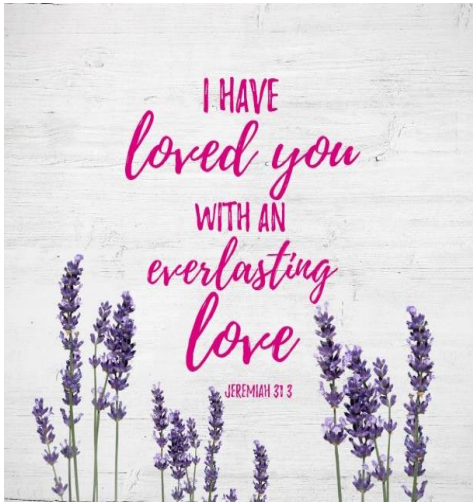


# Guided by a cloud 43 (Exodus 13:21-22)

A few weeks before Christmas we introduced Nell, a new puppy, into our household. This has brought huge amounts of delight and has reminded me of just how precious God's unconditional love for us is. No matter how challenging some of Nell's crazy behaviour is, she is always wanting to show just how much she loves us. When the 'workers' come home after a stressful day they are met with such enthusiasm that the difficulties of the day are soon forgotten. This week is a communion week and this is a time we can focus on God's love for us.



## Worship time

[Nothing shall separate us](#)

[He lavishes grace \(Lean hard\)](#)

[I cast my mind to Calvary](#)

## God's unconditional love.

A lot has been written about the characteristics of God, but when it comes down to it God is love. Love is not something he chooses to do or give, it is the very essence of who he is. He doesn't just love, he 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

Love in the world often has conditions attached to it, "I will love you as long as you love me or add value to my life" people are expected to earn love. God's love however is a stark contrast to this. God's love never fails, *"But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever."* Psalm 52:8

God's love endures for ever, *"Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."* Psalm 106:1

God's love is not motivated by personal gain *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."* 1 John 3:16.

Unconditional love does not mean God just loves the good things we do but that his love is so great he loves every sinner no matter how bad they might appear in people's eyes.

The focus of God's love is redemption which is needed because of the break in the relationship between God and Adam and Eve. God's love is expressed through the giving of himself, in practical action and in his sacrifice, and we should aim to love in a similar way. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 famously tells us what love should be. *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

The goal of God's love is relationship. He created us in his image when we received the breath of his Holy Spirit and this enables us to be in a relationship with Him. Because he first loved us we are enabled to love him and others *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."* 1 John 4:10-11

As we come to take communion this morning we do it as a sign of our love for God and an acknowledgement that he loves us. We also do so remembering that nothing-absolutely nothing-can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:35-39).

"Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you" 1Peter 5:7