

Growing in Love

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Preacher: Tim Tree

[0 : 0 0] So as Leslie said, my name's Tim. It's my pleasure to be one of the leadership team here. And for the next hour and a half, some of you know me, some of you don't, we're going to be thinking about God's Word.

And those of you who have been coming to the church regularly will know that we have been going through a series where we've been thinking about how we can grow.

At five foot six and not very many kilos, I have to say your prayers worked and Brother Courtney was brought safely out of the water.

But we're not talking about that kind of growing. We're talking about how we can grow to become more like Jesus, how we can grow in Christ. And over the last few weeks, we've thought about how we can grow wisdom and influence, in compassion and grace and mercy, in the life of the Spirit, in faithfulness, growing in wonder.

Our youth told us about how they see God and how he fills them with wonder, how we can grow in hospitality. Last week, I note, nobody asked me to preach on growing in obedience.

[1 : 2 4] It means the rest of the leadership team know me pretty well. I've been asked to preach on growing in love. It's often said, if you go to Sunday school and anyone asks you a question, the safest answer to give is Jesus.

I think when Jesus was in Sunday school, Saturday school, the right answer to give, according to him, would have been the word love.

Because when Jesus was asked to summarize the whole of the Old Testament, 613 laws, 39 scrolls, he said, you can sum it up like this, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Last week, John Auger finished a sermon on obedience, reminding us that Jesus told us that we should love one another.

And today, we're going to think about how we can grow in love. Now, my youngest son, who's gone downstairs now, he's doing English GCSE at the moment, and occasionally, he'll come and ask me, questions I simply don't understand.

[2 : 4 2] He'll say, Daddy, is this an adjective or a preposition? And I'll say, it's the word in. I said, how many different meanings can it have?

But this morning, I want us to think about two different ways that we can think about this growing in love. Because that word in, in this sentence, I think can mean two different things.

It can describe what we're trying to grow. We want our love to become more like the love of God.

But I find that incredibly difficult. And so, first of all, we're going to think about it in a different way. We're going to think about how we can grow in love.

And by that, I mean growing up in our faith, surrounded by love, knowing it, experiencing it, and living it.

[3 : 42] And then, growing that in our own lives. So, we're going to start by reading part of a letter that John wrote.

It's the book of 1 John. So, can we have that passage on the screen? And actually, I'm going to ask you to do something a little bit unusual. I'd like you to stand out.

If you're able, I'd like you to stand while we read this. This is 1 John 4, starting at verse 7.

In my Bible, it's titled, God's Love and Ours. It's the section. And it says this, Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us.

[4 : 40] He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us. He has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us. So we will have confidence on the day of judgment.

[5 : 52] In this world, we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. Because fear has to do with punishment.

The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.

For whoever does not love their brother and sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command. Anyone who loves God must also love their brothers and sister.

Amen. Please sit down. That was a chance to sort of stretch your legs a little bit. Might be a while. So can we have the next slides please?

So we are going to think about love. We are going to think about God's love for us and our love for other people. So you know, you don't need to be a genius I think to figure out that that passage might be about love.

[7 : 01] Did anyone notice how many times the word love or loved was said in that passage? Any lots? That's correct.

Who said that? That's good. How many times do you think? Five? Ten? Twelve? So I counted it twenty-three times.

More than once a verse. And love is an interesting word. In English we have one word for it.

And it's not really very descriptive. Because if I now I'm not very good at singing so I'm going to just I'll just need a little bit of help here. If I go I'm loving it.

Come on. Do you not remember the McDonald's advert? It's you're not you're not like all right yeah but you could at least the word love is a strange one in the English language.

[7 : 58] Because it covers what may be not the world's greatest burger up to the love which we read in that passage.

And we're going to think about how God's love is completely different today. We're going to think about three ways in which his love is different and then three ways in which that should impact us.

I'm going to suggest to you that God's love is different in its quality. It's different in its target. and it's also different in its duration.

And the Greeks were much more inventive than us. They actually had eight different words to describe different sorts of love. You'll be glad looking at some of those to know I'm not going to be talking about them this morning.

