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Presentation Transcript
God's Love Applied
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This presentation is a second in a series on *The Eight Qualities of Church Health*. And the title is *God's Love Applied*. And it is follow-up to the previous presentation, titled *God's Kind of Love*.

You might recall that in our last presentation we saw that God's love defines every aspect of His being. "God *is* love," John said. So anything that we learn about the nature of God is also about the nature of His love. We saw that there seems to be three main aspects revealed in scripture about God that also seem to be primary descriptors of His love. Do you recall what those three were? That's right. They were justice, truth and grace. We saw some examples in that last presentation, showing that human beings often have some of these characteristics, but rarely are balanced in all three of them – unless that balance is absent – all *three* of them.

So, it's fine to talk about congregational health, but congregations are made up of individuals. So the only way for a congregation to grow is by the growth of those people who make up the congregation. So, today we're going to think more specifically about how to apply all three aspects of God's love in a balanced way in our lives, in our families, in our congregations and in our communities.

Let's do a little bit of review. Let's go to 1 John 4:8 and 9, and look at this primary descriptor of what the love of God is.

1 Jn. 4:8-9 – *Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us, that He sent His one and only Son into the world, that we might live through Him.* So that one word, *love*, describes God most completely.

Next we learned that the three primary aspects were justice, truth and grace. And I'm not going to read the scriptures that we used to demonstrate that, because they're quite a few, and the last presentation included them. One that comes to mind is, *the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.*

Okay, so those are two things that we can think about. God is love. And God is also justice, truth and grace – those three.

Now, we talk about spiritual gifts in the church – and those are abilities given to us to do the work of God – but there are also fruits of the Spirit. And these are byproducts of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

Now, I want you to think with me about this. If God is love, and if the Holy Spirit was given to make us more Godly, what would you think would *be* the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Well, it would be the love of God in our lives, wouldn't it?

Let's go to Galatians 5:22 and verse 23.

Gal.5:22-23 – *But the fruit of the Spirit is love....* What do you know? There it is, But it says it's also *joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. What is this all about here?

One of the problems for us, in using this word *love* is that it's probably the word in the English language that has more meanings than any other. Everybody has their own idea of what that means. Well, what *does* it mean when it's talking about God? When John said, "God is love," what does that mean? Well, it could mean that He is justice, truth or grace – that those three things are in His character. And I'm certain that that's what it means in *that* instance. But there's this fellow, Christian Schwartz – the one who formed the Natural Church Development program – he had this idea, because he knows that love, for a lot of people, is just a "foo-foo" word.... You know, I was talking to a young lady one time who had a roommate in college, who was in love with the idea of love. She would say – and I'm mimicking the way the girl said it to me – "I love love" (in a sing-song voice). You know, there you go...people have a romanticized idea about it. When we're talking about what God is like, what does love mean? What does that word mean? Well, he had this idea. I think he's probably right about it. In fact, I'm going to go with it today. He said that in the Greek, there is no punctuation in that sentence. There's just love joy peace patience. But what if you put a colon after love? That would mean that joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control define what love is. Isn't that interesting? And aren't all those aspects of what love is? So you have a general term and specific terms following it. That would mean that all these things – joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – are all *qualities* that make up the love of God. If we just stop and think for a minute, we'll see that that is true, isn't it? Those *are* all qualities that make up and describe what God is like. And since God *is* love, that's defining who He is or what He is. He's defining Himself for us.

So, if what this man proposed is true, then these eight characteristics would also have to fit in – or maybe we could say, *under* – those other three descriptors of justice, grace and truth. They'd have to be a part of that, too, wouldn't they? Let's think about how that might work.

If a person is just, certainly goodness would be a part of them. And justice brings peace, doesn't it? So peace would be a part. And anybody who's going to be just, has to be patient, don't they? So patience would be a part of that.

What about grace? Well, we think of gentleness. We think of kindness. We think of joy. And we think of patience, which was also under justice. So they kind of overlap a little bit.

What about truth? We could put self-control under truth, couldn't we? Self-control, as in always *telling* the truth. Truth would be related to faithfulness – hanging on to and living by the truth faithfully. Truth generally brings peace, which was also a part of justice. So those overlap there. Then joy, which is a part of grace, too. So we rejoice in the truth, don't we? So that would fit there, wouldn't it? So we can see that all of these things can fit together if we just think about them that way.

Now, is there anywhere else? We've got God is love. We've got justice, grace and truth. And we have the fruits of the Spirit that talk about love. Is there any place else in the Bible, that you know of, where the word *love* is defined in scripture? Well, yes, it's 1 Corinthians 13, isn't it? These are more or less *behaviors* that Paul talks about.

