



Laura Urista

Love Is...

Remember the *Love Is...* cartoons from the 1970s? They featured a cute, young newlywed couple learning about the ups and downs of marriage, with a short motto or lesson about love. I saw one of these recently and it made me reflect on how much we humans want to know what love is. Many of us spend a lifetime looking for love in all the wrong places but never finding it. But there's no need to despair—we've been given a detailed description of what to look for!

God's Love Is...

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

In this passage, Paul shares 15

characteristics or descriptions of what God's love looks like in action. These descriptions aren't meant to be a checklist of what God requires us to do to earn his love, but rather, descriptions of God's perfect love in practice. The life and love of Christ-in-us fills and empowers us with love for God and love for others—fulfilling what Jesus calls “the great commandment” (Matt. 22:7-39).

It seems to me that the “fruit of the Spirit” described in Galatians looks a lot like these 15 characteristics of God's love:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

Have you ever heard of an orange tree producing apples because it tried **really hard**? Have you heard of a grape vine producing bananas because it **pretended** to? Similarly, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is

spiritual and cannot be produced by human effort. We can't work up God's perfect love by trying really hard or pretending—in other words, by faking it. But we have access to God's perfect love as we allow Christ to share his fruit of the Holy Spirit through us.

Remaining in the Vine

In John 15:5, Jesus says, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*”

How do we remain in the vine, or put simply, maintain a close relationship with Christ? It is simple, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is easy! We remain in the Vine (Christ) by spending time talking with God. Prayer needn't be formal or fancy. The example Christ gave us in the Lord's Prayer is a wonderful outline to help guide us in prayer, but it is not a rigid structure we must follow so that God can hear us.

God hears even our silent prayers, and in fact sometimes those are the most heartfelt! He knows our deepest feelings, those we can't find words to express.

Do you have a special person in your life—a spouse, family member or best friend you can't wait to talk to? Do you deeply miss talking with them when you aren't able to be together for a while? That's how God feels about us, and he wants to spend time talking with us often.

If you feel awkward about praying, or don't know what to say, here is something that has helped me. **Just breathe.** Inhale

deeply then exhale slowly—and as you breathe *in* think **Lord live in me**. Ask Christ to live in you, ask him to share his very nature of love with you. As you breathe *out*, think **Lord love through me**.

Ask God to help you allow his love to flow out through you to others. This doesn't mean you have to beg or plead, because he already wants to share his love with each of us and help us share his loving nature. When the great commandment (loving God and loving others) is our focus and top

priority, all other concerns of life just seem to fall into place.

Listen as the Holy Spirit draws you into a deeper relationship with Father Abba and Jesus. Many people find it helpful to keep a journal or diary to write down their thoughts and feelings as they pray and meditate.

When I faced difficult times as a teenager, my sister suggested that I write out my prayers as letters to God. That helped me focus my thoughts and begin to see God as a close friend, giving

me a sense of comfort and peace.

God's love is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and Christ-followers allow him to **live in us and love through us**.

We can serve as conduits or channels through whom Christ's love flows, like aqueducts for his living water.

"Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them" (John 3:38). □

Laura Urista enjoys helping others learn more about God's love.

"I'm still a rookie second officer but even I know it's not supposed to happen like this."

The captain called "Before Landing Check."

That's normal. The first officer and I moved the appropriate switches, levers and buttons, and chanted the usual incantations. That's normal. The trusty old Boeing 727 responded with its arcane dialect of flashing lights and flickering needles. That's normal. And the all-important landing gear panel is now showing three green lights assuring us that they wheels are locked down. That's normal. But the landing gear control panel is also glowering at us with a trio of red lights, telling us that the green lights are not to be trusted.

"That's not normal."



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