



The love of Immanuel

tuning in to Him as the basis for life, recovery and growth ¹

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Introduction

The Bible is completely clear about it: **God is love** (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8; Ephesians 2:4; 3:19; 6:23; cf. Exodus 34:6-7). Not just in some things He does, but in *everything*. He *is* love, all His character, thoughts, feelings and doings. All love proceeds from Him (1 John 4:7). When we love, it is because He first loved us (1 John 4:10; cf. Romans 5:8; 8:38-39).

And the love of God is of the highest kind. The Hebrew First Testament of the Bible uses for 'to love', among other things, the verb '*ahabh*', the Greek New Testament translates this as *agapao* (e.g. in Matthew 5:43; 1 John 3:11; cf. Leviticus 19:18 ; linked to it are the nouns for love: '*ahabhah* and *agape*'). It is a love that sacrifices itself if necessary for the life and well-being of the other, just like what is called *attachment love* in psychology. It is the kind of love that makes parents enter a burning building at the risk of their own lives, if possible to save their child from the fire. It is the love that gives the other **life** and room to grow. It is also the love that binds people together like glue for life, through thick and thin. That provides security for intimacy and vulnerability. It is the love that made God to look after His people when they suffered from slavery in Egypt and set them free (Exodus 3:7-8). It is the love that brought Him down to this world in Jesus (*Immanuel!*), to reconcile us, who in fact distrusted Him as if we were His enemies (Philippians 2:5-9; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; 1 John 3:1).

The First Testament also calls God '*El Rachum* – the God of mercy (e.g. in Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 4:31).² The Hebrew *rachum* is derived from *racham* – the word for womb and for to love (dearly), to have pity, to have compassion for, to find/show love/grace, to have compassion. Just as a womb allows all nourishment to go to the child, if necessary at the expense of the mother, so God also feeds and cherishes us, if necessary at the cost of His own life. That giving life is also found in the word that was traditionally translated with God's mercy: *chesed*. *Chesed* means a) enduring kindness that is b) life-giving. It is undeserved love, which gives life to those who will receive it, and one of the most characteristic words of God's character throughout the First Testament. *Chesed* and '*ahabhah*' characterize both God's love and the best of human love (Micah 6:8).

Allowing God's love and letting it flow through

In his article, Jim Wilder says something like: Attachment love is a kind of permanent 'glue' that binds two people together. Man is prepared in his brain to connect himself, to attach himself to the source of his life. The one who feeds us, gives us drink, or shelters us will become the center of our attachment love. The Hebrew uses the word *dabaq* (= to glue) to call on us to cling to God permanently in love (Deuteronomy 10:20; cf. Psalm 63:9). Letting the snake feed us is a wrong attachment. When Israel asked the Baals to feed them or give them fertility, a dark bond arose with them. However, those who feed on Words of Life, eat the Bread of Heaven, drink Living Water, and dwell in the shelter of the Most High, also build attachment love. The love that connects us to the Source of Life is attachment love. In it there is a pleasant and joyful connection that makes us thrive and live in wonder & adoration of God, as we were intended.

For His love God seeks people who will receive Him; who are open to be loved (the Hebrew uses the term for them: '*anavim* – the humble/poor/vulnerable; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26; Jesus spoke of not coming for those who think they are healthy but to those who recognize that they are sick; Matthew 9:12-13; Mark 2:17). In the Hebrew Bible, God is also given the title '*El Shaddai* - the God Who wants to let His love and life flow to

¹ In writing this article the following article was very inspirational and useful: E. James (Jim) Wilder, 'Thinking with God: Weaving God's Thoughts into Human Identities and Relationships', unpublished document, Life Model Works, June 2020. A free Dutch translation/edition of it (by Gerard Feller & André H. Roosma) appeared in *Promise Magazine*, April 2021 under the title 'Denken met God – Gods gedachten verweven met onze menselijke identiteit en relaties'. Citations have been borrowed partly from that.

² See: André H. Roosma, '[The Significant Name of God \(22\) - The riches of the Title אֱלֹהֵי רַחֻם - 'El Rachum', Hallelu-YaH](#), 13 March 2021.

us (Genesis 35:11; some translate: the Almighty, but the above sentence gives the main meaning of this title³). He seeks those who are receptive to His indescribable love and who want to pass it on (cf. John 14:22-23).

Receiving God's great love does not remain without consequences in our lives. Our hearts become at ease. We are getting more and more into *shalom*. We become less prone to fear – our old fears melt away (1 John 4:18), for what can happen to us if the Creator of heaven and earth loves us (Romans 8:38-39)? When we notice how God loves us in spite of our shortcomings, we also become softer toward others, having less difficulty loving them (1 John 2:5-11; 4:7-16). Even things that we had trouble getting rid of or cleaned from in our lives will change. Because when we feel so loved and accepted, not only the fear, but also the compulsion to perform disappears. This sets us free from old addictions and the whole rat race of this world (Hebrews 2:14-15).

