

Loved First: Discovering God's Love

The Art of Loving

Over the last few weeks in our *Reset* series, God has been realigning our hearts and priorities. But every reset has a purpose. God doesn't reset us just to slow us down; He resets us so that we can live like Jesus. And to live like Jesus is to love as He loved.

Today, we're beginning a series in Ephesians to rediscover what it means to be loved by God and to live out that love every day. Love is one of the most talked-about subjects in our culture, yet one of the most misunderstood.

As Valentine's Day approaches, we're reminded of love as something we give or prove. Scripture begins somewhere deeper. The love of God is the foundation of kingdom living. Love is not first something we do, but something we receive.

This series isn't about trying harder to love. It's about loving differently because we have first been loved by Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3-6 (NLT) All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. ⁴Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

1. He loved us first (Identity)

Notice how Paul doesn't start the letter with commands. Before he moves to obedience, holiness and calling he focuses on God's amazing love.

We will never love, live and lead like Jesus until we understand how he loved us first.

1 John 4:19 (ESV) We love because he first loved us.

Life in the kingdom does not begin with what we do for God, but with what God has done for us. Everything we are called to become flows from what we have first received.

- We will never be generous until we understand the depth of God's generosity toward us.
- We will never forgive freely until we grasp how fully we have been forgiven.
- We will never serve others with joy until we understand how patiently God has served us, through Christ.

- And we will never love as Jesus calls us to unless we are first rooted in the unshakable reality that we are deeply and completely loved by God.

I love that Paul uses the word *adopted* to describe our relationship with God. It reminds us that we are chosen, that we belong, and that we are loved and secure in Christ.

We do not strive for love; we start from love.

2. Love Revealed through the Cross (Foundation)

Ephesians 1:6-7 (NLT) So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

1 John 4:10 (NLT) This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

God's love is not abstract or merely a feeling. It took shape. It came at a great cost. It wasn't expressed through a Hallmark card, but through a bloody cross.

The cross points to both the seriousness of sin and the depth of God's love.

Romans 5:8 (NLT) But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Love does not overlook sin; it defeats sin through the sacrifice of the cross and the power of the resurrection.

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NLT) But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

The more we understand the depths of God's love for us the more like Jesus we start to love and live.

3. God's Love Transforms Us (Formation)

Listen to the prayer Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus.

Ephesians 3:17–18 (NLT) Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

Paul doesn’t pray for them to get information but for them to experience the depths of God’s love.

Real change and spiritual growth take place when we are rooted and grounded in the God’s love.

Ephesians 3:19 (NLT) May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Ephesians 3:19b (NKJV) to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The fullness of God is the totality of who God is, His nature, His character, His power, and His love. It is God in His completeness.

God’s fullness belongs to God alone. But Scripture tells us that we can be filled with the fullness of God; not by taking on His identity, but by being deeply shaped by His presence.

Adam Clark wrote, *“To be filled with all the fullness of God, is to have the whole soul filled with meekness, gentleness, goodness, love, justice, holiness, mercy, and truth.”*

Galatians 5:22-23a (AMP) But the fruit of the Spirit [the result of His presence within us] is love [unselfish concern for others], joy, [inner] peace, patience [not the ability to wait, but how we act while waiting], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control.

Romans 5:5b (AMP) God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.

1 John 4:7-8 (NLT) Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God is the source of our power to love. Apart from Him, our love runs out, but when we remain rooted in Him, love becomes a way of life.

Conclusion: As we come to the table this morning, we are reminded again that love is not first something we do, but something we receive.

At the table, we remember that we are loved and adopted. This bread and this cup declare that we belong to God, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us.

As we remember the body that was broken and the blood that was poured out, may we allow God to form us again, softening our hearts, renewing our minds, and grounding us in His presence.

Communion doesn't end with remembrance; it leads to transformation. What we receive here is meant to flow through us as we love others with the same grace we've been given.

So, as we take the bread and the cup today, let us receive God's love afresh, allowing it to shape who we are, change how we live, and overflow into the world around us.