

Fruit of the Spirit: Love

1 John 4:7-12 & 1 Corinthians 13

I'm actually going to start by reading you a third reading today – don't turn to it, but just listen and hear what Jesus says:

Luke 6:27-36

²⁷ "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Gracious Father, as we approach this topic of love, we ask now that your Holy Spirit would be at work in us, teach us about your love and fill us, that we might be people who love, to your glory!

A husband and wife came for counselling after 20 years of marriage. When asked what the problem was, the wife went into a passionate but painful tirade listing every problem they had ever had in the 20 years they had been married. She went on and on: neglect, lack of intimacy, emptiness, loneliness, feeling unloved and unlovable, a vast list of unmet needs she had endured over the course of their marriage.

After allowing this to go on for a sufficient length of time, the therapist got up, walked around the desk and, after asking the wife to stand, hugged her, stroked her cheek and kissed her.

The woman shut up and quietly sat down.

The therapist turned to the husband and said, 'This is what your wife needs at least three times a week'.

The husband thought a moment, and said – well I can bring her here on Monday and Wednesday, but on Friday I play golf!

Now, I joke, but love is hard isn't it. I apologise if that feels a bit close to the bone.

The two readings which Margaret and Robin read, are the most popular two readings for a wedding service.

And yet, marriages are struggling and divorce is on the up.

Loving others, is really hard.

Actually, one of the things I try to say to engaged couples before their wedding, is that real love is seen in the hardest moments.

Your love is really put to the test when the other person is difficult, or you are angry or frustrated.

And that's true in all our relationships, not just marriage. That's what Jesus is saying. (We're all sinners), but Jesus says, even the unreligious and 'bad' people, love those who love them. They bless those who bless them, they lend money to those who pay it back.

Real love is seen in how you treat those who mistreat you!

That is the measure of your love.

And Jesus says, love your enemies!

I hope you immediately feel inadequate when you hear that. I hope you are aware that you fall short of this standard. Because it is unbelievably high!

So let me make it clear as I stand up here, that I am not loving.

I am nothing like what I should be, what I want to be, or what I could be.

You see, when there is a bit of pressure making it hard to love, I fall short – sometimes just because I'm tired and I find it hard to think past myself and my needs.

But particularly when another feeling or concerns are pressing on my mind.

I get so easily frustrated. Some people just have a lot of time and they have no concept of urgency, or getting to the point – they keep you talking for ages, and put everything off schedule. I find it really hard to be loving to those people, "I need to go",

I don't have time to listen...

Inside I think... "no I don't care any more, it's been more than an hour already"...

My frustration stops me from being loving.

Or my pride: Someone tells me of the terrible mess that they're in with their family, because of some stupid things they've done - the pain it's causing them and the rejection they feel – and instead of being filled with compassion...

I'm thinking "well it was pretty stupid of you" I wouldn't have done that, if only you hadn't, then we wouldn't be here.

My criticism of them, and pride in myself, means I'm not being loving as I should or could be.

My heart just doesn't naturally respond as I want it to!

It even happens, actually, with those who it *is* easiest to love!

I find it hard to listen and to concentrate, I can get distracted by other things on my mind, and sometimes I even look at my phone – or check the news or the football.

I mean think about it... a **person**, [Vs] an electronic thing!

I don't say this because I want sympathy, or for you to say to me afterwards – you're not that bad, you are loving really. Please don't.

I say this so that you will know it's ok to admit that you're not as loving as you should and could be, deep down.

You don't *have* to admit it to others, but I pray you'll be happy to admit to yourselves and God, you fail to love like you should and could. Your heart is inclined towards yourself, or towards comfort or something other than loving God, and loving others.

Well... it is my job to help you.

I hope having this talk, and this service focused on our love, will get you asking the question "*am I loving?*"

And it is my aim to help you to **be** more loving, and to help you to know how to pray and work towards that.

I'm going to do that in two halves really, looking briefly at these two passages.

Firstly from 1 John, we'll see that **Love comes from God**. The way that we can become more loving, is to know God's love for us, and those around us, more deeply and more fully – that it would be what grips us.

In a sense that's the answer – to know and experience God's love for you *is* how you can become more loving.

After that we'll look at 1 Corinthians and see more about **what that love should look like**.

