

Pandemic Series

Part 6. Love©

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Pandemic Emotions

Part 6 Love

It's tempting to write "Love in the time of corona..." or "Love in the time of chaos," to paraphrase the famous title *Love in the time of cholera*," by Gabriel Garcia Márquez. That pairs well with his title, *A hundred years of solitude*, because in the current pandemic love is severely hampered by the solitude induced by stay-at-home and lockdown orders. In *Cholera* Mr. Márquez tells a tragic pandemic love story; in *Solitude* he lays out the incredible saga of devastation across generations, tragic outcomes of a family in decline. Now we see both tragedy and devastation.

So far, we are only dealing with a fraction of the time of our own generation. Right now. But the disastrous pandemic is already enough to cope with in mere months, with its shattering impact on families and society. Therefore, *love* may not be the predominant emotion on our mind during this pandemic, as anxiety, depression, pain, loss, and grief take up our mental space.

How can we talk about love in this grueling time of global upheaval? Every headline is about death, extreme distress, disruption, economic loss, protests, violence. What place does love deserve in the midst of these dreadful realities? As I listen and watch, the magnitude of depression, anxiety, uncertainty and fear seems to increase exponentially. How can you or I think about loving others when our world seems to have emptied of any certainty? Love? You ask—when I am so depleted, when my "love tank" is empty, when my human frailty is more and more evident every day? Love someone else? I can scarcely tend to myself, let alone anyone else!

What about my feelings of being harassed, crowded, or lonely, what about when I am frustrated and irritable? Love? Oh, come on! You may say, "I'm just too tired to put out the effort, depleted, nothing left to give.

"Love? When I am so afraid?" Ah, fear, yes, fear! This is the emotion that saps our meager strength, that pushes us out of shape, that robs us of the energy to escape the confines of the self.

How can we express love when fear is looming over us and undermining us during this time of the corona virus? Figuring this out can turn our world around even though all the troubles persist. How can we access enough love so we have sufficient to nourish our own souls and abundance to give away?

The Great Truths About Love

1. *We must first experience love, to know it, in order to give it away.* Let's look at how this is possible. It may seem like right now no one loves you, that no one cares about you enough to tend to you and your needs. So how can you be loving to others? Defining love can help us here. Love is not just an emotion, especially not our romantic and thus changeable feeling. Love is a profound *working out* of our valuing and esteeming of another person, the covenant of the will and character which means "I will give myself for you." *It is emotion plus commitment put into action.* The New Testament depicts four kinds of love, defined in the Greek words *phileo*, *storge*, *eros*, and *agape*—brotherly love, parental or familial love, romantic love, and unconditional divine love. The first three are all facets of the fourth. *It seems it takes all our human loves combined to exemplify what divine love is.*
2. *Loving others must begin with our being loved.* We must experience love to pass it on. Therein lies the conundrum! But how? But God! We have to start with Him because love originates outside of ourselves. God defines Himself as love. He is love. That is His divine nature. When the Lord exegetes His own name to Moses up on the mountain, He says, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands..." (Ex. 34:7) The Apostle John, Jesus' closest friend and disciple reminds us, "God is love." (John 14:6) "How great is the love the Father has *lavished* on us that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are." (I John 3:1) We are made in His image, designed to love. That is our birthright, restored by Jesus and the Holy Spirit at work in us. When we experience His divine love and are filled with it, we are able to live it out, to pass it on to others. I believe this is our most creative calling. The Apostle Paul wraps up the essence of this by writing to us that we should not owe anything to anyone except love. (See Romans 13:8)

Tragically, the world's great deprivation is that people don't receive sufficient love. This discovery led to the terms "failure to thrive" and "marasmus,"¹ the tragic state of babies who are fed and diapered but not touched, held, cuddled. In our wounded world the flow of love is stymied and sometimes totally blocked.

3. *Where does love come from? It begins with God.* The most awesome expression of God's love is that Jesus gave Himself for us. He then entrusted to you and me the mandate with which He lived out His earthly life. That is, to love. As the Father loves us, so He loves us. Christ is the full and complete expression of the Father (See Colossians Chapters 1 and 2:9, 10.)

