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Recently I was having a conversation with someone about my first computer, a Kaypro that had a green screen built into the case and two floppy disks—you remember those? It was a huge upgrade from an electric typewriter, and when I entered seminary, I purchased the computer since I knew I would be writing lots of papers.

As I was reflecting on that technology from 30-some years ago, I realized that my smart phone today has more computing power than my first computer. And whereas finding software on that old computer required purchasing programs on a 5-1/4-inch floppy disk, getting an app on my phone is just a click away. Even getting updates on my phone is easy, for many apps update themselves automatically in the background.

There's an app for almost anything. Want to know how far you've run or biked? There's an app to track your route and distance. How about keeping track of your calories you eat or burn up while exercising? Yep—an app for that. I recently found a bird watching app to log the birds I've seen,

with the option to see the listing of birds that others have seen in the same area. There's even an app in development to record the number of bees seen in your yard, allowing scientists to track the bee population, which is crucial to understanding the health of bees.¹

Imagine if we humans had built-in apps that automatically updated. Having a hard time learning the multiplication tables in school? Update your human math app. Not sure to how to prepare a ham for supper? Update your personal cooking app. Not sure how to love someone? Update your love app.

It appears that the apostle Paul was trying to get the church in Corinth to update their love app, for they seemed to be having numerous difficulties. In the portion of the letter we read last week, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to get along, encouraging them to find agreement within the diversity of those who lived in their city (chapter 1). Later in the letter, we hear how they argued about who was the best church leader to follow (3) or which were the best foods to eat (8). They bickered

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about lawsuits (6) and began church dinners without waiting for everyone to show up (11). They even seemed to argue about who had the best spiritual gifts (12).

They needed an app update on how to get along, and Paul offered them a love update in the 13th chapter of his letter:

“Love never gives up,” he wrote. That’s hard, isn’t it? How many times have you ever felt like giving up? Love isn’t easy. It takes work.

Paul continued in his letter, “Love cares more for others than for self.” But it’s so much easier to look out for ourselves than for one another.

What else do you suggest, Paul? “Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have.” But we’re taught to always want what we don’t have, as in “I’d love to have the latest new thing.”

Paul continues telling about this love app update as he writes what love does not do:

“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.”

The updated love does the following:

“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.”²

The Greek language that Paul used to write his letters in the Bible has several words to express the idea of love: *eros*, a sexual kind of love; *phileo*, a loving relationship between best friends; along with another word to describe a parent’s love for a child; and another word referring to love for oneself. These forms of love all have a place in our lives, but Paul used the love word *agape*, an unconditional love like God has for humanity. It’s a love that embraces us no matter how much we mess up our lives. God may find it easy to love us with *agape*, but most of us have a hard time living that kind of love.

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One writer thinking about these different kinds of love suggested that each has a place in our lives.

My dad has Alzheimer's disease and every day my mom goes to visit him at the care facility. She sits with him, she shares a meal with him and she speaks to him. He's not giving back in any way and isn't in a state where he can physically take care of himself. She loves him with both 'agape' and 'phileo' love. She loves him unconditionally, but she also loves him relationally and intimately after years and years of living life together.³

The author suggested that God "wants us to go deeper, to offer love unconditionally, despite the actions of others. It says that 'I will love you, even when you deny me love in return. I will love you even when you don't love yourself.'" To go deeper, to love unconditionally, is, in a sense, a love app update. With this update we begin to love one another as God loves us. When the *eros* sexual love begins to fad, God offers us an *agape* update. When friends run into conflicts and *phileo* love is strained, God offers us an *agape* update. This *agape* love doesn't replace the other forms of love, but helps

us go deeper, helps us get through the difficult times.

Lately we've found ourselves facing difficult times, for we're called to socially distance ourselves from one another. It's hard to offer love in the ways we're used to doing. Hugs and handshakes are taboo. A visit to one another's homes is not a good idea. We can't even get to church for weekly worship, and when has that ever happened on such a large scale in our lives?

Maybe we need a love app update to help us find new ways of expressing love, such as Victoria Albert in New York discovered while watching some children making signs to express thanks for their teachers. She began making signs and went around town holding them in various locations to express her love and appreciation.⁴ Here's a sample of a few of them posted on her Facebook page.

Dave Heinzl had a similar idea when he created some wooden signs that say, "Everything will be ok" and began placing them around Springfield, IL. After posting a photo on Facebook, he received

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requests for 200 of the signs, so he had to “enlist the help of his wife, Hannah, 14-year-old son, Ethan, and 13-year-old daughter, Mia.”⁵

He explained, “People are going to lose people they know (in this pandemic). It's going to get more personal and more painful. But things will get better. There are painful, but beautiful things about change. I'm going to focus on the beautiful things.”

It's not easy in this time of chaos, but God keeps moving among us, striving to bring joy out of despair, healing out of pain, hope out of fear. When you discover that hope, you know you've received the latest love app update.

¹ <https://beescount.org/>

² 1 Corinthians 13:3-7, *The Message Bible*

³ Gary Edmonds, “Agape and Phileo Love: We Need Both,” 2/14/17, www.huffpost.com/entry/agape-and-phileo-love-we-need-both_b_58a1e5d6e4b0cd37efcf23

⁴ www.wgrz.com/article/entertainment/television/programs/daybreak/signs-of-hope-bring-joy-amid-covid-19-pandemic/71-929948b0-8cd6-4e0a-bf32-9d3bbba21654

⁵ Steven Spearie, “Everything is going to be ok' signs defy COVID-19 in Springfield,” 3-29-20, www.pantagraph.com/news/state-and-regional/everything-is-going-to-be-ok-signs-defy-covid-19-in-springfield/article_a2906c69-3a87-55b4-90a9-5b8a87b34ea7.html