

Chapter 4

- Love Is Your Birthright -

"Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely. ... He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken."

- [Dieter F. Uchtdorf](#) -

There was an English royal who mourned her husband's death for 40 years. Victoria was a lively, cheerful girl, fond of drawing and painting. She ascended the throne of England in 1837 after the death of her uncle, King William IV. In 1840, Queen Victoria married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. While at first, Prince Albert was unpopular in some circles, he came to be admired for his honesty, diligence, and his devotion to his family. The couple had nine children. Victoria loved her husband deeply. She relied on his advice in matters of state, especially in diplomacy. When Albert died in 1861, Victoria was devastated. She did not appear in public for three years. Her extended seclusion generated considerable public criticism. Several attempts were made on Victoria's life. However, under the influence of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, Victoria resumed public life, opening Parliament in 1866. But Victoria never forgot her beloved prince, wearing black until her death in 1901 as a sign of her love and remembrance to Prince Albert. During her reign, the longest in English history, Britain became a world power on which "the sun never set."

Love is something that is in our genes; it's a part of our DNA. It's how we are wired as humans, a core need put there by the author of love Himself,

God. Love is a thread that weaves itself through one generation and moves the others forward. Love is vital for life and well-being.

In an excerpt, British psychiatrist Dr. John Bowlby describes something known as "attachment (bonding) theory". He says, "Newborn humans and other animals have the primitive instinctual ability to form strong emotional attachments, or bonds, to special "things." Universal examples are the fierce bonds between parents (especially mothers), and genetic offspring as well as and the bond between healthy mates.

When young children are deprived of psychological nurturances "too much" for "too long," they survive by automatically evolving a fragmented personality. Parts of their personality *want* to emotionally attach to (care about) special people. From abandonment and abuse trauma, other people develop a primal terror of attaching *too much* or at all. Depending on many variables, such wounded girls and boys grow into adults who are ambivalent about true bonding and commitment, or are too shamed, distrustful, and fearful to achieve real bonding with appropriate people.

What Dr. John Bowlby is describing here is that we need love to survive and to be emotionally healthy. However, many of us might not have received this basic requirement at the start of our life here on earth. Remember that we are not perfect people, and the ones that have raised us were not perfect either, although they most likely tried their best. So, by the time we are adults in our 30s and 40s we know we have some extra baggage that is not pretty. We tend to believe less and less in true love and even less in a God of Love. At some point, we will have been hurt by many, will have lost someone dear, will have struggled with our purpose, with illness or disease, or suffer the consequences of a bad decision and become filled with regret.

This is not an absolute, because some have enjoyed a stable life when they were younger. I am talking about most of us who have had a struggle at the early stages of our young lives, and because of that, we struggle with the concept of God being of the true essence of love and relating to Him as a Father.

A Loving Bond Forever

This is a story of a sister who was 6 years old that looked up to her older brother. She had always wanted to be like him, emulate him, and follow him around, to his frustration. They went to the same school, although he was seven years older and in a higher grade than her.

One day, this girl went to her older brother's classroom to ask her brother for some lunch money. She said, "I want to speak to my baba", (a pet name he was affectionately called at home). Imagine the brother's very embarrassed face when the teacher asked this little girl to point out who her "baba" was? She then pointed out to him and said, "there he is" with a huge smile on her face. He must have wanted the ground to open up and swallow him whole at that point.

As they grew, this brother learned Karate and he needed to practice. He would try his moves out on his little sister; not really to harm her, but as a joke. So, one day she took a frying pan and chased him around the house so that she could get him to stop.

Then, in their teens, there was an incident when she found her brother missing when she returned home from school. She began searching for him

frantically and could not find him anywhere in the house or in the neighboring area. She was panicked and so were her parents.

Then, suddenly, without saying much to her parents, she put on her slippers and ran to the sand dunes behind this desert colony in Dubai called The Sheikh Rashid Colony, in an area called Satwa. There he was, as she expected, sitting quietly playing a tune on his guitar. She just stayed there and listened. She knew that whenever he was upset he went to his two favorite spots - the sand dunes, or the Jumeriah beach. Of course, the ocean was too far for her to travel, so she cleverly tried the dunes first.

This sister always believed in her brother. He was a rock star to her, literally. She never missed any of his school concerts or live music gigs. She always gave him encouragement and believed that someday he would become a great Christian worship leader. They shared unique qualities: they were fighters, destiny changers and world impacters.

