

## FOR THE LOVE

NUMEROUS TIMES WHEN I READ THE BIBLE AND MAYBE THIS HAS HAPPENED TO YOU TOO, I READ AND SKIP OVER WORDS OR PHRASES AND DON'T PAUSE TO THINK ABOUT WHAT IT REALLY IS SAYING TO ME.

THE READING FROM EPHESIANS IS ONE SUCH INSTANCE WHERE THE WORDS OF THESE VERSES ARE "PACKED" WITH MEANING THAT WE SHOULD TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER. I BELIEVE A BIG REASON TO STOP AND TAKE IN THESE WORDS IS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US HIS WORD SO THAT OUR FAITH MAY BE BUILT UP EACH AND EVERYDAY WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO DISCERN THE MEANING FOR US WITHIN THE WORDS.

LOOK AT VERSES 16 THROUGH 19. *"I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, He may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION PUTS THESE WORDS IN A VERY CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE WAY *"I ask Him to strengthen you by His Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite Him in. And I ask Him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God."* WOW, WHAT AN IMAGE OF THE LOVE JESUS AND GOD, OUR FATHER HAS FOR US. IT IS ALSO A PICTURE OF THE LOVE WE CAN HAVE IN ORDER TO DO THINGS WE NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE!!! WE SING OF "VICTORY IN JESUS" IS OUR LIFE "VICTORIOUS"? ARE WE LIVING THAT LIFE SO THAT WE DO KNOW THE WIDTH, LENGTH, HEIGHT, AND DEPTH OF THE LOVE FOR US AND THAT THAT LOVE GIVEN TO US FIRST, CAN BE SHOWN TO OTHERS?

OF COURSE, JUST AS ANY TEACHING FROM THE BIBLE IT IS GREAT TO HEAR HOW IT IS SUPPOSED TO WORK, BUT HOW DO WE APPLY THE TEACHING TO EVERY DAY LIFE? EVEN IN THE BODY OF CHRIST HERE AT CENTENNIAL WE ARE HUMAN, AND AT TIMES, "WE ALL FALL SHORT" AS IT SAYS IN ROMANS. WE ARE SHORT WITH PEOPLE, WE CRITICIZE, AND WE JUST CAN'T SEE THEIR SIDE.

GOD KNOWS IN OUR HUMAN FRAILNESS THAT THOSE THINGS HAPPEN, BUT IT'S WHAT WE DO GOING FORWARD THAT MATTERS TO GOD. DO WE CONTINUE TO MAKE EXCUSES FOR SUCH BEHAVIOR AND DO WE JUST THROW UP OUR HANDS AND SAY "THAT'S JUST THE WAY I AM"? VERY TRUE, IT IS THE WAY WE ARE, BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WE CAN CHANGE AND BE THAT DISCIPLE GOD KNOWS WE CAN BE!

WE ARE MADE IN THE VERY IMAGE OF GOD HIMSELF AND HE CERTAINLY HAS THE LOVE DESCRIBED IN THIS VERSE AND MORE IMPORTANTLY IT IS HIS DESIRE TO SHARE THAT LOVE WITH US SO WE CAN SHARE IT WITH OTHERS NOT JUST HERE IN THE FAMILY OF CENTENNIAL, BUT WITH PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO NEED IT. IF WE ASKED THE QUESTION "WHY DO YOU KEEP COMING BACK TO CENTENNIAL WEEK

AFTER WEEK AND YEAR AFTER YEAR?" SOME MAY SAY THE FOOD, BUT REALLY MANY I BELIEVE WOULD ANSWER THAT IT IS THAT FEELING OF FAMILY AND WHAT DOES FAMILY DO? BOTTOM LINE - THEY LOVE EACH OTHER!!! THE ABCS I GAVE LAST WEEK BECOME IRRESISTIBLE IN LIGHT OF THE LOVE WE TALK ABOUT TODAY.

