

LOVE & GROWTH

*A*s a Mercy, my definition of love started out pretty simple. It was primarily about doing whatever pleased my object of affection. If you could throw in a hug or a happy memory, a warm fuzzy or two, well, that was icing on the cake. This is not to say I was opposed to sacrifice, not at all. I sacrificed a lot for people I loved. But at its core, my love was about a feeling.

Thankfully, God did not leave me there.

My journey of love has been more robust in recent years and still continues. I have tasted of the sweet and the bitter both; I have learned that it is considerably more than a warm fuzzy feeling, a hug and a helping hand. It draws me and it terrifies me at the same time.

For the last three years I have been teaching on a series called “Love and Legitimacy”. It is heavily based on Arthur Burk’s teaching called “The Seven Curses”. In my version, I talk extensively about the importance of legitimacy and the seven flavors of God’s love that are opposite the seven legitimacy lies. It is vital that we embrace these flavors of love so that we are not tossed around by the driving need for legitimacy that the lies promise to fulfill but never deliver. When we are anchored in God’s love, we become impervious to the lies. It’s a good teaching.

Alongside of the importance of being anchored in His love, I believe in the necessity of growth. If you are not growing you will never possess your birthright. You will fall short of fulfillment. You will never be all of what

God made you to be. It’s essential. In my mind, the two tracks of love and growth were equally important, but largely separate.

Then through a beloved author of mine, God showed me that I had again confined His love in too small a box. In truth, the love that anchors us is the same love that compels us into the turbulent waters of growth.

We must do our best to grasp what it really means when we accept His love. It is no small thing. It’s not simply that we will be secure and stable, though we will, but when we accept His love, we have embarked on a relentless journey of change. For I believe it is His holiness that sets the standard, but it is His love that drives us to achieve it.



Think of something you created that you fell in love with. Can you leave it alone for very long? Doesn’t it get your best attention, your energy, your resources, until you have gotten it as perfect as possible? Don’t you notice every detail and grieve over the parts that didn’t come out quite right?

Love demands growth for the simple reason that it wishes the beloved to be all the good it could possibly be. Love can exist in spite of imperfections, but it will never lose the desire to remove them. It is an expression of God that we labor over our prized creations, or invest hours in training our pet, or disciplining our children, or coaxing the flower in our spouse to bloom. Even in our imperfection, we

desire our beloved to grow and God does it so much more purely because He does not need us.

So, why does this matter?

It matters because this is a facet of God's nature that we so commonly resize for our comfort. In truth, it is a serious and awe inspiring force.

“When Christianity says that God loves man, it means that God loves man; not that He has some ‘disinterested’, because really indifferent, concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect’, is present; not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes. How this should be, I do not know: it passes reason to explain why any creatures, not to say creatures such as we should have a value so prodigious in their Creator’s eye.”*

Our Father shows Himself differently to us at different stages in our walk. There are seasons when our spirit needs to drink deeply of the refreshing waters of validation or His tenderness. I taught for three years on a love that was primarily about solving our issues of legitimacy. God, in His mercy, has shown me more, and there is still more to come. It is my challenge to you that you not limit His love to the frame you like the most. The reach of it beyond the edges of the earth is not just sheer quantity, but an expansive complexity that we can never fully grasp but will forever be enriched by trying. Every time you push yourself to look at a God who loves you in all seriousness, in a rather terrifying way, your spirit will grow and your capacity to love will grow. The love I can offer my God and the world around me is

so much richer that the paltry version I used to give, and it is now richer still for God having pushed my perspective once more. May you do the same and be blessed as you develop beauty at your core when you grapple with the mysteries of God and find Him there.

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**Excerpt from ‘The Problem of Pain’ by CS Lewis.*

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