

INTRODUCTION

Over the summer we're going to be spending time examining all nine fruit of the Spirit. My main goal for this series is the same as God's goal—for each of us to display these nine character qualities every day of our lives. But you don't have to try to be loving, joyful, loving and patient; there's a better way. Jesus has all the love, joy, and patience you'll ever need. So when you understand that Jesus is living in you, you're set free to surrender to His power in you. My secondary goal in this series is for you to memorize the nine fruits of the Spirit.

Fruit is the outward expression of an inward nature. My dad was a forester and he could identify every tree in the forest. I didn't inherit that gift; I can barely tell the difference between oak trees and pine trees. But when I see an apple hanging on a tree, I know that's an apple tree. When these personality characteristics are seen in your life, it is the evidence of Jesus living in you. The Bible says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Today, we'll talk about love, the first fruit on God's list. There's a lot of confusion about what love is. A group of children were asked to define love, and here are some of their answers: Karie, age 5, said: "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other." Emily, age 8 said: Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. Karen, age 7, said: "When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you." Mary Ann, age 6, said: "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day." Lauren, age 5, said: "I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones." Jessica, age 8 said: "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."

More songs have been written about love than any other topic in the world. This past week I asked my Facebook friends to remind me of some of these love songs. Here's a few of the songs about love. The Partridge family sang "I think I love you." Olivia Newton-John confessed, "I honestly love you." The Doors just said, "Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name?" Justin Bieber piped in with, "I just need somebody to love."

The Beatles said, "All you need is Love, but "you can't buy me love." Roxette claimed that "It must have been love." Robert Palmer was "Addicted to Love," and 10cc declared, "I'm not in love." Elvis crooned "Love me tender," and "Hunka hunka burning love."

Usher blamed the "DJ got us fallin' in love again," and Stevie Wonder "just called to say I love you." Ke\$ha said "Your love is my drug." (but I think she's on something stronger) Ray Charles sang, "I can't stop loving you." But Air Supply admitted they were "all outta' love." And Kenny begged Ruby "don't take your love to town."

Tim told Faith, "It's your love," while Taylor Swift wrote "A love story." Dolly wrote it and Whitney sang it, "I will always love you." Jackie DeShannon said it best when she sang, "What the world needs now is love sweet love."

Then some songs just ask questions about love. The Spinners asked, "Could it be I'm falling in love?" Jefferson Airplane asked, "Don't you want somebody to love?" To which Tina Turner answered, "What's love got to do with it?" And the Bee Gees, the Brothers Gibbs, just wanted to know "How deep is your love?" Then Sir Elton put on a Lion King DVD and asked, "Can you feel the love tonight?" And Haddaway summed it all up by asking, "What is Love?" So, "What is love?" I'm going to answer that question with three life-changing truths from the Bible.

I. LOVE IS THE FIRST-FRUIT THAT PRODUCES THE OTHER FRUIT

One of the problems in the English language is that we only have one word for love. We have to use the same word when we say we love God, love our sweetheart, and love hot dogs. Because we're restricted to the one English word, you can be misunderstood.

The New Testament was written in Koine Greek, one of the most expressive languages in the world. And there are four different Greek words for love. If you want to dig more deeply into these four words, C.S. Lewis has written an amazing book called *The Four Loves*.

A. *Eros* is sensual attraction

Our English word "erotic" comes from this root. It's not just a sexual love, though; it also includes romantic love. This is the feeling of love people mean when they talk about love at first sight. This love is based on physical attraction and it comes and goes. *Eros* never appears in the New Testament.

A man was proposing to his girlfriend. He said, "Sweetheart, I want you to marry me. I know I don't have a new car like Johnny Green, or a nice house like Johnny Green. I don't have a lot of money and I'm not handsome like Johnny Green, but I love you and I want you to marry me." She said, "I love you too, but tell me more about this Johnny Green." That's *eros*.

B. *Storge* is family affection

This describes the love we have for our parents and children. We can choose our friends, but we can't choose our family. We may not like all our family members, but since blood is thicker than water, we show up at family events because of *storge*. When I say, "I love America" I'm referred to this kind of love as well.

C. *Phileo* is friendship love

The city of Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love because it is a combination of *phileo* and *adelphos*, which means "brother." This is a powerful love and Aristotle said it was the highest kind of love. This is the kind of love you mean when you say to a buddy, "I love you, man!"

I was browsing through the greeting card section of a store recently and I came across a card in the love section that said, "If I had an ice-cream cone, I'd give you half. If I had six pieces of

candy, I'd give you three. If I had two apples, one would be yours. If I won the lottery...I'd send you a post card from Tahiti."

D. *Agape* is sacrificial love

This is the highest and the greatest love, and it is the love mentioned most in the Bible, including the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said, "Greater love (*agape*) has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) C.S. Lewis says all four of these loves blend together, and it is difficult to split them up. But he groups the first three kinds of loves as "Need-loves." I need to be loved in those ways. But he called *agape*, "Gift-love." *Agape* is such a special love, that when the King James translators were looking for a word to use in 1 Corinthians 13, they used the word "charity." The word *agape* was rare in Greek literature until the New Testament was written, then the world first understood the real meaning of the this kind of love. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world (*agape*) that He gave His one and only Son."