But they had a different word to describe different types of affection or love. They had eros to describe a romantic love. They had something called storge that describes a sort of natural affinity.

[9 : 03] And they used that to describe the love between a father and his son or a mother and their children. And another word called philio. And all these words are found in the Bible.

And philio describes brotherly love. I'm one of three brothers and two of my brothers are, two of my children are sat at the back with a space in between them.

So maybe that tells you about brotherly love. a little bit. And all of these loves are good and they have their place in scripture. But the word that we see repeated 23 times today is a different word.

In Greek it's called agape. And this is a different quality of love completely. And I suggest you keep your Bible open if you've got it or an app or some of the scriptures will come up on the screen.

And we're going to look at that word in this passage. So first of all we're told that agape is different. It's a different quality of love. And this is a love that originates and always comes from God.

[10 : 10] I looked up a definition of what this love is like and I love it. I'm going to read it. It says it's love that is given selflessly and expansively intentionally and just for the benefit of the receiver.

It's selfless. It's expansive. It's intentional. And it's for the benefit of the receiver. And God this type of love John tells us caused God to act.

The word agape isn't a noun. It's a verb. It's a doing word. And if you read in verse 9 it says this. 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. Selfless, expansive, his only son.

Intentional for a reason and for the benefit of the receiver that we might live through him. And throughout the Bible we see different writers sort of elaborate the different qualities of this agape love.

[11 : 31] In perhaps the most often read scripture at weddings which is in 1 Corinthians 13 we are reminded how different this love is.

I can't you know it's can anyone help me I'm going to say I wrote down patient, kind, perseveres it trusts it protects and there's other things it doesn't do it is not self-seeking it isn't easily angered it keeps no record of wrongs and as we'll look at at the end it says it never fails.

The quality of God's love agape is just different. it's not just more of the same old love it's something completely different.

But there's a different target to God's love too. I'm obviously far too old to ever have used a dating app but I'm told that when you do the first thing you have to do is put in some of your preferences the kind of person you want to like and maybe end up loving sometimes you might put in something about their interests their hobbies the food they like to eat whether they like to travel their height height got the right one there but I wonder if we look at this passage we can see what God's type is because it says in 1 John 4 that he did not love us but that he we did not love him we did not it says this this is love this is agape that we didn't love

God but that he loved us so God's type is us that means me that means you and God arranged it so that the most famous verse in the Bible which you see held up at American football stadiums makes this really clear it said for God so loved what England no yes but no he so loved the world everyone and just in case you thought well maybe that doesn't include me it goes on to say that in a modern translation it says that whoever believes in him I really like the old translation because it takes a bit longer to say it says that who so ever believes that includes everybody the target of his love is different it doesn't show those preferences he loves the whole world and it is not dependent on our reaction to it there's a word used over and over again when Jesus saw crowds and they had needs and it isn't the word agape but it's driven from that word it's a word which we translate as compassion and it means that sort of it literally means like his guts were churned up inside him because he loved these people so much and he saw that they had needs and in

[15 : 14] Matthew 14 14 or there's lots of other places especially in Matthew where it said Jesus saw the crowd he had compassion on them and he healed the ones who looked like they would turn their lives around and appreciate it afterwards no that's not what it says it says Jesus saw the crowd he had compassion and he healed all of them and I don't know if you've ever thought about that because that's not how I would have behaved I don't think we're told that Jesus one time there's a really explicit story where Jesus heals 10 lepers now we believe that Jesus was God which means he knows what's going to happen next and it tells us of those 10 how many come back to thank him one that's 10%

I think got confirmation from my clever son at the back he healed the 90% knowing that they would never come and say thank you what about some of the other things he did he healed the blind knowing that some of them would use those eyes to look at things they shouldn't he healed the lame and those who couldn't use their hands knowing that some of them may use their healing for harm it says he healed the dumb those who could not speak and who knows maybe some of those joined the crowd that shouted crucify him God's love is different it's a different quality and it's a different target and it is for every single one of us but it also has a different duration as well it's different because it lasts and it lasts because

