

# Amazing Love: Introduction

This is the first of 3 lessons on one of the most fundamental truths about God's nature, that God is a God of love. It is one of the most often repeated truths about God. In fact if you were to ask people to describe God in one word, the response you would most likely receive is -- love.

And you know what? They'd be right! God is love! In fact, God's love is a key attribute, a critical aspect of his nature. All through Scripture God is described as a God of love. Way back in Exodus 34:6-7, God describes himself as, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

The Psalms celebrate God's love in song. Psalm 86:5, 15 says, "You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you . . . a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." Psalm 108:3-4 carries the same theme, "I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies."

All of God's saving acts are rooted in his love. His love for mankind is the prime motivating force behind the great redemption provided in the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. For God so - what - the world? **Loved** (John 3:16). Love is such an intrinsic part of his nature that the Apostle John can say in 1 John 4:7-10:

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

So God is love, but what does that mean? What is the nature of his love? How is it expressed to us? In this series on the amazing love of God, we will see 3 different aspects of his love: Love that Redeems, Love that is Unconditional, and Love that is Unexpected. We'll take the last first, working from Luke 15:11-32, the Unexpected Love of God.

## ***Unexpected Love: The Prodigal Son***

The parable of the Prodigal Son of Luke 15:11-32 is actually more of a story about the father than it is the Prodigal. It is arguably the best known of Jesus' parables. It is a powerful but simple story that puts the love of a father between his two grown sons. Grab a Bible and read it through in its entirety.

It divides into 3 sections, one for each character. The first section (v11-20a) showcases the evil, destructive behavior of the Prodigal. The second section (v20b-24) focuses on the Father's reaction to the return of his son. The last section (v25-32) shows the reaction of the Older

Brother, not to the Prodigal's return, but to his *father's reaction* to the Prodigal's return. But the whole story reveals a love that is **absolutely unexpected**, that keeps doing things that take you by surprise. It shows a father who loves his two sons so much that he would do anything to win them.

### ***Unexpected Answer***

We see this unexpected love first in v12 in answer to an **Unexpected Request**: "and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.'" Some say he is wishing his father would die, but that is giving him too much credit. That would imply thought, consideration. There is nothing in this young man's head except himself. He doesn't care how, just wants to be cashed out. He is arrogant, self-centered. But the request is not nearly as surprising as the answer.

**Unexpected Response, v12b**: "And he divided his wealth between them." As a father myself, this **is** unexpected! What would you have said? If one of my two teenagers came to me asking for their share of the Schoap Empire, do you know what I would say? As a wise man has said, "I brought you into this world and I can take you out!" What did the son expect? A knock-down, drag-out fight? Maybe. But the father offers no comment, he just **does it**. Divides his estate, 2/3 to older, 1/3 to younger. Why? Maybe he knows his son, even knows what he is about to do, and knows he is powerless to stop? Sometimes a father has to let go, even to let a grown son inflict some pain. That doesn't mean he stops loving him.

**v13-20a**. Right away, probably as quick as he could manage, he gathered what his father gave him and abandoned the family to work without him, and went "far" away, probably far enough to feel free of whatever shackles he thought home held. Once there, he let loose. "Squandered" in wild living: reckless, godless, immoral, impulsive, sensual, destructive. Whatever he felt like, he did. But not for very long. It wouldn't have taken long to blow it all.

He'd held nothing back, had no reserves. He had spent so much, so stupidly, that when times got hard he couldn't even feed himself, let alone live high. This was no regular famine, it was **severe**. Food is scarce, so prices high. Jobs are scarce, so pay low. He is destitute, physically needy, hungry, alone, without shelter, food, friends. What can he do expect take whatever job comes along?

So he hired himself out as a swineherd. How much lower could he have fallen in Jewish eyes? What's worse, the pigs were better off than he was! At least they had food. At least they had him giving them something.

So he is desperate, utterly bankrupt, physically, spiritually alone and without resource, no one in world who cares, and he finally comes to the end of himself. His senses awake to reality. He realizes what he left, **and** what he could return to. With that realization comes an awareness of his evil and a desire to repent, to humble himself. Not to regain former position as beloved son, but simply to serve in order to be fed. He figures out his speech in advance to get it right, and returns to his father. What is he expecting? A gruff "I told you so?" A grudging "Sweep out the stables?"

But when we see the father in v20, Jesus shows his love taking another **unexpected turn**: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him."

### ***Unexpected Welcome - v20***

Did the father know he was coming? Had he heard about his son's problems? Was it just a coincidence he saw him from afar, was he out getting newspaper and, boom!, there he was? No, it was no accident the father spotted him, and he didn't know he'd be coming. He'd been looking for him **everyday**. His was a **Patient Love**. He'd been hoping, praying, waiting for his return. That same patient love that kept him waiting, looking, now overflowed in **Compassionate Love**. He sees his son coming at last, and he is overwhelmed with compassion for him. If we saw him as father did we'd understand: he must have been filthy, ragged, and smelly. Hardly the same self-confident man who left.

His compassionate love literally **drove** him down road in an undignified sprint. This was unheard of in Jesus' culture. The father was the Patriarch, the epitome of dignity, respect, distinction, and honor. His children may run to him, but never the other way around. But not this father - he hikes up his robe and **runs** to his son. His is an **Eager Love**. He is **eager** to be with him again. "embraced . . . kissed." He grabs him in a bear hug, kissing him over & over.