The New Testament scholar William Barclay writes: "*Agape* is a feeling of the mind as much as of the heart; it concerns the will as much as the emotions. It describes the deliberate effort, which we can make only with the power of God, never to seek anything but the best even for those who seek the worst for us."

Agape love is the most important fruit, because it really produces all the others. It's the primary fruit. You can't have joy, peace or patience without first having love. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul switched his metaphors from fruit to clothing. We're challenged to take off the old dirty clothes of the sinful nature and clothe ourselves in the nature of Christ. He wrote, "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:12, 14)

Stuart Briscoe tells the story of a teenager who used to climb down an old fruit tree that grew near his bedroom window. He used it to escape at night and hang out with his friends. One day his dad announced that he was going to cut down the tree because it hadn't produced fruit in several seasons. The kid didn't want to lose his escape route, so when his dad was gone, he and his friends bought a bushel of apples, and carefully tied the apples to the branches. When the dad returned his son said, "Look, dad, it's a miracle! This tree is now growing apples!" His dad said, "Son, that really IS a miracle, because that's a pear tree!"

We don't produce the fruit of love by artificially trying to fake loving other people. Fruit is the outward expression of the inner nature of Jesus living in us. When my friend, Ron Dunn, used to talk about fruit, he would say that Christians don't PRODUCE fruit, we only BEAR fruit. We're just a fruit rack for Jesus to use to show others His love! So how do you bear this fruit of love?

II. YOU CAN'T LOVE OTHERS UNTIL YOU REALIZE HOW VERY MUCH GOD LOVES YOU

The only way you can pass on the love of God is to know how deeply God loves you. Do you realize that you are deeply loved by the Creator of the Universe? You may know it in your head, but do you know it in your heart?

The Apostle John wrote his first letter to young Christians to help them grow into maturity and the theme of the entire letter is love. He wrote, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1) What comes to your mind when you think of God lavishing His love on you? He's not just passing it out a little bit at a time—it's not a drip, it's a flood of His love.

I once read about a woman who grew up on the Great Plains during the Depression, living all her life in poverty. As she was getting older and approaching the age to die, she confessed to her grandchildren that she had always wanted to see the ocean. So they bundled her up in a car and drove three days to get to the Pacific Ocean. They carried her to a bluff overlooking the vast Pacific Ocean, and as she looked, she began to cry. Her family said, "What's wrong, grandma? Are you sad that you've never seen it before?" As the tears trickled down her face, she smiled and said, "No, I'm just happy to finally see something that God made plenty of!"

Paul's prayer for the Christians in Ephesus was that they would "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge." (Ephesians 3:18-19) I love to stand on the seashore and imagine the vastness of God's love. Or I love to look up at the starry sky and imagine that God's love is bigger and stronger than the physical universe in which we live.

Earlier I mentioned some of the songs that have love in the title. The very best love songs are ones that we sing in church. Songs like, "Jesus Loves Me," "Love Lifted Me," "O Love that Will Not Let Me Go" and David Crowder's, "How He Loves."

But of all these songs about God's love, my favorite lyrics come from a song written in 1915 by a Nazarene pastor named Frederick Lehman. The chorus goes "Oh love of God, how rich and pure; How measureless and strong; it shall for ever more endure; the saints and angels' song." The third stanza is adapted from a Jewish poem that is over 1,000 old. To appreciate the meaning, you must remember it was written at a time when scribes had to use quills, long feathers, with the tips dipped in bottles of ink to write words on parchment. With that background, listen to the third verse: "Could we with ink; the oceans fill; And were the skies of parchment made; Were every stalk on earth a quill; and every man a scribe by trade; To write the love of God above; Would drain the oceans dry; Nor could the scroll contain the whole; Though stretched from sky to sky."

Let me translate that for you. Fill up all the seven seas of the world with ink—trillions and trillions of gallons. Then stretch a roll of paper from one side of the universe to the other side. Then take every stick and tree branch on earth and make it a pen. Then give everyone on earth, all seven billion people, one of those pens and have them write about God's love. They would drain the oceans and fill up the sky, but still it wouldn't be enough to cover even a tiny fraction of how much God loves you!

III. THE ONLY WAY TO LOVE ANYONE IS TO LET JESUS LOVE THEM THROUGH YOU

An old pastor preached one Sunday on love and how this world needs more love. The next day he had concrete poured for a patio he was building behind his house. Before the concrete set, some neighborhood kids decided to play in it. They took sticks and drew their names in the concrete and left their handprints. When the preacher saw them he was livid. He ran out and screamed, "You kids get outta' here!"

