

## **2018 Lenten Message Series: “I Give Up” Overview**

Series: Core Strength

Series Text: 1 John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love.”

Series Overview: We have given ourselves to God “At the Rail.” We have surrendered (“I Give Up!”) those parts of our lives that keep us from God’s plan for us. Now we work our cores (“Work Your Core”). This means we focus on and build the core [spiritual] strength that is the center of who we are, whose we are, and all that we do in and for God. That core is God’s love in us! To work our cores, we invite God to give us His love, we strengthen that love through toning and conditioning, and we exercise that love in how we relate to God and to others around us.

Series Method: We will read through, study, and apply the book of 1 John as a church, both in Sunday morning messages and in the church-wide small groups. It will be a seven week series, with an introduction week, one week for each of the five chapters of 1 John, and a conclusion week where we will take the core learnings of 1 John as a foundation for our lives with Jesus. We will read through a daily devotional book of reflections on 1 John, the book *This Is How We Know* (The Seedbed Daily Text: 1 John) by J.D. Walt.

### **SUNDAY, APRIL 8:**

Title: Core Strength 1: “Love Is Something You Do”

Message Overview: In the Bible, love is not a feeling or an emotion. It is a decision. It is a commitment. God grows the feelings into mature love over time and obedience. In the Old Testament the words “loving kindness” or “committed love” are often used to translate *hesed*, the Hebrew word for love. In the New Testament, the Greek word is *agape*. This love is God’s core identity. We see it in all that God does. We see it best displayed by Jesus on the cross. Those who follow Jesus are called to be filled with this love and then demonstrate it through our lives. Christians are people who love one another.

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-7

Text:

Memory Verse: 1 John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love.”

Skit: Training with Bobby Buff (Personal Trainer: At the Gym) (Andrew & Matt L.)

Blurb: This Sunday we start our new message series “Core Strength.” We are working our [spiritual] core, in order to condition and tone our stamina to live our daily lives in spiritual health. Our personal trainer will be 1 John as we read it through together and gather in small “workout” groups (sign ups are in the church lobby!). Our first message is about the core meaning of love. “Love is a many splendored thing!” for sure, but in 1 John we learn it is not a feeling or emotion, but primarily it is something you do. Don’t miss this first training session!

**WORSHIP OUTLINE:****Opening Song:** *The Lion and the Lamb* -Sanctify**Welcome:** -Pastor David

Happy Easter!

We start with the greeting that Christians have been using on Easter for nearly 2,000 years:

I say, "Christ is risen!" and you respond "He is risen indeed!"

Three times. Ready?

Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed!] (3X)

Amen!

My name is David Werner, and I'm the pastor here at Forest Hills Church

Where we love God and others, grow in Christ, and serve in the power and leading of the HS

A special welcome to those who are here for the first time.

We invite you to stop by the welcome center on your way out and get a mug.

We want you to know that here your cup runs over with blessings from God!

We love kids at Forest Hills, and so this serve is intended for kids, too.

We think you'll find this service not only fun, but also helping you grow, spiritually.

We have bags for you to explore, and an activity table in the back.

**PP:** Memory Verse:

"Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love." -1 John 4:7-8

**Memory Verse:**

Our memory verse today takes us right to the "core" of our new series: Love! We're reading through 1 John together. And our memory verse is perhaps the key verse of the book.

Let's try it together...

"Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love." -1 John 4:7-8

**Worship Music Set:** - Sanctify*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling!**Good, Good Father**Resurrecting*

Worship Prayer

**Prayers:** (Andrew)**Grow Moment:** (David)

For our new message series on 1 John, we're also launching a new cycle of small groups.

We're working on building our spiritual cores together, for the next 7 weeks.

So, let's get some advice from one of the greatest body builders of all time.

As you listen, listen for the importance of not going it alone!

**Video:** (Arnold Schwarzenegger) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCyzvbg5XAo> (1:29 min.)

Clear vision: That's our next 7 week training cycle

Training partners. That's why we're starting small groups.

These will be our training partners!

We will gather together, to encourage each other, challenge one another, watch over each other, and help each other.

You need a plan! So sign up for a small group today! In the lobby.

We've got them before & after worship, Mon. mornings, Tues. evenings & Wed. evenings.

It's for the whole family!

And, if you sign up, you also get this excellent daily devotional book on 1 John.

Read the first 3 devotions before you meet.

