

Philip Yancey, in his book "Reaching for the Invisible God" describes the way God get's blamed for things in this way.

"When Princess Diana died in an automobile accident, a minister was interviewed and was asked the question "How can God allow such a terrible tragedy?" And I loved his response. He said, "Could it have had something to do with a drunk driver going ninety miles an hour in a narrow tunnel? Just how, exactly, was God involved."

Years ago, boxer, Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini, killed a Korean opponent with a hard right hand to the head. At the press conference after the Korean's death, Mancini said, "sometimes I wonder why God does the things he does."

In a letter to Dr. Dobson, a young woman asked this anguished question, "Four years ago, I was dating a man and became pregnant. I was devastated. I asked God, "Why have you allowed this to happen to me?"

Susan Smith, the south Carolina mother a couple years ago who pushed her two sons into a lake to drown and then blamed a fictional car-jacker for the deed, wrote in her confession: "I dropped to the lowest point when I allowed my children to go down that ramp into the water without me. I took off running and screaming, 'Oh God! Oh God, no! What have I done? Why did you let this happen?"

Now the question remains, exactly what role did God play in a boxer beating his opponent to death, a teenage couple giving into temptation in the back seat of a car, or a mother drowning her children? Is God responsible for these acts? To the contrary, they are examples of incredible human free will being exercised on a fallen planet. And yet it's in our nature as mortal, frail, fallen people to lash out at one who is not, that being God."

Can you imagine what would happen, hypothetically, if you loved 50 percent more beginning tomorrow for the rest of your life? Just 50 percent more. You loved your friends 50 percent more, you loved your coworkers 50 percent more. What if the people sitting down at the United Nations would just love one another 50 percent more than they do now? Do you think people would start forgiving and listening instead of battling and positioning?

What would happen if in the Middle East people from diverse backgrounds would love one another just 50 percent more or in Afghanistan or Sudan or Palestine? What would happen if in the inner city and in the suburbs people would love one other just 50 percent more? Can you imagine the difference that it would make in the world?

### **Three Facts about Love**

**It's a universal Need:** We are all looking for love!

From the moment you came out of the womb you were looking for someone to hold you, feed you, protect you, love you. When you got older you were looking for someone to look into your eye and

say, “You matter, you’re secure, you’re significant.” When you blew it or you failed you wanted someone to say, “I forgive you, I’m still for you.” Everybody is desperately looking and wanting to be loved.

**There’s a universal Solution:** God loves all people everywhere and longs to meet the deepest needs of their heart for love!

There’s a universal solution to the universal need, God loves all people everywhere and longs to meet the deepest needs of their heart for love. God loves everyone. He’s demonstrated His love. His heart breaks when He sees what happens to people. He wants to heal, He wants to forgive, He wants to encourage, He wants to affirm, He wants to support, He wants to redirect, He wants to guide, He wants to hold, He wants to heal.

You have a universal need over here of people desperately wanting to be loved and you have over here an omnipresent, all-wise, all-knowing Creator who wants to love and is already loving the world.

**There’s a tragic Disconnection:** Nevertheless, most people remain starved for love for three primary reasons:

1. They don’t know God loves them.

There are millions of people who have never heard this news. Some of them are your neighbors or mine, some are people you work with and some live around the world. The church has sometimes been very ineffective at showing God’s love to the world outside of our church buildings. It doesn’t change the fact that God love’s them and offers every person on this planet a relationship unlike any other.

2. They know of God’s love, but have not received it.

I have no doubt that there are people sitting in this room or listening today that know about God’s love but have never been willing to receive it. Sometimes people are afraid to receive this love because of what demands it might place on their life.

3. They have received God’s love, but don’t know how to experience it in daily life.

Sometimes there are people who receive God’s love initially in salvation but don’t let the relationship develop to the point that they experience God’s love each day. Sometimes we deny ourselves the good things that God wants to share with us. Sometimes we don’t trust Him.

*“Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, **but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection.** When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. . . **Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life** because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the ‘Beloved.’ **Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.**” - Henri Nouwen*

Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that God calls us the beloved. We are beloved in Christ and we are in Christ. Being the beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.

To understand the core of the existence of God's heart, it comes down to believing that God loves you just the way you are. You are the object of His affection and that all these things about purity and all these things about caring for others and all these things about life transformation really start, if they're genuine, at the very core of our existence when we begin to see ourselves as God sees us. He sees us as precious, as valuable, as unconditionally loved, as the object of His affection and concern, as the one who thinks about us because He is in the eternal and He can think about all of us simultaneously and know all of our thoughts, all of our issues, all of our concerns.

