

CS Lewis, The Four Loves:

- (1) **Affection Love:** the easiest example is to think of the care of a mother for her baby, or a baby's response to and connection to mom – that instinct attachment to offspring. It's based on both need and the need to give and be needed. It can also be our care for animals and it can be the attachment to our favorite, most worn soft slippers or old clothes, inside jokes that remind you of sweet times with friends, smells or sounds from childhood. The affection for the people always around us, in the normal day-to-day of life, is the majority of the love we experience, even if we don't label it. Affection Love is the most basic of all the loves and enters into the other loves and even influences them.
- (2) **Friendship Love:** Lewis states that in ancient times, Friendship was the most celebrated Love, but that in our modern world it's often devalued. "Few value it because few experience it," he says. Whereas other Loves seem to have a purpose -- Affection enables us to have the most basic of connections, Romance lends itself to conception, and Agape Love provides a track to redemption -- Friendship Love seems like the one that is least biologically productive, and therefore the one we need least. Lewis thinks Friendship Love likely has the closest resemblance to Heaven, where we will be eternally intertwined in our relationships. In Friendship Love, we develop a kinship over some commonality (a shared interest, talent, job, sports team or even pain).
- (3) **Romantic Love:** Different than Friendship Love – where the focus is on an outward commonality, lovers in Romance are focused on each other, always talking to one another about their love, almost absorbed in each other. A danger in Romantic love is found when a couples follow blindly after a feeling of passion. Because then the passion is celebrated as the pinnacle of everything and when it's gone, couples assume love has died. Certainly, *true* Romance is not so fickle. Romance does overcome some forms of selfishness, planting the interests of the other person in the center of what's most important. It's also a picture of God's love for the world, Christ and his bride, the church.
- (4) **Agape, or Divine Love.** This is the pinnacle of all loves – the unconditional love of God the Father given to us through his Son, Jesus. Affection, Friendship and Romantic love are each the training ground for Agape to grow. They set the stage in a way for us to understand and experience Agape. But Agape and the other three are also rivals, because the deep loss of a friend or romantic companion can bring about great feelings of desolation, cutting us off from being open to Agape. The greatest danger is when the loss of those loves harden our hearts, leave us hopeless and bitter, isolated and closed off, especially to God. It is a natural result when we give our heart to anything *but* God. So it's this delicate balance of being open to love but also guarding our hearts in healthy ways. Because if we play it too safe, we are not living out the Gospel through giving and receiving Affection, Friendship and Romantic love with fellow humans, which honestly sounds pretty lonely. If we play it too safe, we may never experience the fullness of True Agape. Lewis reminds us:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable... The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."

- Over and over Scripture says that God is *abounding in steadfast love* (Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:18, Psalm 86:5 and 15, Joel 2:13). Meaning, God's love is plentiful and abundant, firmly fixed in place, not subject to change, constant, faithful, loyal and true. So if we're figuring out how to love and be loved, that's a pretty awesome example.

1 John 4:10, "In this is love, *not that we have loved God* but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

- It has nothing to do with us. God loves because he IS LOVE. God loves so that we might have life. God loves so that we can be filled with all the fullness of him.

Quotes from Brennan Manning, The Furious Longing of God:

- God's love is **"never, never, never based on our performance, never conditioned by our moods – of elation or depression. The furious love of God knows no shadow of alteration or change. It is reliable. And always tender."**
- **"Words, like anything else used too often, soon depreciate in value, lose their edge, and cease to bite into our lives. When phrases, such as *unconditional love* trip too easily off the tongue, the speaker's ego may experience a temporary rush of exhilaration using an *in* salvation slogan, but his heart remains unchanged."**
- **"Until the love of God that knows no boundary, limit, or breaking point is internalized through personal decision; until the furious longing of God seizes the imagination... nothing happens..."**

The wild, unrestricted love of God is not simply an inspiring idea. When it imposes itself on mind and heart... it determines why and at what time you get up in the morning, how you pass your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, and who you hang with; it affects what breaks your heart, what amazes you, and what makes your heart happy.

The revolutionary thinking that God loves me as I am and not as I should be requires radical rethinking and profound emotional readjustment. Small wonder that the late spiritual giant Basil Hume of London, England, claimed that Christians find it easier to believe that God exists than that God loves them."

Belief in God's astounding, abundantly steadfast love requires us to have a major change of attitude. It requires that we MUST reframe the images we have of God and ourselves. Think about it... how radically would the image you have of God be reshaped if you took seriously the belief of him passionately, unconditionally loving and relentlessly pursuing you? How might your self-image shift if you began accepting yourself as lovable by a truly compassionate and loving God?

You see, I can let go – you can let go [and give in to any weak and tender places] – because Jesus is enough and Jesus in you is enough. His grace in you is enough and his LOVE in you is enough. More than you can even begin to imagine enough. And his love is all around you – fighting for you, pursuing you, delighting in you, giving you NEW AND ABUNDANT LIFE. And his LOVE for you is enough to help you PUT ON everything he's asked of you. Be brave. Let yourself go and step into his love.

PRAYER:

Father, I pray Ephesians 3:16-20 over these women. I pray that according to the riches of your glory you strengthen them with power through the Holy Spirit in their deepest parts. I pray that Christ will dwell in their hearts through faith and being rooted and grounded in Agape love, they may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, of your great love that surpasses knowledge, so that they may be filled with all the fullness of you. You are able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine, so we place our hearts – all the strong and confident as well as all the frail and broken parts – in your care. To steal the words of Brennan Manning yet again, I pray these beautiful things over these sweet moms:

- That the drumbeats of doom in the heads of the women around me will be replaced by songs in their hearts, which could lead to twinkles of hope in their eyes.
- That they will not be dependent on the company of others to ease their loneliness, for you are Emmanuel – God with us.
- I pray the praise of others will not send their spirits soaring, nor will the criticism plunge them into the pit. I pray that although rejection may make them sick, it will not be a sickness unto death.
- I pray that in a significant interior shift in response to your love that they will move from an attitude of I *should* pray to I *must* pray.
- I pray that they will live with a daily awareness that you not only love them, but you like them.
- I pray they will stop comparing themselves to others. And in the same way, they will also not trumpet their own importance, boast about their victories or feel superior to anyone.
- I pray that they will read Zephaniah 3:17 before we meet again and see you dancing for joy over them.
- And I pray that off and on throughout their days they will simply know that they are being seen by Jesus with a gaze of infinite tenderness.

Oh, great Father, we belong to you. Thank you for your love. Amen.