

“Life’s Essential Ingredients” Pt.3

(4/5/20)

We have, this morning, come to the third Sunday of our forced sequester—and to the third part in a special series we have been doing we’re calling—“*Life’s Essential Ingredients.*”

There is a saying I’m sure most of you have heard which goes—“*The most important things in life are the things that money can’t buy.*”

Now I realize that that statement is somewhat trite (causing many younger people to ‘roll their eyes’) I get that, but even though that statement is trite—it is nonetheless true!

When God created us, He created us with a hunger within our souls—a hunger for certain *essentials* that make life—not only *worth* living—but without which would make life *impossible* to live.

These are things that money can’t buy—things that we often take for granted not realizing how much they *do* mean to us—until they are gone.

One thing about adversity is that it has a way of stripping our lives of the extraneous (the things we don’t *need* to live) which often distract us from the things that money *can’t* buy—the things that make life worth living.

In this series, we have been looking at life’s essentials—**Peace, Hope**, and today we’ll look at the third essential—**LOVE**

Love falls into 2 main categories—Human love and God’s love.

I. Human Love

The English language really only has one word for ‘love’—which leaves us to the ‘mercy’ of the context to figure out the depth and degree of the love I’m talking about.

For example—when I say, “*I love pizza*” and then “*I love my wife*”, you’re left to figure out—do I love pizza *less* than my wife or *as much* as my wife or *more* than my wife?

The New Testament was written in Greek, and unlike the English, the Greek language corrects this in that it offers several words for *love* (human love).

First, the Greeks had the word **eros** from which we get our English words—*erotic* and *erogenous*.

This is a word that represents the idea of *lust* and *sexual passion*—a word that is really more about the biological act of *sex* than love.

Secondly, the Greeks had another word for love—the word **storge** which speaks of *family* love (especially the love of a mother for her children).

And then, the Greeks had a *third* word to describe human love—the word **phileo** which means “*affection*”, “*friendship*” or “*brotherly*” (reciprocal) love—“*I love you because you love me, we’re BFF’s, buds...*” etc.

All human beings have been given by God the ability *to* love and inherent within all of us is the need to *be* loved—that is how God wired us.

I saw the results of a study that was done years ago in another country with babies in a state-run orphanage.

One group of babies were held and cuddled throughout the day, and the other group received no human touch at all—no one held them, cuddled them or kissed them.

What the study showed (as horrible and cruel as it was) was that—the babies that were held grew up to be emotionally stable and psychologically well-balanced.

Whereas the babies that were not held grew up with severe emotional problems and were psychologically damaged.

Love is something we need as human beings—in fact, in some ways, we crave it more on a psychological level than we crave food on a physical level.

- ➔ Talk about the missions' documentary where a little starving girl set down her bowl of admit porridge the missionaries had just given her to run over and get a hug from one of the female missionaries)

Human love is a powerful thing—although it's not perfect by any means.

Often human 'love' is polluted by self-interest.

There is many a man who says he loves a woman (and maybe sincerely believes he does) but in reality—he really loves himself more than he loves her which is the real reason he's with her.

In other words, he likes the way she makes him feel when they're out in public and the way, because of her beauty, other men look at the two of them and envy him for 'landing' such a beautiful woman—which makes him feel good about himself.

It's a 'Hollywood' type of 'love', the kind that says, *"I love you because of how you make me feel when we're together. But if the day ever comes when you stop making me feel good about*

myself (you get fat or old)—I'll find someone new who will make me feel good about myself and special again."

And then, there are plenty of women whose love for a man is rooted in selfishness—where they love themselves more than the guy they married because of all he was able to give her in the way of material possessions and financial security.

But because her own self-interest is at the heart of her 'love' for him—it usually means she's got her eyes open looking for a better 'deal' to come along—another guy whose maybe better looking and who has more money and can give her more 'things'...

Such is the nature of *human* love rooted in the heart of fallen man—it is often selfish and self-serving, and the tragedy is more times than not—people are blind to it. (Jeremiah 17:9)

But listen, even though that is true—it doesn't mean that *all* expressions of human love are corrupted by self-interest—many examples of human love are incredibly selfless.

Like the soldier I read about who dove on a hand grenade that had been thrown into a foxhole where he and his fellow soldiers were—using his body to shield them from the blast, sacrificing his life for theirs.

Or like the 72-year-old Italian priest I just read about, Fr. Giuseppe Berardelli, who was infected with the coronavirus but gave a respirator (that his parishioners had purchased for him), to a younger patient (whom he did not know), and died—sacrificing his life to save another:

John 15:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.
[how much more strangers?]