**v21-23** - The son begins his speech, but only gets half way through it. The father is so eager to forgive that he interrupts with his forgiveness. You see, the father had forgiven him already. He was only waiting for the son to come back and receive his forgiveness. He doesn't need to hear any more, doesn't need a "You were right, Dad." There is a real sense of urgency to the father's **Forgiving Love**. It is as though he can't wait to restore him. He forgives him **instantly**. He calls his servants to **quickly** bring the best robe, ring, sandals. These symbols of position are meant to restore him to his place as an honored son. And all that stuff about being a servant in his father's house? Hogwash! Time to be merry!

The calf that was being fattened for sacrifice is to be the main dish at a party instead – this is a **Rejoicing Love!** All because this son, who caused so much grief, has come back – v24: "for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found." And they rejoiced, celebrated, partied! And the son who came back, after looking for love in all the wrong places, of who knows how many empty, temporary encounters, finds real joy with his father.

But the story doesn't end there. The Prodigal is not the only son this father has. There is the Older Brother. And this man turns out to be every bit as arrogant, self-centered, self-indulgent as the Prodigal. Just not as obvious.

**v25-28**. Where is he? Right where you'd think he should be, working in the field. Except, why is he not at the party? Coming in from work, he hears the music and dancing and summons a servant to find out what's going on. Why not go in to see for himself? Why not ask the father instead of servants? He is **distant**. Maybe the Prodigal isn't the only son who has run from his father.

The concise answer from servant in v27 burns him up. He is **angry** at his brother's return, angry at the killing of the calf, angry over the party. But maybe most of all he is angry at the father's acceptance. Because of his anger he stubbornly stays out of the house. What did he expect? Cold shoulder from the father? A chance to sit out and nurse his bitterness? To feel superior at the old man's foolishness?

### ***Unexpected Tenderness***

But just like he ran down the road, the father does the **unexpected** - he goes to his son and entreats, pleads with him to come in. Here is the patriarch, begging one grown son to forgive and accept the other. His love for both his boys is so strong that there is no dignity he will not lay down for them. But his pleading has no impact. The older son is **Disrespectful, v29**: "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look!'" Compare that answer to the prodigal's greeting in v21, "Father, I have sinned . . .". That's not how a respectful son treats his father. He is **Self-righteous**: he claims perfect obedience - "I have never neglected a command of yours." And he is **Accusing, v30**: he accuses father of being negligent and cheap. It wasn't true - after all, the father had divided up his entire estate in v12. The Older Son is totally self-absorbed, seeing only what he wants to see. He further accuses his father of being unfair - of showering love on an unworthy son who wasted his money on prostitutes. And do you know what? He was right? It was true.

But who did the Prodigal sin against? Against the father, not the son. He has no standing for his complaint. The reality is he can't stand the father's love and forgiveness toward one he doesn't feel has earned it. In essence, he's saying, "What is the point of my being 'good' if you are just going to go and forgive this sinner?" His problem isn't with his brother, it's with his father!

What kind of response would the son expect? What would you? Probably the back of his hand, or an angry, "How dare you speak that way to me!" But look at the father's response in v31: "And he said to him, '**My child**, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.'" The father still has a **Tender Love**, even in the face of great disrespect. He recognizes his service & position, despite his attitude. At the same time, he is clear that the son already has his share of the estate, and has had the father with him all along, so why begrudge the family this joy? He repeats the refrain of v24 'But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

The love of this father for his boys is totally unexpected. That he should give over his estate, that he should sprint down the road to greet his son, that he should go out to plead with the other son to come in, are all aspects of a love that is just plain surprising in its depth. This father's love is amazing. It is a patient love that waits, hopes. Love that is merciful, that hurts for sons. Love that is eager, anxious, itching to show itself. Love that forgives quickly, fully, completely. Love that rejoices in turning from sin to salvation. A tender love.

And it is a perfect picture of God's love as our father. His love shows itself in unexpected ways, too. Like the Prodigal, we too were dead and lost. Eph. 2:1 says "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

And we were worse to our father than the prodigal was to his. Even in our deadness, even when we had not returned to our senses as the Prodigal did, even when we were still sunk in our sin, the patient, eager, merciful, forgiving, unexpected love of God reached out to us in his Son. Eph. 2:4-6: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus."

God is love, and his love for you and I is an amazing thing. It is a patient love that waits, hopes. A love that is merciful, that hurts for you. A love that is eager, anxious, itching to show itself. A love that forgives quickly, fully, completely. A love that rejoices in turning from sin to salvation. A tender love. There is **no righteous work we could ever do to earn that love**. It is there for us even before we seek it. It is showered on us as we accept it. Eph. 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

If you have never returned to the Father in the first place, never accepted his amazing love through his Son, you need to do that now. Romans 10:9-10 calls on all to confess him as Lord and accept his payment for their sins on the cross. If you have never accepted his amazing love, the following brief prayer is a simple model to follow.

