

Love

*Setting the
Record Straight*

THE FALL FESTIVALS have passed, and the spring holidays are yet to come. The *Hanukkah* (Feast of Dedication) candles have burned their last, and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts eaten during *Hanukkah*) have disappeared from the shelves, adding pounds to delighted Jewish people the world over. Christmas decorations are packed away, carols won't be sung until next season, and alas, no more Christmas cookies. But that doesn't mean we are left with nothing to celebrate right now. After all, we are told love is in the air, and 'tis definitely the season to celebrate it.

Love, however, is one of those elusive concepts that is very difficult to define. As Bible believers, we know that real love far surpasses human emotion and actually originated with the God of the universe. The word itself appears nearly 500 times in the Scriptures, depending on your translation. But the concept is everywhere. The book of Psalms alone is filled with references to God's passionate love for His people. And in the Writings of the Apostles (NT), John tells us that we are only able to love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). Biblical love is sacrificial, implies action and demands obedience. Yeshua (Jesus) quoted the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) when He told us that the greatest of all the commandments is to love God. And the Bible provides the only measuring stick as to how well we are fulfilling that commandment.

The World's Definition



The world tells us that love is in fact an emotion, an intense feeling of affection or fondness, a sense of deep romance, sexual attraction or attachment. We are told we can fall into it, while just as easily, we can fall out of it. It is devoid of commitment and often based solely on sexual attraction. For many, there are no guidelines, no measuring stick, and the idea of love is fraught with confusion. And to a degree, we have our ancient forebears



to thank for it. Roman society, much like the preceding Greek civilization, was deeply defined by sex. Women were considered chattel and married only to procreate. Marital affection and fondness were virtually nonexistent, and a husband who had no extramarital affairs was considered less than a man. Religious festivals often included open displays of sex and nudity.

Early Christian churches founded by Paul and his teams in cities like Corinth and Ephesus were populated with converts from pagan religions. These religions exploited temple prostitutes and promoted sexual perversion in single and married life, even in religious ritual. Many of them had worshiped one of the most powerful and most perverse goddesses of ancient times, Aphrodite. She is known to this day as the goddess of love. No wonder the world remains confused.

Modern Celebrations of “Love”

Most of our modern celebrations of “love” are quite benign in comparison, but still fall alarmingly short of an understanding of what love should be. Valentine’s Day was originally celebrated to commemorate the actions of a third-century Roman monk, Saint Valentine, and has been a recognized holiday for centuries. One legend says Valentine was killed helping Christians escape Roman prisons, where they were being tortured and murdered, proving his love for God and for his fellow man. Today, it is a global holiday where traditions may differ, but the basic notion of proving

your love to your partner is the same the world over. Some countries—such as South Korea, Spain and Japan—actually celebrate on two separate days, one when women give their men chocolates and the second when men reciprocate with very expensive gifts. Most European countries, Canada, England, South Africa, New Zealand and most of the world see couples expressing their feelings in a variety of ways. In Finland, the holiday is actually called Friend's Day and is a time to acknowledge all of the people who are important to you, not just romantic partners.

In the United States, Valentine's Day ranks third among holidays that generate revenue. In 2020, Americans spent US \$21.8 billion proving their love: US \$2.3 billion of it on flowers, US \$2.4 billion on chocolate and US \$1.7 billion on gifts for pets. Australians spent over a billion dollars, while Brits were a bit more conservative at £658 (US \$888 million) spent on eating out and flowers. Unfortunately, despite the celebrations, expensive dinners, flowers and chocolates, when February 15 dawns, confusion still reigns.

The Measuring Stick

Somehow, as difficult as it might be, we must divorce ourselves from all the world has told us and taught us about love and allow the Lord to pour His love into our hearts. We are instructed to love Him with our entire beings and to love others as He has loved us. In order to do that, it is imperative that we take time to contemplate what the Bible tells us about God's love for us and allow the profundity of each word to penetrate our minds and hearts. In Exodus 33, Moses experiences God's love in a remarkable way. He is a bit bold, telling God he wants to see Him; he wants more of Him. But God responds with incredible tenderness, explaining to Moses precisely where He will position him, how He will protect him and exactly what to expect as He fulfills his request. And as He passes, He self-identifies as a God of unspeakable love:

Love
is kind
bears all things
rejoices in truth
never
hopes all t
is patien

re:

isn't rude

doesn't boast

doesn't envy

isn't resentful

ends

things

nt

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin'" (Exod. 34:6-7a).

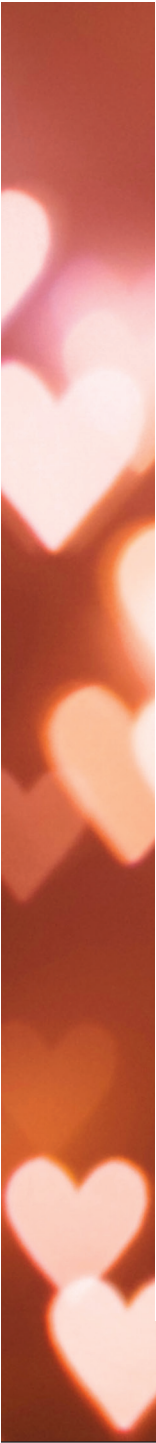
In Psalm 40, you can hear the awe in David's voice as he relates what God has done for him, the God of his forefathers, the God of the universe, in whom is all power, all glory, magnificent and awesome, and yet...

