

Our Loving God
Romans 5:6-8
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I enjoy hearing what kids say about love.

- Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on cologne and they go out and smell each other.
- Love is like an avalanche where you have to run for your life.
- Love is the most important thing in the world...but baseball is pretty good too.
- Once I'm done with kindergarten, I'm going to find me a wife.
- I'm not rushing into being in love. I'm finding fourth grade hard enough.
- It gives me a headache to think about that stuff. I'm just a kid. I don't need that kind of trouble.
- Love will find you, even if you are trying to hide from it. I been trying to hide from it since I was five, but the girls keep finding me.
- You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget, and it's good for them to get reminded.

God says He loves us a lot because He means it. And it's good for us to be reminded of this fact because we forget.

I initially thought the attribute of love would be the easiest one to preach on but not so much. Love may be the best known, but least understood of all His attributes. I share Tozer's trepidation: *"It is like trying to take the ocean in your arms, or embrace the atmosphere...I can no more do justice to this awesome and wonder-filled topic than a child can grasp a star. Still, by reaching toward the star the child may call attention to it and even indicate the direction one must look to see it. And so, I stretch my heart toward the high, shining love of God...No one can do it, so I suppose I must do the best I can and trust the Holy Spirit to make up for human lack."*

Because it's difficult to define and describe the love of God, let's use the prayer Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:14-19 as our prayer today: ***"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be***

strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

We come today to the conclusion of our “Behold Your God” series. While we certainly haven’t exhausted the depths of who God is, I trust you’ve gotten to know Him better this summer. Hopefully this series has primed the pump so that you will continue to know Him and grow in Him. May your beholding lead to believing which will lead you to becoming so you can be all about behaving for His glory and honor.

I purposely put the topic of God’s love at the end of this series because love is the supreme expression of God’s personhood and flows out of His goodness. It affects all His other attributes. One person writes: *“Love is not something He chooses to do or give. It is the very essence of who He is. He doesn’t just love – He is love. It motivates His every action, directs His activities, and reflects His desires.”*

Chip Ingram defines God’s love this way: *“His holy disposition toward all that He has created that compels Him to express unconditional affection and selective correction to provide the highest quality of existence, both now and forever, for the object of His love.”*

Theologian Wayne Grudem offers a simple, yet profound definition of love: *“God’s love means that God eternally gives of Himself to others.”*

Scriptural Survey

Our culture today is primarily focused on romantic or brotherly love – but God’s love is *agape*, the purest, deepest and most unconditional kind of love. It’s not merely a friendly attitude He projects but the essence of His very nature. I did a search on my Bible study program which came up with 745 results. Here’s just a handful:

Psalm 36:7: *“How precious is your steadfast love, O God!”*

Psalm 63:3: *“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”*

Psalm 119:76: “Let your **steadfast love** comfort me according to your promise...”

Isaiah 38:17: “But **in love** you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.”

Hosea 14:4: “I will heal their apostasy; I will **love them freely**, for my anger has turned from them.”

Zephaniah 3:17: “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will **quiet you by his love**; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

2 Thessalonians 3:5: “May the Lord direct your hearts to the **love of God** and steadfastness of Christ.”

1 John 3:1: “See what **kind of love** the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

1 John 4:8: “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**”

A world-renowned theologian was asked what he considered to be the most significant theological truth he ever encountered. His response was immediate: “Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so!”

Sense and Nonsense

Without a doubt, there is no attribute of God so widely believed as the love of God. At the same time, there is no attribute of God that has been so badly misunderstood. Here are two wrong ideas that can come out of a wrong understanding of His love.

- **Because God loves me I can do whatever I want.** Some people use God’s love as a license to live the way they want. Jesus addressed this in John 14:15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”
- **God’s love means everyone will go to heaven.** Many non-Christians have the idea when they get to the gates of heaven, God will smile and say, “Oh, you’ve been a pretty good person, come on in.” This is the heresy of universalism. While this sounds loving, it’s completely at odds with what the Bible teaches. As Acts 4:12 says, only those who put their complete faith and trust in Christ will be saved: “**And there is salvation in no one**

else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

As Max Lucado says, “*Jesus loves you just the way you are but He loves you too much to let you stay the way you are.*” We see this in Jesus’ interaction with a man who had made money his master. It’s very interesting that Jesus doesn’t clobber him even though cash is his king. Listen to Mark 10:21: “*And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”*

Even though Jesus loved him, he was quick to point out what he was lacking and directed the man to follow Jesus as the Lord of his life. Sadly, verse 22 says: “*Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*” Jesus loved him and yet let him walk away. His love never compromises His truth.

