

Loving God for Who He Is

There is a prayer in Ephesians that causes me to pause and think every time I read it.

Paul prays that the people of God would be able to comprehend — with all the saints — what is the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ. Four dimensions. As if love were a space so vast that it takes the entire community of believers across all of history just to begin to map its edges. And then he adds something that makes the whole thing feel impossible: that you would know this love that surpasses knowledge.

Love that surpasses knowledge. You cannot fully understand it. You can only experience it. And the more you experience it, the more you realize how far beyond you it is.

This is where loving God has to begin. Not with what God has done for you, though that is extraordinary. Not with how God makes you feel, though He does. It begins with who He is. It begins with the realization that the God who spoke the universe into existence, who holds every atom in place, who knows every hair on your head and every thought before you think it — that God chose to love you. Freely. Without condition. Without need. Without anything you could ever offer Him that He didn't already have.

That realization, when it truly lands, changes everything about how you love Him back.



THE CONFUSION AROUND LOVE

Love is one of the most misunderstood words in the human language. And when it comes to loving God, the confusion runs deep — not because people are insincere, but because love is allowed to start somewhere and is meant to grow from there.

Someone receives a healing they never expected. Someone prays a desperate prayer and God answers it. Someone's life is going well, and they can see God's hand in it. These things are real. They are valid. And if they lead a person toward God — if they open a door that was previously closed — that is exactly the kind of thing God does. He meets people where they are.

But love that begins somewhere is meant to grow beyond where it began.

Think about it this way. Love is patient — but patience is not the whole of love. Love is kind — but kindness alone does not equal love. These things are real expressions of love, but none of them is the sum of it. In the same way, gratitude, delight, and the feeling of God being near can all flow from love. But none of them is the whole of it. And a love that never grows past any one of them is a love that is still in its infancy.

Infancy is not wrong. It is just not the destination.

The question is not what started the love. The question is whether it has matured. Whether it has grown deep enough to survive the removal of the thing that sparked it. If someone loves God because of a healing — what happens if the next prayer goes unanswered? If someone loves God because life is good — what happens when it isn't? If someone loves God because of the feeling of closeness — what happens in the long stretch where He feels absent?

If the love disappears with the thing that produced it, it never fully moved past that thing.

The destination of love is loving God for who He is. Not for what He gives. Not for how He makes you feel. Not for what is going right in your life. For Him. For who He actually is. A love rooted there has nothing left to lose — because who He is never changes. And here is the remarkable thing. That kind of love does not have to be manufactured or worked up. It is the natural destination of a love that keeps growing — a love that keeps seeing more of who God is and finding, every time, that He is enough.

I have learned that when you truly love someone, you care about everything to do with the one you love. Everything they love, you love. The things that matter to them begin to matter to you. You think about them. You long for what they long for. The same is true for those who love Jesus Christ. Those who truly love Him will find themselves caring about the things He cares about — wanting to think and do and be everything of Him. That is not a burden. That is just what love does.

So search your heart. How much do you truly love God? Not how devoted are you, not how long have you been a Christian, not how much do you know about Him — but how much do you love Him? And if the honest answer is less than you want it to be, that is not a reason for shame. It is a reason to ask. Ask Him to give you His love. He will.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”
— Deuteronomy 6:5 NIV

Every part of you. Not a portion set aside for God while the rest belongs to the world. All of it. Heart, mind, soul, emotions, everything you are. That is the call. Not because God needs it — but because a love that holds nothing back is the only kind that reaches all the way down to the root.

Which means the right question is not what started your love for God. The right question is — has it grown? Is it still growing? And is it moving toward the only foundation that nothing can shake?

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BECAUSE HE LOVED US FIRST

So what is the right reason?

We love because He first loved us.

That single verse from John's first letter contains the whole logic of it. Our love for God is not the origin — it is the response. He moved first. He loved before we existed, before we knew His name, before we had anything to offer, before we had done a single thing to deserve it. His love toward us is the cause. Our love toward Him is the effect.

But here is what makes this more than sentiment: when you truly grasp the nature of His love — when it stops being something you merely know and becomes something you have actually encountered — love for Him becomes the only natural response. You do not manufacture it. You do not work yourself into it. You discover it by understanding what He already did.

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” — Ephesians 3:17–19 NIV

Paul doesn't pray that you would feel more love for God. He prays that you would understand more deeply the love God has for you. Because he knows what happens when that understanding grows — love for God follows naturally. You cannot truly encounter the love of Christ and remain unchanged. You cannot really grasp how wide and long and high and deep it is and continue treating God as an afterthought.

My love for God grows when I realize His love for me. That is not weakness — that is the design. We love because He first loved us.



