

Chapter 3: God calls us to love beyond fear

1 John 4:18-19

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because God first loved us."

When we think of the word *love*, the first images in our heads may be of softness or sentimentality. But there is a power to the love described in the above passage. We usually understand that our love for our families gives us the conviction to pass through whatever danger and pain is necessary to protect and care for them. As Christians, we receive a radical call to extend this love to our brothers and sisters around the world. This love expands our lens, for like God's love, it does not dismiss, ignore, or minimize what it witnesses. Instead, it is active in seeking justice for our neighbors. But fears - of upsetting people, of personal risks- often silence this robust, attentive love.

AJS Co-Founder Carlos Hernández has been forced to reckon with this powerful love through more than two decades of working for a more just country. Because Carlos loves Honduras, he finds its injustices deeply worrying and impossible to ignore. But this steadfast love for his fellow Hondurans comes at a cost - his advocacy makes many in power angry enough to threaten him. One morning after agreeing to serve on a historic commission to reform Honduras' police, Carlos received a threatening note under his door. He reflects, "Holding the note, I thought of my family and what this meant for them. But this fear was slowly overwhelmed by a quieter and steadier emotion - love. I love my children so much that I want them to grow up in a country where peace and justice reign." Carlos remained on the commission, which has since succeeded in removing over 5,000 corrupt police and training thousands more to serve ethically.

Carlos is insistent that fear will not get the final word. He reminds us that, when we are fearful, we dwell on everything we could lose. But when we are brave, we dwell on everything we can gain. This is what it means to be a brave Christian - to feel fear, but to choose love, and to choose to stand up for what is right and just anyway. Day by day, we focus on everything love has made possible in Honduras: families who find justice after violence, community members standing up to demand better education and health services for their children, and children joining clubs that show them futures beyond violence. These reminders of God's faithfulness, and the examples of people like Carlos, inspire us to love beyond fear.

Questions for reflection:

*What are fears that are preventing you from living and loving in the way that God is calling you?
Who are you being called to love beyond fear?*

Prayer:

God, you have loved us with a perfect love - a love beyond what we can imagine. Forgive us for the times we have let fear dim the brilliant light of your love for the world. Please help us to choose love when we are confronted by fear - and may this love lead us to cross divisions and meet your people in unexpected places. Amen