

Love

In the Bible

By Dave DeWitt



The word *love* occurs 348 times in the Bible. The word *loved* occurs 95 times, *loves* 71 times, *lovingkindness* 176 times, and *loving* 4 times. So, depending on your translation, some form of the word “love” occurs about 730 times in the Bible. Finding one definition that fits them all is nearly impossible. The only thing that rings true of every use of the word is the idea of “value.” Everyone who loves, loves someone or something they consider to have value. So, in general, I would say,

Love is a favorable response to the recognition, or assignment, of value.

As I observe the various uses of the word love, there are three main categories I would put them in – **romantic love**, **friendship love** and **giving love**.

Romantic love is a feeling of sexual desire that expects a lifelong fulfillment.
Friendship love is an experience of liking someone or something with affection.
Giving love is an act of unmerited favor without the expectation of reciprocity.

Although there is some overlap between romantic love and friendship love, and there is some overlap between friendship love and giving love, there is no overlap between romantic love and giving love. The reason is, romantic love always has some form of self-interest involved in the loving act, and giving love never does. It can, of course, be argued that everything is done with some thought of self-interest in mind. That’s true. But romantic love has that in mind as part of the act itself. It’s a form of swapping. The actions of romance all have self-interest built into them. On the other hand, an act of giving love is completely done with the other person in mind. Whatever reward is involved, it must come later (from God, an earned reputation, favor with family or friends, posterity, a legacy, etc.) and is not part of the act itself. An act of friendship love may or may not include self-interest as part of the act, hence the overlap.

Romance and friendship are both feelings. Romance is sexual. Friendship is affection. Both are experiential. So, although they are not the same, they overlap. Romance and friendship cannot exist without some kind of positive emotions. Giving love may or may not be based in feelings, but the distinctive point is, it doesn’t have to be. That’s what gives it its power. It allows love to exist disconnected from feelings. This, of course, allows us to love those we have no affection for, or negative feelings for, such as disgruntled parents, spouses, children, neighbors, and enemies. The other two forms of love do not allow that.



[All the emphasis throughout this study, whether **bold**, [brackets] or *italics*, are mine.]

Romantic Love

For the most part, the following principles are based on the Song of Solomon because the Song is the primary example of romantic love in the Bible. Besides the Song of Solomon, there are only scattered examples of romantic love in the Bible, with only vague reference to its meaning. But the Song of Solomon is all about, and only about, romantic love. It seems that God put this Song in the Scripture to show us the value and purpose of romance. So be sure to read the Song of Solomon before considering the following material.



Romantic Love Begins with Visual Stimulation

In the Song, Solomon invites the Shulammitte to a *secret place of the steep pathway*. He wants to be alone with her because he says he wants to *see her form (or appearance)*. The romantic love of Solomon and his Shulammitte bride begins with how beautiful they see each other. He says,

*How beautiful you are, my darling,
How beautiful you are!
Your eyes are like doves behind your veil;
Your hair is like a flock of goats
That have descended from Mount Gilead (4:1).*

Humans are the only beings who engage in romance. And romance for humans is based on visual stimulation. The other senses may come into play, but it begins with sight or mental images.

There is a corollary to this. Although beauty is objective (that is, it is not just “in the eyes of the beholder”), there is a range of personal preferences within the realm of beauty. And although not all of us are beautiful, most of us have a wide range of controllable assets. The Song of Solomon argues strongly for romance based upon personal choices about physical appearance. Therefore, it argues against “arranged marriages.”

Nearly all marriages in the Bible were based upon visual stimulation. God arranged the marriage of Eve to Adam. Abraham married his half-sister Sarah, and arranged the marriage of Rebecca to Isaac. We don’t know what these men looked like, but the women were beautiful and chosen by God for a unique situation. We also read that *Jacob loved Rachel* because *Rachel was beautiful of form and face*. When Laban arranged for Jacob to also marry his older daughter Leah (Rachel’s sister), it never worked out well for Leah. No matter what she tried to do, *Jacob loved Rachel*. Ruth’s marriage to Boaz, David’s marriage to Abigail, and Solomon’s marriage to the Shulammitte all began with physical attraction and personal choice. Remember the statement, *man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7) not only means *God looks at the heart*, but that man *looks at the outward appearance*.

Romance Connects Our Sex Drive to Our Spiritual Nature

According to the New Oxford American dictionary:

Romance is “a feeling of **excitement** and **mystery** associated with love.” I suggest, The **excitement** comes from the potential pleasure involved in satisfying our sex drive. The **mystery** comes from the fact that our sex drive is connected to our spiritual notions.

Sexual attraction alone is not romance. The desire to have sexual relations is common in nearly all animals. The sex drive in biological creatures is a mechanism for the reproduction of offspring. That is not to say the sex drive is a conscious attempt to produce offspring. It usually isn't. The "excitement" experienced by the partners is usually an end in itself. God has built into most biological creatures a desire to mate.

But for us humans, there's one huge difference. The human sex drive is the only one connected to creativity, morality, and a sense of purpose and destiny. And that's what elevates sex to romance. Humans and animals have a body and a personality. But only humans have spirituality. Animals would not become dysfunctional, despondent, depressed, suicidal, (or homicidal) because of a glitch in their mating practices. Humans might. Animals never elevate mating to thoughts of morality, purpose and destiny, and (despite their mating rituals) they never express it creatively. Humans do. And when they do, it's romance.

<u>Plants</u>	<u>Animals</u>	<u>Humans</u>
have a body which is Physical	have a A. Body B. Personality Which is: 1. Intellect 2. Emotion 3. Will Personality develops Society	have a A. Body B. Personality Which is: 1. Intellect 2. Emotion 3. Will C. Spirit Which is a sense of: 1. Morality/Justice 2. Purpose /Destiny 3. Creativity Spirituality develops Culture

Romance Is Jealous

The Miriam-Webster dictionary says,

Jealousy is "a disposition, attitude or feeling" which is "intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness."

Sexual attraction becomes romance when couples are thinking about their future together. That means they are jealous of anyone or anything that interferes with that relationship. Jealousy is an integral part of romance, and it is the one similarity between romance and our relationship with God.

The Song of Solomon is a poem about romantic love. It's not an allegory of Christ's love for the church, or God's love for Israel. But there is one thing that is the same in romance and in our relationship with God. Both are exclusive. Neither a romantic lover nor God will tolerate "rivalry or unfaithfulness."

- Moses wrote, *you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is **Jealous**, is a **jealous** God... For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a **jealous** God* (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24).
- The Shulammitte said: *For love is as strong as death, **Jealousy** is as severe as Sheol; Its flashes are flashes of fire, The very flame of the LORD* (Song of Solomon 8:6).

In the Song, Solomon is presented as a one-woman man (like the church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6). Although Solomon was as far as anyone can imagine from being a one-woman man in terms of wives and concubines, he treated this Shulammitte girl as his only romantic love.

*There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
And maidens without number;
But my dove, my perfect one, is unique (6:8-10).*

We get the distinct impression from the text of the *Song of Solomon* that this Shulammitte was the only girl Solomon was ever romantically “in love” with. When jealousy is not part of a relationship, it’s just lust.

Romance elevates us to ecstasy, lowers us to depression, makes life make sense, and destroys the sense we have made out of life. It’s quite possibly the greatest source of pleasure, and the greatest source of pain, on the planet. Romance thinks about a future with the other person from the very start.

In the *Song of Solomon*, romance is beauty oriented, jealously exclusive, morally good, emotionally captivating, willfully engaged in, and creatively expressed.

Romance Is Hopeful

When romance ends, people are sad, despondent or depressed, and sometimes suicidal. The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports,

While the reasons that teens commit suicide vary widely, there are some common situations and circumstances that seem to lead to such extreme measures. These include major disappointment, rejection, failure, or **loss such as breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend** (http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/Helpline1/Teenage_Suicide.htm).

