

Free To Love

(How Free Are You?)



Bill Loveless
Christ Is Life Ministries

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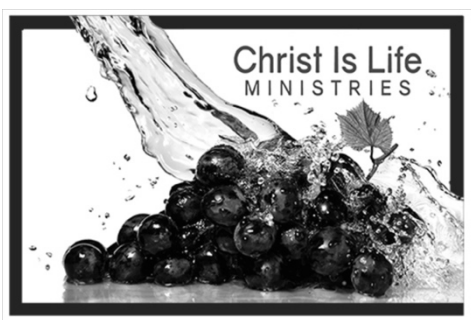
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Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: cilm@christislifeministries.com

Table of Contents

Chapter One

What Is Our Greatest Calling	5
------------------------------------	---

Chapter Two

Two Types of Love	10
-------------------------	----

Chapter Three

Key Truths About Agape Love.....	15
----------------------------------	----

Chapter Four

How Free Are You to Love?.....	22
--------------------------------	----

Chapter Five

What About Loving The Unlovable?.....	30
---------------------------------------	----

Chapter Six

Laboring to Love.....	34
-----------------------	----

Chapter Seven

Loving at a Deeper Level.....	49
-------------------------------	----

Chapter Eight

The Overflow of Loving Others.....	56
------------------------------------	----

Introduction

“What non-believers truly want to see in Christians is not how much better our lives are than theirs. No, what they’re looking for is one thing: love. They want ordinary, broken people who love each other. For the people of the world are ordinary and broken themselves and in need of love--the love that cancels mistakes, values what is lowly, mends broken hearts.” Mike Mason

At the time of this writing, I am on God’s operating table concerning what I will be sharing with you in this booklet. As a result, this is a very personal booklet for me because of what the Lord is revealing to me personally about freedom and love.

I must admit that I have written and taught about God’s love, loving others and even loving myself, according to Matthew 22:37-38, for several years. However, it wasn't until about a year ago that God begin to open my eyes to the fact that I wasn't understanding the priority God put on loving others. Because of what God is teaching me, I can apply what Job said in Job 42:5,6 to my understanding of love. He said,

*“My ears have heard you but **now my eyes see you.**”*

I can identify with Job because, until recently, for me my spiritual walk has been more about “hearing” than “seeing.” (I define spiritual sight as spiritual understanding and experience.) Concerning my understanding of love, I am beginning to “see,” understand and experience what love truly is and how it applies to loving others. Likewise, my prayer for you, as you move through this book, is that you, too, will have greater “eyes” to understand what our greatest calling is as Christians.

My prayer is that God will open your spiritual eyes to the great gift of His love for you and that you will learn to trust Him enough to let Him express that love through you to others.

Chapter One

What Is Our Greatest Calling?

Our Greatest Calling

*“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”
Jesus said to him, “**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.*

*The second is like it: **‘Love your neighbor as yourself.** All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”
Matthew 22:36-40*

As Christians, we are called to be messengers, evangelists, ministers of the truth, teachers, etc. However, are these ministries our greatest calling? Based on this Matthew passage, I have to conclude that our greatest calling is to be **lovers**, i.e., lovers of God, others and self. Jesus declares this to be our highest priority.

This is further confirmed in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but **do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.** ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, **but do not have love, I am nothing.** ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, **but do not have love, I gain nothing.***

Paul tells us in verses 1-3 that love is a higher priority than even our spiritual giftings.

*⁴ **Love is patient, love is kind.** It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always **protects**, always **trusts**, always **hopes**, always **perseveres.***

In verses 4-7 we see that what flows from God's divine love is such things as patience, kindness and humility.

*⁸ Love never fails. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But **the greatest of these is love.***

Paul concludes in verse 13 by declaring that love is a higher priority than even faith and hope.

If our highest calling is to be a lover, how might that change the focus of our personal spiritual journey? It is radically changing my journey because my focus since 1998 has been to be a messenger of Christ-life truths. For me, it was all about getting the liberating message of Christ as our life out to other Christians who were striving in their own strength to try and live the Christian life. As important as that message has been, is it God's highest calling for me? God is persuading me that it is not.

Looking back, I now see that God's persuasion began several years ago when prior to each speaking engagement, my wife would say, "When love is felt, the message is heard." I would politely say, "Thank you," but I missed the significance of what she was saying because my focus was on the message itself.

For 10 years, the Lord was trying to get my attention through my wife but I missed it. But now the Lord is opening my eyes to His truth that loving others must come first, then the message will flow from that love. As a result, I no longer see myself as an emotionally detached messenger. Rather, I am seeking to become a lover who also has a message to deliver. Isn't this an affirmation of what Paul says in Ephesians 4:15?

"...speaking the truth in love...."

This calling to be lovers of others, however, isn't just limited to ministry, it applies to every area of our lives. When people experience God's love through us, it sets the stage for them to respond to that love. This why Paul starts 1 Corinthians 14 by saying.

“Pursue love...”

I believe Paul is exhorting us to pursue love because I we are first and foremost called to be lovers.

What are your thoughts about our highest calling being to become lovers?

Is Love What You Do or Is It Who You Are?

Dallas Willard says this about love. “Our aim under love is not to be loving to this or that person, but to be a person possessed by love as an overall character of life. Love is not what you choose to do. It is what you choose to be.”

I believe Willard’s statements are true for two biblical reasons.

1. You Are a Container of All Of Christ’s Love

“For in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ....” Colossians 2:9, 10a

As a Christian, according to Colossians 2:9, 10, you have the “fullness” of Christ in you. Practically speaking, you are a “container” of all of Christ’s peace, joy, rest, forgiveness, etc., in you. Concerning this study, it also means you have the fullness of all of Christ’s love in you. Why is this important?

As a container you POSSESS all of Christ’s love and are POSSESSED by His love.

Being a container of the fullness of Christ’s love means you do not have to produce love. Instead, you depend on Christ to pour out His love that you possess through you.

2. You Are a Lover in Your New Identity

Willard also said this, "It is not about coming to the unlovable and trying to love them. Rather, come to them as a loving person. Even God doesn't just love, He is love. It is his identity."

Just as love is God's identity, it is our identity as well. How so? First of all, we know from 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we have a new identity:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation [new identity]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Having a new identity means we are partakers of the divine nature:

"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you **may become partakers of the divine nature.**" 2 Peter 1:4

As part of God's making us a partaker of His divine nature, He has imparted to us His divine love in order for us to be lovers. Look at Romans 5:5:

"... and hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out within our hearts** through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

The OVERFLOW of God's love to others is a result of our BEING containers of Christ's love and LIVING from our new identity as divine lovers.

Since we are containers of Christ's love and lovers in our true identity in Christ, do we have any excuse not to love others?

God Is Not Only Calling Us to Be Lovers But to Be Lovable

Think about this statement:

***In addition to seeking to love others, have you considered
BECOMING the kind of person who would be
LOVED by others?***

What made Jesus so attractive? Was it His command of the scriptures or His supernatural powers? I don't think so. I believe He was attractive because of the divine love radiating from His heart. Whether we know it consciously or not, we are drawn to Jesus because of the irresistibility of His love.

That being true, it follows that God is not only transforming us to become lovers, He is also renovating our souls to make us increasingly lovable. You can't have one without the other. I believe this is what Paul is trying to tell us in Ephesians 5:1-2:

"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you...." Ephesians 5:1-2a

Are you willing to seek the Lord for Him to transform you to become more loved by others?

Chapter Two

Two Types of Love

What Kind of Love Are We Talking About?

