

## Cultivating 5 — “All You Need Is Love” Pt3 (03.15.2020)

In the last few messages from our “Cultivating series, we’ve focused on the first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, which is love. Specifically, this first part of the fruit of the Spirit is a special divine type of love that we call “agape” love. “Agape” love is the kind of love that God shows to us, but it is also the kind of love that God calls us to show to each other as followers of Christ. In fact, as one commentator put it, → “Love contains the whole of all that God desires and requires of us.” Loving others as Christ loves us is a big deal!

In John’s gospel, Jesus said, → *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:34-35).*

When Christians love each other, it shows who they belong to. It points people to Jesus. Loving others as Christ loves us is a big deal!

But, in his first letter, John goes one step further and makes an even more powerful statement about what happens when Christians love one another.

In 1 John, John writes: → *“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (1 John 4:12)*

What is John saying? He’s saying that → God becomes visible through our love for one another. *“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another...”*

It seems that John is implying that our love for one another makes visible the love of God—which is another way of saying that God himself is seen, since God is love. → When Christians love each other, in practical, sacrificial, costly, barrier-dissolving ways, then the love of God (or rather, the God who is love) can be seen.

Of course, this raises another question: → What happens if we don't love each other as Christ loves us? It is no small matter is it? → It betrays our connection to Christ, and it hides the reality of God and His love from a world that so desperately need it.

But the question is how do we learn to love others like God has loved us? Well before we try to answer that question, let's remind ourselves about what "agape" love looks like.

Please turn with me to → **1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (p. 971)**

Last week, we looked at the barriers to loving like God. For example, we noticed that you can't love like God if you are proud or self-seeking or quick-tempered or envious. God's love has none of these self-seeking, prideful impulses corrupting it. Now let's take a few moments to look at what "agape" love is.

Beginning with verse 4 we read: *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup>Love never fails."*

→ **1. Patient**—First of all, love is patient. Some translations say "longsuffering." It could be translated as "long-tempered," of course, we don't use that phrase. We commonly talk about being "short-tempered," but being long-tempered never made it into the English language. I think that tells us something about our need to be more long-tempered, don't you?

The Greek word applies more to people than circumstances or events. So, → "agape" love never gives up on people. The Greek word paints a picture of a person who is wronged, and who has the means and the opportunity to get even, but they refuse to do so.

→ **Proverbs 10:12 (CEV)** says, *“Hatred stirs up trouble; love overlooks the wrongs that others do.”* Love overlooks the wrongs others do to us. Instead of fighting back, we overlook, we show patience. → Love doesn’t seek revenge—especially when we have the power and opportunity to get it! Love is patient. It puts up with, and prays for, those who are difficult.

Now, let me just underline something before we go on: →being patient with someone isn’t looking the other way, or pretending that nothing happened. →You can be patient and still lovingly make corrections.

Think about it, what does it mean to be patient with a small child? →Does it mean being silent when they make mistakes and do things that hurt others or themselves? Is that being loving? It’s exactly the opposite, right? You are patient by correcting and teaching and, depending on their age, by helping them understand the seriousness of what they have done and why they shouldn’t do it again. But in all of that, you continue to love and nurture and encourage and forgive and exhibit understanding and patience.

→Another possible translation of this first verb could be that “Love waits patiently.” The idea here is that we are not only to be patient with the person, but it also acknowledges that right timing is a huge part in patiently loving another. →Being patient means we wait for the best opportunity to teach, correct, and encourage. Timing is so important. I don’t know about you, but →I have rushed and crush when I could have paused for the good of the cause.

If you’re like me, your patience can occasionally be in short supply. But remember, this is divine-love produced in us. It comes through the work of the Spirit. And you can help that fruit grow by reminding yourself that you have tried other people’s patience as well. You have wronged others. You have sinned against God and God has extended his patience

to you more than you will ever know. So go ahead and ask God to supply you with the divine patience needed to honour Him, but don't just focus on the patience you need, spend time also reminding yourself of how patient God has been and continues to be with you. Humble yourself and your patience will grow.

→ **2 Kind**—next we come to kindness. Love is kind. This is more than just being nice. The word literally means to “be useful.” → To be kind is to be useful to someone else. It goes one step further than being patient. To be patient is to endure the wrongs of others without striking back. To be kind is to not only endure the wrongs of others, but to then do helpful things for them as well.

