

A couple after many years of marriage went to see a counselor, at the behest of the wife in particular. While sitting there and pouring out her woes she was saying "I never know if he loves me, he never says it, I just don't know." A look of surprise was on the husband's face as he heard the news, and blurted out. "I don't understand Doc, I told her I loved her when we got married and if anything changes I'll let her know!"

Love! Love is all you need so sang the Beatles many years ago. Really is that all?

Hear Oh Israel, the Lord your God is one you shall love the Lord your God with all your might, with all your mind, with all your soul.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son so that all who would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

This my command that you should love one another, as I have loved you.  
By this all men will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Abide in my love.

After the passing of a dear friend of his St Augustine wrote in his confessions during a period of profound sorrow and grieving.

St Augustine: "Do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose. If love is to be a blessing, not a misery, it must be for the only Beloved who will never pass away."

In reply to this many centuries later C.S. Lewis would write;

"there is no escape along the lines St Augustine suggests. Nor along any other lines. There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wring and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

Love is a constant theme throughout the scriptures it is the underlying motive for God's interactions with humanity. It is of utmost importance, however misunderstood in our day and time.

Any quick scan of the internet, spotify, youtube, or google will show you how much of time is spent on dealing with love, in song, word or actions. There are stories, movies, songs about love. Love yet gained, love, in trouble, love lost.

All with the assumption that the writer, singer whatever and the audience knows what love is.

So do we?

Do we know what love is?

With so much of it around so much discussion and song about love you would think there would be a universal understanding that we would have automatically about what it is?  
But I am not so sure.

Can we define what love is? Or does it defy definition? Is there more than one type of love? The ancient Greeks certainly thought so, they had at least 4 if not more different words and concepts to define what we often lump together into the English word for love.

The [Greek language](#) distinguishes at least four different ways as to how the word [love](#) is used. [Ancient Greek](#) has four distinct words for [love](#): *agápe*, *éros*, *philia*, and *storgē*. However, as with other languages, it has been difficult to separate the meanings of these words when used outside their respective contexts. Nonetheless, the senses in which these words were generally used are as follows:

- **Agápe** (ἀγάπη *agápē*<sup>[1]</sup>) means "love: esp. charity; the love of God for man and of man for God."<sup>[2]</sup> *Agape* is used in ancient texts to denote feelings for one's children and the feelings for a spouse, and it was also used to refer to a [love feast](#).<sup>[3]</sup> *Agape* is used by Christians to express the unconditional love of God for his *children*.<sup>[4]</sup> This type of love was further explained by [Thomas Aquinas](#) as "to will the good of another."<sup>[5]</sup>
- **Éros** (ἔρως *érōs*) means "love, mostly of the sexual passion."<sup>[6]</sup> The Modern Greek word "*erotas*" means "intimate love." [Plato](#) refined his own definition: Although *eros* is initially felt for a person, with contemplation it becomes an appreciation of the beauty within that person, or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself. [Plato](#) does not talk of physical attraction as a necessary part of love, hence the use of the word [platonic](#) to mean, "without physical attraction." Lovers and philosophers are all inspired to seek truth through the means of *eros*.
- **Philia** (φιλία *philia*) means "affectionate regard, friendship," usually "between equals."<sup>[8]</sup> It is a dispassionate virtuous love, a concept developed by [Aristotle](#).<sup>[9]</sup> In his best-known work on ethics, [Nicomachean Ethics](#), *philia* is expressed variously as loyalty to friends (specifically, "brotherly love"), family, and community, and requires virtue, equality, and familiarity. Furthermore, in the same text *philos* denotes a general type of love, used for love between family, between friends, a desire or enjoyment of an activity, as well as between lovers.
- **Storge** (στοργή *storgē*) means "love, affection" and "especially of parents and children"<sup>[10]</sup> It is the common or natural empathy, like that felt by parents for offspring.<sup>[11]</sup> Rarely used in ancient works, and then almost exclusively as a descriptor of relationships within the family. It is also known to express mere acceptance or putting up with situations, as in "loving" the tyrant. This is also used when referencing the love for one's country or a favorite sports team.

Which then clouds our understanding of what we understand the meaning of the love songs or love stories, or when we read the following from the bible.

#### **John 15:9-17**

15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

15:10 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.

15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15:15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

15:17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

What sort of love is Jesus talking about here in this section, well in the whole of the gospel and then into the letters that he wrote?