1“Loving is of the essence of being human, the connective tissue of life, the oxygen of life.” James H. Olthuis,

1. Human Love

Here is a key truth we must understand about human love:

Any and all forms of HUMAN love are CONDITIONAL with EXPECTATIONS and FLESHLY RIGHTS attached.

Human love, by its very nature, is always burdened by our expectations and conditions on loving others. Human love not only expects love in return but also puts expectations on what that returned love should look like. When that love is not returned according to our expectations, then we attach fleshly rights to it. Here are some examples of fleshly rights.

Since I am not being loved the way I expect, I have the right:

- To no longer love that person.
- To reject that person.
- To retaliate against that person.
- To get a divorce.
- To find someone who will love me the way I want to be loved.

Human love is “me” centered and is given out according to the conditions we place on it. In other words, human love chooses who to love, when to love them and how much to love them.

There are many forms of human “love” in the Bible. Let’s look at two of them.

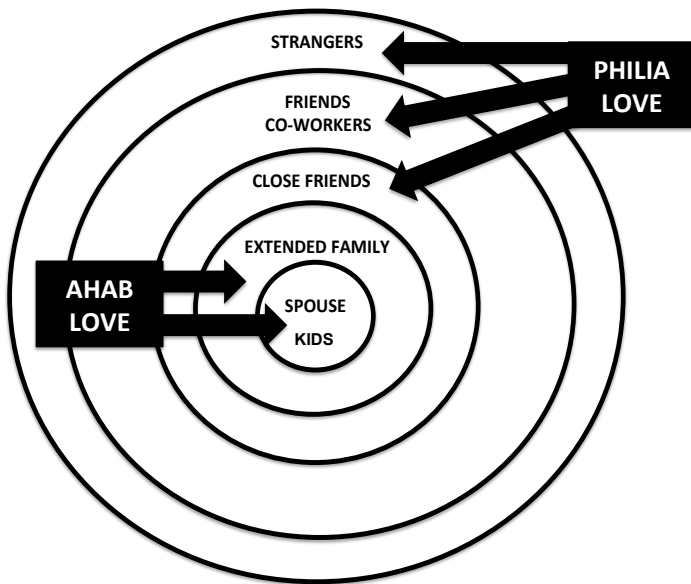
- a) **AHAB** - is a Hebrew word that means love of family.
- b) **PHILIA** - is a Greek word for the most general type of love in Scripture, encompassing the human love one has for fellow humans, and the care, respect, and compassion for people in need.

To better understand “philia” love, look at Matthew 10:37:

“He who [philia] loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who [philia] loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Let’s apply these two different types of human love to our relationships. As we know, we all have different levels of relationships. Look at the diagram below that illustrates this. In the inner circle, if you are married, your most personal relationship is your spouse. As you move out from that inner circle, you see that relationships become less personal.

The diagram below illustrates these two forms of love. “Ahab” love is love for your spouse and family. “Philia” love is a human love that we have for every other relationship.



As you look at this diagram, think about your relationships in terms of human love. What conditions and/or expectations might you be putting on those relationships when it comes to loving them?

The only type of love that unbelievers are able to love with is human love. In contrast, as Christians, we are equipped to love others with *agape* love.

2. Agape Love

“And a second is like it: You shall [agape] love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:39-40

When it comes to the second commandment, the “love” Matthew is talking about is *agape* love. Let me define *agape* love:

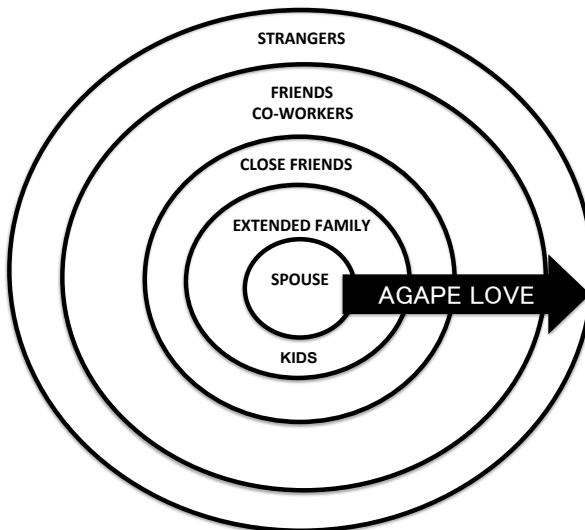
Agape love is the DIVINE love that ONLY comes from God.

Agape love is PERFECT, UNCONDITIONAL, SACRIFICIAL, and SELFLESS.

When we are loving others with natural human love, we can't help but love conditionally. However, with agape love there are no conditions or expectations. In addition, there is one more key truth to loving others with agape love.

Loving others with AGAPE love means you love everyone EQUALLY REGARDLESS of the depth of the relationships.

This concept is illustrated on the following page:



Think about it. When it came His *agape* love, did Jesus love the disciples or the little children more than he did the self-righteous Pharisees? The answer is “no” because *agape* love is perfect, unconditional, and does not play favorites. When it came to *agape* love, Jesus loved the Pharisees, the little children, and His disciples equally. Therefore, let me end this chapter with this.

Loving others with AGAPE love is loving people with the HEART of Jesus.

Note: People ask, “Do you have to like people that you love with *agape* love?” Not necessarily. According to scripture, we are to *agape* love people like Vlademir Putin but we don't have to like his sinful, fleshly behavior. However, there may be people in our lives we don't like today but may end up liking because of a change in their heart or ours towards them.

Chapter Three

Key Truths About Agape Love

In this chapter, I would like to share some key truths about *agape* love. Whenever I use the word “love” in this chapter, I will be referring to *agape* love.

Law and Love Don't Mix

When it comes to unconditional *agape* love you can't mix law and love. When it comes to loving others, we can be tempted to put people under the law by putting conditions on loving them. Here are some examples of what I mean.

* I will love him/her when_____.

* I will love him/her if_____.

* I can't love him/her because_____.

* If he/she_____ then I will love them.

* He/she is not worthy of my love because _____.

***Love and law CANNOT co-exist.
There is NO law when it comes to
loving others.***

AGAPE

When you look at your relationships do any of these “laws” or conditions listed above apply? Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to expose any relationships where you might be putting others under the law.

Love Has No Excuses

I was talking with a man about his relationship with his siblings. He kept repeating that he couldn't truly love them or reconcile with them until they repented of all their wrongdoings towards him. As he was talking, the Spirit brought these three words to my mind: "Love trumps repentance." I didn't share this with him but, as I thought more about this idea, I began making a list of more of the things that love trumps even when our flesh tries to make a case to justify not loving someone.

Love trumps:

- **Unforgiveness** – They must ask for forgiveness before I can love them.
- **Unmet expectations** – I don't have to love them because they didn't meet my expectations of how I want them to love me.
- **Unmet needs** – They didn't meet my needs for love, acceptance, worth, etc. so I don't have to love them.
- **Woundedness** – I won't love them because of how badly they wounded me.

Are you using any of these excuses to not love others?

Love Loves (Regardless)

I know "love loves" seems simple but the Lord brought this thought to my mind one day while I was talking to a friend. As I have thought more on these two words, it became clearer to me that all that Christ's love can do is love. Why?