¹ Marasmus was the predominant cause of death in orphanages especially during WWII when babies were not cared for through touching and holding, due to lack of personnel to tend them. A remarkable change happened when young women who were hidden away due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies were paired with the infants, who began to thrive when they were held and cuddled, touched and talked to.

The Scriptures abound with descriptions of how God loves you and me. He looks on us with “tender mercies” (Psalm 25:5, 40:11, 51:1, 69:16, 103:4 and many other passages) This tenderness includes the compassion a father has for a beloved child (Psalm 103:13, 14) He loves us as both a father and a mother (Isaiah 66:12, 13), even describing that he bounces us on his knee. This adoring attention makes us alive! When we look to Him, our faces shine with radiance, the physical expression of a heart and soul that are fully loved. (Psalm 34:5) He treats us with these “tender mercies, which are new every day.”

One amazing outcome of our loving encounter with God is that when we worship Him we take on attributes of God, such as His love. We become like who we worship! (See Isaiah Chapters 42 to 45) This is a profound truth, expounded on in various ways in the Old Testament. It is a very significant reality! Where we face, where we look, where our eyes focus, is the direction we go. I remember my husband learning this in his flight training; we experience this principle in driving a vehicle, hence the safety of keeping our eyes on the road ahead.

4. *I learn to love by experiencing God's love.* Our own completeness is only fulfilled in Christ. (Col. 2:9, 10) In Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3) As a child I memorized the great love chapter, I Corinthians 13, believing it described how God wanted me to love other people. In adulthood it dawned on me that it is first of all a description of how God loves me! When I accept and experience all these ways in which God loves me, I am on the path to loving others. His love comes first.

I Corinthians chapter 13 begins with the preeminent reason why love is crucial. Then it describes the qualities or attributes of how God loves you and me:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (vs. 4 – 8a, NIV)

You might notice the correspondence in these attributes of God's love with what we call “the fruit of the Spirit” as described in Galatians.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22, 23, NIV)

5. *FEAR is the barrier blocking God's love.* By whatever name, and to whatever degree we name it, fear looms up. Anxiety, dread, trepidation, distress, apprehension, terror. It debilitates us, freezes us, paralyzes us, blocking our spiritual and emotional receptors to love. So, what can we do when love is blocked by fear? Paradoxically, the Word says, “Perfect love casts out fear. (I John 4:18) so how do we get rid of our fear in order to love? We let God do the loving first. Just as Jesus' temporary, physical death conquered eternal death, it also conquered fear. His perfect love can cast out our fear, therefore we can have confidence!

When we offer our fear or fears to the Lord, He responds. I find in Psalm 34:7 a good model for how to do this. I've have practiced this for decades. "I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears." I write a list of my fears and literally lay it before God. For my Jungle Camp survival training anxieties, I included my fear of snakes, of drowning, of accidents for myself and my children. God met me in each one I laid before Him, so that when I stepped on a coral snake my foot fell just behind its head and it could not strike me. When I was drowning, he sent me rescue. When David was bitten by a rabid dog, God sent a vaccine through short wave radio contacts to our remote, roadless location. When David almost died of asthma from DDT poisoning, God spared him through our prayers. So many fears—all met by God's loving provision. In the Peruvian Amazon when I thought I would die the Lord gave me hope and raised me up; He showed me that even the mighty Apostle Paul thought he would die, "despairing" even to life itself (II Thes... ?) He showed me that King David also "despaired even of life itself... He said that if God had not rescued him, he "would have dwelt in the silence of death." (Psalm 94:17) Might you feel that way right now?

Practical Love

I suggest you write down every characteristic of God's love described in I Corinthians 13 and in Galatians 5, above. Let them soak into your soul! If your heart has been wounded and is full of injury, He can bring you healing. A healed heart can hold onto the love which fills it, without leaking, and have an overflow for others. Let His love fill your heart and let the overflow spill out of you in all your daily interactions. Ask Him now to fill you with his love and to bring you all the heart-healing you need. (You might like to see the [YouTube](#) video called "Hidden Heart Messages." It is one of our series on *Thriving*, also viewable on our [Heartstream](#) website.

