our righteousness is called (in plain language) the forgiveness of our sins. Or, as it says here: “sins not counted,” “sins covered,” “sins not to be seen.” Here stand the clear plain words: All the saints are sinners and remain sinners. But they are holy because God in His grace neither sees nor counts these sins, but forgets, forgives, and covers them. (Luther’s Introduction to Psalm 32).

Closing Prayer

Holy and Loving God, thank you for making us your children through Jesus and for the gift of reflecting your love to others. Help us to show kindness and care for everyone around us, and let us always mirror your mercy in our actions. When we falter, help us remember that we are forgiven in Christ and that you’ve put us in this world for a purpose. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

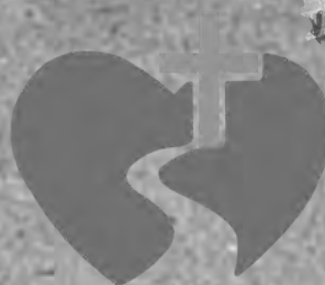
1 John 4:19

WEEK FOUR

1 John 4

By: Jillian Russell

2026
**THE WAY
OF LOVE**
1 JOHN 4:19



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

Week Four: 1 John 4

Memory Verse (repeat aloud together)

1 John 4:19: *We love because He first loved us.*

Opening Prayer

Lord, thank You that love comes from You. As we open Your Word, we ask that You fill us with Your Spirit, so we can love our family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers with a heart that mirrors Yours. Give us the courage to step in and love those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture Passage: 1 John 4:1-21

Please read 1 John 4:1-21 slowly. As you listen, note the repetition of certain words or phrases throughout the passage.

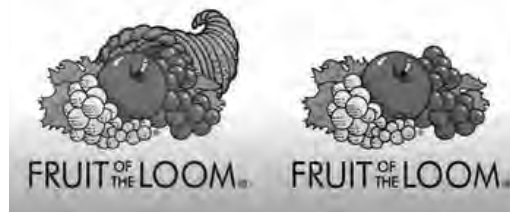
Reflection

Have you ever had a memory you vividly and wholeheartedly believed was true—only to find out it wasn't? Or at least slightly not how you have always remembered it? Well, you definitely would not be the only one to have had this happen. Many of you may have heard of the Mandela Effect. This is a phenomenon in which people collectively misremember the specific details of a person, place, situation, or event as if it were a reality, which in fact it was not.

Some of the most popular examples of the Mandela Effect that you may know include:

“Luke, I am your father.” – In Star Wars: Episode V, you probably remember Darth Vader uttering the famous line, “Luke, I am your father.” The line was actually “No, I am your father.”

Fruit of the Loom Logo – Did you know that there is in fact not a cornucopia behind all the fruit in the logo? There never was. There is only fruit.



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
1 John 4:19 — ”




Reflection Continued

1 John 4 centers around two major themes. First, believers are instructed to “test the spirits” to determine whether they are from God (1 John 4:1–6). Second, we are reminded that “God is love” (1 John 4:7–21), and therefore we are called to love one another.

Now, 1 John 4 may not necessarily have active Mandela Effects, but it also tells us that sometimes, we have to test what we hear or see, or think is true to be sure that it’s actually true. In the passage, John talks about testing to see if something is from God. To start, we must understand that when John is speaking of ‘spirits,’ here he is indicating that what we’re dealing with is on a spiritual level. John is probably speaking here about the driving factor behind what is being taught. John has already said that false prophets are among the people of God teaching that which is definitely not from God. John was concerned that false prophets and false teachings, much like Mandela Effects, would deceive his readers. 1 John 4:2 gives the test for spirits which actually come from God. These spirits are those that acknowledge Jesus Christ’s real incarnation. Not every message comes from God, and believers must discern what aligns with the truth of Christ.” “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). God’s Spirit empowers us to discern truth. John adds that believers overcome the powers in this world because of God’s Spirit within them (1 John 4:4).

The second major section returns to the idea that “God is love.” 1 John emphasizes that God’s love is not some abstract concept. It is passion expressed in action. God made love real and present by sending Jesus to live among us and to die for us.



