

Hello Everyone, we are so glad that you are worshipping with us online. Happy Father's Day and I hope you'd enjoy the special treats you get from your family and celebrate this day with your loved ones. But we also want to extend our prayer and support to some who had lost loved ones such as a grandfather, a dad, or a son, or those who want to be fathers but can't. Father's Day might be a difficult occasion – our hearts go out to you and may the Lord bring back great memories of the loved ones who passed away and grant you strength to handle your loss and persevere in faith, hope, and love!

We are continuing our series, "Love Is" and our topic today is "Love bears all things." Different Bible translations bring out their respective nuance of the words "bear all things" (**πάντα στέγει**); for examples,

"Love never gives up." (New Living Translation)

"Love puts up with all things." (Common English Bible)

"Love is always supportive." (Contemporary English Bible)

"There is nothing love cannot face." (New English Bible)

Although there are different nuances of this Greek word "to bear", the term denotes the sense of a covering, like a roof that protects and keeps off something which threatens, or a shelter that keeps out any harmful force or influence. Things or people under this cover are safe and secure. So I think the NIV comes closest to the primary notion of the original: "Love always protects."

So in using this word Paul is saying this: agape love – the life-giving, sacrificial love grounded in the character of God and modeled in the life of Jesus – gives protection by creating a safe and secure space for the good of others.

Have you ever experienced this kind of love? Would I be correct to say that everyone desires to receive such love?

In the remaining time I would like to look at two word-pictures – one from the OT, one from the NT – that capture the essential characteristics of this love that bears all things, that always protects.

Ex. 19:4 You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and **how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.** (NIV)

Deut. 32:10 In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. **He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, ¹¹ like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft.** (NIV)

God is pictured as the strong and affectionate mother eagle that watchfully guards and attentively cares for her young during the time when they are needy and vulnerable; her protecting wings become a refuge from life-threatening situations, sheltering them from dangerous environment.

The Exodus story recalls that God hears the moaning and cries of despair from the Hebrew slaves and how He delivers them out of the land of slavery, liberates them from the tyranny of oppression and bondage, promises them a new future of freedom and abundance. God stands between them and the Egyptian slave-drivers; He supplies food for daily

sustenance; He leads and guides them with the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night; He protects them from their enemies – God does all these even when they complain and murmur.

Love that always protects is love that liberates people from enslavement and oppression.

When I was in Grade 7 I had a really good schoolmate whose father was the chief detective of the HK police. That was a pretty big deal to me - at least in my preteen brain - because in that warped head of mine I believed that I got the police force behind me.

At the same time I also hung out with some soccer friends who were gangsters, members of a triad. One of the leaders of the gang really liked me and invited me to join his gang, and he was even willing to waive the joining fees! I was so flattered but declined his invite; I was emboldened by his promise of “protection”, however.

So, I got every angle covered: got protection from the good guys and the bad guys, the police and the

triad. Now if you were me, wouldn't you feel safe and cool, embolden to act like the king of the hill?

But there's more: see, in Grade 6 I passed the baptismal confirmation examination – I got the seal of approval and officially became a standing member in God's family. So in addition to the police and the gang/triad, I also had GOD on my side!

With this false sense of security, I behaved like a pretty obnoxious punk outside the church and a proud youth group leader in the church. My schoolmate even asked me for protection!

Let me be crystal clear: the purpose and goal of God's protecting love for His people is not to give us permission to be arrogant, to behave badly or to pursue our self-serving agendas. God's protection is to ensure freedom for us to fulfill His purposes.

Ex.19:4 ... how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you **obey me fully and keep my covenant**, then out of all nations you will be **my treasured possession**... ⁶ you will be for me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. (NIV)

While it's true that God protects us and provides safety and security, that he secures our freedom, makes space for us and grants us hope of a great future like He did for the Hebrew slaves, we are liberated to live out our identity - by faith and in obedience - as His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation so that other nations/the world would be blessed, and thus people are drawn closer to God!