Firstly 1 John.

Let me start by sharing what someone said to me this week.

They've been coming to the identity course, and recently coming along to church, I think for about 3 months, having never really been before. This person said to me

"I think I need to go to church or a Christian group every day! After I go to church or the identity course, if someone cuts me up on the way home, I think like 'oh man, well I guess they could have had a really rough day or something could be going on I just don't know anything about'

But if it's been a few days since hearing about God and someone cuts me up I'm all like [and their face changed] and the anger started to come and I said, 'the red mist comes'"

Now, that's really interesting isn't it. I wanted to say – yea, church *is* what we need, God knows we're weak, and he intends for us to go to church.

Inside, I was jumping up and down with joy, because clearly the Holy Spirit is at work and this person is being affected, helped, changed by what they're learning. Praise God!

I wonder if you've ever noticed that happen to you?

That's a small example of exactly what is going on in 1 John 4. The big idea is that we are changed to be more loving, either towards God or other people, by first receiving God's love

Let's have a look at 1 John 4.

I have to confess, I find this letter hard to follow at times, so I'm going to try to keep it really simple.

V7 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God” we *can* love, he says – because we know God, and love comes from him!

V11 “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” we can love, and also we *should* love.

V16 “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.” we need to rely on God in order to love, that is, we are dependent on him to love, we draw strength from him, in order to love.

V19 “We love *because* he first loved us” we DO love, and the reason is because he loved us first. There is an order, and God’s love comes first, and our love, for him and for others comes second.

V21 “And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” we are commanded to love others, if we are Christians (that is, if we do love God).

Now I could say a lot more, but I hope you saw that God’s love for us is primary, he makes the first move, he loves us first, we love him back as a response.

He also empowers our love. So to love the person who tests my patience, I need to rely on him. God’s love for us enables us to love him, *and* it enables us to love others.

So, we need to understand God’s love for us, we need to soak it up, drink it deeply.

It is the power and source of your love, if you want to love more/better, you need to know and experience and be utterly saturated in God’s love for you.

That’s what my friend who has been coming to identity was experiencing, as they understood more about God’s love for them, as they heard about real love, it changed them – it really made a difference!

You can think of it this way – the people who you hang out with change you. You become more like those who you spend time with. That’s true isn’t it?

Well, v8 and v16 say “God is Love” and so the more we spend time with him, the more we hang out with him, the more loving we become.

And that will be a really helpful way to understand it for some here. If you are more intellectual and love to understand things, let me remind you that it’s not just about understanding and having knowledge of God’s love for you. We do need that, but knowing about God’s love doesn’t change your heart, we need the Holy Spirit to draw us close to God, to make it an applied experience, to make it real and transforming.

That’s why our love, is a fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit.

If that’s true, what do you think I prayed for you all in my preparation?

These words from Eph 3

“I pray that you, [by the power of the Holy Spirit]... may have power, together with all [Christians], to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—so that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

So, you need to know God’s love for you.

We said at the start, that love is seen most of all at the hardest times, when the pressure is really on, when it's difficult to love. *Then* love is really tested, really seen.

So look at Jesus' love for you. V9

[“⁹ 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.¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”](#)

This says that God let his own son die, so that you could live.

Sometimes we find it hard to give up a chocolate bar, for someone we love!

Jesus chose to die for you, he chose to take all the anger and punishment we deserved, he chose to be cut off from his father in hell, to secure our eternal place in heaven, our everlasting friendship with God. He loves you!

Was it easy? Well in the garden Jesus, pouring with sweat, and fear, called out to God – longing for a different way. But there wasn't, the cross was the only way he could save you. And he loves you that much, that he did go through with it.

[“Having loved us, he loved us to the end”](#). His love faced the ultimate difficult moment and proved true, strong and sacrificial.

God loves you! He gave himself up, for you.

His love is seen in action.

And as we move onto the next passage, 1 Corinthians 13, p1154 that's what I want us to see first. That **real love is seen in action**.

You see, what is the most common passage read at weddings, and makes its way onto posters and wall hangings all over the world as a beautiful poem about love, an ethereal description; it's actually deeply practical, it's a telling off!