Agape love has:

- No conditions
- No expectations
- No limitations
- No selfish motives

In addition, agape love doesn't:

- Judge
- Criticize
- Compare
- Take offense
- Hold grudges
- Hold onto the right not to forgive

Love simply LOVES

Love = Power

Until a recent event took place, I had never equated love with power. I realized this when I went to share my testimony at a men's prayer breakfast. I had a long-term relationship with the pastor and had taught and preached at his church a number of times. As I was driving over to the church, the Spirit implanted these thoughts into my mind, "Bill, I want you to first and foremost focus on loving these men and not on giving your testimony." So, when I started speaking, I silently prayed this prayer during the whole time I was speaking, "Lord, love these men through me."

Please recall the words of Lord through my wife: "When love is felt the message is heard." When I got through, my pastor friend came over to me and said, "I have heard your testimony many times before but never more powerful than today." I realized that by my focusing on loving these men, the Spirit was working in power through His love to minister to the hearts of these men.

Here are some other examples of the power of agape love:

- It can disarm others and make them open and transparent.
- It can bring a person to brokenness.
- It can draw an unbeliever to salvation.
- It can move people to love you.

When you let the Spirit speak His words of love through you to another, God will release His power to accomplish His purposes in that person's life (and in yours).

So, will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

Have you every put love and power together? How might it change your willingness to love if you believed there was the power of God associated with it?

Love Is An Unstoppable Force

*“For **I am convinced that neither** death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **will be able to separate us from the love of God**, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38, 39*

Romans 8:38-39 promises that nothing will separate us from God's love. In addition, Paul tells us that nothing and no one is going to stop God loving you. Likewise, no one can stop you from loving other people. They may say, “No” to your overtures of love, but that will not stop Christ's love from pouring through you into them. because it is truly an unstoppable force.

When I think of this truth, it reminds me of one of my board

members who calls me periodically and says, “I love you Bill and there is nothing you can do about it.” Isn’t this a great example of the unstoppable love of God?

How would it change your willingness to love those who are difficult to love or who you fear will reject your love when you realize there is nothing they can do to stop Christ’s love through you?

Love Makes You “Safe”

First, let me tell you what I mean by “safe?”

By safe, I mean that others will TRUST you enough to share DEEP things from their hearts that they would likely not otherwise share.

I have found this to be true in my ministry with pastors. My desire is for them to feel safe with me. In general, they can be pretty closed up when it comes to sharing their personal struggles. As I build the relationship with them through loving them, my desire is they will be able come to a place where they feel safe enough to say, “I want share something with you that I have never shared with anyone else.”

Becoming a safe person is a process for the most part but loving others with Christ’s love can eventually create an atmosphere of safety and trust.

Are you becoming a “safe” person? How would you describe a safe person?

Love Is the Key to Unlock a Person's Heart

*"...and hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out within our hearts** through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Romans 5:5*

I have seen God's love unlock many people's hearts, including mine. I had a padlock on the door of my heart which was filled with anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, and woundedness. This went on for many years until God brought a man into my life in 1996 named David Love. (Only God could bring a Love to a Loveless.)

This was the darkest time in my life. The wheels were falling off and I was spiraling down into depression and despair. David and his wife Denise were missionaries to Colombia at the time. The reason we met was that I was head of the mission's committee of my church and I was interviewing David to see if our church would support them financially. I went to pick him up for lunch and on the way there he said very few words. Little did I know what was about to happen.

I started the interview with a question but he didn't give me a response. I thought that was strange but I was soon to realize that we weren't there for me to interview him. Rather, we were there for me to experience the love and the power of the love of Jesus through him. When David finally opened his mouth he didn't answer my question. Rather, he started probing me about my life. Before I knew it, I was pouring out my heart for the next three hours. 46 years of pent-up pain and heartache came pouring out. The love through him was so powerful I couldn't stop from weeping in the middle of the restaurant. What I didn't realize at the time was not only the love of Christ that was being poured through him but the power that love had to pierce the thick walls of self-protection surrounding my heart.

What ended up happening was that I invited David to stay with us that weekend and for the next 48 hours God continued to pour His love through David. Christ's love was like a surgical scalpel

digging deeper and deeper and cutting away the hardness of my heart. I had no idea at the time it was God's power flowing through His love that was beginning to set me free. All I knew was that I was being loved by Jesus through David. It was unconditional and irresistible. (Since then, David and I have become very close friends.) When I look back on that event, I saw and experienced the irresistibility of agape love unlock my heart.

Conclusion

There are many more things that can be said to describe agape love. However, I think you will better understand why the Lord wanted me to share these specific descriptions as you read through the next few chapters.

Chapter Four

How Free Are You to Love?

I believe that freedom and loving others go hand in hand. Therefore, in this chapter, I will take a closer look at the direct relationship between freedom and the ability to love.

We Are Free!

*“It was for freedom that **Christ has set us free**; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1*

*“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another.**” Galatians 5:13*

Since Christ is our freedom and we contain the fullness of Christ (Colossians 2:9, 10), then we are totally free in Christ. Because this is true of us, freedom is not something we are working towards. It is something we are working from. This is good news isn't it? But the problem is that few of us feel like we are completely free. I believe this is true for three primary reasons:

1. We don't fully believe we are free.
2. We have not walked long enough in appropriating Christ's freedom to experience His freedom.
3. We choose not to walk in our freedom in Christ.

Freedom and Love

These three reasons not only negatively impact our experiential freedom in general, but, more importantly, they impede our willingness and ability to love.

As I have looked over both my life and the lives of those I minister to, I initially failed to see how closely freedom and love were connected. But now God is persuading me of the following truth:

Your willingness and ability to love are directly proportional to your EXPERIENTIAL freedom in Christ.

It stands to reason, doesn't it, that the greater the freedom you are experiencing, the greater is your capacity to love.

You Have to Be Free FROM in Order to Be Free TO

I would like to add the following corollary to our connection between freedom and love.

You have to be free FROM whatever is blocking your ability to love in order to be free TO love God, others, and self.

Let me use the following example of a spiritual artery to illustrate this principle.

Your Spiritual Artery

As you know, a physical artery contains all the blood you need to sustain life. However, we also know that plaque can build up in an artery and prevent the blood from fully flowing. If that plaque is not dealt with, over time it could kill us by a stroke or heart attack.

What if we applied this analogy to a "spiritual" artery? In your spiritual artery, you contain all the Life of Christ i.e., His peace, rest, forgiveness, etc. For the sake of this illustration, let's focus on the love of Christ. We learned earlier that since we have the fullness of

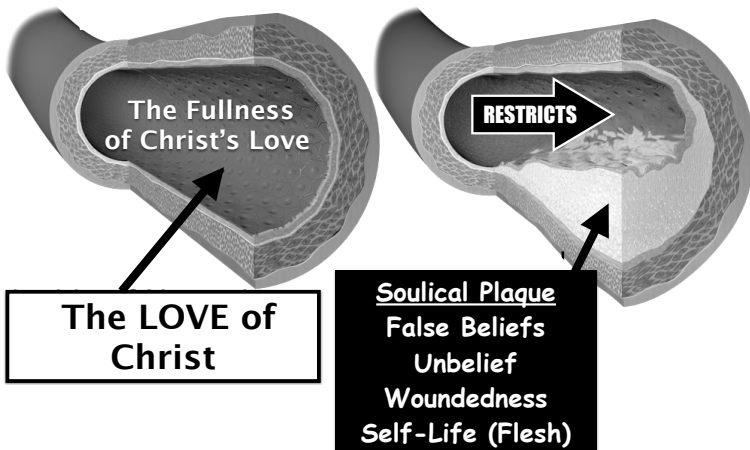
Christ in us (Colossians 2:9, 10), we contain all of the love of Christ. However, similar to a physical artery, we have plaque on our spiritual artery as well. I call this “soulical” plaque.

