

The Language of Love

I Corinthians 13:1-7, 12-13

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If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

We certainly receive many messages about what love is. Maybe we can say what it is not. Maybe we have some clues about what healthy relationships look like. I wish there was more than one word in the English language for love. I love James Taylor, I love Mexican food, I love my husband Jeffrey, I love being a pastor. One word, many meanings.

Today is Valentine's Day. There are certainly a variety of messages about love on Valentine's Day. Just walk down the card and gift aisle at CVS or think about past years since many of us are not quite out and about during this pandemic. The cards cover everything from silly to weird to thoughtful to sexy. If you love someone, the message seems to be, you will buy them flowers, jewelry, a nice dinner, Victoria's Secret lingerie, or chocolate. Is that how you show love? Is that you feel loved?

I have thought about this question quite a bit over the years in both my personal life and professional life. I have offered pre-marital counseling, led retreats on healthy marriages and relationships, and counseled couples and families who were struggling. One of the best resources I have used when it comes to love is the *Five Love Languages* by Gary Larson. Jeffrey and I read it together early in our marriage and it gave me language and insight into what giving and receiving looks like. And it helped me as a parent and friend.

Dr. Chapman spent years taking notes with couples he was counseling when he recognized a pattern. What he discovered was that couples were misunderstanding one another and their needs for feeling loved. Chapman is convinced that keeping the emotional love tank full is important.

When your spouse's or partner's emotional love tank is full and they feel secure in your love, there is better health in the relationship. After going through his notes, he discovered that there are five "love languages" that people seem to respond to. The likelihood that your partner's primary love language is the same is unlikely. So, when couples have different primary languages, there are bound to be misunderstandings.

The five primary love languages are - words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, acts of service, and receiving gifts. Here is an overview of the five love languages and how people feel loved through each of them.

Words of Affirmation

In simple terms, the words of affirmation love language is about expressing affection through spoken words, praise, or appreciation. When this is someone's primary love language, they enjoy kind words and encouragement. They also enjoy uplifting quotes, love notes, and text messages and cards. That is one of Jeffrey's primary love language. He loves receiving cards from me. He likes to read the printed text and my words to him over and over. I did not know that at first. I enjoy receiving cards, but I realized he deeply valued and felt loved when he read or heard words of love and affirmation.

Quality Time

Love and affection are expressed through this love language when someone gives someone else their undivided attention. This means putting down the cell phone and turning off the tablet, making eye contact and actively listening. It can mean scheduling time together and putting it on the calendar. People with this love language are looking for quality over quantity. This is one of our son's primary language. He would ask me to play a game with him sit with him, do something together.

Physical Touch

A person with this love language feels loved through physical affection. Aside from sex, those who have physical touch as their primary love language feel loved when their partner shows physical affection in some way like holding their hand, touching their arm, or giving them a foot massage at the end of the day. We all need some physical touch, but for some this is the primary language.

Acts of Service

When someone's primary love language is acts of service, they feel loved and appreciated when people do nice things for them. Whether it's helping with the dishes, little acts of service go straight to the person's heart. When Jeffrey does tasks around the house that I usually do, I feel like saying – Take me, I am yours! I feel loved and cared for. Those actions feel loving.

Receiving Gifts

To a person whose love language is receiving gifts, gift-giving is symbolic of love and affection

in their mind. They treasure not only the gift itself but also the time and effort the gift giver put into it. When you take the time to pick out a gift specifically for them, it communicates to them that you really know them.

So maybe in Valentine's Day, we take time to be open to the Divine Source of Love, learn what our love language is and take time to find out the love language of someone we love. That may bring some clarity and joy.

Paul wrote a letter to church in Corinth because there was a lack of clarity and joy. That community of early believers were in conflict about many things – food, theology about who were insiders & outsiders, and about love. Corinth was a large wealthy Greek port city. It was a center for art, philosophy and Greek mythology and religions. Temples throughout the city honoring Aphrodite. It was a fast city. Maybe we would say an ancient Las Vegas. Paul was writing to clarify how a lifestyle lived in relationship with Christ differs from that of the culture.