When the Scriptures say God loves us as a parent, that is like *storge* love. I especially love that he has compassion on us, as a father (Psalm 103:13, 14). I always think of my sticky little children after a day at the beach or park. Quite the messes from watermelon and sand, yet we lovingly bathe them and put them into bed so that 30 seconds later the sticky messes have morphed into cherubs. I love Isaiah 66:12, 13, which tells us God loves us like a mother too and even dandles us on her knee. These are such beautiful images for us! I also love Isaiah 65:1, which reassures us as a mother reassures a frightened and fretful child, "Here I am!"

When Jesus says we are brothers He is illustrating *phileo*—loving us as our brother. The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus "is not ashamed to call us brother." (Heb. 2:11)

God loves us with the passion of a lover too—*eros*. He doesn't want other messing with us! We belong to Him, and He experiences jealousy when our hearts wander away. He loves us with an everlasting love! (Jer. 31:3)

God's divine love incorporates all these human loves. *Agape, complete unconditional love—with no strings attached!* Jesus says, "greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for another." (John 15:13) And, we know He did just that!

So How Does God's Love Flow Through You?

From a practical standpoint, how you and I behave is the way we express His love. We are entrusted with the awesome task of making God visible. (See Colossians.) *He is the "invisible" God, yet through us He becomes visible!* It's up to you and me to live in such a way that others can see God through us. Since love is His nature, we exhibit His nature by loving others.²

How in the world can we do this during a pandemic, in this chaotic and divided world? Here are some realistic suggestions of how others benefit from your love. These are characteristics of *agape* love, manifest in familial, parental, brotherly and romantic love.

- *Draw in close*—to God and to each other. Seek intimacy rather than distance.
- *Respect*—let every word which comes out of your mouth and every facial expression, every gesture convey respect. That means, no belittling, no loaded words, no coarse joking, no teasing at someone's expense. Use a filter for your mouth—ahhh, that mask can serve a double purpose—keep out germs and keep in unwholesome words! Don't let the ugly words escape your mouth or your mask! If you have only one communication rule, make it respect!
- *Listen*—what concerns does your child have? Your roommate? Your beloved (You did fall in love, remember!) What will re-activate that love? What words does this person long to hear to minimize fear and anxiety, to know he or she is loved?
- *Be patient*—Count to ten (or 100!) and breathe a prayer for understanding. What does this person need?
- *Offer help*—perhaps food for your neighbor, help with math, cleaning the garage, keeping order in the crowded room. What does this person need?
- *Share your heart*—rather than escape into useless, empty pursuits. You can turn “too much time together” into deeper relationship by inviting sharing and self-disclosure.
- *Clean up the messes*—let “love cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20, I Peter 4:8) One good news item this week was of a high school senior who spent the night cleaning up his neighborhood after a demonstration. His caring attitude and work were actually lauded and rewarded. We never know who is looking—besides our loving Father! Listening and reading it seems most people have complaints about others' loudness, or messiness, or forgetfulness. You can be the patient one!

² I have a book in process called *Making God Visible*, based on my years of ministry to global workers and my doctoral work on the role of the Holy Spirit in personality growth and development.

Suggested Reading and Listening

A book which most delightfully and fully describes how God loves us is *Hesed*, by Michael Card.³ I strongly recommend you drink in the truths he explores about how God loves you and me, about what God's "loving kindness" includes.

Also, because we are faced with so much fear with the pandemic and world crises, we can recall that Psalm 23 says we can "fear no evil." We *are* surrounded by evil. Perhaps your heart will resonate with and prayer for peace and the sharing of God's heart as reflected in this song of lament:

"Weep with Me," by Rend Collective,⁴

Weep with me
Lord will You weep with me?
I don't need answers, all I need
Is to know that You care for me
Hear my plea
Are You even listening?
Lord I will wrestle with Your heart
But I won't let You go
You know I believe
Help my unbelief
Yet I will praise You
Yet I will sing of Your name
Here in the shadows
Here I will offer my praise
What's true in the light
Is still true in the dark.

³ Card, Michael. Dec 18, 2018. *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God's Lovingkindness*.

⁴ Source: [LyricFind](#), Songwriters: Ali Gilkeson / Chris Llewellyn / Gareth Gilkeson / Stephen Mitchell / Patrick Thompson, Weep with Me lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group