Jesus tells us in **Luke 6:33-35** → *“And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”*

God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked and we are called to do the same. We're called to be helpful even when we get nothing in return. We are called to be helpful period! Our love must prompt us to action.

→ In **Matthew 11:28-30** Jesus says, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* The word the NIV translates as → “easy” in verse 30 is the same word translated as “kind” in 1 Corinthians 13. Jesus is saying that his yoke is “kind”.

In Jesus' day, they would yoke a young, inexperienced oxen with a strong, experienced one. → The experience oxen would be yoked tightly, and the inexperienced oxen would be loosely tied. That way the young inexperience oxen would be able to gain strength and experience while the other oxen did most of the work. → To be kind is to come alongside someone else and make their load easier. It is to love while showing others how to love. Love is patient; love is kind.

Now let's look at v. 7, love *"always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

Notice the word "always." It is repeated before each of these verbs for emphasis.

→ Some people look at this verse and think that Paul is saying that love is being a doormat. It is about us putting up with all things always no matter what. There is a sense in which that is true. Clearly, we are called to love beyond what we would usually call reasonable in human terms. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. We are to forgive seventy times seven and so on. But that doesn't mean that we are just to roll over and take it until the Lord returns.

→ Again, think about God's love, after all that is what we are talking about here. God's love accepts us as we are, but His love also is corrective and transformative, right?

The writer of Hebrews declares: → <sup>5</sup> *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,"* <sup>6</sup> *because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."* (**Hebrews 12:5-6**)

Discipline and correction are acts of love. They are expressions of caring. → They are a necessary tenderness that sometimes stings.

Now verse 7 is chiastic in structure. In this case, what that means is that → the first and the last words, “protects and perseveres” are paired and they point to the present struggle that love requires in our broken world. → The two middle words, “trusts” and “hopes” are also paired, and they point to the future when God’s work will be fully accomplished in us. This gives us an important insight into what Paul is getting at in this verse.

→ “Protects” and “perseveres” find their strength to continue in our “trust” and “hope” in the working of Christ. It is claiming by faith that, → *“he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6)*

OK, let’s quickly look at these four verbs:

→ **Love always “protects”**. The word that the NIV translates as “protects” literally means “to cover.” Think of the image of a roof protecting or covering a family. It means to “bear” or “carry,” or “support,” rather than to “put up with.” We could say that “love never tires of support.”

→ Instead of focusing on what’s wrong with someone, love focuses on what’s right. Instead of criticizing the negative, love emphasizes the positive. Love does not gossip or listen to gossip. → Even when a sin is certain, love tries to correct it with the least possible harm. Love never protects sin but it desires to protect the one who sins.

**Proverbs 10:12** states: →<sup>12</sup> *Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.* Think of the cross for a moment. → With the cross, did God cover up our sin? → No, the cross shows us just how ugly and painful our sin is, but at the same time, in the cross God

forever covers those who trust in His Son. What this means is: → love seeks to save, not condemn. Love seeks to restore, not judge.

OK, let's move on to perseverance.

→ **Love always perseveres** —the word that the NIV translates as “perseveres,” is a strong action word. It was a military term used of an army's holding a vital position at all costs, knowing that the battle is over if the position is lost. → We could translate it: “Love, keeps going to the end.” Or “love always gets the job done.”

Richard Armstrong, in his book, "Make Your Life Worthwhile," tells the story about a man in Wales who tried for 42 years to win the heart of the lady of his dreams.

For more than 40 years, the persistent, but rather shy man slipped a weekly love letter under his neighbor's door. But she continually refused to speak and mend the rift that had parted them many years before. Then, after writing 2,184 love letters without ever getting a spoken or written reply, the single-hearted old man decided that perhaps he should change his tactics. So, he gathered all the courage he could muster and knocked on the door to ask the lady to marry him. To his delight and surprise, she accepted. The couple, both 74 at the time, became husband and wife.

It took 42 years, 2,184 love letters, persistence and the courage to have his love pay off with loved returned. Love keeps going to the end.” Love always gets the job done.”

