

# “Savoring Love to Expand Your Love”

Psalm 148, John 13:31-35, Acts 11:1-18, 1 John 4:19 & Luke 10:27

Pastor James York

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**Prayer for Understanding** Lord Jesus, we want to be people who perceive you, savor your love and grow in you, to be among those in whom the power of your hope is at work and who confess you in word and deed. Awaken us, Lord. You speak your powerful word always anew throughout the ages. Give us ears to hear! Amen.

How does one become a more gracious, joyful loving person? One way is by savoring God’s love for you. Scripture proclaims: **1 John 4:19 NRSV “We love because God first loved us.”** God has filled creation with “I love you” notes.

Forest Bathing expands our love. Forest bathing was developed as a natural way of healing. Forest bathing is the mindful practice of bathing yourself in nature. One strives to let go, be present in the moment and soak in the majesty of creation, to hear God say, “I love you” through every aspect of creation. Often the process fills one with wonder, peace, comfort, and clarity. Perceiving God’s love is restorative, rejuvenating, enhances love, and awakens fresh ways to love. Studies have found that forest bathing heightens sensory awareness, enhances quality of life, and improves both mental and physical health. Poets and novelists have written about the healing power of nature for centuries. Recent studies have found that forest bathing has a positive neuro-psychological effect, the nervous system changes, the stress hormone cortisol is reduced resulting in measurable less anxiety, depression, mood disorders, memory loss, lack of concentration, and fatigue. A slow, mindful, perceptive walk through nature has been shown to decrease cortisol levels in participants by 12.4 percent after 15 minutes. Studies have found positive effects on the cardiovascular, respiratory, and immune systems. Unable to get into nature, then go for a virtual hike on YouTube or watch *Planet Earth*.

If science were able to measure love, these studies would also likely reveal that forest bathing heightens one’s perception of being loved by God, which enables them to be a more loving person. To enhance your forest bathing minimize distractions, turn off your phone, listen to your body, let your soul set the pace and immerse yourself in nature. Breathe deep, rest and move, be still and know God. Utilize all your senses. Let love enter through your ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands, and feet. Listen to the birds singing and the breeze rustling in the leaves of the trees. Look at the different greens of the trees and the sunlight filtering through the branches. Smell the fragrance of the forest. Breathe deep and taste the freshness of the air. Feel the trunk of a tree. Dip your fingers in a stream. Release the stress and welcome the calm. Let go and receive love.

The psalmist sings of God’s love that is revealed in nature that awakens our soul to praise of God, makes us strong and expands our love. **Psalm 148 NLT “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise God from the skies! Praise God, all angels! Praise God, all the hosts of heaven! Praise God, sun, and moon! Praise God, all you twinkling stars! Praise God, skies above! Praise God, vapors high above the clouds! Let every created thing give praise to the Lord, for God issued God’s command, and they came into being. God set them in place forever and ever. God’s decree will never be revoked. Praise the Lord from the earth, you creatures of the ocean depths, fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather that obey God, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and birds, kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth, young men and young women, old men, and children. Let them all praise the name of the Lord. For God’s name is very great; God’s glory towers over the earth and heaven! God has made people strong, honoring faithful ones—the people of Israel who are close to God. Praise the Lord!”**

You can expand your love by savoring God’s love for you proclaimed by the majesty of creation. Another way to expand your love is by savoring the love people have for you. In our kitchen, beside the refrigerator is a little cabinet desk. On that desk sits an I-mac which scrolls through family pictures. I see pictures of Leslie, Spencer, Abigail, my parents, family, and friends. Often, they make me smile, sometimes cry and other times laugh. They always fill me with love. In my study here at church, I have pictures of family that I can see on every wall. Whether at home or at church I can quickly soak in the love of the people in the photos. It never ceases to amaze me how these pictures help me savor love and enable me to be more loving. Savoring loving pictures makes me less self-absorbed, more at peace with everyday tensions and more patient. I recommend picture gazing as a spiritual practice.

What do you do to feel the love of others, to celebrate the grace of love freely given to you? How do you affirm your sense that you are God's beloved child? How do you daily savor that you are cherished, valued, forgiven, appreciated, beautiful, talented, and deeply loved by a multitude of people and will be loved by all people for eternity?

You can expand your love by savoring God's love for you proclaimed by the majesty of creation and by savoring the love people have for you. Another way to expand your love is by savoring God's love revealed to you through Jesus.

The gospel of John proclaims: **John 13:31-35 NLT** "After Judas had gone, Jesus said: Now the Son of Man will be given glory, and Jesus will bring glory to God. Then, after God is given glory because of Jesus, God will bring glory to Jesus, and God will do it very soon. My little children, I will be with you for only a little while longer. Then you will look for me, but you won't find me. I tell you just as I told the people, "You cannot go where I am going." I am giving you a new command. You must love each other, just as I have loved you. If you love each other, everyone will know that you are my disciples."

Jesus' resurrection, love swallowing death, the mending of all relationships is a process of glory, a revelation of divine love saving human life. Jesus' resurrection reveals God as a self-giving flow of life and love to God's children. Jesus' resurrection draws every person, all of creation to God connecting us all in supreme love. Jesus calls us little children. Little children are dependent on their parents. Little children have an insatiable hunger for their parent's love. Little children are often filled with wonder as they bathe in the majesty of creation. Little children discover how to love by incarnating their parent's love. Jesus incarnates the love of our heavenly parent for us and commands us to follow his example of love.

