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Love

We are first going to dig into scripture and begin to be intentional about going beyond in love, beyond in understanding God's love for us, beyond in our love towards God, beyond in our love for ourselves and others. Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength should be at the very center of our lives and relationship with the Lord.

We are called and exhorted to love God with everything in us. God should be at the center of all that we do. When I dedicated my life to the Lord in 2008, an exploration on "love" was the very first study I was led to dig into.

I was born in the very last year of the seventies, and I seem to have a connection to the hippie, free spirit, free love era. I rather enjoy the music that flowed from seventies. I loved what the era seemed to stand for – *love*.

Love drove me. Love was the motivator in most aspects of my life. I would pick up the theme of love in movies and in music. To me, love was and is the most important element we possess. For a large part of my life, love was presented to me in the secular sense. So when the

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Lord led me to dig into the topic of love in 2008, I was enamored with the truth that I found.

At the time, I studied from the King James Version. The term “love” wasn't specifically mentioned in one of the few verses I was familiar with regarding love. I'm sure you're familiar with I Corinthians 13. The King James Version states this familiar passage like so:

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

...

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The term “charity” is mentioned here, rather than the word “love”. Like many newlyweds, my husband and I had this passage read during our wedding. So when I was looking “love” up in the King James Version, I thought, “Why does this say “charity”, and not “love”?”

This is when I learned about a useful tool called the Strong's Concordance. When one references the concordance, it is discovered charity is a Greek word for *agapē*, which means affection, goodwill, love, benevolence, brotherly love or love feasts¹. As the Lord began to

¹ Blue Letter Bible. (2020, December 11). G26 - *agape* - Strong's Greex Lexicon (KJV). Retrieved from Blue Letter Bible: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G26&t=KJV>

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formulate and populate the seven components, love had to be at the center; loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

As we dig into Scripture to support this truth, my hope is the words will be planted in our hearts and souls. The words will go out, be received, be cultivated in our soul and not return void in our lives. Let's pray before we get started:

Father, God, I thank You for love. I thank You Lord that You *are* love. Father, I pray that souls have been prepared to receive the words that will be shared. I pray that your Holy Spirit will move in each soul's life and multiply love; cause love to expand and grow. Lord, love casts out fear. Father, I pray in this season when there is so much going on that folks could be fearful about, Lord, receiving these words, accepting these truths will grow and expand in the souls of many – pushing out fear and casting out darkness. Amen.

Deuteronomy 7:9 Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

He lavishes His unfailing love on those who love Him. What does that term lavish mean, according to Oxford Languages? The adjective is sumptuously rich, elaborate or luxurious. The verb? To bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities on.

The Lord's unfailing love is poured out on us, sumptuously rich, elaborately and luxuriously. He is bestowing His love in generous or extravagant quantities. He loves us so much!

Psalms 36:7 How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.

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He is so ready to forgive; so full of unfailing love for all who ask. I sense the need to pause here for a moment. If you do not yet know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I pray this Scripture goes deep into your heart right now. The Lord is so ready to forgive. He is so full of unfailing love for all who ask.

There are no qualifiers. There is no shame too big to keep you away from His forgiveness. There is no history or past too gross or miry that would keep Him from loving and forgiving you, and extending eternal salvation to *you*. In fact, you could even pray a prayer right now simply saying, "Jesus, I don't know why, but I know that there's something pinging my heart right now. I would like to ask You to become my Lord and Savior".

It is that simple. And if you do so, the Lord needs us to walk alongside one another. I would be happy to connect with you. Please reach out to me and I will gladly spur you on in your new walk with Jesus.

Psalm 86:15 But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

Psalm 136:26 Give thanks to the God of heaven. His faithful love endures forever.

Zephaniah 3:17 For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty Savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

In a season where there appears to be global fear rising, the Lord's love will calm those fears. He is living among us and we trust He will lavish us with His unfailing love. We in turn love Him and move according to His will and His ways. There is a promise here for us. He will calm our fears.

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John 3:16, perhaps the most popular verse of the Bible, states: *for God so loved the world, He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have ever lasting life.*

Jesus was given for you and I, because God so loved the world. He does not hate the world. He does not want to ruin the world. He loves the world, and He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, for you and I so that we would not perish, but would be able to then spend eternity with Him.