If I can learn that, then it begins to remove me from trying to perform to earn His favor or trying to impress you to make you somehow think I'm either better or more spiritual or more kind or whatever. If I can't experience God's love, human love is a good second best. But as good as it is it becomes a poor substitute.

But then what people keep doing to me is you keep letting me down and every time I try and find that unquenchable love in another human being and whether it's in my wife or whether it's in a close friend or whether it's in being a dad or whether it's with a ministry partner, these human frail pieces of dust just keep letting me down.

Somewhere along the line I feel manipulated and I feel used and I feel abused and then that's very painful except it gets worse because then I look in the mirror and I find that I am using and manipulating and abusing others so that I can feel better about myself.

I would say the core of our heart and lives is when we begin to grasp the love of God.

### **Defining The Love of God**

God's love is His holy disposition toward all that He has created that compels Him to express unconditional affection and selective correction to provide the highest and best quality of existence both now and forever for the objects of His love.

Let me unpack it just a little here because the words were actually chosen fairly carefully. God's love is holy we've learned that word before. It means separate or totally other. I want you to know it's not like the love of a human being. It's a different kind of love. It's a different category and it's a holy disposition. It's just the way He feels, the way He thinks all the time about you and it's that He's created – He has this holy disposition that compels Him to do two things.

He's just compelled not because of something in you but because of something in Him to express unconditional affection. I'm not trying to be emotional here but God longs to show us affection all the time. Some of you are parents of small children, you know how you feel about your kids, you know how it is to hold them close, you know what it's like to tuck them in, you know what it's like when there's a big day.

God loves me so much that anytime my life, my thought, my relationship, my finances and my priorities are moving me toward unhealthy things that will do damage to me and damage to others His love does what? He brings about correction.

That's what God's love is. He's compelled to do it. Why? He corrects us in order to provide the highest and best quality of existence. It is the abundant life Jesus talked about. That's just another way of saying it. It means living to the brim, living fulfilled, living not dependent on people's response but something that wells up inside where the deepest longings and thirst of your soul are satisfied.

That's what God wants for you. That is experiencing the love of God. That's the goal and so He's compelled by a holy disposition to constantly give unconditional love and sometimes it's by correction. It's not based on your performance and affection.

It's selective correction. Anytime He can withhold what's justly due, it's called mercy, He does because I'm the object of His affection. This isn't after you become a Christian. Does the scripture say, "God so loved the believers that He gave His only Son?" God so loved the world. This is how He feels about the most wicked person on this planet. As hard as it is to believe God loves everybody but He also demands and expects our obedience to do His will.

### **Characteristics of God's agape love:**

*"For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 NLT*

The characteristics of God's agape love are interesting and we should really come to know them.

It is a giving love: John 3:16

God gave the ultimate gift. He gave His life. On this Memorial Day weekend we ought to pause and give thanks for a giving and loving God.

It is a sacrificial love: John 3:16

True love is sacrificial but again God's sacrifice for us is almost unfathomable.

It is an unconditional love: John 3:16

It is a boundless love: Ephesians 3:14-21

*When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, <sup>15</sup> the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. <sup>16</sup> I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. <sup>17</sup> Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. <sup>18</sup> And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. <sup>19</sup> May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. <sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within*

*us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. <sup>21</sup> Glory to Him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21 NLT*

God's love is expressed primarily through His goodness, mercy, long-suffering and grace. Dr. Ryrie says, *"The love of God is like a tree and there are branches of its expression and they are primarily His goodness, mercy, long-suffering and grace."*

Do you ever think of God today or at this moment being concerned about you? You know how some of your mom's are, "Hey, call me when you get there. I want to know you've made it okay." The God of the universe sort of has that attitude, "Hey, I'm checking on you, want to make sure everything's okay." Is that how you think of Him?

Do you think of Him as far away, hard to get to? Do you wish you could get His attention? "The love of God is expressed in His goodness. It's also a benevolent concern for His creatures as well as mercy. This is the aspect of His goodness that causes Him to show pity and compassion."

Have you ever just really blown it and felt so shameful and so bad that you think you're not even lovable by God or anybody else? The love of God is expressed in His mercy and He just looks down and says, "This didn't surprise me at all. I'm not even shocked. In fact, before the foundations of the earth when the Godheads were determining what the price tag of men's freedom would be, Jesus knew that He would come and He would hang on a cross for that very shameful sin. As He said to the woman about to be killed for being caught in adultery, "Go and sin no more." He gives us second chances. He loves us and longs for us to do the right thing and make the best choices.