1 Cor.13:4-8 – *Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 – 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. But where there are prophecies, they will cease. And where there are tongues, they will be stilled. Wherever there is knowledge, it will pass away.* Love is the most important thing.

So how would these behaviors relate to the eight definitions of love in Galatians? Under *justice* we have goodness. Goodness would be not delighting in evil, wouldn't it? You know, if you're into goodness, you're not into evil. Goodness is not self-seeking either. It's not arrogant or selfish, not narcissistic. Peace is under justice. If people are keeping tabs of everybody else's wrongs, they usually don't inspire a lot of peace. When we keep no record of wrongs, it tends to create more peace. Perseverance always perseveres in trying to keep the peace. Patience. Paul said love is patient and it always protects.

Under *grace* you could think about gentleness – does not boast and is not proud. Kindness. How does gentleness have to do with not boasting and not proud? Well, the connection is not immediately apparent because the word *gentleness* in English doesn't mean the same thing that it does in Greek. But we'll get there. Kindness – he said, “Love is kind and it always hopes the best.” So that's kind, isn't it, when we are always hoping the best for people, instead of wishing that they would break a leg. Patience. Paul said. “Love is patient and it always protects.” That was under justice, too, but there's overlap there. Joy – we could put “does not envy” under that one, because if you're always envious of other people, you're not a happy camper.

Truth. Under truth we had self-control. Certainly faithfulness could fit in under that, because we said that earlier. And under faithfulness, we could say love always trusts and it never fails. So *always* and *never* have to do with being faithful. Under peace, we could say that it keeps no records of wrong and always perseveres. And joy rejoices with the truth.

So, when we take all four of the biblical concepts of love and we put them together, we get really, much more specific meaning of the word *love*, as it is intended in the Bible.

It's funny. A teenage girl came to our door this morning. We didn't answer it. I was just looking through the peep hole at her. She was wearing a T-shirt that said, "I love my boyfriend." What do you think she meant by that? Well, there's all the human, emotional stuff that goes with that. And some of it would probably apply here. I mean, there's some of that there. But that is *different* from what the Bible is really talking about all together.

So, if we take all four concepts, we come up with three major aspects, with eight specific components, and thirteen specific behaviors. Interesting to think about it, isn't it – how that works – how specific that can be when we just put it together. If we remember that most people are strong in *some* of these aspects, and weak in others, that can help us know that there are specific aspects that we can all work on to improve.

One of the concepts of Natural Church Development is that we always work on the *weakest* congregational quality first. Do you remember the barrel with the staves at different levels, and the water got out over the lowest stave? So, if you raise that stave up, it's going to make the whole barrel fuller, right? And so, as you keep working on the lowest one, it keeps raising the level in the barrel. So that same principle applies for the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. If we're lacking one of these big time, if we start working on that, that's going to be the *most* helpful in making us a more loving person.

So let's look at each one of these eight words and what they mean, and see how we could increase them in our life.

Let's look at *patience* first. According to *Vine's*, that word is *makrothumia*. It means to be long-tempered, rather than short-tempered. I thought that was a pretty good definition. It means *long-suffering* – that's the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation. You know, I'm *really* patient when nobody's bugging me. So this is provocation in the face of being bugged – when there's pressure. It's the opposite of anger, and it's associated with mercy. It's also used to describe God. So, it's the quality, also, that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. And it's the opposite of despondence and is associated with hope – *Vine's* tells us. People who have this kind of patience are both determined and merciful.

So how does this relate to love? Well, it's the expression of love in an *enduring* way – a patient way. Matthew 18:21.

Mt. 18:21 – *Then Peter came to Jesus and said, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"* See, he was getting the picture,

but he didn't have it fully yet. *And Jesus said, "I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times."* So somebody who's willing to let other people off the hook seventy-seven times in a row has *makrothumia*, or Godly patience.

So, are we patient when we're provoked? There are usually two main reasons why we're not. One is unresolved issues from the past. I talked to a man once who came for help because he was getting instantly angry with his teenage son. And as we explored the situation, it came out that his father had physically abused him when he was a child. What that tells us is that he's identifying with the abuser instead of the abused. So he has some stuff he has to work through. And the other thing that can cause us most often to not have this type of patience is narcissism. There are those people who believe they should always have what they want when they want it. And if they don't get it, they get upset. If this is our kind of weakness – and this is where I'm asking you to think about you – is this the low stave in your barrel? We tend to expect results too quickly if we don't have this kind of patience. When we mature in this kind of love, we tend to give ourselves, and other people, time to grow naturally. And, of course, natural growth includes making mistakes and then learning from them. So growth isn't something that's mandated by a snap of the fingers, or fiat, or by an instant miracle from God, or by some magic fairy waving a wand and tapping us on the head. But it's through a *process* of trial and error and learning. And all that takes time.