Here are four key things that make up our “soulical” plaque?

- **False beliefs**
- **Unbelief**
- **Past woundedness**
- **Self-life (Flesh)**

Look at the illustration on the following page that illustrates this.

YOUR SPIRITUAL ARTERY



Before I expand on these four causes of soulical plaque, I want share a key truth concerning the blockage in a spiritual artery caused by soulical plaque.

Our soulical plaque not only BLOCKS us from LOVING OTHERS, it also prevents us from RECEIVING God's love.

I hope this truth makes sense because blockage works to restrict giving love to others and receiving love from God.

How do these four areas of blockage restrict the flow of Christ's love in us and through us?

1. False Beliefs

False beliefs about spiritual things, such as God's character, our identity, and living the Christian life, severely restrict the flow of Christ's love in us.

Let me give you a personal example. I was raised with unloving parents. I did everything I could to earn their love but to no avail. When I became a Christian, I projected my earthly parents' faces onto the face of God causing me to believe I had to work to earn God's love. I didn't learn until 30 years later that I was already a container of God's love and an unconditional lover in my new identity in Christ. All that time striving to earn God's love prevented me from loving others and receiving God's love.

Here is another example. I ministered to a lady who, because she was sexually molested as a child, felt so guilty and "dirty" that she believed God couldn't possibly love her. As a result, she couldn't receive God's love or give His love to others.

Is it possible that you have false beliefs about God or His truth that is preventing you from receiving the love of Christ or giving it to others?

2. Unbelief

Unbelief is another problem that restricts our receipt of God's love. We all grapple to some degree with knowing God's truth but not believing it applies to us. On some level we are all "unbelieving" believers. Our unbelief creates a roadblock to our willingness to give and receive love.

For example, the Bible states that God loves us unconditionally. However, among the Christians I have ministered to, there are many that don't believe God loves them because they think their past sins are too great for them to be loved by Him. If they are unwilling to receive Christ's love, then they can't give it to others.

What do you know about God's truth but struggle to believe it applies to you? In what ways might your unbelief negatively impact your receiving and then giving the love of Christ?

3. Woundedness

Woundedness comes in many forms: abuse, trauma, divorce, etc. It can create deep scars in your soul that keep you focused on yourself and thus prevent you from receiving and expressing the love Christ.

I ministered to a man whose fiancée was killed by a drunk driver the night before their wedding. When he came to see me fifteen years later he was still very wounded. He was so angry at God that he was incapable of receiving or giving love. It wasn't until the Lord healed his wounded heart that he was able to receive His love.

How were you wounded in the past? How might that be hindering your ability to give and receive love?

4. The Flesh (our self-life)

We, acting in our flesh, cannot love unconditionally because our flesh is always self-focused and self-serving. All our attempts to love others from our flesh results in expectations, conditions, and fleshly rights.

Whether we are aware of them or not, we have expectations when we love others from the flesh, the most common one is that our love will be returned.

In the flesh, we love with conditions. For example, the flesh can say, "Not only do I expect you to love me but here are the ways I want you to love me."

Loving from our flesh also includes fleshly rights. My flesh says that I have the right to be loved and if you don't meet my expectations and conditions of how I think you should love me, then I have the right not to love you in return.

In what ways is your flesh resisting your ability to give and receive love?

What Is the Toxic Overflow of Our Soulical Plaque?

Not only does our soulical plaque restrict the flow of Christ's love, it results in a TOXIC overflow of FLESHLY feelings/behaviors.

Let me give you some examples of some fleshly behaviors:

- **False beliefs** – A false belief that my sin is so great that God can't love me, may leave me with fleshly feelings of frustration, self-condemnation or unworthiness.
- **Unbelief** – If I don't believe God really loves me then I might have fleshly feelings of rejection, depression, or fear.
- **Woundedness** – Out of my woundedness, I can justify fleshly behaviors of unforgiveness, anger, and self-protection against those who have hurt me.
- **Flesh (self-life)** – Loving out of the flesh can result in my unwillingness to forgive, to repent, or die to my fleshly rights. Loving out of my flesh, can also result in my trying to manipulate and control others so they will love me and then justify rejecting them when they don't meet my expectations.

What are the fleshly behaviors you experience based on your false beliefs, unbelief, woundedness and your flesh?

There is one more drawback to our soulical plaque.

The Soulical Plaque Impedes Our Willingness to Love

***Another result of soulical plaque and fleshly behaviors is
UNWILLINGNESS to love God or others.***

Our will makes choices based on what we think and feel. Our unwillingness to give and receive love results from the fleshly behaviors that flow out of our soulical plaque. This is crucial because without the Spirit's removal of our plaque we will be stuck in our unwillingness to love other.

Chapter Five

What About Loving The Unlovable?

Who Is the Unlovable Person(s) in Your Life?

If you have unlovable people in your life, your flesh is not going to like this chapter. I know this because of what happened with an unlovable person in my life.

See if any of the following people fit into your “unlovable” people category:

- Those who have, in the past, wounded you or are engaged in wounding you now.
- Those who continue to reject or malign you.
- Those who have no interest whatsoever in your life, but who should have.
- An estranged family member.
- An ex-spouse.
- Those who are always needy and come to you to meet those needs.

Who are the unlovable persons in your life? What happened to you that made you see them as unlovable?

My Unlovable Person

My close relative, Jim (not his real name), was a very unlovable person in my life. Jim held on to every past sin I have ever committed against him (50+ years’ worth.) For

many years I didn't have to deal with Jim until we ended up in a business deal together. It involved selling a piece of land. For two years, as we were trying to sell the land, Jim made it a point of trying to make me feel worthless at every turn. Every phone call, text and email was meant to minimize and reject me.

I wanted to get even with him but I restrained myself. However, my flesh was very angry. I really wanted to sell this land so I wouldn't ever have to see Jim again until his funeral. Before I go on, let me share with you what I did and what most of us tend to do with the unlovable people in our lives.

We Tend to Compartmentalize Unlovable People

Imagine a prison cell or a room with a lock on the door. Our tendency with those unlovable people in our lives is put them away in a prison cell or a locked room in our minds. I call this "compartmentalizing." We believe that if we can just not think about them, correspond with them or be around them, then we can go about living our lives without consequences. Out of sight, out of mind.

The problem with this human "solution" is that fleshly responses, such as anger, unforgiveness, and avoidance, towards unlovable persons restricts our desire and ability to love them, plus those fleshly behaviors will "leak" out into other relationships. The truth is:

It is impossible to COMPARTMENTALIZE negative or toxic relationships. They will inevitably NEGATIVELY impact every other relationship.

I tried to compartmentalize Jim but it was a losing battle. His face would come to mind or he would call and my flesh would rear

its ugly head. I didn't realize until later that my angry and critical attitude towards Jim spilled over into some of my other relationships, as well. My fleshly attitudes towards Jim robbed me of loving him and prevented the flow of agape love towards others.

This is why it is PARAMOUNT that you allow the Holy Spirit to heal and transform your heart.

Think about a negative relationship that you have had or are currently experiencing. Have you tried to compartmentalize them? How effective do you think you have been?

Love and Boundaries

I won't go into any depth about this issue but suffice it to say there are certain abusive and toxic people that you need to draw boundaries with to protect yourself against them, especially those who have physically harmed you or have threatened to do so. While you can learn to love them with agape love, you must separate from them physically because of their potential to physically hurt you.