*I confess that I am a sinner in need of your forgiveness. I accept Jesus' death on the cross as payment for my sin. I believe that he paid my debt, and that you raised him from the dead. I accept Jesus Christ now as my lord and savior. Thank you for showing such amazing love to me.*

### **Unconditional Love: Hosea 1-3**

One could certainly say that the love we will look at in this lesson is unexpected. But it is more than that. Unexpected is not strong enough to convey the example of God's love we will see today. It is **unconditional**. What we say that something is "unconditional" we mean that it is not dependent on any conditions. It exists no matter what the conditions are. I can illustrate it better by relating it to common experience. If you work for someone, you have some conditions of employment. Some of those conditions of employment might be that you show up to work on time, you actually work, and you don't cheat, lie, or steal in the process. Break those conditions, and guess what? You're out of a job! Jobs are conditional.

Conditions define and limit relationships. Something that is conditional is limited, like your boss's patience. Something w/o conditions has nothing that fences or limits it. It is absolute. It stands by itself. God's love is not conditional. It is infinite. It is far beyond **any** human love whatsoever - Romans 8:38-39 says nothing will separate us from God's love. It is beyond death, beyond life, more powerful than angels or demons, outlasting the present and the future, stronger than any powers, above any height, deeper than any depth, greater than anything in all creation, is the love of God.

Eph. 3:18-19 says that the love of Christ is wider and longer and higher and deeper than we can understand. We can comprehend it in the sense of knowing that it is beyond us, but it surpasses our knowledge, we can't know it in its fullness - can't unscrew the unscrutable.

This lesson, in a very small way, barely registering on the Richter scale of understanding, will try to peel back a little bit of the mystery to reveal the wonder, the incredible riches of God's love for you and I. One thing we will see is that unconditional love pursues relentlessly, without limits. Anything that is pursued relentlessly, pursued without condition, takes patience, sense of determination & fixed purpose. It means that you go after it no matter what, how hard it is, or how little the reward may be.

Last year our family drove out to the Dallas Theological Seminary graduation to mark the end of 5 years of Saturdays and early mornings. Once there we had to pick up my mother at the DFW airport, flying in from San Diego. DFW is like a lot of airports, drive on an access road between the terminal/baggage claim areas on the right and a big, multi-story parking garage on the left.

We're driving to the terminal, passing other terminals along the way, and Jonathan and Sarah notice all these little carts everywhere - on the sidewalk, against the terminal, in the walkways from the garage. The little carts you rent for \$1.50 to help you lug your bags. They ask me what all those carts are doing there, and I tell them about them. Then, without much thinking about it, I tell them that when you return the cart where you got it, you get some of your money back - 25, 50 cents, whatever it is. And you could almost hear the light bulb switch on over their little heads.

They were so excited about all the money they were going to make that they couldn't wait to get to the terminal. Forget about Grandma, get the carts! And so we finally arrive at the right terminal and park. Only guess what? No carts! They were all way back at the other terminal where all the lazy people fly. Our terminal is the one everybody makes sure they get their 25 cents back. So no carts. They are crestfallen. Being a good dad, I try to keep their spirits up by telling them to look around in the parking structure. Big mistake.

In the blink of an eye, Jonathan is gone. I mean, just gone! Sarah is kind of looking around here and there, this side of the structure, not really seeing much. Mildly disappointed, but no big deal. We call for Jonathan. Total silence. We call again, hands cupped at the mouth, full diaphragm, the whole works. Nothing.

And then, very faintly, far distant, we hear a sound. Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. We strain to make it out. What is it that? Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. Seems to be coming from the stairwell in the center of the garage. We go over, and it's much louder here. We think, there is no way that could be Jonathan way down there. He didn't have time! What could he be doing? Sarah runs down to see, we yell down and sure enough. Jonathan is 5 floors down with the one and only baggage cart in the place, dragging it upstairs. Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. Big grin on his face, thinking of all he can do with 25 cents in the DFW airport. This boy has determination. This boy does not give up! He is relentless.

And that same dogged determination characterizes God's love for us. It doesn't matter where we are, how hard to reach, what we do, or that we are only worth 25 cents. God is absolutely relentless in his determination, because he has chosen to love us!

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Moses says

God loves Israel. Why? Because they were so good? So big? So good-looking? No, v7: "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you . . ." Why? "because the Lord loved you"

He loved them because he chose to, that's all! And when he chose to love them, what did his love depend upon? Did it depend on their obedience? on their faithfulness? on their holiness? No, his love for them was by his own sovereign choice. It depended on no conditions. What did it depend on? Only on himself. In all his infinite faithfulness, forgiveness, and mercy, his continues apart from conditions, because it is God's love. Unconditional love is infinite love.

The Bible says a lot about unconditional love, but one of the best illustrations I know is in the book of Hosea. Hosea gives new meaning to the phrase "unconditional love!"

Being a prophet was a tough job. Not only did it typically mean a life of unpopularity among your people as you railed away at their sin and spoke of coming judgment, but sometimes God asked his prophets to take extreme measures to illustrate their message.

- Did you know that the Lord told Isaiah to go barefoot and naked for 3 years? It was a sign against Egypt and Ethiopia that they would go naked into captivity in Assyria. Isaiah 20:2-3
- Jeremiah 13, prophet told to take waist-cloth, loincloth, underwear. Wear, don't wash, then stuff under a rock many days. When retrieved, no surprise it was gross, nasty, completely ruined. An example of Judah's worthlessness, like nasty, unwashed, filthy, vile piece of old underwear.