One reason for such extreme reactions is that romance is a form of hope. To lose a romantic relationship is to lose some of our hope. People become dysfunctional, depressed, despondent, dangerous, or suicidal when they run out of hope. **Because we can’t live without hope.** Let’s summarize the basic principles of hope, since they are also true of romance.

By definition: **Hope is desired expectation.**

We **invest** in our hope. We do not usually invest in areas where we only have desires. But when those desires are coupled with expectations, we invest in them. I might desire to own my own personal executive jet airplane. But since I have no hope for that, I will not invest in a hangar to keep it in. Hope is:

1. A desired expectation
2. As intense as the desire
3. As valid as the expectation
4. Always unfulfilled
5. Always an object of investment

And romance is a form of hope. So those five things are also true of romantic love. For example, romance in the *Song of Solomon* is

1. A desired expectation – desiring and expecting the fulfillment of sexual desire
2. As intense as the desire – their attraction intensified as their desire for each other grew
3. As valid as the expectation – they expected to spend the rest of their lives together
4. Always unfulfilled – their desire for each other was always longing for the fulfillment
5. Always an object of investment – because their love was hopeful of fulfillment, they invested in each other and their future together.

Romance Is Living with Unfulfilled Desires

The Shulammitte says:

*On my bed night after night I sought him
Whom my soul loves;
I sought him but did not find him (3:1).*

The reason people flirt, date, and become romantically involved is because of their sex drive. But if the sex is satisfied, the romance ends. So romantic couples must ask: “How close can I get and not go too far?” and “How far can I stay away and still be involved?” It’s like a child asking their mother, “How close can I get to the edge of the Grand Canyon?” Answer: They should visually experience the Grand Canyon, but not fall in.

The tension created by sexual desire intensifies the relationship and pushes the couple toward marriage. The Shulammitte said,

*Sustain me with raisin cakes,
Refresh me with apples,
Because I am lovesick (2:5)*

The reason sexual desire intensifies is simply because it remains unfulfilled. Since romantic love is a form of hope, it can only exist in a state of unfulfillment. *Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?* (Romans 8:24). Just like any other hope, romantic love disappears when it’s fulfilled.

If we couple our romance with marriage, then we have accepted a life-long commitment, which is never fulfilled as long as we both shall live. As long as sexual desire continues, romance will continue in marriage because the expectation of it lasting as long as you live is never fulfilled as long as you are alive.

But if we are willing to satisfy our sexual desire without a life-long commitment, then our hope for romance is gone because romance (being a form of hope) requires both the desire and the expectation. Anytime I separate sexual desire from a life-long commitment (thus separating desire from expectation), romance is no longer possible. I cannot fulfill a life-long commitment to a spouse as long as we are both alive. I can fulfill a sexual desire. But if I do that apart from a life-long commitment, then I have separated the two, thus eliminating romantic love. Romance must always keep the two together and unfulfilled. If sex remains in the context of a life-long marriage, then it remains romantic because it’s never separated from the life-long commitment. As soon as sex does not need a life-long commitment, it destroys romance.

For example, let’s say you are romantically in love. So, by definition, your sexual longings are connected to a life-long commitment. Then let’s say you sexually cohabit with your partner outside of marriage. Now your sexual desires are no longer connected to a life-long commitment. Your hope for sexual fulfillment is gone because it is being fulfilled. You will continue to have sexual desires, and you will continue to have them fulfilled. But they have nothing to do with a life-long commitment. So, by definition, romantic love is impossible.

If you decide to marry your cohabitating partner, it will have to be on some basis other than romance. This makes marriage into a business deal. Maybe you want children, a family structure, financial security, credibility in the community, significance at work, or something else you consider to be profitable. But whatever the reason, it’s just business. It has nothing to do with sexual desire, so it is not romance.

Romance Makes Marriage Unique

Marriage is not like any other social arrangement. It's not just business. For example, if you start a business, you hire people who will make money producing goods or services without causing trouble. If that does not work out, you can fire them and hire others. Actually, you have to, or you will jeopardize the future of your company. But your spouse and your children will not always make a profit for you or have a personality that gets along with everyone else. You can't interview your children ahead of time to see if they will fit in, or be sure your spouse will not change into someone you did not bargain for.

If marriage is just business, then it will be broken when the business is no longer profitable. So the divorce rate climbs. If we feel like it's not valuable for the children, or our significance, security, or credibility, then the profit of the marriage is gone.

Couples who cohabit together before marriage have a higher divorce rate because their marriage is not based upon romance.

The sociology Department of both Duke University and Michigan University interviewed 30,000 couples who married after living together. The sociologists found that **80% of the marriages arising from cohabitation ended in divorce.**

(<http://loveundefiled.blogspot.com/2009/06/study-shows-divorce-rate-of.html>)

Here are the divorce statistics for the 21st century in America:

- First marriage is 41% to 50%
- Second marriage is from 60% to 67%
- Third marriage is from 73% to 74%
- Cohabitation before marriage it is 80%

[And, by the way, the children of divorced parents are prone to divorcing 4 times more than the children of couples who are not divorced] (<http://www.divorcestatistics.info/divorce-statistics-and-divorce-rate-in-the-usa.html>).

The message of God to Adam and Eve is that romance is God's mechanism to get us married. That message was reiterated by Jesus and illustrated in Jacob's marriage to Rachel, Ruth's marriage to Boaz, David's marriage to Abigail, and Solomon's marriage to the Shulammitte.

- *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24).
- *Rachel was beautiful of form and face. Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel"... So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her* (Genesis 29:17-20).
- *Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this? ... It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid..."* (Ruth 2:5; 3:8-9).
- *Abigail... was intelligent and beautiful in appearance... Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife... Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife* (1 Samuel 25:39-42).
- *And He [Jesus] answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made the male and female and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father*

and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate”
(Matthew 19:4-6).

The divine design is for the intensity of the unfulfilled physical attraction, coupled with the hope for a life-long commitment, to only increase until it leads to, actually forces the couple into, marriage. After that formal legal commitment, sexual desires can be consummated without destroying romance because the two (sexual desire and the expectation of a life-long commitment) remain connected. And as long as both partners are alive, these two remain unfulfilled.

Romance Includes Disagreements and Arguments

After they are married for a short time, Solomon and the Shulammitte have a disagreement. Solomon came to her late at night after being outside working. She reports:

*A voice! My beloved was knocking:
‘Open to me, my sister, my darling,
My dove, my perfect one!
For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of the night.’*

But she is already asleep. Being awakened and half asleep, she answers:

*I have taken off my dress,
How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet,
How can I dirty them again? (5:3)*

After refusing to let him into her bedroom, she has second thoughts because her *feelings were aroused for him*. So she prepares herself and tells us:

*I opened to my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away and had gone!
My heart went out to him as he spoke.
I searched for him but I did not find him;
I called him but he did not answer me (5:4-6)*

So she went out at night to look for him. She had lots of trouble and did not find him. The next morning she asked the daughters of Jerusalem to help her. They found Solomon and expressed her feelings to him, that she was *lovesick* for him. Then she went to where he was working, and he took her into his chariot. They returned to Jerusalem (where they had sexual relations) and then went on a sort-of second honeymoon to the villages.

The reason lovers argue is because they are spiritual beings. Animals don’t argue, that is, they do not “give reasons or cite evidence in support of an idea, action, or theory” (New Oxford American Dictionary). They may physically fight over food or territorial rights, but they do not argue about priorities, significance, affection, time together, security, or differing views of their purpose and destiny. Humans do.

All lovers argue.

- Unwise lovers look for a personal victory. Wise lovers look for a resolution to the conflict.
- Unwise lovers make a case for their position. Wise lovers look at both sides.
- Unwise lovers try to prove a point. Wise lovers try to preserve the relationship.
- Unwise lovers maintain their pride. Wise lovers practice humility.