And while we're at it—how about the thousands and thousands of doctors, nurses, EMT's and other health-care workers all across our nation who are working non-stop, putting their own lives at risk every day to treat those who are sick with the Coronavirus?

We could go on and on with stories of selfless love demonstrated by people all over the world and from every walk of life.

The question is—how is this kind of love possible coming from fallen human beings?

The answer is—because they have been made in the image of the God Who is Himself love. (1John 4:8)

II. God's Love

The Greeks had another word for 'love', a word they used to describe an all-consuming love—a word that the Christians took for themselves and used to describe God's love—the word **agape**.

Now, we must be careful here because I've heard pastors say that this Greek word was invented by the Christian church and used exclusively in the N.T. to represent God's love.

And yet Jesus, in Luke 11:43 said, —"*Woe to you Pharisees! For you love (agapao) the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.*"

The Pharisees were *consumed* (unconditionally) by a 'love' of prestige and for the praise and recognition of men—and so in that regard they *agaped* the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

However, it is true that by far the most common use of the word 'agape' in the New Testament is in connection with *God's* love—which is an all-consuming, unconditional love characterized by selflessness and sacrifice—

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved (agape) the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God's love is an all-encompassing, unconditional love that loves freely regardless of how that love is returned—if returned at all!

In that regard, God's love is vastly different from human love which is often (not always) but often *reciprocal* ("I love you *because* you love me.") and *conditional* ("I love you only *when* you treat me right and do what I say and give me what I want...").

God's love is not like human love.

The dictionary defines love (human love) like this: "*a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection—as for a parent, child, or friend; sexual passion or desire.*"

Notice how the dictionary defines human love in terms of *feelings*.

God's love is not a *feeling*—it is selfless action toward others in need. (John 3:16)

God's love is unconditional, universal and non-discriminating—as the Scriptures say, "*God so loves the world*" and "*is no respecter of persons.*"

Human love is limited and can diminish over time—Jesus said that during the Tribulation Period, "*...the love of many will grow cold.*" (Matt.24:12)

That's not just true of the coming Tribulation Period—the love of many a husband for his wife, and wife for her husband has grown cold toward the person they vowed they would love for better or for worse, in sickness and in health—for the rest of their life.

For many couples it isn't until "*death do us part*"—it's until "*divorce do us part.*"

And again, such is the nature of human love rooted in the fallen, selfish heart of man—it often has an ‘expiration date’ attached to it.

But God’s love (agape) never diminishes and it never expires because God is the source of this love and God never diminishes or changes—*“He is the same yesterday, today and forever.”* (Heb.13:8)

Human love (the love of the world), *“loves its own”* (John 15:19)—its own family, its own friends, and those in its own sphere of influence who can benefit them in some way.

God’s love, loves all—even His enemies:

Matthew 5:44-45 (NLT2)

⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies...⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

When people hear Jesus say we are to *“love our enemies”*—they immediately respond, *“How can I love (have feelings for) my enemies!”*

Well, you probably can’t—but again, God’s love isn’t about feelings.

In 1Corinthians 13:4-8, Paul the apostle gives us the best definition/description of God’s love in all the New Testament—using all verbs, because God’s love is not feelings, it’s actions!

That’s how we can love people we have never met and have no feelings for during this crisis—by helping them in tangible ways and meeting their needs (pick up medicine, groceries etc.)

Look, loving people as God commands with His agape love is impossible for us—it is beyond our natural ability.

This is not a love I can manufacture or produce out of my own fallen human heart.

It is not in me to love like this because agape love is a divine, supernatural love that only flows from God Who is its source!

So then, how can God command me to do something that is impossible for me to do?

God never tells us to do the impossible without supplying the ability to do it—and that ability comes in the Person of the Holy Spirit living within us!

The moment we received Jesus into our hearts as our Savior—at that moment, the Holy Spirit moved in and poured God's divine love into our hearts (Rom.5:5)

Paul the apostle lists **'love'** (agape) in Galatians 5:22 as one of the *fruits* of the Spirit.

The fruits of the Spirit are actually—the attributes of God.

God's attributes are intrinsic to His nature—and to His nature alone.

That means that unbelievers (what the Bible calls the “natural man”) cannot duplicate the attributes of God from a fallen heart—which means he can ‘fake’ but cannot ‘make’ the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The only way for a person to experience the attributes of God in their life (which are exclusive to His nature)—is to have the God's nature *planted* within them.

And that only happens when they receive Jesus into their heart as Savior and the Holy Spirit moves in.

At that moment, as Peter tells us, they become “*partakers of God’s divine nature.*” (2Peter 1:4)

Once God’s nature is planted within a person thru the new birth, as they abide in Him—the fruit of the Spirit will grow ‘naturally’ as a by-product of their relationship with Jesus—and the first on the list (Gal.5:22) is **love** (agape)!