In their later years, they talked about how much they had endured in their young lives, but still had each other's back, and that was something that would never change. Their bond was made in heaven with the same blood running through their veins. Funny enough, it happens to be AB positive, literally. Let me introduce you to the "D'souza Siblings", and this is my story; and the brother in this story, if you have not already guessed, is my brother Christopher D'souza. We have had to go through many challenges, but I believe that a bond so deep will never be broken. It is our special blend of sibling love that will always stay in my heart and comfort our souls forever.

Chris is my hero, my best friend, and a big part of my life. He ruled and reigned on the platform of my heart until Jesus came. If we, as humans, can put someone on a platform, even though they may not be perfect, how much more does God need to be enthroned on our heart? He so deserves it!

The D'souza brother and sister team will always share a bond that the world will never take away. But there is another real person who passionately loves us even more. His bond is an everlasting covenant that He makes with us from now to eternity. He is God. He is our Father. He is Jesus, and Our Comforter, The Holy Spirit! And together, this Holy Trinity makes a covenant and bond with us to never leave or forsake us. And by the way, this a bond that even God cannot break, because He cannot go back on His word.

A Powerful God Becomes Vulnerable for His People

God is love, as opposed to the belief of many who feel that He is not a loving God, or that His love for mankind is conditional, just as the love of people for each other can be conditional. First, I would like you to take a look at the basic definition of the word "love." In the American Heritage Dictionary (2003) love is described as "a deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness" (para. 1). But, does this give you a clear and comprehensive view of the real meaning of the word *love*?

Volf (2010) wrote, that "the pivot of 1 John 4:7-12 and the pivot of the whole of the Christian faith is the simple claim that God is love, or, as Gregory of Nazianzus puts it more poetically, that God's 'name is love'" Both the author of 1 John and his readers embrace this claim with such powerful conviction that he can introduce it in a subordinate clause (he will repeat it

soon in a main clause). To say, God is love, is not a static way of saying "God loves." Clearly, the author affirmed that God loves; he stated so explicitly twice in our text and 46 times in the whole epistle. Indeed, a major thrust of our text is that God loves— actively (God is engaged with humanity so that "we may live") and abundantly (out of love God sends "his only Son," which is to say, God's very self)".

The claim that God *is* love says more, however, than only that God loves. It names the character of God's being, not merely the nature of God's activity. It describes the divine Fountain from which the river of divine love flows. God's very being is love—so much so that the great church father, St. Augustine, could, maybe a bit too daringly, invert the claim and write "Love is God." This is not just any kind of love, of course. And, it is not love as mere inter-human activity, as though Augustine had anticipated Ludwig Feuerbach, the great 19th century critic of religion whose method consisted in transmuting all claims about God into claims about humanity. But love properly understood is God, and God is properly understood to be love."

God's love is different from human love, which is conditional. God's love is unconditional and never changes in response to a particular situation or a person. He is love and that attribute of Him can never be altered. He loves because He is love. He loves because He knows no different and cannot not love. He loves because He wants to love and desires to love. Love is at the core of His heart and He is the author of love—unconditional & everlasting love. It does not matter who one is or what that person did or is doing, He still loves that person. However, He has created a way out for mankind by accepting Jesus, His son. And that's again because of His Love.

The Vantage Point

Even when we who have lived a life of sin all along, and only genuinely repent and call out to Him at the very end of life—at the last breath—He will still, out of His love, forgive and accept us into His kingdom. He will never leave or forsake anyone. This is perhaps what makes God most vulnerable, in a sense, to mankind. Henriksen (2011) has said, "there is one element in this love-story that may bespeak the character of love and personality more than anything else: the open-endedness of any love story—including God's story with us—implies that the parties engaged are in some ways susceptible to the experience of vulnerability.

When God becomes human, God is opened up to the vulnerability of a love-story: God might be rejected, God's desire for community might be rejected, God's love may fail to constitute full community. This negative risk is what ultimately manifests itself in what takes place at the crucifixion. Here God's vulnerability over and against human sin comes to its foremost expression when Christ is delivered into the hands of those who take his life. Thus, in the love-story with humankind, God is confronted with the possible alternative that death is God; but by raising Jesus from the dead, God makes visible that this is not the case. The vulnerable love of God implies a willingness to give up the outcome of the event of incarnation. Accordingly, even God may be seen as one who for the sake of love opens up to something that is not controlled beforehand (note how this corresponds to the link between freedom and personhood that I have suggested above). This might be taken as an indication of God's desire for a true relationship and a true community with humankind, where humans are not coerced instruments of God's will, but real and personal participants in God's story."

