

God’s Heart

Galatians 5:13-15 (ESV) ¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

Memorial Day morning, rather early, I woke up with a heavy feeling on my heart. It was not even 6:00am but there was a strong inner prompting to pray for a person and I had no idea who. “Lord, who do you want me to pray for?” The first name that came to mind was Paul Baumunk and when you think of Paul, you also think of Joy. “Dear Lord Jesus, please give to Paul the strength he needs to make it through another Memorial Day Service. Please strengthen Joy to help Paul. Then I thought of my friend Bob Blessing. Bob served three tours in Iraq and has suffered terribly with PTSD ever since. I knew the feeling that God had given me meant I needed to call Bob and pray with him before the day was over. He lost so many comrades during his time in Iraq. He felt those losses deeply and Memorial Day brings back so many painful memories. Waking up and feeling a heaviness in my soul motivated me into action. I knew there was something God wanted me to do. That heaviness of heart would stay until I did what God was calling me to do.

I say this, not to toot my own horn, but as a personal example of God’s love in action. In my heart that heaviness I felt can be called a burden of love. God implants inside of you a heartfelt love that means there is a definite need that God wants you to meet. It is not just a thought in the mind but there is a tug in your soul, a motivation of love to actually do something the Lord wants you do to. Your emotions are impacted in one way or another and it is that strong inner pull of God’s love that moves you into action.

Galatians 5:13 (ESV) ¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. **Galatians 5:13 (NLT2)** ¹³ For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. This past week I read a chapter in a book that I will now quote from. The author makes the point that the term love is thrown around so much that it has lost its deep meaning, especially in the way the term means in how we are to treat each other. I can say, "I love coffee" and I do, especially from Dunkin Donuts. I can also say I love my daughter's dog and yes, I do. I can also say I love my daughter. Each time the term love has a completely different meaning. I am sure no husband has ever said to his wife, I love you in the equal amount that I love pizza. So, the term love can often be meaningless until it is properly defined.

To begin with I am talking about the type of love that God asks of us to give away to each other. In the Greek it is called agape, unconditional love given to someone and expecting nothing in return. Having said that please do not say to someone, "I agape you," unless you are Greek of course. They will wonder what you have been drinking.

In the book *The Wisdom Of Your Heart – Discovering the God-Given Purpose and Power of Your Emotions*, the author writes, *"Agape isn't just a theological concept or philosophical ideal. It's not a contract God has to keep but we don't. Agape is real love, really and truly an emotion. It's an emotion God has for you [God feels love toward you] and for the world; it's an emotion you have as well. You may have felt only the edge of what God feels, but you've felt it all the same"* (author Marca Alan Schelske, pg. 237).

There is an emotion that we have all felt. *"This emotion connects us most deeply to God's heart. When we feel it, we feel the most like God does."* It is called compassion. Compassion is that inner feeling inside of you that you identify with another person such that

you are moved to act in that person’s best interest (ibid. pg. 237). It is not just a thought in your head, it is a feeling in your gut that moves you to act.

Second, as an emotion, compassion is unique. It is an emotion of identification. You see a person dropping all of their groceries in the parking lot. Your heart goes out to that person. You identify with that person. You feel with that person. The Latin term for compassion combines *com* (meaning with) and *pati* (to suffer), expressing the idea to suffer with someone. I have seen so many of you hurting for the people in Ukraine so much so that you were moved to action in prayer, financial support, doing mailings and more. To me that is an example of God’s unconditional love, an act of compassion, and expecting nothing in return. It is that pull, that tug of the heart, a deep feeling that motivates you to take action. You sense their suffering, and you know you have to do something.

The police all across the country had a terrible week last week due to the shootings in Texas. There is anger in the air and tension toward the police. They all feel it deeper than we know. Last Sunday and Monday I had the opportunity to pray with two police individually. Before I left, I looked at each of them right in their eyes and said, “Kurt, I love you.” “Tommy, I love you.” The expression on their faces was priceless. One of them, their eyes got really moist, and the other one hugged me tightly. What was happening there? “Strong inner prompting to stop and pray. To not stop would be to disobey God. Secondly, in prayer God’s Holy Presence, God’s holy love was right there, and they could feel it. It is a holy moment and yes, God’s love impacts our emotions. We want to give it away. God gives it to us so we will give it away. We love because He first loved us. Loving one’s neighbor fulfills the Law Paul says.