Now, the reason why love can always persevere is because of the next two aspects of love. → Love always perseveres because we trust and hope in what God can and will do through Christ. Moving on to the first of these two aspects of love that help us to endure.

→ **Love always trusts**—“trusts” is the common New Testament word for “believes.” “Love always believes.” “Love never loses faith.” → We could translate this: “Love always

gives the benefit of the doubt." Or love is never cynical or suspicious. It is to think the best of someone, not the worst.

→ Job's friends weren't particularly good at a love that trusts. They believed the worst about him. They blamed all his suffering and problems on his sin. They certainly didn't give Job the benefit of doubt because they had no true love for him.

→ The religious leaders of Jesus' day suffered from the same lack of Christ-like love. They tended to see the worst in others, including Jesus! In Luke 5, when Jesus forgave the paralytic of his sins, the Pharisees immediately concluded He was blaspheming (Luke 5:21). Jesus counters the charge by healing the man, thus giving proof of his claim. Most of the crowd were convinced and glorified God (v. 26), but we know from their later words and actions that the scribes and Pharisees remained convinced that Jesus was evil. → Hatred believes the worst, but love believes the best.

But Paul isn't saying that "Love always believes the best about people." Such a statement doesn't ring true with our experience does it? Love doesn't magically turn off our logic and discernment. Discernment dictates that there are times that we cannot believe the best about a person. → There are times when we can't give the benefit of the doubt, because there is no doubt. But even then, love compels us to trust. You see, the point Paul is making here is that → love 'never loses faith.' It never loses faith in what God is doing and what God can do. So even in those times when you can't trust the person, you can trust God who is at work in the person.

→ **Love always hopes**—finally we come to love always hopes. This is another future facing aspect of love. → Christ-followers look forward, not back, knowing that God is working in every person, knowing that everyone is a work in progress.

→ Hope believes that good will eventually come to those who may be failing now.

Let's face it, failure is found in every Christian's life, but there is always hope, not based on the Christian, but on Christ.

Paul reminds us in Romans: → *"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand."* (Romans 14:4)

Instead of judging, love hopes. → Love hopes in the Lord for it is the Lord, and only the Lord, who can make each one of us stand. The Lord is at work in each one of us. Christ is the one who promised to finish the work he began.

**John MacArthur comments:** → "Even when belief in a loved one's goodness or repentance is shattered, love still hopes. When it runs out of faith it holds on to hope. As long as God's grace is operative human failure is never final. There are more than enough promises in the Bible to make love hopeful."

Love bears what otherwise is unbearable; it believes what otherwise is unbelievable; it hopes in what otherwise is hopeless; and it endures when anything less than love would → give up. Love refuses to take failure as final.

In **Matthew 18: 21-22**, we read, → *'Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."* Love always trusts. It forgives and continues to forgive because it refuses to take failure as final.

"Agape" love never gives up on people. It is patient and kind, always protecting, always trusting, always hoping and always persevering. → This is the kind of love that God has for us, but is it the kind of love we give to others?

If you are anything like me, the polite answer is, → “Some days, I’d like to think that I’m working on it, but I’m nowhere near where I need to be!”

It’s a safe assumption that regardless of our maturity level, → we all need to grow in the fruit of “agape” love, but how do we do that? Let me spend the rest of our time today giving you a few practical suggestions as to → **how you grow in love.**

→ **1. Depend on God**—Remember that we are talking about the fruit of the Spirit here. We can only produce the fruit of love if we are abiding in Christ. We must depend on God.

In **1 John 4:19**, John puts it this way: → *“We love because he first loved us.”*

We can love with a love like God’s only because God first loved us. Without God first loving us, we wouldn’t be able to even begin to love like Him. Why? — because God’s love is the source of our love.

In **1 John 4:9-10**, John states: → *“God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”*

In these two verses John talks about the supply of God’s love. God showed us his love for us. He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus and taking away our sins. We received that love by understanding our need to be forgiven and by giving ourselves to Jesus. But John doesn’t end the thought there.

In verse 11 he says, → *“Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.”* Do you see what he is saying? Since you have been supplied with God’s love, you now have the capacity and, yes, even the duty to be a supplier of God’s love

to others. In other words, → our capacity to love like Him comes from Him. Of course, this is just another way of saying that love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit being produced in our lives. So, if you want to develop your love for others, you first must grow in your loving relationship with Yahweh.

