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ANALYSIS
OF LOVE

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Forward

Love is one of the foundational virtues in a Christian's foundation of faith. If our faith was imagined as a house, we need a strong foundation to build up the house to last. In Psalm 118, Jesus is said to be a cornerstone to build on. Another foundational stone that will hold up the entire house is love. Love is aligned to the cornerstone of Jesus, and allows a sturdy, virtuous life to be built up. After all, Jesus said that the two most important commandments are, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and love your neighbor as yourself" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Mark 12:30). We must first understand what love is to understand the power of that statement. The research included in the report has been gathered from my travels around the world to speak about how Christians understand God's love and partner with Him to love their communities. The implications of how we understand, and practice love impacts our relationship with God, with others, and even with ourselves. Since love has such a multi-dimensional impact on one's life and society, it must be understood and studied beyond the implicit teachings of culture.

September 2023, I left a secure job at a university to pursue the research outlined in this paper and start a nonprofit. The organization is called Fire in the Bush. The mission is to create spaces and empower people to experience testimonies of God's love. Since love is such a big topic, I interviewed Christians from around the world to learn more about its range. I heard testimonies about how love is defined and experienced, and how people love their communities. After hearing many stories, I have been able to understand in greater depth of the modern believers' understanding of the Bible and see how God is working today.

However, interviews alone were not enough to gain a full picture of love. While the scope was broad and ambitious, I wanted to create a clear definition of love and assess a theory to conceptualize love, which I believed would support modern believers to fully obey the command "love God and love others". While this theory was a nice starting point, I realized that it would not fully encapsulate what love was, because I was trying to pick and choose what kind of love was important while excluding other types of love.

Through travelling around the world to see how Christians are living and practicing their faith, I found common themes of love and how different cultures express love. I knew Christians of impeccable character in every country that I was visiting. I was connected to people through friends, those I have previously worked and served with, and people I met at churches and ministries where I was visiting. It is important to me to cultivate collective learning. Therefore, from the inception of my project, I wanted to incorporate the stories of Christians outside my own cultural context.

While I have preconceived notions from my upbringing/family of origin, my educational background, and growing up in the United States, I brought in a multi-cultural lens through the interviews and research. Many researchers noted a need for more diverse perspectives which have been missing from research. The work presented here will add to the field by bringing personal stories to the forefront.

I hope readers will benefit from the research to increase a wider world perspective about practicing Christianity, to learn from one another, and be challenged to think critically as we strive to live out one of the greatest commands. I truly believe that when Christians live lives of love, societies change, culture is shaped, and people can see who God with increased clarity. This research highlights people around the world who have taken the call to love quite seriously.

I. Introduction

Love is one of the supreme virtues in modern Christianity and largely a focus in the western world. Love is such a focus, many philosophers and academics have devoted their studies to trying to understand what love is, how people interact with it, and how love shows up in relationships and societies.

Depending on one's outlook, love is something beautiful and worthy of focusing on. Others feel the need to ask, "why is love important?". My research targets individuals identifying in the religion of Christianity. While I hope the information can be beneficial to those outside this faith tradition, the interviews are centered around modern Christians and their experiences (this will be unpacked later in the paper).

I went into the project assuming that all Christian believers agreed love is important to one's walk of faith. However, this thought was quickly disrupted when I interviewed a woman in South Korea who works with youth. She mentioned some teenagers ask why love was important for Christians. How do we separate what culture says love is and what God says love is? The variations in expressions and understandings of love across time and space does not detract from love. There is a beautiful integration of what love is based on these expressions of love (Jeanrond, 2010). Each culture reflects unique aspects of who God is, since humanity is all made in God's image (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Genesis 1:26). Love is essential to the ancient and modern Christian walk of faith because it is a key lens for how we are to understand God's love for us, our identity and purpose in God, and it informs perfect relationship with family, friends, community, and the world. Love informs our understanding of basic human existence.

This proposal has a multi-cultural focus because one cannot understand the whole-ness and unity of God's love without analyzing the people He has made. I set out to analyze primary sources and current literature, the role of love in the Bible, and interviews for modern-day, global Christians to create a holistic perspective and create collective understanding about love. Many researchers have identified western thinking dominating the current literature and interpretations of scripture. As a result, finding sources outside western thought can be difficult. I used ancient philosophies of East Asian societies to understand various interpretations of love.

My proposed theory combines elements from psychology and philosophy. It sought to communicate the importance of love in the Christian tradition and create a paradigm to understand love on a spectrum. While the theory was able to capture what love is in part, it failed to fully encapsulate the nuance of love without excluding certain types of love. Since the theory I set out to prove was largely influenced by Christian theories of love, eros love was often

ostracized and criticized as not being a “pure” form of love. This thought is pervasive in churches around the United States even today, although the narrative is beginning to change. Yet, as I studied love, I began to realize that romantic, physical love has a place in the conversation just as much as other types of love (such as cognitive and other-focused love). The theory was not able to recognize the need for this love, and as a result, I found it insufficient to incorporate the multi-cultural scope of the project and the dimensions across one’s lifespan.

The virtue of love is explored through two lenses: a review of how Christians have understood love in the past and how Christians currently understand/practice love. These two lenses will help Christians understand the present condition of love and where to grow and implement love for God and His people. Studying love is essential for Christians, because it is one of the markers of a spirit-filled life (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Galatians 5:22). It is the responsibility of mature Christians to pass on this information and disciple the next generations in Christian virtues in order to train up the next generation in the way they should go so that they do not depart from it (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Proverbs 22:6). This research is a resource for Christian leaders and parents. After the research has been shared, the interviews will be released to the public as a source of encouragement and equipping to go and love the community.

Since love is in the first two commandments, it is essential to start here. One way to visualize love is as a foundational stone in a Christian’s foundation of faith. Jesus is the cornerstone (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Psalm 118:22), and love is measured up against Him and laid down to build into more complex issues such as justice, righteousness, and obedience. Understanding and walking in these complex instructions God has given throughout scripture, one must first have a strong foundation of faith. Christians must study and learn what love is and how it applies to everyday life. We must learn from past scholars and thinkers to understand how culture and society have shaped the concept of love to how we interact with it today. God’s word, the Bible, is just as relevant today as it was when it was written. The interviews in this project highlight the ways that people are living out scripture in modern day.

Living a moral and virtuous life as a Christian today takes practice and effort, as stated by N.T. Wright and Dante. Dante describes two things required to walk to God in his epic poem, *Purgatorio*. These two things are a person’s will and God’s light. Another way to say it is, “we should approach love as an art which needs to be learned just as we need to learn the art of living.” (Fromm, 1975). Love takes intention, effort, and revelation from God. Societies will change for the better if we know true love and practice it every day to make it a part of our character. Since stories are a building agent for character, this project creates a digital library of testimonies with Christians around the world to support youth and new believers beginning the journey of faith, so they can walk in the best path God has set out for them. Intergenerational stories are needed today more than ever.

My working definition of love is a desire for perfect relationship that is expressed through action. Perfect relationship has been revealed by God to us, but love is not exclusively “Christian” (Jeanrond, 2010). “The concept of love, in one form or another, has informed the definition and development of almost every human culture in the history of the world - past and present, East

and West, primitive and complex” (Jeanrond, 2010, p. 29). While love has been in every culture and faith tradition throughout time, I believe these traditions reveal elements to a bigger truth. Just as color books have outlines for people to color in, love is not vibrant and seen in its entirety without God. God brings order and understanding to love in the purest sense, as outlined by scripture.

Although love from God is perfection, time has warped love into its own sort of god. When I went into this research, I felt pessimistic and disappointed by how the world perceives love. Rather than seeing it as a gift from God and something pure and holy, I saw many forms of disordered and abusive love that made it difficult to see God as good. I have come to conclude that the love I saw was not love at all. But, due to limited vocabulary with the word love, disordered and abusive love can be associated with God. Instead, disordered love is birthed when we make love or ourselves idols, devoid of God Himself. If God is love and other attributes of God are known such as, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, etc., then disordered love cannot be the love of God. The historical overview of love’s development from Jesus to modern day will reveal how love devolved into its own god.

Culture plays a role in what perfect relationship from God to human looks like. One of the most poignant examples is from the researcher Dr. Batja Mesquita who is a leading scholar on emotions and how emotions are understood across cultures. Generally, in western settings emotions are something that live within a person. However, in eastern settings, emotions are something that live between people (2022). While the difference is slight, it impacts the experience of love quite drastically. Love is an action, an emotion, and a character virtue. What this looks like will vary based on one’s cultural background. Jeanrond says, “every form or expression of love is rooted in a specific culture” (2010, p. 9). Christians need to learn from cultures outside their own to gain a better picture of love as a perfect relationship. The Bible was experienced through an ancient near-east perspective, which encourages readers to look outside and seek additional resources since we live in a modern age.