John 15:9-17 9 *"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 **When you obey my commandments**, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. 13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.*

There are a few things to pull from this passage. The first to emphasize is *"when you obey my commandment"*. The terms *"obey"* and *"commandment"* may not sit well with many in today's society and culture. I want to encourage you to not throw this book down, and to press beyond the disdain for these words, for therein lies fruitfulness. Stepping outside of our comfort zone, yields increase in awareness, understanding, and blessing.

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Commandment is simply doing what the Lord asks us to do, responding to what He instructs us to do as led by his Holy Spirit and His Scripture. What is the result of yielding and doing so? The result is living a life *filled* with joy! Scripture, here, says the joy will overflow! If the words "command" and "obey" do not feel good in your soul, but yet you're feeling sorrowful, down, or perhaps anxious, Scripture says, when we do what He asks us to do from a place of heartfelt, devoted love – joy will overflow. The joy will be *abundant*. The joy will be *magnificent*! The word then goes on to say, there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend.

"You are my friends", Jesus says. He laid down His life for you and me because He viewed us as friends. Jesus freely willingly laid down His life for you. He did not have to. He possessed the freedom to choose, just as you do, when He walked this earth. Jesus decided He would do what His Father instructed Him to do, what the father commanded Him to do. He chose to walk out His purpose and His call, for your sake and mine.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. 8 Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

Romans 5:2-5, 8 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops

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strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Galatians 4:6 *And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."*

In a season where many may feel they're being faced with trials, this passage in Romans five is an encouragement. Trials bring with them the potential to develop endurance. We know based on what we just read, love endures *all things*. If we press beyond the pain and discomfort of challenging circumstances, endurance will develop strength of character. Character will strengthen our confident hope of salvation. The hope of our salvation will never lead to disappointment. If you're experiencing problems and trials, a paradigm shift may be in order. A perspective shift from focusing on trials and problems, to trusting God, will not disappoint. His love for us, will be the anecdote to overcoming.

He saves us and then lavishes us with His unfailing love. When trials come our way, strength develops and reinforces our salvation. Because He loves us so dearly, He gave us his Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with *His* love.

Let's take a moment to allow this to soak in for a moment.

First, God loves us so much, He gave His Son to die for you and I. Jesus then walked the earth because He loves those the Father loves and saw us as friends. He then chose to walk to and endure the cross and die

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for you and I, making it possible to accept Christ into our lives as Lord and Savior, being reconciled to God. And then because of God's great love for us, scripture says He gave us Holy Spirit to then fill our hearts *with His love*.

Is this not mind boggling to your natural mind?! He gives us *His* love. He gives us His Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. There is no other religion or value system or principle out there that does instructs to live loving a god and others, and then provides the way to empower to do so. Not one.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the only God who loves so much that He died for us and then gives us His very Spirit to live within us and fill our hearts with His love and Son. Amazing!

***Galatians 2:20** My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

***Ephesians 2:4-5** But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)*

***1 John 3:1** See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him.*

Again, if you are reading this, and this seems foreign, but you are intrigued, I would love to encourage you to prayerfully consider, even if it might be hard to do.

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If you believe there is no God or you are not sure if there is a God or if perhaps you might be in a different religion or other thought pattern or paradigm, I encourage you to pray something from your own heart and soul. Perhaps the following prayer could be a launching pad into your own words, “Jesus, if You are the one true way, I would like to know You. I would like to know the truth”. Simply begin a conversation with Him today. I trust, the remainder of this book will then draw your heart further into our Father, and understanding will be attained. The words, Scripture and truths will become alive in your life and mind, through the power of Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God is love. Love comes from God. Even though I thoroughly enjoyed the seventies era, the genre of music that came from that time, and I loved the age aspired to emanate love, I discovered the love being offered oftentimes was fabricated from a natural mindset. The structure was comprised from derivatives of the soul, rather Scripture and Spirit.

The love being offered may have even seemed to feel good for a season, but true love comes from God – anything other source will fall away when life is shaken. Any semblance of love not flowing from His Holy Spirit within us, is a natural, fleshly love that will eventually begin to deteriorate. Scripture shares, anything that is built *not* from God will eventually fall away².

² Hebrews 12:27-29 This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain. 28 Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.

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1 John 4:9-11 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. 10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

Perhaps you can relate, perhaps you feel there should be more love. There should be love permeating our spaces in this season to break through darkness, to break through challenging seasons and challenging times. Love is fully available to each and every one of us. And not just any love, but a love *unfailing*.