Let's look at the second one – *joy*. The Greek word there for joy is *chara*. (I'm probably slaughtering these in Greek, but I hope you'll let me off since I'm not one.) This word refers to the kind of joy that comes from a relationship with God – you “joy in the Lord.” You've heard that phrase out of the Bible. It doesn't have anything to do with the problems of this life, or striving for fun, or adrenal rush, or money, or any of those things. It doesn't ignore the problems of this life, but is present in spite of them, because it doesn't have anything to do with them. This word *chara* is closely related to *charis*, which is the word for *grace* in the New Testament.

Luke 10:17 is a good scripture to read when we talk about this kind of joy.

Lk. 10:17 – *The seventy-two returned with joy* – Luke 10:17 – *and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."* The seventy-two returned with *chara*. *And He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and to overcome all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice"* – do not have *chara* – *"that the spirits submit to you, but have chara that your names are written in heaven."* That's why Christians can be joyful in spite of problems – because we have a relationship with God. So it's a rejoicing kind of love.

I was talking to a teenager some time ago, who was telling me that her mother was always in a bad mood because of all the problems she had. And this bad mood her mother exhibited all the time had a terrific effect on her and all of her siblings. It was like a wet blanket that kept them from having any joy themselves – just wallowing in the problems. Her mother just needed to learn to “be happy.” Don't worry, be happy, right? We had a song about that a few years ago.

What was that guy's name? *Don't Worry, Be Happy* song? Bobby McFerrin. And do you know what he's been doing since he wrote that song? He's somehow associated with Carnegie Hall and he teaches children music. He's not worrying. He's being happy, and he's helping other people to be happy. When I learned that about him, that song meant a lot more to me. It just seemed like he really knew what he was talking about.

So, when people are cutting us off in traffic, when they're being rude to us in line at the store, or cutting in front of us at the movie, or stealing our identity, or hacking into our bank account and siphoning off money, we can smile and say to ourselves, "I know something you don't know." Is this your weakness? If it is, then we would need to be more focused on the ministry God has given us and not let our moods, or lacks, influence us so much. You know, that's something that *we* know that others *don't* know is what God has given us to *do*.

Okay, let's look at the third word – *peace*. I really don't know how to pronounce this. It's E-I-R-E-N-E and it has to do with our reconciliation with God. Peace. We have peace of mind because we're reconciled to God. But the Greek word goes *way* beyond the English word. It's about the well-being of an individual or a community in *all* aspects of life. It's big! It's a big word.

Romans 12:16. Paul is telling us here how to have this kind of peace.

Rom. 12:16 – *Live in harmony with one another* – which is another way to say live at peace. And how do we do that? *Do not be proud, but willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what's right in the eyes of everybody.* You know, if you do what's right in the eyes of everybody, it doesn't give people room to gossip, which destroys peace. And if we associate with people who others might think are lower than we are, that makes people think that we're trustworthy. And that promotes a sense of confidence and peace. If we're not proud, then people are not put on the defensive, but they want to be on our side. *If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everybody. Don't take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "It's mine to avenge. I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

What kind of love is this peace? Well, it's a reconciling kind of love of God. And when we're not arrogant, not ignoring, not above others, when we cut people some slack, those things go a long way toward bringing us back into relationship with others. So it's a reconciling peace. That's the nature of it.

So, let's think about that. Who's treated us badly? How are we dealing with it? You know, when I work with people in counseling, I hear a sad tale about how they were mistreated by somebody else. And quite frequently I get to talk to the "somebody else" and I hear another tale entirely. Quite often, what we think of as a mistreatment by others is really a *misunderstanding* between us and that other person.

I think I've mentioned more than once the couple that came – who were ready to divorce – and after ten sessions they didn't have anything else to argue about, because they found out on *every* count they just misunderstood one another. Isn't that interesting? Neither one of them intended to mistreat the other.

So, who's mistreated us? Are we sure? Or are we just not understanding what's happened? What if they're just not giving us what we want and we consider that mistreatment. You know, some people do. Every time they don't get what they want, they think it's mistreatment. There's another name for that. It's called self-centeredness.