Understanding the interviews and implications first require defining key concepts and providing a brief historical overview. While this is not a comprehensive overview (many researchers have published entire books on this topic), it provides context for readers to be on the same page to discuss the various perspectives of modern believers and continue the discussion of what this all means for us today.

II. Background and Significance

When one thinks of Christian character, what is the first virtue that comes to mind?

Each person may have a different response, but collectively many Christians would respond saying love is one of the important virtues to be practiced in a bible-believing Christians life. N.T. Wright, one of the most highly regarded New Testament scholars, defines Christian character as a “pattern of thinking and acting that runs right through someone, you have to think about it and act on it regularly to make a habit into character” (2010). Virtues are the driving force of strong character. If one’s character is built on feelings alone, then one’s actions cannot

be anchored completely in truth. The Bible is the anchor when it comes to Christian character, not one's personal feelings (Hindson, 2003). When the mind is focused to learn and implement the virtue of love in life, one begins to reflect God's love for his people to the world. Paul taught us to capture every thought, to practice love we must consciously act with determination. We will discuss what this looks like for modern Christians later, but at this moment, concepts need to be defined for the discussion.

Other philosophies and religions around the world have a similar perspective on character. There is a list of ethical values in Confucianism that bring forward the goal of ultimate harmony through the importance of moral character. Love is reflected in each of these values, although the words may not traditionally be translated as love (Wallace, 2019). Across the world in various religions and philosophies, "love – or expressions of love such as compassion, respect, and desire for absolute beauty or goodness – is a central value" (May, 2011). The expressions of love may vary from culture to culture or may have different implications depending on the language. Love is central in the two greatest commandments (originating in the Hebrew Bible) stated by Jesus.

Mark 12:28-33 states, "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (English Standard Version Bible, 2001)

Here Jesus clearly states the two greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor. Love is not just important; it is foundational for obedience to God. This was not only emphasized in first century Israel, but generations of rabbis also reference the book of Deuteronomy when discussing love. An unnamed scholar said, "Do all that you do for the sake of love" (May, 2011). Simon the Righteous added to this saying, "By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, by the [Temple-]service, and by deeds of loving-kindness" (May, 2011; Mishnah, p 446). Love is a central attribute of Judaism and is the tradition that Jesus was brought up in. More Rabbis teach about love being an essential element in the Torah, yet often Christians overlook this perspective as we project personal definitions of love onto the Hebrew scriptures. According to some rabbis and Jewish scholars, the Law was given to humanity for the sake of perfect relationship. This gift, then, aligns with the key definition of love I have set out to understand.

A. Define Key Concepts

While this is not an all-inclusive overview of every word for love around the world, the purpose of this section is to discuss the various elements of "love" and how this concept shows up in

language and culture. Rather than defining every individual word, which is impossible, I have chosen to lump the attributes into categories and discuss the various attributes in Greek, Hebrew, and other languages and traditions that were represented on this trip.

1. *Self-Love*

In Greek culture, there was an emphasis on self-love. The Greek word for this concept is “Philautia”. According to Strong’s Concordance, *philautos* is, “properly, *a lover of self*, describing someone preoccupied with their own selfish desires.” (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.). The only time in the Bible this word is used is in 2 Timothy 3:2, which states, “But understand this, that in the last days hard times will come- for people will be *lovers of self*, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ... avoid these people!” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). This attribute, according to 2 Timothy 3, is a warning of what not to be. Outside of the Bible, what did this concept look like? Ancient Greeks had two perspectives on this word, the positive and negative. The negative is revealed in 2 Timothy, to be arrogant and narcissistic in self-love; One that disregards others in order to serve self. This is a form of disordered love. Disordered love is an obsessive love resulting in broken relationships with others. However, there is also a positive sense of the word when someone increases their view of themselves to establish positive self-worth and strives to be the best version of themselves. Aristotle was a philosopher who lived 384 BC – 322 BC and spoke about love in his writings. Aristotle (1925) encouraged this kind of self-discovery and self-love. Jean-Jacque Rousseau, a French writer and philosopher (1712 – 1778) also speaks of love for oneself (*amour de soi*). *Amour de soi* is about preservation, it can produce humanity and virtue. Rousseau contrasts *amour de soi* to desire for the admiration of others (*amour-propre*), which can also be translated as pride (Rousseau, 2004). *Amour-propre* can be dangerous when one solely lives for societal approval. Epicurus says, “If you are ever tempted to look for outside approval, realize that you have compromised your integrity. If you need a witness, be your own”. Love in a biblical sense and in many eastern cultures, focuses primarily on others and serving others without thinking of oneself, which can be contrary to this view of love.

2. *Other-Focused Love*

The Hebrew word *chesed* is untranslatable to English because we have nothing quite like it. The closest translation is having been loving-kindness (Lord Rabbi Sacks, 2019). Scholars read the Torah, Prophets, and Wisdom Literature and found *chesed* is a core concept throughout. There is no better place to look at this concept in action than Ruth. Lord Rabbi Sacks said Ruth is a short story of *chesed*. *Chesed* is a “choosing love”, a gift from God, freely given (Lord Rabbi Sacks, 2019). Other translations of *chesed* include steadfast love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, goodness, and devotion. *Chesed* goes beyond the sensational side of love (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.). It is about relationships, generosity, loyalty, and personal relationships beyond the law. Already you may be able to see the English word for love cannot encompass the breadth and nuance of the connotation of love here in the word *chesed*.

Confucianism has a similar value to the faithfulness translation of *chesed*, this virtue is *Xin*. *Xin* can be translated as faithfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, and keeping promises (Wallace, 2019). Li, Ericsson, and Quennerstedt (2013) explain the Chinese root of *Xin*. *Xin* is the “seat of all emotions and embodies the inherent goodness of human nature and wisdom”. It can be both a positive word and a negative word based on context, in certain context *Xin* can even impact one’s health. Philosophically, *Xin* is related to interactions with people and choosing to be in good relationships.

Agape is thoroughly discussed in Western theological tradition. Scholars like Anders Nygren, a Swedish theologian (1890-1978), argues that agape is the only form of true Christian love (Nygren and Watson, 1953). Denis de Rougemont, a Swiss cultural theorist (1906-1985), sees it as an affirmation of this world and an acceptance of human limitations, including human life in its concrete conditions (May, 2011). Agape is highly regarded as an ideal form of love.

Agape is God’s attitude to humanity according to John 3:16 and Romans 5:8 which states, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). Love demands demonstration, as shown from how God loves us. God demonstrated love, which means His love was preexisting and He chose to love us in a tangible way (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Romans 8:29). We are called to respond to His agape love with agape love through obedience to His commandments (see John 14:15). Dr. Mesquita says ancient Greek and Japanese tradition, emotions are something between people, not within them (2022). Love is felt through demonstrated action rather than a feeling within a person.

Agape is regarded as deeper than *phileo*, because where *phileo* is based on sentiment, agape “selects an object for a higher purpose” (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.). John 21:15-17 outlines this concept.

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.’ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’”

Throughout the story of Jesus and Peter there is a shift from agape to *phileo* love, the more Jesus asks, “do you love Me?”. Strong’s argues the reason for this shift is, “First it is a love that values and esteems, unselfish and ready to serve. End with the thought of cherishing the object above all else” (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.). Service and cherishing are noted by

Jesus in the context of love. Phileo is about manifesting an affection characterized by consistency, from the motive of highest veneration.

Philia, on the other hand, is the most important type of love to philosophers like Aristotle. Philia is friendship-love. Aristotle talks about this love as one based on wishing and serving others well, without regard to one's own gain or pleasure (1925). Rousseau disagrees with Aristotle and argues that erotic love is superior to friendship. Other Christian thinkers across time (such as St. Augustine to Kierkegaard) believed that friendship took away from spiritual love and therefore could not be the supreme form of love (May, 2011). While philia is disputed, it is widely talked about in the context of love.

