

# “A spiritual fitness check”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday May 2, 2021

1 John 4:7-21

How many of you get funnies forwarded to you through

e-mails each week?

Thankfully, I don't get too many, but the odd one comes my way, and I wanted to share a couple lines with you this morning from one.

The subject is: 39 Things you should've learnt by now I won't give you all 39, but here are 5 of my favourites:

1. Don't worry about what people think, they don't do it very often.
2. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than standing in a garage makes you a car.
3. If you look like your passport picture, you probably need the trip.
4. No man has ever been shot while doing the dishes.  
*and the one I want you to remember this morning.*
5. A person, who is nice to you, but rude to the waiter, is not a nice person.

Hopefully, these are all things we have learned in life by now.

I entitled the message this morning “a spiritual fitness check”

And I don't know what you expected the spiritual fitness check to be –

Some of you might have wondered if I would be asking you questions like:

1. Are you praying everyday?
2. Are you memorizing your Bible?
3. Are you reading the Bible?
4. Are you part of a small group?
5. Are you tithing your income to God's mission?
6. Are you giving generously to God's work?
7. Are you fasting, practising other spiritual disciplines and becoming more holy and Christlike?
8. Are you serving more, giving more of your time and energy to the work of the church or serving Christ in the community more?

Now I would welcome you answering all of those questions, and those would all be good questions to consider, and would tell you something about your faith, and whether it is growing or not, or what areas you might decide you need to give more attention to.

But finally, they are not the spiritual fitness check. You can be doing all those things, your prayer time can be increasing, your giving to God's mission both financially and through your own service can be increasing, you can be practicing spiritual disciplines,

involved in Bible studies and small group ministries and still not actually growing in your faith.

It would difficult to do all those things, and not grow, but it is possible.

The test, the spiritual fitness measure is simply one question.

### ***Are you becoming more loving?***

Are you learning to love God more, and are you learning to love others more.

The Apostle Paul said;

*“If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don’t love, I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.*

*If I speak God’s Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that say to a mountain, “jump” and it jumps, but I don’t love I’m nothing.*

*If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don’t love, I’ve gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.”*

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 The Message

If our spiritual life is helping us to grow, if we are on the right track with God, doing the things we need to do, which might include reading your Bible more, serving more, giving more, praying more, you will be loving more.

You will be loving God, and loving others more.

Love is a word we toss around a lot.

What we see and hear in our world often has little resemblance to what the love of God is about.

The love we are to have isn't just any love- we are to have agape- love – which is the love of God. We are to love as God loves.

In Greek there are several words for love.

I'm sure many of you have heard this before.

The word that Greek literature is filled with is “eros”

“Eros” is another Greek word for love.

But its meaning is really the opposite of “agape”

“Eros” is love that is for my own sake.

“Eros” is love that is for my pleasure, for what it gives to me.

Eros is the word for love that fills Greek literature.

Agape is the word for love that fills the pages of the Bible.

Agape is self-giving love, love that serves the other.

Agape is the love spoken of in 1 John, and throughout the Bible:

“Beloved, let us *agape* one another, because *agape-love* is from God; everyone who *agape-loves* is born of God and experiences a relationship with God.

The person who refuses to *agape* doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is *agape*-so you can't know him if you don't *agape*.”

Beloved, let us love- *agape* love one another.

Next Sunday is Christian Family Sunday in the Church, and Mother's Day in the world.

I don't hear many husbands complaining that their wives are too loving, that it's a problem because their wives are serving them too much and looking towards their needs.

Likewise, not many wives complain that their husbands and children are just too loving, wanting to serve them, and care for their needs, and supporting them just too much.

Not many brothers and sisters complain because their sister or brother is too considerate, too kind, too patient, too supportive.

Some of you might be thinking that you can take this *agape* love too far.

*Agape* love, God's love doesn't make us doormats.

God isn't a door mat.

God doesn't do all we would like Him to do for us.

God, very often leaves us to do, entrusts us to do, and empowers us to do.

Love is supportive, not controlling.

It helps us to find our own competencies, it doesn't stifle our growth, or take away our challenges.

What would our church be like if everyone looked not to their own interests, but to the interests of others, and to the interests of Christ, to build up the body of Christ?

Here's the spiritual fitness challenge:

Eugene Peterson says; ***"The only people in the church you need is the people you find difficult."***

Is there anyone in the church you find difficult?

Hopefully, you can think of one person who you don't understand, or just seems difficult for you to get along with.

Ask God to teach you how to love that person.

It may not be easy, but begin by doing the loving thing towards that person.

Be patient, be kind, do not be arrogant, boastful or rude.

Look to serve those you are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Look to their interests, ask God how you might serve them.

What about at work, or in your family?

Maybe there is someone you find difficult in your life outside the church.

Begin to look to how you might serve that person, how you might look to their interests, and how you might build them up.

Ask God to teach you how you might grow in love.

Ask God to fill you with His love, so you might learn to love the unlovely, as Christ did.

Do the things that will grow your love of God and love of others, and you will be great in the kingdom of God.

A person who is kind to you, but is rude to the waiter, is not a kind person.

A person who says they love you, but is rude to the waiter, may eros you- they may love you for what it will do for them, but they probably don't agape love you- and they are not a loving person (they are not filled with the love of God).

Beloved, let us agape-love one another, because agape-love is from God; everyone who agape-loves is

born of God and knows God. Whoever does not agape-love does not know God, for God is agape-love. God's agape-love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is agape-love, not that we agape-loved God but that he agape-loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God agape-loved us so much, we ought to agape-love one another.

This is God's challenge to us, to learn to live God's love in all our relationships.

Amen.