As powerful as human love can be at times—God’s love is the greatest force in the universe for changing a life!

There are many skeptics that would immediately challenge the idea that God is a God of love.

They would say, “*How could a God of love allow a horrible disease like this COVID-19 to infect and kill so many—how is that indicative of a loving God to allow such a thing?!*”

Well, there is the answer few are willing to accept—that this pandemic is not an act of love but of **judgment** on God’s part.

We cannot flippantly dismiss the possibility that this pandemic is a judgment from God for sin (the world in general and America in particular).

Listen, it wouldn’t be the first (or last) time God has used *pestilence* (among other things) to bring judgment upon a group of people who refuse to repent of their sins—

Numbers 14:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? ¹² I will strike them

with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you [Moses] a nation greater and mightier than they."

1 Kings 8:37-40 (NKJV)

³⁷ [Solomon praying to God as he dedicates the Temple]—"When there is famine in the land, pestilence *or* blight *or* mildew, locusts *or* grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness *there is*; ³⁸ whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, *or* by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: ³⁹ then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), ⁴⁰ that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

God's judgments have a 'multi-pronged' purpose—to punish the wicked, awaken the righteous and save the lost.

We see this hinted at in what Habakkuk the prophet prayed when God told him He was going to send judgment upon the southern kingdom of Judah—he prayed, "*Even in judgment, please don't forget to be merciful.*" (Habakkuk 3:2)

In 2Peter 3, after Peter talks about the world-wide judgment that God brought in the days of Noah—he then talks about another world-wide judgment coming in the future.

But even as Peter is prophesying about coming judgment he stops and says—

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise [of coming judgment], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Sometimes, before God brings forth His ultimate judgment upon a people—He will show mercy by first bringing lesser or preliminary judgments to get their attention.

God uses these judgments, in part, to revive His Church—but also to show mercy to the lost by creating fear in their hearts to hopefully bring them to Jesus for salvation!

There are many people that will wind up coming to Christ during this pandemic—people that wouldn't ordinarily come to church or listen to a sermon or Bible teaching.

I wrote to a group of pastors telling them how we have begun to livestream the teaching portion of our Wednesday night and Sunday morning services and how we have people watching live via Facebook and YouTube that have never set foot in our church.

And that the number of people tuning in was more than we usually get for a service at our building (and that number has been growing with every service we livestream).

I realized that the Lord is using this time to reach people with the gospel and the teaching of His Word more than we have ever experienced up to this point.

To see Him using this forced sequester to reach a larger audience than ever before (many of these people are unsaved and wide open to Jesus since they are genuinely scared about this pandemic and the uncertainty of the future) is an amazing thing!

I told the pastors—let's embrace this time and use it for the glory of God!

In closing, if human love is essential for life—how much more is God's love?

Knowing that God loves you *unconditionally* and wants you to live with Him *eternally* in His Kingdom—is the most powerful, life-changing truth in the universe!

Human love often needs to be *earned* (it's not unconditional)—as it's often based on performance (as when a parent's love is based on their child's obedience or ability to play sports or how well they perform academically in school).

There are a lot of people who have grown up in a situation like that where they had to earn their parents love—and then they become Christians and bring that concept of love into their relationship with God and begin to think that—God’s love needs to be earned as well.

This causes many to think that God *doesn't* love them because they have failed so badly in life and therefore haven't *earned* His love—they haven't given God a reason to love them—"*so how can He love me?*"

How can He love you?—because it's His nature to love—and to love unconditionally, regardless of how much we fail and blow it and don't deserve it!

That is the whole message of Good Friday (next week) and the cross—that God so loved a world of sinners, failures, losers and reprobates that He sent His only begotten Son to die for them—all because He loves them!

And listen, if God commands us to love even our enemies—how much more should His love be applied to our marriages and in our relationships with our earthly families and our church families?

Remember that God's love is a fruit of the Spirit—all fruit contains the seeds to produce more fruit.

When you accept God's love for you, (by accepting Jesus as your Savior) it begins to grow in your heart and then as you share it (sow it into the lives of others)—it grows and produces more fruit and much fruit. (John 15:8)

I'd like to end by sharing with you a true story about how the love of God working thru two Christians changed the life of a man very few, if any, thought was a life that was worth anything.

