

God Is \_\_\_\_\_.  
God Is Love

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We are excited you have joined us today wherever you are, whether at one of our campuses or online! My name is Rhett. I'm one of the pastors here at The Creek and I could not be more grateful and humbled to share this time with you.

If you joined us last week, you know we started a new series called *God Is \_\_\_\_\_*. Dan kicked us off and he said the one thing he wanted us to take away from the message was this: **knowing God is the most important pursuit to give your life to**. Dan made a very profound statement that I don't want us to miss. He said that although God is indescribable, not contingent upon anything, not comparable to anything, and His ways are so far above ours, God is a knowable God. And not only is He a knowable God, but He pursues us to *make* Himself known. From the smallest aspects of creation to a burning bush to coming to live among us as Jesus, God makes Himself known and wants us to know Him. John 17:3 says, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

That's our hope in this series: to *know* God—not as some far off idea or concept, but as a God who makes Himself knowable. The Greek word for "know" goes beyond mere information about or knowledge of. It's a word that means to know something personally, relationally, and experientially, even to the point of becoming known. It's a call to a relationship with God. This verse comes in the context of Jesus' high priestly prayer to the Father before He was arrested and put on the cross. He said out of everything, this is eternal life—to know God—and His prayer is that everyone would be in such a relationship with God that they would be like one, as He is like one, with the Father.

Today we get to dive in a little deeper to one aspect of God to help us know Him and it's this: **God is love**.

Love is a concept that gets defined many ways in our world and culture today. We throw this word around a bit flippantly—from loving people to loving dogs (I know they are "people," too) to even loving simple things like food. It is very easy to "love" something in our lives.

I want us to take a closer look at our definitions of love and try to simplify and clarify some of our concepts and maybe even some of our misconceptions about what love is or what it looks like. Here is why this is important: **how we define love will determine how we apply it to God, ourselves, and others**. Keep this thought with you as we try to work through what love is today.

We would be wise to start by recognizing that our definition of love has probably changed throughout our lives. Take yourself back to when you were young, maybe middle school age, and you had that one celebrity crush you just couldn't shake. You know who I'm talking about. At that point in your life, you probably thought that was love, right? My crush when I was younger was Aunt Becky from Full House. She may have had some trouble recently, but maybe the jail time makes her a little more dangerous. I don't want to leave out anyone who thought her better half, Uncle Jesse, was your idea of love. Have mercy! Guys, I know, I'm not doing us any favors with our spouses, but there is hope because at one time Jesse too had a mullet!

When I was twelve, I had a very different definition of love; even when I was 24 it was different. And now that I'm married and we have four (mostly) awesome kids, my idea of love looks a bit different. What we see as love has probably shifted over the years as we've learned more, experienced more, and lived more.

But there is a very subtle danger in this that I want us to be aware of: the *definition* of love does not change, only our *understanding* of it. Our understanding of love will change as we grow and live more, but the true definition will remain the same. The tension we live in is that our culture and society have one way of defining love that may have hints of good in it, but it's always changing or shifting, and this definition is not the same as how the Bible defines love. 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love." The same John who wrote this in the book of 1 John also wrote the gospel of John. In the gospel he tells a beautiful story that unpacks these three little words and gives us a fuller picture of what he means when he says God is love.

If you have a Bible or a Bible app, open it to John 4. I want to look at a story that you may be familiar with about a woman who was going to grab some water from a well then had a life-changing interaction with Jesus.

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Let's stop and get a little bit of cultural context here. First, we know men and women didn't typically interact, except as husband and wife. Second, as the text says, the Jews looked down on the Samaritans. Third, what we can perceive from traditions and history is that women would get water in the morning together (maybe as a form of social gathering), so the fact that this woman is alone, at noon (the hottest part of the day), indicates she was avoiding wagging tongues and was a social outcast of sorts.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

At this point, the woman is getting a little confused by what Jesus is talking about, as she thinks He is speaking literally about water that keeps you from thirsting again.

Before we go on, can I ask a question that may cause an issue for married couples? My wife and I eat snacks in bed at night after the kids go down. She's on a chips and queso kick right now, so much so that she bought me a little breakfast in bed TV tray for Father's Day. I know this could be gross to some people but don't go judging us because I know some of you do things like clipping your toenails and drooling on your pillows in bed. You thought I was going somewhere else but come on now—this is still church. But I kid you not, regardless of the years of encouragement, tears of frustration, and constant ignoring of my pleas, my wife will always ask for a drink of water after we are in bed. I'm under the covers, relaxed, and half asleep. Does anyone else struggle with this? Sweet Moses, this is like the thorn in my side. So lately, while I've been preparing for this message, my response has been using what Jesus said: "If you knew the gift of God and who it was you were asking for a drink of water." Or I'll say,

“Here’s your phone. Open the Bible app. I promise you’ll never thirst again.” Let’s just say it has not gone well and I still go downstairs to get water.

He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.”

At this point, the conversation probably got a little awkward for the lady. First, she tries to lie to Jesus, which is never a good idea. Then when she’s caught her response is, “Sir, uh, I can see you know stuff; you’re smart.” Give compliments, distract—great tactics!

Over the next few verses, they get into a discussion about how Samaritans and Jews are supposed to worship, and she says, “When the Messiah comes, he will tell us all these things,” and Jesus responds by saying, “I am the Messiah.”

