



What Is Real Love?

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God.”
(1 John 4:7a, NLT)

To some “Jesus Loves Me” is a simple Sunday school song. However, to those who know the power behind those three words, they mean so much more. It has turned their world upside down. Suicides have been prevented; drug addicts have been cured; relationships have been saved; and “nobodies” have become “some bodies” because they have encountered the love of Jesus.

Today we say, “I love ice cream” or “I love that sports car” in the same way we say, “I love you.” We speak of “falling in love” and “falling out of love.” We think of love as a tingly feeling; something that makes you feel good – even if it means choosing to do wrong. Musicians sing about it; actors portray it in television and movies; writers describe it in magazines and books; but is this real love? Although feelings may be involved, real love is not a feeling; it is a CHOICE!

God’s love

What is real love? If you want to know real love, look to God. That is his nature. The Bible says, “God IS love.” He loves because he is love. He expresses love in everything that he says and does. The Bible uses a special word for this kind of love: *agape* (Greek). It is an unselfish, unfailing and sacrificial love. The Bible says, *“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.”* (1 John 4:10, NLT) God expressed his love by giving his Son to die on the cross. Love is a gift. It is a supernatural love that only God fully possesses, and only he can fully give. It does not depend on your behavior. Did you know that he chose to love you, to pursue you, and to invite you to join his family by believing in his Son? (John 15:16a) When you believed in Jesus, you responded to that love.

A forever love

His love has no beginning or end. God says, *“I love you with an everlasting [forever] love.”* (Jeremiah 31:3a, NIV) Can you believe that? Others may abandon you, abuse you, ignore you or just quit talking to you, but God’s affection for you never ends – no matter what. He loves you when you are awake; he watches over you when you are asleep. He never tires or takes naps. He is always with you, rejoicing over you. For God has said, *“I will never fail you. I will never forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5b, NLT) You may feel at times that no one loves you – not your parents, not your friends, not your teachers, but God NEVER stops loving you! Can you imagine love like that?

Unlimited love

There is no limit or boundaries to God's care for you. His love never changes. You can't earn it or turn it off. He doesn't love you more if you get all A's or if you flunk. You can be the star athlete or the one who couldn't pass the tryouts, but he will love you just the same. No matter how you act or what you may have done, you cannot cut off his love. However, God is holy and never excuses sin. He will discipline you because he loves you, but he will never condemn you. Nothing can separate you from his love! (Romans 8:38)

An unknown writer beautifully paraphrased God's love from Zephaniah 3:17. Enjoy!

He cannot contain himself at the thought of you, and with greatest joy spins around wildly in anticipation over you ... and has placed you above all other creations and in the highest place in his priorities. In fact, he shouts and sings in triumph, joyfully proclaiming gladness of his heart in a song of rejoicing! All because of you!" Translated by Dennis Jernigan

A portrait of love

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NLT) the apostle Paul painted an astonishing picture of God's love. Read aloud thoughtfully.

Love is patient and kind.

Love is not jealous, boastful, proud or rude.

Love does not demand its own way.

Love is not irritable.

Love keeps no record of when it has been wronged.

Love is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

Love never gives up.

Love never loses faith.

Love is always hopeful.

Love endures through every circumstance.

Love will last forever.

Now read it again and in place of the word "love", put "Jesus." For example, "Jesus is patient and kind." Read it one more time and insert both your name and Jesus' name. "Jesus in (your name) is patient and kind."¹ Do you believe that is possible?

The Bible says, "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." (Romans 5:5 NIV) God's love has flooded your heart with love. Not only does he want you to experience his love, but he also wants his love to overflow through you to others. Is there someone you are having trouble loving? Hate and an unforgiving spirit can keep that love from flowing through you. The Bible says, "Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32, NLT) Confess

your feelings toward the person and receive God's forgiveness. Then ask Jesus to love him/her through you. You will be amazed at how your attitude changes and how differently the person will respond to you if you keep loving him/her. Try it!

Attitude Check:

- How does your attitude reflect that of someone who is deeply loved?

Explore:

- Read Romans 8:31-39. Describe in your journal what God's love means to you.
- Read "Love" (in front of the *Student New Testament*.)
- Memorize 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

Talking with God:

- Father, help me to remember every day how wonderfully you love me. Cleanse my heart that your love will flow through me to others.

¹ *A Love Worth Forgiving*, Max Lucado 2002, p.164