I don't know about you but both of those conjure visions I can do without. I'm glad God doesn't speak thru prophets anymore!

Hosea lived and prophesied primarily in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, some 200 years after Solomon's death. He ministered for 40+ years, spanning the reigns of the last 6 kings of Israel. He was there at the very end, when Israel was invaded, and carried away to captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC. 40 years before that ending, at the very beginning of Hosea's ministry, it would have been impossible to believe that in a few short years Israel would cease to exist. Jeroboam II was on the throne, an evil man but a strong ruler, restoring Israel's fortunes and Northern borders almost to what they were during David and Solomon's reign (2 Kings 14:25). Politically, militarily, and economically he had brought Israel back from the brink.

For most of Jeroboam II's reign, the superpower of the day, Assyria, was in a slump and not actively pursuing conquests. With freedom from war he literally rebuilt Israel so that it was a place of abundance (Hosea 8:14; Amos 3:15). Economic prosperity brought no spiritual well-being, however. If anything Israel committed even greater evil. The weak, the needy, and the poor were oppressed, Baal was worshipped and temple prostitution flourished, Israel was absolutely depraved. And do you know what was to blame for their depravity? Chapter 4 says it was the priests of Yahweh!

So Israel has absolutely and completely abandoned Yahweh for Baal, and has prostituted itself, men and women, to worship the false god. What does God do? Does he bring down fire and finish them off once and for all, and start over with another nation? No, he loves Israel. Oh, he is angry at their sin, and his holiness is offended at their spiritual adultery. But it doesn't change his love for Israel because he *chose* to love them, and his love is *infinite*. Instead, he will give them an illustration they will never forget!

**Picture of Adultery, 1:1-9.** The first 3 chapters of Hosea present alternating pictures of adultery and promises of restoration. Hosea's entire life becomes an illustration of God's unconditional love. Truthfully, I think Isaiah and Jeremiah had it easy compared to Hosea. At the very beginning of Hosea's ministry, when God first began to speak thru him, he gave the prophet an assignment that is absolutely unimaginable to me:

- Hosea 1:2-3 "When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.' So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son."

A question I have been asked several times is, "How can I know who God wants me to marry?" Significant question, real concern. If there's one area of your life you don't want to mess up, it's in choosing a mate. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God told you exactly who to marry? Put a big old red heart on their foreheads so you could recognize them easily? Who could you trust more than God to make the perfect choice for you?

Given that, can you imagine Hosea's gut reaction? "You want me to marry a *what*?" Gomer must have seemed an unusual choice at best. In fact, it skirted the edges of the law, which forbade priests from marrying prostitutes (Leviticus 21:7). Hosea was not a priest, but still, this man of God must have felt there was something really unsavory taking a prostitute for his wife. Even though Hosea knew that his marriage was an illustration of Israel's adultery, it stands to reason that he would be wondering what was going on. Her name alone must have made it tough! A rose by any other name may still smell as sweet, but had Shakespeare ever heard of Gomer?

*Why would God ever tell one of his prophets to do this? Marry a prostitute?* Israel's spiritual adultery has reached its peak, and God will illustrate the depth of their depravity and the anguish their depravity causes him by this incredible difficult life assignment.

If you are married, think about the qualities you cherish most about your husband or wife. Is it their kindness? Tender affection for you? Constant care for yourself and your kids? Spiritual

depth? It might be any of these and more besides. Hosea must have dreamed of a companion that was all those things. What dreams did Hosea give up? He would have had an expectation of a loving family, a pleasant refuge amidst the difficulty of his calling. Well, now he can forget about it.

If Gomer was a temple prostitute to Baal, as many believe, then going in to her must certainly have seemed compromising his relationship to the Lord, like joining himself to Baal. How would we react today if one of our single men told us that God had told them to marry a prostitute and they were headed downtown to check one out?

Now, it's possible that Gomer was not a prostitute at the time of their marriage, but that she would become one later. That would fit the picture of Israel as a chaste bride when she came from Egypt. But that is small comfort! And I think that the sense of the text in 1:2, "take a wife and children ""of harlotry"" indicate that Gomer probably was a prostitute at the time of marriage.

What was the married life of Hosea and Gomer like? Was she at home, or was she in the Baal temples, or was she walking the streets? There are three children, starting in 1:3, but only the first one is specifically said to be Hosea's. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, v6 & 8, say nothing about the father. Maybe he was, maybe not. Think of the pain the man endured, and not for a short time. This obviously took place over a number of years.

And the names of these children! Jezreel, v4 - God has scattered, to signify upcoming judgment. But that's not bad compared to what his little sister and brother got saddled with. Lo-Ruhamah, v6 - not loved. Ouch! Imagine calling your little girl something like "Hated!?" And Lo-Ammi, v9 - not my people. Ouch again! Scattered, Not Loved and Not Mine.

Imagine carrying those names for life! They are just babies, innocent. Yet because they share in Hosea's life, they share in God's unique plan for their family. God told Hosea the reason for the children's strange names, have to wonder, what was Gomer's reaction to them? This is obviously a severe lesson, one that is going to take all the facets of Hosea's life to illustrate. Pain in Hosea's family is illustration of God's pain over the unfaithfulness of his lovely bride Israel.

