

Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

Do You REALLY Experience The Love Of Others?

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What Does Love Really Feel Like?

A dictionary would define love as an intense feeling of deep affection for someone or even for something. The media would most often narrow love down to romance or sexual encounters. But of course you can love your parents, your children, and your faith family and friends beyond any sensual intent. However, one reality generally escapes the mind of anyone who genuinely loves another: **If you love, you will be hurt.**

As “loving” as people like to think they are, most really don’t let themselves completely *be loved* by others. They may allow themselves to be hugged and to receive affectionate words and other expressions of love — but deep inside they can’t allow themselves the vulnerability to be loved without reservation. A key reason? They fear being hurt.

Even experiencing the amazing love which God has for them can be elusive for many Christians, as described in an excerpt from the Preface of our workbook, *Demolishing Strongholds*:

“As I [Mike] read my Bible on the morning of November 29, 1989 I pondered Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians (3:16-19): *“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”* I was convicted that the amount of the *love of Jesus* that I’d ever felt, even after

many years in ministry, was about the size of a decimal point. The love I’d experienced had no depth, breadth, or width to it, and it certainly didn’t surpass my knowledge.”

How could I share the love of Jesus with others when I hadn’t felt it myself? The Holy Spirit had to reveal to me the strongholds of deceit and rejection that had kept me from experiencing the love of our Lord. Paraphrasing 1Corinthians 13:1, *“If I’m the most “Christian” of Christians but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.”* What a frightening place to be in, a place maybe you can relate to as well.

Both our mothers suffered from a stronghold of rejection. On the surface they seemed entirely different people, one always socializing and the other reclusive. But their *fear of rejection* prevented them from experiencing the love others were giving them in so many ways. Our prayer was that neither of these women would die without experiencing the love of others. The sad truth is that both moms lived almost 80 years before they could *experience* the love others had for them. Perhaps you have family members in the same prison. Possibly you are yourself.

Effects Of A Person Who Can't Experience Love



“The reason I brought you to Israel is because the children of divorce in the United States are breaking My heart.”

Just after our Father finished revealing to us in 1994 the Hebraic foundations He was restoring, I [Mike] was sitting on the wall in front of the Church of the Teardrop halfway down the Mount of Olives. In the greatest depth of sorrow I’d ever experienced I heard my heavenly Father impress the above quote into my heart.

Soon after our return to the States we read a longterm study on the effects of divorce on children. Tragically, the most prevalent and relationally destructive effect on kids is this: **“They can never let themselves fully belong to other people.”** In other words, children of divorce erect around themselves an emotional safeguard to keep them from being hurt.

During the two decades since we returned from Jerusalem we’ve recognized other categories of individuals who are plagued by *abandonment issues*, finding it difficult to experience complete love:

- Adopted children
- children who don’t know their father or whose dads were emotionally distant or vocationally absent
- children conceived out of wedlock
- children with a parent who suffered prolonged illness or early death
- children raised in a home where another sibling had ‘favored child status’
- children with unaffectionate parent(s).

These walking wounded have a very difficult time letting themselves be loved or entrusting themselves fully to a relationship with others. **Abandonment** and feelings of being **expendable** open the door for strongholds of bitterness, rejection, and fear and insecurity to wall off the love that people would extend to them. At the same time, these unclean spirits keep them from loving others.

Symptoms of Abandonment

In discussions with people who’ve been tormented by abandonment and expendability, we’ve learned that many compensate by doing whatever’s necessary to receive *recognition* and *acclaim*. An old adage explains, **“If you can’t experience love, you’ll put yourself in control!”** Those who are beset by abandonment and the strongholds that keep it agitated don’t let themselves be unreservedly loved. So they grab attention by their achievements and accomplishments and even overt acts of kindness in order to gain the approval of others. But, these don’t fill the void experiencing unwavering love provides. They need **deliverance** and **healing**, but are often most resistant to what ONLY JESUS can do for them. [See **Lifabyte 6. Feeling Left Out** for more insight on various types of people who may find it difficult to receive love.]

A thought to consider:

The 1970 movie, *Love Story*, produced an often quoted phrase: **“Love is never having to say your sorry.”** But nothing could be further from the truth! If you love someone, you will be hurt. And healing in your heart will not occur until there is complete reconciliation. The emotions of love are fragile, and each person involved needs to practice humble consideration for the other.

*“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **First go and be reconciled** to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23,24).*

*“Bear with each other and **forgive whatever grievances** you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you**” (Colossians 3:13).*

“Some ‘friends’ pretend to be friends, but a true friend sticks closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24, paraphrase)

“A friend loves at all times, and it is for adversity that such a friend is born.”

(Proverbs 17:17)

You may have realized that you’ve been unable to experience love and/or have a hard time demonstrating it. Be encouraged! There are some steps you can take to be changed. At your very core you’ll need our Lord Jesus to deliver and/or heal your emotions, for that’s a fertile playground for demonic oppression. You’ll also need someone alongside you who deeply cares for you and is seeking the same Christ-like goals you are. This describes a *Value-based Relationship*, which is far different than a Positional-based Relationship or Activity-based Relationship.

