

Chapter 1

INCORRUPTIBLE LOVE:

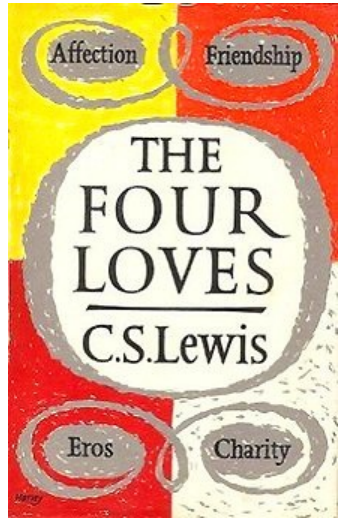
The Four Loves

by C. S. Lewis

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

INTRODUCTION

We speak of love as a single emotion, feeling or decision, but the truth is there are at least two very different varieties that lie beneath a single word: being loved and loving. And beneath that are two sources from which we can draw our love from: human nature and divine nature.



The word love, like a multifaceted diamond, sparkles in all directions at once. However, the English word “love” has been diffused by the nuances of it’s many potential meanings.

Parents love their children, friends can love one another and lovers may feel passionate love toward each other. All three of these human-based loves have one thing in common: the need to both love and to be loved back.

But in all the universe, there is only one type of love that is Divine-based, and therefore entirely incorruptible, according to the beloved 20th century scholar and author C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) — unconditional love or charity, derived from the Greek word “agape”.

“The human loves can be glorious images of Divine love. No less than that: but also no more,” writes Lewis. In *The Four Loves*, one of his most famous works of nonfiction, readers explore the ups and downs of all four kinds of love. He identifies these four types of love as; family affection, the most basic form; friendship, the rarest and perhaps most insightful; eros, passionate love; and charity, the love of God.

Reviews of the book are almost unanimously excellent, such as; “A masterful commentary on the ways in which man loves, and how each kind relates to our human and spiritual nature.”

I decided to first listen to the audio version because it is the only book which is available voiced by the author from his original BBC broadcasts in 1960.

Mr. Lewis has not only a very imaginative gift for fictional writing (such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*) but his unique style of nonfiction storytelling is both captivating and challenging. I enjoy trying to keep up with his brilliant mix of British humor, intellectual logic woven into his deeply held beliefs.

I. Family Love (Greek: Storge)

According to Lewis, storge love crosses all boundaries — between the human sexes and even the animal species. Perhaps best symbolized by the adoring love of a mother holding an infant, storge love is usually an in-born instinct. Lewis feels this is the humblest love which forms a solid foundation for all the other types of human love.

We first learn of storge love in a non-reciprocal context, when a parent loves their child, but they don't really expect the love to be returned in any significant way at first. This is why in adulthood when we say we "long for love" what we really mean is that we want to be loved as we were once loved by a parent. But storge love can be difficult to replicate by friends and lovers.

Lewis explains that storge or "needed" love often tries to imitate divine "agape" love or "given" unconditional love's actions, but it usually falls short without some type of inner transformation.

"The glory of storge love," says Lewis is that "it unites those who would otherwise not come together...Familiarity teaches us first to endure, then to enjoy — affection causes us to notice the goodness in others."

Some of the pitfalls of storge love is that it often can be assumed a human right, but may remain very conditional. Storge love, says Lewis, is prone to jealousy and can become very self-gratifying.

His warning; storge can become a substitute or even a rival with agape love, which he feels is settling for an inferior human substitute for the more divine charity of unconditional love.

II. Friendship Love (Greek: Phileo)

I found the chapter on friendship love very thought-provoking. Lewis considers friendship as the most undervalued and often lacking type of human love that too many people are missing out the full benefits of.

According to Lewis, “phileo love is not universal (like storge and eros) and therefore is the most unnatural of the three human-based loves.”

All friendships are entered into voluntarily — not based upon family relationships or physical attraction. In fact, he says “Nothing is so unlike lovers as a friendship. The importance of friendship is masked by the fact that it is so arbitrary — a thing or gift of choice,” he writes. He refers to phileo love as “naked personalities” in comparison with eros as “naked bodies.”

Lewis refers to friendship as the “least jealous” of the human loves — offering us the example that when a third friend joins two good friends, the love between them all often multiplies as the size of the group grows.

It is clear that Lewis highly values the deep friendships of his life, which comes out in his heartfelt plea for an expanded perspective and priority for true friendships that he views as much more than mere companionship or comradery, usually involving strongly shared values and activities.