**Promise of Restoration, 1:10-2:1.** So the life lesson is very hard for Hosea and his whole family. The reality of Israel's evil is right there among them in the person of Gomer. But along with that pain there is the promise of restoration from the very beginning. Starting in 1:10, God says there is coming a day when he will reverse each judgment these children's names convey:

- 1:10 - The people who were called not my people will be sons of the living God
- 1:11 - Israel who had been scattered will be reunited
- 2:1 - The people who were "not my people" and "not loved" will be "my people" and "loved."

**Picture of Adultery II, 2:2-13.** I wonder if Hosea's family could picture that restoration? Could Israel? How would it happen, especially in the light of Hosea's message? Because it's a harsh message for a harsh reality. Israel is condemned as a spiritual prostitute in 2:2-5.

- v2 "Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts."
- v4-5 "I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'"

Israel is so lost they think their needs are provided by Baal. Because of Israel's adultery, God is going to take action to frustrate her lust, 2:6-7a.

- "Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them.

Because of Israel's adultery, God is going to expose her, 2:9-10.

- "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands.

**Promise of Restoration II, 2:14-23.** These charges read like a certificate of divorce. God says the time is coming when Israel the Prostitute will be frustrated, exposed, and scattered. And it would happen soon, although Israel couldn't imagine such a thing. But there is a real message of hope to go along with Hosea's message of judgment. Not hope that judgment will be averted, but that God would not give up his bride, prostitute though she was.

What did the Lord plan to do to win Israel back to himself? This is the amazing part - he would pursue her (2:14-15):

- "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."

Israel will call Yahweh husband again, not master (2:16). There will be no idolatry, no judgment or war (2:17-18). There will be a new relationship between the Lord and Israel (2:19-23)

- I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD. "In that day I will respond," declares the LORD -- "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond

to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel [Israel]. I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

**Picture of Restoration, 3:1-5.** God's unconditional love is relentless. It is a beautiful promise of restoration. But it is still future tense. The present reality of Hosea's life was the unfaithfulness of Israel, all too vividly brought home in the unfaithfulness of his wife. Sometime after the children were born, Gomer took off, abandoning the family. And at some point, most likely years later, God tells Hosea in 3:1, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

If loving Gomer wasn't easy in the first place, it must be nigh on to impossible now. She is at rock bottom, because Hosea finds her on auction block at the slave market in 3:2. When she left the family she must have descended even further into prostitution. Chapter 2 possibly pictures that in figurative language about Israel. Pursuing other lovers madly, frustrated in all her encounters, handed from man to man for years, until she is all used up. After years of selling herself she is totally without physical appeal, good only for menial labor, she is sold at auction.

And where is Hosea all this time? Taking care of the kids, preaching, Maybe he'd kept tabs on Gomer over the years. If his marriage was a true picture of God's unconditional love, he would never have stopped loving or being concerned for her. He would follow her and pursue her to the bitter end, even to the auction block in the slave market!

And so he either hears that Gomer is being sold, or in God's providence he is out in the marketplace and sees her on the block. She is haggard, old before her time, without redeeming qualities in any other man's eyes. He pushes to the front, out bids any others, and buys the wife who has so abused him back from slavery. Such a beautiful picture of God's love and the future restoration of Israel as he restores her as his wife in v3: "Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you." He is saying that they are to live happily ever after. Did they? If it is the complete picture of God's restoration of Israel, they certainly did.

Hosea and Gomer present a compelling picture of unconditional, redeeming, restoring love. Above all, theirs is an amazing story of God's relentless, unconditional love for his adulterous and faithless people.

This is a hard story for us to grasp, because any of us would struggle to love in the face of continual unfaithfulness. That is because we can't love infinitely. We don't have it within ourselves to love unconditionally. Only God does. We think, "How could he love so much?" Every one of us has our own heart of prostitution, and we can only wonder at God's remarkable love for us.

But God can and does love unconditionally, because he loves based on *his* choice. He is God. The infinite, almighty Lord of the Universe has chosen to love us, not the other way around:

- 1 John 4:10 - "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
- 1John 4:19 - "We love, because He first loved us."
- John 15:16 - "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit . . ."
- Romans 9:15-16 - "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

God's unconditional love does not depend on man's desire or effort. It only depends on himself.

- *What if I don't believe?* He still loves you, but his love won't stand in the way of his holiness and righteousness. You must put your trust in him. Just as he loved Israel all the way to Assyria, He will love you all the way to Hell.
- *What if I am a Christian, but I continually "betray" God in sin?* There is no evil you can commit to make him stop loving you. His love is unconditional. His forgiveness is always available. But you can cause him pain and yourself much lost blessing and opportunity.
- *What if someone I love very much is a Gomer to me?* Do you give your love with conditions? Or do you love without limits? Ask God to restore a godly love to the one who has hurt you.

And so Hosea is a beautiful illustration of God's unconditional love. But there is one better. God gave his love its absolutely fullest expression in his Son - Hebrews 1:1-3 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

No more need for prophet's pictures. The infinite love of God is fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15)

### ***Redeeming Love: The Book of Ruth***

As we've looked at God's amazing love over the last few weeks, we've seen in the Parable of the Prodigal Son that his love is unexpected. It is given without regard to dignity or place, and it overlooks sin and mistreatment. We've also seen from Hosea that God's love is unconditional, without limits. It is infinite, unbounded by terms and conditions. Today we will finish by looking at redeeming love, love without concern for the cost, that subjects itself to great loss for the sake of another. Redeeming love is the heart of the book of Ruth.