To be fully free to experience *and* share love, you need at least one Value-based friend in your life. (We’ll have more on this type of friendship on the next page.) [We also suggest you read **Teaching E-mail 29. Are Your Friendships Spiritually Authentic?**]

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Keep in mind that there’s a genuine sacrifice entailed in loving others as Jesus would through you. In your heart you’re no longer fearful of being hurt in any way. And to authentically *love* and *be loved* calls for a humility that verifies you’re free of strongholds and toxic symptoms. It’s then that you can experience the



love of Jesus and not fear emotional wounding yourself.

The following attributes of *agape* love are found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Place a number describing yourself from 0 to 100 to indicate the depth of each love-based character quality in your life.

- My love is patient.
- My love is kind.
- My love does not envy.
- My love does not boast.
- My love is not proud.
- My love is not rude.
- My love is not self-seeking.
- My love is not easily angered.
- My love keeps no record of wrongs.
- My love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
- My love always protects.
- My love always trusts.
- My love always hopes.
- My love always perseveres.

How did you do? In the areas in which you fall short of a 100 ask a friend who loves you to help you. There is no reason you should not experience love *or* share love completely. In the process of loving you’ll find that the walls that keep you from receiving love will come down. And you’ll find these words of Jesus far easier to respond to:

“If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also” (Luke 6:29).

The True Love of Jesus	Controlled By Strongholds
<p>Using Toxic Symptoms To Mutually Work Out Your Salvation <i>“WE have a problem”</i></p> 	<p>Viewing Toxic Symptoms As Basis For Destructive Conflict <i>“YOU have the problem”</i></p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earnest desire to become more like Jesus through sanctification. • View toxic symptoms as opportunities for your sanctification into Christ’s likeness. • Any interpersonal tension seen as our Lord’s means to reveal to you specific areas for character development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always seeing what’s wrong with others instead of with yourself. • Believing you deserve better than you get. • Blinded to your own toxic symptoms and negative treatment of others. [Adam & Eve pointed fingers and got thrown out of the garden].

HAVING AND BEING A DEVOTED, LOVING FRIEND

[adapted from the Institute in Basic Life Principles Seminar]

<u>Level of Friendship</u>	<u>Distinguishing Characteristics</u>
1. Acquaintance	Based on occasional contact. Freedom to ask general questions: public information.
2. Casual Friendship	Based on common interests, activities, and concerns. Freedom to ask specific questions: opinions, ideas, wishes, goals.
3. Close Friendship & Fellowship	Based on mutual life goals. Freedom to suggest mutual projects to reach life goals.
4. Intimate Friendship & Fellowship	Based on commitment to mutual Christ-like character development. Freedom to correct each other.

What's the deepest level of relationship you have with others? Who are they? _____

When I (Mike) was asked to preach at different congregations over the years, I'd occasionally survey those gathered using the four levels of friendship, above. Only 5% of people in most congregations got beyond a Level 2 relationship — **Casual Friendship**. No one admitted a Level 4 relationship with anyone else in their congregation, even their spouse. Think about that for a moment. Does that sound like the depth of relationships the love of Jesus would produce in those who claim to belong to Him?

In order to be in a relationship of **Intimate Friendship & Fellowship** several elements must be in place in each person involved. Through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit there must be:

1. Complete repentance, which results in a clear conscience. (Matthew 3:2, 4:17; Acts 2:38)
2. A distinct reduction of fear in each person's life, especially a fear of being loved and/or corrected by another person which requires a vulnerable openness to input. (1 John 4:18,19; Matthew 10:28; James 4:6; Ephesians 4:1,2) This can only occur after strongholds have been demolished, and the people involved deeply desire to rid themselves of all toxic symptoms.
3. A mutual desire to become more like the image of Jesus in character and love, and to bear lasting fruit for the glory of the Father; a common wholeheartedness and trusting obedience to the will of the Father. (Matthew 3:8, 7:21-27; John 15:1,2; Mark 12:30)

With these three relational criteria in place, an intentional agreement can then be made between the parties in order to develop a Level 4 relationship. In essence they are establishing a **Value-based Relationship** with the love and character of Jesus Christ as their mutual goal through the Spirit at work in them. This relational responsibility of *true biblical fellowship* as a brother or sister in Christ calls for a deep level of commitment both to our Lord and to each other.

Please consider:

Marriages, families, and home fellowships that aren't seeking or living out Level 4 relationships (Value-based) are revealing the lack of love they have for one another. They will never fully serve the *Kingdom interests of Jesus* because they'll be habitually reluctant to receive and/or give the *love of Jesus*. Being effectual as Jesus-in-the-flesh to other people through love combines the grace of His Spirit with the willingness and vulnerability to love. Are you willing?