He reminds us that in past generations friendship was considered “the crown of life”. Friendship can be used to accomplish great things, as Lewis puts it, “Phileo love makes; the brave braver, the kind kinder, but also, the proud prouder and the cruel more cruel... Friends can give us the needed moral support... or immoral support.”

Lewis considers friendship to be “the most spiritual” of the three human loves, perhaps because of the of the willingness friends often have to lay down their life for another true friend. This section of the book challenged me to become less of a loner in the second half of life by seeking out deeper friendships.

III. Passion Love (Greek: Eros)

Lewis kicks off his discussion of the most primal form of love by saying that having sex is only a small part of true eros, which he defines as “being in love — a delighted preoccupation with the beloved.”

I like that. He differentiates between mere lust, as the self-seeking desire for momentary sexual gratification, and eros, the desire for the beloved to receive pleasure. He is eluding to contemplation of a far more comprehensive desire for the well being of a beloved mate.

Lewis feels true eros obliterates the distinction between giving and receiving of love. Here he seems to be calling couples to view their strong desire for complete union to be a foreshadowing of spiritual union with God.

“Sex ceases to become a demon when it ceases to be a god,” says Lewis, warning readers of the tendency to worship sexual self-gratification, which has been a major obstacle in the spiritual life of many loving souls over the centuries.

Lewis feels there are three primary views of the human body; 1) “evil, 2) glorious,” and the third he borrows from St. Francis of Assisi is 3) “Brother Ass”. Presumably meaning that Lewis agreed with St. Francis that the body should receive minimal attention, such as would be given a lowly donkey employed as a beast of burden.

Regarding eros he warns, “Natural things are dangerous when they begin to seem too divine.” In this Lewis feels many people are tempted to worship physical love-making as the absolute pinnacle of pleasure in this life.

During the sacred act of love Lewis says “All of the forces of masculinity and femininity in the universe are engaged and work through us...As the symbols of Father Sky united with Mother Earth.” This is a powerful image of why sexual orgasms are such an amazing, exhilarating and “oneing” experience.

Eros, says Lewis, is the passion within us to say that two are better than one. We understand and are committed to a life that is better together than apart — which speaks of a mutual covenant/agreement.

Lewis views “falling in love” as something that happens to us, whereas staying love as a choice. He warns that eros can make no promise of permanence. For that, he feels that long-term selfless love (agape) is required.

He closes this section with a metaphor of how a garden cannot tend to itself, but requires an external gardener to tend to the weeds and the challenges it will face against natural elements — speaking to our need for agape love. I really loved how he treated this important subject.

IV. Unconditional Love (Greek: Agape)

To love as adults means learning how to put someone else ahead of our self. Learning to love in a mature, healthy and satisfying way isn't something we can be expected to do all alone, without assistance. That's where agape love comes in.

According to Lewis, all the natural loves (storge, phileo, eros) are “by design to be second things, not first, because they are so prone to let us down if treated as the first things.”

This statement is a perfect example of the depth of wisdom residing in C. S. Lewis. He’s saying that without making agape love our first priority, we will likely never feel fulfilled in our quest for fulfilling love.

He continues, “All creatures and relationships are temporary. To fully give our heart over to another created being is to court disaster.” To offer great love, means to open yourself up to great suffering, as the mystics have affirmed.

“To love is to be vulnerable. Only the truest form of love (between Creator and the created) will never pass away. We should draw nearer to the love of God, not by attempting to avoid true suffering inherent in any love, but by accepting them and offering them to God,” writes Lewis.

“Natural loves must be transformed by agape love to become secondary. God is love — we must begin with God’s love for all creatures — which is totally disassociated from ‘need’. He manifests this love toward us first in creation, then in human redemption,” says Lewis.

Lewis explains, “The desire to be loved is not Love itself. None of the natural loves seek the good of the object simply for the object’s sake, except agape. Yet each of the natural loves seek to imitate agape. By receiving the gift-love of agape from God, we have the double benefit of an enhanced ability to now give agape love to others,” Lewis joyfully concludes.

“God, who has loved us into existence, loves us into the power of loving others — and receiving agape from God and others... While we all desire the natural loves, we often resist receiving and giving agape from God or others.” This is so true. Many who are wonderful givers of love are much less able to receive love due to either pride or inflated egos.

Lewis continues, “To receive a love which is truly a gift which bears witness solely to the givingness of the Giver and not at all to our loveliness or worthiness is a severe mortification. We desperately need to receive such love from God and others — but we don’t naturally want to.”