→ **2. Disconnect Your Pride**— pride makes us impatient. Pride makes us unkind. Pride makes us envy and boastful and self-seeking. Pride keeps a record of wrongs. Pride doesn't protect, doesn't trust, and doesn't hope. Instead of persevering, pride gives up on others. Pride tells us that no one is as deserving of God as we are. → If we have a problem with pride, it will be impossible for us to love like Christ.

Pride steals appreciation and gratitude from our hearts and without gratitude for what God has done, we can't love like we should.

First, we must depend on God; then we must disconnect our pride. Next, we must

→ **3. Direct ourselves toward others**— we need to be intentional in focusing on others. Richard Foster once said, → *“One of the greatest expressions of love is simply to notice people and to pay attention to them.”* That doesn't sound too hard, does it? Noticing people and paying attention to them seems to be a simple thing, but how often do we do it? When you are on the way to work, are you noticing other people and paying attention to them? Most likely, only when they get in your way, right? Our society teaches us to think about ourselves. It teaches us to grab as much toilet paper as we can and forget about everyone else.

Paul in **Philippians 2:1-5** says, → *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. → <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in*

*humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”*

Paul’s questions are rhetorical. He is saying, “Since you have received encouragement and comfort from being united with Christ; and since you have fellowship, tenderness and compassion from the Holy Spirit, you need to show the same love you received. Since you have received His love, give His love.”

→ Loving the way God wants us to love means we must direct ourselves to think about the interests of others. And, since the world teaches us to focus on ourselves, we must be intentional in retraining ourselves to think about other people. If we aren’t intentional, it won’t happen. Now is the perfect time to think of others. Who is a shut-in, who could you pick up some groceries for? → Who can you share your stash of toilet paper with?

→ **4. Take Deliberate steps**—After directing your attention, you need to take deliberate steps. You need to go into training, but your training must be slow and deliberate.

Think back to January 1<sup>st</sup>. Some of you made New Year’s resolutions to get into shape. How did you do? A safe bet is that some of you gave up a few days into the process, why? Most likely it was your approach. People often give up because they join a club and go to the gym and exercised until they drop. They do too much and get too sore and gave up.

Growing in our love is like getting back in shape; it’s like running a marathon. You don’t just decide to do it and put on some shoes and start running. If that’s your approach, you’ll give up before you get very far.

Training for a marathon is a long process. You start by jogging a short distance and then, over time, you increase the amount you run until you have the capacity to make it through the marathon. You must start off slow and build. You must see growth as a process. → You must set small goals to reach the big goal. It begins with a decision to become more loving, but love is like any other muscle, it must be slowly, gradually developed then, as time goes by, you will see your love stamina increase.

→ It's possible that there are people in your life right now that you have a hard time being in the same room with, let alone love. How are things going to change? They'll change by deciding to love them and then by doing something to get you on the way to developing that love.

In **Matthew 5:44**, Jesus says, → *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* A good place to start is simply by praying for them, but when you pray for them, don't just pray that God will make them more lovable. Pray that God will give you the capacity to love them just as they are. That's the first and greatest step. Begin by praying and you will be amazed at how God will develop His love in you. Finally, you need to:

→ **5. Delight—love isn't lost.** Look at the beginning of v. 8 *“Love never fails.”* The Greek word translated as “fails” means to be without effect or impact. → Agape love always has an impact; it is always effective. Sometimes it may not seem effective, but we have this promise. Love will always be effective. → If it's not effective on the person we are showing it to, it will be effective on us! More likely, it will be used by God to do something to change both the giver and the receiver.

→ Washington Irving once said, *“Love is never lost. If not reciprocated, it will flow back and soften and purify the heart.”* Love never fails. This one truth alone should encourage us when showing love becomes difficult. It's as if God is telling us, → “Try loving

and I will make sure that your efforts will pay off. I guarantee that your love will have an effect. Your efforts won't be in vain, I promise!"

That's the way it is with love. → Love always has an effect: the more we love like Christ, the more we change others and the more we are changed ourselves. In other words, the more fruit we bear.