Compassion moves you to act. It is wrong to just sit on it and do nothing. My daughter had car problems a few weeks ago. She stopped because she heard something wrong with her car, something underneath the car. A bystander saw this and asked her what was wrong. She

told him there was a banging noise under the car. This bystander literally crawled underneath the car and did something to it and the noise did not reoccur. I knew what was wrong with the car, a particular shield had fallen down. Later I took her car into my mechanic and told him to fix it. They put the car up in the air and that shield had been put in place perfectly by the person who crawled underneath the car. I thank God for the young man that helped my daughter. Whether or not he was an angel I do not know. But when you are moved with compassion to help another person you are God's angel, God's messenger sent to help a person or persons in need. Something, namely God's love, moves you to do something to meet the given need. We weep with those who weep, and we rejoice with those who rejoice. We identify with a given need and we know exactly what to do to help.

This is an illustration I am using because it summarizes what I am trying to say. Several years ago, a dear friend and I were driving down the freeway, exceeding the speed limit just a little bit. I saw a huge station wagon pulled over on the shoulder. As we went bombing by the car, we saw it had a flat tire with a young mother and three children inside the car. I literally slammed on brakes and pulled over onto the shoulder. We got out and I could see her flat tire had done some damage to the car. With her window still closed I told her my friend and I would change her tire for her. Yes, she was nervous. Let me tell you why we stopped. When I saw that young mother with three children, my heart went out to her. A young mother with three little children and a flat tire made me think of the young mothers I know and how they would appreciate help. To make a short story longer, after changing the tire I told her that I would drive her car to the next exit and gas station and she and her children could ride in my car with my friend driving and that we did. The spare tire was huge, and you could only turn the steering wheel so far. She agreed to it, and off we went.

If you think I want you to stop every time a car is pulled over you have missed the point. These days, especially on the freeway, we have phones and we can dial for help. My daughter

was in a safe place when she pulled over. God’s love, which I am calling compassion, begins with an emotion; you identify with the person in need, and God’s love motivates you to reach out and help. Not all people are willing to receive help. If you are told to go away, then go away. Not all people wanted the help of Jesus, let alone you and me. Compassion is a combination of the intellect and emotion, a feeling you have and you know you have to do something. Please know God is the one who created emotions and God feels deeply. At the center of God is love, a holy love. It is that love that he gives to us that motivates us to act.

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” God looked at the world and saw it was perishing. God could not just fall asleep or take a nap. God knew He had to do something. God was moved by His loving compassion to do something. God is not detached somewhere ignoring all that He sees. *“God’s solution was to enter into our problem to be with us. It is called the incarnation. Through Jesus, God became one of us, the ultimate expression of identification. The King of the universe took on the human struggle of human life, the indignity of puberty, the insecurity of poverty, the fear of living in an occupied nation, the injustice of being falsely accused, the dread of being arrested, the physical pain of torture, the heartache of being abandoned, and the suffering of being separated from the Father”* (ibid pg. 239).

God did this not just to solve a problem. He did it to be with us. Immanuel means God with us. God entered into our experience. In Jesus, God identified with us. God felt what we feel (ibid pg. 239). That my friends is compassion.

Please do not just intellectualize God’s agape love. It is other-centered love that motivates you to identify with another’s need to act to help. It is a real emotion and you have felt it. And when you do, you are feeling in a small way how God feels toward you, toward the people around you, toward the whole world. “When you step out to serve someone because of that feeling, you are mirroring God’s heart, entering into someone else’s experience because of

love. We experience compassion because we have been made in God's image, and God's heart is compassion. When we feel compassion and act on it, we are living out God's image in the world. In fact, when we feel and act on compassion, we are doing what Jesus wants us to do, further reaching His kingdom in the world (ibid 239). It is kingdom living.

The Lord's time – Christian friendships help keep us close to God. The love we give each other comes from God....ad lib. Amen.