



Experience God's Love

A 10-day devotional

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Day 1 "What is Love?"

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

The Word of God unfolds an unselfish love that cares more for others than we care for ourselves. However, popular culture uses the word *love* to mean many different things. Take for instance the following examples:

A young girl with candy dripping down her chin declares, "I *love* chocolate."

A grown man jumps up from his courtside seat and shouts, "I *love* this team!"

A high school student encourages his girlfriend to get an abortion as he whispers, "I really *love* you, and I don't want anything to come between us."

Expressions like these should make us wonder what exactly we are talking about when we use the word *love*. Is all love the same, or are there variations that we should be aware of?

The ancient Greeks came up with multiple words to express different types of love. This is not an exhaustive list, but three words that they used to define love were *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.

Eros is where we get the word *erotic*. It refers to a passionate physical attraction in which our motives are often about what we can get out of the relationship. *Philia* is the type of emotional love you have for a brother or sister. The Greek word *agape* refers to an unconditional love. It is love that gives without expecting anything in return, a love that moves us to action no matter what the cost may be to ourselves. It is this love that motivated Jesus to go to the cross so that sinful humanity could be saved. This type of love is a choice.

Aren't you glad that God's love for you is of the *agape* variety? His love for you is patient and kind. He is not frustrated or irritated. He bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. His love for you is beyond what your human mind can even comprehend. Yet it is as real and consistent as the rising and setting of the sun.

Only as we come to know the depth of love that God has for us will we be able to give that same type of love to others.

Father, I ask that you show me your love. I admit that my understanding of love falls far short of what you intended. As I take the next forty days to experience your love, I ask that your Holy Spirit would fill me with the reality of unconditional love. I thank you for this in advance right now. (Continue to pray as God's Spirit leads you.)

Day 2 “The Great Exchange”

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

Paul makes an amazing statement here. He says that his corrupt nature, which was the root of his sin, has been killed in Christ’s death, and that he literally no longer lives. He says that the life that is lived through him is a life of faith in which the Spirit of Jesus actually lives His life on Paul’s behalf. Has this been your experience of the Christian life? Have you truly learned to count your selfish nature as dead, and in turn live exclusively by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Since it is clear that this is God’s desire for every one of His children, we would be wise to meditate on the truth that Paul is presenting here until this becomes our daily reality. We can know that God does not show partiality. What He promises in the Scriptures to one of us, He promises to all.

Jesus offers to live His life on our behalf. What a glorious offer! Our sinful, selfish, broken, fallen, finite lives that can bear no lasting fruit for God’s kingdom can be exchanged for the perfect, infinite, overcoming, and fruit-filled life of God Himself. In Christian theology, this has often been called “The Great Exchange.”

Indeed, it is a great exchange. We give Jesus all of our life. He gives us all of His life. Not just as a someday, faraway intellectual concept, but as a living, breathing reality right here and now! The truth is, if we could see the eternal life that Jesus is offering us this very moment, we would all make this complete exchange as quickly as possible. Our hesitancy is based on our deception—either in believing that the life we have apart from Christ is somehow worth holding on to, or that the life Christ is offering us is deficient in some way and will leave us unsatisfied.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The life offered to us by the Spirit of God is nothing short of heaven on earth. This is the life mankind was created for since the beginning of time. Only as we enter more deeply into the reality of exchanging our lives for the life of Christ will we come to know real fulfillment. Make this exchange today, then allow God’s Spirit to teach you how to live an exchanged life every day.

Father, I ask for your forgiveness for the many times that I have held on to my life and not trusted you to live your life in and through me. Today, I choose to fully exchange my self-led life for your glorious eternal life. Thank you for making this exchanged life available to me!

Day 3 “To Love God Is to Obey God”

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” John 15:9–10

Jesus said to love Him is to obey Him. Western society has given us so many definitions for love, but most of them are related to our emotions. Very few of us think of loving God as obedience or submission to Him. We can only understand this when we come to realize the biblical meaning of the word *love*. The original Greek word for love is transliterated *agapao*, and it means to “actively do what the Lord prefers.”¹ So, to love God is to prefer Him above yourself. Having this understanding of love is critical and has wide-ranging implications.

When we say, “I love God,” we are not merely saying that we have a fond emotional affection for God. We are saying that in all circumstances, by the empowerment given to us by His Holy Spirit, we will choose His will above our own.