So this passage I read about love had a broader purpose. We probably hear it most often at weddings. Does this love have anything to do with the love on a Valentine Card or red silk pajamas? What kind of love is Paul talking about? When we read the word "love" in the Bible, what kind of love are we talking about?

There were 4 types of love reflected in the Greek of the New Testament and in Greek and Roman cultures of Jesus' time and early church

Storge - affection.

This is the love between parents and children, among family. This word for love appears in Romans 12:10 - marks of a true Christian "Love one another with mutual affection, outdo one another in showing honor." Comfortable love. Day to day kind of love. Colors other kinds of love. Kind of love, of affection, that grows over time.

Is this the kind of love Paul is referring to in I Corinthians 13? No

Storge love, Affection, Comfortable love is not what Paul is writing about. He does remind believers in other letters that this kind of love is also part of our Christian faith.

Philia - Brotherly or sisterly love, the love between friends

As you probably know, this is the origin of the city name of Philadelphia - city of brotherly love. Jesus loved his disciples with kind of love. He said to them in John's gospel:

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer." John 15:13-14

Philia. Love between friends. Love among friends. In some ways it is the least natural. We can physically survive without it. We choose our friends. To love someone as a friend is a high

calling. In some ways the Greeks elevated this love to the highest level. There is a sense of humility in this friendship love. We feel blessed and honored to be someone's friend. It is a joy, a gift.

A few years ago I read about a young man named Mark Lowry, 13, who was a seventh-grader at Cross Lutheran School, in Yorkville, Illinois. He was diagnosed with leukemia. By the end of the week the school's 15 other seventh-and eighth-grade boys discovered that Mark would undergo chemotherapy and lose his hair. They all of them decided to have their heads shaved. How long do the boys plan to go hairless as a show of solidarity with their classmate? "Until Mark grows his hair back" was the unanimous response. Friendship.

Jesus said his disciples were his friends. I have people in the church express their gratitude for church friends.

Is this the kind of love Paul talks about in I Corinthians 13? No.

Philia love, Love among friends not what Paul is writing about. But Jesus does tell disciples that this kind of love is part of our Christian faith.

Eros - Intimate, sexual, romantic, erotic love.

Being in love. The kind of love lovers are in. Sexual intimacy is one expression of Eros love. It is the kind of love we feel when we can't stop thinking about another person. It is that endorphins buzzing and butterflies in your stomach feeling. Eros wants the beloved. Eros sees no distinction between giving and receiving.

Eros is an amazing gift from God. Pleasure and joy. If it is used to exploit or only for immediate self-gratification, it is not eros. Eros love is the full expression of body and soul together.

Is this the kind of love Paul talks about in I Corinthians 13? No.

Eros love intimate love for the beloved is not what Paul is writing about. But this kind of love can be an expression for the beloved in our lives as people of faith.

Agape - selfless love, sacrificial love, unconditional, a gift

God's love for us shown in Christ. In his sermon on the mountain, he shocked his listeners. Many listening to him knew who was really loved by God, who was clean and unclean, who was lovable and not lovable by God.

Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" But I say to you, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.;" Matthew 5:43

Agape love. Divine Love. Source of all love. A bold love that empowers and connects.

Is this the kind of love that Paul is writing about in I Corinthians 13? Yes

God is love. Our theology shifts when we know that this Divine Love is in us and it is something we experience in our bodies, we live in it, we share it, we speak up. Love moves us to care for our neighbors near and far. It comforts us and challenges us.

Cornel West famously said, "Justice is what love looks like in public."

I want to close with a contemporary translation of the last verses of 1 Corinthians 13 from The Message by Eugene Peterson.

"We do not yet see things clearly. We are squinting in a fog, peering through the mist, but it will not be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright. We will see it all then, see as clearly as God sees us, knowing God as directly as God knows us. But for right now, until that completeness comes, we have three things to do. Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly."

Amen.