Love that always protects is love that shapes a life aligned with God's purpose.

Now let's look at a NT word picture that paints another shade of love that always protects.

Jn. 10:9 **I am the gate**; whoever enters through me will be **saved**. They will **come in and go out, and find pasture**. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full**. (NIV)

This 2nd word picture is a Gate/Door of the sheep pen; Jesus describes Himself as the Gate-Keeper-

Shepherd who keeps the sheep out of danger, looks after them and attends to the wounded ones, and cares deeply for the wellbeing the flock under his watch. The sheep that enter this Door/Gate into this protective circle are “saved.” To be saved is to be healed and kept in good health – the person’s outer and inner safety is preserved.

In the Gospel of John the word “saved” describes those who once dwelled in darkness but now live in light, broken but are now made whole, and once spiritually dead but now received eternal life/life-everlasting.

Love that always protects is love that brings healing to a wounded soul.

In this passage Jesus also describes how the sheep enjoy the pleasure and freedom to live life to the full within this secure space created and guarded by the capable Gate-Keeper-Shepherd. Brimmed with vitality and joy, the once spiritually hungry and thirsty sheep are now satisfied by the bread of life and the living water. These sheep have a sense of satisfaction and contentment – come in and go out,

and find pasture – under the leadership and protection of this gate-keeping shepherd who desires the wholesomeness of every individual sheep, in contrast to the thieves and robbers whose aim is to hurt, kill, and destroy.

Jesus’ mission is to open the gate of the sheep pen so that each sheep that enters will live life to the full, experiencing the future blessedness of the new heaven and earth in the present, i.e., to flourish as one created by God, to realize, cultivate and use the full potentials for kingdom mission, to bless others.

Love that always protects is love that empowers others to be God’s best version of self.

The Lord has given me the privilege to walk alongside a sister to explore Jesus’ calling to life mission in the past year. At the end of her journey of exploration, she shares with me what she’s learned in this process: “Each of us has a story. It is filled with events and experiences—some good and some difficult—that have contributed to making us who we are today. The journey helps me understand how these events and experiences have

led me to where I am today and how God is shaping my life. I am also reminded of my core convictions and I am once again convicted to consistently demonstrate them in my day-to-day behavior.

After engaging in this process, I have become more intentional about my personal and spiritual growth and development. And because I have been personally renewed, it has helped me in my relationships at home with my husband and my kids.”

Jesus the Gate-Keeper-Shepherd’s protection aims at seeking God’s best for His sheep, so they can enjoy the wholesomeness – shalom – of life and live in the light instead of darkness. He wants us to live God’s tomorrow today!

Let me quickly recap what “Love always protects” looks like and conclude with a few practical applications.

Love that protects is ...

Love that liberates people from enslavement and oppression.

Love that shapes a life aligned with God’s purpose.

Love that brings healing to a wounded soul.

Love that empowers others to be God’s best version of self.

Here are some practical steps of love you can take in this coming week:

1. **Pursue justice:** Use the materials Pastor Jeremy and Kerri put together in your small group and children to pray, listen, and talk compassionately about the issue of anti-Black racism.
(cornerstonechurch.ca/talkingaboutrace;
cornerstonechurch.ca/cornerstonekids).
2. **Protect your marriage:** Prayerfully consider with your spouse how you could establish a supportive rhythm in your schedule to connect and to celebrate each other’s uniqueness.

3. **Practice active listening:** Watch out for wounded souls and bring words of healing, as the bible teaches in ^{Prov. 16:24} Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Henri Nouwen in his book, *Reaching Out: The Three Movement of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975, p. 66.) suggests the idea of giving shape to a life that allows us to turn our enemy into a guest and “create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.”

Love that bears all things, always protects:

This is a generous love that is not dependent on the worthiness of the other person.

It is a welcoming love that makes space for the individual to feel accepted and valued.

It is an embracing love that extends grace and forgiveness to the one who did wrong.

It's a love that attends to the wounded, allows time for healing.

And this love supplies necessary resource for growth and transformation in community.