

6 ANCIENT GRECIAN LOVES

WITH BIBLICAL WISDOM

The ancient Greeks had a far richer vocabulary for love than we do today. Here are six distinct kinds of love that can enrich our understanding of connection and faith.

PHILIA

Loyal, Friendship Love

Pronounced: FEEL-ee-uh

Deep companionship rooted in shared values, loyalty and mutual respect.

Biblical reflection:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” — John 15:13 (NIV)

EROS

Passionate, Yearning Love

Pronounced: AIR-oss

A fiery, sensual love, often seen as irrational yet compelling and creative. Theologian Anders Nygren contrasts it with Christian love, calling eros self-seeking rather than self-giving.

Biblical reflection:

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine.” — Song of Solomon 1:2 (NIV)

LUDUS

Playful, Affectionate Love

Pronounced: LOO-duss

A lighthearted, flirtatious love of teasing, laughter and youthful banter between friends or romantic partners.

Biblical reflection:

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” — Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)

AGAPE

Unconditional, Sacrificial Love

Pronounced: uh-GAH-pay

The highest form of love—selfless grace, caring for others regardless of return. This is the love God shows us—and that we are called to reflect.

Biblical reflection:

“God is love.” — 1 John 4:8 (NIV)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength... Love your neighbor as yourself.” — Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

PRAGMA

Enduring, Committed Love

Pronounced: PRAG-muh

A mature love cultivated over time—marked by patience, compromise and deep understanding.

Biblical reflection:

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” — 1 Corinthians 13:7 (NIV)

PHILAUTIA

Love of Self

Pronounced: fil-OW-shuh

Self-love in the sense of healthy self-esteem and self-care

Biblical reflection:

“We love because he first loved us.” — 1 John 4:19 (NIV)

Remember also the command to love your neighbor as yourself—healthy self-love empowers our love for others.

WHY THESE MATTER

Understanding these different loves invites a deeper, richer appreciation for the ways we connect—with others, with ourselves and with God. Each one mirrors a facet of His love for us—and how He calls us to love in return.

QUICK REFERENCE TABLE

Greek Word	Meaning	Biblical Echo (NIV)
Eros	Passionate Desire	Song of Solomon 1:2
Philia	Loyal Friendship	John 15:13
Ludus	Playful Affection	Proverbs 17:22
Agape	Unconditional sacrificial love	1 John 4:8; Mark 12:30-31
Pragma	Enduring mature love	1 Corinthians 13:7
Philautia	Healthy self-love	1 John 4:19; Mark 12:13