

This is love

What a great series we've been on this last few months. We taught about faith encouraging so many to believe God. We shouted the truth about hope and it impacted so many! The Hope Initiative was a great success and we saw our biggest Easter weekend ever.

So many hearts touched, so many lives impacted by the message of HOPE. We were able to let people know – There is a new day dawning, the best IS yet to come. Your best days are not behind you but in front of you. People say you can't but God says there is more!! This series on hope has powerfully impacted us all.

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 13:13** "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." **The GREATEST of these is love!** The Bible does give us a clear "God point of view" of what love really is and it is twofold. In scripture we get a glimpse of God's love, how it touches our lives. We also we get a look at how we decide to respond to God's love. How we walk in God's love.

1 John 4:10, "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 is an action from a God point of view to give us an understanding of His love towards us and lets us in on the discussion. God's decision to love us caused His son Jesus to be sent to the world and to die for us as a sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 5: 6 – 8 says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ***But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***"

This was a difficult decision for Jesus – yet love won over pain. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus wrestled with this decision. Yet He submitted to the plan God had. This is love – Jesus was beaten, whipped, tortured and was crucified – He did this for love so we could receive the forgiveness of our sins and to live in the power of a new life. Every time we see God's gritty love wins.

While we were sinners, while we were unclean, living in shame and guilt. When we were in our most vulnerable place, while we were in our weakest position, when we were deserving of death, punishment and penalty Jesus died for us. The bible says "He did this for love so we could receive the forgiveness of our sins and to live in the power of a new life."

God demonstrates to us what real love is all about. **Real love is a decision to act.** No matter how difficult no matter how hard – we walk in response to God's great example of love. But the scriptures also speaks about this.

2 John 1:6, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love." So we receive love so we can love and walk in love.

John 13: 35 says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Walking in love is the hallmark of His kingdom. It's what everyone would point to, to be acknowledged as His disciples or followers.

Walking in love is to walk in obedience to the instructions of scripture. Walking in love is to walk in obedience to God's commands. This is amazing love. But not all of His commands are easy. Some are difficult and require courage and a sense of bravery. Let me explain.

I think the scriptures are redefining love for us in our 21st Century. In fact I think the bible understanding of love flies in the face of what our culture has told us. In one breath we can say "I love coffee" and in the next breath we can say "I love my children." Thankfully English is a complex and diverse language that helps us to differentiate and understand what we mean.

I believe the Bible describes God's love as different from our love of a hamburger. I think the scripture explain that God's love is in fact gritty. That means to love like God loves is to show a sense of courage and resolve.

Gritty love is tough, resolute, and strong enough to withstand adverse conditions. Gritty love is brave and determined. Gritty love can be heroic, fearless and willing to confront injustice. Gritty love is unwavering, tenacious and it perseveres.

Gritty love is God's kind of love. Gritty love is loving the unlovely and forgiving the worst sinner. God's love is tough able to withstand any force against it. God's love is great, boundless, unlimited and abundant. Listen to this extended explanation of God's love to us in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:35 - 39, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This scripture says a few things for our consideration.

1. Nothing can separate us from God's love – this is incredibly reassuring.
 2. God's love makes us "more than conquerors" To conquer means to overcome, defeat and to triumph over. But God's love give us the advantage of being beyond conquerors, we are over and above being a conqueror, we're greater than a conqueror.
 3. That is with God's love – in God's love – by God's love we can face any trial, distress or complicated circumstance knowing that nothing has the power to separate us from God's gritty love. God's love is powerful. It overtakes us wherever we are. It surrounds us no matter what reinforcements we place against it. **VIDEO**
 4. Note the scripture here asks "who shall separate us from God's love." Not just what but who – we are reminded that no one alive on the planet has the power or the ability to separate us from the love of Christ.
 5. This is love – hell yeah – because not even Hell can separate us from God's love. This scripture explains clearly that not even angels, or demonic rulers not even wicked spirits of darkness can separate us from God's gritty love.
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1. **We see this love demonstrated in Marriage:** God's love is not a romantic love promoted by Valentine's Day chocolate. But marriage is a demonstration of God's gritty love in action. Marriage is more than just sharing a bed, the bathroom and desert when you go out! Marriage is an opportunity made to show God's gritty love when we are called upon to act better, be richer and keep healthy in every way.