With other toxic people, such as those who constantly ridicule you, demean you, or criticize you, you need to set up boundaries with them, as well. For them, it may take physical separation or it may mean being honest with them and telling them they must stop the offensive behavior if they want to have a meaningful relationship with you.

I Wanted To Keep Protecting Myself From Jim, But

I was living in self-protection with Jim. I didn't want to be around him, hear from him or even think about him. However, in the midst of my soulful agony towards Jim, the Lord came along one day and said "What about Jim?" And I responded somewhat sarcastically, "What about Jim?" The Lord said, "I can't let you continue not loving him. You write and teach about love but you are

not applying that to Jim.” (At times like these I realize why it is so much easier to teach the truth than live it.)

My first response was a fleshly one because I wanted to keep on protecting myself from Jim rather than loving him. However, I knew in my spirit that the Lord was right and it was time to stop self-protecting and start loving. The problem was that I was not willing to love Jim. (I will continue my story in the next lesson.)

(Note: I didn't hear an audible voice from God. These were thoughts He inserted into my mind.)

Chapter Six

Laboring to Love

Labor to Love

You have heard the expression “labor OF love.” When it comes to loving someone, especially the unlovable people in your life, it is not only a labor of love, it is a labor TO love. Let me define what I mean by “labor.”

Labor is the INTENTIONAL pursuit of or the willingness to RESPOND to God’s INITIATING work in transforming our lives.

The word “labor” is used in Hebrews 4:11 where it says:

“Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest....”

The New Testament Greek word for “labor” means “diligence.” Diligence in the Greek means to make haste, to exert oneself, or to endeavor. These words imply an intentional pursuit of something. Since we are not initiators but responders to God’s work in our lives then our “labor” is an intentional pursuit of, or willingness to respond to, God’s initiation in whatever He is doing in our lives.

Actually, the truth is we can’t even produce the willingness to respond. God must produce that as well. But, as we seek the Spirit to transform our wills (make us willing), we respond with a greater willingness to pursue Him and His will, etc. Now let’s apply this to laboring to love.

Labor TO love means the INTENTIONAL pursuit of or the WILLINGNESS to pursue and depend on God to transform you to LOVE OTHERS and to become an agape LOVER.

I have discovered that loving is not passive. It is a very active pursuit of God to transform my will to love others and to become an unconditional lover. This active pursuit (labor) is especially true when it comes to loving difficult people.

One of the key results of the labor is God's removing our soulical plaque resulting in our greater freedom to love. Now, I want to share some practical application of what it looks like for us to labor in order to experience freedom to agape-love others.

Laboring to Experience Freedom to Agape Love

In this section, I want to share with you some practical applications of what labor looks like in order to be freed up to love others. If you sense from the Spirit that any of these are applicable to you, seek Him to transform you as you apply them.

1. Seek the Holy Spirit to expose your COVERT "soulical plaque"

*Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And **see if there be any hurtful way in me**, and lead me in the everlasting way."* Psalm 139:23, 24

Our soulical plaque comes in two forms: "overt" and "covert" plaque. The overt plaque is easy to spot but our covert plaque is much more difficult to see. It requires you to seek the Spirit to reveal or expose any false belief, unbelief, past woundedness or areas of your self-life that are preventing you from loving others. Here is a prayer I continually pray about my relationships:

"Lord, when it comes to _____ (name of person) would you expose any blockage in my heart towards loving him/her."

2. Once the Spirit exposes your soulical plaque, ENGAGE Him to do whatever is necessary to set you FREE from it.

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

As the Spirit exposes your plaque, seek Him to do whatever is necessary to remove the blockage. For example, you can seek the Spirit to:

- Renew your mind to the truth concerning your false beliefs.
- Move you from unbelief to belief in the areas of your unbelief.
- Heal you of your woundedness and the effects of it in your life.
- To walk in the Spirit's power over your flesh and transform you to live from Christ-likeness.

Here is an example of engaging the Spirit to remove an area of your soulical plaque:

"Lord, you have exposed my unforgiveness towards my father. I am seeking you to renew my mind to the truth that I am a forgiving person in Christ and transform me to be willing to forgive him."

3. Pursue God to Love – Be INTENTIONAL

"Pursue love..."

1 Corinthians 14:1a

The word "pursue" in the Greek means to run after, to seek after eagerly, and to earnestly endeavor to acquire. Pursuit of anything means you need to focus on and be intentional concerning that pursuit.

Intentional means WILLFULLY DETERMINING to act.

(Remember that even pursuing God is a response to His producing in you the willingness to pursue.)

Let me further explain intentionality by the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7.

*“.... **seek** and you will **find**....”*

“Seeking” in this verse means an intentional pursuit of Christ. Have you thought about the converse of this verse? If you don’t seek Christ, you won’t find Him. Therefore, determine in your heart to respond to the willingness the Lord has put in your heart to pursue Christ to love others through you. This was certainly true with Jim.

When it came to loving Jim, I was very intentional, primarily, because of the resistance by my flesh. By that I mean, I had to intentionally pursue God to love Jim through me because my default fleshly thoughts were to dislike him and reject him. Practically speaking I prayed the following prayer:

“Lord, love Jim through me.”

Every time the Lord brought it to mind, I would pray that simple prayer.

4. As you seek to depend on the Lord to love through you, you may not FEEL or EXPERIENCE love for that person.

*“for we walk by **faith** and **not by sight**.”*
2 Corinthians 5:7

Over the six months that I was asking the Lord to love Jim through me I was not feeling or experiencing any love for him. However, what do we know by faith? Every time I prayed that prayer, God was transforming my heart. How can we be certain of that when we are not feeling or experiencing any change? Look at Philippians 1:6:

*“For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it [bring it to completion]** until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

Whether you can feel it or not, God is working non-stop to transform your heart. Remember that this is a walk of faith not feeling or experience. The good news is this:

You will EVENTUALLY feel and experience Christ’s love for that person.

I will never forget when I first began feeling love for Jim. It was the final confirmation of God’s work in renovating my heart. It will be the same for you. Meanwhile, believe God is working by faith whether you feel it or not.

5. Seek the Holy Spirit to tear down your walls of SELF-PROTECTION that prevent you from loving others.

Have you ever thought about love being a wrecking ball? I see love like a wrecking ball because it can tear down our walls of self-protection resulting from our false beliefs, unbelief, woundedness or our flesh. Here is a key truth we need to understand about self-protection:

We think these walls protect us from being HURT again when in actuality they PREVENT Christ’s love and power from flowing in and through us.

I believe the height and thickness of our self-protective walls are directly proportional to the amount of soulical plaque we contain. As for me, my self-protective walls were very high and very deep when it came to Jim. I knew my only hope for being free to

love him was for the Lord to break down my walls. (And Jim's)!

In addition to breaking down your personal walls of self-protection, God's love through you has the power to break down others' self-protective walls. In some relationships, it can happen fairly quickly. For others, it may take a long while.

In my case with Jim, even after 60+ years of our building up walls between us, I witnessed God begin breaking down our walls in six months.

Are you unsure whether you even have walls of self-protection against others? I would encourage you to ask the Lord to reveal whether you have them and then show you in what ways they are impeding your ability and willingness to love others.

6. When fleshly thoughts come into your mind engage the Holy Spirit to take those thoughts CAPTIVE.

*"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and **we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.**" 2 Corinthians 10:5*

Winning the battle of the mind is essential in experiencing freedom to love. For example, think about the unlovable person in your life. What thoughts come to mind? Sinful thoughts or Christ-like thoughts? If they are judgmental thoughts for example, every time you take ownership of those thoughts you are hardening your heart towards that person. That is why Paul says, "take EVERY thought captive."

