



“A Different Kind of Love”
Part 4: “When God’s Love Hurts”
 by Pastor Tim Dodson
 at JF Believers Church
 in Menomonie, Wisc
 on Sept 15, 2019



1 John 4:7-21 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we 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. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*

**“Your love towers over me
 Gracious tempest in the sea
 Your love is like a storm
 Your love is crashing over me
 It's surging like a raging sea
 Immerse me in the wonder of Your love”**

- Gracious Tempest by Young & Free

This is our fourth and final session on the issue of God’s love...a “*different kind of love*” to be sure. If we have carried anything way from these reviews, I hope and pray that it is a new and clear understanding that God’s love is vastly different from the world’s version. Let *His* love forever be found in this fellowship, in all of its splendor and in all of its ramifications.

Deep down, we tend to live with this belief that the acquisition of love will give us everything that we want, take away any and every pain, and will fulfill all the oft emptiness that we naturally live in. We generally embrace a Hollywood ideal of love that drips positive emotions and produces mornings filled with perfect cups of coffee and heart shaped pancakes.

But God’s agape love is not like that. God’s love is honest. Agape love is true and firm. His love has a plan with a destination. He knows what is best for our lives and He seeks to motivate us to achieve it. It is sometimes a love we desire, and sometimes a love we seek to avoid. But it is always a love that is exactly what we need.

The often unspoken truth about God's love is that sometimes this kind of love can hurt. And when God is the One that is spurring us to engage in this love...both the giving and receiving, it can become a very personal and vivid pain. Yet we must remember that God knows intimately every inch of our soul. So, when God calls us to advance forward, that journey can come with some spiritual sting. After all, He knows us so well and thus He knows exactly what buttons to push to grow us up and prepare us for more of Him. And sometimes that will cause a deep, emotional, heart wrenching response. Just think of Peter in the Bible after He denied Jesus three times during the crucifixion. The very next time Jesus sees Peter, He asks him, "Do you love me?" And how many times does Jesus ask Peter this? Three times. No coincidence. Jesus knew exactly what Peter needed. That's true love. That's agape. A love that only God, who knows us completely and intimately, can faithfully deliver. But it IS a love that He calls upon us to practice...toward Him, and towards one another.

We can tend to approach God with the idea that if we could just find His supreme will, everything would be ok. Life would be smooth sailing and our days would be replete with fulfillment and joy. But that isn't true. Truth be told, God's will is one of the most uncertain places we can be. If you are there today, you know what I am saying is a fact. There is a peace that "passes all understanding." There is a great sense of God's love upon us. Yet there can also be uncertainty, apprehension, a sense of loss, even tears and pain.

Let's put it out there...that oft unspoken truth. ***God's love can sometimes hurt.*** He calls us to places we don't want to go, to things we don't want to do, to be people we don't want to be. He knows the deepest desires of our hearts, both the beautiful and the despicable. His words and His actions cut through our pride and self rule until our flesh is laid bare.

How often we think because we hurt that God is not in whatever we are dealing with. We think that because there is pain and discomfort that we have made a wrong turn or have somehow inexplicably fallen out of God's favor. Because we have embraced the world's definition of love instead of God's version, we equate warm fuzzy feelings and smooth sailing as signs of God's presence and His blessing. Yet with just a cursory review of God's loving interaction with the players from the pages of the Bible certainly paint another picture.

God is saying: *You don't understand the reason for the pain. You might think I've deserted you, but I will never leave you. You might think I don't love you, but I love you to the height of heaven and the depth of the sea. You might think I don't care about what's happening to you, but I am orchestrating your days and care about every hair on your head. My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts. Yes, I do care about you and what's happening to you. In the end, this will make you better. It will make you more like me...*

C.S. Lewis, who endured the loss of his wife to cancer, put it this way: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Because God loves us, He desires our obedience...our acquiescence...our allegiance, more than our comfort. Allowing troubles, trials and pain is one way our loving God makes that so. No one likes getting our feet kicked out from under us, but if it brings healing or prevents greater suffering, if it causes us to crawl on our knees back to Christ, then it's just what we need. It is therefore love in its purist form. Faith in Jesus Christ does not guarantee an easy life but it does promise a perfect eternity.

Of course Satan loves to exploit our misunderstanding...our ignorance as to the realities of the nature of God's love. During tough times, Satan will tell you (falsely) that God doesn't love you...he doesn't care about you or isn't doing anything to help you. But Satan is a liar — an opportunist who looks for vulnerable times to convince you to question God's power, provision and promises. God has not abandoned you. He has not given up on you. His love sometimes may not be pleasant, but His hands are still open to you. And so are ours...

There is an innate need in man to understand, to know the reason, to have the explanation of the great cosmic question of "why." But the fact is, with God, sometimes you're simply not going to get it on this side of eternity.