The Purpose of Romance Is to Get Us Married

Romance always has marriage in mind.

Sexual attraction without marriage in mind is just lust.

Solomon had the goal of making the Shulammitte his wife from the beginning. After they are married, he called her *my bride* six times. With all the emphasis on physical admiration and sexual desire in the book, there is no idea of sex outside of marriage, or sex by itself. He courts her, and then he goes to get her in his wedding carriage (3:6-7).

When Solomon saw the Shulammitte, he thought about marrying her. He did not first think he needed a wife and then go look for a woman to marry. His thoughts and motivations for marrying her started after he saw her. But marriage is not actually the goal of romantic love, it's just the only way it can be fulfilled. Marriage is a necessary fulfillment of romantic passion.

Romantic Love Includes Sexual Attraction and Friendship

Here is where romantic love overlaps with friendship love, but not giving love. Romance can exist without friendship, but not for long. The affection of friendship will become part of romance if it is to last.

The word *love* occurs 15 times in the NASV translation of the Song of Solomon. Hebrew has four *words that could be translated love*, but only three of them are in the Song of Solomon.

- One word is דוד (*dod*). This is usually translated *beloved*, or *beloved one* (which can mean *lover* or *betrothed*). It is the root of the name *David*. In the Song of Solomon, this word emphasizes **romantic attraction**.
- A second word is אהב (*aheb*). This is translated *love*, *beloved*, or *lovers*. But it emphasizes the idea of *friendship*. [It's like the Greek word φιλέω (*phileo*).] It is "Affection both pure & impure, divine & human" (BDB). It's often used of a parent's love for their children, for example David's love for Absalom is called אהב (*aheb*). In the *Song of Solomon*, this emphasizes **friendship**.
- The third word רַעְיָתִי (*ra'yati*) translated *my darling* is used nine times in the Song. It has the idea of one who is a **loved companion**. The word is usually associated with friends of a bride, including her bride's maids.
- But the strong Hebrew word for *loyal love* חַסִּיד (*chasid*) is not used in the Song of Solomon. חַסִּיד (*chasid*) is like the strong word ἀγάπη (*agape*) for love in Greek, which is the **giving/serving loyal love** defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. That's the love required for a life-long mature marriage. But that (the love required for a life-long marriage) is not discussed in the Song of Solomon.

Romantic Love Includes Sexual Attraction, Friendship and Companionship, But Not Maturity

Romance is the beginning of a marriage relationship, not the maturity of it. In the Song of Solomon, romance is repeatedly pictured as, or compared with, spring, not summer, fall, or winter. The Song is about romantic love before and immediately after marriage. **It is not a book about marriage.**

Romance launches marriage in a context of friendship and sexual relations. But as marriage matures, other factors are added. Shared responsibility, raising children, financial stability, extended family relations, choices about schools, churches and civic duties all add something to marriage beyond romance. Romance cannot, and should not be expected to, overpower these responsibilities. Nor should it be used to ignore them. In marriage, love must progress from romance, through friendship, to giving (doing the best good for your spouse, expecting nothing in return).

As mentioned above, the strong Hebrew word for love [חֶסֶד (*chasid, loyal love*)] does not occur in the Song of Solomon. Romance thinks of giving only in terms of swapping. One cannot think of his or her romantic lover in the sense of giving or serving without focusing on personal benefits. In a mature marriage the leader is the one doing the most giving and where the giving act expects nothing in return.

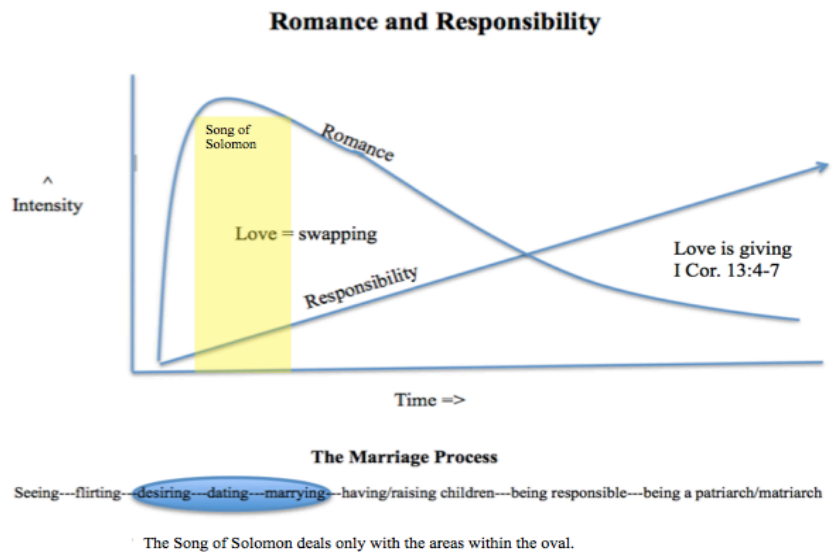
Romantic lovers are givers with the expectation of reciprocity.
 Married lovers become givers without the expectation of reciprocity.

Romantic Love Cannot Define Marriage

Romantic love is designed to get us married. It drives us to marriage, but it cannot keep us married. Marriage based upon romance alone, and seeking to maintain that romance, is doomed. The reason is that the sexual desire always decreases. The stronger the intensity, the longer the romantic love will last. And it never dies out altogether. But it decreases to a point where it can no longer provide the desire needed to maintain hope.

Meanwhile, the responsibilities of marriage increase. We have to be responsible for (and to) the needs of a spouse, the training and education of children, the financial needs of the family, in-laws, extended family demands, the problems facing our married children, grandchildren, and the moral example of being a matriarch and patriarch. Because all this is increasing, and romance is decreasing, it is impossible to base a marriage entirely upon romantic love.

In order for marriage to survive, romantic love must be increasingly replaced by giving love, using friendship love as a bridge between the two. Loyal love חֶסֶד (*chasid*) in Hebrew, giving/serving love ἀγάπη (*agape*) in Greek, must take over and dominate romantic love. It does that through friendship love, but once established, it can, and must, carry on even without romantic or friendship love.



Giving love is probably best defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and we shall discuss that later. But while we are studying romance, we need to realize its assets and its limitations. Romantic love gets us married, but it cannot keep us married.

Who Should Initiate Romance?

I can find nothing in the Bible to suggest the old adage that “men are the initiators and women are responders.” Men should lead their marriages and families. They should also lead in a romantic relationship. But there is a difference between leading and initiating.

According to Merriam-Webster,

To **lead** is “to **guide** on a way especially **by going in advance**” or
“to **direct** on a course or in a direction”

To **initiate** is “to cause or **facilitate the beginning**” of an action.

The greatest giver is always the leader in any situation, including all three types of love. And initiating can be a form of leading, but not necessarily. There is much more to leading than initiating, and leading might not include initiating at all. The Bible has many examples of good women initiating good things. I suspect all the egalitarian feminist examples of woman leadership in the Bible are not a good woman leading at all, but a good woman initiating.

The perfect wife of Proverbs 31 initiates service to her husband and family. Deborah initiated the war that Barak fought against the Canaanites. Jehosheba initiated the action that saved the infant heir to the throne of the Southern Kingdom from the wicked Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11:2).

In the area of romance, Boaz initiated a relationship with Ruth. But Ruth initiated the action that led to their marriage. Abigail initiated contact with David (although not for romantic reasons), which later led David to propose marriage to her when her husband died. We don't know how Solomon met the Shulammitte, but both initiated romantic expression. The Song of Solomon begins with the Shulammitte expressing a desire for his kisses. Several times in the book she initiated looking for him. In the end, she invited him to go with her to the villages for a romantic time together.

In discussing sexual relations between married couples, the Apostle Paul seems to make initiation mutual.

The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does (1 Corinthians 7:3-4).