John tells us that love is not just something that God does it is who he is it says in verse 16 that God is agape people can change what they do I teach in a medical school up at London Bridge I'm a Chelsea fan and I'm a runner one day I won't do those things I might carry on doing one of them but I won't be able to do all of them but I'm not going to look at him in a little embarrassing I'm Jacob's father I have three boys I am his father I'm Joseph's father as well just and Elijah's that's who I am it's not what I do

God is love and that means you can rely on it because his character does not change and that should have an effect for us it should have an effect on us in verse 18 it says and I'm so glad that our dear sister prayed this for Courtney that he would know that perfect agape perfect love casts out fear God does not want us to be constantly terrified that we might have fallen out of favour by forgetting to say amen at the end of a prayer I remember when I was sort of younger and I maybe didn't understand that God's love for me was this permanent constant thing that I used to go to sleep at night and often I'd pray and sometimes I'd fall asleep and I hadn't said amen and I thought well is he going to be angry with me now so the next night you know sort of as you fall asleep you put two or three amens in the bank so then maybe if you but God is not like that he says perfect love when you have my perfect love when you live in my perfect love it should drive out fear and he knows that we find this hard to accept because it's not naturally how we behave it's not how most of those other loves behave and so the Bible is full of promises about the permanence of his love in Jeremiah he says this I have loved you with an everlasting love in Romans he says nothing can separate us from the love of God and this comes because of who he is but it also comes because of who we are

I've been watching a depiction of the life of Jesus and things that went on around it called The Chosen you can get it on Netflix you can actually it's free thechosen.com I think no adverts I don't get any kickback for this it is a fantastic series and I had never read this bit of Isaiah 43 before but in it Jesus says it to Mary Magdalene it's a sort of imagined scene but it is a beautiful bit where God tells his people who they are it says this but now this is what the Lord says he who created you Jacob and Joseph he who formed you Israel do not fear for I have redeemed you I have saved you I have made you new I have summoned you and you and you by name you are mine I will always be Jacob's dad and he will always be my son and I will always be

[21 : 32] God's child God's love is different because it's based on who he is and who he has made us to be so God's love is very different those of you who have come here often will have heard me sometimes mention this book when we teach the children downstairs we often use something called the Jesus storybook Bible and the thing that it says is every story whispers his name and at the end of the story of Adam and Eve where they are cast out of the garden of Eden it says this about God's love and it describes it it says you see no matter what in spite of everything God would always doesn't use the word agape because it wasn't written in Greek but it's the same permanent love he will always love his children with a never stopping never giving up unbreaking always and forever love

God's love love for you is different so that's nice isn't it is that where 1 John 4 ends is it a sort of sit back put your feet up bask I love to be loved kind of passage no that's not the end if you read it it is full of challenges for those of us who say we want to grow more like Jesus it says this dear friends since God has so loved us we ought to love one another slightly awkward word that one ought isn't it because it sort of implies that maybe we don't always sometimes occasionally I wonder what he'd insert for our fellowship here but the word that they use is exactly the same it isn't like in 1 John 4 there's one word for God's love agape and then some other lesser word for the love that he asks us to have it says this

God so loved us we ought to agape we ought to love each other with that same intensity with those same attributes it says we should love because he first loved us all agape all love like that comes from God we love because or because of his love we are able to love now my boys will probably recognize that picture of some glowing embers there I'm really lucky I have a lovely barbecue in my back garden it sort of doubles as a sort of outside fireplace and I love sitting by it at night and I was sat by it and I was feeling that warmth and I just started thinking where does that warmth come from and actually it's really interesting because the warmth that's in those bits of wood comes from the sun all the energy that they are emitting has been absorbed from another source and I don't know if this is going to work is it going to you can just see that it has grown there actually it came from vines the wood it has absorbed light and because of that it can radiate light and heat and it reminded me of God's love that we can appreciate and live in that love that God gives us and that is the only way in which we have something to give out that agape love love and I have to say you know

I I was saying to someone earlier this morning I said you know as I've been thinking about this sermon this week God has challenged me so many times I have so far to grow in love I was actually running home listening to something to help me prepare for this and someone phoned me and I was sort of thinking about love and I was like how irritating do I have to answer that and suddenly I thought love is patient and because I was thinking about God's love I was living in it and I started to give out his love you can't give what you have not yet received and others should be able to feel that warmth if you have your finger still in 1 John 4 if you go back a chapter John speaks all the time about love in this letter different bits are dotted around and I find 1