Philia-love varies from culture to culture in how it is internalized and communicated. Up until this point, we have analyzed love from a western and ancient near-east point of view. However, eastern cultures have a lot of depth to add to this section. Ancient eastern cultures were widely ruled with social hierarchies. This impacted the philosophies and religions of the day. For instance, in Confucianism, "the system brings peaceful relationships to a peaceful society, the system is founded on normative behavior that honors orderliness, and the system turns on the acceptance of hierarchical relationships" (Warren, 2019, p 443). This is mirrored in Judaism which speaks of the aim of both love and law is to order relationships by relational traditions and experiences (Jeanround, 2010). The well-being of society was greatly emphasized in how people showed up and supported one another. This is similar to philia and agape, seeing love as sacrifice. Ephesians 5:21-6:24 also outlines how orderliness in relationships is not only shown in other world philosophies and Hebrew Scriptures, but it is a continuous theme even in the letter to Ephesus.

Xiao is a core Confucian value of filial piety and respectful love towards parents. Wallace says, "Xiao is considered the most natural, strongest, most reliably present, most essential type of love" (Warren, 2019). Similar to other commentaries on love, Xiao is seen as a "binding virtue of all relationships". However, Xiao is not only children to parents, but Wallace also shares this love can be the "parent's desire and duty to protect and nurture the child and the child's grateful awareness..." (Warren, 2019, p 451). Duty is widely woven into love in this culture, which mirrors closer to ancient near eastern culture that the Torah was written.

3. *Romantic Love*

On the one hand of romantic love, we have the biological/neurotransmitter form of love, which boils down to physical attraction and what happens in the body with attraction (Wallace, 2019). This concept is understood in every culture, although different cultures have different beliefs about the importance of the physicality of love.

Eros love is spoken about a lot throughout history and in conversations about love. De Rougemont characterizes eros as an irrational passion that is always discontented with earthly and temporal existence; it moves the lover to a total surrender of self and absorption into the All. Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher (1844-1900), suggests that the Christian understanding of eros love has poisoned the collective understanding of eros, which in turn is forbidding us to taste the happiness God has prepared for us (May, 2011). Even for Plato, Eros'

love can only go so far to capture what “true”/supreme love is. I would not go so far as to agree with Nygren that Eros is not on the same level as agape love, however I do not believe we completely understand what love is when we restrict our view to Eros love only.

“In romantic situations, Confucianism visualizes the happy and stable bonded couple as:

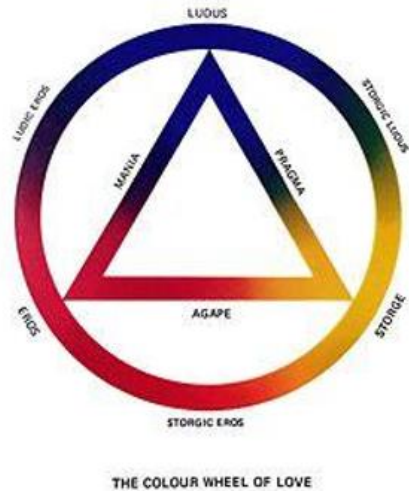
- sacrificing for one another,
- showing integrity in communication and promises (honesty),
- showing compassion or sympathy or empathy or understanding or other forms of warmth, and,
- fulfilling the expected roles: the man will shield and care for the woman and the woman will defer to the man, the diligent husband will provide for the household, working outside the house, and the diligent wife will complete household and child-rearing duties and to some degree manage the house.” (Wallace, 2019, p 447)

As one can see, the romantic love in this setting is focused on action, as Dr. Batja suggested in her research on emotions with eastern cultures. There is fluidity between my sections, especially as we bring understanding into a multi-cultural context.

Buddhism also teaches about the “Golden Mean”, which highlights appropriate responses. Intense passion and desire are not celebrated, but instead the goal is to walk in virtue of moderation (Wallace, 2019). This is quite contrary to Eros, the Greek perspective of strong desire, which we speak about shortly.

The most common Hebrew word for love is ahav (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.). This is the closest word to how we use “love” in English. It can mean anything from the attachment of friends (see 1 Samuel 18:1) to lust/sexual desire. There are also words specifically for man and wife love or a bellowed type of love (predominantly in Song of Songs – Dode –or Rayah; Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.). Additionally, Hosea uses “ahav” to refer to God’s relationship with Israel and the husband to his wife (Hosea 3:1; Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, n.d.).

The current research about love often speaks of “love styles” and more research is coming out about how various cultures interact with love styles. In short, love styles were created by Canadian psychologist John Alan Lee in 1973. He defined the primary types of love as Eros, Ludus and Storge. The secondary types include Mania, Pragma, and Agape (Lee, 1973). “In Lee’s (1973) original formulation, falling in love is also significantly influenced by social and cultural experiences.” (Sanri & Goodwin, 2012). The findings suggested that “Storge and pragma were significantly higher among Turkish respondents, as were Ludus and mania; pragma, mania, and agape were all higher among rural respondents. Eros was highest among rural British respondents; storge, pragma, and agape highest among rural Turks” (Sanri & Goodwin, 2012). What this means is that in the Turkish participants, practical love was more understood and practiced than the feeling-type of love that was more widely practiced by the British participants.



(Kaitlindzurenko, 2015)

4. *Cognitive Love*

Cognitive love is about consciously thinking about love. While cognitive love is not devoid of emotion, it may not be as emotive as affective types of love. We will discuss key terms in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism outlining what cognitive love is and how it contributes to the broader understanding of love.

First, “Yi” can be translated as, “uprightness, righteousness, knowing right/wrong, doing what is right regardless of personal benefit (duty)” (Wallace, 2019, p 449). I consider this cognitive love, because of the thoughtfulness associated with considering one’s actions in the broader course of society and personal duty. This expression of love is about how one’s thoughts influence one’s actions. Christians are taught the need to take hold of one’s thoughts, and this is an external representation of the teaching.

Second, “He” can be translated as harmony or orderliness. Order is an integral element of Daoism. Wallace argues, “orderliness constrains passionate choice, bringing to a couple in love an imperative to be ‘reasonable’ and non-disruptive in behavior” (Wallace, 2019, p 454). Again, we can see here how He is consciously thinking about others outside the relationship to have broader, societal harmony. When we reflect on Deuteronomy and Leviticus, we can see how orderliness and relational harmony with God are outlined in each commandment and boundary. Jeanrond (2010) speaks of God’s laws as ways to stay in perfect relationship with Him, rather than senseless rules and regulations for a religion. ‘He’ is similar, the goal is for harmony, a tenant of Daoism and Confucianism (Wallace, 2019).

Lastly, Buddhist benevolence references kindness, friendship, love, benevolence, or pity (Wallace, 2019). This value creates an attitude or response of love for others. According to Berkeley Buddhist Priory, “Charity is something that we ourselves do, and benevolence is recognizing something everything else is doing and then going along with it. In charity you don’t recognize it, you just do, but in benevolence you’ve for this two-way thing going very beautifully... the feedback you get is joy” (Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, 2020).

5. *Disordered Love*

Mania is a kind of obsessive love, which leads to destructive relationships. Mania can impact any of the loves above and corrupt something that was meant to be good. Self-love (amour-propre) can turn into a heart's lust for status, and it will eventually corrupt love into something it was never intended to be (Rousseau, 2004). Disordered love impacts excess/deficient loves that will be outlined in the proposed theory section.

B. Historical Overview

Ancient thinkers saw love as, “a great human and even cosmic force, but none of their surviving texts attributes such vast ethical significance to it” (May, 2011). Love was seen as a governing force, but not given the same importance it is given today. In Simon May's book, *Love: A History*, he walks through the various philosophies of ancient western culture to present. I will summarize his extensive work to support our journey to the modern understanding of love that will be explored in the interviews.

Plato begins by expanding the views of love from physical desires to a sort of paradise. Plato shared love as a spiritual endeavor. This spiritual endeavor was essential to become fully human and live life to its fullest. These conversations are recorded in the *Symposium* (Plato, 1993). May connects this transitory thought to Deuteronomy and Leviticus saying that “Love makes us ‘whole’ as individuals... love is aroused by beauty... love enables us to get beyond a superficial relation to things... love brings the best out of us as lovers – above all, virtue and wisdom” (2011). While this is still attributing aspects of love to physical desires, there is now an element of cognitive love that is being added into the thoughts surrounding love. Plato argues that the ultimate aim of love is to possess beauty and goodness (Plato, 1993). Love must seek another good. This love that Plato speaks of is rooted in desire, true to modern western thought on emotions.

Aristotle builds on Plato's thoughts and articulates love as, “a bond between individuals for the sake of their flourishing, rather than, ... a way of looking beyond individuals to a timeless reality of absolute beauty” (May, 2011). We have already discussed the Greek word *philia* above in key terms. Aristotle found that friendship (*phila*) was the supreme form of love (1925). This view integrated to the western world around him and the sphere of his influence.