Another example is mentioned by Oord (2012), "To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

He went on to explain, "When I say love involves intentional action, I mean at least the following four things: First, love is not accidental or unintended. While we should appreciate positive results generated by unintentional actions, we should not call unintended results the consequences of love. Loving action is purposeful; love is deliberate. Second, love requires freedom. Entirely determined creatures cannot love. The freedom of love is limited, however, because freedom is always restricted to some degree. When loving, we choose among a limited number of options, but we are constrained by a wide variety of factors, actors, bodily constraints, and conditions. Sometimes these limit us to free choices between difficult options. Choosing the best option among those available—given the circumstances and constraints—is an expression of love."

Third, Oord mentions that, "...love involves motives. While we are likely never conscious of all our motives, an act of love has as its primary motive the promotion of well-being in some particular expression. Love's overarching motive is the doing of good. But what it means to do good in one situation may differ radically from what it means to do good in another. Lovers gauge prospectively how possible actions may or may not promote well-being. Motives matter."

And Fourth, Oord says, "...love involves a degree of desire. Sometimes, the desire is strong; other times it is muted. While love is more than mere desire, desire always plays a role—in one or another—in expressions of love. "Desire less love" is an oxymoronic phrase."

I believe that Oord has done a fantastic job of truly describing the key components of love, but that this definition is still derived from a human's perspective. At least he has ruled out the possibility of love being fictional or intangible in its expression; if anything, Oord has confirmed that it has a defined goal, which is purposeful and deliberate. This is a good example of how God operates as He is purposeful and deliberate about loving us despite our frailties, but His love is so much more.

Lets also take a look at the biblical definition of love from the Scripture which some of us may have read before, 1 Corinthians: 1-13, in which is written, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am

fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

The Revelation of Divine Love

There is a paramount difference in the way we perceive Love from what is an inspired standard given to us by God, Himself. So, one might think that He would comply with it to have these standards given to His children. The truth is that we have never known True Love, because we have never followed the standards laid out in Scripture. We have our own standard, which I am suggesting is derived from our own desires or the ones that the world sets up for us. Actually, may I say that we as imperfect people do not have the ability to understand True Love on our own, and the sooner we acknowledge that, the better it is going to be for us to find it.

Here's another definition of God's Love from the periodical of Dreisbach (1997), who provided a very vivid and appropriate perspective on this matter: "What sort of lover is God? Does His love escape or overcome the problems involved in human love? I think it does. If my existence and the existence of the world are signs of God's love for me, these signs are present wherever and whenever I am. They are not withdrawn, no matter what I do or become. Hence God's love is totally tolerant. Nothing in heaven, nothing on earth, nothing in the present or in the future can separate me from the love of God. So long as I am, there is nothing I can do or fail to do that will remove or end these signs of my value. Hence, this value is conferred on me, not on my going to church or saying my prayers or doing anything else. And so this love is totally respectful of my freedom. Indeed, in that the primary signs of this love are the existence of self and world, rather than being a limitation on freedom this love is the very foundation of it. And just as a child's sickness is no evidence of a lack of its mother's love, so too

difficulties and suffering in the world do not count against the love of God. Furthermore, this love is present whether or not I love God. It is in no sense something earned; it is indeed grace."

God, You Complete Me

The key is that there is one inherent component of God's love that we can never fully give true freedom in love to anyone. We are all selfish to some degree or another. God loves us enough to give us the complete freedom to choose, which in turn gives us the total freedom to even choose to love Him or not to love Him. His gift of the freedom to choose Him is, in essence, His true expression of love for all people.

This kind of freedom can never be matched by us, as even the most loving person will have limitations in this area. The fact that we can will to not love Him or will to love Him—even though He is God and can easily with an extended command make us love him, but has seen it necessary to let us use our own will to choose to love Him—is mind-boggling to me.

Ask yourself this question: who has ever given you that kind of freedom of choice? We as people fall out of love with a person as fast as we fall in love with a person. Then, when the other person is struggling to let us go, we play the card of choice and will. But God is not like that. Whether we decide to love Him one day or choose to even hate him on another day, His love for us remains constant. His love is unconditional, and He knows that someday we will also love Him unconditionally. It will be a choice that we make willfully, even though some days this will be challenged. He beautifully and silently draws us into that place. He is a master strategist.