What Love Is

Human love is generally a *response* to the conditions and circumstances around us. We love because someone pleases us or because they’re good looking or because they’re from Wisconsin. By contrast, God loves us *because that’s the kind of God He is. Period.* Nothing in us causes Him to love us.

Richard Strauss suggests 7 characteristics of God’s love.

1. **God’s love is self-giving.** To say it another way, love is a verb, not primarily a feeling. We see this in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: “*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*”
2. **God’s love is sacrificial.** Jesus bore our sins and the shame and suffering which came with that sacrificial act. 1 John 4:10: “*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.*”
3. **God’s love is unconditional.** God’s love is extended to us when we don’t deserve it. Deuteronomy 7:7-8: “*It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose*

you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you...

4. **God's love is eternal.** We can never exhaust the love of God. Jeremiah 31:3: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love."*
5. **God's love is holy.** Since God is holy, then His love must be a holy love that expects holiness in those He loves. Hebrews 12:6: *"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves..."*
6. **God's love is comforting.** True love brings security and comfort. Every time He thinks about you, He thinks about you lovingly. 1 John 4:18: *"There is no fear in love..."*
7. **God's love is life-changing.** 1 John 4:19: *"We love because He first loved us."*

One of the clearest passages about God's love is found in Romans 5:6-8. *"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Let's break it down by looking at 4 descriptions of our condition before we came to Christ:

1. Weak. This word is usually applied to the sick and feeble, to those who have been wiped out by some kind of disease. It's also used in the moral sense as an inability to fulfill a duty.

2. Ungodly. Even if we could change, we had no desire to change in the first place. We were not only weak but wicked, obtuse and obnoxious, irreverent and impious.

3. Sinners. The word "*sinner*" means to miss the target, to deviate. We have totally missed the mark of God's perfection.

4. Enemies. This word is found in verse 10 and means, "*adversaries filled with hostility and hatred.*" This is not a very popular teaching, especially when we're focusing on God's love but it's true. Ephesians 2:3 adds that we were by "*nature objects of God's wrath.*"

There is no reason for God to love us. You are not a naturally lovable person – and neither am I. Sin has infected our lives so much that it has distorted even the parts we think are beautiful. Sin “uglyfies” everything it touches.

If you find all this discouraging, remember this: *If God loved you only when you were lovable, then when you stopped being lovable, God would have to stop loving you!* It’s better to admit the truth, isn’t it? God loves us in spite of our unloveliness. We can count on His love because it doesn’t depend on our personality or our performance.

God’s Unconditional Love

Now that we’ve established the truth about who we are, let’s look at God’s incredible solution to our impossible situation. Romans 5:7-8 reveals the unconditional nature of God’s love: ***“For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.”*** I wonder how many people I would be willing to die for? It’s actually just a handful.

We would do well to memorize verse 8: ***“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** The wonder is not that Christ should die for us – *but that He should do so while we were weak, ungodly, rebellious sinners, and the enemies of God!*

If you’re a believer and struggle to believe God loves you, think about this: *If God loved me enough to give His Son when I was His enemy, surely He loves me enough to care for me now that I am His child.*

Our Response to God’s Love

Biblical love always leads to action. Love is always incomplete alone – it requires some kind of movement. It’s impossible to just say you love someone without demonstrating that love in tangible ways. What are we to do in response to God’s love?

1. Love Him wholeheartedly. Matthew 22:37-38 raises the bar for us. If we say we love God, we need to demonstrate it with everything we’ve got: ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”***

2. Love your neighbors. Matthew 22:39: *“And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

3. Love your enemies. Matthew 5:44: *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*

4. Refuse to seek love in cheap substitutes. It’s so easy to look for love in all the wrong places. Sex outside of marriage is a sin. Watch what you watch. Only text what is appropriate. Get an internet filter like Covenant Eyes. Stay faithful to your vows. Be holy as He is holy. Christian, don’t cave in to the world. Don’t be a deserter like Demas as recorded in 2 Timothy 4:10: *“For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.”*

1 John 2:15-16: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”*

5. Love Compels us to Tell Others. 2 Corinthians 5:14, 20: *“For the love of Christ controls us...Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”* Because we have been the recipients of His incredible love, we are called to be ambassadors of that love and share it with others.

6. Love invites you to be saved. In the passage from Romans 5 that we looked at earlier, the word *“for”* is used 4 different times. The meaning is so broad no one English word can convey what it really means. Here’s how it could be translated, *“for the benefit of”* or *“on behalf of”* or *“instead of.”* When the Bible says Jesus died for you, it means that He died on your behalf, in your place, so that you can enjoy all the benefits of His work.

