



WORDS MATTER: Love

What the words we use truly mean.

Opening Prayer:

Loving Father, Your love was shown to us at the death of Your Son upon the cross. Help us to follow the example of this love as we live as Your children. Amen.

Q: How is the word “love” used in daily life? What do people say that they love?

A: The word “love” is used in a wide variety of ways. People say they love things like pizza and football while also saying they love their spouse or parents. We also talk about God’s love for us and our love for Him.

Q: What is your definition of love?

A: Answers will vary.

Q: What does our culture speak about love?

A: People in our culture use the word “love” in various ways. Many think of love in terms of simply be nice. They might say, “Love everyone.” They believe that you must value everyone’s preferences and opinions. Also, this is often understood to mean that a person’s preferences or opinions cannot be questioned or corrected. Others think of love mostly in terms of the feelings they have towards different things or people. They might say, “Love is love” suggesting that any relationship between willing people is the same in nature. Still others suggest that love is about what makes one happy. They might say, “Love yourself” suggesting that whatever one desires or comes most easily to a person must be thought of as good.

Q: How does the dictionary define love? Should the word “love” only have one meaning?

A: “Love” may be used differently in different contexts as the following portions of the definition from Merriam-Webster below reveal:

- *strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties maternal love for a child*
- *attraction based on sexual desire: affection and tenderness felt by lovers After all these years, they are still very much in love.*
- *affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests love for his old schoolmate*
- *warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion love of the sea*
- *unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another*
- *a person's adoration of God*

Q: Who teaches us what the true nature of love really is? Read 1 John 4:16.

A: 1 John 4:16 says, "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." Jesus is God in the flesh and so, we look to him to learn what love is and how to practice it in our lives.

Q: How does Jesus love? Is his love a niceness, happiness, or feeling or something else? How does that love manifest itself? What does this suggest about the nature of love? Read 1 John 3:16–18.

A: 1 John 3:16–18 says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." While Jesus surely has compassion and affection for us, his love is ultimately about action taken for the benefit of us who are in need. We are first the recipients of Jesus' magnificent love. Then we become the givers of this love in our interactions with others. Love is selfless action meant to help one in need.

Q: Is love mere acceptance of another regardless of what they do? Can a rebuke be loving? Read Psalm 141:5.

A: Psalm 141:5 says, "Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it." Some in our culture suggests that love is unquestioning acceptance of another. Rebuking one who is error is an act not of hate but love, leading them to God's forgiveness and the goodness of His ways.

Q: Does God's love of us include rebuke? Read Hebrews 12:5–6.

A: Hebrews 12:5–6 says "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." Just as a parent will at times need to correct his child because he loves them, so also God rebukes us to bring us back under his loving care. While this might not bring immediate happiness, it does greatly benefit us as those God loves.

Q: So how then should we speak of love?

A: God's love is not about niceness, happiness, or feelings, but selfless activity he does for those he loves. His love does not just accept anything, but calls all away from the perils of sin and calls us towards Himself through his Son. This is how our love for each other and for all should be. We should demonstrate love in selfless actions, and by calling those we claim to love away from sin and to God through Jesus.

Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, you are love. Let us rest in your love given to us in Jesus and share that love every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.