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
1 John 4:19 — ”



Reflection Continued

God continues to show us love through Jesus' life-giving presence among us. God's love does not depend on our initiative or on our worthiness. We don't have to reach out to God or even believe in God in order to be loved. We don't have to clean up our act before God can love us. We don't have to measure up to some standards in order to be lovable. 1 John insists that the more fully and completely we know God, the more the immense reality of God's love dawns on us.

We are not the makers of this love. We are called to open ourselves to God's love so that God can love others through us. When we love one another, we re-present God to the world. When we allow the love that God has showered on us to cover those around us, we make God's love become real and visible in the ordinary lives of ordinary people. When God's unimaginable, limitless love comes alive in us, we become the real presence of God in the world. It becomes tangible in ordinary acts of kindness, patience, forgiveness, and grace.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever experienced the mandala effect? If so, how did you find out what you thought you knew to be true was false?
2. Who is someone that you have a difficult time getting along with that God needs to help you love?
3. God showed love for us by sending Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins. What insight does this give us into how God expects us to show love to others?
4. What specific steps will you take this week to demonstrate your love for another believer?

Closing Blessing

Blessing that Meets You in Love by Jan Richardson

It is true that
Every blessing begins
With love,
That whatever else
It might say,
Love is always
Precisely the point.

But it should be noted
That this blessing
Has come today
Especially to tell you

It is crazy about you.
That it has been
In love with you
Forever.
That it has never
Not wanted
To see your face,
To go through this world
In your company.

This blessing thought
It was high time
It told you so,
Just to make sure
You know.

If it has been shy
In saying this,
It has not been
For any lack of
Wanting to.
It's just that
This blessing
Knows the risk
Of offering itself
In a way that
Will so alter you-
Because this is
Simply where
Loving leads.

This blessing knows
How love undoes us,
Unhinges us,
Unhides us.

This blessing knows
How love undoes us,
Unhinges us,
Unhides us.



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

1 John 4:19

WEEK FIVE

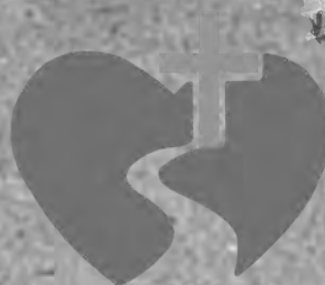
1 John 5

By: Pastor Sarah Schaaf

2026

**THE WAY
OF LOVE**

1 JOHN 4:19



“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”

Week Five: 1 John 5

Memory Verse (repeat aloud together)

1 John 4:19: *We love because He first loved us.*

Opening Prayer

For Grace to Seek God

O Lord, you see
that all hearts are empty
unless filled by you,
and all desires are frustrated
unless they point to you.

So give us light and grace
to seek and find you,
that we may be yours,
and you may be ours, forever.

— *Christina G. Rossetti (1830–1894)*

from Prayers Ancient and Modern

published in Every Moment Holy: Volume III — The Work of the People



Scripture Passage: 1 John 5:1-21

Please read 1 John 5:1-21 slowly. As you listen, note the repetition of certain words or phrases throughout the passage.

Reflection & Questions

There aren't enough pixels on a camera or pages in a notebook to capture some moments.

I felt this way when I first traveled to Tanzania. Before our group made our way to Dodoma to spend time with our companions, we journeyed to Tarangire National Park on safari. We drove into the wildlife preserve camp late at night, exhausted, and quickly fell asleep.

“ —

| We Love because He first loved us. |

1 John 4:19

— ”



Reflection & Questions Continued

We awoke to the distant roar of lions and monkeys swinging overhead. It felt like I had stepped into a scene from *The Lion King*. Having grown up in a small city in West Virginia, the experience felt like an extraordinary gift — something I might never witness again.


I spent most of those days wide-eyed, standing on the seat of the safari rover, feverishly clicking my camera and jotting down notes as giraffes glided lazily by and elephants flared their ears in warning when we wandered too close to their calves. One day we traveled deep into the preserve to visit an enormous baobab tree, often called the “Tree of Life.” Its massive trunk was hollowed by time. We climbed inside, completely encircled by its ancient majesty and the life that still thrived in its branches.