Ruth is a powerful story, one that has struck many with its beauty. Goethe said Ruth is "the loveliest complete work on a small scale." It is a sweet story of the love of a widow, Ruth, for her mother-in-law, Naomi, and their need for a redeemer, who is present in the person of their kinsman, Boaz.

Since it's a love story I thought I'd see how the ultimate purveyor of love stories, Hollywood, handled it, and checked out "The Story of Ruth" (1960, starring Elana Eden as Ruth and Stuart Whitman as Boaz). Hollywood's Ruth is your typical Bible movie fare - lots of intrigue, lots of dash and adventure, and lots and lots of romance. With all that romance floating around, there was one key element of the Biblical story that was missing entirely - didn't even register. Redemption.

And that is not real surprising, because the world understands the concept of redeeming love at a very shallow level. In fact, I think you could pretty much summarize the world's grasp of redemption with two simple examples, the first of which is S&H Green Stamps.

Are you old enough to remember S&H Green Stamps? Blue Chip stamps? Plaid stamps? Before they asked you "Paper or plastic?" the grocery stores used to ask you "Green stamps or Blue?" As a kid without much of a concept of money, you could always tell how much money you spent by the number of Green Stamps your mom got. Depending on the size of the purchase, the cash register at the checkout would spit out a corresponding length of stamps that you collected, pasting them into a little book. When you got enough stamps, off you'd go to the Redemption Center, where you would redeem the stamps for useful household items, like dinnerware or World Book encyclopedias. And so the Green Stamps version of redemption is like **getting something for nothing**. You take these little green stamps (which were no earthly good anywhere except at a Redemption Center) and trade them in for real stuff (dinnerware). There is no real cost, except to the kid who had to lick all those stamps.

The redemption the world is most familiar with is True Love. In the redemption of True Love, an ugly, malformed soul (usually a guy) is won from its darkness by pure love (usually of a girl). The evil one's heart is first warmed, then changed, by the purity and innocence of love, so that he is literally a new man by the end. Think Beauty and the Beast here. True Love says that redemption is romantic, really really romantic. And redemption comes to you when you are really a creep, and someone really loves you anyway, and so you decide to stop being a creep. To the world, not everyone needs redemption, just the really creepy. Who bears the cost of redemption? The one who is redeemed, not the redeemer. All the change occurs on his side. The world is familiar with redeeming love, but it is not Biblical redemption.

Biblical redemption is a far cry from Green Stamps or True Love. Biblical redemption is not getting something for nothing, it is **getting nothing (us) for something** of great price. Biblical redemption is rooted in love, but it isn't romantic love that causes a change of heart. It is faithful, loyal love that pays the price for another. Let me give you a couple examples.

### ***Two Pictures of Redeeming Love – Levirate Marriage and the Kinsman-Redeemer.***

Did you know God legislated redeeming love? There are two laws, one for a brother's name if he died without heirs, and one for people or property sold away from their original owners. Both laws are pictures of redeeming love, and fundamental to understanding biblical redemption.

The first picture is in the law of levirate marriage. Levirate (Latin, brother-in-law) marriage is in Deuteronomy 25:5-6: *"If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears **shall carry on the name of the dead brother** so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel."*

The object of love was the dead brother, not his widow. The redeeming love of levirate marriage was not romantic love, it was faithful love that would act sacrificially toward the dead brother to preserve his name. And that is **the first thing to know about biblical redeeming love: it is faithful love that acts sacrificially.**

That's why although there was a provision for not taking your dead brother's wife as your own, it was a shameful thing. Deuteronomy 25:7-10 says, *"However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled."*

Redeeming love is faithful love that acts sacrificially. We'll talk about that sandal thing in a second, but consider this: Whose child would the baby born of a levirate marriage be? The dead man's. If the dead man had an inheritance, to whom would it go? The dead man's child. To whom would it have gone otherwise? Possibly the surviving brother! In other words, redeeming the dead brother's name by giving him an heir could be very costly. **And that is the second thing to know about biblical redeeming love, it comes at cost to the redeemer!** Redeeming love is faithful, sacrificial love, and it is very costly. By the way, the sandal was probably a visual way of expressing that one had walking rights on the land (cf. Josh. 1:3; 14:9; Ps. 60:8). By taking it off, they were showing the rights were being forfeited.

The second picture of biblical redeeming love is in the law of the kinsman-redeemer. It is based on God's covenant relationship with Israel **that he would give them the land** he had promised to Abraham, and **that they would be his people** (Exodus 6:2-8).

Turn to Lev. 25:23. Because of this covenant relationship, because they were his people and he gave them his land as an inheritance, he instituted the law of the kinsman-redeemer to keep **his people and his land free** for himself. First, a person's land was to be redeemed if it passed out of the original family's hands: Leviticus 25:23-25, *"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you*

*hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land. If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his **nearest relative** is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold."*

That term "nearest relative" is the Hebrew *goel*, redeemer. The nearest relative is the kinsman-redeemer who is to come and redeem his kinsman's property. Second, if an Israelite fell into slavery, he was to be redeemed: Leviticus 25:47-49: "*If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.*" So a kinsman-redeemer was to redeem his relative's property or person.