The man should be the leader in his marriage, his home, and his family. But that does not mean he must always be the initiator. Under the Mosaic Law, the Israelite women could initiate a vow before God. Their father or husband could negate that vow, but the woman had the right to initiate it (Numbers 30:3-8). So the leadership of the father or the husband did not mean he always initiated everything for his daughter or wife.

Women often score higher on creativity tests than men. Yet men generate most new inventions. Women are better in verbal creativity, men are better in spatial creativity. Men are better at logical, linear thought, women are better at perceiving details (<http://www.creativityland.ca/2010/male-and-female-creativity-is-there-a-difference/>). A good leader is not necessarily the one who generates all the new ideas. And a creative person is not necessarily the best leader. A man should not overlook a

woman's capacity to generate new ideas. Good ideas come from encouraging many ideas before selecting the right course of action and leading others to it.

So we can conclude that in romance there is nothing wrong with either a man or a woman initiating the relationship, as long as they respect the other's right to veto their advances. Men will likely be more focused logically and spatially and women will usually initiate verbally and with details, but there is nothing wrong with each initiating in the area of their greatest contribution.

Applying Romantic Love

When a person reaches the romantic age (usually early teens), they will, and should, begin looking for someone of the opposite sex who they find visually attractive. They should also make themselves as visually attractive as reasonably possible. [The vast majority of young people have enough controllable physical assets to make themselves reasonably attractive.] Do not ignore or discount the value of visual stimulation.

After physical attraction begins, it should be coupled with the spiritual factor. What does this person believe? How do they act morally? How do they view their purpose in life? What do they perceive as their destiny? They will not have thought through all this in a detailed manner, of course, but it is crucial to be sure they are thinking biblically in these areas. Romance is impossible without spiritual considerations.

There are also practical considerations. Has this person's parents been divorced? Will our cultural, ethnic, and church backgrounds mesh or cause conflict? What will our extended families look like?

If a person is a likely candidate for marriage, begin the dating process. Do not date people you do not have significant thoughts about marrying. If the romantic desire increases to the point where it must be fulfilled in a life-long sexual relationship, then proceed toward marriage.

*Enjoy life with the woman whom you **love** all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:9).*

Friendship Love



Friendship love recognizes the value of association with some person, place, thing, or idea, and responds to that with affection. It sounds a bit awkward, but I will call this **like/love** because it is the form of love where we like someone or something. Although we usually think of friendship as something we have with people, the biblical concept of friendship love includes things and ideas. Remember James 4:4,

*You adulteresses, do you not know that **friendship** [φιλέω (*phileo*) love] **with the world** is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a **friend** [φιλέω (*phileo*) love] **of the world** makes himself an enemy of God.*

Remember our working definition. We will develop this as we proceed.

Friendship love is an experience of liking someone or something with affection.

Before we go into some detail examining the biblical concept of friendship love, let's compare and contrast it with romantic love.

Romantic love is selective
Romantic love is affectionate
Romantic love is a form of hope –
desire with expectation
But
Romantic love is jealous
Romantic love begins visually
Romantic love focuses on appearance
Romantic love always involves
another person
Romantic love is always connected to
the sex drive

Friendship love is selective
Friendship love is affectionate
Friendship love is a form of hope – desire with
expectation
But
Friendship love is not jealous
Friendship love begins by understanding character
Friendship love focuses on perceived quality
Friendship love may be about people, things or ideas
Friendship love is only connected to the sex drive
when it overlaps with romance.

Now we shall do an inductive study of friendship love beginning with the most prominent Old Testament word [אַהַב (*ahab*)] and then the most prominent New Testament word [φιλέω (*phileo*)].

Friendship Love In The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, friendship love is most often described using the Hebrew word אַהַב (*ahab*). In other words, the Hebrew language would use this word for liking someone. But this Hebrew word is much broader than the value of friendship. It is used of love for God, one's children, other close relatives, romance, a neighbor, or a friend. It may also be the love of activities or things (like sleep or food). The "Brown Driver and Briggs Lexicon" defines it as "**Affection both pure & impure, divine & human.**"

Here is their longer discussion about this word:

1. Human love to human object; abs., opp. hate אָזַר; of love to son; so also of Dvd's loving Amnon; never to parent, but mother-in-law; of man's love to woman; wife; but also (where of carnal desire); אָהַב אִשָּׁה a *loving a paramour*; woman's love to man; of love of slave to master; inferior to superior; love to neighbour, partic. to stranger; love of a friend to friend.
2. Less oft. of appetite, obj. food; drink; husbandry; length of life; of cupidity; of love of sleep; also c. obj. abstr. wisdom (personif.), knowledge, righteousness, etc.
3. Love to God;
4. Esp. Pt. אָהַב
 - (a) *lover*, (fig. of Jerus.);
 - (b) *friend* Hiram of David; also Abr. of God.
5. Of divine love
 - (a) to individual men;
 - (b) to people Israel, etc.; to Jerusalem;
 - (c) to righteousness, etc.

This is the first word translated *love* in the (NASB/KJV) Bible. God used it in reference to Abraham's love for his son Isaac.

He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love [אָהַב (ahab)], Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

This act was commanded to give Abraham an opportunity to prove his faith in God. I suspect this is also given because this is what God had to do with His son. But in any case, the love involves the idea of affection and friendship.

Friendship Love Describes Affection Between People

אָהַב (*ahab*) is used to describe Isaac's love for his wife Rebekah, his love for his son Esau, Rebekah's love for Jacob, Jacob's love for Rachael, Jacob's love for Joseph, Samson's love for Delilah, Elkanah's love for Hannah, Saul's early love for David, David and Jonathan's love for each other, Israel and Judah's love for David, Michal's love for David, Solomon's love for *many foreign* women, Amnon's love for Tamar (before he raped her), King Ahasuerus' love of Esther, Israel's love for strangers, false gods, false teachers and false prophets, and Hosea's love for Gomer.

Friendship Love Described the Affection of God

אָהַב (*ahab*) described God's love for Solomon (when he was born and when God made him king), as well as Solomon's love for God (*except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places* – 1 Kings 3:3). This word also is used to describe God's *everlasting love* for Israel (Jeremiah 31:3).

Friendship Love Described the Affection We Are to Have toward God

אָהַב (*ahab*) is used to describe the standard for affection toward God.

You shall love [אָהַב (ahab)] the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus quoted this three times and added, with all your mind (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).

Heart generally represents personality: intellect, emotion, and will.

Soul generally represents spirituality: morality, purpose/destiny and creativity.

Might is the word for excesses, usually translated *very*, *exceedingly* or *greatly*.

Mind is the word for thoughts or understanding.

In the Ten Commandments, God used this word to express the loving response He desires. While forbidding idol making, God said,

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love [אָהַב (ahab)] Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:5-6; also Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9).

Here God expresses His jealousy. We cannot love God and some other gods. This is what our love for God has in common with romance. Our love for God must be exclusive. But notice, it is only a one-way jealousy. God is jealous for us in that He will not tolerate our involvement with other gods or other religions. But we are not to be jealous of others having a relationship with God. So in the reciprocal sense, God's love for us is more like friendship [אָהַב (ahab)] love, it's selective but not exclusive.

Friendship Love Does Not Negate the Fear of God

God shows his lovingkindness to those who אָהַב (ahab) like/love Him by keeping His commandments. In other words, God wants us to keep His commandments out of an affection for Him. Usually, we begin the process of commandment-keeping out of fear. We are to fear that God will be *visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Him.*

Fear is the most basic motive for all law-keeping. Without fear, we only keep laws we agree with. For example, there are only two reasons you keep the speed limit. Either (1) you agree with it, or (2) you are afraid of getting caught breaking it. Solomon said,

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Every person should fear God. And every person who fears God will keep His commandments because they are afraid of the consequences of breaking them. This fear will never go away as we mature because with increased knowledge of things like the Sovereignty of God, a realization of His holiness, an appreciation for His justice and the wrath needed to satisfy His character, there comes fear. "God is like a fire on a cold night, you want to get close, but the closer you get, the more there is to fear" (Walt Henrichsen).