PEOPLE WANT TO BE **ASSURED** THERE IS A PLACE WHERE THEY ARE NOT STRANGERS. THEY DO THAT BY **BELONGING** TO SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES AND MOST IMPORTANT THEY SENSE A "**CONNECTION**" IN THAT FAMILY OF GOD, THAT BODY OF CHRIST. I HAVE MENTIONED THIS BEFORE AND WILL AGAIN BECAUSE IT IS A LONGING, A VERY STRONG HUNGER OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

EACH ONE OF US WANTS TO BE IN A PLACE WHERE WE CAN BE OURSELVES, FAIL, AND REMAINED LOVED FOR WHO WE ARE, RIGHT WHERE WE ARE. SO MUCH FEAR IS BORN OUT OF THE THOUGHT THAT IF WE FAIL OR SHOW WHO WE REALLY ARE, WE WILL LOSE THE LOVE OF THOSE AROUND US, BUT I ASK IS THAT REAL LOVE AS WE KNOW FROM THE SCRIPTURES? I DON'T THINK SO!!!!

FROM PROVERBS TO THE WELL KNOWN LOVE CHAPTER OF 1 CORINTHIANS TO 1 PETER WE ARE TAUGHT THE TRAITS OF LOVE AND WHAT THAT TYPE OF LOVE CAN DO. PROVERBS SAYS "*Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.*" CORINTHIANS 13 SAYS "*Love is patient and kind*" AND 1 PETER SAYS "*Love covers a multitude of sins*". FROM JUST THIS SMALL SELECTION OF VERSES WE CAN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE TRAITS OF LOVE GOD DESIRES US TO DEMONSTRATE TO OTHERS.

A group of four-through eight-year-olds were asked: "*What does love mean?*" Their answers vary from the amusing to the profound...

Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.

Love is when you go out to eat & give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.

Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.

When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.

Love is what makes you smile when you're tired.

When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.

When you tell someone something bad about yourself and you're scared they won't love you anymore. But then you get surprised because not only do they still love you, they love you even more.

Love is when mommy sees daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Denzel Washington.

Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.

Love cards, like Valentine's cards, say stuff on them that we'd like to say ourselves, but we wouldn't be caught dead saying.

AS USUAL THERE IS HUMOR WHEN ASKING CHILDREN OF A YOUNG AGE SUCH AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION, BUT THERE ALSO A BIT OF TRUTH IN WHAT THEY SAY AND CAN IT CAN BE PROFOUND.

LET'S LOOK INTO THAT LOVE AS DEFINED BY THE TERMS USED IN VERSE 18 – THE WIDTH, LENGTH, HEIGHT, AND DEPTH, A FOUR DIMENSIONAL LOVE. HOWEVER, FIRST I WANT TO EXPLAIN A DIFFERENCE THAT IS IMPORTANT TO TODAY'S MESSAGE AND IS FOUND IN PAUL'S WRITING TO THE EPHESIANS. HE

IS NOT PRAYING **THAT GOD'S PEOPLE KNOW THAT GOD LOVES THEM, BUT THAT THEY WOULD KNOW GOD'S LOVE.** HE IS EXCITED NOT FOR US TO JUST ONLY KNOW GOD LOVES US, BUT TO GO BEYOND WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO KNOW GOD'S LOVE – **THE WIDTH, THE LENGTH, THE HEIGHT, AND THE DEPTH.** WHEN WE KNOW THAT, AS MUCH AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE, THEN WE CAN SHOW IT AND PASS IT ON TO THOSE AROUND US! THEN WE INDEED CAN FULFILL THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT "TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES"!!!!