I especially remember Becky Seibert’s laughter during those days. A long-time member of the Global Mission Board, Becky carries a deep love for our companions in Tanzania. Joy seemed to overflow from her — not only on safari, but even more during our time spent with our companions.

Having traveled to Tanzania many times before, and returning again since, Becky did not feel the need to capture every moment. She simply received each moment as it came. She breathed it all in, carrying the testimony of that sacred place home with her — just as she had done so many times before.

When have you experienced God’s gifts and love surrounding you?

At this point in your study of 1 John, your head may be spinning as much as mine did on safari. The ideas in this book move quickly, circling back again and again. This letter from John the Elder reads more like a poetic sermon than a formal letter. Rather than presenting ideas in a neat, linear order, John revisits core themes found in the Gospel of John.



“ —
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— ”
1 John 4:19

Reflection & Questions Continued

The book uses an ancient rhetorical technique called “amplification.” Instead of moving straight from one idea to the next, John returns repeatedly to familiar themes such as life, truth, and love. Each time he revisits them, he adds a slightly different angle, bringing new depth and clarity.

If you were to “amplify” one theme or idea from 1 John, which would you choose and why?

Here at the conclusion of John’s letter, the Elder clearly states the purpose of his testimony, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)

1. How is this purpose different from the purpose of the Gospel of John? (See John 20:30–31)
2. What do you think helps someone come to believe in Jesus?
3. What helps someone stay faithful to Jesus and keep trusting in the gifts God has already provided?

1 John 5:6–12 reminds us that we do not do the work of believing alone. We are given powerful testimony through the Spirit, the water, and the blood — witnesses that are greater than any human testimony. For people of faith, Spirit, water, and blood are rich images that tell the story of God’s saving work. One practice that helps believers remain grounded and steadfast is sharing biblical stories together.

1. In your group or in pairs, share a story from the Bible that involves the Holy Spirit, water, or blood.
2. Can you think of a story that includes all three? (see John 19:34)

“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
— ”
1 John 4:19

Reflection & Questions Continued

As Lutherans, we trust in the testimony and work of the Holy Spirit. In the Third Article of the Creed, on sanctification, Martin Luther writes:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church. He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

Take a moment to reflect. Luther reminds us that belief in Jesus is not something we accomplish through our own work, it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. How does it feel to hear that our faith is a gift, not a personal achievement?
2. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit calling, enlightening, or sustaining you in faith?

At the beginning of this study of 1 John, Bishop Daniel grounded us in the practice of confession — honestly naming our sin and asking God for forgiveness.

As the letter draws to a close in 1 John 5:18–20, we encounter a different kind of confession. Instead of confessing sin, John the Elder offers words of assurance. He speaks three strong declarations of belief, each beginning with the phrase “we know that...”.

These statements are meant to steady the hearts of his readers. They remind the community who they are and whose they are. John reassures them that they have been given a secure and beloved place in Christ, a place made firm through the eternal life God has given.

1. See if you can identify the three “we know that” assurances in 1 John 5:18-20.
2. As this study comes to an end, what do we know as people of faith?
3. How will these assurances guide the way we live and act moving forward?

“ —
| **We Love because He first loved us.** |
1 John 4:19 — ”

Closing Prayer

Gracious God,

You have walked with us through this study, steadying our hearts with your truth and surrounding us with your love. Thank you for the gift of your Word that reminds us who we are and what we believe.

When we doubt, assure us.

When we wander, gather us.

When we grow weary, renew us through the testimony of your Spirit.

Help us to trust the promises we have heard, that in Christ we are held securely, forgiven fully, and given life that never ends. Let these assurances shape the way we live, the way we love, and the way we serve.

As we go from this time of study, keep us rooted in your truth and grounded in your grace. Make us bold witnesses to your light in a world that longs for hope.

We rest in what we know because we rest in you.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.



“ —
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— ”
1 John 4:19



2026

**THE WAY
OF LOVE**

1 JOHN 4:19