"I waited patiently for the LORD; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God... You have multiplied, O LORD my God, Your wondrous deeds and Your thoughts toward us; none can compare with You!" (Ps. 40:1-3, 5a)

The prophet Zephaniah, a contemporary of Jeremiah, cried out to the people of Israel of impending doom. He spoke of the day of the Lord more than any other prophet and warned the people that the day of God's wrath was coming, a day of judgment on sin. And yet, he encouraged them, reminding them of God's faithful love: *"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing"* (Zeph. 3:17).

David, whom God called a man after His own heart, was more aware than most of his own shortcomings, sin and unworthiness. Yet he could proclaim: *"How precious is Your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of Your wings"* (Ps. 36:7).

The prophet Isaiah brought some of the most chilling prophecies in the Bible to the people of Israel, warning them of the penalties for their sin. However, with each terrifying word, he brought a message of hope because of the love of God: *"For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but*



My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Isa. 54:10).

In the Writings of the Apostles (NT), Paul tells us: *“For I am sure 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...”* (Rom. 8:38–39).

Jeremiah tells us that God loves His people with an everlasting love (31:3), that He has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west (31:34), that His plans for us are for good and not evil (29:11). Titus reminds us that it is only because of the kindness and love of God, according to His mercy, that we are saved (3:4–6). The Bible cries out to us that He is our shield and defender, our wisdom and peace, our salvation and protection, our Healer, Father and Friend. Could there be anything more incredible? Perhaps only that there is nothing we can do to earn this love, to make God love us more or cause Him to love us less, and literally nothing in the heavens or on the earth can separate us from the compassion, tenderness, kindness, faithfulness, forgiveness, power and authority that are God’s love.

Responding to God’s Love

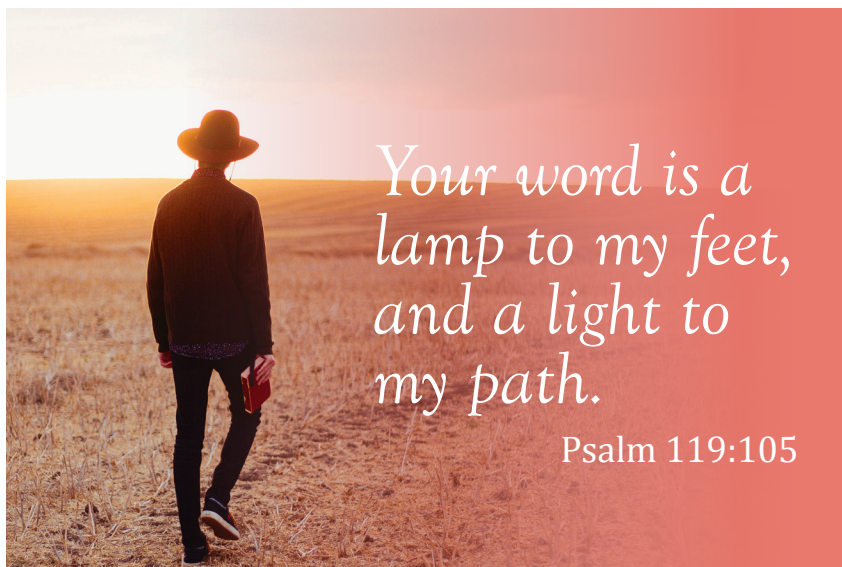
What should our reaction be? What is our measuring stick? God’s love is unconditional. He doesn’t love us if we do or don’t or because we are or aren’t. He does so because that is who He is. But the Bible is clear as to what our reactions should be. Like Moses, we should fall on our faces before our God and worship Him in humility. Like David, we should cry out, *“Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your*

truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day long” (Ps. 25:4–5). With the prophet Micah, we should proclaim, “But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God my salvation; my God will hear me” (Mic. 7:7).

With the prophet Isaiah, we should sing, *“They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:31), and remind ourselves and others, as Isaiah did, “Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you...blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Isa. 30:18).*

Perhaps one of the most poignant yet clearest instructions in the entire Bible on how to love God is found in the Gospels, where we are told, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).*

We are living in a dark time marked by division, conflict, fear and even hatred. It is a time when the light of the believer should shine more brightly than ever before. The love of God should be poured out through us to those who are trapped in that darkness. And all we need to do is allow the love of God to overwhelm us, surrender to Him in humility and commit to a life of obedience. Our light will shine and our lives will reflect the peace and joy that true love brings. There is no confusion in that.



*Your word is a
lamp to my feet,
and a light to
my path.*

Psalm 119:105

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Scripture is taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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