In the last intimate conversations between Jesus and His disciples, Jesus said it was especially important that they *abide in Jesus' love* (John 15:1-17; cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:5). That is not sitting inside and reasoning that it is beautiful that the sun shines outside, that is going outside and expose yourself to the pleasant radiation of the sun of God's love, and then pass it on again!

The relational part of our brain

The human brain has a relational part, a part that is engaged in involvement with others, that needs to be trained and built up, precisely through the practice of loving and attuning to God. This relational part of the human brain shapes our identity as well as our reality. This means for everything we do in relationships with others, that we must be careful with each other's boundaries, imperfections and limitations, and with what is going on inside the other. And we will have to pay attention to the necessary safety measures. If we observe these, we will **a)** be more aware of God, **b)** experience more character change, **c)** be able to receive and pass on love, **d)** taste God's thoughts more easily, and **e)** more easily form relationships with those whom God intended that for us.

Two kinds of thinking; a slow and a fast track

For some people, faith is primarily a matter of conscious thought. I often call that 'using your thinking head'. Stories, explaining, talking about, reasoning, studying, consciously weighing choices, Bible reading, consciously praying – they all belong here. Neurologically, it is driven from the left hemisphere, and takes place in the cortex, the outermost/front part of the brain. The left brain is not super-fast; we therefore speak of the slow track.

That would take far too long in emergencies and with all the simple things we do all the time. That's why we have a second system in our brain. This works much faster and often it is finished thinking before we are even aware. We therefore call it the fast track. This is fed from images, emotions, past experiences and the like, which are stored in the deeper parts of the brain, in the so-called limbic system, and in the right hemisphere. It is not so rational, but very *relational*, and is mainly influenced by what we have felt and experienced and by –often unconscious– communication of love *or* unsafety. More than conscious thinking, what happens at this deep level determines our identity and character. (Note from a reviewer: We get attached to all sorts of things at this level, including things that aren't good for us, like drugs. A lot of the things we teach addicts don't work because we're trying to let the 'slow track' overtake or correct the 'fast track', which does not work.)

Jim Wilder on these two: "The slow track of the conscious mind can think **about** God, but it cannot think **with** God. The slow track allows us to **believe** things about God but it is fundamentally limited in **knowing** God. The slow track is the 'home' of the majority of what we might call 'religion'." Thinking **with** God goes via the fast track, and is possible through attachment love and spiritual-emotional attunement to God.

Spiritually-emotionally attuning to Immanuel

What we need now in our spiritual life is good nourishment for those deep parts of the brain; for that fast track. A good way to get that is through what we discussed above: receiving God's love. When we attune spiritually-emotionally to Immanuel – God Who is with us; really receiving His love, then something is going to change at this deep level. It ensures that we gain more relational awareness of God and experience Him more closely involved. It also ensures that we can receive and pass on His love more and more and that we can better attune ourselves to the Spirit of God.

In interpersonal relationships, our spiritual-emotional attunement mainly involves looking at or holding each other. This is one of the reasons that lovers and mourners like to hold the hand of their loved one and look at each other a lot. And things get better when there is already a lot of bonding love flowing

³ See: André H. Roosma, ['The Significant Name of God \(19\) – The riches of the Title אֱלֹהִים - 'El Shaddai', Hallelu-YaH, 17 June 2020.](#)

between the two. Then you feel a unity that offers security. Moving together in the same way – such as when you dance together – can also help to ‘get on the same wavelength’. When you attune yourself to each other in this way, your right hemisphere can easily and unconsciously take over the thoughts and feelings of the other person in real time, super-fast *and* deeply – much faster and more deeply than is ever possible through explaining and reasoning. In the ideal situation, this is the way babies learn to deal with difficult feelings: through mutual attunement with the mother, they can tap into the more mature capacities in the mother’s deep brain. Also later, for example, when we are anxious about something and then attune ourselves to someone who is at ease in the middle of such a situation, via a glance we can take over some of his or her calm feelings and thoughts in a split second.

In walking with Immanuel, this works the same way, although it often takes some human help and some practice and habituation because we don’t perceive Him physically. This attunement to Immanuel is therefore very different from conscious meditation. Meditation results from focusing our attention on something. Conscious meditation on truth and God’s character, however, does not automatically produce a mutual state of spiritual-emotional attunement. God does not need to reveal Himself for meditation to function. Meditation can also be non-relational, but what we have described and need here is contemplation. As we mean it here, it is relational. Contemplative prayer flows from an awareness of God’s active presence. Contemplation involves thinking with God (in real time) using mutual attunement. We can practice and exercise with it, take time for it, to learn to live and to grow spiritually in Christ-likeness in our character and in our unconscious, spontaneous reactions (the fast track). In the same way, Jesus had His disciples practice during the three years that He accompanied them 24/7. Jesus’ own “spiritual exercises” only had to ensure that His attunement to the Father *continued* to function properly. Consider, for example, how Jesus prayed for His persecutors even in His tremendous suffering on the cross. That ultimate maturity reflects a great relational capacity in the fast track of the brain. We need more practice. To become so mature, gentle and loving in our automatic reactions (i.e. in the fast track in our right brain) requires a lot of practice, with Immanuel and often with others who precede us in this. Spiritual formation thus combines transformative moments with God with formation practices with people. The essence in both is the development that becomes possible from loving attachment relationships.