But as we mature and study the Scripture, we begin to admire God and just want to be close to Him as we would a close friend. We see how He dealt with Adam and Noah and Abraham. We see His love for Israel, His hatred for sin and love of righteousness. Then we see all this materialized in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and we like/love Him because of who He is.

But the Apostle John tells us,

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love (1 John 4:18).

What is the connection between fear and love?

Moses never disconnected love from fear. He told the Israelites,

*Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to **fear** the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and **love** [אָהַב (ahab)] Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 10:12).*

If we do not have an affection for God, if we have not come to know Him well enough to admire His character and His attributes, then we need to obey His commandments out of fear. *perfect love casts out fear* not by eliminating it but by trumping it. Fear is necessary in all areas where we are not perfected in love.

As we get to know God, we also get to like/love Him. We want to get closer and closer to Him just because we like Him. That creates more fear, but it also creates a love, which trumps fear because we appreciate so much His ways. We look at how He created things and how He responds to things and what He loves and hates, and we grow in our adoration of Him. So we keep His commandments because we like to keep them. And we like to keep them because we like/love Him. We then keep His commandments out of love and that trumps fear. As David said,

*O how **I love Your law!**
It is my meditation all the day.*

*I hate those who are double-minded,
But **I love Your law.***

*I hate and despise falsehood,
But **I love Your law** Psalm (119:97, 113, 163).*

Perfect love casts out fear not because fear no longer exists but because fear is no longer needed. It is no longer relevant when we love the one giving the commands. The problem is, we do not always love God perfectly at all times in every situation. In those situations, we need to fall back on our fear of God, always striving to **love** [אָהַב (ahab) like/love] God perfectly, which then trumps (*casts out*) fear.

Friendship Love Is Always Selective

Friendship love is not jealous. It is not exclusive. It assumes one's friend will have other friends. But it is selective. Friendship love always selects one or a few friends and eliminates others. One cannot be a friend of everybody. To love everyone is to love no one (Proverbs 18:24).

*A man of too many friends comes to ruin,
But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24)*

For example, if we love God, we will hate those who are the enemies of God.

*Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who **love** [אָהַב (ahab)] Him be like the rising of the sun in its might (Judges 5:31).*

In Malachi, God created a discussion where He told Israel that He loved them, and the proof was that He hated Esau, defined as the desolation He caused Esau. Here's the discussion.

*"I have **loved** [אָהַב (ahab)] you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have You **loved** [אָהַב (ahab)] us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have **loved** [אָהַב (ahab)] Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness (Malachi 1:2-3).*

Friendship Love Does Not Require Discernment

The biggest weakness of friendship [אָהַב (ahab)] love is that it is used for both good and evil. אָהַב (ahab) itself requires no discernment. Therefore, it might be placed in worthless, foolish or evil people or objects. Here are some examples.

- *How long, O naive ones, will you love [אָהַב (ahab)] being simple-minded? (Proverbs 1:22)*
- *sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach?
How long will you love [אָהַב (ahab)] what is worthless and aim at deception? (Psalm 4:2)*
- *Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The lovingkindness of God endures all day long.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.
You love [אָהַב (ahab)] evil more than good,
Falsehood more than speaking what is right (Psalm 52:1-3).*
- *How long, O naive ones, will you love [אָהַב (ahab)] being simple-minded? (Proverbs 1:22)*
- *The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;
And My people love [אָהַב (ahab)] it so! (Jeremiah 5:31)*
- *Their liquor gone,
They play the harlot continually;
Their rulers dearly love [אָהַב (ahab)] shame (Hosea 4:18).*

Friendship Love Should Be Accompanied by Discernment

Moses wrote,

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love [אָהַב (ahab) like/love] the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

This passage gives us an example where God sent the Israelites a false prophet or dreamer who passed one of the tests of a true prophet in that his or her prophecy or dreams came true. But their prophecy or dream led Israel into following other gods. The text tells us this situation was a test, set up by God to see *if you love [אָהַב (ahab)] the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*. So friendship love should always be accompanied by, judged by, and filtered through, a discernment from the truth taught in the written Word of God.

Friendship Love Is Not Necessarily Reciprocated

Just because we אָהַב (ahab) like/love someone does not mean they will return the love. There is an old saying:

Love yourself and you will be miserable,
Love other people and you will be happy... but disappointed.

Well, not always. But there is no guarantee that loving others will be reciprocated or even appreciated. Job complained,

*All my associates abhor me,
And those I love [אָהַב (ahab)] have turned against me (Job 19:19).*

David reported,

*In return for my love [אהב (ahab)] they act as my accusers;
But I am in prayer.
Thus they have repaid me evil for good
And hatred for my love [אהב (ahab)] (Psalm 109:4-5).*

Friendship Love Can Be for Things or Ideas

- אהב (ahab) describes Isaac's love for a certain food.
- Rehoboam *loved* [אהב (ahab)] *the soil... the hill country and the fertile fields* (2 Chronicles 26:10).
- David said the wicked and deceitful *loved* [אהב (ahab)] *cursing* (Psalm 109:17).
Israel *loved* [אהב (ahab)] *detestable things. And they became as detestable as that which they loved*
- [אהב (ahab)] (Hosea 9:10),
*He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love [אהב (ahab)] kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God (Micah 3:2; 6:8)*

Friendship Love In The New Testament

In the New Testament, the Greek text uses the word φιλέω (*phileo*) to communicate friendship love. The “Louw and Nida Greek Lexicon” defines φιλέω (*phileo*) as

“To have love or affection for someone or something based on association” or
“To particularly like or enjoy doing something — ‘to like to, to love to.’”

So, like the Old Testament Hebrew word אהב (*ahab*), the New Testament word φιλέω (*phileo*) is a **like/love**. But it must again be noticed that φιλέω (*phileo*), like אהב (*ahab*), is not synonymous with friendship, it is a like/love that includes friendship, but the meaning varies dependent upon the context.

Here is a brief inductive study of friendship love based on the New Testament's use of φιλέω (*phileo*).

Friendship Love Is a Personal Love But Not an Inferior Love

Friendship [φιλέω (*phileo*)] love includes significant personal relationships. For example, it is used to describe Jesus' love for Lazarus (John 11:3, 36), and it is a command for *young women to love [φιλέω (phileo)] their husbands* and to *love [φιλέω (phileo)] their children* (Titus 2:4).

Clearly, friendship love can be good, personal, and significant. But, more than that, it can be a superior kind of love. Many teach that it is inferior to ἀγαπάω (*agapao*), the other word for love in the New Testament (which we shall consider next). But that's not the case. Many times the meaning of these two words overlap. φιλέω (*phileo*) usually stresses the affection of a like/love, but it is not meant to be inferior. In the famous discussion between Jesus and Peter on the beach in Galilee, after Jesus' resurrection, we see these two words used with overlapping meaning. Here is the discussion.

*So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep (John 21:15-17).*

Notice that Jesus asked Peter two times if Peter loved Him using the word ἀγαπάω (agapao). Peter never used that word in this discussion but always responded with φιλέω (phileo) love. Then Jesus asks using the word φιλέω (phileo) for the first time, and John records this, not as a new question, but as the third time he asked the same question. This annoyed Peter because he understood Jesus asked the same question a third time. So both words have overlapping meaning.

But we should never assume that Peter would give a response that diminished Christ’s question. That was never Peter’s way (John 13:37). Rather, Peter is stressing his affection for Jesus. The third time Jesus says, if you have affection for Me, if you like/love me, then *Tend My sheep*. So we must conclude that the two Greek words can have overlapping meaning. But there is also a different emphasis, which is one of meaning, not significance. The φιλέω (phileo) friendship like/love of the New Testament can be a powerful motivating force for obedience to Christ.