In order to be a kinsman-redeemer a man had to meet 3 requirements. 1) He had to be the **nearest relative** (brothers by birth order, then uncles, then cousins). 2) He had to have the **ability to redeem**, that is, to have the wherewithal to pay the price of redemption, and he had to be free of obligation himself. Redemption costs. The one who redeems his brother or his brother's land is giving up his money for his brother's sake. And who gets the land? Not the redeemer, but the one who was redeemed. He must give up part of his own inheritance to buy the land back not for himself, but for others. 3) Finally, He had to be **willing to redeem**, as we shall see in Ruth.

You see the same two principles of redeeming love at work here. Faithful love that acts sacrificially, and a real cost to the redeemer. Being a kinsman-redeemer came only at a sacrifice.

### ***Redeeming Love Pictured in the Book of Ruth***

And those same two principles of redeeming love are clearly seen in the book of Ruth, where the faithful, loyal love of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz combine with the providential, sovereign care of God to produce a spectacular picture of redeeming love.

#### ***Ruth's Loyal Love to Naomi (1:1-22)***

If you have never read Ruth, you need to, tonight. We will only have time to hit the highlights. As the book opens, we see a family from Bethlehem, Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Kilion, moving to Moab to escape a famine in Judea. In the course of time, Elimelech dies and the two sons marry Moabite women. Then they die, leaving 3 widows and no children (1:1-5).

Understand, Moab was considered a bad place. Moab was one of Israel's oldest enemys. Descended from the incestuous union between Lot and his oldest daughter, it was the king of Moab who called Balaam to curse Israel, and when that failed the Moabite women seduced the men of Israel to immorality and idolatry, so that some 24,000 Israelites died in the resulting judgment (Numbers 22-25). Worse, the Moabites worshipped their false god Chemosh by sacrificing children as burnt offerings, burning them alive. Moab was so hateful to Israel that in Dt 23:3, God forbid any Moabite from entering the assembly at the Tabernacle "to the 10<sup>th</sup>

generation." It was a very big deal that a Moabite woman, Ruth, should be the center of this story.

In v16-18, Naomi decides to return, sending her daughters-in-law away. But Ruth refuses to go in a pledge repeated countless times at weddings all over the world, usually from bride to groom . But they were originally spoken from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law! v16, "*But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."*

How many mothers pray for a Ruth for their sons? In 1:19-22. Naomi, whose name means pleasant, is home, but she is a suffering woman. She says, "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." I don't really think she is bitter against God, it's just that the circumstances of her life have been very, very hard on her. She and Ruth are in abject poverty, they are bereaved over their dead husbands, they are bereaved over the end of their husband's names (no children), and here they are in the evil days of the Judges, without a protector or defender. Naomi and Ruth need a redeemer, and badly. And as if in answer to her sadness, God answers back with his own loving provision in Chapter 2.

### ***God's Loyal Love through Boaz (2:1-23)***

Chapter 2 shows God's loyal love in the person of their kinsman Boaz. How would Naomi and Ruth provide for themselves in Bethlehem? Leviticus 19:9 provided for the right of the poor to glean the fields, picking up the grain and kernels that were left from the reapers, but how safe was it for a young Moabite maiden to glean? Have you ever worked around agricultural day-laborers? They could be a tough crowd! She needed to glean in the fields of a righteous man, who would treat an alien with consideration. When Ruth goes out to work, God directs her steps exactly where they need to go, Boaz' field (2:1-3).

Boaz, Elimelech's kinsman (brother, uncle, or more likely a cousin), takes a great interest in Ruth and instructs his men to help her out. His concern for a Moabite gleaner is extraordinary. In the movie, Boaz did it because Ruth was really cute. But in real life, Boaz did it because of the love Ruth had shown for Naomi (2:4-16). Boaz tells her in v11-12, "*I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband -- how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."*

When Ruth goes home at the end of the day, Naomi is astounded at the amount of food she has gleaned, well beyond her expectation (2:17-23). She knows someone was looking out for her, and when Ruth tells her it was Boaz, Naomi says in v20, "*The LORD bless him!*" . . . "*He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."* She added, "*That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."*

### ***Naomi's Loyal Love to Ruth (3:1-5)***

And with the introduction of the kinsman-redeemer the story of Ruth becomes more than just a love story. Now the plot truly begins to thicken as God's providential hand is revealed to Naomi and she knows that something more than human kindness is at work. Naomi has in mind that Boaz may be the one God will use to redeem them from their trouble. After some time, Naomi shows her love to Ruth for all that she has done for her by encouraging her to go to Boaz and ask him to redeem her. *Ruth 3:1-5 - "One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered."*

By the way, that thing about uncovering the feet, no one knows what that means. It is pretty obviously some kind of symbolic action, and some have suggested it is something licentious or immoral. But the actions and the attitudes of Ruth and Boaz belie any evil intent. It was something symbolic that meant something to them, and nothing to us.