Jesus modeled this preference of His Father’s will for us in the garden of Gethsemane prior to His crucifixion. He preferred His Father’s will above His own. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

To love God means that we agree to put the whole of our lives in complete submission to another person who we are acknowledging is so far greater than us, that He is worthy of our complete adoration in every facet of our lives.

Likewise, to say that you love another human being is not a small matter. Before we casually use the words, “I love you,” we would be wise to first check our hearts and ask ourselves, *Am I really living in a way that shows that I care more about this person than I care about myself?* If not, then rather than using vain words, may we ask God’s Spirit to teach us to care more about others than we care about ourselves. When our words and actions go hand in hand, we can expect the love of God expressed through us to produce powerful results.

Father, today I choose to express my love for you by preferring your will and your ways above my own. Help me to understand the implications of what it means to truly love you with the whole of my life. I desire to remain in your love, and I choose to believe you will give me the spiritual strength I need to prefer you at all times and in every circumstance.

1 James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), s.v. "agapao," <http://biblehub.com/greek/25.htm> (accessed April 9, 2017).

Day 4 "Called to Forgive"

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ... For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:12, 14–15

Tears are often an indicator of physical or emotional pain. Pain hurts. God's intention in allowing us to walk through pain is always good, though we often cannot see this at the time. It helps to be aware that the greatest goal He has in His heart for His children is that we will be conformed into the image of His Son, Jesus. Sometimes, in the midst of our pain, just knowing these truths in our minds is not enough to comfort us.

What about the times when those closest to you caused you the most pain due to their words or actions? What about the times that those you looked up to, or those who were even leaders in the church, failed you? What about when all hell breaks loose and you feel like you have no one you can turn to who understands or cares? What then?

A simple yet profound prescription arises from the Word of God. It is completely counterintuitive to our natural minds, and yet, because God has told us it is the solution, it is in fact the only thing that works. Forgiveness. Letting go. Choosing to cancel the debt we believe we are owed by our offender and entrusting justice entirely to the judge of all the earth.

Easy? No. Possible? Yes, through the empowerment given to us by the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that the same Spirit that lived inside of Jesus, and was able to forgive His murderers while He was suffocating on the cross, lives inside of you. The same Holy Spirit who gave Stephen the grace to forgive his murderers while stones were crushing his body, lives inside of you (Acts 7:60). This is not a matter of mustering up enough human strength. This is a matter of humbling ourselves before the Spirit of God and asking Him to give us the grace to forgive.

Father, I ask for your forgiveness for the ways that I have wrongfully responded to those who have sinned against me. Today, I choose as an act of my will to forgive _____ (name of your offender) for the way that he/she has sinned against me: _____ (be as specific as you can here). By the power of the Holy Spirit, I cancel _____ (offender's name) debt once and for all, and I choose to ask that you bless _____ (offender's name) by molding him/her into your image. By your grace, I choose to no longer speak about the offense against me but instead to speak blessings over _____ (offender's name). I trust you to protect and defend me. I believe you to heal my heart of this offense now so that I may love well.

Day 5 "God Loves You Unconditionally"

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Many times, we can get into a rut with God where we think that we must perform to earn His love. The truth is, we have all been indoctrinated in some form of conditional love. That is the only kind of love that fleshly humanity understands—a love that gives as long as we are receiving something of equal or greater value in return. At home, at school, at work, and beyond, most of our life experiences have ingrained in us an understanding that if we perform well, we will be appreciated and cared for. And if we fail, we have come to accept shame, disapproval, and in some cases, even hatred, as the norm.

To break out of this conditional love mentality, it will take a revelation from God. Only the Spirit of God can reveal to our hearts just how much He is for us and not against us. He has given us His Word to break through a faulty understanding of His love. In this passage in Romans, we learn that even while we were God's enemies, He loved us enough to die for us! Jesus said there is no greater love than to be willing to lay down our lives for another person. So, the truth is, God loved you at the greatest measure possible while you were still living in complete rebellion against Him.

If He loved you with the greatest act of love when you hated Him, can you believe that He loves you today? May the Spirit of God have mercy on all of us, so that we will once and for all break free from the lies that would have us believe that God's love is conditional.

He loves you. He will never stop loving you. His love is what you need. Will you allow His unconditional love to embrace you now?