Somebody was apologizing to me recently for not returning my phone call. And while this was going on, I was sitting thinking about how *busy* this person was, and how overloaded they were. I don't know that I would have thought about that except recently I've become a lot busier than I ever have been in my life, and there's been a few phone calls *I* haven't returned. So nothing like a dose of the same medicine to help us understand others, right?

So, is this your weakness? If it is, then we need to work on improving the relationships in our life, because this kind of lack – a lack of peace – is the cause of it. So this would be especially true when we think about helping other people reconcile. It's necessary for us to first work on improving the relationships in our own life.

Let's look at another one – the fourth one – *faithfulness*. What is this word in Greek? Well, the word is *pistis* – P-I-S-T-I-S – and it's translated many times *faith*. And the idea there is that we trust others and then they trust us. So this is the *reliable* quality of the love of God. You know, we trust God because He always does what He says He's going to do. If He makes us a promise, then He keeps it. So He's faithful. He's not a flaky God, you know, that sometimes shows up and other times doesn't.

I was talking to the mother of a young woman who volunteered to help at a humanitarian school for a year, and she asked her daughter if anybody had offered her any financial aid, which is customary when a young person goes on that kind of a mission. Her daughter told her, "The people who have always come through for me have come through for me again." So she had a circle of people that she knew that were trustworthy – that were always going to be there to support her. Isn't it nice that she had friends like that? So this kind of consistency is called faithfulness.

When Assyria surrounded Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, the Rabshakah confronted Hezekiah on the wall. He thought Hezekiah was counting on help from Egypt. He didn't realize he was counting on help from God. He was going to learn that very soon, but he hadn't learned that yet. He told Hezekiah that trusting in Egypt was like leaning on a splintered reed. Do you know what a splintered reed does?

We used to have a patch of bamboo behind our house when I was a boy. And they looked really strong, but if you whacked somebody on the back with it, it would, a lot of times, bend over. And then it would pop back up and it looked like it was as good as new. But if you waved it around, it would fall over all the time, and it wasn't good for much of

anything after that – at least, not for whacking, which is mostly what we did with them. (We did a lot of stuff with that bamboo that my mother didn't approve of, but I did learn, when I read Hezekiah, what that was about.) Because you bruise one of those bamboo pieces, they'd stand up straight again, but if you put any weight on it, they were going to cave in – and the splinters were sharp and could pierce your hands.

So he was telling them that Egypt was like a splintered reed. And that's exactly what he meant by it. So the point is, for us, that when people *count* on us, we need to come through for them. If we tell people we're going to do something, then we need to.

So, is this your weakness? If it is, we can grow by focusing on being more reliable, consistent and prompt in keeping our commitments. And this causes others to see us as trustworthy. And it promotes relationships. So it is an aspect of love.

Goodness – the fifth one. *Agathosyne* – I think – A-G-A-T-H-O-S-Y-N-E. Here the English meaning of this word *goodness* is not the same as the Greek. When somebody's *good* in English it may imply a sort of benignness, or non-violence, or mildness. But in Greek it implies a striving for the standards that God calls good in our own lives *and* in the lives of other people.

An example of this kind of goodness is when Jesus went into the temple and He saw the moneychangers. He cleared the courts of those that were doing business there. And He did it in a rather powerful way. So this is the kind of love that's concerned sometimes with correction and also with self-monitoring and making sure that we're doing the right thing. It's a parent's duty – a Christian parent's duty – to apply this kind of love to our children. We have to set the boundaries and hold to them.

I know of a congregation where the wife of a man and the husband of a woman committed adultery. It was common knowledge in the congregation. And this sin nearly destroyed this entire group. That was because the congregation was not willing to confront this problem, as Paul told the Corinthians they *should* do. There were children involved in that congregation. How was that going to affect them? Of course, that's always the view we take in LifeResource Ministries, because we're dedicated to helping the children in the congregation.

Would this be your weakness? If it is, then we need to be harder on ourselves – and on others – when God's standards are clearly violated in a *major* way. I'm not talking about personal preferences or minor issues here. I've noticed that people are more likely to speak up on minor things and let the big problems go unconflicted. Isn't it interesting how that works? They won't take a stand on the thing that are *really* important.