### ***Boaz' Loyal Love to Ruth and Naomi (3:6-18)***

Ruth follows Naomi's instructions (they obviously made sense to her). When Boaz senses someone there and starts from his sleep, asking who is there in v9, Ruth answers, *"Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."* Putting his garment over her was a symbolic way of affirming that he would protect her and provide for her as a husband. She is asking him to marry her and redeem her. Boaz is only too happy to oblige, again because he recognizes a remarkable depth in Ruth, v10-11: *"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character."*

Evidently Boaz is quite a bit older than she, but rather than run after the young men, she has honored him with her request. However, there is a problem, v12: *"Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."* Boaz encourages Ruth to trust God for the outcome. He is willing to redeem her, but he is under no obligation to do so, because there is a nearer kinsman.

### ***God's Spectacular Redemption (4:1-22)***

In chapter 4, God brings all the strands of the story together with a masterstroke on the part of Boaz. v1-6: *Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and*

*they did so. Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." "I will redeem it," he said. Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."*

The closest kinsman wants no part of the redeemer job if it means marrying Ruth. Is he biased against Moabites? No, he says in v6 that he might endanger his own estate. There is something else at work here, and that is the law of the levirate marriage. Remember that law is based on faithful love that acts sacrificially, and that incurs a terrific price to the redeemer? That is why this nearer kinsman won't redeem Ruth. He just isn't willing to pay the price. He would pay for the field, and that would cost money. But if he married Ruth and raised up children to Elimelech's dead son, that would cost more. And who would inherit the field he paid for? The son, not him. He simply isn't willing to pay the cost of redemption, and so he forfeits his right, v7-8 - *"Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel. So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.*

This guy isn't waiting around for Ruth to spit in his face, he hands the sandal to Boaz, forfeiting his rights to his kinsman, Boaz. If the action of the redeemer was not legally incumbent upon the "nearer redeemer" then ***it was that much less incumbent upon Boaz***, wasn't it? Boaz is truly demonstrating faithful, sacrificial love toward Ruth, Naomi, and the deceased.

*Ruth 4:9-10 - "Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"*

Boaz met the 3 requirements of a kinsman-redeemer. 1) He was a kinsman, 2) he was able to redeem, and 3) he was willing to redeem. But even though he fit the legal description, he was under no obligation because he wasn't the closest. Not only was he willing to bear the price, he went well beyond the letter of the law to redeem Ruth and Naomi. Boaz showed faithful, sacrificial love. He was willing to incur terrific cost to himself for Ruth's sake. And what was the result? v13-14a, Boaz marries Ruth and she gives birth to a son, Obed. Look at what is said of little Obed, v15-17: *"He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David."*

And so Naomi and Ruth are redeemed from poverty to fullness, from bereavement to joy, and they are protected and defended by Boaz. That's how they see it, anyway. God has a longer view. If Ruth is not redeemed, Obed is not born. If Obed is not born, Jesse is not born. And if Jesse is not born, the David, is not born, and the kingly line of Judah does not take the throne. And what implications does that have for the ultimate Son of David, Jesus Christ? God redeemed Naomi and Ruth from their need, but he was also sovereignly establishing Messiah's house.

Because that Messiah, Jesus Christ, is our own Boaz, isn't he? He is our own Kinsman-Redeemer, meeting all 3 qualifications. He is our close kinsman: *Hebrews 2:14, 17 - "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil -- . . . For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."*

He is our kinsman, and he is able to pay the price to redeem us: 1 Peter 1:18-19 - *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."* Romans 8:1-3 says, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.**"*

He is our kinsman, he is able to redeem us, and he was willing to redeem us. In fact, like Boaz, he was under no obligation to do so, but he went beyond the letter of the law for us! 2 Corinthians 8:9 - *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* Philippians 2:6-8 - *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!"*

Like Naomi and Ruth we were in desperate need of a redeemer. We were under the curse of the law, subjected to our own sinfulness without relief. Galatians 3:13 says "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." And we were stuck in a futile way of life, always going, but never going anywhere. Peter calls it an "empty way of life" (1 Peter 1:18).

Ephesians 2:9 says that we are saved by grace through faith, as a gift from God. Have you ever stopped to realize that the whole notion of grace requires redeeming love? Redemption is a necessary consequence of grace, for if grace means we are given something we don't deserve (i.e. salvation), yet there is a price to be paid for our sin, then someone has to pay our price, someone has to redeem us from it. And that is exactly what our Kinsman-Redeemer did for us.

We need a Kinsman-Redeemer because we cannot pay the price for our sin. And no one else could either, unless they were free from sin's debt. Only Jesus could redeem us, and his redeeming love on the cross, the living expression of grace, bought us back when we had sold

ourselves into the slavery of sin. There is not way you can ever redeem yourself. You cannot pay sin's price. If you have never accepted God's redeeming love, you need to do that now. Confess your sin, ask him to forgive you and to be your Lord and Savior. And come see me afterwards and let's talk.

God's love is unexpected, unconditional, and redeeming. And God, in his unexpected, unconditional, redeeming love, reached out to you and I, looking beyond our sin to satisfy our need. What is the proper response to such love, to such redemption? How would you feel toward anyone who did something really, really wonderful for you, at a huge cost to themselves? You'd love them for it, wouldn't you? I don't think we need to berate ourselves about keeping our noses clean and acting right, I just think if understanding God's love at a deep level doesn't stimulate us to love, and honor and thanksgiving in return, nothing will.

*1 John 4:7-10: Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*