“A young man cowered in the corner of a dirty, roach-infested death row cell in a South Carolina prison. His body curled in a fetal position, he seemed oblivious to the filth and stench

around him. His name was Rusty, and he was sentenced to die for the murder of a Myrtle Beach woman in a crime spree that left four people dead. Police arrested twenty-three-year-old Rusty Welborn from Point Pleasant, West Virginia in 1979, following one of the most brutal slayings in South Carolina history. Rusty was tried for murder and received the death penalty for his crime. Bob McAlister, deputy chief of staff to South Carolina's governor, became acquainted with Rusty on death row. Bob had become a Christian a year or so earlier and felt a strong call from God to minister to the state's inmates—especially those spending their last days on death row. Bob's first look at Rusty revealed a pitiful sight. Rusty was lying on the floor when he arrived, a pathetic picture of a man who believed he mattered to no one. The only signs of life in the cell were the roaches who scurried over everything, including Rusty himself. He made no effort to move or even to brush the insects away. He stared blankly at Bob as he began to talk but did not respond. During visit after visit, Bob tried to reach Rusty, telling him of the love Jesus had for him and of his opportunity—even on death row—to start a new life in Christ. He talked and prayed continuously, and finally Rusty began to respond to the stranger who kept invading his cell. Little by little, he opened up, until one day he began to weep as Bob was sharing with him. On that day, Rusty Welborn, a pitiful man with murder and darkness behind him and his own death closing in ahead of him, gave his heart to Jesus Christ. When Bob returned to Rusty's cell a few days later, he found a new man. The cell was clean and so was Rusty. He had renewed energy and a positive outlook on life. McAlister continued to visit him regularly, studying the Bible and praying with him. The two men became close friends over the next five years. In fact, McAlister said that Rusty grew into the son he never had, and as for Rusty, he had taken to calling McAlister "Pap." Bob learned that Rusty's childhood in West Virginia had been anything but "almost heaven." His family was destitute, and Rusty was neglected and abused as a youngster. School was an ordeal both for him and for his teachers. Throughout his junior high years, he wore the same two pair of pants and two ragged shirts. Out of shame, frustration, and a lack of adult guidance, Rusty quit school in his ninth-grade year, a decision that was to be just the beginning of his troubles. His teenage years were full of turmoil as he was kicked out of his home many times and ran away countless others. He spent the better part of his youth living under bridges and in public rest rooms. Bob taught Rusty the Bible, but Rusty was the teacher when it came to love and forgiveness. This young man who had never known real love was amazed and thrilled about the love of God. He never ceased to be surprised that other people could actually love someone like him through Jesus Christ. Rusty's childlike enthusiasm was a breath of fresh air to Bob, who came to realize how much he had taken for granted, especially with regard to the love of his family and friends. In time Rusty became extremely bothered by the devastating pain he had caused the family and friends of his victim. Knowing that God had forgiven him, he desperately wanted the forgiveness of those he had wronged. Then a most significant thing happened: the brother of the woman Rusty had murdered became a Christian. God had dealt with him for two years about his need to forgive his sister's killer. Finally, he wrote Rusty a letter that offered not only forgiveness but love in Christ.

Not long before his scheduled execution, this brother and his wife came to visit Rusty. Bob was present when the two men met and tearfully embraced like long-lost brothers finally reunited. Rusty's senseless crime ten years earlier had constructed an enormous barrier between himself and the brother. The love of Christ obliterated that barrier and enabled both men to realize that, because of Him, they truly were brothers reunited on that day. It was a lesson Bob would not forget. Not only did Rusty teach Bob McAlister how to love and forgive, he also taught him a powerful lesson about how to die. As the appointed day approached, Rusty exhibited a calm and assurance like Bob had never seen. On his final day, with only hours remaining before his 1:00 A.M. execution, Rusty asked McAlister to read to him from the Bible. After an hour or so of listening, Rusty sat up on the side of his cot and said, "You know, the only thing I ever wanted was a home, Pap. Now I'm going to get one." Bob continued his reading, and after a few minutes Rusty grew very still. Thinking he had fallen asleep; Bob placed a blanket over him and closed the Bible. As he turned to leave, he felt a strong compulsion to lean over and kiss Rusty on the forehead. A short time later, Rusty Welborn was executed for murder. A woman assisting Rusty in his last moments shared this postscript to his story: As he was being prepared for his death, Rusty looked at her and said, "What a shame that a man's gotta wait 'til his last night alive to be kissed and tucked in for the very first time."

There are a lot of "Rustys" in this country—people who have done terrible things and have been written off by society—people that everyone seems to hate and wants to be rid of.

But look how the love of God working through one man (Bob) reached out and changed this murderer and condemned criminal into a forgiven, redeemed son of God!

Look at how the love of God working through a victim's brother extended love and forgiveness so that enemies became brothers in Christ!

The world cannot understand this kind of love because it's supernatural—it's the love of God!

And I would add—it is essential for life!