Let's get pumped up!!

And now, we've secured our own personal trainer here today.

Maybe even better than Arnold Schwarzenegger, want you all to meet, Bobby Buff!

**Training with Bobby Buff** (Andrew & Matt)

**Offering:** *God is Love* -Sanctify

**Message:** Core Strength 1: "Love Is Something You Do!"

**Bumper Video**

**PP#1:** Core Strength: Love Is Something You Do!

"Now, these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." -1 Cor. 13:13

Core Strength: "Love Is Something You Do." 1 Corinthians 13:13, "Now, these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

**PP#2:** *A picture of my face superimposed over Arnold Schwarzenegger's in a body building pose.*

I want you to know, it's not lost on me. I'm starting a message series using physical workouts and gym routines, to try to teach about spiritual conditioning. I am fully aware that my physique tells you all that I'm no expert on physical toning. I can't tell you much about visiting a gym regularly.

But luckily for me, I don't have to be a *perfect* physical specimen in order to draw upon the principles of conditioning. And I do apply them in smaller ways! Those who live near me know that most days I'm pretty committed to getting out there and going on a cardio...walk. But my doctor says it's as good as running! My problem is that I need to bring my caloric intake under control. You might be happy to know that even though it's past Easter, I've kept going with my no-calories-after-supper-fast I had during Lent. Hey, small steps!

**PP#3:** Bible study for life transformation!

Engaging 1 John as a model.

Our goal this message series is to practicing engaging Scripture—God's Word given to us—in a way that transforms our lives. We've declared a Jubilee Sabbath, to get restored back to God.

We've opened our hearts to Jesus at the rail. Then we gave up what keeps us from fully following Jesus. Now we are going to learn to engage God's Word, to tone us, shape us, keep us on the right path that God wants for us. We're going to 1 John to see God clearly, and we're going to study 1 John, by reading it, engaging it on Sundays, and in small groups, and in daily a devotional, and as we do, we're going to be practicing the method for how to engage any Scripture in a life-transforming way.

**PP#4:** Engaging Scripture to Transform [*Reese, make this slide look interesting, please.*]

1. Listen
  - Read it
  - Learn about it
  - Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying
  - Sit with it, let it work on you
2. Discuss
  - Read it with others
  - Learn from others
  - Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying
  - Meet regularly
3. Apply
  - Ask what God wants you to do about it
  - Make small changes in your daily life
  - Support from others and the Holy Spirit

There are three basic steps to reading Scripture this way. 1. Listen! Read it. Learn what you can about it, it's context, it's situation in history, what the original purpose was. But also intentionally ask God to reveal to you what you should hear. Listen to the Holy Spirit, that inspired it's first writing, to also inspire your reading of it. This is a prayer-ful process. And then, let it work on you over time. Let it steep. Keep listening as you go about the rest of your day.

2. Engage others. Sit with a partner, or small group. Ask what God is saying to others through the reading. You will hear God speaking through others. This is why the small groups are key!

And 3. Application. Do something about what you hear and learn. Ask God what He wants you to take away from this reading. It's not just about learning more. What's key is what you are going to do about what you learn. Scripture is alive! And by that I mean that when you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit wants to reveal things to you, show you insights into your life, and make corrections, improvements, affirmations, and ways to get better. Normally the Holy Spirit will give you something to do with what you have read...usually a small thing. Your response to reading the Bible should not just be, "Oh, that's interesting." It should be, "Oh, that's what I have to do." The ultimate goal of reading the Bible is holy living. We'll come back to that more in a couple of weeks. Just remember, reading the Bible is dangerous. When done right, it doesn't leave you the same!

**PP#5:** 1 John

In the New Testament

Almost to the end of the Bible

Is a General Epistle (letter) - written to all Christians

So, let's start today's workout. We begin with some weight lifting. Lift your Bibles! Grab the ones in the pews, if you will. The Bible has two broad parts. The first is the Old Testament, testifying to the old covenant, or the plan of salvation that came through animal sacrifices. This was all before Jesus, and takes up about three-fourths of the Bible. Mostly it's the story of the Jews, called the Israelites.

The second part is the New Testament, or new covenant: the plan of salvation that came through Jesus. You find it about three-fourths of the way through the Bible. Find Matthew, if you can. So, the Old Testament is before Jesus, the New Testament is all about Jesus.

