

In my home, we always go around the dinner table and thank God for something specific in our lives. Wayside is our church home and spiritual family so I would like you to have the opportunity to thank God publicly for specific things in your life that you see as a blessing from God. I'm going to have the microphone passed so that it can be on the recording for those who worship with us on-line, so raise your hand and someone will bring the microphone to you. I'll start by saying that I am thankful for you, this church body, for those who volunteer, for those who support this ministry and the on-line ministry, and for the opportunity it gives me to serve the Lord by sharing His Word. I am so thankful to God that His grace called me to preach and teach the Word of God. Now it's your turn. What gratitude wells up within your heart?

Usher passes the microphone to the congregation. (If you are reading this on-line take a moment to thank God for a few things that are special to you.)

Did you know there is a verse that is repeated twelve times in Scripture? We have seen that repetition in Scripture is a way of emphasizing its message. The Spirit of God inspired the Word and repeated things so that we would take hold of them. Jesus stated that the Great Command is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. In fact, **the command to love the Lord is repeated ten times in Scripture** (Deuteronomy 6:5<sup>i</sup>; 11:1<sup>ii</sup>; 11:13<sup>iii</sup>; 13:3<sup>iv</sup>; 30:6<sup>v</sup>; Joshua 22:5<sup>vi</sup>; Joshua 23:11<sup>vii</sup>; Matthew 22:37<sup>viii</sup>; Mark 12:30<sup>ix</sup>; Luke 10:27<sup>x</sup>) This tells us how important it is to God that we love Him.

This command to love God is not the selfish demand of an egocentric person who craves respect and attention. Vines Hebrew dictionary tell us the word for love (*ahab*) has "the sense of having a strong emotional attachment to and desire either to possess or to be in the presence of the object."<sup>xi</sup> It is used of the emotion of a spouse toward his or her mate. This is not a one-sided demand, but one of mutual intimacy and caring. It is a command for our highest good, to find the purpose for which we were created and in which we find completion.

The New Testament uses the Greek word *agape* as an equivalent. It is used in Scripture for the love God has for Jesus (John 17:26<sup>xii</sup>), for mankind (John 3:16<sup>xiii</sup>), and particularly for those who believe on Jesus (John 14:21<sup>xiv</sup>). It is the emotion we *should* have toward one another (John 13:34<sup>xv</sup>). Perhaps most importantly, the Bible tells us it is the very nature of God (1 John 4:8<sup>xvi</sup>).

John the Beloved called himself "the one whom Jesus loved" (John 20:2<sup>xvii</sup>). He tells us that we love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19<sup>xviii</sup>). Love begets love. When you are loved by someone, sincerely and unselfishly, the natural response is to love them in return. That is why the most repeated verse in Scripture, one that even outnumbers the command to love God, is this wonderful phrase first recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:34 <sup>34</sup> *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love*

*endures forever!* It is repeated twelve times in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 5:13<sup>xix</sup>; 7:3<sup>xx</sup>; 7:6<sup>xxi</sup>; 20:21<sup>xxii</sup>; Ezra 3:11<sup>xxiii</sup>; Psalm 100:5<sup>xxiv</sup>; 106:1<sup>xxv</sup>; 107:1<sup>xxvi</sup>; 118:1<sup>xxvii</sup>; 118:29<sup>xxviii</sup>; 136:1<sup>xxix</sup>; Jeremiah 33:11<sup>xxx</sup>)! In this verse, we are told that God's love for us is forever. The Bible declares this truth even more times than it commands us to love God. There are many more verses in the Old Testament that speak of God's goodness and love, but these twelve are almost an exact repetition of the verse in 1 Chronicles. It appears that this was the national anthem of Israel. **All twelve verses tell us to give thanks to the LORD for the glorious attribute of steadfast love.** Ten of the twelve include goodness as an additional attribute for which we should give thanks. This wonderful attribute of steadfast love (*hesed*) is mentioned 125 times in Psalms alone.

Therefore, let us gratefully acknowledge the steadfast love of God this morning. Many of you already have mentioned how God has displayed that love in your lives. There are so many displays of God's love that we often overlook them. In the sermon two weeks ago we read of Paul preaching on Mars Hill. He told his audience that God did not leave us without evidence of His love for us. *<sup>25b</sup> he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.* Acts 17:25b God chose to create us as beings who could receive and give love. Paul went on to explain that God put us where we live in the time we live so that we might seek after Him and find Him. He is not far from each person who ever lived (Acts 17:26-27<sup>xxxi</sup>). God desires a relationship with every one of us.

