



SERMON GUIDE

PROOF POSITIVE



Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Introduction

The Cleveland Clinic is ranked the #2 hospital in the world, renowned for cardiology and heart surgery. Imagine going there with a serious heart issue—you'd have brilliant surgeons, skilled nurses, advanced imaging, and the best care available. But the most important part of that hospital isn't what you see; it's what you don't see: the power plant. No matter how great the surgeons or how advanced the equipment, if the power plant fails, nothing can be done. The hospital becomes no more valuable than a cabin in the woods.

Your heart is the power plant of your body. It pumps oxygen-rich blood to every cell, tissue, and organ you have. Your brain, muscles, kidneys, liver, and immune system all depend on it functioning well. But your physical heart only has an earthly impact. It's your spiritual heart that matters eternally, because no matter what else is true about you, if your heart isn't right with God, you'll never become what you were meant to be or go where you should go for eternity.

Today we're doing a spiritual EKG and discovering the three surefire signs of a heart that's healthy before God.

Key Points

1. A Healthy Heart Is Strongly Confident Before God

When you feel condemned, where do you turn to get out of the pit? John writes, “By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:19–20, ESV). Your heart is the throne of your life. Your thoughts, your emotions, and your will all take orders from it. So if it’s out of line, imagine what chaos is created.

Notes



Healthy Hearts

Proof Positive | Week 36 | 1 John 3:19-24

Walk toward God in obedience, and watch Him open doors your own heart never could.

Notes

3. A Healthy Heart Is Spiritually Diligent for God

What truly separates a believer from an unbeliever? “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us” (1 John 3:24, ESV). Those who keep God’s commandments belong to Him. But it is not obedience alone that sets you apart; it is the Holy Spirit living within you that sets you apart.

Scientists have developed hypersonic sound, a beam so narrow and high frequency that only someone standing exactly where it lands can hear it. The people just a few feet away hear nothing at all. That is what it means to have the Spirit. When you are in the right place with the right heart, you hear something the rest of the world cannot hear at all.

The first time you truly hear the Holy Spirit, He tells you that you are a sinner who needs a Savior, and that Savior is Jesus.

Key Takeaway

Obedience is what makes your heart healthy, and it is the Holy Spirit inside you that helps you be obedient. Let Him lead, and a confident, obedient, diligent heart will follow.



Healthy Hearts

Proof Positive | Week 36 | 1 John 3:19-24

Reflection Questions

1. Where does your heart condemn you right now, telling you that you are useless or without value? Do you know what God says about you, and are you willing to believe it over your own feelings?

2. Is there an area of obedience you have been putting off, that God has asked of you but you have not yet followed through on? What would it look like to take that step this week?

3. Have you ever sensed the Holy Spirit speaking to you in a way the people around you did not seem to notice? What is one way you can quiet yourself this week to listen for His voice?

Introduction

There is a message that needs to be shouted from the rooftops to every man and woman between the ages of 21 and 30: Grow up. In 1960, 66% of men and 77% of women had hit all five traditional adulthood milestones by age 30—leaving home, getting formal schooling, marrying, having a child, and gaining financial independence. By 2010, only 28% of men and 39% of women had done the same, and by 2026 that number is expected to fall to somewhere between 15 and 25%.

We have a real maturity problem in America, and sadly, the Church has the same problem with spiritual maturity. Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe once said, “After over 40 years of ministry, I am convinced that spiritual immaturity is the number one problem in our churches.” Too many Christians think growing up just means showing up, but you can sit in the same pew for 30 years and never actually grow. Growing up in Christ is more than just showing up on Sunday morning, going to a small group, or holding a leadership position. First John 2:12-14 explains that the number one sign of spiritual health is spiritual growth. Healthy things grow, and today John shows us not just how to grow older but how to grow up.

Key Points

1. Start the Process of Growing Up

John begins by writing, "... to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake" (1 John 2:12, ESV). There is nothing wrong with being a spiritual baby; that is how you enter God's family in the first place. But there is something wrong with staying one.

I remember walking out of a movie theater the night I got saved as a 9-year-old boy, and the one thing I could not get over was that all my sins had been forgiven. I had gone from knowing about Jesus to knowing Jesus.

Notes

[illegible]

Spiritual maturity never comes in a microwave; it only comes through a crockpot—slowly, over time. How do we start the process of growing up? Understand it is a process. If you're going to grow up, you've got to want to grow up. You have to decide to grow up. You've got to make an effort to grow up, and you've got to continue to grow up.

Never lose the thrill of your forgiveness, but do not stop there. Birth is only the beginning; growth has to follow.

2. Stay in the Progress of Growing Up

John moves from children to young men, "... because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14, ESV). Growing up always means gaining more responsibility. At 16 you can drive. At 18 you can vote, sign contracts, and live on your own. At 21 every restriction you faced as a teenager disappears, and you are no longer just taking from the world; you are giving back to it.