Friendship Love Can Be a Selective Affection for the Lord Jesus Christ

In the New Testament, this is especially descriptive of our affection for Jesus over others, even over ourselves. Jesus said:

- *He who **loves** [φιλέω (phileo)] father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who **loves** [φιλέω (phileo)] son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:37).*
- *He who **loves** [φιλέω (phileo)] his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal (John 12:25).*

The interesting thing is that this is not just a legal or mechanical choice to obey God but affection for God. It’s a statement that, if we have a greater affection for our family members or our own life, then we are not worthy of a relationship with Jesus.

Friendship Love Describes the Affection of God

Jesus said,

*For the Father **loves** [φιλέω (phileo)] the Son (John 5:20).*

John described Himself as,

*The disciple whom Jesus **loved** [φιλέω (phileo)] (John 20:2; 21:17, 20).*

Jesus described God’s love for the disciples by saying,

*The Father Himself **loves** [φιλέω (phileo)] you, because you have **loved** [φιλέω (phileo)] Me (John 16:27).*

Paul tells us that God saved us because of His affection for mankind.

*But when the kindness of God our Savior and His **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] for mankind appeared, He saved us... (Titus 3:4-5).*

Friendship Love Is Associated with Faith

Faith is to **trust** the evidence provided by objective observation. Faith and friendship love are not the same, and friendship love is not a form of faith (although both romantic love and friendship love are a form of hope). But there is a close association between faith and love. Although there are exceptions, we will tend to believe (trust) those we love and love those we believe (trust). Jesus told the disciples,

*... the Father Himself **loves** [φιλέω (phileo)] you, because you have **loved** [φιλέω (phileo)] Me and have **believed** that I came forth from the Father (John 16:27).*

Paul seemed to be placing friendship love alongside of the faith of real believers when he said,
*If anyone does not **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] the Lord, he is to be accursed (1 Cor. 16:22).
Greet those who **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] us in the **faith** (Titus 3:15).*

Friendship Love Includes Our Affection for Fellow Believers

There is an old saying that goes:

Saints in heaven,
That will be glory.
Saints on earth,
That's another story.

We sometimes hear believers say, "I love him, but I don't like him very much." I remember a cartoon that pictured a preacher speaking to the congregation. The sketch included the view of a grumpy guy sitting in the choir, with his arm folded and a frown on his face. The preacher said, "God loves you, I love you, and brother Johnson is working on it."

But the apostles commanded us to have affection for one another. Observe:

- *Be devoted to one another in brotherly **love** [φιλέω (phileo)]; give preference to one another in honor (Romans 12:10).*
- *Now as to the **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] one another (1 Thessalonians 4:9).*
- *Let **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] of the brethren continue (Hebrews 13:1).*
- *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] of the brethren, fervently love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] one another from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).*

Friendship Love Can Also Be an Affection that Is Not Good

Jesus used this word in a negative way several times, especially of the scribes and the Pharisees. He said *they **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men (Matthew 6:5), they **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues (Matthew 23:6) and **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] respectful greetings in the market places (Luke 20:46).*

While instructing the disciples in the Upper Room before His crucifixion, Jesus told them the world would hate them.

*If you were of the world, the world would **love** [φιλέω (phileo)] its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you (John 15:19).*

So **love [φιλέω (phileo)]** of *its own* is also a characteristic of the pagan world. The worldly liberals love their own, but so do the worldly conservatives. When a significant percentage of the people love it, we should be suspicious because the world loves its own and hates those who Christ has chosen *out of the world*. Remember James 4:4,

*You adulteresses, do you not know that **friendship** [φιλέω (phileo) love] **with the world** is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a **friend** [φιλέω (phileo) love] **of the world** makes himself an enemy of God.*

The Apostle John is given a revelation of the future. At the end of it in the distant future, after the tribulation on earth, after the Second Coming of Christ, after His 1000-year reign on earth, an angel shows John a great city. This city is the New Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place for believers. Then the angel says:

*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who **loves [φιλέω (phileo)]** and practices lying (Revelation 22:14-15).*

It is clear that those who are eliminated from the heavenly city are also lovers. **[φιλέω (phileo)] love** is not necessarily a virtue.

Friendship Love Includes Discipline

The main passage for God's discipline is Hebrews 12, and it uses the word ἀγαπάω (*agapao*).

For those whom the Lord loves [ἀγαπάω (agapao)], He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons (Hebrews 12:6-8).

But Jesus also says He disciplines those for whom He has a friendship [φιλέω (*phileo*)] love. When Jesus talks to the seven church in Asia Minor, He says,

*Those whom I **love [φιλέω (phileo)]**, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent (Revelation 3:19).*

Applying Friendship Love

Make your spouse a friend, find another friend, and make God your friend. All will involve affection, and all will be based on admiration of character. That means they will take time and study. But be careful with friendship. It can also involve affection for the wrong people and the things of this world. It can be the most powerful life affiliation, or the most destructive.

*A man of too many friends comes to ruin,
But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24)*

Giving Love

Of the three main categories for love— **romantic love**, **friendship love**, and **giving love**, giving love is the only one that is not based upon a feeling. It’s a decision to give something to someone who does not necessarily deserve it, without a thought of getting something back from that person. In this sense,

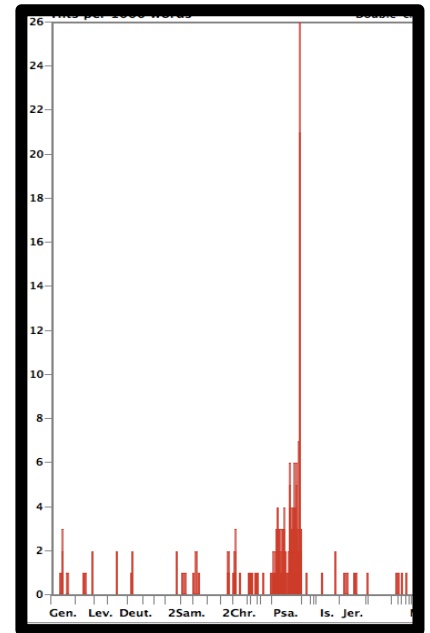


Giving is doing the best good for the object of the gift

Giving love is unique in many ways. It is the only love not tied to feelings or looking for reciprocity from the loving act. It is also unique in the area of giving love to God because God does not need anything and He is the source of everything. So giving love is not necessarily tied to need. Ultimately, all reciprocity comes from God. But the giving act itself, even when it involves giving to God, does not have in mind reciprocity as part of that act.

Giving Love In The Old Testament

The strongest word for “love” in the Old Testament is the word **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*). It might be translated: **love, unfailing love, kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, or loyalty**. What all these have in common is that they are some form of giving. **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*) is used throughout the Old Testament, but (as you can see from the graph) it is used heavily in the Psalms.



We shall now do an inductive study of giving love in the Old Testament. Although we cannot be exhaustive because there are too many references, we shall try to be complete in the sense that we shall try to cover all the meanings of the word.

Giving Love Is an Act of God which Describes the Favor of God

This is the basic word for an act of God whereby He grants favor to man.

- *He said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] and His truth toward my master (Genesis 24:27).*
- *I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies (Genesis 32:10).*
- *In Your lovingkindness [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation (Exodus 15:13).*

Giving Love Is an Attribute of God

*...but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)], justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:24, also 32:18).*

Giving love is not only an act of God, it is an attribute of God. The second of the Ten Commandments forbids making any kind of idol because God is a jealous God who visits iniquity on the next generations. But then He adds that He is a God who shows חֶסֶד (*hesed*), giving love, to those who אָהַב (*ahab*) love Him.

*You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] to thousands, to those who **love** [אָהַב (*ahab*)] Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:4-6).*

So it is an attribute of God to give to those who show affection for Him. But this is not just part of the Ten Commandments. Later, we read the same thing when God described Himself to Moses.

*Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] and truth; who keeps **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 34:6-7).*

Therefore **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] is not just an act of God. It’s an attribute of God. An attribute differs from an act in that an attribute is always true of a person, all the time, without exception. For example, God is always loving but not always merciful. His mercy came to an end with the Flood at the time of Noah and with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. An attribute describes a person’s essential nature. It is part of God’s character to punish the guilty (defined as those who hate God) and show **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] to those who **love** [אָהַב (*ahab*)] (show affection for) Him (defined elsewhere as repentance).

But notice that the **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] is *compassionate and gracious*. In other words, it is unmerited. It also *forgives iniquity, transgression and sin*. So it is not only unmerited, but it cost God something. If you forgive sin, you do not just overlook it, but you take the consequences of that sin upon yourself. For God, to forgive sin means that He takes upon Himself the hurtful consequences of our sin. He then bears the burden of our sin. But His justice requires that sin to be paid for. And that is why Christ had to die on the cross. That is an act we sinners do not deserve. It is an act of **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] (This concept is repeated in Numbers 14:18-19; Deuteronomy 5:10; and 7:9, 12).

Giving Love Can Be Removed by God, Unless It Is Promised Forever

*For thus says the LORD, “Do not enter a house of mourning, or go to lament or to console them; for I have withdrawn My peace from this people,” declares the LORD, “My **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] and compassion (Jeremiah 16:5).*

When God gave David what we call the Davidic Covenant, He promised David an heir on the throne forever.

*When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom ... but My **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12, 15-16).*

Here the **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] of God meant He would not take the throne away from the descendants of David as He took it away from Saul. **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] is an attribute of God in that He gives His love to those who love Him and removes it from those who don't. That's why He removed it from Saul.

But in the Davidic Covenant God, promised His **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] to David's descendants. Many of those were bad kings, finally ending in the curse of Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24ff). God's righteous holy character could not tolerate the evil of Coniah, so He removed him and all his blood descendants from ruling as king. But what about God's **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] to David? He promised David a descendant on the throne forever.

Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a descendent of Coniah. But Mary was also a descendent of David through his son Nathan. Through the virgin birth, plus a legal marriage of Mary to Joseph, Jesus fulfilled God's **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] to David. Jesus had no children, but He rose from the dead, thus giving David an heir on the throne of Israel forever. So the **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] of God may be removed, but not when He promises that it will be *established forever*.

Giving Love Will Not Be Removed for Anyone Who Walks with God

Solomon said:

*O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart (1 Kings 8:23).*

We repeatedly read,

*O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] is everlasting (1 Chronicles 16:34, 41).*

Giving Love from God Is the Reason We Can Repent and Return to Him

David wrote:

*Surely goodness and **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever... Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; According to Your **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD...Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your **lovingkindness** s [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)]; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions Psalm 23:6; 25:7; 51:1).*

Giving Love Is a Form of Hope

Hope is desired expectation. It is a desire that is not yet fulfilled. The **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד (*hesed*)] of God is something that is desired but unfulfilled during this life. David wrote,

*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,
On those who **hope** for His **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*)...*

*Let Your **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*), O LORD, be upon us,
According as we have **hoped** in You...*

*O Israel, **hope** in the LORD;
For with the LORD there is **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*),
And with Him is abundant redemption (Psalms 33:18, 22; 130:7).*

Giving Love Is Something that Should Be Taught to Believers

David considered the giving love of God something that should be taught to Israel.

*I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;
I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation;
I have not concealed Your **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*)
And Your truth from the great congregation (Psalm 40:10).*

Giving Love from God Should Be Emphasized in Song

- *I will **sing** of the **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*) of the LORD forever;
To all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth (Psalm 89:1).*
- *I will **sing** of **lovingkindness** and justice,
To You, O LORD, I will **sing** praises (Psalm 101:1).*

Giving Love Should Not Be Extended to Evil Men

*Let there be none to extend **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*) to him,
Nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children...
Because he did not remember to show **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*)
But persecuted the afflicted and needy man,
And the despondent in heart, to put them to death (Psalm 109:12, 16).*

Giving Love from God Is for the Glory of God

The reason David seeks the **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*) of God is not for himself but for God, because it is part of the character of God. When it comes to application, this is very significant. The reason we should pursue **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*) toward spouses, children, parents, and other believers is not because of them but because it gives glory to God.

*Not to us, O LORD, not to us,
But to Your name give glory
Because of Your **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*), because of Your truth...
For His **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*) is great toward us,
And the truth of the LORD is everlasting.
Praise the LORD...
Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;
For His **lovingkindness** [חֶסֶד] (*hesed*) is everlasting (Psalm 115:1; 117:2; 118:1).*

Giving love is connected to the fear of God

- *Oh let those who **fear** the LORD say,*

His lovingkindness [חֶסֶד (hesed)] is everlasting (Psalm 118:4).

- *By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for,
And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil (Proverbs 16:6).*

As with friendship love [אַהֲבָה (ahab)], giving love is also connected to the fear of God. But unlike friendship love, giving love does not trump the fear of God, it expresses it. The one who fears God is the one who expresses His giving love. So this kind of love, *lovingkindness* [חֶסֶד (hesed)], casts out fear only in the sense of focus. Those who fear God also focus on His giving love.

Giving Love in the New Testament

The New Testament word for giving love is **ἀγαπάω** (*agapao*) [or the noun form **ἀγάπη** (*agape*)]. This was a little used word in the Greek language, but Christ and the apostles elevated it to a meaning that characterized our relationship with Christ and believers relationship with one another. Here is how Strong's lists its translation (the number indicates the number of times it is translated that way in the KJV).

ἀγαπάω agapao; of unc. or.; *to love*: —beloved(7), Beloved(1), felt a love(1), love(80), loved(34), loves(20).

Although this is clearly the strong word for love, the meaning still requires the context for clarification. The “Louw and Nida Lexicon” says this about the Greek words for love:

Though the meanings of these terms overlap considerably in many contexts, there are probably some significant differences in certain contexts; that is to say, φιλέω and φιλία are likely to focus upon love or affection based upon interpersonal association, while ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη focus upon love and affection based on deep appreciation and high regard. On the basis of this type of distinction, one can understand some of the reasons for the use of ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη in commands to Christians to love one another. It would, however, be quite wrong to assume that φιλέω and φιλία refer only to human love, while ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη refer to divine love. Both sets of terms are used for the total range of loving relations between people, between people and God, and between God and Jesus Christ.

But I am not suggesting we can get our definitions strictly from following the definitions of the Greek or Hebrew words. The three categories I have suggested come from the way the word “love” is used. It’s just that the predominate word for giving love in the New Testament is ἀγαπάω (*agapao*) as a verb, and ἀγάπη (*agape*) as a noun. Here are some conclusions we can draw from the use of this word in the New Testament.

Giving Love Is the Basis of All Morality

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘You shall love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40).

There are actually three objects of [ἀγαπάω (*agapao*)] love in this passage – God, your neighbor, and yourself. This connects giving love to friendship love because we are commanded to have a friendship affectionate [φιλέω (*phileo*)] love for God (1 Corinthians 16:22), others (Romans 12:10), and everyone loves themselves *for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it* (Ephesians 5:29). Some think people become depressed or suicidal because they don't love themselves. Actually, just the opposite is true. If they did not love themselves, they would not be depressed about their circumstances.

Giving Love for Your Neighbor

Jesus defined giving love for your neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan as *the one who showed mercy* [ἔλεος (*eleos*) *unmerited favor or compassion*] toward him (Luke 10:30-37). The beaten man in the parable had an immediate obvious need, which he could not meet himself. He was not necessarily poor, he did not need to explain his condition, and the Good Samaritan did not give him money. The Good Samaritan showed giving love in that he helped the one with a need, giving of his time and using his personal assets. So, loving our neighbor means depleting our assets to help whoever we come across with a need.

