



PART 11: BUCKET OF LOVE

1 John 3:11-20

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True LOVE is Jesus' sacrificial, life-giving death for us so that we may love others in a sacrificial, life-giving way.

The apostle John says in this passage, **"This is how we know what love is..."** Just think about it; finally, we will get the answer to one of the greatest longings, desires, and questions of humanity, "What is love?" Our world is confused and hurt about love. Plus, with the English language limitations, we put all our "loves" into one bucket I like to call, the "bucket of love." I love my wife, I love my kids, and I love Chipotle. Obviously, there are different levels to the love of my wife and kids compared to Chipotle. And then you have Hollywood and classic movies such as *The Princess Bride* that speak of "True Love." If we are honest with ourselves, the pursuit of love has left a wake of deep pain and brokenness.

"When it comes to love, we are both the victim and the perpetrator of the crime. Because we are human, we love, but because we love, we bleed. Love is the source of our highest highs and lowest lows. Love is joy and laughter and gift and freedom and faith and healing, but when love goes south, it's a knife to the chest." *John Mark Comer, "Loveology"*

What is Love: 1) Broken Love 2) The Source of Love 3) The Overflow of Love

Context

The beginning of this passage in verse 11 starts with the word "for." So, let us look back and see what it is referring to. In verse 10 it says, "This is how we know who the children of God are..." In Doug's sermon last week, he shared about the four marks of a child of God: 1) Sincerely professes Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, 2) Given a new birth, 3) Given a new identity, 4) Given a new power for a new lifestyle. This passage expounds on a new lifestyle marked by love.

Broken Love

The apostle John uses the example of the relationship between Cain and Abel to talk about broken love. The backdrop to this is the pulsating command of God in Genesis 1, "be fruitful and multiply." And yet by the second generation of all of creation, the love that should have been between two brothers is stained by hatred and death.

John goes on and gives us this convicting statement in verse 15, "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." John is back to his intense language, echoing the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-22, "You have

heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.'" Jesus goes on in this passage to charge us to reconcile with one another if there is hatred. This is all a reflection of Jesus' focus within the Sermon on the Mount to flip upside down the systems and values of the world to get to our hearts. And John sees that hatred is a reflection of a heart of death, and we need to cross over from death to life. As verse 14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death."

The term "brother and sister" is specifically referring to the redefined family of God. So, the test of our love is not that we serve the poor and marginalized or even those who don't know Jesus. The test is that we love each other in the church, as the church, brothers and sisters in Christ. This echoes Jesus' words when He says we are one of His when we serve "the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me." Does God care for the poor, sick, marginalized, and those who have never heard the gospel? Yes! But we need to experience God's love in us first so that it naturally overflows to those around us. It is hypocritical to go halfway around the world to love those in need, yet not love our family. It is like our bucket of love. As God pours Himself into us, it should naturally overflow to others.

The Source of Love

The source of love is Jesus. Our culture often idealizes and idolizes love between a man and a woman and misses the source. Jesus is the source that impacts all our relationships: marriage, family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. As verse 16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." Simply, love = Jesus' death ...and we should do likewise. 1 John 4 expounds on this idea as it says, "God is love," and then verse 19 says, "We love because He first loved us."

This implicitly comes out in the Greek word used for love, *agape*, ἀγάπη. There are four Greek words used for love; three are used in the Bible. Agape has a sense of unconditional, sacrificial, life-giving love. The three other words for love are:

Storge – empathy love. A love that is natural and emotive often within family members or sometimes with close friends. This is the love and affection of a parent for a child.

Philia – friend love. This is the love between close friends like siblings, often called "brotherly love," but indicated by a direct choice of friendship and a strong bond because of shared, common value or interest. As C.S. Lewis says, "This is the type of love where we stand side by side while Eros love is face to face."

Eros – romantic love. Eros love is not specifically used in scripture but romantic, sexual love is seen in scripture and a good gift of God to us. Romantic love is seen in Jacob's love for Rachel, or the beautiful and sometimes erotic book of "Song of Songs" and lastly, Hosea's pursuit of Gomer.

Resource: Please check out C.S. Lewis's book "*The Four Loves*."

I would like to ask you two questions in response to Jesus being the source of love. **First, have you received the saving love of God?** We are made for God, yet our brokenness and sin separates us from His love. It is simply crying out to God and saying, "Lord, I confess my empty ways, and I need you. May your love and salvation pour over me."

Second, are you continually experiencing the love of God? It is so easy for us to lose our first love. We often struggle to experience the love of God continually. We have barriers of sins, wounds, and warfare.

BARRIERS TO INTIMACY WITH GOD: Sin, Wounds and Warfare

God. What must God be like? He keeps every living creature breathing. He spins the stars and makes them burn. Everything beautiful you have ever seen - mountain streams sparkling in the sunlight, fawns bouncing through meadows, poppies of every color dancing in the spring breeze, glittering pure white snow - is an artistic expression of His glory, a stroke from His creation brush. And, He is love (1 John 4:8). What kind of love must such a being possess? Infinite love. Faithful love. Joyous love. Unfading, undying love. Redeeming love. Sacrificial love. Every kind of human love we have witnessed, experienced or longed for is a dim reflection of His great heart: He is a Trinity - a pulsing, living community of divine love.

And this great, glorious, good being has invited us to know Him: "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God" (John 17:3). In fact, He has invited us into Himself (John 17:21).

So why do we struggle to find joy in God, to find comfort in His love? We all have barriers to intimacy with God in our hearts: sin, wounds and warfare swirl together and solidify in our souls to create a wall between our hearts and God's heart. This wall keeps God's love, joy and hope from being poured into us. It keeps us from receiving His love, from loving Him back and from loving others as He does.

SIN

We are born with a sin nature (Psalm 51:5), a base-level mistrust of and antipathy toward God. J.I. Packer says we are all infected with an "irrational anti-God syndrome." It makes us suspicious toward God, inclines us not to trust Him and tempts us to blame Him for everything we can.

As we go through life, our sin nature prompts us to ignore God's commands and choose sinful ways to get what we think we need for happiness or wellbeing. Doing this, we sear our consciences (1 Timothy 4:2). We mistrust God and disbelieve that He has good things for us, so we disobey Him. Then we feel guilty, and this makes us angry or ashamed, increasing our desire to keep away from God. The wall grows.

On top of this, other people sin against us, wounding our hearts.

WOUNDS

We were created for perfect love, but no one on earth loves perfectly. For this reason, each one of us is wounded in the very relationships that also nurture and bless us. Additionally, some people in our lives have wantonly chosen to wound us or rob us of precious things to satisfy their own sinful desires.

When we are wounded, we try to make sense of what happened to us. Because of our innate distrust of God, we often create false explanations: God is cruel; God doesn't care; I'm unlovable; God doesn't even exist; There's something wrong with me.

We also choose to nurture bitterness and anger toward those that have hurt us and toward God Himself.

Our pain, our false beliefs and our anger add cement to the wall between God's heart and ours.

WARFARE

On top of this, we have an evil, merciless and deadly enemy: Satan. He hates us because God loves us and because we bear His image. Satan's goal is to destroy us. He wants us to despise ourselves, to hate God and to hurt other people. He gets a foothold in our lives in numerous ways: sin, trauma, family lines and occult activities.

When we repeatedly engage in a sinful thought pattern or behavior, it's as if we wear down our immune system to demonic oppression. Eventually we can be 'infected' with a spiritually-oppressive spirit related to our chosen sin. These might be spirits of anger, lust, greed, pride or any form of addiction.

Our enemy doesn't play fair, and he will capitalize on our wounds, or the traumatic events in our lives, to prey upon us. Car accidents, illnesses, the loss of a loved one or someone's sin against us can create an opening for him to tell us lies and oppress us. This kind of oppression might come from spirits of shame, fear, anxiety or self-hatred.

Demons also access family lines, possibly through the wounds our families give us, and sinful patterns or struggles can be passed to us through our families.

Lastly, any kind of occult involvement - Ouija boards, tarot cards, seances, reciting spells or curses, occult objects - can open us up to powerful occult spirits.

Demonic or satanic oppression in our lives always works against intimacy with God. God loves us and is good. Satan wants us to believe we are bad and God is worse. He will always work to support the wall between God's heart and ours.

TEARING DOWN THE WALL BETWEEN GOD'S HEART AND OURS

Most of the tools you need to tear down the wall and draw nearer to God you will find in this guide: community, spiritual disciplines, mentoring, worship and service. You are on your way! Sometimes, however, we need special help to overcome certain areas of sin, deep wounds or troublesome warfare. This may come in the form of Intensive Healing Prayer. (See Appendix I for more information.)

The Overflow of Love

I love seeing the overflow of love in this community; the pictures of your faces on these chairs, small groups walking alongside each other in times of grief and joy, people picking up groceries for those who are at-risk, and car parades driving by to extend condolences, to encourage, or to celebrate a graduation. One ministry of Greenwood that I do want to highlight is Under Construction. Check out the zoom interview in the sermon video.

Plus, I love seeing the overflow of love to the ends of the earth through our great mission partners. Please check out the Serve page on Greenwood's website for ways to pray and partner with several ministries during COVID-19.

Conclusion

*True LOVE is Jesus' sacrificial, life-giving death for us so that we may love others in a sacrificial, life-giving way. A good way to start being a part of Jesus' love to others is to make a **PRAYER LIST**. As we pray, we align our hearts with God and His ways.*

What is love? What is true love? "Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."