

CHURCH OF THE HIGHLANDS

Study Guide

What Is Love?

Mark Pettus
February 8, 2026

Major Points

- 1 Healthy relationships start within us through heart transformation, not behavior modification — we must know what we believe about love to know how to live it out.**
1 John 4:7-8
- 2 God is love, and love is defined by God's character — patient, kind, not self-seeking — not by cultural misconceptions of feelings, approval, or conditions.**
1 Corinthians 13:4-8
- 3 God demonstrated agape love through the cross, proving our worth — we are not worthy of His love, but we are worth His love because value is determined by the price paid.**
Romans 5:8
- 4 We cannot give agape love until we receive it — our capacity to love others depends on letting God love us first, as demonstrated by Jesus washing the disciples' feet.**
1 John 4:19

Key Quotes

- “Christianity is not behavior modification. It is heart transformation.”*
at 9:15
- “That is not real love. That is indifference with better branding.”*
at 12:29
- “We don't really have a loving problem. We have a receiving problem.”*
at 24:00
- “We can't give what we don't have.”*
at 29:56

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Pettus said that 'healthy relationships start in us.' What does that mean to you practically, and why do you think he emphasized 'in us' rather than 'with us'?
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2. When Pastor Pettus replaced the word 'love' with 'God' in 1 Corinthians 13, how did that shift your understanding of God's character? Which attribute stood out to you the most and why?
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3. Pastor Pettus identified three misconceptions about love: love as just a feeling, love as approval, and love as conditional. Which of these misconceptions have you most struggled with in your own relationships, and how does the biblical definition challenge that?

4. The sermon made a distinction between not being 'worthy' of God's love and being 'worth' God's love. How do you reconcile the reality that we've all sinned and fallen short with the truth that God demonstrated our value through the cross?

5. Pastor Pettus said we don't have a loving problem—we have a receiving problem. Think about Peter's refusal to let Jesus wash his feet. In what ways do you find it difficult to receive God's love, and how might that be affecting the way you love others?

Word Studies

ἀγάπη

agapē

Greek

Self-giving, unconditional love that seeks the true good of another regardless of merit or cost, distinct from affection-based or erotic love.

μέρος

meros

Greek

A share, portion, or allotted part—signifying personal participation in something that belongs to one by right or gift.

τέλος

telos

Greek

The uttermost end, completion, or final consummation—conveying love carried to its absolute limit rather than merely a chronological endpoint.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

God's choice to love Israel was not based on their merit or size but on his own faithful character—illustrating the Old Testament foundation for the unconditional agape love Pastor Pettus described.

Hosea 3:1

God commands Hosea to love his unfaithful wife just as the Lord loves Israel despite their unfaithfulness, powerfully picturing how God's love pursues us even in our betrayal, paralleling Jesus washing Judas's feet.

Zephaniah 3:17

God rejoices over his people with singing and quiets them with his love—an Old Testament portrait of God actively delighting in his people, reinforcing the sermon's call to receive God's love rather than strive for it.

Ephesians 3:17-19

Paul prays that believers would be rooted in love and grasp its full dimensions, directly connecting to the sermon's thesis that receiving the depth of God's love is the prerequisite for loving others.

Isaiah 43:4

God declares 'you are precious and honored in my sight, and I love you,' affirming the sermon's point that our worth is determined by the value God places on us, not by our performance.

Further Reading

- **The Four Loves**
by C.S. Lewis
- **Loveology: God. Love. Marriage. Relationships. And the Never-Ending Story of Male and Female**
by John Mark Comer
- **Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging**
by Brennan Manning

Scripture References

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
Matthew 19:26	Read Aloud	6 : 12	<i>But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this ...</i>
1 John 4:7-8	Read Aloud	15 : 03	<i>Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from...</i>
1 Corinthians 13:4-8	Read Aloud	16 : 06	<i>Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or bo...</i>
Romans 5:8	Read Aloud	19 : 02	<i>but God shows his love for us in that while we wer...</i>
1 John 4:9-10	Read Aloud	17 : 51	<i>In this the love of God was made manifest among us...</i>
1 John 4:19	Read Aloud	23 : 03	<i>We love because he first loved us.</i>

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
John 13:1	Read Aloud	26:38	<i>Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus k...</i>
1 John 4:11	Read Aloud	19:40	<i>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love...</i>
Romans 3:23	Referenced	18:17	<i>for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory o...</i>
John 13:2-5	Read Aloud	27:14	<i>During supper, when the devil had already put it i...</i>
John 13:6-9	Read Aloud	28:56	<i>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do...</i>