Let me use my relationship with Jim to make this applicable. Early on I was not taking any of the judgmental and condemning thoughts towards Jim captive. However, as I began seeking God to renew my mind to the truth then I took those thoughts captive by speaking God's truth into them.

For example, my thought was, “Jim deserves to be judged for all he has done to me.” If I don't take ownership of that thought and speak truth into that thought it might look like this. “I have no right to judge Jim because there is only one judge and that is God not me.” Furthermore, I would add a simple prayer like this. “Lord, persuade me that Jim doesn't need my judgment, he needs to experience Your love through me.”

Be honest with yourself and think about the recurring sinful thoughts you have about someone. Begin speaking truth into those thoughts and watch how the Spirit prevents you from taking ownership of those thoughts.

7. FORGIVENESS is a vital part of freedom

*“... **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” Colossians 3:13*

I believe forgiveness is a essential in becoming free to love. This is because:

Unforgiveness CUTS OFF the flow of Christ's love and forgiveness in you.

In addition to cutting off the flow of Christ's forgiveness, unforgiveness:

- Imprisons you.
- Hardens your heart towards that person.
- Builds up your soulical plaque.
- Will be toxic to those around you.

I know these things to be true experientially because of the unforgiveness I had towards my dad for 48 years. My unforgiveness was like a cancer in my soul. The cancer went from

stage one to stage four over those years with the result that my heart grew harder, more resistant, and more bitter. In addition, it made me toxic to my wife and everyone else around me.

We really don't have any excuse not to forgive, do we? Why not? Because:

- We contain all of Christ's forgiveness. (Colossians 2:9, 10)
- We are forgiving people in our true identity. (Ephesians 4:32)
- We have no fleshly rights not to forgive. (Galatians 5:24)
- Christ totally forgave us when we were unworthy of being forgiven. (Colossians 2:13)

Remember this when it comes to forgiveness:

It may take several ACTS of forgiveness for you to eventually experience an ATTITUDE of forgiveness towards that person.

Because of the many years of abuse, it took me several acts of forgiveness before the Lord produced an attitude of forgiveness in me towards my dad. I define an act of forgiveness as a point in time where some thought came to mind or the Spirit brought a thought to mind concerning my past woundedness in order for me to forgive my dad in that moment.

It took over two years of experiencing acts of forgiveness for the Spirit to transform me into having an attitude of forgiveness. Once the Lord produced that attitude there was no need for any more acts of forgiveness.

In addition, just as the Lord was transforming me to forgive my dad, He was also setting me free to begin loving my dad. This

freedom didn't apply to just my dad. It started freeing me to love others as well. I wish I could put into words what that freedom felt like. The closest I can come is that it felt like I was being let out of prison after living in solitary confinement for 48 years.

Who is the person who wounded you that you have not forgiven? Begin with acts of forgiveness, knowing that God will eventually produce an attitude of forgiveness towards that person.

8. Seek The Lord To Move You From Unwillingness to Willingness When You Are NOT Willing to Love Someone

Even though I talked about this earlier, the ultimate problem in loving others is our willingness or unwillingness to love them. It is easy to be willing to love those that are easy to love. However, when it comes to those who are more difficult, we become increasingly unwilling. So, what do we do with our unwillingness to love?

Our only option is to SEEK God to transform our hearts to BECOME willing.

This is one of the key reasons I must depend on God because I know that I can't make myself willing. How about you? This is why I prayed the following prayer concerning Jim.

"Lord, give me the willingness to pursue loving Jim."

Initially this was a very difficult prayer to pray but after continually praying it over time, the Holy Spirit changed my unwilling heart to one willing to pursue loving Jim.

Many people are unwillingness to forgive because of the amount of pain they have endured from someone. As hard as it may seem, our only option is to seek the Spirit to move us from unwillingness to willingness.

Who is it you are unwilling to love and/or forgive? Are you willing to engage the Holy Spirit to transform you to become willing to love or forgive that person? What might be the consequences if you remain unwilling?

9. Remember that if your unlovable person is a Christian, they have a NEW IDENTITY in Christ just like you.

Why is this truth so important? Imagine a black curtain for a moment. On this curtain are imprinted all the different ways you have been hurt or wounded by that person. Behind this curtain is a diamond representing their new identity. What are the results in your heart if you focus on the wrongs set out on the curtain and never open it?

Now let's imagine that this is your curtain on which is listed all your sins, fleshly behaviors, resistance to God and His will, etc. What does God see? Does He focus on your curtain and reject you or does He pull the curtain back and focus on who you are in your true identity and love you? If God pulls our curtain back, do we have any excuse for not opening the curtain of the unlovable person and seeing them in their true identity?

You see, God does not like our fleshly behavior but that does not stop Him from loving us because of who we are in Christ. Likewise, since in our true identity we are unconditional lovers, then we too must look beyond the curtain and love them as God loves them.

Have you ever thought about God looking past all your sin and fleshly behaviors and still loving you because of your true identity in Christ? Wouldn't the same be true of those Christians who have hurt or wounded you?

10. THANK God for the unlovable people in your life

Do you think your response to this statement will be, “Thank you, God, for these unlovable people who have caused me great heartache and pain?” or is it “Are you kidding me?” I understand how you feel because that is exactly how I felt about Jim.

But that began to change when the Lord brought to my mind 1Thessalonians 5:18:

*“... **in everything give thanks**; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

When I got to the word “everything,” it started flashing like a neon light. Then, the Lord reminded me that “everything” included Jim. I believe there is a key reason for thanking God for those difficult people in our lives.

God uses thanksgiving for these difficult people as part of the process of setting us FREE (i.e. removing our soulical plaque) from our fleshly attitudes towards them.

How does He do that? God does it by using these people in our lives to expose our plaque. If we can’t see the plaque, then we can’t engage God to be set free from it.

As difficult as it may be, I would encourage you to spend time thanking God for the people that you struggle loving. (Even if, initially, it is done through gritted teeth.)

11. Loving the unlovable will most likely be a JOURNEY rather than a SPRINT.

If you are like me, you want to experience transformation sooner than later. However, learning to love people we struggle

with is more likely to be a journey rather than a sprint, especially if the following conditions apply:

- If you have struggled with them for a long time.
- If you have been hurt or wounded deeply.
- If your heart is really hard towards them.
- If you are unwilling to allow the Spirit to transform your heart.

Remember that even if it is a journey rather than a sprint, there is still freedom along the way and certainly at the end of your journey. Are you willing to take the first step?

12. What if those you are seeking to love don't RETURN your love?

Your love not being returned is very hard because as we are being transformed to love that unlovable person, our expectation is that they will see the change in us and respond positively to it. However, the truth is you have no control over whether or not that person will respond positively. The good news is this:

Regardless of their response, you WILL BE set free to love that person UNCONDITIONALLY even if they never respond positively.

My encouragement to you, as you seek to love that difficult person, is to give up on any expectation that they will love you in return. If they eventually do, then praise God for moving in their hearts to respond.

What Does Freedom to Agape-Love Look Like

As the Lord continues to set us free from our soulical plaque, then we will be free to:

1. Love without any conditions or expectations.

In the process, you will find yourself loving less and less with conditions and expectations and loving others more with unconditional love.

2. Love without judging.

Freedom from judgments is freedom indeed. You will find yourself dropping the judgments you have towards people and replacing those judgments with Christ's love.