LOVE IS NOT A FEELING

I had a pastor — a mentor and a dear friend — who passed away some years ago. Pastor Chuck. There are things he said that I will carry for the rest of my life, and one of them was this:

You don't always feel it. Love isn't a feeling. It can be — you can feel love. But if you make it purely about a feeling, what happens when the feeling is gone? What happens when there is no emotion left toward the one you are supposed to love?

He said: sometimes you won't feel like loving. And that is exactly when you must choose to love. Not because of what you feel. Not because of what you have or don't have. Not because of how you're being treated. But because you are called to love. And love is not a feeling — it is a sacrifice.

God's love was a sacrifice. Jesus went to the cross. He is Love — God is Love — and He went to the cross while we were still sinners. I am certain He did not feel like being

nailed to a cross. He was not emotionally delighted at a crown of thorns being pressed into His skull. He did not enjoy the agony of what was happening to His body. But He went. Because love is not a feeling. Love is a choice to give what the other person needs at the cost of what it takes from you.

That is why Paul says without love, you are nothing. Not less effective. Nothing. Because love is not one quality among many — it is the whole thing. It is the entire recipe.

◆ ◆ ◆ THE WHOLE RECIPE

I am not a good cook. Though sometimes I feel like one and can surprise myself and some others. But even I know that when you leave out important ingredients from a recipe, what you end up with is not the dish you were trying to make. It doesn't matter how good the other ingredients are. Missing one changes everything.

Love is like that. First Corinthians 13 gives us the full recipe — and it is not a short list. Patience. Kindness. Not envying. Not boasting. Not proud. Not rude. Not self-seeking. Not easily angered. Keeping no record of wrongs. Rejoicing in truth. Always protecting. Always hoping. Always persevering. Never failing.

Every ingredient is essential. You can be patient with someone while being unkind about it — helping someone with something that takes all your time while doing it with a bad attitude. You can be modest, saying nothing about your achievements, while being deeply prideful inside. You can be kind to someone because you want something from them, which makes the kindness self-seeking. You can have some ingredients without others. But what you have in that case is not love. It is something that resembles love from a distance.

The hard question — the one worth sitting with — is this: am I using all the ingredients, or only the ones that are convenient for me right now?

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”
— 1 Corinthians 13:1–2 NIV

Nothing. Not diminished — nothing. All the gifts, all the knowledge, all the faith — without love, it counts for nothing. Which tells you everything about how central love is to what God is actually after in a human life.

And here is the thing about the full recipe: no one completes it on their own. Apart from Christ, not one of these ingredients can be consistently produced by human will. I know because I have tried. The only way love in its fullness becomes a reality in a life is when Christ's Spirit is doing the work from the inside — when the circuit is restored and the source of love Himself is living and active in the one who is trying to love.

God is love. His Spirit in us is love at work. And when we trust Him to change our hearts and keep trusting Him to make us like Him, love begins to become less of an effort and more of a habit.

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HE IS LIFE

From the short amount of years I have lived on this earth, I have come to see that not much really changes from generation to generation — only the way things are done. We live. We work. We achieve. We are known by some and forgotten by others. We build things that outlast us or don't.

Fame will one day be: how many people have forgotten who I am. Money will one day be: who got what they did not work for. Achievement will one day be a footnote in a history no one is reading.

What makes a life stand out — what remains when everything else has faded — is love. Not fame. Not wealth. Not accomplishment. As Paul says: these things pass away. Love never fails.

And this is why loving God for who He IS — not for what He gives, not for how He makes you feel, not even for what He did at the cross — is the only foundation that holds. Because who He is never changes. He was love before creation. He will be love after this age ends. Every circumstance changes. Every feeling shifts. Every gift can be removed. But He remains who He is. And He is Life itself.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” — John 15:5 NIV

Apart from Him — nothing. Not a little. Nothing. Outside of God we are not diminished, we are dead. Which means loving God is not a religious duty. It is an act of choosing life itself. It is alignment with the only source of everything real, everything good, everything that lasts.

So why should we love God?

Because God commanded us to. And His commands are life.

Because we love because He first loved us. And His love, when truly encountered, makes loving Him back the only reasonable response.

Because He is not just the giver of good things. He is the source of Life itself. And a person who truly understands that — who has actually grasped even a fraction of how wide and long and high and deep that love is — does not need to be told twice.

“We love because he first loved us.” — 1 John 4:19 NIV

When you know how loved you are, loving Him back is not a command you have to follow. It is a direction you cannot help but move.

Don't try to feel love. Ask God to show you how wide, how long, how deep, and how high His Love is. Then let His Love guide you.