Father, I desire to understand your love for me. I give you my sin, my shame, and the feelings of condemnation that I have wrestled with. I choose to embrace the truth of your Word and believe that you love me simply for who I am and not based on my performance. I thank you that your love for me is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Day 6 “We Are God’s Children”

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. 1 John 3:1

God's children. Have you ever stopped long enough for this truth to really sink in? You are God's child. You are His son or His daughter. You stand on this earth as a child of the King of Glory. You are an earthly representation of the family of God. Your heavenly Daddy is the rightful owner of all things. He is in full control of every detail of human history—past, present, and future.

Nothing can happen to you unless it first passes through the sovereign hands of your eternal Father. You have nothing to fear. There is nothing that you will ever need to worry about. Ever. Under any circumstances.

Allow your heavenly Father to embrace you in this moment. Allow the truth of His sovereignty and His affectionate parental love for you to so infuse you with divine courage that you will never be the same again.

No matter what your earthly family may have been like, you now have a heavenly family, made up of sisters and brothers from all over the world. You now have a Father who is interested in the uniqueness of you. He cares so very much about you. He loves the special things that make you who you are. He delights in you. He wants to listen to you. He wants to hear about what you are facing. He will never leave you or forsake you. Not now. Not ever. On into eternity, He will still be there caring for you.

Entrust yourself to Him today. Allow His fatherly Spirit to father you. Allow Him to speak into your life. He has nothing but your best interests at heart. When He speaks to you about anything, listen well and seek to apply His instructions in your daily practice. In this way, He will become far more than a distant spiritual Father, but your moment-by-moment best friend and confidant. Your leader and the lover of your soul.

Heavenly Father, I need you to father me. Deep in my heart, I want to know that you are my Father and that I am your beloved child. Help me to rest in your love for me. Teach me what it means to live close to you so that I fulfill the reason why you have adopted me into your family.

Day 7 “Without Love We Can Accomplish Nothing”

If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2–3

Paul makes it clear here that it is possible to experience the power of God moving in and through our lives yet fail to have love. Many people run here and there seeking spectacular evidence of God's power in their lives. This is not new. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 12:39). Paul cautioned that even if we possess the power to understand all knowledge, and have faith that moves mountains, without love, we are nothing. Amazingly, he continued by stating that if we are willing to give up all that we own and be brutally killed, but are without love, we “gain nothing.”

Let this truth sink in. Paul, a man who healed the sick, raised the dead (Acts 20:10), planted churches among the unreached, and who endured beatings for his faith, declared that all of it is nothing if we fail to love. Elsewhere, Paul stated the value of prophesy, healings, faith, and the surrender of our material possessions for the purpose of advancing Christ's kingdom.² So he is not saying spiritual power is without value; he is simply putting it into perspective. Love is paramount.

Is God's Spirit calling you to simplify your spiritual quest? Have you found yourself pursuing the power of God but lacking His love? What if instead, you simply began to pursue a wholehearted love of God that would position you to deeply love all those He brings into your life? Could it be that this approach to your spiritual growth would result in more lasting fruit? Allow the Spirit of God to put love in its proper place, so that everything you do is done out of love.

Father, I ask for your forgiveness for times when I have sought to represent you without a deep and real expression of your love. Today, I choose to believe that love is the most important thing. I choose to pursue your love for me and for others above all things.

2 See 1 Corinthians 12:7–11 and 2 Corinthians 9:6–7.

Day 8 “Love Is the Greatest Thing”

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 22:36–40

Mount Everest is known as the earth's highest mountain. With an elevation of over 29,000 feet, it has no other competition. The thought of climbing to the summit has captivated the imagination of mountaineers for decades. It was not until 1953 that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay made the first official ascent.³ Previously many had died trying.

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus presents us with a spiritual Mount Everest. This summit stands head and shoulders above any other spiritual pursuit we may have had. The Pharisees were gathered together, and one of them asked Him what the greatest commandment was. Unflinching, Jesus stated that it is to love God and to love others with all that we have. Everything else hangs on these two things.

Happily for us, we do not need to attempt to climb this spiritual mountain in our own strength. If that were the case, none of us would be able to reach the summit. The key is to realize that Jesus already lives at the top of this mountain. He is not inviting us to try to climb up through our own efforts. He is inviting us to die to ourselves so that He can live His life of love through us.

There are many earthly and spiritual pursuits that we could choose to go after. Jesus narrows the playing field here. He effectively says, “Pursue me for this, and I will take care of all the rest.” Simultaneously, He lets us know that if we miss this, we've missed it all.

