

A BIMONTHLY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED ON THE WESTSIDE, FOR THE WESTSIDE!

WHAT IS LOVE?

Once more Valentine's Day is coming! It is intended as a joy for all (and certainly is for the card industry!), but for those uncertain in love it is an angst, while those who have loved and in some way lost are in dread of it. What is more, some of us have no clue how to define love, for we are not good with words, yet we ooze its joys and sorrows. Others of us can philosophize about it all day, but deny it to others or to ourselves, oftentimes because we know the pain of rejection, whether for reasons genuine or insincere. For such, Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1850 poem *In Memoriam*, is small comfort: "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

Of just one syllable, "love" is yet most profound. We are by no means the first generation to discover this. Long ago, the Greeks sought to discern love's meaning by the use of four terms: *eros*, *storge*, *phileo*, and *agape*. These they understood to express the variant meanings and feelings of love in the multiple contexts in which it is experienced.

Eros the Greeks understood to be passionate, romantic, or sexual love. It is that expression of love we describe in English as erotic. Because it is a fire, it needs handling within the fire doors of marriage. In the western world we are paying a heavy price for permitting *eros* to burn uncontrolled. Unwanted babies are killed, many of the born grow up in insecure homes, and love which was designed to serve others is enslaved to our own passions. As the saying goes, "Men play at love, because they want sex; and girls play at sex because they are looking for love." Minutes of pleasure are followed by years of emptiness, guilt, and brokenness. That which God designed as holy for that special person within the safety and security of marriage has been tarnished and made sordid, and reduced to animal appetite.

Storge reminds us that no matter how determined the endeavor to impose fluid definitions of family on society, the nuclear family has been a given throughout history.

Storge speaks of the natural love existing in families, between parents and children, siblings, and wider family members, too. Yet, the rejection of the J u d e o -

Christian worldview, whether in practice or in theory, has devastated the health and happiness of many families.

Phileo takes us outside the bounds of family and refers to that strong affection which friends enjoy. True friendship is immensely precious. As one person put it, "A friend is one who comes in when the world goes out."

Agape is a love of the will—a decision to sacrifice oneself for our romantic interest, our family members, or our friends. In short, *agape* is the glue which binds all our relationships together. It reminds us that our relationships are other-person-centered, although there are times we need to sacrifice our desires for our own welfare, too.

So, whether Valentine's Day makes you smile or cry, breathe gratitude or cynicism, know this, there is a love in which we all share. It is the love of God. He created this love in its beauty and depth. In our sin we misuse it. Some are promiscuous, some hate their families, some can't build friendships, and some only sacrifice for themselves. Yet, in Jesus Christ is found an unconditional, self-sacrificing love, which is more than a match for our sins in love and in life. Wrote Paul to the Christians of Rome: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). By resting in Christ, we enter through the door into that special love which God has for his children.





IN THIS IS LOVE . . .

Light is shed on the nature of the Bible, when we note that three of the four ancient Greek terms for love are found in the New Testament. After all, it was written in *koine Greek*—that is to say, the Greek commonly spoken across the Mediterranean in the day of Jesus and his apostles.

While the New Testament (like the Old Testament) is unashamed of sexual love, and prescribes how it may be enjoyed in a God-honoring way, the word *eros* is not used. A variation of *storge* (family love) is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans. There he directs the Christians at the heart of the Roman empire to love one another as they would love their own families: "Love (*philostorgoi*) one another with brotherly affection" (12:10). Their tender affection for one another within the church should stand out, says Paul in effect, from the brutality of Nero's Rome.

Of the four terms, the New Testament uses *phileo* and *agape* the most. By the time of the New Testament, the two words were more interchangeable, but remain distinguishable. For example, Christians are called to love sacrificially (*agape*) our enemies (Luke 6:35), even though we have with them no strong liking or friendship (*phileo*). Yet, this is where the message of the New Testament is so wonderful, and why we heartily commend getting into Bible reading: Jesus personifies both *agape* and *phileo*, for he sacrifices himself unto death on the cross (*agape*) so that we may experience profound friendship (*phileo*) with God!

To understand this, we must appreciate three realities.

Firstly, that God loves us before we ever love God. Writes the apostle John, "In this is love (*agape*), not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the

propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). John speaks of the voluntary and sacrificial love of God the Father in sending his Son to us; and that of God the Son in willingly bearing the penalty of death we deserve for our sins.

This is so very generous, but until we realize, **secondly**, that in our natures we are God's enemies, we shall never grasp just how merciful God has been. It is not as if we really love God, have sinned by accident and in ignorance, are longing to make it up to God, and are trying to find out how we may do so. Rather, Paul writes, it was "*while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God" (Romans 5:10). In other words, God reached out to us in Christ, loving us notwithstanding our ugliness in the bitter hatred we have for him. Although offended by our sins against him, God has promised in Christ to pay for them and to reconcile to himself all who come to him in faith. Amazingly, he doesn't just reconcile us, he receives us as his sons and daughters. Now that is what we call grace! We deserve to be rejected by God, and yet are enveloped by his love.

Thirdly, those who have been reconciled to God cannot but love God with all their hearts. Indeed, a proof we have received his love is that we love God and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–40). Writes Paul to the Romans, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (5:5). Thus, we are indebted to God not only for the sacrificial love of Christ, but for the power of the Spirit to love others with the same *agape* love, beginning but not ending with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is in this spirit of love that we publish *The Way*, for God calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19)—commending by lip and by life the great love of God we cherish in Christ.