God’s Lavish Love

Let’s drill deeper by meditating on 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.”* I preached on this passage almost two years ago but thought it would be a good referresher for us.

1. God loves and lavishes. Here’s how it begins: *“For God so loved the world...”* The word *“for”* puts this text in context. If we go back a few verses, we

read that during the time of Moses, God's people experienced a plague as a result of provoking God. With the poison of snakes in their veins, all they had to do was look at a pole with a bronze serpent on it and they would live. God gave them a solution for their sinfulness.

For **"God."** This is precisely where the Bible begins: ***"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*** Everything begins with God and ends with God. The sooner we realize life is all about giving glory to God and not to ourselves, the better off we will be. It's not about you. It's all about Him.

I love that little word **"so"** because it shows us God doesn't love a little, but a lot. I enjoy asking our grandson Pip how big he is. As he pumps his arms high in the air, he proclaims, ***"So big!"*** The volume of God's love is cranked up high because he ***"so loves."*** The word ***"love"*** is the word *agape*, which refers to an unconditional covenant kind of love. It's a verb, meaning it's a word of action.

Notice God loves the whole ***"world."*** This would have been a shock to Jewish listeners who thought God only loved them. I love how the video we just watched proclaims this truth.

While you may not feel loved by others, God loves you more than you can even imagine! You matter to the Majesty! He takes great delight in you, no matter what you've done. He loves you no matter how you've been living. He treasures you in spite of all your transgressions.

The word ***"gave"*** in the phrase, ***"...that he gave his only Son..."*** has the idea of "lavish" and means, ***"to abound, to pour out."*** It helps us see that God loves us so much He lavishes us with the gift of His Son.

The phrase ***"His only Son"*** is very significant. The idea is that Jesus is the ***"unique, one and only"*** Son. Some older translations use, ***"only begotten Son."*** I heard about a young boy who was trying to quote John 3:16 and when he came to this part he said, ***"For God so loved the world that He gave his only forgotten son..."*** There's more truth to that than he realizes – it's way too easy to forget the Son.

2. We lean and live. While it's helpful to know God loves and lavishes, none of it will matter until we lean into Him: ***"...that whoever believes in Him..."*** Aren't you glad that the word, ***"whoever"*** is in this verse? God loves the whole world,

which means everyone and he offers salvation to whoever, which means you! He loves the whole mass of people and He loves me in my mess!

To believe means to, “*trust in, rely on and lean into.*” The idea is to fully surrender to the Savior, to give yourself up to Him, to take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping.

Our good works don't work. Being good is not good enough because no one is good enough. The issue is not right behavior, but right belief. The only way for sinners to be saved is by repenting and receiving the Savior, by leaning on the Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:12 says, “***Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.***”

Unfortunately, not everyone will benefit from what Christ has done. The offer is universal but the application is exclusive – salvation is only through Jesus Christ and is applied only for those who believe and receive Him.

God *loves* and *lavishes* and when we *lean* into Him we will *live*.

I love how this verse ends: “***...should not perish but have eternal life.***” Would you notice that the only negative aspect of this verse is found in this phrase? To “***perish***” means to be eternally separated from God. Another word for this is Hell, a place of eternal and conscious judgment. It is described as a place of darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth, eternal fire, and torment. The word “***but***” shows a contrast - we don't have to perish; we can have eternal life instead.

There's no way you can earn God's love because it's not for sale – nothing we do can make God love us any more than He already does *and* there is nothing we can do to make Him love us any less.

I am more sinful than I ever believed and more loved than I ever dared to imagine. So, here's a question: *What more does God have to do to show you that He loves you?*

God loves and lavishes. Let's lean on Him so we can live. *That's something even a child can understand.*

When it was impossible for us to reach out to Him, He reached out to us. Will you respond right now?

Invitation

You can do that right now...

“I don’t understand how you can accept me when I don’t measure up. But I get it now that you love me so lavishly that you sent your Son to die for my sins on the cross. I confess that I am a sinner and I turn from the way I’ve been living. I need you to be my Savior. You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I desire to live under your lordship for the rest of my life. Thank you for not only being born but for dying in my place and rising again so that I can be born again. I lean into you now by faith so that I can live with you forever. Make me into the person you want me to be. In Jesus’ Name.”

Closing Song – “The Wonderful Cross”

“Love so amazing, so Divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Communion

In the days of the early church, communion was also called, “The Agape (Love) Feast.” The purpose was to eat together in an expression of relational unity by celebrating the ultimate expression of love by remembering the death, burial, resurrection and second coming of Jesus Christ.

Have you ever asked Jesus how much He loves you? I picture Him answering like this, *“This much”* as He stretched out His arms and died as your substitute.