Paul is writing to a church in Corinth, and the Corinthians are being unloving to each other. And he writes, love is patient, love is kind, love does not envy – and he means – you're not patient, you're not kind, you're full of envy – and therefore, you're not loving!

So, to feel what this is trying to say, we should put own name there! Look down at v4 please, and read it slowly, putting your own name in:

[Dan] is patient, [Dan] is kind.

[Dan] not envy, even when he sees *that* phone, *that* house, *that* job.

[Dan] does not boast, [Dan] is not proud.

It's not supposed to be an exhaustive list, this isn't everything – it's supposed to be specific, and helpful.

So you might think (like me) – “yea I really am quite impatient”

V5 [Dan] does not dishonour others,

[Dan] is not self-seeking, [Dan] is not easily angered, [Dan] keeps no record of wrongs.

Do you see how practical it is? If you're asking the question “am I loving?” Well this helps you to answer it doesn't it. and I don't need to read very far to know that this isn't describing me!

It's amazing how many young people these days think of love as a feeling. Talking about a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, people will say, "oh yea I love him, I definitely love him" and the next week they're not going out any more. Well that's sad, but why use that word?

Or if there is some tension at home they might say:
"I'm so not loving my mum right now".

Yet of course you should love your mum! The word is used to describe feelings. I'm frustrated with my mum, or I'm feeling bruised by my mum – feelings.

But 1 Corinthians is teaching us love is deeply practical. Rooted in choices we make, ways we behave, the direction of our will.

Dan is patient, Dan is kind. That means I'm gentle towards the people who take up more time.

Dan does not boast, Dan is not proud. That changes the way I speak, the words I use. It means I want to talk about you and not just myself all the time – so I listen really carefully to what you say.

Dan is not easily angered.

Do you see – deeply practical.

[Dan] always protects, always trusts, always hopes,

[Dan] always perseveres!! That's about how I don't give up!

Do you know, think about what would happen if you were really like that? Wouldn't you be a pleasure to know? to be around?

What a blessing you would be to others.

Love is not just a feeling, real love is seen in action.

That means at times, to be loving, we will have to dig in and force ourselves to behave in a certain way.

But we need to remember, as well, **real love is not just actions.**

Look up the page, to v1

"¹ If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

Do you see what he's saying – I can do the washing up at home for Sam, and it's possible to do it without love – if I do that I'm like a clanging gong, not like a person.

It's not even talking about things like 'buying Sam tickets to a football match for her birthday' – when I love football and she hates it. He's talking about doing the *right* thing, but with the wrong heart.

I could patiently listen to that person who takes more time than I want, pouring out their troubles, I can give them the time they need, but without love in my heart I'm just like a wall, not like a person – and certainly not like what God wants me to be!

So real love *does* have feeling and heart behind it, it *is* seen in action but it is not *just* action.

Ultimately, what we are talking about: is that God gives me a new heart. The Holy Spirit works inside of me and changes my attitude.

That's why the bible commands us to love more, to grow in love, to keep loving more and more and more.

It says: “[Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you *have sincere love for each other, \(now\) love one another deeply, from the heart.*”](#)

And love is the first fruit mentioned among the fruit of the spirit because love is like the sap of the tree.

It flows through the tree (you) to give you life, and **love** is what makes all the fruit sweet.

God wants you to hear the challenge and the command today to love more and more, in your choices and actions... from the heart – it is a command.

God also wants you to know just how deeply you are loved by him, because that is, as I understand it, *how* the Holy Spirit works to change your heart – by bringing the love of God to you, - and to your heart and not just to your mind.

So remember *this* about God's love for you: [God] is patient, (with you)

[God] is kind, (to you)

[God] does not envy (he has all he needs)

[Jesus] does not boast, (before you)

[Jesus] is not proud, (against you – challenging you)

[The Holy Spirit] does not dishonour others,

[The Holy Spirit] is not self-seeking, (he cares for you)

[God] is not easily angered, (with you, because of his love for you)

[Jesus] keeps no record of (your) wrongs.

[Jesus] does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (he wants nothing but good, purity and truth in your life)

[The Holy Spirit] always protects, (he never leaves you)

[The Holy Spirit] always trusts,

[The Holy Spirit] always hopes, (for your good)

[God] always perseveres. (with you)

God's love for you, is perfect and constant.

Amen.