

Measuring Up to the Love Post

How many of you had family height charts when you were young? How many of you had them for your children? You often see them in family films, usually a door post with markings on it charting the growth of the different family members over the years and sometimes, over generations. It wasn't a tradition we had in my family. Maybe because as one of six, all the markings over all of the years would have eventually interfered with the integrity of the door jamb itself, resulting in a DIY emergency! Or perhaps, as hardworking parents of six, my Mother and Father were just too busy to keep up with us all. In any case, I stopped growing after twelve years, remaining the pint sized 5'0" I am today. It's a tradition I didn't keep with my boys either but I'm certainly not feeling scarred by the lack of it and hopefully neither are my offspring.

Whilst it's a charming idea to have a visual record of how an individual is growing, and how we are measuring up against our siblings, it is just one, linear measurement. The markings can show who was growing the quickest or who was the tallest but it wouldn't show who was the most shy, who was the best at football, and even who was the most mischievous because these are not traits that can be measured easily.

It started me thinking about what if God had a growth post or chart, how would I be measuring up to it? God's heavenly standards are very different to our earthly ones. What does God want us to be like? How does He desire us to grow? The answer lies within the commands He gave us.

The Gospel and Epistles of John reiterate how God wants us to live our lives and that is to love God and to love one another as He loves us. God loved us so much that He gave His only Son to die for our sins, there is no greater love.

“A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

John 13:34 NIVUK

“My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.”

John 15:12 NIVUK

“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”

1 John 3:23 NIVUK

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:35 NIVUK

It couldn't be more clear.

Question. So what is love? Answer. God is Love!

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. **God is love.** Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”

1 John 4:16 NIVUK

So if God is love and we are made in the image of God, therefore we are Love too!

A popular reading at weddings is 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. I'm not generally a fan of the paraphrase Bible versions but in this case the Message version works really well.

'Love never gives up
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first",
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end
Love never dies' (vv.4-8, MSG).

In the King James Version, the Word used for love is Charity,

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up..."

Translated from the Greek, agápē, meaning,

"love: esp. charity; the love of God for man and of man for a good God."

"*Agape* is used in ancient texts to denote feelings for one's children and the feelings for a spouse. *Agape* is used by Christians to express the unconditional love of God for his children. This type of love was further explained by Thomas Aquinas as "to will the good of another."

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_words_for_love

So we are to love one another with the unconditional love that God shows towards us.

For the last two years I've read Nicky Gumbel's Bible in One Year. When discussing the applications for this passage he used the example of a friend of his who substitutes the word 'Love' for her own name and the impersonal pronoun, 'It', for 'She' and sees how far she can get down the list before she has to stop if it's something she is not yet measuring up to in her life. It's a useful exercise so I tried it myself, this time using the NIVUK translation on the 16 characteristics of love.

1. "Lizzie is patient, - immediate fail! I'm not very patient at all, something I really need to work on there. I did continue though, just to see how I would do on the others.
2. Lizzie is kind. - well I'd like to think so but sometimes I do have unkind thoughts and as we can see from Scripture, thinking about something wrong or unkind is as bad as doing something wrong

“do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.”
Zech. 8:17 NIVUK

But if we renew our thinking we can be transformed,

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
Romans 12:2 NIVUK

3. Lizzie does not envy, - well on this at least I do much better. I am very blessed, there is actually no-one else who I would rather be. God has been very good to me.

4. Lizzie does not boast, - I’d like to think that I don’t do this then I re-read what I wrote about envy then realised that it could be interpreted by some as boasting. I didn’t intend it that way but I can now see how some things may appear boastful to others.

5. Lizzie is not proud - I would like to say I’m not proud in an arrogant sense, but I am proud of achievements I have worked hard for, and I am very proud of the achievements of my family. I try hard not to be proud of material gains.

6. She does not dishonour others, - I would be mortified if anyone thought this. I try hard not to engage in gossip but sometimes I do slip up.

7. She is not self-seeking, - I’m a great champion of the underdog so I would like to think that I am not.

8. She is not easily angered, - It would take a lot to get me verbally angry about things but I do bottle a great amount up and ‘deal’ with people and situations in my head. I realise this is wrong,

““You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “Raca,” is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.”
Matt. 5:21-22 NIVUK

9. She keeps no record of wrongs. - Oh dear, I’m from a family of ‘score-keepers’ so this is a tough one. I know that I have got better and I have actually gained much peace from just letting things go. It takes a lot of effort and energy to keep holding on to hurt but you only have to forgive once.

10. Lizzie does not delight in evil - I do not, but this isn’t to say I never sin but rather I never go out of my way looking for evil things to do. Even Paul struggled with this,

“For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”
Romans 7:19-20 NIVUK

11. but she rejoices with the truth. - Praise God I do!

12. She always protects, - As a Mother I am a natural protector, I would like to think I am a loyal wife and friend coming to the defence of those I hold dear.

13. She always trusts, - The only one we need to have our trust in is the Lord. Difficulties arise when we try to manage under our own strengths or rely on others.

“Trust in the LORD for ever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.”

Isaiah 26:4 NIVUK

14. She always hopes, - This I do, I look forward to my reward in the Eternal Kingdom of God.

“Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.”

Psalms 146:5 NIVUK

15. She always perseveres. - Well I always try!

16. Lizzie never fails.” - The Message version has “never dies” and whilst I often fail, because I am a child of God and my salvation is assured, I won’t actually die. My body will fail but my spirit is eternal.

It’s a very interesting exercise and I suggest you try it yourselves and also ask your spouse, children and friends how they would answer if God was asking them about you.

I realise that this reads like a report card, and in essence this is what it is. This is how we measure up on God’s Love-Post by loving God, by living in love, and loving our brothers and sisters as God loves us.

My Love-Post report might say ‘must try harder’ but I’d like to think I’d ‘shown potential’, I’ve still got growing and maturing to do and, unlike my physical limitations, there is no limit to how much love I can show, how much love I can be, if God is love, then so am I.