How often have you thanked God for your very being and for the fact that He made us capable of love? He gives us breath. We have just the right atmosphere. Through science we can now appreciate the extent to which God designed this planet to have variety and yet not have the uninhabitable extremes that we see in the planets we can observe. Living among these beautiful red cliffs, we should be especially thankful. The beauty of God's creation and colors surround us every day. We can enjoy breathtaking sunsets, glorious monsoons with their lightening bolts, wild creatures like fox and elk, magnificent pines just north of us, the brilliant cactus flower colors, and on and on.

Paul summed it up in saying God gave us everything! As James declared, *"Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of heavenly lights in who whom is no variableness or shadow of turning"* (James 1:14). Every good gift comes from our unchanging God. In stating that, James added another thing for which we can be grateful. God doesn't change. His goodness and love are declared to be forever. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases as those twelve verses declare. We won't wake up one day and find He has changed His mind about loving us.

It was interesting to me that the New Testament did not have the same phrase of giving thanks for God's goodness and enduring steadfast love. Then it dawned on me that the whole New Testament is God's demonstration of that goodness and love expressed in Jesus. He declared that to see Him was to see the Father (John 14:9<sup>xxxii</sup>). So, in seeing Jesus, we should see the goodness and steadfast love of God.

O give thanks to the Lord for the demonstration of God's goodness and steadfast love revealed in a way we can understand them in the life of Jesus! Jesus explained it like this: *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13<sup>xxxiii</sup>). Jesus made it unmistakably clear that He was showing the love of God for us in the way He would give His life to ransom us from eternal death (Matthew 20:28<sup>xxxiv</sup>). He even referred to us as friends!

In the Old Testament Abraham was called a friend of God. He is the father of faith. We who come to Christ by faith then are also considered friends of God (John 15:15<sup>xxxv</sup>). It is hard to grasp the wonder of that. If you were a friend of a president or king of a country, imagine the doors it would open for you. Well, **in Christ you are a friend of the King of all creation. He has opened the most wonderful doors of all, the doors of love and fellowship with Him.** He opened the door into the Most Holy place and invites us to come and spend time with Him there (Revelation 3:20<sup>xxxvi</sup>).

When Jesus healed the multitudes, fed the masses, and rebuked the religious leaders who were oppressing the worshipers, He was demonstrating the love of the Father for us. When He demonstrated patience with His disciples' desire for position and prestige, He was showing us what steadfast love and goodness of God look like. Thank God that He has the same patience with us!

When my family goes around the Thanksgiving table and declares what they are thankful for, the most common first expression is simply "Jesus." <sup>19</sup> *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* Colossians 1:19-20 To be free of guilt and at peace with God is the freest a soul could ever be. We should have no fear of death or what may come tomorrow, for God is on the throne of heaven and He is good and He loves each of us personally, not just as one of mankind or a part of the bride of Christ. He knows everything about you and every thought you think and deed you've done, yet if you are in Christ you are eternally loved.

That steadfast love of God is also demonstrated in His promises of things to come. <sup>9</sup> *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"*— 1 Corinthians 2:9 But we do know a few wonderful facts from Scripture about what is to come, even if we can't imagine how wonderful it will be. Death will be swallowed up by victory. The trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will rise first and then we who are alive and remain will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. We are supposed to comfort one another with these words, for our loved ones in Christ who have gone before us will be there to meet us (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). Now there is something for which to give thanks!

What happens then is something for which I am so grateful even now just knowing that day will come. We will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52<sup>xxxvii</sup>). This mortal body will put

on immortality. Our carnal nature will not rise with us. Temptations will be gone forever. Our focus will be Christ and His love forever and nothing will get in the way of that. We will be like Him for we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2<sup>xxxviii</sup>). Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the Philippians. *<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* Philippians 3:20-21 O glorious day!

