

For the past two weeks we have been going through a sermon series based on 1 Corinthians 13:13 which reads:

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The first message in this series was titled “A Faith for All Seasons” and it focused on Faith. Here is a quick recap:

1. Faith is comprised of specific knowledge and information given to us by God through His Son and Word. This knowledge is known as THE faith.
2. Faith is produced when we exercise our will through belief and obedience in accordance with the Words of Christ.
3. Faith is a feeling: feelings of Joy, Perseverance and Hope.

The second message was entitled “A New Hope” and it focused on Hope. Here is its recap:

Hope is an experience produced by faith. It is the absolute certainty that we will receive what God has promised us. We have this absolute certainty because it is God who guarantees it, and He already has given it to us.

In the Bible we see that hope means to **trust in; wait for; look for; desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future.**

So, this morning, we will continue our deep dive into God’s Word with the conclusion to our sermon series while focusing on Love in a sermon entitled “All You Need is Love”:

1. Faith,
2. Hope, and
3. **Love**

During the first sermon I shared this screengrab of George Michael singing one of his biggest hit songs, “Faith”. Then we saw an example of biblical faith in Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice his one and only son Isaac.

For the Hope sermon, I shared a moment from the Star Wars original trilogy movie “A New Hope” where Princess Leia asked General Obi-Wan Kenobi for help because he was her only hope. During that message we could see that the Holy Spirit is also a source of hope, for his power causes hope to abound from Romans 15:13.

When we started this series, I also shared a screengrab from the Disney+ show, WandaVision, where the two titular characters are talking in a flashback about Wanda's recent loss of her brother and Vision shares "But what is grief, if not love persevering?".

Here are some additional examples of how the world looks and thinks about love:

1. In 1967, The Beatles released their hit single "All You Need is Love"
2. The "Love Is..." comic strip from New Zealand cartoonist Kim Casali started in the 1960s and reached international renown in the early 70s when the movie "Love Story" used one of their most famous strips as part of their marketing campaign
3. In Star Wars "The Empire Strikes Back" movie from 1980 we get this famous exchange between Princess Leia and Han Solo.
4. Years later, in 1993, Trinidadian-German Eurodance artist Haddaway released the single "What is Love"
5. Author Nicholas Sparks wrote "A Walk to Remember" in 1999 and in this book, we see the quote: "Love is like the wind, you can't see it but you can feel it."
6. Finally, also on Disney+, based on a character from the Toy Story 4 movie, in late 2019, "Forky Asks a Question: What is Love?"

So, now let's look at some definitions of the word love to help us get to an answer to Forky's question.

DEFINITIONS

Before I dive into the definitions, let me give a fair warning that some of these definitions shared today will be referring to romantic love between a man and a woman so for any remaining little ears in our audience, parents beware.

The English word "love" has been used in reference to a "strong affection for another" since before the 12th century, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary. It has been said that the English language has only one word for love, but English also has other words *implying* love such as affection, friendship, attraction, etc. The word "love" though is a constantly evolving concept with ever-broadening definitions. Human love, therefore, cannot be simply defined, as it is being redefined all the time.

Webster's most current definition of love reads:

NOUN:

strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties; attraction based on sexual desire : affection and tenderness felt by lovers; affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests; an assurance of affection; warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion; the object of attachment, devotion, or admiration; a beloved person; unselfish loyal and benevolent; concern for the good of another: such as the fatherly concern of God for humankind or brotherly concern for others; a person's adoration of God; a god (such as Cupid or Eros) or personification of love; an amorous episode; the sexual embrace; a score of zero; God.

Interesting that God makes the list last.

VERB:

to hold dear; to feel a lover's passion, devotion, or tenderness for; caress; to fondle amorously; to copulate with; to like or desire actively; take pleasure in; to thrive in; to feel affection or experience desire.

As we have done in the previous weeks, now let's look at what the Bible says about the word love; both from the Old Testament and the New Testament.

To truly answer Forky's question of "What is Love?" we need to go to the origin of love. The Bible tells us that love originates in God.

In the English language, the word *love* is forced to bear the burden of a multitude of meanings. We "love" everything from "chicken and waffles" to our parents, but in vastly different ways. The languages in which the Bible was written, Hebrew and Greek, are more precise in that they utilize different words for the different types of love. The ancient languages differentiate among sexual, brotherly, and familial love, and the kind of love that God has for creation and that we may have for Him.

For any Seinfeld fans out there, back in Season 8, Episode 19 we get "The Yada Yada" episode. Amusingly, this 'Yada' word has its root meaning in Hebrew. The Hebrew word *yada* and the Greek word *eros* are the words used to indicate sexual love. In Genesis 38 Judah makes love with a woman he assumes is a prostitute. In the original Hebrew of verse 26, the word is *yada*, meaning "to know" and in this context "to know carnally" or "to have sexual intercourse with." In the New Testament, the Greek word *eros* is not found because there is no context in which it might be used.

The second type of love is the brotherly love that exists between close friends regardless of gender. There is no sexual connotation; it is the love for and by a friend. The Hebrew word is *ahabah*, and it is used to describe the love between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:17.

And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

The Greek word for brotherly love or affection is *phileo*, as used to refer to friendship in John 15:19, Romans 12:10, and Hebrews 13:1.

¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

¹³ Let brotherly love continue.

Of family or tribal love, the Hebrew word is once again *ahabah*, indicating a deep affection, and the Greek word is *storge*. We find *ahabah* throughout the Old Testament because of its broad range of meanings, but the Greek word *storge* is only found in the New Testament as a negative word, *astorgos*, meaning “not loving good” (2 Timothy 3:3).