**THE FIRST ELEMENT TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE IS ITS WIDTH.** WE CAN EASILY KNOW THAT HIS LOVE'S WIDTH OR BREATH IS VERY DIFFERENT THAN OURS. WE CAN ADMIT WE LOVE CERTAIN PEOPLE AND NOT OTHERS. WE LOVE CERTAIN TYPES OF PEOPLE AND NOT OTHERS. THEN WHAT ABOUT THE "UNLOVABLE" PEOPLE? PONDER THIS THOUGHT – THE PERSON YOU MAY DISLIKE THE MOST, GOD LOVES THAN PERSON! NINE WORDS WE HAVE TO REMEMBER IF WE ARE HIS DISCIPLE AND HAVE THE SLIGHTEST INKLING OF UNDERSTANDING GOD'S LOVE - "*He Hates The Sin, But He Loves The Sinner*". THAT IS THE TRUE WIDTH OR BREATH OF GOD'S LOVE. HIS LOVE ENCOMPASSES EVERYONE - **PERIOD.** THE VERSE IN 1 TIMOTHY 2:4 "*Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" AND 2 PETER 3:9 "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*"

**THE SECOND ELEMENT TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE IS ITS LENGTH.** THE WORD USED HERE REFERS TO TIME. GOD'S LOVE KNOWS NO TIME LIMIT – NO BEGINNING OR END. GOD DOESN'T TAKE HOLIDAYS OFF, OR THE WEEKEND, THERE ARE NO REGULAR BUSINESS HOURS, 9 TO 5, AND HE ISN'T JUST AVAILABLE ON SUNDAYS WHEN WE ARE IN CHURCH! HIS LOVE IS PRESENT AT CELEBRATIONS, AT OUR BEDSIDE WHEN ILL, AND ANY OTHER PLACE OR SITUATIONS WE MAY FIND OURSELVES IN. JESUS PROMISED THAT HE WILL BE WITH US UNTIL THE END OF TIME BECAUSE HE IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOR THE FUTURE.

**THE THIRD ELEMENT TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE IS ITS HEIGHT.** WE COMMONLY THINK OF HEIGHT OF COURSE AS A MEASUREMENT SUCH AS THE HEIGHT OF OUR STEEPLE OUTSIDE FROM THE GROUND OR THE PEAK OF SOMETHING SUCH AS A NOISE LEVEL. HERE THE WORD USED COMBINES THE TWO TO MEAN THE QUALITY OF GOD'S LOVE SURPASSING ANYTHING WE CAN COMPARE IT TO. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT YEARS AGO WHEN A NICKEL CUP OF COFFEE, JUST PLAIN COFFEE WOULD SOME DAY EVOLVE INTO "GOURMET" COFFEE AND THE PRICES WE WOULD PAY FOR "THE BEST". WE MANY TIMES CRAVE THE BEST NO MATTER THE COST, GOD'S LOVE IS LIKE THAT BUT SO, SO MUCH MORE!!!! A REFERENCE HERE, PHILIPPIANS 4:7 "*Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*" GOD'S PEACE COMES AS A RESULT OF KNOWING GOD'S LOVE!

**THE LAST ELEMENT TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE IS ITS DEPTH.** THIS MAY BE THE MOST DIFFICULT OF THE FOUR TO GRASP. IT IS NOT ONLY REAL BUT REACHES TO THE DEEPEST PARTS OF OUR SPIRIT. GOD KNOWS OUR "DARK PARTS", THOSE CLOSETS CLOSED OFF AND WITH HIS LOVE REACHES INTO TO THEM TO CLEAN THEM OUT. THAT IS THE DEPTH OF HIS LOVE.

GOD'S LOVE IS SO WIDE, IT EMBRACES EVERYONE, IT IS SO LONG-LASTING, IT WILL NEVER LET US GO, IT IS OF SUCH HIGH QUALITY THAT IT WILL NEVER LET US DOWN AND SO DEEP TO MEET OUR DEEPEST NEEDS.

REMEMBER THE VERSE FROM ROMANS 8:38-39 " *For I am convinced 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.*" PAUL KNEW GOD LOVED HIM, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY HE KNEW GOD'S LOVE!!!

MAY OUR PRAYER FOR EACH OTHER BE THAT WE KNOW THE WIDTH, THE LENGTH, THE HEIGHT, AND THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE.

AMEN.