In the first couple centuries of the common era, two philosophers firmly believed and articulated the view that love at its foundation is sexual. These two individuals are Lucretius and Ovid, poets in the Roman Empire. We have already discussed love as romantic desire on a physical level. While they may have been in a minority, another individual who spoke of love quite differently was influencing the world's understanding of love for many generations to come. This individual was none other than Jesus.

Within the Christian movement, the understanding of love is widely debated and discussed. May (2011) and Jeanrond (2010) state that Christianity turned love into a supreme virtue beyond what the people of ancient culture may have believed. Jesus, Himself, does not speak extensively on love, rather it is His followers that discuss love at length. Earlier the verses in Mark 12:29-31

were mentioned, where Jesus spoke of love being the most important commandment given to His people. Additionally, He speaks of love in Luke 6:27-30, the Sermon on the Mount, which May connects back to Exodus 23:4-5 and Proverbs 25:21.

Jesus' disciples and followers speak of love a lot. They make bold statements such as the portion in 1 Corinthians 13, declaring what love is or saying that "God is love" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 John 4:16). "Here, for the first time in Western history, love is clearly named as the essence of the divine."

There are two primary thoughts on love that Jeanrond explores in his book, *The Theology of Love*. These two beliefs originate in John's and Paul's respective writings. John shows that love is how God reveals Himself. John, through his gospel, emphasized that love is commandment to, "work for unity and harmony within the parameters of this community" (Jeanrond, 2010, p 36). Harmony is a large aspect of how John instructs others to love. Paul reveals that "love is the binding force of a brotherhood of believers in Christ" (May, 2011, p 86). Love is highly influential in the teachings of Paul, in fact, it is "the central dimension of Christian discipleship and existence" (Jeanrond, 2010, p 38). Paul would argue that only through the Holy Spirit can we truly love as God has called us to love.

Augustine, a North African theologian, and philosopher (354-430), builds on Jesus' teachings and the gospels and other New Testament writings to proclaim that there is no virtue without love. Augustine primarily thought of love in relation to God. God is the source of all virtue and love, which means that by our own power we cannot love. We can only love through God, and when we love it is always ultimately directed to God.

Twelfth-century religious writings and conceptions were largely talking about group formation and differentiation. Many writers and thinkers of that time were looking at roles, behaviors, and what it means to the 'inner man' compared to the outer man. (Walker Bynum, 1982, p 85). Bernard of Clairvaux was a monk who lived from 1090-1123 and spoke to his fellow monks about how to live a good life. He emphasized love as a broad concern for Christian living and thinking. "Love itself was seen as a form of knowledge." (Jeanrond, 2010). He emphasized that part of human love was desire. He had four degrees of love. First, bodily love. Second, love God for our own good. Third, love God for His sake. And fourth, concerns human love for the self. His theology was primarily for an audience of monks; however, it was applied beyond that group.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German Protestant reformer who spoke into many theological issues. He was greatly involved in Augustinian teachings (Jeanrond, 2010). "Love is the means by which God 'produces a divine man, who is one... with Him; a man who, when he loves his neighbor... can glory that he has acted like a God'." (May, 2011; Luther, 1518). Love allows humanity to share in divine image (Luther, 1518). Luther also compares pagan love with Christian love. Luther spoke of love as a Christian "possession". Ultimately, for Luther, Christian love (like Augustine) must be directed to God whereas other loves were not directed towards God (Nygren and Watson, 1953).

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance created large rifts in understanding across disciplines, and the understanding of love was no different. One example is broadening the love that used to be solely for God. Now, there is greater worship of His creation and other people without being considered blasphemous. Baruch Spinoza, a Portuguese-Jewish philosopher (1632-1677) says, "...love cannot 'ascend' from the natural to the supernatural, from world to God, from body to soul, from the material to the purely spiritual, from a life of earthbound fate to a life of heavenly freedom, and from a world of evil to a realm of pure good." (May, 2011). As readers we can see how love is zooming out from the micro love of God, to be able to see more of what God has made and humanity. These thoughts lead towards Rousseau's development as he combines the topic of love with romanticism.

Spinoza showed how loving nature was a way to love God. Rousseau changed love as a duty for God to love as a duty to humanity. Self-identity can be found in love for God, others, and the self. There is no specific audience this kind of love requires, contrary to previous traditions where love was only for God. We have already discussed the two forms of self-love outlined by Rousseau. This twisting of love is in danger of turning from what Jesus and the rabbinic scholars taught about love and turning it into a contemporary philosophy on how to live a good life and be happy. Love became such an ideal that the foundation for love as a religion separate from God is set. During the next 300 to 500 years, May articulates, "Where once God was love, now love is God. It is itself the supreme Good; the creative source of all things; absolute Being; immortal; true; nameless." (2011). The German philosopher Schlegel (1772-1829) coins the term, 'religion of love' (Schlegel, 1971). No longer are philosophies of love about Christianity in the 1800s to 1900s. In fact, a fellow German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860), declares that sexual love is the ultimate goal of humanity. Quite the contrast to Socrates and Plato stating that it is the ultimate good that is striving to be achieved (Schopenhauer, 1966). Schopenhauer says love is "... that obsessive attention to one person who intuition tells us is the right mate for reproduction" (May, 2011).

While I could continue to Nietzsche, Freud, and Proust as they argue the importance of self-love and love without God, I will stop the history here. The thoughts devolve into the state of modern people that love is one's own truth and definition. I believe the modern belief allows for many problems of belief in modern believers and contorts scripture from its original intention outlined by rabbinic thought, Jesus, and the gospel and New Testament authors.

Research and conversations about Christian love have primarily been in western thoughts and traditions, as outlined above. While we are in a unique time of globalization, there is still a lack of information and commentators coming from cultures outside the west. Therefore, my history is largely influenced by the shifts in western culture as it pertains to love.

C. East/West Perceptions of Love

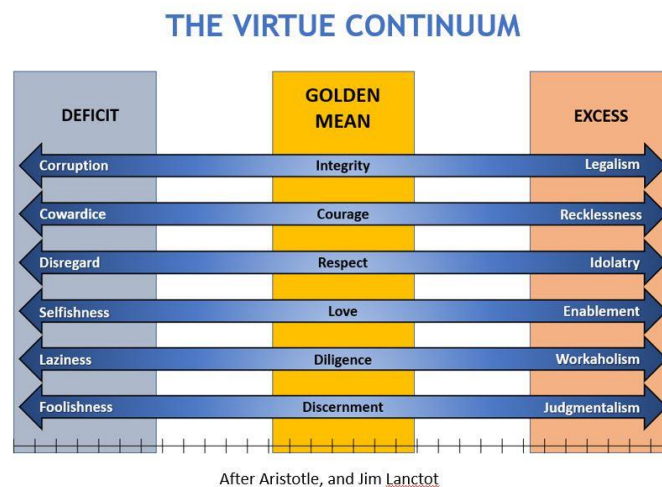
As we have already seen in the two previous sections, while love is a widely talked about topic, there are differences in how we conceptualize this virtue depending on the primary cultural influence for young, developing children. Related to this research, some of the largest differences can be found in family and romantic relationships. Family is a core value of many eastern

countries, one is able to see how fidelity to family and honor are woven through eastern philosophies, as seen in concepts such as He, Yi, and Xin. Family is important to western cultures as well; however, observers are able to see the value of independence within family units. Many western families with children over the age of 18 do not live together, compared to traditional eastern families. When it comes to romantic relationships, eastern media highlights duty to one's spouse in a social hierarchy. Additionally, there is a value on remaining in control of one's emotions at all times (Warren, 2019). Comparatively, western culture largely experiences love as a rush of emotion that is willing to sacrifice everything for one person. Love, then, becomes something that originates within a person in western cultures and radiates out (Mesquita, 2022). Generally, in eastern cultures, love originates outside of a person and radiates in to connect with the divine. Specifically, in Japan emotions are seen as something that exists within/between people (Mesquita, 2022), whereas western countries see emotions as something living inside the person. This simple difference can make it difficult to understand concepts, as the researcher's experiences when asking questions about how the Japanese people interacted with their emotions. Both cultures provide insight to the way God designed love, inside and out.

D. Paradigm of Love

The theory I set out to test is a combination of a couple different models and theories outlined from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual 5*, and Pinkman's relational theory. I will begin by explaining each individual aspect, then highlight a visualization of the concept.

