



WHEN YOUR HEART IS ACHING

A few years back, a team of child psychologists posed this question to a group of 4-10-year-olds: "What is love?" Here are some of the replies they got:

- "When my grandma got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grampy does it instead, even when he got arthritis, too. That's love" (Rebecca, age 8).
- "I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones" (Lauren, age 4).
- "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on aftershave and they go out and smell each other" (Karl, age 5).
- "When I had my piano recital, I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people and saw my Daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn't scared anymore" (Cindy, age 8).
- "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen" (Bobby, age 7).
- "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth" (Billy, age 4).
- "If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend you hate" (Nikki, age 6).

- “Love is when Mummy sees Daddy on the toilet and doesn’t think it’s disgusting anymore” (Mark, age 6).
- “Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mummy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss” (Emily, age 8).
- “You really shouldn’t say ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. If you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget” (Jessica, age 8).

That’s a positive look at love, but love can come with its heartaches, too: loss of loved ones; spouses that have let us down; broken relationships; abuse by parents or partners; marriages that don’t end happily-ever-after – or maybe haven’t happened at all? The point is: even in the strongest marriages, the happiest families, the greatest friendships, there can be heartache. Just look at the charts over the past 7 decades!

So how can we sing when we find ourselves in that kind of a place? That’s what today’s psalm is all about.

Psalm 63

The intro tells us David was in ‘the Desert of Judah.’ Where was this desert? There are 3 possibilities:

- **A geographical place.** You could say it was in the deserts of *Ziph* or *Ma’on*, places in southern Israel.
- **A relational place.** David experienced 2 exiles in his lifetime. Both involved a bucketload of heartache.
- **A spiritual place.** It could represent a disconnect with God, a result of being cut off from the Tabernacle.

Whatever the context, David’s heart is broken; he looks to God; and God meets him there. And the lesson is this: every heartache, whatever the situation, is a chance to discover – or rediscover – a ‘love that is greater than life.’

And in this psalm David describes this love as 4 things:

1) As Refreshing As Water (vs1). We all know hydration matters. Can anyone tell me how many glasses of water we’re supposed to drink a day? 6-8 glasses or 2 litres-worth, apparently (and that can include coffee - though not *just* coffee. That much caffeine in the system might be a no-no). The point is: we all need water to survive – on a personal level, and an ecological one. Take it away, and you’ve got an extinction-level event on your hands! In the same way, we need the love of God. In fact, we need it more - because without it, we wouldn’t be here!

2) As Nourishing As Food (vs2-5). How important is food? If you’ve ever fasted, you’ll know! It’s essential: we need vitamins and minerals and nutrients for our bodies to function properly. Now I’m sure you’ve heard it said that kids have 2 stomachs, the idea being your mains-stomach might be full, but there’s always room for ... ice-cream! And we might laugh, but there

might be some truth there. Because yes, we have a body that needs feeding, but we also have a spirit. And that spirit needs feeding too, with a relationship with God; with Scripture; with prayer.

3) As Satisfying As Sleep (vs6-8). Another crucial element to a healthy and happy existence is one that people can sometimes take for granted (unless you're a new parent, in which case, you'll never take it for granted again!): sleep. Like food and water, sleep matters, both to our physical health and our mental health. And in a similar way, David says, we need a relationship with God. We all go through those 'watches of the night' – those times when the cares of this life make it difficult to sleep. Knowing that God is watching over us can make all the difference.

4) As Reassuring As Armour (vs9-10). This last point might seem strange, until you remember David's situation. He's facing an enemy that is intent on his destruction - and yet he's at peace, because he knows that God loves him, and his enemies are dogfood. Now you might be thinking, "I haven't got any enemies. There's no-one out to get me." Oh yes, there is - the greatest enemy of them all (he's not called Satan or 'adversary' for nothing). But God is a greater friend, and the Bible's promise is that ultimately, God wins! And if we put our trust in Him, we win, too.

This Is How Much

So, when we find ourselves in a place of loneliness or brokenness or emptiness – and we all will, at some point – it's a reminder that we need a greater, more enduring love than this. Because the only solution to loneliness, brokenness, and emptiness, is God. It might sound a glib answer, but it's not. It's the *ultimate* answer.

But how can we be *certain* that God loves us? Because of this (cue picture of the cross). The crucifixion was the greatest proof of love there has ever been – hence Romans 5:8:

"God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

As Jesus hung on that cross, He was thinking of you and saying, "This is how much I love you." And that's how we can know.

That's how to sing when your heart is aching.