

## “We Purify in Hope”

*“How Shall We Live” – part 2 (umcdiscipleship.org)*

1 John 3:1-7

**[Title slide]** *Welcome, Prayer*

**[baseball glove]** Did you know the first baseball game was recorded in the Bible? Look it up. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the Big Inning.” OK, so that’s a corny way to start a sermon. But whether you’re groaning or laughing, at least you’re listening now!

I love dad jokes. In fact, one of the ways I can recognize my children is by their response to my humor. If suddenly they started laughing at my jokes, I would begin to doubt their identity. And if my jokes started making sense, they would probably ask, “Who are you, and what happened to our real dad?”

**[Father and son, verse]** This morning we are reading again from the letter of 1<sup>st</sup> John. Last week, we talked about John’s purpose – he was one of the original apostles, and early church father, and this letter, written within his faith community, was his last word to those who never had the chance to meet Jesus face-to-face. John poured out his heart for his dear children – us – so that we could know God’s love.

“How great is God’s love, that we should be called his children!” says verse 3:1. That’s a pretty high honor. Unlike my children, who are stuck with me for biological reasons and didn’t have a choice, God chooses his children.

John says how wonderful it is that God calls us his children. When I call my children, it’s usually to get them to set the table or clean their rooms. Yet God calls us his beloved. God isn’t required to call us his children; it has nothing to do with biology or legality. By love, God looks at us and says, “Yup. They’re mine!” If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. His wallet photo album would have a million pages.

**[Crowd, verse]** John goes on to say, the world will not recognize us as God’s children. The world doesn’t know God, because the world doesn’t love God. The Hebrew word for “know” is *yada*. It means to know someone intimately, inside and out; not just being content to know their name and phone number. God knows what makes us tick, our thoughts and moods, our hopes and dreams. No

one knows us better than God. By comparison, the world looks at us and says, "I don't get you." Being known as God's child is a whole new level of being understood, down to the number of hairs on your head.

**[messy child]** When you really think about it, it's strange that God loves us and calls us his children, at least by our standards. For a comparison, take our own human children. By nature, they makes messes. Anyone who has ever changed a diaper knows that. Spiritually, as God's children, we also struggle. We are impure, selfish, emotionally messy. That's why John says God's love is amazing, lavish, surprising. We tend to feel unworthy of this attention and love God showers on us. We don't deserve it; it's called grace. You can't earn God's love. You have to receive it humbly.

**[bible verses]** Even though we are God's children, John reminds us how incomplete we still are in this life. By God's mercy and grace, we are being remade, renewed, conformed to the life, love, and example of Jesus Christ. Yet this process takes time. John says, "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3)

This passage echoes a similar thought from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

**[mystery]** Part of our Christian faith is learning to embrace mystery. That's tough. In today's world of instant information, we want answers to every question, right now. We have scientific processes, the internet and social media, even dictionaries and encyclopedias, if you're into that sort of thing. But when we try to apply those methods to understanding God and the Bible, we come up short, because you cannot dissect a story, especially not when you are part of it. You can only hope to reflect, meditate, and simply enjoy the relationship God shares with you. It's only in the next life, at the Resurrection, when we finally see God face-to-face, that God's glory will be fully revealed, and we will know God just as God knows us. Better yet, we will know ourselves the way God knows and loves us.

**[Jesus and children]** Children feature prominently in the Bible. Of course, children are no more pure than we are. But spiritually, there is something different about a child, in attitude and demeanor. In Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” In Matthew 18:10, Jesus also said, “...their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” In other words, the pure faith of a child is something that we should all long to have.

How can we obtain it? I have a two ideas that might help.

**[Hands, world map]** First, we need to understand that our greatest desire in this life ought to be becoming children of God, not just creations of God. God, the Creator, made this world for us to enjoy, and created us for a relationship with himself. In fact, God is inherently relational. Three persons in one being – the Father, Son, and Spirit, eternally connected and relating to each other in perfect love. Any religion that posits God as aloof and alone, solitary in the void of the universe, doesn’t understand the nature of the God of the Bible, the One who entered the world in Jesus, to love and save the world, who sends us the Holy Spirit to continually guide us and comfort us. Moving from creation of God to child of God is the natural and proper way to grow in our relationship with God and “purify in hope.”

**[Serve God, not the world]** Second, we should understand that the world, meaning those opposed to God, will always have trouble understanding and recognizing God’s children, because we don’t fit their expectations. Take Matthew 5:9, for example: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.” Peace making is dangerous. It doesn’t bring fame or fortune, and it is often ridiculed. Yet God expects us to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, and pray for those who persecute us. (Matthew 5:38-48) In the end, we have to ask ourselves, whom do we want to please? Our heavenly Father, or ourselves? Purity comes from pleasing God.

**[verses]** Let’s read 1 John 3:2-3 again. “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”

Purity matters. I’m not saying that Christians are perfect. What we are experiencing is called “sanctification”. We are being set apart for a specific purpose, for God’s purpose. We are being purified, gradually, when we give our wants and desires over to God. God, by the Spirit, creates in us a more perfect reflection of Jesus. It’s a process, and it takes time.

In sanctification, God takes away our “bent to sinning,” as the old hymn goes. The issue is this: if we choose to continue to sin, even when we know God’s will (and friends, we ought to know, since discipleship includes reading the Bible!), then we create a false dichotomy, a paradox, a hypocrisy. Sin and love of God cannot coexist in one person. Eventually, something has to give. Therefore purification requires honesty, confession, and being real with God.

Purity must be desired. Integrity must be strived for. It does not come naturally or easily. But by the grace of God, we can find it.

**[Hope]** John says that this hope for Jesus, this hope for what can be better in us and in the world, is what God uses to purify us. Think about what it feels like to be hopeless, just for a moment. Think of things that make you despair. Conflict, injustice, greed, selfishness and indifference. When faced with those things, it can be difficult to stay hopeful. And it is much easier to fall to temptation.

We need to be people of hope, especially in the church. Without hope, there is nothing. Even John’s community was struggling with false teachings, people who were trying to deny the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Hope was their defense, and it can be ours, too. In today’s world, hopeless people are also vulnerable to bad teaching, being led astray, being scammed, being lied to. Those with hope recognize and reject those attacks and instead take Paul’s advice in Philippians 4:8 - they think about “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

**[water bottle]** Did you know, when you buy bottled water at the stores, it isn’t actually pure water? In chemistry we learn that pure water isn’t healthy for you, because it lacks the electrolytes your body needs. Fortunately for us, pure water doesn’t exist in the natural world. There are always small amounts of

dissolved minerals in it, so it's safe and healthy to drink. However, the bottled water is purified. It goes through a process, like filtration or reverse osmosis, to remove the impurities. The bad stuff is taken out, the good stuff left in.

**[title slide]** Psalm 119:9 tells us how to keep ourselves on the path of purification. “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.” As we read God's word, as the Spirit speaks to us, as we follow Jesus Christ with everything we have and everything we are, God continues to sanctify us and use us to bring hope and healing to the world around us. That's what the church is for – to glorify God by ministering, giving, and loving the world around us, the world that doesn't know us, not yet. And that is our hope.

Let's pray.

Memory Verse: 1 John 3:2-3

“When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be called a child of God? How does that fact make itself known in someone's life?
2. In what ways has God lavished his love on us? (1 John 3:1) How have we responded to that love?
3. In what areas of life does purity make a huge difference? How does one regain purity?
4. Why is what we are becoming in Christ a mystery? Why wouldn't God reveal everything to us now?
5. Finish this sentence: “I know that I will be like Christ when I ...” (1 John 3:2)