I was talking to a mother recently who was complaining about her son not doing his homework and not keeping his promise that he made to his soccer coach. I said, "All of that is just a function of him being fifteen-years-old. When he's the age of his father, he's going to be acting like his dad. What you really need to be worried about, and you really need to take a strong stand on, is he having unprotected sex? Is he doing drugs? Is he driving drunk? Or driving with friends that are driving drunk? Those are the things that

you really need to be worried about. Sometimes parents will nit-pick their kids over little things, and let them do *that* stuff. I'm not exactly sure why this is true, but I'm going to work on that some more.

Let's look at another one. The sixth one is *kindness – chrestotes – C-H-R-E-S-T-O-T-E-S*. This means to attend to others in the simple details of relationship – being interested, paying attention, remembering names, giving gifts and writing cards – all the things that make a relationship work and that imply care, or taking care of other people. Think about all the things in the creation that God has designed just for us to enjoy – like the New Mexico skies. We have good skies here.

I had something interesting happen the other day. My boss is all excited because he's getting a new Iphone. You've seen them on TV – you know, just push the screen and all that? And he lives on the phone doing his job. I don't think I've ever walked into his office that he wasn't on the phone, because he has a lot of out-of-town work that he does. And he currently does that work on a Blackberry SmartPhone, which cost him five hundred bucks. When he told me he was getting an Iphone, he asked me if I wanted his Blackberry. I said, "How much?" And he said, "Oh nothing. If you want it, you can have it." He probably could sell that on Ebay, since it's not very old, but he thought I might like it since he knows I'm also a techno-freak like he is. That's *chrestotes*. That's that kind of kindness – you know, where he was just *thoughtful* about something he thought I would need.

Some time ago, a ten-year-old boy – one of my clients – brought me a Cinnabon when he came in for therapy. I think that was probably his mother's kindness more than it was his, but she wanted *him* to get the credit for it. So that's more of his kindness going toward him, right?

So, is this your weakness? If it is, then we need to think about the little things that bring joy to the lives of other people.

Next one – *self-control*. E-G-K-R-A-T-I-E-A. That means self-control. And in English, it's not quite the same. This means moderation in *all* areas of life. It's not just about food and drink or what we say. But it's having power over yourself, whether it's not putting too much of something into one's mouth or not letting something hurtful out of it. In application, Paul talked about Christians as athletes, who train diligently so they can win a race. Or a boxer, who does not, when he's being attacked by his opponent, just flail his arms wildly, but controls himself under this extreme onslaught and waits for an opening to land a good punch. It's not just about physical things that we must do to maintain well-being, but also the things that we *say* and the way that we treat other people. So this is *self-disciplined* love.

I was talking to a younger therapist who said she had trouble being patient with her clients. The more she got to know and love them, the more she just wanted to tell them straight out what they needed to do, instead of patiently guiding them to the understanding for themselves.

So, is this your weakness? If it is our weakness, then we could do well to focus on consistency in our personal life – very closely related to reliability and steadfastness. The sense of it from the scripture is *not* about self-control for self-gain or self-sake, but it's about being self-controlled so that we can serve and take care of other people. That's the point of it.

Okay, let's look at the last one then – *gentleness*. *Praytes* – P-R-A-Y-T-E-S. This is the opposite of argumentative, self-righteous and stubborn. It means to be mild, tolerant, humble, easily disposed toward other people. Mellow would be a word that we would use to talk about this.

Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. That was that kind of gentleness – not stubborn, not self-righteous, but gracious.

You know, our clinic has had some financial problems recently – not because of mismanagement on the part of the clinic, but because of the company that manages Medicaid in this state has failed to pay our clinic for a lot of the work that we have done. So it's created a cash-flow problem. And the director recently announced that he was going to have to begin paying us every two weeks, instead of monthly – to kind of even out the cash flow – while they try to recover all of this money that was owed them. It was really interesting to see the various responses of the staff. Some got upset and wanted to argue about it – didn't think it was fair or got all upset. Others said, "Well, whatever we have to do during this crisis, we're willing to do it. We're doing that because we believe the management here is honest and decent and they're not trying to rip us off." So that's that kind of gentleness – where we're willing to work with people.

Is this your weakness? Well, if it is, it would help if we pay less attention to our rights and think more about going with the flow.

Okay, that's a quick exposition of what Godly love is according to the Bible – with Jacob's associations included. I'm sure you made your own while you were at it. After listening to it, one might be tempted to say, "Well, I need to improve here and here." And if you do that, that's a good thing. The problem is that sometimes, in these areas where we're not very strong, it's because we're blocked by some reason or another. So to help with those blocks, next time we're going to propose some things a person can do to stimulate growth in all these areas. And then after that I promise we're going to move on to the second of the eight qualities of church growth.