As followers of Christ, love for God and love for others is the summit we should have our eyes fixed on. As we surrender our lives completely to Jesus, we can expect His Holy Spirit to live a life of sacrificial love in and through us.

Father, I thank you for making it clear to me that love for you and love for others is the most important thing. I thank you that I do not have to attempt to live out this lifestyle on my own. Today I ask you to live your life of love in and through me for your glory.

3 Wikipedia, s.v. “Mount Everest,” https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mount_Everest&oldid=773583690 (accessed April 9, 2017).

Day 9 “The World Does Not Know Love”

The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4

The world around us is knowingly or unknowingly chasing after love at a breakneck pace. People are trying to get their hands on anything they can to fill themselves with some form of life. From the latest digital device, to their latest social media post, to the latest restaurant, to the latest vehicle. There are simply so many things competing for our worship.

You see, anything we turn to for life outside of God is an idol. This can even include seemingly good things like family and friends. Our God is a God of love, and in His love He is also a jealous God. Let me explain. He does not want anyone or anything competing for our deepest affections. Just as a husband expects his wife to only express physical intimacy with him and no one else, God expects us to find our deepest spiritual satisfaction solely in Him.

Is it possible that there is something in your life today that you have allowed to become an idol? Is there anything that you consistently turn to for life outside of Christ? God desires all of your heart. He wants to be the one and only person, place, or thing that you look to for life. Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Today you can experience an abundance of life in Jesus that makes all the pleasures of earth pale in comparison. Do you believe that?

Take a moment and allow God's Spirit to speak to your heart. *Father, I ask you to show me any areas of my life where I have turned to other things for life outside of you. (Wait and give Him time to speak to you.)*

The truth is that choosing idols comes from the root sin of choosing to be the leader of your own life. God's Spirit does not turn to idols, and you will not either, if He is truly in control. The repentance that God desires is for us to change our mind about who is leading our life. As you repent by surrendering fully to Christ's leadership, His supernatural empowerment will fill you with the strength to overcome.

Father, I confess that I have allowed idols in my heart. I agree with you that turning to _____ (be specific) for life, instead of turning to you for life, has been a sin that has grieved you. By your grace, I change my mind regarding who is the leader of my life. I no longer want to be the leader. I ask you to lead my every thought, word, and action. I thank you right now for taking over my life with your life.

Day 10 "Unconditional Love: It Begins with Receiving"

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2

We have addressed this numerous times throughout the forty days, but loving others unconditionally has to begin in our own hearts. We simply cannot give to others what we have not first received from God. God wants us to know that we are loved unconditionally, that He has removed condemnation from us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We are justified and made whole again solely and only thorough the finished work of Jesus.

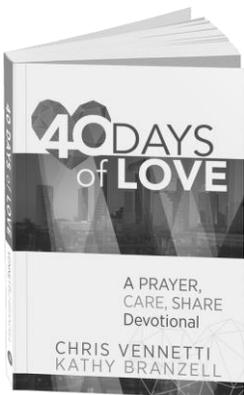
We can know these things intellectually, yet still fail to walk in them as a daily reality. We desperately need the Spirit of God to take the truth of God and reveal it to us so that we know that we know that we are loved.

Clearly God's love for us cannot be based on our emotions. If we base God's love for us on our emotions, we would be on a constant roller coaster, feeling loved one day and unloved the next.

Instead, we must learn to take God at His Word. He is the one who has said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). He is the one who has said that He "will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV). We must come to a maturity in our faith where we simply accept what He has said about us as the truth and walk in it as our daily inheritance as His children.

This is not arrogance; it is taking God at His Word. This simple yet profound practice exchanges our up-and-down emotions for the solid rock of the Word of God, which will never change. Allow God's Spirit to teach you to make this exchange of your emotions for His eternal truth, and you will never be the same. A lifestyle of unconditional love for others begins by receiving God's unconditional love for you.

Father, I thank you that you love me unconditionally. I thank you that this is based on your Word, which will never change. Teach me to walk in the full assurance of your love for me in every circumstance so that I am prepared to extend unconditional love to others.



These devotions are excerpts from *40 Days of Love* by Chris Venetti and Kathy Branzell. You can order *40 Days of Love* on Amazon.com, CBD.com, and Barnes and Noble.com.