Firstly, the framework of my theory is based on Aristotle's understanding of virtues. Aristotle distinguishes ethical virtues from virtues of the mind. The difference lies in the engagement of the soul. Virtues of the mind are founded in the soul's reasoning, while ethical virtues come from a part of the soul that cannot reason (Aristotle, 1925, 1103a-10). He introduces the Golden Mean Theory with his ethical virtues such as courage. The virtue is between an excess and a deficiency, what lies between is the "golden mean" (see image below).



If we take courage as an example, we can see Aristotle's rationale below.

“The courageous person, for example, judges that some dangers are worth facing and others not, and experiences fear to a degree that is appropriate to his circumstances. He lies between the coward, who flees every danger and experiences excessive fear, and the rash person, who judges every danger worth facing and experiences little or no fear. Aristotle holds that this same topography applies to every ethical virtue: all are located on a map that places the virtues between states of excess and deficiency. He is careful to add, however, that the mean is to be determined in a way that takes into account the particular circumstances of the individual (Aristotle, 1925, 1106a36–b7).”

So, the deficiency of courage is cowardice, and the excess is rashness. These two attributes help us understand what true courage is and how to interact with a characteristic that impacts the way we live our life, similar to the Buddhist thought of the Golden Mean. In the same way, we will see how love can fit inside of this paradigm.

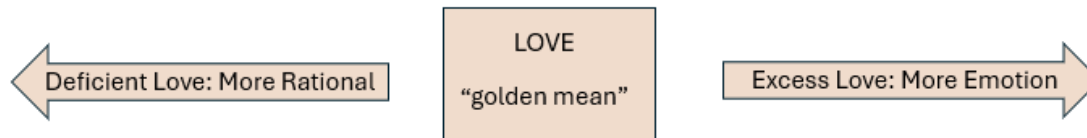
Secondly, the theory is inspired by the Diagnostic Statistic Manual (DSM) 5. While I was in graduate school, there was a shift from the DSM 4 to 5 in the way diagnosis were communicated. The system was switched from a tiered diagnosis to a spectrum. For example, Aspergers and Autism were previously separate diagnosis and were diagnosed based on tiered levels. But this switch put them into one diagnosis where Aspergers was higher functioning (requiring less support) to lower functioning (requiring more support).

Similar to Aristotle’s model, however in this model we are not excluding certain kinds of love but revealing how they do not fulfill the fully independent type of love. There are some kinds of love that are excessive but may reveal a different side of love we would otherwise not be able to see. Especially, as I have previously mentioned, since we have one word for love in the English language, there are other words we lump with love that need to be separated as we grow our vocabulary to be more articulate of the reality of certain circumstances.

Finally, relational theory outlines what personhood and identity are (Pinkman and Folsom, 2022). This paradigm reveals one’s identity is based on relational connectedness between God and the person, and people with people. At the foundational level of this theory, the way we interact with God is often the way we interact with others. So, if we have a positive, loving relationship with God, we can use the knowledge to then go and love others in a way that glorifies God.

Love can only be fully understood in relationships, and, by my definition, true love can only be practiced within the pursuit of perfect relationship. Vincent Brummer says, “Love has generally been taken to be an attitude of one person towards another, rather than as a relation between persons.” (Brummer, 1933, p. 33). Therefore, as we work to understand what love is, there has to be an understanding on two planes. Jeanrond says, “The human desire for love always develops within larger networks of relationship” (2010, p 19). The first, is a heavenly perspective of love in the perfect relationship with God. The second is love in the striving of perfect relationship with His people. Love is not exclusively Christian but can be found outside of it to (Jeanrond, 2010). While I still believe that perfect love can only be found in God, this model reveals how

love makes sense in Christianity, but others can live, and experience love outside of the Christian faith as well. However, for the purpose of this research, we focus on love within Christianity.



(Hannah Hayes, 2024)

These three concepts have been combined to create a paradigm on how to understand and speak about love. As seen in the picture above, the golden mean is Love. Since my first language is English, I am going to use the broad word with my definition of, love is a desire for perfect relationship as revealed through actions.

Deficient love is apathy, where there is no desire, only rationality. True love requires some element of desire, even the desire to live to one’s ideals. Deficient love can look like resentment and bitterness and self-love. The closer we get to the mean, the more an attribute can look like love, but until the ultimate desire is perfect relationship without any impurities it either falls toward deficient love (without desire) or excess love (overwhelming desire). There needs to be an element of rationality.

Excess love is a type of mania love. Obsessive and controlling to the extent where it is no longer benefiting one another or seeking perfect relationship with another person, only a selfish view. The closer we go towards the means we can see terms like blind devotion.

E. Study Rationale

Love, and its many variations, is a hot topic right now both in the secular world and in the religious world. It is all the more important to make sure people are on the same page in an increasingly modernized world where information can be accessed anywhere at any time. The issue of miscommunication comes when we think we know what the other person is saying, but our world perspectives may be so different that we are projecting our own assumptions on another person.

While the impact of this study can benefit anyone who is interested in learning more about love and/or study what God means when He speaks about love. This research supports building basic knowledge and assisting those ready to step out into greater thought queries and practical applications of love. Christians are meant to learn from one another and grow in intimacy with God as a global body of believers. Experiences from around the world are brought together in a concise location to better understand the greatest commandments we have been given in the Hebrew Scriptures and from Jesus Himself, “Love God and love others”.

Lastly, the paradigm was not intended to be theoretical in nature, but influence discipleship in church and para-church organizations. Discipleship is about intentional relationships. Discipleship is a practice throughout societies in and outside Christianity. Intergenerational relationships are important as we raise up the next generation of believers, yet the young adults in the church today are dwindling or intermingling with other religions.

At the beginning of my research, I was asked an interesting question, “Why is love important for believers?”. I went into this research with the assumption everyone would see the importance of love in Christian tradition, however this was greatly impacted by my life experience. There are so many virtues worth discussing and outlining in a discipleship relationship, however without the foundation, there can be no discussions about more complex concepts. For instance, if we do not understand God’s love for us and what that means, we cannot understand what true justice, righteousness, or even anger looks like.

Why is it important to know what biblical justice is? If we do not have a biblical foundation, then the twisting of concepts like justice become easier to fathom and we allow sin to enter the church under the guise of “love”, even when it is something that God clearly states He despises. Church and outreach initiatives need to be welcoming without compromising the truth. When we look at love through the perspective that love is the desire for perfect relationship as revealed through actions, there are still many excusable actions. Which is why, as Christians, we need to make sure God and His word remain at the center of love.

God gave us His commandments so that we can have relationship with Him, not to constrict or micromanage His people’s life (Jeanrond, 2010). God’s justice may look different from our own when we live outside His will since He loves us so much, He doesn’t want us to sin, so He will make it known when we are living outside His plan. This and more will be discussed later in relation to the results and discussion of biblical concepts.

III. Research Methods and Designs

A. Study Design

The project includes a cross-sectional, multi-cultural study to define love and analyze the impact one’s understanding of love has on a person and the community. The combination of theoretical and practical knowledge results in a well-rounded understanding of the concept of love. I did a qualitative data analysis by collecting information through interviews. Interviews were reviewed for key words and themes after all had been completed. While there are eight countries represented in the interviews, the hope is for the results to be applied to the general condition of Christians around the world. Since this is a cross-sectional study, there will be no follow-up with participants after the initial interview is conducted.

B. Sample

The sample of Christians was chosen to represent modern believers in the protestant sect. The countries were originally chosen to represent the entire globe to highlight the understanding of love from east to west. Interviews were conducted in six countries, however there were

immigrants interviewed that represented more countries. The countries that are represented in the sample include: United States, China, South Korea, Japan, Poland, Canada, Hungary, and Germany. The sample represents views and experiences from east to west, there is no representation to compare north to south. The interviews planned in South Africa were not completed. There is one unofficial interview in the airport that revealed one experience of Christian-specific love in Africa.

The sample of interviews of modern believers was initially set up through personal connections and word of mouth. I was able to interview 21 people. There were a couple unforeseen circumstances that interrupted the plan while I set out to conduct more interviews for this section of the research. Most notably, when the war in Israel broke out a large majority of my interviews were not able to be conducted. Due to security risk of individuals, we were unable to do an online interview (as we were able to do with other individuals). In addition, there were some interviews that fell through after being planned for the research. I was able to adapt by shifting my interview model from solely in-person to a hybrid model, this never-the-less interfered with the research interviews.

C. Research Methods

The questions being asked have not been used by any other study. Since the research is testing a theory set out by me, the social theories influenced but do not define the research. All interviews have been transcribed for a qualitative data analysis. All interviewees have been asked the same question. I have gone through the interviews to highlight key words and phrases and expressions to assess what is similar, then the interviews are grouped by country to assess what is similar and different across regions.