The kids ran off and when he walked back inside his wife said, "Honey, I thought you preached a sermon yesterday on loving everybody. You didn't show much love to those kids!" He said, "Well, what I meant was I love people in the abstract, but I don't love them in the concrete." That's the problem with a lot of people. They love people in the abstract. Like Linus said to Lucy, "I love humanity, it's people I can't stand."

John wrote: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God...No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." (1 John 4:7,12-14)

Lee Ezell wrote in his book, *Porcupine People: Learning to Love the Unlovable*, "Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person. That perfectly describes God's love for us; an unconditional commitment on His part, to us, the imperfect person."

Actually, I used to say some people were unlovable, but someone corrected me. They reminded me that no person is unlovable, because God loves them. That's so true, so now I just say some people are unlovely. But Jesus can love unlovely people; do you believe that?

For the next few minutes, I want you to envision the face of the person you have the hardest time loving. This person gets on your nerves and when you see them walking your way you first thought is, "Oh no." The person may be a family member, a friend of a friend, a fellow church member, or someone you work with. It might even be your boss. So just picture that person. Got him or her in your mind? Now, do you really believe Jesus loves that person? Next question, will you *allow* Jesus to love that person through you?

The night before Jesus was crucified; He was at the Passover meal with His disciples. The job of washing feet always fell to the lowliest slave. The disciples were so full of their self-importance, that none of them would stoop to washing feet. So Jesus got up and played the role of a slave. He washed all their feet, even the feet of a disciple named Judas Iscariot. As Jesus washed Judas' feet, He knew Judas had already sold him out for 30 pieces of silver. Yet Jesus loved him. I don't think Jesus gave him the express wash job either. I believe Jesus did an especially thorough job of cleaning around the toenails and between the toes of that man whose feet would later lead a mob to arrest Jesus as he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. So if Jesus loved Judas and washed his feet, don't you think He can and will love that unlovely person through you?

Every time I perform a wedding like I did last evening, I read 1 Corinthians 13, which has been called the Love Chapter. Karl Haffner, a pastor in Washington State, paraphrased this chapter. With apologies to him and the Apostle Paul, I've adapted it: If I speak with the confidence of Donald Trump and sing with the ease of Celine Dion but don't have love, my words are like scraping fingernails on a blackboard. If I can hack into the CIA's mainframe computer and

outsmart my chemistry professor, if I can memorize the Psalms and read Leviticus without dozing, but have not love, my value is equal to a pile of used dental floss. If I give my designer clothes to Goodwill and let my little sister rummage through my closet, or if I donate a gallon of blood every hour but don't have love, my offerings are useless. Love is Patient—even if it means skipping a trip to the yogurt shop in order to tutor an immigrant. Love is Kind—it doesn't stoop to ethnic jokes. Love does not envy the basketball team captain, the National Merit finalist, or even the blonde who sports the most even tan. Love doesn't get a swelled head over straight A's or a scholarship to Yale. Love isn't snooty about a new car or season tickets to the Cowboys. Love never laughs at the fat kid who hangs out of his t-shirt in PE. Love smiles when getting cut off on the interstate. Love submits an honest tax return. Love doesn't whine about the referee's bad call. Love hangs on to hope when your family is coming apart. Love does not change like hemlines and hairdos. Love is like the Energizer bunny. It keeps going & going & going. In the end only three things will remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

CONCLUSION

Since this is Memorial Day weekend, it's a good time to tell this story that illustrates love. During WWII a man died in combat in France and his two friends desperately wanted to give him a decent burial. They found a cemetery in a nearby village. It happened to be a Roman Catholic cemetery and the dead man had been a Protestant. When the two friends found the priest in charge of the burial grounds, they requested permission to bury their friend, but the priest refused because the man wasn't a Catholic. When the priest saw their disappointment, he explained that they could bury their friend immediately outside the fence. So they buried their friend outside the fence of the cemetery.

Later, they returned to visit the grave, but couldn't find it. Their search led them back to the priest and, of course, they asked him what had happened to the grave. The priest told them that during the night he was unable to sleep. He got up and moved the fence to include the dead soldier.

Edwin Markham was an American poet who wrote eighty poems even when he was aged 80. One of my favorite lines from his poetry says: "He drew a circle that shut me out; Heretic, rebel—a thing to flout; But love and I had a wit to win; We drew a circle that took him in." (The Shoes of Happiness, 1913) Is there someone you need to move your personal fence to include in your love, even if they've shut you out?

This week, you're going to be confronted with people who are unlovely. Will you make a choice that you're going to love them the way God loves you? But don't try to do it in your own strength. Just whisper a quick prayer, "Jesus, I know you love this person so much that you died for him/her. I can't love this person, so please, Jesus, love this person through me. Use my smile, my eyes, my words, my hands to show your love to this person."

Remember, fruit is the outward expression of an inner nature. An apple growing on a tree identifies that tree as an apple tree. When you love unlovely people, you are identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus!

OUTLINE

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- C. *Phileo*: Friendship love
- D. *Agape*: Sacrificial love

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes