

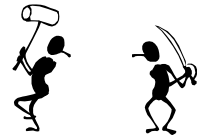


Love



Need for Love

- ❑ “Love” is often defined as “a deep and tender feeling of affection or devotion.”¹ Such love usually depends on the loveliness of the object loved. The biblical words for “love”² have a broader range of meaning. For example, God’s “love” is not dependent on the loveliness of the object loved, and God’s people are called to love in a similar way.³ Such love is not self-centered, but is willing to give and sacrifice for the well-being of others.
- ❑ All of us have a basic need to feel loved. Most of us have a deep desire for relationships of love.
 1. If love is so desirable, why is there a great lack of love in our world? Why isn’t there more love in our world today?⁴



Source of Love

- ❑ “God is love” (1 John 4:8b, 16b). Love is part of the very *nature* and *character* of God. God is the source of love...“for love comes from God” (4:7b). God’s love is perfect and unfailing.⁵

Hope because of Love

- ❑ In the Old Testament period, Israel had hope *because* of God’s love. The LORD said...
 - 📖 “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful’ (Jeremiah 31:3-4, NIV).

Advent of Love

- ❑ While the word “love” is not found in the “Christmas story” (Matthew 1:18-2:23; Luke 2:1-40), God’s love is evident. God’s love is made clear in the following famous verse:
 - 📖 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son [Jesus Christ], that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).
- ❑ Christmas is a time of giving, but the greatest gift ever given was the gift of God’s Son.
 2. When you consider God’s gift of his Son, why do you think it is a gift of love? In what ways is God’s love evident in the giving of Jesus Christ?⁶



¹ “love” in the English language has a broad range of meaning, but this is the most common understanding of the term.

² Hebrew verb *’āhēb* (noun *’ahābā*) and Greek verb *agapaō* (noun *agapē*) are the most common words for “love.”

³ This certainly applies to loving “unlovely” people. But our first love should be toward God, who is most “lovely.”

⁴ People and groups tend to be self-centered and self-serving. The biblical diagnosis of the problem is a broken or impaired relationship with God who is the Source of love.

⁵ The words “His love endures forever” are found 44 times in the Bible. The words “unfailing love” are attributed to God 29 times. The Old Covenant is called a “covenant of love” (7 times). God’s love and faithfulness go together.

⁶ First of all, it is a demonstration of God’s “unfailing love.” Though God’s people had been unfaithful and unloving, He remained faithful and loving. Though everyone deserved judgment, God provided redemption. As He promised, God sent a Savior – the Messiah. Secondly, the humility of the Incarnation is amazing! “...being in very nature God, [Christ] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:6-7, NIV). God the Son greatly humbled himself to identify with human beings. He entered this world through physical birth, through a humble lady in a very humble setting. He passed through human infancy and childhood before beginning his earthly ministry. See “demonstration of love” on next page.

Demonstration of Love

- ❑ God's love was demonstrated in the giving of his Son in the form of a baby. But the ultimate demonstration of love was the giving of his Son as a sacrifice.
- 📖 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*Romans 5:8, NIV*).
- 📖 "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (*1 John 4:9-10, NIV*).
- 📖 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (*1 John 3:16*).



Benefits of Love

- ❑ Because of God's love in Christ Jesus, we can have...⁷
 - Peace with God, and restored relationship with him (*1 John 4:9-10 above; Lesson 2*).
 - Joy of salvation and eternal life (*John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5*).
 - Hope of a glorious inheritance as God's beloved children (*Romans 8:16-17; 1 John 3:1*).
 - The indwelling Holy Spirit who fills our hearts with love (*Romans 5:5*).
 - A new ability (empowered by the Spirit) to love others with God's love (*Galatians 5:22*).
 - Eternal security in God's love in times of trouble, hardship and attack (*Romans 8:35-39*).
 - Mutual blessing and unity in the fellowship of love – the church (*Colossians 3:12-14*).
 - ❑ These benefits are offered in the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ.
3. When someone gives us a costly and valuable gift, how do we respond? When someone sacrifices greatly to give us a gift that we desperately need, how do we respond? How do we feel toward that person? How do we treat that person?

Response to Love

- ❑ God has offered us the gift of his Son, and we should receive him!⁸ Once we have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, we should continue to respond to God's love on a daily basis.
- ❑ We should love God with all our being (*Luke 10:27a*). We should love our brothers and sisters in Christ (*John 13:34-35*), and love other people in general (*Luke 10:27b; 6:35*).
- ❑ We should obey the Lord (*2 John 1:6*), give generously (*2 Corinthians 8:8-15, 24*); share the gospel with others (*2 Corinthians 5:11-15*), and "live a life of love" (*Ephesians 5:1-2*).
- 📖 "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another" (*1 John 4:11, NIV*).

Reflection

- Do you desire love? Do you know the Source of love? Have you received the gift of God's Son? If you do not believe, ask questions, seek answers, and seek the source of love.
- As a Christian, do you think about the love of God on a daily basis? Are you loving God and loving others as you should? Review this handout. Read the Bible references and John 4:7-21.

⁷ Every truly good thing comes from God – the God of love. This list could be much longer!

⁸ Of course, many do not receive Jesus Christ. The reasons vary. Some people do not receive Jesus because they do not believe in God, or the truthfulness of the Bible, or the Bible's claim that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14:6*). If you have not received Jesus for this reason, I encourage you to further investigate the claims of Christianity. I have numerous resources that provide evidence for the existence of God and the truthfulness of the Bible. Some people do not receive Jesus because they want to maintain control of their own lives (and truly receiving Jesus means receiving him as Lord of our lives). But Jesus said, "whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (*Matthew 16:25-26a, NIV*).