A Prayer to Know the Love of God

God, I see now that it is only by your love that I have reached this point in life. For I have been your enemy, neither loving you nor worshiping you as you deserve. I have sinned against you, and grieved you. Yet, in your great love, you sent your Son Jesus to reconcile us to you. Your righteous anger which was due to me has fallen on him. Thus, in faith I receive Jesus and his great sacrifice for me, for only through him may I know peace with you. Pour your love into my heart, I humbly pray, that I may love you all my days, and in the name of Jesus love others as an ambassador of your reconciliation, so that others of your enemies may also know your love. Amen.

DISCOVERING GOD'S LOVE IN THE HARD PLACES OF LIFE

WESTSIDER, DAVID TREPKE

Have you ever had things go wrong in your life? How does one handle a situation when bad things happen? I have had those questions answered and share my story with you.



Five years ago I was in my mid-forties and thought I was living the good life. I was married, with a daughter and a good job. Then one day my dream turned into a nightmare. After being married for over twenty years, I found out that

my wife was having an affair—surely, the ultimate betrayal! Within a year I was divorced and had, in effect, to start my life all over again. It was so unfair! While going through the divorce, I had feelings I never knew I had. The one emotion that would not go away was anger. I had support from family and friends but that could not remedy the anguish and pain. I wanted retribution and satisfaction for the wrong inflicted on me.

I was a casual drinker at the time, and always thought myself to be responsible. I would have two to three drinks with friends. Yet, on a roller coaster of negative emotions, things turn out differently.

One night changed my life forever. I had gone out with friends and was drinking. Yet, this wasn't the typical two-to-three-drink night. I was wanting to numb the pain in my life. So, that night, I drank a lot, beginning with a Vodka Martini and ending with shots of whiskey—so many that I lost count. By closing time my friends had left, but I was still at the bar having another shot. Others wanted to call a cab to take me home. I didn't want to take a cab, preferring to drive myself home. I had driven home numerous times after drinking, but nothing ever happened to me. Besides, when drinking, there is the feeling of being invincible. That, however, was not to last long.

I remember getting to my car and proceeding to drive home. The next thing I recall was a police officer knocking on my window with his flashlight shining in my face. What I didn't know is that I had blacked out behind the wheel. I had swerved into another lane and hit a pickup

truck. Thankfully, nobody was injured, and there was very minimal damage to the truck. My car, on the other hand, was totaled. The front end was damaged and both of my airbags went off.

Inevitably, I was handcuffed and taken to the hospital, treated for minor cuts and given a blood test. Then I was taken to jail, where I was charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI). I do not recall a lot of that night, and had to read the police report to see where the accident had happened. Following my overnight stay, I was greeted by my mom, dad, and sister in the jail in what became the lowest point of my life.

Yet, God in his great love and grace (unmerited favor) used the experience to bring me to the end of myself and to transform me into the man I am today. I, therefore, let go of the negativity and surrendered my life to God. On getting home from the jail, I emptied down the sink a bottle each of vodka and of whiskey, and a six-pack of beer, for I couldn't live that way anymore. Since then I have not had a drop of alcohol to drink, and have forgiven my ex-wife.

I remember my dad saying at the time that we all make bad choices in life, but that it is up to us to make the bad choices good. Those words remain forever etched on my memory, even though my dad has now passed away. Yet, I am forgiven by God not for the personal reforms I undertook, or for the genuine repentance to God they expressed. My trust for forgiveness is in Christ alone. There's a hymn I love by Chris Anderson which beautifully explains why:

*His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange!
Clothed in my sin, God suffered 'neath God's rage.
Draped in his righteousness, I'm justified.
In Christ I live, for in my place
He died.*

God has overruled my sinful decisions in the past to bring me to Christ and to grant me a new life in him. It is amazing to me that God can do



this! I now look out on my new life with hope in God my Savior. I can say with Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts that, "Life is like a book. God has written every chapter of my life. I'm just reading it one page at a time."

*****ECRWSEDDM****

Residential Customer
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

† Westside Soccer Club

Grades 3–7

Every Friday

Girls 4:00–5:30 P.M.

Boys 5:30–7:00 P.M.

The vision of WSC is to create and nurture a valuable learning atmosphere, where Westside children can develop their soccer skills as well as character traits pleasing to God, such as good sportsmanship, fair play, teamwork, giving one's best, perseverance, respect for opponents and officials.



physical, and social) by providing Christian leaders with a uniquely designed structure, program, and materials.

† English as a Second Language

All ages

Our ESL classes are available to any looking to improve their English skills in a casual, individualized setting. English learners of any skill level are welcome to join the class to work on grammar, reading, writing, vocabulary, and pronunciation.



† Prayer

All ages

Needing prayer? Bring your burdens along to our close-knit prayer group. A warm welcome awaits you. Just come as you are! We all need God's help.



REGULAR ACTIVITIES

February 8 and 22, March 8 and 22

6:45–8:15 P.M.

† GEMS and Cadets—

Girls' and Boys' Clubs

Grades I–6

GEMS is an exciting, safe environment for girls to learn about God, His Word, and His world. Each meeting girls will have a Bible lesson, a time for crafts, and practice movement to our theme song for the year.



THE CALVINIST
CADET CORPS

In Luke 2:52—
“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature,
and in favor with

God and men,”—we find the goal of Cadets, to help boys grow spiritually in all areas of life (devotional, mental,

INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

February 15, 7:00 P.M.: “The Church in China Today.” A firsthand presentation by Virginia Yip, with light refreshments to follow.

March 1, 7:00 P.M.: Annual gathering for prayer that God would bless the crops and industry.

March 29, 6:30 P.M.: GEMS and Cadets Pinewood Derby.

Questions about our worship services (Sundays 9:45 A.M. and 5:50 P.M.), other activities, or church?

Contact us at 616-459-4451 or 7thref@7thref.org