“No sooner do we believe that God loves us because of what He is, than because of what we are (because we are intrinsically lovable). It is hard to believe that we are but mirrors whose brightness is wholly derived from the Sun that shines on us.”

“It is hard to bear agape love (charity) from our fellows, but yet each of us needs it. There is that within each of us that cannot be loved simply by natural love — we can’t love the unlovable without help. Agape which must be learned — is needed by all — first to be believed, then endured and then delighted in,” Lewis writes. “For where agape is, to some degree is heaven.”

The crescendo of his discourse on *The Four Loves*: “Natural loves ultimate power lies their ability to prepare us for agape love — and provide embodiment’s of agape — natural alters on which the flames of agape may descend. Natural loves can pass into eternity only to the degree that they have allowed themselves to be taken to the eternity of agape — a sort of death.”

This resonates with the words of Jesus...”Truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24).

CONCLUSION: Saturated in Love

We live in a world saturated with Divine love, if we have the eyes to see it all around us — in every thing and in every one. How can we become so filled up with this Divine love to change our hurting — and often hating world?

One word: Agape. According to www.LoveofGodProject.org the word “agape” is used over 260 times in the New Testament, and the Hebrew equivalent “ahavah” is used over 230 times in the Old Testament.

You could say love is the #1 theme of Biblical Scripture. If fact, all spiritual wisdom traditions affirm the Golden Rule: ‘To Love Others As You Would Have Them Love You’, which Jesus summed up the in four simple words: “Love God... Love Others”.

Many wonder for a lifetime how they can truly please God and others. The answer: practice unconditional agape love — no matter what the result.

Yes, agape love changes everything. My challenge to you dear reader, shared by the wise pastor/teacher Bob Mumford, is simply this: Give yourself to follow agape love, wherever it takes you today!

It is very likely that *The Four Loves* will end up in my four daughters and nine grandchildren’s stocking for Christmas 2020, as a follow up to previous books given to them in recent years, including *Humility* by Andrew Murray, *Resilience* by Eric Greutens and most recently *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henry Nouwen.

P. S. Here are a few meaning-full quotes on the topic worth reading:

“Wisdom is knowledge deepened by love.” -Matthew Fox

“History is both emanating from and also seduced by the same force: Divine Love...The dynamics for divine intimacy and human intimacy are the same.” - Richard Rohr

“The love of God creates in us such a oneing that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another.” -Julian of Norwich

“Love of God and love of one another lies at the core of every traditional religion. Love not only permeates those religions, it transcends them and binds them together. Divine love embraces everyone and everything. There is nothing outside the divine embrace.” -Teilhard de Chardin

“Like flowers waiting on rain, our hearts wait on love...giving attention to another opens us to love” -Mark Nepo

“Two things happen in any loving relationship. First, a new being — the relationship — is born with its own unique potentials and purpose. Second, the relationship — this new being — enhances and develops the individuals within it, each with their own unique potentials and purpose.” -Cynthia Bourgeault

“By love, God can be embraced and held, but not by thinking. Only love — not knowledge — can help us reach God.” -The Cloud of Unknowing

“The future of the earth lies not in science and technology, but in the spiritual power of world religions and the power of love. We are born out of love, we exist in love, and we are destined for eternal love.” -Ilia Delio

DIVINE LOVE: THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

(A ballad/song based on *The Four Loves*)

We're all born of Love,
We all exist in Love,
We are destined for Divine Love,
It's the journey of a lifetime.

From day one - to the end of our days,
We live and learn in the school of Love.
Our Creator, loved us into life,
Gives us the power of loving others.

FAMILY LOVE first teaches us we belong,
And how to embrace another's goodness.
We each long for unconditional love,
Of father, mother, sister and brother.

TRUE FRIENDS are "the crown of life"
which help us to achieve great things.
True friends make the brave braver,
And the kind kinder, for Love's sake.

PASSIONATE LOVE means finding delight,
In filling our beloved's deepest needs.
Where giving and receiving converge,
Union with another's body, mind and soul.

DIVINE LOVE means mirroring God's love.
Earthly loves prepare us for heavenly love.
We're made to love God and one another,
This requires unconditional love from above.

From the adoration of our parent's love,
To the sparkling eyes of a best friend,
To the passionate kiss of our beloved,
To the transformation of Divine Love.

How, you may ask ... can we truly please God?
By practicing unconditional love with every one!
It's now my life's challenge, loving more each day!