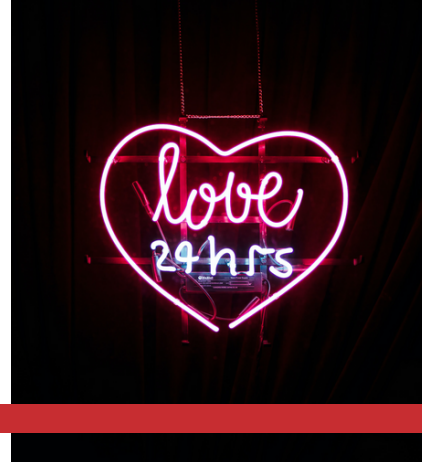


I WANT TO KNOW WHAT LOVE IS: CAN WE FIND LOVE THAT TRANSCENDS LIFE, APPROVAL OF OTHERS, OR RELIGIOUS RULES?

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How heartache, pain, and loneliness have a way of hardening us to the prospects of love is a sentiment shared through the rock song titled, "I Want To Know What Love Is". This song by British-American band, Foreigner, resonated with listeners worldwide, becoming the group's biggest hit. How writer Mick Jones came to create the song's lyrics is interesting. "I don't know where it came from. I consider it a gift that was sent through me. I think there was something bigger than me behind it. I'd say it was probably written entirely by a higher force." (Source: Wikipedia)

An artist giving full credit for their most popular work to a "higher force" is rare. Exploring beyond how the song came to be, let's consider just a portion of this "80's gold":

*In my life, there's been heartache and pain
I don't know if I can face it again
I can't stop now, I've traveled so far
To change this lonely life*

*I wanna know what love is
I want you to show me
I wanna feel what love is
I know you can show me*

Heartache and pain often open the door to loneliness and the search for true love. The lyrics echo our desire to be loved for who we are and for someone to show us tangible expressions of love.

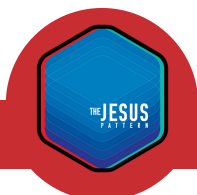
We long for the type of love that transcends the harsh realities life, moral performance, approval of others, vocational achievement, or religious rules. This rare love is offered to us through Jesus.

Here is how the apostle John heard Jesus describe God's true love:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." (John 3:16-21)

Jesus says that God is filled with love for people. This love is both general and specific, meaning that God loves all of humanity at once and he loves you as an individual person, right now, at this very moment. He created you, knows you by name, and is aware of every detail of your life, even down to the very number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:29-31). God finds you worth all of his love just as you are.

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But, a person may think, 'You don't know the things I've done.' I have degraded myself and wasted so much of my life. I am unworthy of God's love. All of my dignity is gone because I've done wicked things, hated what is good, and led others to do the same.'

Friend, remember, though you may have done undignified things, your true dignity does not come from yourself. You are dignified because you bear the image of God - your Creator.

So precious is your life to God that He is not willing for any of your sin to separate you from Him forever. Yes, God loves you and me even though we are marked with Adam's stain of sin. God is aware of every detail and still loves you personally - dearly and urgently. You cannot out-sin God's personal love for you.

Do you find this kind of love hard to imagine? How can we know for sure that God loves us in this way?
Belief in Jesus gains our release from condemnation and brings freedom from the corrupting stain of sin.

Jesus explains that God showed his love by giving "his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (v.16) Jesus wants you to know that his coming down to earth was not meant to pile on condemnation. Instead, Jesus came to receive upon himself the just punishment that our sin deserves in a way that makes us innocent before God.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church gathered in Rome to help them understand this truth better:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

Once we believe and receive "in Christ Jesus" status, the Holy Spirit supplies us with an overcoming life that empowers us to faithfully follow Jesus, frees us from the penalty of sin, and guarantees eternal life.

Believing as Jesus describes means coming to the light, "so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out by God." In other words, true love and a forever rescue come to the person who believes in Jesus alone as their personal Savior in a way that displays faithful obedience to Jesus.

This person will evidence a transformed life that leaves old ways behind and is now clearly, though not perfectly, patterned after Jesus. Jesus says this Spirit-led transformation happens in a way "that it may be clearly seen that his (or her) works have been carried out in God." v.21
God's love rescues us for a purpose.

As God lovingly sent his only Son to rescue us, Jesus sends us to our neighbors, coworkers, and friends. Giving up our lives to love others well reveals that we love him. Our actions to love all people in very tangible ways show Jesus that we are grateful for his sacrificial rescue. We know God loves us because he gave his only Son. People will know we love them when we share our one life with them. And that is what love is and does.