Giving Love for God

The first and foremost command is to love God. The difference is, God has no needs. We need to give to the One who doesn't need anything. As He told the rich man how to love his neighbor, Jesus also tells us how to love God. It is not by meeting His needs, as the Good Samaritan did, but by giving to *God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*. God does not want our physical assets, He wants our heart, soul, and mind. Actually, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for tithing without this [ἀγαπάω (*agapao*)] love for God (Luke 11:42). We are to give God our thoughts, our feelings, and our whole emotional and spiritual being. Also, notice that's not required, or appropriate, in giving to our neighbor.

Giving Love Should Extend to Your Enemies

One of the main contributions of Jesus in teaching the mind of God was to teach that love should extend to our enemies.

*You have heard that it was said, "You shall love [ἀγαπάω (*agapao*)] your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love [ἀγαπάω (*agapao*)] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ... For if you love [ἀγαπάω (*agapao*)] those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same (Matthew 5:43-44 and 46)?*

This takes love outside of friendship or any affection. While loving my neighbor, I might feel compassion for his needs. But with my enemies, I have (by definition) no such feelings or motivation. To *love your enemies* means to *do good to those who hate you* (Luke 6:27). Loving my enemies describes a love that honors God and seeks only for a reward from God.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High (Luke 6:35).

Giving love [ἀγαπάω (*agapao*)] should extend to our enemies because it represents the character of God [*for God so loved the world* (John 3:16)], and therefore the foundation of all morality – pleasing God.

Giving Love Should Never Serve Wealth or the World

*Do not **love** the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the **love** of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).*

For most of us, that comes down to things we can buy with money. But Jesus said,

*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:24).*

We are all tempted to give what we earn toward our own wealth. But Jesus said that replaces God as the only one to be served. The love of wealth draws our attention to this world and off of heavenly rewards and godly virtues. The rewards we get from our wealth detract from our heavenly rewards because we have paid ourselves instead of waiting on God. The problem here is not the wealth per se but serving it by living in luxury. There are many wealthy people in the Bible. For example, Abraham was one of the wealthiest men in Canaan, but he lived in a tent. But when we love wealth, we serve it and give it to ourselves. In the case of a certain rich man,

*Jesus felt a **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mark 10:21).*

Giving Love Is a New Command for the Church

*A new commandment I give to you, that you **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] one another, even as I have **loved** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] you, that you also **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] one another (John 13:34).*

The question, of course, is “Why is this a **new** commandment?” since it was given in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). The Old Testament command was for Israelites to *love your neighbor as yourself*. For Israel, that was their fellow Israelite or someone with a special need. It was not a definition of the relationship of one believer toward another believer. In Old Testament Israel, there was no distinction between loving unbelieving Jews and loving believing Jews. Jews were to love Jews because they were Jews.

But Jesus gave the apostles a new commandment, which was to define the church—not the love of a certain race, nationality, assembly, organization, or corporation but the love between individual believers. The reason this could define the church is *because the **love** of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us*. Love for individual believers is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and is, therefore, an evidence of salvation (1 John 3:10). Giving love is the identifying mark of the church (Ephesians 1:15). It was not the case in the Old Testament because the Holy Spirit was not given to every believer in the Old Testament.

Giving Love to Christ Means Keeping His Commandments

*If you **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me, you will keep My commandments... He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who **loves** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me; and he who **loves** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me will be **loved** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] by My Father, and I will **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] him and will disclose Myself to him... If anyone **loves** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not **love** [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).*

So, we should not claim to love Jesus if we do not keep His word—literally, completely, and without compromise.

Giving Love Accomplished Our Salvation

For God so loved [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

But God demonstrates His own love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Giving Love Accomplished the Security of Our Salvation

Who will separate us from the love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

Giving Love Is Defined with 16 Attributes

1. Love is patient
2. love is kind
3. and is not jealous
4. love does not brag
5. and is not arrogant
6. does not act unbecomingly
7. it does not seek its own
8. is not provoked
9. does not take into account a wrong suffered
10. does not rejoice in unrighteousness
11. but rejoices with the truth
12. bears all things
13. believes all things
14. hopes all things
15. endures all things
16. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

What is significant about this definition of love is that it does not require romance, affection, or the thought of reciprocity. So it can be applied to all commanded love—love of spouse, parents, children, neighbors, enemies or fellow believers—without the need to share a romantic or friendship love.

Giving Love Is Greater than Faith and Hope

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Faith is trusting evidence

Hope is desired expectation

Love is a favorable response to perceived value

Giving love is such a response which does not expect reciprocity

But, why is love greater than faith and hope?

1. Faith and hope evaporate when they are fulfilled. Love does not. When we get to heaven, we will not need faith or hope that we will go to heaven. Faith and hope die with fulfillment. But love does not. It is the only one of the three basic virtues that endures.
2. The reason love is greater than faith is because love must govern how we exercise our faith. Paul wrote,
*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but **faith working through love** (Galatians 5:6).*
If faith is not governed by giving love, it could be a faith based only in self-interest. For example, I might believe my house is covered by insurance, but I have no love for my insurance company. One might believe in Christ to go to heaven, but care nothing about keeping His commandments. That faith would not be working through love.
3. But love must also govern our hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3). One might hope for the fulfillment of sexual desire without the thought of giving to their sexual partner as a spouse. I might hope to go to heaven but care nothing about God. Such hope would not be working through love.

Giving Love Should Dominate Our Use of Spiritual Gifts

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have **love** [ἀγάπῳ (agapao)], I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have **love** [ἀγάπῳ (agapao)] I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).*

But giving love should dominate all our spiritual gifts. We should not teach, administrate, help, or serve without “giving love.”

Giving Love Governs Our Speaking the Truth

*As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in **love** [ἀγάπῳ (agapao)], we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:14-15).*

We cannot grow spiritually as long as we are *tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men*. False teaching requires the mature believers to speak the truth. But this must be done with the thought of giving to others. Truth must be told, but it makes a difference **how** it is told. Solomon said,

*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise brings healing (Proverbs 12:18).*

James tells us,

And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell (James 3:6).

That does not mean we should always be mild and soothing with our speech. There was a great difference between how Jesus spoke to the Pharisee Nicodemus (John 3) and the woman at the well (John 4). To the woman at the well in Samaria, Jesus said,

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (John 4:10).

Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said,

Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things (John 3:10)?

To the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves (Matthew 23:15).

John the Baptist said to them,

You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (Matthew 3:7).

Each of these presentations of the truth was done in love because it was the best for the other person, without thought of reciprocity. The Gentile conversation with the woman at the well and the harsh words to the Pharisees both were loving because they presented the truth in the best way for the other person to stop believing what they did and consider believing the truth. Both occasions had the best good of the other in mind without thought of reciprocity. As Paul told Timothy, *the goal of our instruction is love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)], from a pure heart (1 Timothy 1:5).*

Giving Love Is the *Perfect Bond of Unity*

- *Beyond all these things put on love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)], which is the perfect bond of unity (Colossians 3:14).*
- *And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).*
- *Above all, keep fervent in your love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] for one another, because love [ἀγαπάω (agapao)] covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).*

The bond of unity among believers is not tolerance, or even peace and tranquility; it's doing the best good for one another expecting nothing in return from the one served. Unity happens when we give (do the best good for) one another without the thought of getting something from one another. Most arguments in marriage, families, and our organizations are a selfishness contest. The solution is not tolerance or agreement with one another, but seeking the truth without expecting something in return.

Applying Giving Love

Love is a progressive thing. It may begin with romance or affection, but if it is to survive, it absolutely must progress to giving love. For example, a mother has affection for her child. She like/loves him. She does things for him and is rewarded by his response. But some day that will have to progress to her doing things (like forcing him to leave home and get a job) which are loving, but not rewarding. Romance and friendship may continue on, but they cannot maintain a relationship. If they cannot inspire the development of giving love, they will destroy the love they created.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35).