What does unfailing mean? Unfailing is without error or fault; reliable and constant (Oxford Languages, 2020). God loves us with a love **without error**. He loves us with a love **without fault**. He loves us with a **reliable** love. He loves us with a **constant** love in those times where we may feel insecure or doubtful or trembling at what might be around us. Praise God! Did you know? God also desires *our* love.

Reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit (Oxford Languages, 2020). Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is not solely about you and I receiving all the unfailing love from God He is willing to lavish. A reconciled relationship will move us to also love God.

In any healthy relationship, any true connection, there should be an *exchange* of love. The same is true in our relationship with the Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:5 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

Now I know there is an apparent misconception that the God of the Old Testament was not loving. But then along comes Jesus in the New

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Testament and all we see and read is about love. Love has been God's central theme throughout the entire Bible. All He has ever and will ever desire, is to pour out His love and *receive* our love.

We see this again in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 10:12 “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul.

This is an expectation coming from the Old Testament, in the fifth book of the Bible.

Deuteronomy 11:13-14 “If you carefully obey the commands I am giving you today, and if you love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and soul, 14 then he will send the rains in their proper seasons—the early and late rains—so you can bring in your harvests of grain, new wine, and olive oil.

There is blessing in following after the Lord and what He is instructing us to do. There is blessing in loving the Lord as He loves us. There is blessing that flows from the Lord when love is reciprocated.

Deuteronomy 13:3 The Lord your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul.

I pray we are willing to explore and discover *what* or *who* might be at the center of the affections of our lives. I pray there is a willingness, desire and follow-thru to uncover where we invest all of our emotion, adoration, and love. Should we discover someone or something, other than God, is at the center, I pray we begin to take steps of recourse to grow in our love exchange with the Lord.

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He desires we understand where our love and affection resides. He truly does desire we love Him with everything we consist of. Then, His love will flow freely through us to others.

Deuteronomy 30:6 “The Lord your God will change your heart and the hearts of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and soul and so you may live!

The Lord desired the Israelites – as well as you and I – to have a changed heart, one that would be moved by His love to love Him with all our heart and soul. Unfortunately, the majority of Israelites missed this desire of God’s heart, time and time again. The exhortation first came shortly after being led out from slavery in Egypt, through the parting of the Red Sea, into what is known as the wilderness.

Amidst the Ten Commandments found in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, a very prolific and key statement was made:

Exodus 20:6 I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

Planted within apparent rules dictated by God through Moses, the Lord made a very profound statement, one seemingly glazed over by the recipients. He will *lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love Him and obey His commands.*

I would like to think I would have asked Moses to pause for a moment and repeat that statement, or perhaps expound upon the words. Why are these words, smack dab in the middle of the Ten Commandments, not included in the modern day décor found in gift shops with the ten instructions scribed by Moses? I might even have asked if Moses was willing to run back up the mountain to gain some clarity from the Lord on this omitted point.

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What does loving the Lord look like? How do I love Him? How could He possibly desire *my* love? I need answers, Moses!

Instead, Scripture shares the Israelites were fearful because of the Lord's presence and desired not to hear from God again. Instead they preferred to hear from Moses. They seemingly chose to hold fast to the rules and regulations, rather than inquire and pursue relationship with a God willing to speak with them and make Himself known. Sound familiar?

Later in Joshua, after the Israelites had been led out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land, the children of God were exhorted again.

Joshua 22:5 Love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, hold firmly to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul."

Just in case they were unable to accept and understand the Lord's desire for their love in the Promised Land, Joshua stated one more time prior to his passing:

Joshua 23:9-11 "For the Lord has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you. 10 Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the Lord your God fights for you, just as he has promised. 11 So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

According to Exodus 12:40, the Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt working and performing under the slavery of their captors. Perhaps this is why in Joshua 24 God's chosen people "pinky swore" to Joshua they would serve and obey the Lord, omitting they would also *love* Him. Could it be, serving, doing, being driven by task masters were their comfort zone and there was no understanding, nor desire, to love the Lord? Could this exemption to grow in love for the Lord have been

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the reason why the Israelites so quickly failed to obey, as we see in the second chapter of Judges?

For generations God's people would continue to wrestle with their inability to love the Lord and obey the letter of His law, wafting between obedience and disobedience for years. Yet, the Lord's desire for transformed hearts eager to respond to His love and instruction never ceased. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel reiterated God's desire:

***Ezekiel 36:26** And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new Spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, **responsive** heart.*

Let us not miss it in this hour. Let us not dismiss the God Whom created the Universe, desires a transformed heart within us. He desires our hearts be pliable and malleable in the hands of our Father. From Old Testament to New Testament, God has always desired we embrace a heart that responds to His love, Spirit and instruction.