Consider the fact that every bit of suffering and pain in this fallen world stems from sin, which is rebellion against God. Now imagine a place where there is no sin, and therefore there is no more suffering and pain, no heartache or loss. Every tear will be wiped from our eyes. That implies we will never look back but only forward to eternity in the presence of our Savior, ecstatic with His love, and ever in perfect peace. I'm grateful that this is my eternal destiny in Christ. Aren't you?

But now let me end where I began. I'm grateful for you. We have the privilege of watching one another grow in Christ. Even when personalities grate on one another we can know God is shaping us to fit together as living stones into the eternal temple of the living God. And when we struggle with loving a brother or sister in Christ, we need to think of how much work God has yet to do in us to make us like the Son. Then think of what God is doing in that person and what the finished person will be like, in the very likeness of Jesus with every fruit of the Spirit abounding. Think of what it will be like to live surrounded by people who express nothing but love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23<sup>xxxix</sup>).

That is what we should be like now, but we all know we are works in progress. That does not excuse us, but it should help us be patient and forgiving with others. I am saying this to say I'm thankful Jesus has promised to finish the work He started in us (Philippians 1:6<sup>xl</sup>). I'm thankful for the love, compassion and caring that we share for each other and for the body of Christ around the world, but I'm really looking forward to that day when the work in us is completed.

The culmination of these two most frequently repeated verses to love God and His love for us is the wedding of all weddings. Someone recently asked me where the woman was in the Trinity? After all, both male and female were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27<sup>xli</sup>). The Holy Spirit is described with some attributes like comfort that we would call feminine, but the pronoun used for Him is masculine. Some Catholics want Mary to be the feminine part of the godhead. But the Biblical answer to where is the woman in heaven is that she is the bride of Christ, the church.

John describes it in the Revelation. *<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*

*"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

Revelation 21:1-4

That is our future because of the goodness and steadfast love of God evidenced in Jesus. The wedding of all weddings awaits us who are the bride of Christ. It is not wishful thinking. It is the theme of the Bible for almost 6000 years! Every detail predicted to this point has come to pass. By faith we are assured that the rest will also. Bride of Christ, church of God, called out ones, we should be the most grateful and gracious of all people.

There is a brief description of our marriage to Jesus in Revelation. <sup>6</sup> *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; <sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."* Revelation 19:6-9 When we realize these truths, we should overflow with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8-9<sup>xliii</sup>). May you and your family have a blessed Thanksgiving! Let us close by standing and singing once again Forever.

#### Questions

- 1 Why are things repeated in Scripture?
- 2 What command is repeated ten times?
- 3 What is the implication of the Hebrew word for love?
- 4 What is the most repeated verse in the Bible?
- 5 What are some of the ways we observe God's love?
- 6 How is God's eternal love expressed in the New Testament?
- 7 How do we see it expressed in the gospels?
- 8 How will we see it in the future?
- 9 How does that future help us relate to one another now?
- 10 What is the culmination of these two most frequently repeated verses?

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#### <sup>i</sup> **Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

#### <sup>ii</sup> **Deuteronomy 11:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.

#### <sup>iii</sup> **Deuteronomy 11:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> "And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

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iv **Deuteronomy 13:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

v **Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

vi **Joshua 22:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."

vii **Joshua 23:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.

viii **Matthew 22:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

ix **Mark 12:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

x **Luke 10:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

<sup>xi</sup> Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

xii **John 17:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

xiii **John 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

xiv **John 14:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

xv **John 13:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

xvi **1 John 4:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

xvii **John 20:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

xviii **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us.

xix **2 Chronicles 5:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud,

xx **2 Chronicles 7:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

xxi **2 Chronicles 7:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> The priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the LORD that King David had made for giving thanks to the LORD—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry; opposite them the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood.

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<sup>xxii</sup> **2 Chronicles 20:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever."

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Ezra 3:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Psalms 100:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Psalms 106:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Psalms 107:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Psalms 118:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Psalms 118:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>xxix</sup> **Psalms 136:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Jeremiah 33:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD: "'Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!' For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Acts 17:26-27 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

<sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

<sup>xxxii</sup> **John 14:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **John 15:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

<sup>xxxv</sup> **John 15:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **Revelation 3:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:52 (ESV)**

<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

<sup>xxxix</sup> **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

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<sup>xi</sup> **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

<sup>xii</sup> **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Peter 1:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

<sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.