

# LESSER LOVES

12 • 24 • 2025

1 JOHN 2:5-6

What stories do you remember from childhood? As the oldest of five kids, I often listened to stories long past the time when they would be considered age-appropriate. Many winter afternoons would find a 10-year-old Allison snuggled with a chubby-cheeked little brother to watch Winnie the Pooh.

In one of these adventures, Pooh ends up comically trapped in a borough entrance. After gorging himself on honey, he simply cannot fit back out and finds himself immovably wedged in the narrow opening. His friends attempt to break him free, but at last tell him the undeniable truth: unless he refrains from honey—and shrinks his round middle—he will remain trapped. Pooh complies, but one tempting night he nearly gives in to his appetite. Realizing his vulnerability, his friends quickly remove the honey, while Pooh says lamentably to himself, “I wasn’t going to eat it, I was just going to taste it.”

While Pooh does desire freedom, his desire for honey still rivals it. I wonder if you, like me, have rivaling loves? Theologian Michael Reeves writes in his book *Delighting in the Trinity*, “. . . we will only change what we love when something proves itself to be more desirable to us than what we already love. I will, then, always love sin and the world until I truly sense that Christ is better.”

How then do we rightly order our loves? How do we know and experience that Christ is better? Let’s consider together John’s words:

*“But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: The one who says he remains in him should walk just as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:5-6, CSB).*

In this letter, John wants to assure his listeners that this Triune God in whom they have believed is the real deal—worth every ounce of devotion and obedience they have. He makes two of the most famous statements about God: “God is light” (1:5), and “God is love” (4:7). This God is one of complete truth, radiant purity, and generous love. And through Christ, he loves us with a love that is full, free, and perfect, with or without us.

Yet, that same complete love is progressively made complete in us as we learn to walk with Jesus and “find out what pleases the Lord” (Eph. 5:10, NIV). John shows us that the gospel of grace frees us from thinking we could possibly earn God’s love, while at the same time freeing us to diligently live into his love by choosing to do what pleases him. Dallas Willard sums this up well in his article in the *Christian Herald* (UK) entitled “Live Life to the Full”: “Grace isn’t opposed to effort, it’s opposed to earning.” As we both trust Christ and align our lives to his, our tastes begin to change and our loves find their right place.

Would we, this Advent season, look long at this God whose perfect love overflowed to us in the coming of Jesus, and then ask: Where might lesser loves (just a taste, even) be keeping me from living into God’s love? Then, led patiently by the Spirit, might we make room to experience ever more of his love by following him in child-like trust and obedience. Beloved friends, it’s true: Christ is better and his love sets us free.



## PRAYER

*Father, Son, and Spirit, would you help us to pause and to truly see you. In seeing you, would we experience your love? And in experiencing your love, would we desire to love you in return with our whole lives. Satisfy us with your love and free us to follow you wholeheartedly as we taste and see that you are good. Make your home with us, Lord, as we walk with you. Amen.*



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