

Bible Study Series
God Like Characteristics
Session 1: Love

Studies of **5 Hebrew and Greek words** for love help us understand what loving someone really means.

1. AHAB – HEBREW WORD FOR LOVE

Hebrew word for love. Describes a variety of intensely close emotional bonds. So Abraham loved his son Isaac ([Gen. 22:2](#)), Isaac loved his son Esau ([Gen. 25:28](#)), and “Israel loved Joseph more than all his children” ([Gen. 37:3](#)).

In a more romantic manner, Isaac loved his wife Rebekah ([Gen. 24:67](#)), and Jacob loved Rachel ([Gen. 29:18](#)), but Delilah manipulated Samson by challenging his love for her ([Judg. 14:16](#)). We are all called to love the Lord, by expressing obedience to His commandments ([Deut. 6:5](#)), and to “love thy neighbour as thyself” ([Lev. 19:18](#)). Moreover, “he that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul” ([Prov. 19:8](#)).

2. AGAPAO – GREEK WORD FOR LOVE

- God’s love is described as the Greek word *agapao*, which means unconditional love, preferential love that is chosen and acted out by the will. It is not love based on the goodness of the beloved, or upon natural affinity or emotion. Rather this is benevolent love that always seeks the good of the beloved.
- This type of love is exclusive to the Christian community because it flows directly from God’s love: “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” ([1 John 4:7,8](#)).

3. AGAPE – GREEK WORD FOR LOVE

- Although common in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, the word rarely occurs in existing secular Greek manuscripts of the period. Like its synonym *philia*, it designates love between persons ([John 13:35](#)), or people for God ([1 John 2:15](#)), of God for humanity ([Rom. 5:8](#)), and of God for Christ ([John 17:26](#)).
- Whereas *philia* emphasizes the idea of love arising from personal relationships, *agape* is founded upon deep appreciation and high regard. It is perhaps for this reason that *agape* is the love which God commands.

4. PHILEO – GREEK WORD FOR LOVE

- One of four greek words for love, this one signifies friendship, fondness, affection, delight, and personal attachment. This word is one of feeling – a heart of love – whereas *agape* is a matter of benevolence, duty, and commitment. We are commanded to have *agape* love ([Matt. 5:44](#)) but not *phileo* love because feelings cannot be commanded.
- *Phileo* is also the word for “kiss.” Jesus asked Peter if he had unconditional, sacrificial *agape* love, but Peter responded that he had *phileo*, or brotherly love. Peter’s love deepened, and he wrote of *agape* love in his later books.

5. PHILADELPHIA – GREEK WORD FOR LOVE

- With the roots words *phileo*, “to love,” and *adelphos* “brother,” this word signifies loving someone like a brother or sister. We might think of it as fraternal affection.
- This is not the love God has for us, but rather love between brothers and sisters in Christ. It implies that a familial bond between people who would not otherwise share affection is possible

Let’s look at a few principles that describe His amazing affection for people:

1. **God’s love is intrinsic to His nature.**
2. **God’s love is universal.**
3. **God’s love is unconditional.**
4. **God’s love is sacrificial.**
5. **God’s love is contagious.**
6. **God’s love is motivating**