Listen to the wedding vows again they showcase this kind of love. “I take you to be my lawfully wedded (husband/wife), to have and to hold, from this day forward, **for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.**” Whoa! This is love!

Marriage demonstrates a resolute, gritty love – for worse, for poorer and in sickness and **it remains gritty until death!** It’s not until you’ve walked through these experiences that you know and understand this kind of love. Many have and decided to call it quits. Others have sought help to make it through with God’s kind of love. But in marriage and by extension our children – no one knows gritty love like this until they have had to walk it. You need God’s love to make you more than a conqueror.

Ephesians 5: 25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Marriage is a holy estate – a sacred vow we make. Its natural extension is towards our children as well. Husbands are called to give themselves up for their wives. This love requires sacrifice. It is an exclusive relationship between two people that remains exclusive because of the gritty love of God.

2. **We see this kind of love as we reach out to others:** This kind of gritty love is to mirror God’s love towards us in that while we were sinners, unworthy of His love we are called to love like this and to forgive others as well.

Colossians 3:12 – 14 says, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Put on love – it’s another way to say walk in love, lead with God’s love towards those who have done you wrong.

Forgiving others is not an admission that what they did was ok, it was probably horrible but the gritty love of God calls us to lead with compassion. Our Christian calling means we forgive others as Christ has forgiven us – we can do this as we walk in love not offence, not hurt, not insult or judgement.

Forgiveness is one of those things that greatly defines our lives. The ability to forgive those who have abused us, victimised us, deeply wounded us and hurt us is **a sign of maturity** and demonstrates we are more than conquerors through Christ’s gritty love.

The scripture encourages us to walk in compassion, kindness – that means don’t be horrible to other people – even if they deserve it! Be careful what you post on social media. We’re called to walk meekly or humbly, quietly and yes quietly even when we’ve been hurt by others.

The scriptures say we need to walk patiently bearing with others – patience speaks about a better tomorrow – patience is part of God’s love towards us that implies we will get through this and find even our enemies will have nothing to say to us. This kind of love says we don’t have the right to revenge, we don’t have the right to remain offended, this kind of love says we don’t have the right to retaliation. This is tough love.

Gritty love says that when you have a complaint, a grievance or even a criticism against another that instead of taking to Facebook to give everyone a piece of your mind you forgive. Instead of tweeting out your pain, your insecurity or childish behaviour “as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” This is tough! But God’s word says, “above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” It seems the Lord is interested in us walking together in harmony and if overlooking a slight helps that then overlook the slight.

Proverbs 19:11 says, “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.” The Passion translation says, “...you are virtuous when you overlook an offense.” But that takes a lot of love. Thank God we have a deep well to draw from. God’s love is enormous.

3. **God’s love is incredible and expansive:** So this gritty love shows itself in a myriad of ways. Listen to this passage of scripture.

Ephesians 3: 17 – 21 says, “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

It’s this kind of love that empowers the church. Imagine a church living and walking in this kind of love. Imagine a church that acts on this kind of love. It’s this kind of love that empowers our mission to reach every corner of our city, our county, our country and our world. This is the kind of love that empowers us to live holy lives.

This love is what empowers the church to heal the sick, heal broken hearts and broken lives. It’s this kind of gritty love that empowers us to reach out to the unlovely, the unloved, those who no one else wants, the untouchables. It’s this kind of love that reaches out to the disabled believing for a better tomorrow. It’s this kind of love that gives us a voice for those who feel they have no voice. It’s this kind of love that helps us to challenge injustice, speak out against harassment, prejudice and discrimination. This is the kind of love that says we will stand up to inequality, bias and bigotry.

This kind of love reaches out to the person who feels overlooked, unimportant ignored and forgotten. This is the kind of love that husbands and wives need to make it through their current circumstances – that God is not far away but right there in the midst of our worst night mares giving us strength to make it through.

It’s this kind of love that wades into the lives of people and lets them know the world may say no to their dreams but God says there is more, the best is yet to come. We say trust yourself to the love of Jesus Christ who demonstrated His love by dying for us to receive God’s forgiveness.

There really is no end to God’s great love. I pray you will to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. I pray you will understand that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing in all the universe.

No wonder the scriptures declare “... the greatest of these is love.” This is love!