Spiritually, the only way you move from child to young man is by getting into the Word of God. Unless you get into the Word of God on a consistent basis, you will never grow to full spiritual maturity. If spiritual maturity is going to be a goal in your life, then Bible study must become a priority in your life. Do not think you can attend church once a week, be spoon-fed with 35 minutes' worth of truth, and that's all you need. Just as you need to eat food every day for your physical growth, you must eat the Word of God every day for your spiritual growth.

If you want to grow, stop letting your Bible collect dust and start letting it feed you every single day.

3. Strive for the Priority of Growing Up

What does it actually mean to be spiritually mature? Spiritual maturity is not about your age or how many years you have attended church. It is about how well you know God. John shows us the final mark of that maturity when he describes

Notes



Growing Up

Proof Positive | Week 37 | 1 John 2:12-14

someone who knows "... him who is from the beginning" (1 John 2:14, ESV), and John calls that person a father. In Scripture, a father, or in the case of a woman, a mother, is not just an older believer, but someone devoted to fellowship and growing every day in the knowledge of God. Children delight in the wonder of God, and young men are devoted to the Word of God, but fathers and mothers are dedicated to walking with God and knowing Him closely.

Walking closely with God has nothing to do with how much you know. I studied in seminary with PhDs who I don't believe knew Jesus at all. Spiritual maturity has everything to do with how much you know God, how well you know God, and how intimately you know Him. Do you know how it is demonstrated? In how you behave, not just what you believe.

Do not settle for knowing about God when He is inviting you to know Him. A mature faith is proven not by what you recite, but by how closely you know Him and how much your life looks like His.

Key Takeaway

Growing up in Christ is a process, not an event. It starts with the thrill of forgiveness, continues as you feed daily on the Word of God, and reaches its goal when you walk with God closely, not just know about Him. Healthy things grow, so keep growing until you are bigger on the inside than you appear on the outside.

Notes

[illegible]

Growing Up

Proof Positive | Week 37 | 1 John 2:12-14

Reflection Questions

1. Do you still feel the thrill of knowing your sins are forgiven, or has that wonder faded over time? What would it look like to thank God for that forgiveness today the way you did when you first believed?

2. Honestly, how much time do you spend in God's Word in an average week? What is one small change you could make this week to feed on Scripture daily instead of once on Sunday?

3. Would the people who know you best say you know God intimately, not just facts about Him? What is one step you could take this week to grow closer to Him, rather than just learning more about Him?

Introduction

Psychologists tell us we are hardwired with six universal emotions—joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise; and left uncontrolled, every one of them can crash into something destructive. Think of those emotions as planes constantly taking off from every home, office, and school. Without a control tower, they will eventually crash. Love is meant to be that control tower for your soul, because the only place with no love at all is hell. First John is called “The Love Book” since John uses the word love 46 times in five chapters. In 1 John 2:15–17, he shows us how not to waste it. Anything you love more than God, or instead of God, is wasted love.

Key Points

1. Love God, Not the World

Notes



Two stores once opened across the street from each other. One put up a sign that said, "If you need it, we have it." The other answered with, "If we don't have it, you don't need it." If God does not have it, you do not need it.

Do not waste your love chasing what this world offers, because Jesus offers everything it promises and offers it better.

2. Look to God, Not the World

The world pulls at us in three ways. In 1 John 2:16 (ESV), John names the first as “...the desires of the flesh...” These are good desires from God, but they get out of control—whether it’s food or drink, instant gratification, position, or power. The second is “...the desires of the eyes...,” the appetite to have more, buy more, and keep up with everyone else, which always ends in envy and debt. The third is the “...pride of life...,” which is the desire to go our own way and believe our thinking instead of God’s Word.

None of these come from the Father; they come from the world. If you love this world and not the God who created it, if you love what you have but not the God who gave it to you, you'll be chasing what won't last. You will never be satisfied, and you'll die realizing too late that you always were looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Enjoy what God gives you, but the moment you love the gift more than the Giver, you are chasing a mirage.

3. Live for God, Not the World

What are you giving your life to that will not even be here next year? John gives us six words that explain why loving this world doesn't only waste your love; it wastes your life: "And the world is passing away ..." (1 John 2:17, ESV). We have something in common with this world: We're both passing away. You may be on the front page today and won't even be

Notes



Don't Waste Your Love

Proof Positive | Week 38 | 1 John 2:15-17

Reflection Questions

1. What area of your life right now competes with your love of God, whether it is a person, a possession, or a desire you have let get out of control?

2. Which pulls at you the hardest: the desires of your flesh, the desires of your eyes, or the pride of life? What would it look like to hand that one thing over to God this week?

3. If you thought honestly about how you spend your time and your money, would you say you are living for the world you can see or the God you cannot? What is one change you could make this week to live more for Him?