The old commandment to love, **Luke 10:27 NRSV** "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." The emphasis is on our ability to love. One of the monumental insights of the theology of John is God first loved us. We love because God first loved us. The first step in the new commandment is to savor God's love for us. God's love for us in creation. God's love for us through other people. God's love for us through Jesus. God's supreme expression of love, taking on human flesh, taking on the sins of all people, burying the sins of the world through death on a cross and resurrecting every aspect of love for eternity through resurrection. As we savor God's love for us, we are inspired to love. Whenever you are struggling to love, let go of the old commandment and embrace the new commandment. Instead of trying harder to love, savor God's love. Savoring love will expand your love. Jesus joins us in our deepest fears, sustains us through our greatest losses and resurrects the image of God within us, goodness, the ability to love. Savoring God's love will enable us to expand our love, to become more like Jesus, to love more like God loves. God's love is grace, free, ever-expanding, peaceful, joyful, spectacular. When we as little children incarnate God's love through our love for one another, the world sees the source, energy, and life of that love, God's love for us.

You can expand your love by savoring God's love for you proclaimed by the majesty of creation, by savoring the love people have for you and by savoring God's love revealed to you through Jesus. Another way you can expand your love is by saying "yes" to God.

**Acts 11:1-18 NLT** "Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized Peter. "You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them!" they said. Then Peter told them exactly what had happened. "I was in the town of Joppa," Peter said, "and while I was praying, I went into a trance and saw a vision. Something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all sorts of tame and wild animals, reptiles, and birds. And I heard a voice say, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.' "No, Lord,' I replied. 'I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure or unclean.' "But the voice from heaven spoke again: 'Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.' This happened three times before the sheet and all it contained was pulled back up to heaven. "Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon entered the home of the man who had sent for us. He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had told him, 'Send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He will tell you how you and everyone in your household can be saved!' "As I began to speak," Peter continued, "the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. Then I thought of the Lord's words when Jesus said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift God gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way?" When the others heard this, they stopped objecting, they were silenced and began

**praising God. They said, “We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life.”**

Savor God’s love to enable you to let go of judgmental noes and let come loving “yeses.” We resist change. Often one will default to “no” when something new, unusual, or uncomfortable is happening. Every time you refuse to love you are saying “no” to God. How are you saying “no” to God? How are you rejecting God’s command to love?

Peter was with Jesus for three years and witnessed him loving all people. Jesus loved and healed people regardless of religion, lifestyle, and actions. Jesus did not require anyone to do or be anything different to be loved, forgiven, and healed. Peter also had a lifetime of teachings that taught him that certain lifestyles were impure and unclean. Peter like most people struggled to love people who were different from himself. The old commandment instructed us to try harder to love. The new commandment invites us to savor God’s love, to let God’s love transform us, sometimes through prayer, trances, visions, circumstances, and other people. The new commandment invites us to savor God’s love, to let our “noes” to God be transformed into “yeses” of expanded love. Most people are unable to muster up love for all people. All people will be enabled to love all people by savoring God’s love.

The scripture begins with Peter being criticized. After Peter explains his experiences of God’s love there is a supernatural transformation of these critics. **Acts 11:18 “They stopped objecting, they were silenced and began praising God.”** For whom is God inviting you to stop objecting to a way of love? How is God inviting you to be silent, to savor God’s love? The result will be love, praise of God, love of someone that you previously were unable to love and love of a way of life you once believed was impure.

After hearing of God’s expanding love the critics were silent. Too often today people are not listening because they are immediately formulating a rebuttal. Too often today people are busy shouting, condemning, being unkind and being unloving instead of thoughtfully wondering if there might be more going on here than we realize and prayerful pondering Gods’ invitation to love.

Homiletics declares: “We will generalize, scrutinize, jeopardize, antagonize, stigmatize, demoralize, victimize, brutalize, ostracize and marginalize, but we will not under any circumstances apologize, harmonize or even socialize with those who may be leading us into new territory.”

Rachel Held Evans said: “It is a frightful thing — thinking you have to get God right in order to get God to love you, thinking you are always one error away from damnation. It is a kind of legalism, really... How ironic. The very condition of humanity is to be wrong about God. The moment we figure God out, God ceases to be God. Maybe it is time to embrace the mystery and let ourselves off the hook.”

Frederick Buechner said: “Faith is the word that describes the direction our feet start moving when we find that we are loved. Faith is stepping out into the unknown with nothing to guide us but a hand just beyond our grasp.”

Czeslaw Milosz wrote: “The sacred exists and is stronger than our rebellions.”

In her book, *A Return to Love*, Marianne Williamson wrote: “Until your knees finally hit the floor, you are just playing at life, and on some level, you are scared because you know you are just playing. The moment of surrender is not when life is over. It’s when life begins.”

You can expand your love by savoring God’s love for you proclaimed by the majesty of creation, by savoring the love people have for you, by savoring God’s love revealed to you through Jesus and by savoring God’s love to enable you let go of your “noes” to God and let come loving “yeses.” Amen