In the New Testament, when asked what the most important, first, and greatest commandment, as well as what must be done to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded...

***Matthew 22:37** Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'*

***Mark 12:30** And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'*

***Luke 10:27** The man answered, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*

Loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is the number one desire of God's heart. When we finally understand and

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embrace the magnitude of God loving us, we cannot help but love Him in return.

1 John 4:19 King James Version (KJV) We love him, because he first loved us.

As you have been reading up to this point, I imagine many thoughts have been cropping up. Hopefully you have been able to take note of those thoughts regarding God's love for you and *God's desire for your love*. Now, I'd like us to take a moment to explore what might be at the center of our affection, rather than God.

If we were to revisit the seven components placed on my heart for *Beyond*, it is possible one or any combination of the other components, replace God being at the center. It is possible our affection and love for the Lord, has been replaced by other areas of life.

The first component might be *self*. We might be so enamored with our self and image, Jesus never truly becomes the center of our lives. The selfish nature is typically at the center for folks, especially before coming to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, self at the center can continue after Jesus is asked to be Savior, yielding a will and motives not surrendered to lordship of Holy Spirit in our lives.

When our will is not surrendered to Jesus as Lord, we are not radiating Jesus, but radiating self with the banner of Jesus over our lives. This can cause confusion for those around us. This can cause folks to believe we are hypocritical. This most certainly causes others in our lives to see a distorted and inaccurate version of God, unfortunately leading many to have no desire for reconciliation to God through Jesus.

The second component that might be at the center and not aligned properly according to the Kingdom, is our *call*. Our call could be at the center of our lives and potentially leading to activism or

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fundamentalism. It can be that “thing” that *we do*--investing all of our time, talent, and energy into yielding no fruit for the Kingdom of God. We read earlier, we are to be fruitful – *for God*. As Christians, when we are not yielding God’s fruit in our lives, we may be sewing even more confusion into the lives around us.

Another component that might be at the center is our relationship with others? *Relationships*. At the center of our affections may be relationships and the influence of our immediate family and/or extended family. Parents and siblings, spouse and children, or both, could be the center of our affection, rather than Jesus. What might be the impact of placing parents at the center rather than the Lord? It could mean their fears, concerns, natural guidance could replace Holy Spirit leadership in our lives.

Another area that might be at the center of our life is our *job* or *ministry*. Oftentimes, a career assumes front and center attention in our lives. Now, what might this look like? There be a mindset of being too busy for devotion, worship, time in God’s house, or developing meaningful connections with the Body of Christ. It might also appear as deterioration of relationship with a spouse or children. A job front and center may cause one to not present in the home, or not present when one *is* home. It may also look like utter devastation when layoffs or the loss of a job impacts one’s life.

Similarly, folks may discover their ministry has become the center of their lives rather than God. This may look like performance driven efforts, rather than prayer driven priorities. Ministry centered may yield campaigns, board meetings, and programs devoid of Holy Spirit and filled with natural ambition. When challenges hit, the ministry may crumble, rather than stand firm, because it was not established by God.

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Another are which may nestle at the center of our affections, rather than Jesus, is a zealous, passionate concern for those around us. Whether those in our home, our neighbors across the hall or across the street, our communities, we can be overly concerned with the cares, concerns and opinions of others. Many times, one's hyper-concern for their reputation in the eyes of a community and society, or even a classroom, church or work environment, can lead to over concern for what people think. This over concern drives our behavior and outcome, rather than Holy Spirit.

Will you do me a favor? Before you read on will you commit to asking the Lord to search your heart and to reveal to the truth about that which is currently captivating the center of your affections? Like the Psalmist in Psalm 139 give permission, "*Lord, search me, know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. Lord, help me to see where I might be displacing You as the center of my life.*"

Proverbs 3:12 says *the Lord corrects those He love, just as a father corrects a child in whom He delights*. It behooves us to embrace both Psalms and Proverbs, and ask the Lord to search and correct any area currently prohibiting us from loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and effectively living an unshakable life.

Consider asking the following and capturing in your journal:

Do I trust God truly does have the words of life that I should follow after?

Do I trust God to be able to speak truth into these areas?

Can I trust Holy Spirit to help me relinquish control so I don't need to have control?