Life, recovery and growth

Unfortunately, in our development, things often don’t go well or go not quite right. Bad experiences are stored deep in our right hemisphere as signals that constantly say: “watch out for...!” and “be careful with...!” and lead to survival mechanisms like withdrawing from others or warding them off. In dealing with others, it affects our expectations.

What is needed then to effect substantial change at that deep level, so also in our character or in our identity, is feeling safe and secure. Our survival and self-protection mechanisms work like a kind of ‘firewall’. Healthy attachments only let in that which comes from someone we are connected to by attachment love. In other words: Attachment love that flows provides on a deep level the security we need to allow for changes. Note, says Jim Wilder: The brain checks for the **presence** of attachment love, not so much for what we **believe about** attachment love.

This makes spiritual-emotional attunement to the God Who is love and is involved with us – so Immanuel – so powerful for life, renewal/recovery and growth of identity and character.

As we tune in to God in our walk with others, our thoughts, words, and actions begin to align with His, and we become more like Him. Thus our whole life becomes an internship in the school of His Love (internalizing His love more and more).

Going deeper

Jim again: “Starting an attachment relationship, like falling in love, can be quite easy with people we like. Maintaining attachment when things go wrong is the touchstone of emotional maturity. When someone suddenly *feels* more like an enemy than a friend (or suddenly starts to hate us) we discover the power of our attachment love.

God is also lovingly (*‘ahabbah*) attached (*chesed*) to such a person whom we currently *experience* as our ‘enemy’. That means if we are synchronized in mutual attachment with God at such a time, our spontaneous response to that “enemy” will be love. Also times when God Himself *seems* to be our adversary immediately reveal the power of our attachment to God. These spontaneous reactions to “enemies” are the measure of spiritual maturity. Loving our enemies becomes the testing and training ground for attachment to God and others. Any identity failure created by our early development will be exposed. The good news is that we are most open to transformation after we experienced someone more as an enemy for a while, but in the meantime we come out of it together through re-alignment with each other, with God’s help. This underscores that if our attachment to God (or one of God’s people) is strong enough, there are opportunities to continue to support the relationship in a state of mutual attunement, and thus for growing further.”

Helping and stimulating each other

How can we help and encourage each other in this? There are a number of things we can do:

- Sharing Immanuel experiences with each other:
By sharing with each other what we have experienced with God and in His presence and love, we encourage both ourselves and the other and make it easier to attune to God.
- Introduce the other to 'Immanuel':
When I worked for a large company, an international expert would sometimes visit our department. If his expertise was also interesting for people from another department, we would sometimes open an afternoon for them. We were then only present as hosts and let the people from the other department ask the expert their questions. At most we sometimes helped with translation or something. It works the same here. We introduce people to God and help them listen to God. If necessary, in the case of threatening misunderstandings, for example, we help them understand each other well, so that a good attunement with God is created.

In all of this, doing this together causes us to become more and more intertwined with God and each other. A weave of God, the community and ourselves.

Jim about this: “The threads from which a piece of cloth is woven go in two directions. When practicing strong attachment relationships with God and others, the sutures run in different directions, but the result is one piece of cloth. Wires running above are constantly alternating, but always in both directions. Sometimes God’s thread can be seen through it. At other times the threads of your life appear in me or mine in you. The fabric is God and you and me. One moment one thread is in front and sometimes another. The strength of the fabric is determined by both the threads we see and the threads that are hidden. We think with God and God’s people through mutual attunement and become new. God’s patterns and colors emerge as we bond and become intertwined. Our spiritual life as individuals and communities (and there is less separation than we may think) becomes an eternal fabric of relationships.”

An example prayer

The following prayer is inspired by the prayer on p. 253 of Karl Lehman’s book *Outsmarting Yourself*.

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Immanuel truth that You are *always* with us, and we ask You to help us increasingly perceive Your loving and gracious presence.

Loving Father, sometimes our circumstances evoke old traumatic thoughts, feelings and experiences. Help us to receive Your love and to expose these thoughts, feelings and experiences before You and let them be healed and neutralized by You. We always want to put these before Your throne, and also the thoughts that we think of ourselves in response to them, which may sound very logical, true and correct, but which are not in accordance with Your truth. Give us the grace to bravely face and recognize these things with courage and to keep us always accessible to You and Your love.

Heavenly Father, we want with You to proclaim a stop to the enemy’s plans to destroy relationships and sow division (thus thwarting those plans) – give us the grace to do so.

Heavenly Father, we are eager to cooperate with Your plan for thriving relationships, a healthy community and united, relational churches that will bring Your love to the world – please give us the courage, grace and love we need to bring this vision to fruition, that it will be fulfilled.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen

Literature

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Karl Lehman, [*Outsmarting Yourself: Catching Your Past Invading the Present and What to Do about It*](#), [This JOY! Books](#) (Three Cord Ministries, Inc.), Libertyville (IL USA), 2011; ISBN: 978 0 9821835 9 5.

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