John 3 really really challenging it tells us to love with actions not just words it tells us that if we see a brother or sister in need we have to help it says this if anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has not pity on them how can the love of God be in that person dear children let us agape let us not just agape with words or speech but with actions and with truth so we are asked to share that love and just like God's love has a different target so ours should have a different target as well in this part here it says love your brothers and your sisters and I must admit

[28 : 27] Joseph saw me make this slide yesterday and he sort of thought love my brothers because it isn't always easy is it but God tells us that this is the challenge he gives us this is the kind of love that we should have for one another in fact in so in the gospel of John it says this it says that the most distinctive thing about people that are growing in Christ will not be the size of their bible or how many words in it are underlined it won't be how often they look like they're doing the right thing it will be you will know that they are my followers it will be like a tattoo on them a permanent mark because of how they love one another and Jesus tells us throughout the scripture and the writers to the churches in the letters tell us that we ought to love our brothers and sisters in God's family but it's certainly not meant to be like some sort of fraternity or some secret society with some secret handshake

Jesus tells us that our love needs to be so much more expansive than this two weeks ago Andrew Bartlett when he was talking about hospitality reminded us of a story of an instance where Jesus went to a banquet and he told people when you have a banquet don't just invite your mates don't just invite the important people but invite those whose society has cast out and in probably one of the most famous parables that Jesus told in response to that summary of the Old Testament love your neighbour as yourself someone said who's my neighbour and he told the parable of the good Samaritan he told us that our love needs to go so far beyond this room we should love in that way the early church were known for doing this

I was reading a bit of a history of the early church and one of the things that they were known for so in Rome or in the Roman world there were some terrible things that people could do a father if he didn't like his child was allowed to cast it aside leave it on the roadside to die and the early church were known for going and looking after those children and bringing them into their household they didn't form a committee they didn't have an online protest where you had to sign something they knew it was terrible but they did not love just with words they loved with deeds rolled their hands up and showed God's love and God calls us to do the same and he also calls us to have a different duration although not really mentioned in this passage that famous bit from 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us that love never fails or I like that amplified version that sort of adds a bit more colour to it where it says it never fails or runs out or fades or gives up

God calls us too to have a never stopping never giving up always and forever kind of love to do but it's really really difficult to do isn't it sometimes I think it reminds me a little bit of so probably only a certain generation of people might remember this advert I love this advert does anyone know what these are Rolos does anybody know the question that was constantly asked about Rolos do you love anyone enough to give them your last Rolo now I used to be technical and say that's the beginning I'll give someone that one so strictly speaking not really what it was saying but the idea is that these are a finite resource they're really soft I prefer them from the fridge they are really good but they're a finite resource and it's risky to keep on giving out and quite frankly if you give there might not be enough for you but if we come back to that thing that we thought right at the beginning we can grow in our ability to give love if we grow in the presence of surrounded by in the knowledge of contemplating

God's love and that will mean that there isn't just one last Rolo to give away do you like Rolos they're pretty good try them God tells us that he can give us Courtney where are you come on but there is an inexhaustible supply of Rolos and it doesn't matter who you are oh this is dangerous I'm not sure we've safety checked this oh yeah okay oh so bit more arc on it right that was not bad all right but the thing about these Rolos and there's two big things of Rolos at the back okay so take some with you and I hope that they remind you that God's love is different and that he calls us to share it you might need to share those actually I think I've got enough but the thing about

[35 : 02] Rolos is that you need to take and receive what is offered to you Leslie and in the same way that most famous verse in the Bible said that God so loved the world that he gave his last Rolos that whoever believes and receives the choice is yours God's love is on offer but you need to be the one to accept it let's pray father God thank you so much for your never giving up always and forever love I pray I pray that you will help us to accept the love that Jesus offered us that as

Courtney told us can lead to new life and help us to be a people who share your love in this world for your glory amen P Paul to us know we have people