3. Love without fear

For some of you, loving someone who has hurt, wounded, or rejected you is a fearful thing. This is because loving someone like that makes you feel vulnerable to being hurt or wounded again. I understand because this is how I felt with Jim. Our human tendency when wounded is to protect ourselves from being hurt again. However, I find it ironic that in scripture it says,

*“... **perfect love** casts out **all fear**....”*
1 John 4:19

The irony is that don't love because of fear and yet the opposite is true in 1 John 4:19. Perfect love, which is agape love, has the power to not only remove your fears, but to replace it with Christ's courage. As you seek Christ to love that person through you over time, (it may be a long time based on the depth of your woundedness) you will find yourself growing in courage to love that person regardless of how they have hurt you in the past.

This is truly a supernatural process that I know is possible because I saw it in my relationship with Jim and I have seen it happen with many of those I have ministered to.

Would you be willing to pray that the Lord remove any fear you might have about being hurt again and replace your fear with His courage?

4. Not only forgive those who have offended you but move to a place of unconditional love for them.

One of the greatest experiences we can have is to be free from unforgiveness. It allows you to not only forgive but to eventually love your offender. It may be a journey from forgiveness to unconditional love but I have seen it in my own life with my dad and Jim and in the lives of many others as well.

Have you ever given any thought to the fact that the Lord is able to transform you not only to forgive your offender but eventually to love him/her?

5. Be more selfless and sacrificial.

Freedom to love results in your being less preoccupied with yourself and more concerned about others. It produces both a greater selflessness and a greater desire to be more sacrificial.

Are there any other results that you can think of that can result from your being free to love?

The End of One Story and the Beginning of Another

To sum up what happened with Jim, for six months I prayed the simple prayer asking the Lord to love Jim through me. As I said previously, for that six months I didn't feel or experience any love towards Jim. I was very intentional about that prayer whenever I called or emailed him. During that time, I didn't sense any change in his rejection, criticism or anger towards me.

Then one day, I got a call from Jim and he said these words which he had never spoken before. "Can you help me?" (He was asking help concerning our business deal.) I knew the Lord had done a work in my heart because I didn't respond with a negative or sarcastic remark. Instead, I said, "How can I help you?" I realized in that moment that God was changing Jim's heart as well as mine.

When we finished the conversation, Jim uttered two other words I had never heard from him, "Thank you." Little did I know that this was the beginning of a new relationship with him because from that time until now, our relationship continued to draw closer.

As of this writing, it has been over a year since that phone call. God continues to deepen our relationship. For me, what God did to Jim and me was a "Red Sea" event because of the depth of Jim's hatred of me and my dislike of him. What did the Lord teach me from this?

God's love CAN move you to LOVE the most UNLOVABLE people in your life.

Amen! All of this was a miracle from my perspective since it would have been impossible without God's supernatural intervention in my heart and Jim's.

Chapter Seven

Loving at a Deeper Level

Loving at a Deeper Level

If we are walking in dependence on God, then we know He is transforming us in every area of our lives. However, God is never satisfied with us reaching a certain level of transformation and then becoming “settled” where we are. I call being settled as getting into a spiritual La-Z-Boy and being satisfied with where we are.

It is the same with loving others. God continually wants to move us to deeper levels of loving others. Consequently, I want to share with you some things the Spirit is revealing to me about engaging Him to love more deeply.

1. MARINATE in God’s love to receive and give love.

“Be still and know that I am God...” Psalm 46:10

One of the ways that can help you receive and give God’s love more deeply is to come to Him in stillness. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know.” Have you thought about the converse of this verse? If you aren’t still, you won’t know. Learning the holy habit of stillness has brought me into a depth of knowing God that would have otherwise never happened.

I call coming before the Lord in stillness “spiritual” marinating. When it comes to God’s love, I sit still before Him and receive His love. When I come into His presence in stillness, I am not necessarily praying or meditating on some scripture. I am simply being still in His presence and receiving His love and loving Him in return. Being still in His presence has revolutionized how I view God’s love for me and through me.

If you are not doing so, my encouragement to you is to begin

sitting in stillness before the Lord and marinating in His love. You don't have to pray or expect the Lord to speak to you. Simply present yourself to Him.

2. Be INTENTIONAL in loving more deeply those closest to you

In addition to being intentional to pursue God to love the unlovable, be intentional in going deeper in your love for those closest to you.

Look at your relationships for a minute. Especially your closest ones. Are you growing in your love for them or have you “flatlined” in your love? The reason I ask this is because the Lord revealed to me that I had flatlined in my love for my wife. I was surprised at that but I now see why the Lord said what He did. Now that I am aware, I am now constantly seeking the Lord to continue growing my love for my wife.

I define “flatlining” as settling for where you are or not pursuing a deeper love with someone. This happens with those closest to us because we have developed repeated patterns of behaviors and interactions with one another. We know how a person close to us will typically act, react, or respond, etc. to certain things we do or say. We get into what I call relational “ruts” where we no longer are seeking to know them and love them at a deeper level.

Look at your close relationships. Have you flatlined concerning your love for them? If so, begin seeking the Lord to give you a willingness to be more intentional in loving them.

3. See people in 3D

When you think about the people you know, like your family and friends, ask yourself, “How much do I really know about them?” Are you seeing them in one dimension based on your prior experiences or are you looking at them in what I call “spiritual 3D.”

This is what I mean by spiritual 3D.

Understanding the MOTIVES behind what someone is thinking, feeling, believing or how they are behaving.

Let me give you some examples to explain. What do you know about the following concerning your friends?

- **Family background** – what kind of family they came from. Loving, unloving, abusive, etc.
- **Internal struggles** – what are their internal struggles such as their fears, anxieties, insecurities, etc.
- **Relationship struggles** – are they struggling in their marriage, with their kids, friends, or family.
- **Spiritual struggles** – are they struggling with false beliefs, unbelief, or past woundedness.
- **Adverse circumstances** – have they experienced trauma such abandonment as a child, divorce, or premature death of a parent.
- **Church affiliation or biblical background** – this can help you understand why they believe what they do about God or living the Christian life.

Here are some key reasons why knowing someone in 3D is so important in building a deeper relationship.

- It gives you a deeper understanding of how you can encourage them, speak truth to them, or walk beside them.
- It gives you insight in how to be sensitive and compassionate in areas where they struggle.
- It helps you to be discerning in navigating the relationship.

- It gives you understanding of how to pray for them.
- It presses you into the Spirit to love them in spite of their beliefs, their struggles, or their past.

What is the most important result of looking at someone in 3D?

Others will come to REALIZE and EXPERIENCE at deeper levels your unconditional love for them.

That being true, my encouragement to you is to never stop learning about someone because learning will lead you to loving them more deeply.

[**Note:** I realize that you can't get some people to open up but as we talked about earlier, God's love/power can eventually penetrate the hearts of closed down or defensive people which may, in turn, result in their opening up to you. While this is truly a labor to love these people, God, loving them through you, is fully capable of breaking down their walls of self-protection to a point they started sharing more of their hearts with you. And, who knows, you may become God's instrument to set them free.]

4. Loving at a deeper level makes you SAFER

We talked earlier about love making us safe. We are already safe in God's love and He will make us safe for others. For example, in light of loving at a deeper level, I intentionally pray, first and foremost, that the Lord will continue to make me safer for my wife. I want there to be an increasing level of trust and safety in our relationship.