Flip through the pages with me. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—keep flipping—are all stories about Jesus’ life. Acts—keep flipping—is about the lives of the Apostles. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon, are all letters written by the Apostle Paul to churches and people about Jesus.

Keep flipping: next are the general epistles or letters: Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John and Jude are all letters written to all Christians. Revelation, the last book, describes the end times. Well, maybe “describe” is a bit generous. Let’s just say it’s *about* the end times!

So, flip back to the three Johns. Find 1 John.

It’s written to all Christians.

### **PP#6:** 1 John

Author: John the Apostles (who also wrote the Gospel of John, 1,2,3 John and Revelation)

Date: Circa 90 A.D.

Location: Ephesus

Audience: Christians around Asia Minor

Purpose: A general encouragement to all Christians to stay true to Jesus.

Written like a sermon, a message about God’s love.

Notice that 1 John doesn’t look like a letter! Most of these books in the middle of the New Testament look like letters, with the “to” and “from” identified. The author, although not identified, is certainly the same author—because of writing style and syntax—as the Gospel of John, these three little letters, and the book of Revelation. Most people in history have identified the author as the Apostle John. The dating of the letter is towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, due to some of the gnostic themes in the book, which developed about 40 years after Jesus’ death. We’ll come back to this, too, in a couple of weeks. John was living in Ephesus—that’s eastern Turkey—for the last part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and so most likely it was written when he was living there. He seems to have written it as an open letter to the Christians there in the surrounding area, to encourage them to hold fast to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 John, it seems, is more like a sermon than a letter. It’s a sermon about the love of God, and what that means for those who follow Jesus. Pretty exciting stuff, actually. That’s why we’re reading it. We want the transformation that John is talking about when we live in this love of God!

### **PP#7:** Theme verses of 1 John

1 John 3:16 “This is how we know love: Jesus laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”

1 John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love.”

If you wanted to look for a theme verse in 1 John, I would suggest two. The first is 1 John 3:16. You’ve probably heard of John 3:16. Some suggest it as a theme verse in the whole Bible. Well, 1 John 3:16 could be a theme verse for 1 John. “This is how we know love: Jesus laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” It’s about love. Jesus showed us that love when He died for us. We show that same love when live for others.

Or, the other theme verse could be our memory verse. Let's try it together again: "Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love." -1 John 4:7-8

**PP#8:** Major themes in 1 John

God is love  
 We have fellowship with God in this love  
 We love others with God's love  
 Obedience is the test of love  
 We are being made holy  
 God is overcoming the evil in the

All right. So the theme word in 1 John is love. God is love. God showed His love to us in Jesus. We live that love when we live for others. So, the major themes are God's love, that love shown to us through Jesus, us living lives of this love through obedience, holiness in our lives, and God's overcoming of evil in our world. Hang on to the theme of love here, as we start reading.

**PP#9:** 1 John 1:1-7

1 We announce to you what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have seen and our hands handled, about the Word of Life. 2 The Life was revealed, and we have seen, and we testify and announce to you the Eternal Life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. 3 What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy can be complete.

Turn to 1 John 1. Let's start reading. Now, you might notice a lot of similarities to how the Gospel of John begins. Sometime this week, when you have some time, compare the openings of the two. Pretty cool. So, in 1 John, John starts out by saying that he and those with him share about Jesus, whom they have personally met and experienced. Verse 1, "We announce to you what existed from the beginning [Jesus always was, He is God], what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have seen and our hands handled, about the Word of Life. [Jesus is the Word of Life, salvation.] 2 The Life was revealed, and we have seen, and we testify and announce to you the Eternal Life that was with the Father [Jesus is God] and was revealed to us [in the person of Jesus]. 3 What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy can be complete.

John is sharing all this, bears his own personal witness and testimony, because he really, really wants them to know Jesus personally, too. Through Jesus they can be restored in relationship with God, and fellowship with other believers! That is abundant life and true joy!

**PP#10:** 1 John 1:1-7

5 This is the message that we have heard from Him and announce to you: "God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all." 6 If we claim, "We have fellowship with Him," and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully. 7 But if we live in the light in the same way as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin.

Verse 5, “5 This is the message that we have heard from Him and announce to you: “God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all.” 6 If we claim, “We have fellowship with Him,” and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully. 7 But if we live in the light in the same way as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin.”