The Love that God the Father has for the Son Jesus is the exact same love that the Son Jesus has for his disciples. The love that sees Jesus going to the cross, and then his glorification in resurrection, is the same that we are to grow into to abide and bear fruit from.

Love one another as I have loved you! We are to love as Jesus loved us! Inconceivable! Impossible!  
What sort of love?

The word used throughout this section is agape. It is the selfless love, the highest of the loves, seconded only by phileo, friendship! These two then are the key love words, and concepts love, friendship.

All the other concepts of love used are derivatives of these in particular of agape, with which each other concept each other type can descend into selfishness and cruelty! Paul writes to the Corinthians if I have all things yet do not have agape I have nothing!

Keep my commandments and abide in my love, How are we to love as Jesus loved us and as the Father has loved Jesus by keeping the commandments and abiding as a branch abides in the vine, the power the ability the capability flows from the vine itself. The Branch by itself and disconnected to the vine is unable to bear fruit, unable to produce, unable to even live. The only way we can have the love of God is to abide in the vine, which is abiding in Jesus, the vine. Our life our power our ability comes from abiding in the love of Jesus. How do we abide? Knowing the Word of God through the word of God, obeying what is commanded, which is to obey, abide and to love.

Simple profound! So then why is it so hard for us to do? Because left to our own devices we don't want to! Lay down our lives for others! Inconvenience ourselves so that others may increase. In an age when self actualization reaching our full human potential is so very much in vogue the notion that we have to give that up seems to be sounds to be inhuman.

Forgetting I think in the process what Jesus has promised that those who gain their lives will lose them and those that lose them for Jesus Christ's sake will find them. That the very line to lay down one's life for one's friends is an action that Jesus has done for us and is the one who is calling no commanding us to follow! Agape love is love that does not see its own needs as being intrinsically superior to the person who is the object of that love. Our agape is to flow from the agape that Jesus has shown, and given to us. If we cannot bring ourselves to love our brother as Jesus has loved us then perhaps we can begin to love Jesus, as he loved us? In obedience then to him we are to demonstrate and live this out in our own lives in community in family.

The verse that we read about laying one's life down for one's friends is often used in the context of the military and the personal sacrifices that soldiers often have done for others, and there are countless tales of this type of high heroism and sacrifices, the selfless actions that saved others lives.

I pray that no one here has to be placed in such a situation. There is also an everyday implication to what Jesus is saying. Just because we are not in a war time or crises situations it does not get us of the hook of living this out!

"It is much easier to die than to lay down your life day in and day out with the sense of the high calling of God. We are not made for the bright-shining moments of life, but we have to walk in the light of them in our everyday ways.

For thirty-three years Jesus laid down His life to do the will of His Father. "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Yet it is contrary to our human nature to do so."

I can say that I never knew what joy was like until I gave up pursuing happiness, or cared to live until I chose to die. For these two discoveries I am beholden to Jesus.

Malcolm Muggeridge

If I am a friend of Jesus, I must deliberately and carefully lay down my life for Him. It is a difficult thing to do, and thank God that it is. Salvation is easy for us, because it cost God so much. But the exhibiting of salvation in my life is difficult. God saves a person, fills him with the Holy Spirit, and then says, in effect, "Now you work it out in your life, and be faithful to Me, even though the nature of everything around you is to cause you to be unfaithful." And Jesus says to us, "...I have called you friends...."

Remain faithful to your Friend, and remember that His honor is at stake in your bodily life.

J.Oswald Chambers

So we are to obey Jesus Commands, and his greatest command is that of loving one another, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to lay down our lives for our friends and to abide in Jesus' love.

While the following account is more specifically about forgiveness it still says much about the joy of obeying and the joy that comes from that. The Feeling follows the action of the will, not often the other way around.

Corrie Ten Boom in her words.

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear.

It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown.

"When we confess our sins," I said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever."

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.

It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality.

Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.” And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

**For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.**

And having thus learned to forgive in this hardest of situations, I never again had difficulty in forgiving: I wish I could say it! I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on. But they didn’t.

That the feeling follows the obedience, joy flows through, abiding, obeying Jesus and loving one another in the large and the small things in life. It is most telling and often harder to sustain over the long haul.

It is as we love out of the response to Jesus' love that we will feel love, that agape, that self giving love that wills the good of the other!

We have been loved with an extravagant love as Jesus laid his life down for us, and in that love let us love one another, be known as Jesus followers because of our love.