D. Strengths

There is a large gap in academic research on love that is currently being explored in literature, which is bringing in a multi-cultural lens to the conceptualization of love. This research is centered around understanding the various perspectives of love, specifically bringing in global philosophies, academics, and individuals understanding of love historical and in the present moment. Person-centered interviews were prioritized in this research to make sure the research was not solely theoretical but had practical application for people interested in interacting with the research. What this looks like is having examples of how people are living out the theory being tested and then having practical ways that other people can practice the love being explained by various people.

E. Limitations and Barriers

The sample size, as previously mentioned, was smaller than anticipated. As a result, the results are unable to be statistically significant due to the population this sample is reflecting. The small sample size is partially due to a flawed initial model I set out with - primarily that all the interviews with modern Christians were to be in-person. Towards the end of the research, I pivoted to include virtual interviews. However, due to the time, this meant that there were less people that could be included in the sample. Additionally, the sample is not entirely inclusive of

as many cultures. South American and African Christians are not represented in the interviews. Lastly, including research from eastern and African countries from modern academics was difficult. Many researchers stated that research outside the western perspective is a rising area of interest and identified need. While this research contributes to addressing the gap, there remains a gap in academic research for a multi-cultural perspective of love.

One of the greatest limitations I encountered was my own unconscious bias and preconceived notions. The essence of the theory was largely based on western thought. While this will be discussed more in the analysis portion, it is worth noting here that it took a lot of intentional effort to look outside my worldview. Even with this conscious effort, there will be interpretations and conclusions I come to that are based on the way I was trained to think.

IV. Preliminary Suppositions and Implications

A. Theoretical Framework Implications

This study helped assess if the theory being tested sufficiently defines the various aspects of love to support the definition and interaction with various forms of love. Since this is a new theoretical framework, there is no research surrounding it.

B. Subsequent Research

There are a couple more opportunities for study I have identified after completing the initial research design. Firstly, we need to study further how to encourage virtue development in discipleship centered relationships, specifically learning with a multi-cultural perspective within Christianity. Since fewer young adults are involved in organized religion, another question I have is, “what does it look like to incorporate discipleship into the western church to decrease people falling away from the faith?”.

Another area of interest I would like to investigate is, “how can we support new believers at specific stages of life, rather than a generalized blanket approach?”. While there are certain attitudes that can be incorporated no matter the age, how can we create good programming that addresses the needs of anyone seeking to meet God.

C. Impact

The results of this research will impact the greater understanding of love, so that we are able to better instruct individuals at the beginning of their faith walk. If there is not an understanding of the faith foundation or a proper biblical foundation for one’s beliefs, then two things are likely to happen. First, the individuals may not stick with the faith once they encounter questions that feel bigger than their foundation or if they have not been taught sound truth, then the lies are more believable. The second thing that is likely to happen, is that the Christians are divided on issues due to their basic definition of the foundational principals. This will result in more factions and sects of Christianity that argue with one another instead of unifying to spread the good news of

Jesus. Teaching what love is from this approach will support better missions, outreach, youth programs, and discipleship.

Outside of Christianity, the impact of Christians living loving lives is incredible. In order to highlight this point, I want to share a story of a woman I met in an airport in South Africa.

Her story began with the question, “How can I help you?”. Such a simple question, yet the impact it has on a community can be powerful. She shared about a community struggling with poverty, food insecurity, and hopelessness. A church came into the community and began training the people about God’s love and how to practice loving community. They taught on Sundays and showed tangible love by meeting the needs of the people in the community. As the community slowly accepted the church’s help, the woman shared how the neighbors began to recognize the needs of one another and provide opportunities for others to earn money, when one house had extra. Children began bringing double portions of food to school to provide for other children whose families were not able to provide lunch due to illness and medical fees. The community came together and donated money to increase security for the children’s school, so that they won’t have access to drugs and other harmful options. The woman shared that the change started with simply sharing the gospel and the community accepting and believing in Jesus. The change was tangible as they invited God into the space more and more.

While the primary audience of this research is meant to benefit people at the beginning of their faith walk, the hope is that anyone who is interested in walking forward as an intentional disciple of Jesus will be able to utilize this research to grow in deeper intimacy with God. Missionaries and church staff will be encouraged and equipped with creative solutions to continue loving their community in a culturally humble way, which will increase the effectiveness of outreach. As previously stated, new believers will be given the resources to go deeper into their relationship, and the research will highlight one of the basic virtues of Christianity. The new believers will not only grow in understanding of what Jesus taught, but they will also be given tangible ways to practice the theoretical knowledge they are learning. Finally, this research is intended to support youth, age 13-18, to learn more about what it looks like to have the fruit of love in their spirit-filled life. This research will support those discipling this age group and any people in this age group to dive deeper into love and what that means to their present and future aspirations.

Finally, Christian believers’ understanding of love and its implications on society will improve. Rather than solely hearing information from majority culture, individuals will have the opportunity to hear from perspectives outside their own to gain a more holistic view of the global church and how our unique perspectives help us understand the heart of God, given that we are all made in His image.

V. Findings

A. Interview Questions

Each interviewee was asked the same set of questions. The primary questions relevant to this research were:

1. How did you meet God and start relationship with Him?
2. Based on your life experiences and study of scripture, what is love?
3. What are some of the ways you have experienced God's love?
4. How do you approach loving your community through God's calling on your life?
5. What is one practical action this week out listeners can love someone?

B. Sample

Country of Origin	Number of Interviews	Occupation	Notes
South Korea	1	Business Owner	
Japan	1	Pastor	
Poland	3	Pastor, Business Owner, Engineer	
China	1	Scientist	
United States	13	Missionaries/Pastors, Student, Customer Service, Educator, Physical Therapist	4 have lived in Germany for over 30 years; 1 is living in Poland; 1 is an immigrant from South Korea; 1 lived in UK for 20 years
Germany	1	Social Worker/Musician	
Hungary	1	Nanny	
<i>Total</i>	<i>21</i>		

C. Definitions of Love

Theme	Attribute	Country	Comments
Sacrifice		All	John 15:13
Desire	“Love is something that pulls us in and brings us in.” Wanting the best for others	USA Poland, USA, Germany	
Commitment	“You’re committed to live not just for	USA, Japan, Poland, Hungary	

	yourself, but for this other person.”		
	“Love is like a good husband”	Poland, USA	
Grace		S. Korea, Germany, Poland, USA	

The most common answer to this question about defining love had something to do with sacrifice. Everyone mentioned some sort of response how love is sacrificing something for a greater goal. A couple people specifically mentioned John 15:13 which says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). Another attribute of love that came up was how love is represented in relationships, for example having the desire for people, the commitment to persevere, and show grace (from both God to humans and humans to one another).

D. Experiences of God’s Love

Theme	Attribute	Country	Comments
1. Sacrifice	God gave His son for us. Lays down his life for a friend (John 15:13)	Every country spoke of sacrifice in the context of God sacrificing Jesus for them	
2. Relationship/Commitment	Marriage – keeping promises. God continues to meet us where we are at Keeps His promises. Desiring one another and responding back to Him Discipline us because He loves us.	Poland, Japan, Hungary, USA USA & Germany Poland S. Korea Hungary S. Korea,	

	Openness within emotional states	Germany, USA	
	He desires relationship with us	Everywhere	
3. Comfort	God bringing community in loneliness.	Poland, Hungary, Germany, USA	
	Never leave/abandon you (faithfulness)	S. Korea, Japan, Poland, Germany, USA	
	Grace in difficult seasons	Germany, USA, Japan, China	
	Being seen	USA, Germany	
4. Provision	Lord's Prayer	Germany, USA, China	

Once again, sacrifice was mentioned by every participant – specifically that God loved us so much, He gave His son, and Jesus' willing sacrificed Himself for us. I noticed that however the people defined love was primarily the way they received love from God. The responses were tangible and intangible responses. Everything mentioned fit under how people spoke about relationships with others. The German participant spoke about basic trust, he said, "If you got no trust, you got not the possibility for harmony". Harmony and orderliness of relationships is important when we receive love from God. It seems that we learn how to love and be in relationship with others based on how God relates to us, or we learn how to relate to others and place those assumptions into our relationship with God. One participant said, "I think its very, very hard to love without God being in us, in our hearts". First, we need to know God's love, then we can love others as pieces of God Himself.

