



fruit

but the fruit of the Spirit is **love**, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control





“The measure
of love is to
love without
measure.”

St. Augustine



Survival

We feel a general kind of love for something or someone that meets our needs. There is a sense of affection for someone who gives us water when we are thirsty, or a tree that shelters us from rain. But our love doesn't extend beyond those met needs.

God's love for us goes beyond mere survival; it isn't just the means to happiness or enlightenment or non-death. In order to understand and respond to it, we have to know what it is, and how we can begin to love God and others in return.

In "The Four Loves," C.S. Lewis wrote, "Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not need to create). It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." Friendship and grace and redemption is not a requirement for existence. But when it comes to love, we are never operating on the bare minimum.

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first," doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

- 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most widely recognized passages of Scripture. Can you find something new in it today?
- How can you apply this passage to all of your relationships?
- What aspects of your life are “unnecessary,” but give you meaning and purpose?
- What relationships in your life are the healthiest?
- What is your favorite way to show love?
- What is your favorite way to receive love?

“The point of 1 Corinthians 13 is that love is not our duty; it is our destiny. It is the language Jesus spoke, and we are called to speak it so that we can converse with him. It is the food they eat in God’s new world, and we must acquire the taste for it here and now. It is the music God has written for all his creatures to sing, and we are called to learn it and practice it now so as to be ready when the conductor brings down his baton.”

N.T. Wright



Gift

Friendship is beautiful because it can almost be completely selfless. It stirs in us the desire to do work on someone else's behalf, to take a weight upon ourselves purely because it will remove it from another.

When a friend is hurting, and everything in you wants to relieve some part of their burden, it isn't because you feel obligated to do so. It's not because you owe it to them or because they'll be indebted to you. You won't gain anything. It is wholly because of love.

God's love could be called excessive, in the sense that he provides much more than enough. It is an extravagance, a grace wholly undeserved. Not just a gift, but a lavish one.

Seeing people with Jesus' perspective, where everyone is a beloved child and friend, leads us to a life of selfless love. It gives us the freedom to rejoice in other people's joys as though they are our own, and the ability to give the gift of a reprieve from pain.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

EPHESIANS 1:7-10

- What does it mean to be 'lavished' with grace?
- How have you seen God do this in your life?
- What relationships are you keeping out of obligation?
- When has a friend lifted weight off your shoulders?
- Who might need encouragement today?

*“Life - natural life -
has no better gift to
give. Who could have
deserved it?”*

C.S. Lewis

Forgiveness

True friendship is selfless, but it lives in a broken world and involves imperfect people. Small resentments can worm their way in, taking up space where affection should be. We begin keeping track of what we feel like is owed, and our relationships become transactional. Bitterness and anger come to the forefront of our hearts when we don't receive the attention we feel is owed, or the gratitude we think we've earned.

But the love we have for our friends is the same love that 1 Corinthians says "keeps no record of wrong." A bad track record should have no relevance to our present love. This doesn't mean we should remain naive, but we should be willing to show grace without considering what may be owed to us.

Forgiveness is letting go of a debt, releasing someone of what they owe you. There is always a cost with wrongdoing, and grace is taking that cost upon yourself. It doesn't mean your relationship can or should go back to how it was before. It is an extension of the grace Christ has showed us.

“So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

LUKE 17:3-4

- Where do you see God's grace in your life?
- What is God's standard of forgiveness?
- Have you had a friendship fall apart because of resentment?
- Who in your life is hard to forgive?
- Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to ask for forgiveness?

“The mark of perfect Friendship is not that help will be given when the pinch comes (of course it will) but that, having been given, it makes no difference at all.”

C.S. Lewis

Supernatural

Friendship, and any relationship, means being willing to love in excess, without expectation of reciprocation. It's the same love modeled for us by Christ, who gave grace after grace. No relationship in this world could compare. God created us individually, knit us together with intention and delight. Jesus stooped to our level, became human, and died so we could have the chance of a future with him. And the Holy Spirit lives within us, empowering us and interceding for us daily.

When we accept this supernatural love from he who created us, we also receive the ability to love supernaturally. On our own, we aren't capable of the sacrificial grace God shows us and asks us to give. But we become empowered to choose to love in the same way, to not only rely on our emotions and just 'feel it.' Through the great, infinite love of God, we are able to foster heavenly relationships with those we encounter on this earth.

“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

JOHN 15:13-15

- What does Jesus ask of us, when he tells us to love one another?
- In what ways did Jesus show love for his disciples?
- Do you feel that the Holy Spirit ever expresses love?
- How do 'acts of love' factor into our faith, if we aren't saved through works?
- Is your faith mainly in your head, or your heart? Should it matter either way?
- In which ways do you need to be supernaturally empowered to love?

“What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”

St. Augustine

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