Finally, there is the Hebrew word *chesed* and the Greek word *agape*, which are used to express the kind of love God demonstrates toward His elect. *Chesed* is often translated as “steadfast love” or “lovingkindness.” A good example of *chesed* is found in Numbers 14:18, “The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression”.

God’s *chesed* love is why He never gives up on those He has adopted as His children. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people repeatedly fell into idolatry and sin, yet He always preserved a remnant; He never gives up on His people. The reason is His *chesed* love.

A similar idea is found in the New Testament with the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* love is the goodwill and benevolence of God shown in self-sacrifice and an unconditional commitment to a loved one. *Agape* is like *chesed* in that it is steadfast, regardless of circumstances. *Agape* love is the kind of love we are to have for God in fulfillment of the greatest commandment as we read in Matthew 22:37:

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Jesus wants to instill *agape* in His followers as we serve others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 22:39; John 13:34).

³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

The ancient Greeks had anywhere between the above four and eight different words for love (*depending on the source*):

- Eros: sexual, erotic

- Philia or Phileo: friendship

- Storge: affection

- Agape: unconditional, divine, selfless

- Ludus: flirtatious, playful, casual, uncommitted

- Pragma: committed, long-standing

- Mania: obsessive, possessive, addictive, dependent

- Philautia: self-love

Love, today, instead of being merely a strong affection for another, is synonymous with acceptance, tolerance, celebration of diversity, open-mindedness, desire, and pleasure.

Another type of love we hear a lot about currently is “self-love” (*philautia*). In a Psychology Today article we find self-love defined as “a state of appreciation for oneself that *grows from actions* that support our physical, psychological and spiritual growth.” Self-love can be a natural and healthy appreciation of self, but also has the potential to easily become excessive, narcissistic, and *selfish*!

The scriptures talk about loving yourself in two different ways:

1. As an Assumption

Leviticus 19:34 reads:

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

And Matthew 22:39 as already read, tells us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We naturally love and care for ourselves. Notice that the Bible never directly tells us to love ourselves because it's unnecessary. (*It tells us to love God and others.*) We take care of our own needs. We do so to the extent of putting ourselves and our welfare, needs, desires, and ambitions first, before God and before others. It is for this reason that God's Word says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3). The problem is not that we do not love ourselves, but that we

love ourselves too much and others too little. Self-love can too easily morph from a natural state to a corruption of what is natural. The goal instead should be for natural love to be transformed into spiritual, or Christ-like love.

Most sins stem from love of self and a lack of love for God and others. Think about it: hate, greed, envy, murder, strife, gossip, slander, arrogance, and pride all result from a love of self. When we love ourselves without regard for God or others, the result is sin. If God's law is summed up by love for God and love for others (Matthew 22:37-40), then sin, defined in Scripture as "lawlessness," is any thought, word, or deed void of (spiritual) love.

2. As a Corruption

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 we read:

3 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. **2** For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, **4** treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **5** having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Do you hear the problem? There will come a day (*and that day certainly seems to be already here*) when people will be lovers of themselves without love for others, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Self-love is natural, but it is not Christ-like or spiritual love.

In 1 John 3:16-18 we read:

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **17** But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

According to this passage, Jesus is the reason we even know what spiritual love is! In laying down His life for us, He taught us everything we need to know about true love.

Then in John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And in Romans 8:38-39 we read:

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the most basic sense, love is the emotion felt and actions performed by someone concerned for the well-being of another person. Love involves affection, compassion, care, and self-sacrifice. Love originates in the Triune Godhead, within the eternal relationship that exists among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 John 4:7–8).

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Humanity has always struggled to define love, and is constantly redefining it, but God's definition is clear and will never change. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 we see best defined:

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

C. S. Lewis concisely said, *"Love is unselfishly choosing for another's highest good."*

Loving is unique to the human experience of being an image-bearer of God. Marcella and I are pet owners and as such we may love our dog, Mercy; and we are concerned for her well-being and care for her. On the other hand, I cannot say that Mercy truly loves us back. Oh, she wags her nub of a tail, sits by us, and comes when we call (*if she can hear us*), but all those responses are because we feed her, take care of her, and keep her warm at night. Animals cannot love in the same way that humans, created in God's image, can love.

In Matthew 5:43-44 we read:

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Romans 5:10 states:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

And we read in Colossians 1:21-23:

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

So, this is the good news of Jesus Christ: For God so loved His enemies (*us*), that He gave His only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Three days after He died, Jesus rose again, conquering death. Through his death, we are reconciled to God (*no longer enemies, but friends!*). Because of Him, we can be saved. Whoever believes in Jesus through faith will have everlasting life!

If you need to truly now this truth about the good news of Jesus Christ, please see John or I after service.

We read in 1 John 4:9–11, 19:

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

As a mathematician I enjoyed coming across this biblical example of the transitive property: God is love, and Jesus is God, then Jesus is love.

Jesus is the reason we even know what love is. In laying down His life for us, He taught us everything we need to know about true love. Love is self-sacrificing, generous, unending, not a temporary feeling or attraction. Because of God's love for the world, we know love is also undeserving and often unreciprocated.

Biblical love is the love of God. It is a perfect steadfast, unwavering, and uniting love. We who belong to Jesus have received God's love and are able to share it by choosing to love others. We do that by remembering that in Christ, we are, and have, everything we need. Therefore, we are free to give everything we have. That's true freedom. That's real joy. And that's biblical love!

Only love will prevail in the end.

Let's pray.