And that's just gas on the flames if you are already going through a painful ordeal. I am reminded how scripture says that it *"impossible to please God without faith."* And sometimes it is impossible to have faith if we had all the answers. The reasons for this is legion. Maybe you wouldn't understand if He told you. Maybe you would flat out disagree with Him. Maybe He is using you to get to someone else. That's permissible in His realm by the way. Jesus let Lazarus die so that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (and lots of other people) would see the glory of God. Maybe His answer is no, and you aren't listening. Maybe the answer is "go" and you're not listening. Maybe it's a future time thing and he simply sees the days ahead and where this thing will lead you if left unchecked. Maybe He wants to be God and have you say you trust him? *"Though he slay me, I will follow."*

Humanity is a strange bunch. Instead of being joyfully thankful for the 6 days of sunshine, we complain about the one day it rains. Instead of giving thanks for years of health and vitality, we get angry and bitter when we get to the end and we have to go. Whether we agree or support it, God will allow His creation to go through anything in the name of love. Anything at all. For God, the manifest of His love is a higher priority than comfort, enjoyment, and even happiness.

We know that pain was not part of God's original design. But love on the other hand, was. God knew that in order for love to exist, free will would also have to exist. In a world where He gave humans the choice to love or hate, He knew some would choose the latter and pain would inevitably be the price. But God chose to not take away His creation's humanity, even though He knew rape, murder, disease, and tragedy would plague our world. But He did not bend to the will of man. He held the course and loved us for a millennia.

One thing is for sure. Pain is a unique opportunity for humanity to choose whether it will love God for who He is, rather than for the gifts that He bestows upon His creation. Indeed God loves to *give* to His children. But God wants to be loved for who He is -- for His mercy, grace, kindness, compassion, and other attributes -- and not because He makes life easy for us.

God no doubt allows pain to remind us that our home is not in this world, and that our real life begins in the next life. I believe He wants us to long for that place. And pain has a way of keeping our hope there, rather than on earth. This is a good thing, for heaven promises more wonderful, beautiful things than those which are found here. Earth is for deciding whether we will love one another as well as our Creator; Heaven is where our experience of life will find its fruition.

No matter how we feel on this matter, one thing is for sure. God is no stranger to pain. He knows betrayal. He knows we will resist him. We have failed Him on so many levels. Yet He will continue to pursue us, discipline us, accept us back, and forgive us. He will ache as we bring untold misery into our lives through our disobedience because now it is more than just humanity at large but rather He is now watching a daughter or a son ruin their worlds. Every act of rebellion, every unkind word we utter to others, every self-sabotage is like one more dagger thrust in his side. We're his children. He can't stop caring.

Still, he remains patient even as we blame him for the pain we brought into our own lives by going our own way. He warned us. We pretended we didn't hear. And then we blame him for the fallout. And yet He still loves. Still, he pursues.

In the Desiring God article ***God Wounds Us Because He Loves Us***, author Marshall Segal writes, *"Sometimes the Lord's love for us feels like the opposite of love, but that's only because we can't see everything he sees. Behind the real pain he allows is an even more real love for those for whom he sent his Son (John 3:16). ...The world would never call any kind of pain 'love.' The world simply does not have categories for God doing whatever necessary to draw us to himself — his strength, his righteousness, his help, his peace. But his love for us explodes the world's small categories and far surpasses its weak expectations. The pain may feel like God's fierce anger in the moment, but it actually serves to reveal his warm compassion toward us..."*

Again, we have such a limited understanding of God's ways. Though our circumstances may seem unfair, God sees the bigger picture of compassion.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

Let me ask you point blank. Is this the version of love with which you love others? Do you love your kids the way Jesus loves His? Do you practice agape love or some fluid version of the worlds? Should we not as a church seek diligently to practice *that kind of love* here in our midst? We can quickly spout the perceived correct answer and say “oh yes!” But think about what we have learned about His agape love. Think about what we have learned even today in this last segment of this series. Then consider your answer in light of such. Ephesians 5:1-2 calls us out... *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, (agape love) as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”* We are herein called to love as God loves. To “walk our life out in that love.”

How much easier it would be to let this issue slide. Certainly the vast majority of the greater church has done so, fulfilling the prophecy: *“...having a form of godliness but denying its power.”* (2 Tim 3:5) I think the only thing harder than receiving God's agape when it hurts is our practicing of it in return. But our text for this series tells us that *“Whoever does not agape does not know God, because God is agape.”* (1 John 4:8)

Matthew 7:21-23 ESV reminds us that *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

As true and faithful followers of Christ we must look to Him and Him alone for the standard on love. Because culture is trafficking counterfeit coins, lying as they stamp “LOVE” on each one—be it sexuality and lust, abuse and exploitation, greed and selfishness, or the oft church practice of dishing out a “feel-good everything goes” version in an effort to appease the casual church attender. Christians would do well to acknowledge this fact.

Mark 8: 31- 38 *And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? “Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”*

Now let's get something straight. Peter may have been a bit brash and quick with his tongue. He may have stumbled a few times, but there is no reason to believe that Peter acted in any way other than out of his personal definition of love. Foolish, yes, but well-motivated! But just because he meant well, doesn't mean he wasn't being used by Satan in the matter. It happens, even if we don't see it coming.

It is hard for us to grasp the scenario that Jesus was describing could be such a perfect love while wrapped in such a painful cloak. Jesus was going to be beaten and executed for doing nothing more than loving mankind. Jesus, while teaching of his impending death, was also teaching a chilling reality. *Love is not painless.* Real love comes at a price, and is not to be confused with mere compassion. Many *do not* accept that truth, and inadvertently *war* against what God is doing with raising His children. Peter was one of those. Are you?