

## **LOVE COMES ONLY FROM GOD, GOD IS LOVE**

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

The reason God wants us to love is because he *is* love, and he created us to be like him - to love. The only reason we're able to love is because God loves us: "Love comes from God ... because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8 NIV).

We were created in God's image to do two things on earth: Learn to love God and learn to love other people; life is all about love.

But love all started with God. He loved us first and that gives us the ability to love others (1 John 4:19). The only reason you can love God or love anybody else is because God first loved you. And he showed that love by sending Jesus Christ to earth to die for you. He showed that love by creating you. He showed that love by everything you have in life; it's all a gift of God's love.

In order to love others and to become great lovers, we first need to understand and feel how much God loves us. We don't want to just talk about love, read about love, or discuss about love; our need is to experience the love of God.

We need to reach a day when we finally, fully understand how God loves us completely and unconditionally. We need to become secure in the truth that we cannot make God stop loving us.

Once we're secure inside God's unconditional love, we'll start cutting people a lot of slack. We won't be as angry as we've been. We'll be more patient. We'll be more forgiving. We'll be more merciful. We'll give others grace.

But you cannot give to others what you have not received yourself, and so my hope is that, as you learn how much God loves you, you'll also let him heal your heart so that his love can flow freely through you. It's impossible to love others until you really feel loved yourself.

## **LOVE IS AN ACTION**

***Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions. 1 John 3:18 (NLT)***

Love is something you do.

You show love by what you do, not just by what you feel.

Love is more than attraction and more than arousal. It's also more than sentimentality, like so many of today's songs suggest. By this standard, is love dead when the emotion is gone? No, not at all. Because love is an action; love is a behavior.

Over and over again, in the Bible, God commands us to love each other. And you can't command an emotion. If I told you right now "Be sad!," you couldn't be sad on cue. Just like an actor, you can fake it, but we're not wired for our emotions to change on command. Have you ever told a little kid, "Be happy!" ***I'm trying, daddy!***

If love were just an emotion, then God couldn't command it. But love is something you do. It can produce emotion, but love is an action.

The Bible says, "... Let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions." (1 John 3:18, NLT) We can talk a good act: 'I love people.' But do we really love them? Do you really love them? Our love is revealed in how we act toward them.

### **LOVE IS A SKILL**

***Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7 (NLT)***

Love is a skill that can be learned. In other words, it's something you can get good at and that means you get better at love **by practicing love**.

You may think you're a good lover, but God wants you to become a great lover, a skilled lover, a master lover. Yet, most people never learn how to love. You can become an expert at relationships.

Wouldn't you like to become known as a person of extraordinary love? When people spoke of you they might say: "He doesn't care who you are or what you look like." "She doesn't care where you've been or what you've done or where you're from."

The only way you get skilled at something is to practice at it. You do it over and over. The first time you do it, it feels awkward, but the more you do it, the better you become.

The same is true with love (1 John 4:7). Let's practice loving each other. As the Bible says, "Practice these things; be committed to them, so that your progress may be evident to all." (1 Timothy 4:15, HCSB)

### **LOVE IS A HABIT**

***If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. Luke 6:32 (NIV)***

If you only love on and off, like a light switch, you're not loving like God wants you to love. Jesus said, "If you only love those who love you what credit is that to you?" (Luke 6:32a, NIV)

His point is - anybody can love those who love them. Becoming a master lover means you learn to love the unlovable. It's when you love people who don't love you, when you love people who irritate you, when you love people who stab you in the back or gossip about you.

This may seem like an impossible task and it is - that's why we need God's love in us, so we can then love others: "... We know and rely on the love God has for us." (1 John 4:16a, NIV)

When you realize how much God loves you - with an extravagant, irresistible, unconditional love - then his love will change your entire focus on life. If we don't receive God's love for us, we'll have a hard time loving other people. I'm talking about loving the unlovely; loving the difficult; loving the irritable; loving people who are different or demanding.

You can't do that until you have God's love coming through you. You need to know God's love so it can overflow out of your life into others.

Love must become your lifestyle, the habit of your life. Through [the magazine, bundled material] we're going to learn the habit of love and you're going to become one of God's master lovers.

But it starts with a decision. Are you ready?

Your life is worth far more than you think, and by learning to love others with the love God gives you, you will have an influence far greater than you could ever imagine. If you will commit to this, you will experience love as God means it to be, filled hope, energy, and joy.

My prayer for you is "that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love ..." (Philippians 1:9, NCV)

### **LOVE IS A CHOICE**

***... That you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 30:20, NIV)***

Love is a choice and a commitment. You **choose** to love or you **choose** not to love.

Today we've bought into this myth that love is uncontrollable, that it's something that just happens to us; it's not something we control. In fact, even the language we use implies the uncontrollability of love. We say, "I **fell** in love," as if love is some kind of a ditch. It's like I'm walking along one day and bamm! - I fell in love. I couldn't help myself.

But I have to tell you the truth - that's not love. Love doesn't just happen to you. Love is a choice and it represents a commitment.

There's no doubt about it, that attraction is uncontrollable and arousal is uncontrollable. But attraction and arousal are not love. They can lead to love, but they are not love. Love is a choice.

You must choose to love God; he won't force you to love him (Deuteronomy 30:20). You can thumb your nose at God and go a totally different way. You can destroy your life if you choose to do that. God still won't force you to love him. Because he knows love can't be forced.

And this same principle is true about your relationships: you can choose to love others, but God won't force you to love anyone.

### **HEART**

***A man's heart reflects the man. Proverbs 27:19 (NIV)***

The Bible uses the term "heart" to describe the bundle of desires, hopes, interests, ambitions, dreams, and affections that you have. Your heart represents the source of all your motivations -- what you love to do and what you care about most. Even today, we still use the word in this way when we say, "I love you with all my heart."

The Bible says what is in your heart is what you really are, not what others think you are, or what circumstances force you to be (Proverbs 27:19). Your heart is the real you. It determines why you say the things you do, why you feel the way you do, and why you act the way you do.

Physically, each of us has a unique heartbeat. Just as we each have unique thumbprints, eye prints, and voiceprints, our hearts beat in slightly different patterns. It's amazing that out of all the billions of people who've ever lived, no one has ever had a heartbeat exactly like yours.

In the same way, God has given each of us a unique emotional "heartbeat" that races when we think about the subjects, activities, or circumstances that interest us. We instinctively care about some things and not about others. These are clues to where you should be serving.

Another word for heart is passion. There are certain subjects that you feel deeply passionate about and others that you couldn't care less about. Some experiences turn you on and capture your attention, while others turn you off or bore you to tears. These reveal the nature of your heart; listen for inner promptings that can point to the ministry God intends for you to have.

When you were growing up you may have discovered that you were intensely interested in some subjects that no one else in your family cared about.

Where did those interests come from? They came from God!

God had a purpose in giving you these inborn interests. Your emotional heartbeat is a key to understanding your shape for service. Don't ignore your interests; consider how they might be used for God's glory. There is a reason that you love to do these things.

Listen for inner promptings that can point to the ministry God intends for you to have.