### **God's love for you means . . .**

1. His thoughts, intentions, desires, and plans for you are always for your good and never for your harm.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. <sup>12</sup> In those days when you pray, I will listen. <sup>13</sup> If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me."* Jeremiah 29:11-12 NLT

If we could just grasp this today it would change our life. If we could really believe that God's thoughts are always for our good it would take away the darkness that can threaten to affect our lives.

2. He is kind, open, approachable, frank, and eager to be your friend.

In John 13, Jesus reminds His disciples that they are not slaves even though servant-hood is a part of being a disciple, but they are His friends. We used to sing a song that simply celebrated the fact that we are God's friends. Over and over we would sing, "I am a friend of God, He calls me friend!" He is available 24/7. He's always there to listen and to help. You won't know that if you don't learn to trust Him and if you don't really know God as He truly is.

3. He emotionally identifies with your pain, joy, hopes, and dreams and has chosen to allow your happiness to affect His own.

You know what we do sometimes? Sometimes we think bad thoughts about God in the middle of our pain. It's horrible that we do this but sometimes in our human frailty we get messed up and think that God might be causing our pain. NOTHING could be further from the truth.

Have you thought when you're in pain and when you're hurt that God is on the other side of the fence? The fact is, He is on your side of the fence behind you with His arm around you and your joys bring actual happiness to the heart of God and your hurts and your struggles bring tears. Have you ever thought of that?

Have you ever thought that when Jesus' friend Lazarus dies in John 11 that He wept, that He hurt, that He felt for Mary and He felt for Martha and it broke His heart when He saw what a fallen world and death had done? Is that how you see God? When you're really struggling instead of being down on you, He weeps with you?

4. He takes pleasure in you just for who you are totally apart from your performance and/or accomplishments.

*For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.* Zephaniah 3:17 NLT Remember this is the God that sings over you. I can't get that image out of my head although I don't pretend to have ever heard Him sing. What songs would He sing over you?

5. He is actively and creatively orchestrating people, circumstances, and events to express His affection and selective correction to provide for your highest good.

Do you think of our God as not only loving but actively orchestrating and allowing relationships and events and circumstances so that He could express affection through a person, affection through a job promotion, affection through a discovery of a spiritual gift, affection through a new friend that really understands you, affection through a relationship that you never thought you would have?

Does He also in His love so care that selectively He brings circumstances and people to bring about selective correction and bring some pain and discouragement and depression and maybe you lose a job and maybe you lose a friend because He wants to get your attention? Maybe your 401(k) went down and maybe your business is going south because just little by little, you didn't mean to, but you're drifting?

God's so jealous and He so loves you and He sees where you are heading but He does some things that make you mad at first but like watching the little kid run out into the street He runs out after you, grabs you by the neck, jerks you back so the car doesn't hit you and out of love gives you a little whack on the rear end and says to you, "Now, don't go there anymore. You're too precious."

It was February 1941, Auschwitz, Poland. Maximilian Kolbe was a Franciscan priest put in the infamous death camp for helping Jews escape Nazi terrorism. Months went by and in desperation an escape took place. The camp rule was enforced. Ten people would be rounded up randomly

and herded into a cell where they would die of starvation and exposure as a lesson against future escape attempts.

Names were called. A Polish Jew Frandishek Gasovnachek was called. He cried, "Wait, I have a wife and children!" Kolbe stepped forward and said, "I will take his place." Kolbe was marched into the cell with nine others where he managed to live until August 14.

This story was chronicled on a NBC news special several years ago. Gasovnachek, by this time 82, was shown telling this story while tears streamed down his cheeks. A mobile camera followed him around his little white house to a marble monument carefully tended with flowers. The inscription read: IN MEMORY OF MAXIMILIAN KOLBE: HE DIED IN MY PLACE. Every day Gasovnachek lived since 1941, he lived with the knowledge, "I live because someone died for me." Every year on August 14 he travels to Auschwitz in memory of Kolbe.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

If you ever doubt God's love, His incredible love understand that He didn't just lay down His life but that He paid the price for your sins and mine that affects us for eternity. Someday this life is going to end. I deal with it constantly it seems. The older I get the more it affects me to watch people die and if that was all there was it would be overwhelming but death is not the end.

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. <sup>7</sup> Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. <sup>8</sup> But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. <sup>9</sup> And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation. <sup>10</sup> For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son. <sup>11</sup> So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.*  
Romans 5:6-11 NLT