So, God’s love here is introduced in Jesus as Light, and Truth, and Fellowship. God’s love has no darkness in it, no selfishness. If we claim to be God-followers, Jesus-followers, Light-followers, Truth-followers, then our lives should show evidence of light and not darkness. When we strive to live in the light, Jesus’ healing blood washes away our sin, and makes us able to live lives of light. We are being made holy. For John, if God is love, that means that we live out that love. God’s love is legible in our lives. When you are someplace, or with someone, and then you leave, is there a palpable presence that God’s love was there? Is that your impact? Is that what you bring wherever you go? That’s what John is talking about here!

Sounds like we may need to go to the gym! We need to strengthen our core!

**PP#11:** Our “spiritual core” according to 1 John, is *God’s Love*

Working your core:

1. God is love (*agape*: self-sacrificing commitment)
2. God’s love is shown best in Jesus’ sacrifice
3. We receive God’s love when we receive Jesus
4. We live God’s love through obedience
5. We love others with God’s love

So, here’s our core, our centralized foundation, from which everything else comes. Our core strength is: the love that is God.

Now love is a word that we often misuse. “I love pizza!” Or “I love you [have romantic feelings for you, my wife].” or “I love you [I care deeply about you, my friend, my sister].”

But the love that God is, is not those things. It’s a very special kind of love described in the Bible, almost unique to the Bible. The word as used in the New Testament, and here in 1 John, is *agape*. It means the kind of love that shows itself in self-sacrificing commitment for the other. A deep caring about others to the point where you put them, and their betterment, before yourself.

This love that God is, is most clearly seen in Jesus, who gave up everything, and sacrificed Himself for us, even dying on the cross, out of God’s loving commitment for us. It’s a steadfast commitment focused on the other. That’s hard core!

So, back to working our cores: We receive this love that God is when we receive this Jesus as our own, and take Him as our Lord and Savior, choosing to make Him our central purpose.

We then live out this love—that now grows and works in us, as God lives and works in us—through dying to self and living in obedience not to ourselves, but to our Lord Jesus. Love is not a feeling. It’s a choice. It’s an action. It’s something we do. Church, love is not a feeling or an emotion. Yes, feelings and emotions often are there, and even grow out of committed love. But love, godly love, is something we do! Just look at Jesus!

**PP#12:** Godly love is something we do!

So, when we love, we live in obedience. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” And we live it out in how we live NOT for ourselves, but like Jesus, we live for others. Love is something we do!

Are you panting...breathing heavy? It’s hard work, working our cores, isn’t it! Feel the burn? That rub against our normal way of living, how we normally frame our lives through selfishness? Keep working your core. Push out that laziness! Keep going! How do you need to live in better obedience? Keep going! What does that look like in your life?

**PP#13:** *Image of a person basking in God’s love.*

I want to end today, not with a charge, or something you need to do. I want to end with that buzz, that good feeling that comes after you work out. It’s that feel-good celebration that comes when you do it right. I want you to just take in, bask in, that amazing love that is God.

It is not the way of the world, nor is it even found randomly in the world. That willful self-sacrificing commitment for the other is not part of the natural order. Yes there is instinct, and sacrifice given for the whole, and we see something close to it in animals protecting their young. But real love is always the gift of God’s own very presence, breaking into creation. Let that soak in. The very best in our world, is when God shows up, or His love is lived out. That is true beauty!

You’ve experienced this. You know what this is like! It’s beautiful! It’s transforming!

Just imagine Jesus! Caring about you that much? There is no way to answer why! It just is. It’s godly love: acceptance, valuing, choosing, going after, giving up for, dying for. And that is the most beautiful thing on earth! That’s why Christians call Jesus’ cross beautiful! It’s because it shows the love that is God. And not only do we get to know it, or be known by Him, we also get to live it, act it out in our lives, make it real where we go.

John can write about this love, but it doesn’t do it justice. That’s why he starts out saying, “We pass on what we have personally experienced. We have seen real love. We have touched Him, and been transformed by Him. It’s beautiful beyond words. We can’t describe it, we just point to Him. And this is our complete joy.”

True love, real love, is always—and only—God. Let His love wash over you, fill you, flow out of you. “Now, these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Amen!

**Closing Song:** *I’m a Believer* - Sanctify

**PP:** Memory Verse

“Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ... God is love.” -1 John 4:7-8

**Announcements:**

Sign up for Small Groups

**Benediction:** -Pastor David