E. Ways to love the community.

Theme	Attribute	Country	Comments
1. Sacrifice	Time	Japan, Poland, USA	
	Finances	USA, Germany	
	Slowing Down to be with others	Japan, China, Germany	
2. Mindfulness	Entering into relationship and being	S. Korea, Japan, China, USA,	

	<p>present</p> <p>Practicing Gratitude</p> <p>Looking outside yourself to meet another's need.</p> <p>Creating space to be able to see the needs of those around you.</p> <p>Consciously thinking and trying to act as Jesus would.</p> <p>Prioritizing connecting to God</p>	<p>Hungary, Germany</p> <p>S. Korea, USA, Poland</p> <p>All</p> <p>USA</p> <p>All</p> <p>All</p>	
3. Action	<p>Forgive</p> <p>Patience</p> <p>Service</p> <p>Encourage</p>	<p>All</p> <p>S. Korea, Japan, Poland, Germany, USA</p> <p>All</p> <p>USA, Poland, Japan</p>	
4. Relationship	<p>Reaching out to others to make sure they feel a part of the community.</p> <p>Meeting the practical needs of those around you</p> <p>Treating others like family</p> <p>Mentorship/Discipleship with others to help them grow in their relationship with God</p>	<p>All</p> <p>Japan, Poland, Germany, China, USA</p> <p>USA</p> <p>All</p>	

Finally, it came as no surprise to me that sacrifice and relationships were mentioned concerning how people love others. However, there was one response in sacrifice that was outside my

expectations. Participants from South Korea, Japan, and Germany spoke about consciously slowing down from a busy schedule to be with people. The second response everyone brought up in one way or another was mindfulness, which shows how connected the world is becoming in the sharing of ideas. Additionally, mindfulness is a big topic of conversation in social sciences, so it is not surprising that it impacts the way Christians practice basic virtues. These answers reflect what was shared when we discussed cognitive love.

VI. Analysis and Discussion

A. Interview Results

The two largest themes that came out of the interviews were sacrifice and relationship. Whether it was defining what love is, how people experience love from God, or how they love their community, these two themes were interwoven into every aspect of love in every interview.

1. *Relationship – Intimate and Community*

“Love has generally been taken to be an attitude of one person towards another, rather than as a relation between persons.” (Brummer, 1933, p. 33). Most people that spoke about love as relationship were speaking in analogies. The most commonly spoken about were marriage, parent-child, and societal duty.

- i. **Marriage.** A couple of people spoke about true love being like a husband and wife. Specifically, they spoke about love like marriage in a Confucianism thought path. Some of the attributes of a couple in Confucianism (as outlined above in key terms) are sacrifice, keeping promises, fulfilling expected roles (Wallace, 2019). Ephesians 5:25-28 was specifically mentioned for this concept, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.” Love in the marriage context is putting another’s needs above your own and reflecting the model scripture has given us. Ultimately, the way husband and wife are to love one another originates in how God loves His people – which is similar to relational theory.
- ii. **Parent-Child.** Since one of God’s titles is Father, many people were able to relate to Him as Father. When people spoke of a parent-child relationship with God, it was often in the context of discipline (specifically noted from the Hungarian participant, Nati). God put boundaries up for her, which communicated love so that the person can grow closer to God and not practice anything that would be harmful to them. Rather than looking at this with disdain, Nati actually spoke about it with awe and reverence. Both love and law aim at ordering human relationships. Order of human relationships is desired, so the laws and “rules” that God establishes can actually be beautiful and a way people draw closer to God. This surprised me that a people from Hungary, Germany, and South Korea brought

up this point, because I often felt in the minority thinking this way. However, I was able to see that more Christians didn't see the Law as something awful, but something that when used properly can bring life. Xiao is seen as a "binding virtue of all relationships". We can see God in this theme of Xiao by His desire to protect and nurture us as His children.

- iii. **Societal Fidelity/Duty.** Many of the interviewees identified the need to show up in community and meet practical needs as a way they practice love in the community. One of the most common answers and challenges to love was to reach out and make sure that people feel a part of a community, especially the community of faith. This also can loop back to the value of social harmony and unity, which was a large emphasis of the first century church (which can be seen in Acts 6). Yet not only were people communicating the need for emotional and spiritual connectedness, but also for tangible needs. Loving the community meant meeting food insecurity, serving broken families, and serving neighbors with a heart of faith. What I mean by heart of faith, is seeing God in each person and treating them as people made in the image of God. The Japanese church is doing an excellent job by creating programs that directly serve those in need around them. The pastor in Japan spoke about creating a workout program for older adults for them to come together and socialize, work their body, and receive a meal.

2. *Sacrifice*

Every single person mentioned an element of sacrifice within their interview. Many mentioned sacrifices for each aspect of love (definition, God, and other).

- i. **Define love and how God shows His love.** The commonalities that came from the definition were John 15:13 and John 3:16. John 15:13 says, "There is no greater love than this, than that a man would lay down his life for a friend". When people unpacked this topic, they reflected on how God did that for them through Jesus, and how they are called to do the same for those around them. For example, one interviewee (an immigrant from South Korea) mentioned what it is like in the military to literally be there for your comrade, even in the face of death. He exemplified mentorship and bringing lived experience to encourage others. He connected this experience to going into the community and being a big brother to those who don't have the same influences, because of someone being that to him. This attribute is a ripple effect – because one person loved him well, he can now go and love others well in the same way. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." This kind of love through sacrifice offers grace, which was a theme that was often repeated in the context of sacrifice.
- ii. **Showing love to the community.** Once again, there was a strong ripple effect when someone felt loved by God or loved by others. Many of the missionaries would say they felt loved by others giving their resources so that they could go serve communities to spread the gospel. The mere fact that others gave of their finances meant that they could

love the community they were in. The cycle of giving kept repeating exponentially. Yet, finances were not the only way people spoke about love being a sacrifice. Another way is the sacrifice of time. This showed up through prayer and hospitality. Again, it was amazing to hear that the way people loved their community was often the way they experienced love from their community. One person said that he felt so loved that he knew people were praying for him, so, the way he chose to love the community he was in was to intentionally take time out of his day to pray for others. Along the lines of time, and intrinsically tied to relationships, people spoke of slowing down. Sacrificing a bit of productivity to meet people where they are and simply serve one another with their time. This can look like giving an ear for someone to speak and feel truly heard. It can also look like slowing down enough to see the practical needs of the community around you like food insecurity, homelessness, and isolation. Then, these people would go and meet the need, not just identify, and recognize that there was a need. There was always follow-up in some form when people spoke about love through sacrifice.

3. *Mindfulness*

The last theme that is worth mentioning in this section, is the repeated sentiment of mindfulness. This mindfulness reflects cognitive love quite strongly. This section surprised me the most. Going into the interviews, I anticipated that most people would focus on service and “agape” love. I was pleased to see people responding with deep thoughtfulness of how to love and how each action (every day and grandiose) matter in the kingdom of God. Interviewees spoke of remaining present in relationships, practicing gratitude in relation to God, looking outside one’s own need to see others, prioritizing connection to God, and consciously thinking and trying to act as Jesus would. These qualities reflect the relational theory, connecting to their relationship with God and letting that fuel their relationship with others. One participant said, “We receive love from God, and we also give it out because we’re filled up”.

B. Literature/Interview Analysis

1. *Other-Focused Love*

As expected, other-focused love was widely highlighted by every interviewee at some point in the interview. Love couldn’t simply be an internal emotion or something that is never acted upon. In fact, a participant in Poland even explicitly stated that love is a verb, it demands evidence. Which harkens back to the definition of love we were testing, “Love is a desire for perfect relationship as revealed through action”. We can know perfect relationship through God’s relationship with people, and we get to learn to reflect that nature.

- i. **Chesed.** Some translations of chesed include steadfast love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, goodness, and devotion. Grace came up a lot in how people wanted to be treated and how they saw God treat them. Many admitted that they still had to consciously work on giving grace, which in and of itself is a practice of grace. Others spoke about steadfastness and remaining in relationships with others even when things get messy because they are working towards something bigger. Their desire is perfect relationship with God and

people, and persevering through difficult times was no exception to this goal. This perseverance is a fruit of choosing-love (chesed). We can see how deeply embedded relational theory is in people's responses. They sought relationship with others based on the relationship they experienced with God. Later, there will be a discussion on discipleship which speaks of the need to prioritize a cognitive love with God that focuses on actions and relational equity before trying to expend personal energy to accomplish the dreams He has put on people's hearts.