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Can you imagine how this woman felt? She was not accepted by Jewish people because she was a Samaritan, she was not accepted by her own community of Samaritans and women, and now she’s standing before the Savior, the Messiah, who has just told her everything she ever did. I want to be clear that the story doesn’t tell us she was a prostitute who was chasing other men, but she was divorced five times. While I’m sure she played a part, we don’t know the circumstances surrounding the divorces. What we know of this culture is that divorce was generally something initiated by the man. Again and again in this woman’s life, someone had promised her love and then did not fulfill his promise. She had to be devastated. She was discarded, tossed to the side, told she wasn’t good enough, and ignored by all social groups. The shame of the world was on her shoulders and at this point her self-worth was probably reduced to nothing.

The woman was feeling the weight of the world’s definition of love. The world defines love in this way: love is conditional. The culture did not accept or love this woman because their love was conditional—conditioned on who she was as a woman, as a Samaritan, and, in her own town, on the circumstances she was in or had gone through. While we could never imagine treating someone this way based on these things, unfortunately, I think our world today defines love in the same way. It may go something like this:

1. When you are dating someone, you don’t instantly start loving them. You want to get to know them, see if they meet your standards, and then you will love them on those conditions.
2. We withdraw or take back love from people who have broken our conditions. If they have hurt us in a big way, then we will withdraw our love. Or if they do something we don’t agree with, then we will withdraw. There are no examples of any disagreements in today’s society that cause us to withdraw love or even hate others, right? Everyone’s good, everything’s good?
3. We say that we can fall out of love with someone and we can’t explain why. It’s the classic line, “It’s not you, it’s me.” I remember my first girlfriend, Jessica Slutz, in the 4th grade (that’s another issue) tried to give me this line. She said, “It’s not you, it’s me,” and I said, “You’re dang right it’s you!” Just kidding—I think I threw a pinecone at her because my love was conditional.

You see how fickle this worldly definition is! It’s ever-changing and ever-shifting because it’s based solely on conditions. What you’ll find when you operate in the world’s definition of love is that it will

never be enough; it will always leave you wanting more, just as Jesus said to the woman at the well: “If you drink of this water, you will thirst again.”

Jesus’ response to the woman at the well flips this worldly definition of love on its head and gives us the perfect picture of God’s definition of love. Here’s what God’s love looks like: **love is unmerited, unconditional, and unfailing.**

1. It’s unmerited because we didn’t deserve it. My wife and I have four little ones at home. When they were born, there was nothing they could do to make me love them. It was just there because they were my sons and daughters.
2. It’s unconditional, meaning it does not have any conditions one has to keep or meet in return for the love to remain. It has no strings attached. The Greek word used in 1 John 4:8 defining God as love is the word “agape,” which is defined as an unconditional, pure, willful, sacrificial love that desires another’s highest good. Though my wife and I may have disagreements, and my love may not be perfect like this, my hope is that it is unconditional, it’s willful, and it’s sacrificial, to serve her for her highest good (even if that means queso at 10 at night).
3. It’s unfailing. Psalm 130:7 says, “Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.”

This word “unfailing” is a Hebrew word that means a love that is steadfast or constant, it’s faithful, it can’t be broken—that is, it never fails. I love this because it says that there is not only this unbreakable, constant, unfailing love, but there is also FULL redemption. He doesn’t leave us in our junk; He redeems us out of it.

Because God is love and because He loves us so much, He accepts us right where we are, gives us literally everything to show His love, and wants to redeem us out of all our mess. This is what I want you to hear today and let it redefine your idea of love: just like the woman at the well, **even when you are at your worst, God says you are worth it.**

If you don’t believe me that this is God’s heart for you, then look at Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is the definition of love—pure, unmerited, unconditional, and unfailing. This is God.

This is how a God, who is love, change my life 18 years ago. I was chasing after everything I could to look for this love. Whether it was partying, relationships, academic or athletic accomplishments—everything I was pursuing was looking for this love, something that would make me have a sense of fulfillment. I remember that someone shared the story of God’s love for us that looks completely different from anything this world could offer. They said, “If you believe with all your heart and enter into a relationship with this God, then you’ll be forgiven of all your sin and junk and set free to live fully alive through Jesus.” Half a life-time ago I made the decision to admit all my junk, just like the woman at the well, to ask forgiveness, and to follow Jesus, and I can’t tell you the difference God’s love made in my life. It changed my language, my desires, and my heart, and it gave me life. If you don’t have that story, then don’t let this moment pass. I’m pleading with you. I don’t know where you are looking for love in your life, but what I know is that there’s only one God who can give you what you’re looking for because God is love. And just like the woman at the well, He loves you, right where you are, and He proved it when He sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins on the cross. In that moment He took all the conditions you believe you had to live up to in order to receive His love and He nailed them to the cross. By sending Jesus to this world God defined love for us.

This is why we celebrate communion each week. We get to take a moment to remember what love looks like and thank Him for that love. We take the bread and juice that represents Jesus’ body and blood

broken and poured out in place of the death we deserved. On the hill of Calvary, where *our sin* put Him on the cross, He says, “I love you.” He showed us the greatest love by giving His life so that we could have eternal life. If you haven’t accepted that love fully in your life, take this moment during communion and during this next song to come to the porch, talk with someone, come talk to me after service, and be set free. If you’re afraid to walk down in front of all these people, there’s no shame; we love you, we are for you. We all need God’s love. I mean, come on, I probably need to head to the porch after this. God loves you. He loves you—don’t leave here without accepting that.

Father, help us to know You and know the definition of what and who love is—unmerited, unconditional, and unfailing. No matter where we find ourselves today, we pray that just like the woman at the well who met Jesus and saw His true love, we would allow freedom and hope and peace to fill us so much that our testimony would change this city. If we don’t have that story or that love, then let it be today that You change our story, Jesus. We pray this in Your Name. Amen.