A true lover of the human soul, He has chosen to give us that option of total freedom and to give it to us no matter what we do or become. I would like to ask you that question again. Can you think back to any one person in your life who gave you the ultimate freedom to completely and totally love you with absolutely no strings attached, unconditionally, willingly, with full commitment and without any compromise, even knowing well in advance that you will fail them miserably in meeting those expectations, but that they will still fully accept and love you anyway? Is there a person like that out there? The answer has to be a resounding no! This is how the true love of God is "unrelenting for you" by definition.

The God of our Universe, the one true God, gives us complete and total freedom in love; and just because we may not feel like it, does not mean that His love for this world and its people are irrelevant to Him. If we argue about this, then we have to first understand the wholeness of theology and the Scriptures and then pose our arguments about it. He is not the uninvolved and disinterested God that we make him out to be—far from it. It is this very "will" that He gave us, which has created all the trouble and brought about negative notions about the image and persona of a truly loving Father, God.

Burtness (1997) gave a compelling description of freedom of choice that God gives His people by noting the following:

"Since God created us to be response-able and Jesus came to make us free, true freedom is never from responsibility but always for responsibility. And since no one can be responsible for something unless that person has freedom to exercise some choice in the matter, true responsibility presupposes some degree of freedom. The freedom/responsibility problem

ought not to be seen as a struggle between the two, but rather as an investigation of the relationship and the interpenetration of the two. The Christian becomes free in Christ to do the will of God, and to act responsibly by responding to God's prior redemptive acts."

However, what is important to note is that we all have to choose to respond responsibly to the free will that God has given us. He, on the other hand, still chooses to love us whether we deserve to be loved or not by will. In doing so, He has also given us total freedom of choice. What will we do with our choice today? Will we choose to love Him with our own will or will we choose to doubt His Love that surpasses any earthly standard of this world? The decision is yours to make today.

Life Application Steps:

Ask Yourself These Questions:

1. What is my definition of Love? Do I love people conditionally because I seek something in return, or do I love people unconditionally as I would hope to be loved myself?
2. What is my current standard for loving someone and am I prepared to give them a free will to love me?
3. After reading this chapter, has my understanding of God's love changed? How much does He really love me?
4. What are my thoughts towards *this* God of Love? Moreover, what have I discovered are His thoughts of Love towards me?

5. Am I going to choose with my will to love Him despite of how I feel sometimes?

Activation Prayer

Father God, as I read this chapter, I cannot help but wonder if you truly love me unconditionally. Please, help my unbelief. When I think about the love that is described in this chapter, I feel unworthy. I even honestly wonder whether there is a love that loves so unconditionally. Life has taught me that everybody that does some good for me has an agenda, they want something in return. Nothing in life is free. I always wait for the other shoe to drop.

On the other hand, I also feel that at times I cannot give unconditional love myself. Why should I give of myself when I know someone will ultimately hurt me? You and I both know that I have put myself out there many times only to get hurt and neglected. Therefore, I cannot understand the concept of unconditional love. It is foreign to me. I can only pray that you show me and teach me how to accept your unconditional love and how to give it away.

Only God can right the wrongs in your life. Only He can heal your hurts. Why look to others who will always fall short—look to Him who is love, to teach you about unconditional love.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." 1 John 4:7

Victorious Declaration

Now take a moment and decree this over yourself.

Lord, pour out your love over me. I speak your love over my life. I speak that this love will spoil me, I speak your love will lift me up, your love will engulf me. I speak your love will save me. Your love is rescuing me. Have your way with me, Lord. You behold my face, Lord, with love. You are looking into my eyes because I am your beloved. I speak kisses from Heaven over me and your liquid love is covering me right now as the angels dance all around and then look up to you and sing "Holy, Holy, Holy." You are worthy of my love and I of yours, Lord. I am created by the creator of Love. I am designed for love. I am destined for love. You are love and I am love. Yes, I am love. You are proud of your love for me Lord, and I am abandoning myself to your love today—to that love Lord. Your Love Lord, this I speak over myself today again, over and over as you make all things beautiful by your love in my life. I declare and decree this over myself today. I am perfectly and fearfully made with a God of Love that is YOU. I believe it and I declare it over my life TODAY! Amen.