- ii. **Xin.** Keeping promises is an essential way we experience love from God. To remind readers, Xin can be translated as faithfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, and keeping promises. These are many words Christians are using today to articulate how God loves His people. When we think about reflecting God and creating a loving character through practice, we can see that the promises we make hold weight in others' lives. Ecclesiastes 5:4 says, "When you vow a vow to God, do not delay in paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow". One of the ways we can continually practice love is by having a character of integrity, faithfulness, and keeping the promises we speak. While they may not be "definitions of love", they are attributes and reflections of it.
- iii. **Agape.** It is no surprise that agape made it into the list of talked about concepts. Many of the individuals in Germany specifically called out agape love as they spoke. While I see the importance of agape love, I still disagree with Nygren that agape is the only form of true Christian love. People spoke of agape in how God demonstrated love and the precondition of this love with no action on our side. In a way, they spoke of the "grace" aspect of the word agape. Augustine and Luther speak about agape when it selects an object for a higher purpose. Many interviewees also communicated love needs to see something more in a person than what originally meets the eye.

2. *Romantic Love*

The way I understood romantic love before this project would not have qualified it to be in the discussion section of this paper. However, learning from ancient eastern philosophies, I can see how it has a role in love with God and with others. People spoke a lot about the duties required when in a committed relationship. Yet, it was not duty alone that dictated one's actions, but a genuine desire for something bigger than the present moment. People spoke about the difficult seasons when motivation was at a low, but then they would reflect on how God showed up and brought energy, community, renewed vision. From this, they were then able to go into the world and do the same for others. Their love and obedience for God was not torn down by difficulties but built up because they were focusing on a higher love than an emotion in the moment. It is like Berkeley Buddhist Priory said about the value of benevolence versus charity, "Charity is something that we ourselves do, and benevolence is recognizing something everything else is doing and then going along with it. In charity you don't recognize it, you just do, but in benevolence you've for this two-way thing going very beautifully... the feedback you get is joy"

(Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, 2020). The feedback we get when we practice love beyond ourselves, is joy. We need duty, desire, and a committed love to love like Jesus did.

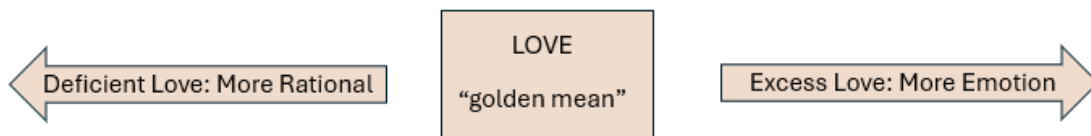
3. *Cognitive Love*

Previously, I mentioned how cognitive love was striking in the best way. The interviewees repeated they genuinely thought about their actions and meditated on ways to love others. Yi can be translated as, “uprightness, righteousness, knowing right/wrong, doing what is right regardless of personal benefit (duty)” (Wallace, 2019, p 449). This kind of love is reflected in many modern-day believers. Two people mentioned the importance of discipline and the Laws when relating to love. Jeanrond spoke about God’s laws being a way to stay in perfect relationship with Him, the goal being harmony among people (2010). Cognitive love is important to people, even though it is not as widely talked in the spheres of faith I have been in. This is a space I think can most benefit the field of discipleship and mentorship. First, people must learn how to think and relate to the concept of love. We must have a good relationship with God before we can love like Him. It is impossible to act like someone one spends no time with, and this is also true in the spiritual realm too.

4. *History of Love*

As expected, history did influence modern Christian thinking. However, the greatest influence, regardless of country or nationality was a surprise to me. Augustine and Luther seem to be the biggest influences in the sample of modern Christians that I interviewed. First, Augustine spoke about love’s primary relation being to God. He focused on loving God in humanity, not just humanity for humanity’s sake. Second, love being directed ultimately to God no matter who you are serving. This rang true in many interviews, people often talking about the reason they looked for ways to love their community was because of their love for God and His instruction around serving. Luther said, “Love is the means by which God ‘produces a divine man, who is one... with Him; a man who, when he loves his neighbor... can glory that he has acted like a God’.” (May, 2011; Luther, 1518). Luther spoke in the same stream as Augustine that love is a way we reflect Jesus here on earth, and people expressed the exact same sentiment in the interviews. History does matter in our understanding, even if we are not explicitly taught the history of philosophies on love.

C. Reflection – Theory Assessment



(Hannah Hayes, 2024)

My theory set out to reveal how excess love and deficient love can distort the golden mean of what the virtue of love truly means when Jesus said that loving God and loving others were the most important commandments. Unfortunately, the theory I set out to test was unable to fully encapsulate the nuances of love in a multi-cultural context. One of the primary areas that it falls short is the incorporation of romantic love. I did not anticipate this kind of love being as important to the concept as it was. I was also coming from a largely western thought process, which hindered how I related and defined romantic love. Broadening my influenced supported a greater understanding of who God is and how He loves His people.

When reviewing this theory, there is a gap in certain kinds of love for specific seasons of love. For example, the way a mother loves her infant child will be different when the child becomes an adult. While there is still a need for the mother to protect her child, the same measures are not appropriate given different contexts.

D. Application – Love God and Love Others

Jesus told His followers the two greatest commands, to love God and to love others. This command is just as relevant today as it was when Jesus spoke it, as it was when it was written in Deuteronomy. What does this mean in the context of the research?

1. Love God

Interviewees from around the world challenged Christians to practice prayer, meditation, living in community, and Bible study as primary ways to love God. Churches and para-church organizations need to partner together and make serving opportunities clear and easy to onboard for people at every stage of the walk of faith. Additionally, trainings on spiritual disciplines should be incorporated into new believer training or for those interested in diving deeper into their faith. Every Christian I spoke with was constantly diving deeper into concepts or talking with God about how to grow in deeper intimacy with Him. One woman, who is a missionary in Germany, shared she was asking God and meditating on what it looked like to be a person God wanted to share His secrets with. This kind of intimacy is birthed from years of intentionally drawing near to God, studying His word, and practicing what He has instructed from scripture. She lives in community and actively seeks out ways to love God by serving those around her. Everyone stated the need for community when practicing love. There are many resources the community can share and utilize. These resources should not be used in isolation, but as a tool to bring people together. Especially in an isolated society with digital relationships, it is even more important to connect with the community around you.

2. Love Others

After interviewing Christians from around the world, studying various forms of love, and reviewing philosophies, I believe there is an even stronger need for discipleship and mentorship in today's culture. Jesus took on 12 disciples to teach and then sent them out. These disciples then intentionally invested in other people, who then invested in others, and so on. The ripple

effect of discipleship is essential to practicing a loving life. Christian virtue is essential to one's walk with God. If youth and new believers do not understand the foundation, the binding agent, of faith, how can we expect them to walk forward and practice justice, righteousness, or even obedience. Love is the foundation to all of that. But everyone spoke of the need for community in the walk of faith to receive love and to give love. Faith is not an isolated experience. It cannot be and it was never established to be that way. Instead, we are to walk forward in messy relationships while we strive to have perfect relationships with God and with one another. Love thrives in discipleship relationships. My call to action from this research is to find someone to mentor and to be mentored by. This will have become a focus of my own organization after this research, and I hope that it can encourage others to seek those relationships out.

VII. Conclusion

I feel comfortable using the definition I established earlier to define love. Love is a desire for perfect relationship as revealed through action. Love is revealed by participating in community and sacrificially loving others without seeking personal gain. Love is about remaining committed and choosing to love in the midst of hardship, suffering, and uncomfortable circumstances. Regardless of feelings, love is a characteristic trait that requires one to think about the action/impact and act in accordance with scripture. While expressions of love vary depending on culture, when Christians spoke about love they spoke about it in very similar terms.

While my theory is insufficient and needs work, I believe in the power of the various expressions of love. Each is important in its own time and way. For Christians, we must learn to discern when each is appropriate. The muscle of discernment is practiced in relationship with God and with others. It matters how we act, and if we want to be known as those who love, we need to practice this or else we will fall into complacency and apathy.

Micah 6:8, the anchor verse of GLOBAL Justice, says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness (chesed), and to walk humbly with your God?" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). We have been given everything we need, by God, to live a life of love for God and others. Christians need to build this character everyday by choosing to love in its various forms and seeking first our relationship with God. We can do this through intentional mentorship and discipleship, serving in church/community organizations, prayer, meditation, and studying scripture. Since God is love, we must go to the source before anything else, or else we can make love an idol.

When in doubt, we are given a beautiful poem about love found in 1 Corinthians 13,

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away... For now, we look in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love".

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Interviews