Introduction

Just as there is real gold and fool's gold, there is teaching that is true and teaching that is false. As followers of Jesus, we must learn to tell the difference. In 1 John 4, John gives us three tools by which to recognize true prophets from false ones. Only believe what is based on the Word of God, exalts the Son of God, and comes from the Spirit of God.

Key Points

1. Test the Teaching

David Vetter was known as “the Bubble Boy.” He was born without an immune system and had to live inside a sterile, protective bubble for 12 years just to survive, because even the smallest germ could kill him.

Just as there are germs that are always waging war against our bodies, there are false preachers and teachers and preaching and teaching that are constantly warring against biblical truth and our faith. We do not have any kind of bubble to protect us from false teaching, but we do have a test. The word “test”

Notes

[illegible]

3. Trust the Truth

Let the Spirit inside you be your insulation, and you will never be fooled by what is only pretending to be true.

Only believe what is based on the Word of God, exalts the Son of God, and comes from the Spirit of God. Test everything you hear, because not everything that sounds spiritual is true and not everyone who claims Christ actually knows Him.

Notes

[illegible]

Don't Be Fooled

Proof Positive | Week 39 | 1 John 4:1-6

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever accepted something as true just because it sounded good or came from someone convincing, without actually testing it against God's Word? What would it look like to test it now?

2. When someone talks about Jesus, do you know enough of what Scripture says about who He is to recognize if they are describing someone else? What is one thing you could study this week to get to know Him better?

3. Can you point to a time when the Holy Spirit helped you recognize something was wrong even before you could explain why? How can you lean on Him more this week when you are unsure what to believe?

Introduction

Key Points

1. God Has Personally Displayed His Love

The Apostle John makes it even clearer when he says, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8, ESV). Notice the difference: Love is something we do, but for God, love is what He is. That means His love for you

Notes

[illegible]

has nothing to do with your performance; you cannot make Him love you more by doing your best or love you less by doing your worst.

2. God Has Practically Demonstrated His Love

Talk is cheap, and plenty of people question whether God loves anyone at all when they look at the tragedy and suffering in this world. But John gives us one piece of evidence just as real and just as historical as any tragedy: the cross. "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9, ESV).

The word “manifested” means to come out in the open, to make a public demonstration of something. God has not just told us He loves us; He has shown us. “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” (1 John 4:10, ESV). He took the first step. He made the first move. He paid the full price of that love when He sent Jesus to die for our sins.

If you ever wonder whether God could really love you, go to the cross, because His love does not stop there; it only starts there.

3. God Has Powerfully Declared His Love

Jesus was not born into this world like the rest of us. As the Son of God, He was sent into it, a perfect man sent as a personal Savior, so that in Him God could declare His love to every human being who would ever live. John draws out what that means for us: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us"

(1 John 4:11–12, ESV). If God is love and God lives in you, His love will show up in how you treat others—friends and enemies, family and strangers alike.

Just as a compass always points toward true north because it responds to the earth's magnetic field, once God's love abides in you, your heart becomes a compass that always points toward love. Do you understand what this means? It means you'll love your friends, but you'll also love your enemies. You'll love your family, but you'll also love strangers. You'll love your neighbor, and you'll also love the world. You'll love those who do you right, but you'll also love those who do you wrong. You'll love those who know God, and you'll love those who don't.

You cannot keep God's love to yourself; if it is truly in you, it will move you to love the people around you, even the ones who are hardest to love.

4. God Has Permanently Determined His Love

John writes, “By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:17–18, ESV). One day you will stand before God, but that should not frighten you, because if His love truly is in you, fear has no place left to live.

A grandfather once told his granddaughter his wedding ring stays on because he loves her grandmother. She noticed her grandmother's ring did come off. But his never came off. God's ring never comes off either.

Mary Ann Bird grew up disfigured and teased mercilessly. Once, during a school hearing test, which Mary Ann dreaded and always tried to cheat, one teacher leaned close to her good ear and whispered, "I wish you were my little girl."

Notes



No Love Like It

Proof Positive | Week 40 | 1 John 4:7-18

That is what God has said to you since before you were born, and because of a love like that, you can become His child today.

Notes

Key Takeaway

God's love for you was never about what you could do for Him. It was proven at the cross, declared to the whole world. And it will never be taken back. There is no love like it, and because of that love, you can belong to Him today.



No Love Like It

Proof Positive | Week 40 | 1 John 4:7-18

Reflection Questions

1. What would change if you truly believed God's love depends on Him and not on you?

2. When you think about the cross, does it feel like proof that God loves you personally, or does it still feel distant? What is one way you could meditate on that truth this week?

3. Is there someone in your life who is hard for you to love, whether an enemy, a stranger, or someone who has hurt you? What would it look like to let God's love move through you toward that person this week?