This applies to our friendships as well. God wants to work through us to encourage others in their Christian journey. The safer we become, the more likely friends or loved ones will share their hearts and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to speak truth to them, give compassion, and transform their lives.

5. Ask the Lord to EXPOSE and set you FREE of any judgments, negative opinions or conclusions that you have towards others.

As I become more intentional in learning to love at a deeper level, the Lord is exposing my judgments (minor or major) about people. Before I go on, let me define what I mean by judgments.

Any thoughts, feelings, or conclusions that you have about someone that result in your JUDGING them.

Some judgments are petty such as thinking a person at your church is dressed too casually (or talks too much or sings too loudly)] Others are serious judgments like the one I had with a friend of mine.

One friend in particular hurt me pretty badly in the past and has not repented of what he did. I have gotten past a lot of the pain and still meet with him from time to time. But the Lord is calling me to love him at a deeper level and that requires me being set free of some of my judgments about him (of which there were several). In the past, I would sit there and think, "Doesn't he realize that he hurt me? Why can't he figure it out? When is he going to repent?"

The problem with that line of thinking is I became his judge, jury, and executioner. Early on I didn't want to be around him but he was my friend and I knew we would meet from time to time. The Lord did not give me permission to bring up the past situation that caused the pain. What He wanted me to do was to look past my judgments and love him unconditionally.

The process for me was:

- God's exposing my judgments and the death those judgments caused in my relationship with him.

- Intentionally looking past my judgments and focusing on loving him.
- Taking every judging thought about him captive when it came to mind.
- When I wasn't with him, asking the Lord to heal me and set me free of my judgments.
- Continually remembering that I was called to love not judge.

When I sat with him, I would engage God to take those painful, judging thoughts captive and to keep me focused on loving him. I compare this to the time Peter walked on water. How did Peter do it? The only way he could do it was keeping his eyes fixed on Jesus.

In like manner, I had to focus on loving my friend regardless of what judgmental thoughts came into my mind. Early on this was a very hard battle, but each time it became progressively easier to focus because the Lord was replacing my judgments with His love. Currently, I can sense he is responding to Christ's love through me. Even though it was hard early on, it was worth it because not only am I loving this friend, but this process is helping me in every other relationship as well.

Think about your spouse, family, and friends. Ask the Spirit if He has someone in mind that He wants you to start looking past your judgments and start loving. Begin intentionally engaging God to replace those judgments with His love, always remembering it is a process.

6. Love people where they ARE by seeing their SPIRITUAL potential

I know that in my 20's and 30's, I was not a very lovable person because of my woundedness and the toxicity of my flesh (i.e., angry, controlling, demanding, and manipulating). I had some very serious soulcal plaque. However, I will never forget the first man who loved me warts and all. He was a much older Christ-centered man who became a spiritual mentor.

In fact, through him I felt the love of God for the first time. I couldn't believe that as toxic as I was, he still loved me. One of the main reasons he could was he saw beyond my flesh and realized my spiritual potential.

As a result, my mentor started teaching me and encouraging me in my walk with the Lord. I was drawn to Jesus through him and I experienced His unconditional love through him. My wife's statement to me was so true with this man: "The love was felt with the result that the message was heard." Little did I know that my mentor's love for me when I was at my worst became a vital part of my spiritual transformation and freedom in later years.

Do you see people where they are now or where they could be if they knew Christ for salvation and started living from Christ as their Source? Aren't you glad God looked past your sins, your flesh, etc. and saw your spiritual potential? In like manner, ask the Spirit to give you eyes to see the spiritual potential in others and be willing to be used of the Lord through loving and encouraging them to make their spiritual potential a reality.

Conclusion

I hope this chapter has been helpful in growing your desire to love others more deeply. These are very practical things the Lord is showing me that are resulting in some very surprisingly loving responses.

Chapter Eight

The Overflow of Loving Others

I want to end this book with some final thoughts concerning what the overflow of being free to love others might look like.

Loving Like Christ Results In Being Transformed Into Christ-Likeness

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, **are being transformed into His likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18*

Someone once shared with me that he believed love is the only fruit of the Spirit and that all other spiritual fruits flow from it. He was pointing me to 1 Corinthians 13 that says love is patient, kind, etc. He took it further and applied it to Galatians 5:22, 23 saying that love is joy, peace, kindness. This is consistent with 1 John 4:8 which says, “God is love.” Love is not just an attribute of God, it is His very nature.

Whether you agree with him or not, I believe that first and foremost, our becoming lovers in Christ will result in our experiencing more of the fruit of the Spirit through us. We see this in the passage below.

*“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. bearing with one another, and forgiving each other,** whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And **above all put on love,** which is the perfect bond of unity.” Colossians 3:12-14*

Look again at the passage where it says “above all put on love.”

Paul makes it clear that the HIGHEST priority in our Christian walk is to become a LOVER.

Love Will Pervade Every Area of Your Life

One of the results of becoming a lover in Christ is that love will flow into every relationship you have. Look at the following verse.

*“Let **all** that you do be done in **love**”*
1 Corinthians 16:14

What does this verse mean and what does that look like in practical terms? I wish I had a complete answer but what I can tell you from what I am experiencing is I now have a desire to make every encounter a love encounter. Whether I encounter someone close to me or a perfect stranger, I am intentionally asking the Lord to love that person through me.

Love WINS Out

You may have read the book *Love Won Out* written by John Paulk. He was an unbeliever very committed to the homosexual lifestyle. He hated Christians because during gay parades, he would see them with signs that read, “Turn or burn.”

Then he got very ill. A Christian couple who lived nearby found out about Paulk and began bringing him food and taking care of all his needs. This illness went on for a long time but the couple persevered in lovingly taking care of him (and not telling him they were Christians). One day Paulk asked why they were taking such wonderful care of him. They said that they wanted to express the love of Christ and it was that love that irresistibly drew him to Jesus to be saved.

It is hard not to praise God when you read a story like this one. However, we know that not all people will respond like John Paulk.

However, it makes no difference their response because for you and me:

***The love of Christ is no longer just an action.
It is a WAY OF LIFE.***

I pray the Holy Spirit will use this booklet to move you into a deeper love relationship with Him and with everyone you come in contact with.

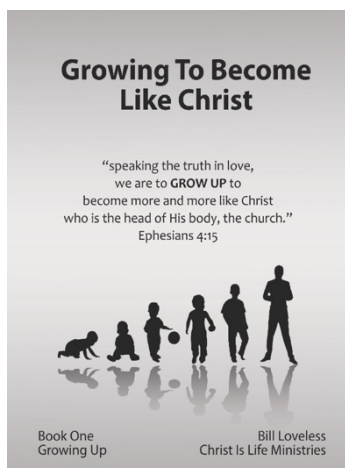
In His love,

Bill Loveless

Where Do I Go From Here?

At our website listed below, we encourage you to check out our four-part discipleship series called ***Growing Up – Growing Out – Growing Deep*** designed to teach Christians how to fulfill their purpose and calling. The first book in the series is called ***Growing to Become Like Christ***.

Book One covers the following topics:



- What it means to grow up spiritually to become like Christ.
- The difference between living “A” Christian life versus living “THE” Christian life.
- What it looks like practically to grow to become like Christ.
- What are some of the hindrances to spiritual growth and how we overcome them.
- How becoming like Christ transforms every area of our lives.

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MATERIALS

CILM has this series and many other studies, booklets and videos at our website listed below. To purchase ready-to-use copies from **Amazon** or **download for free** and do your own printing, copying and binding, please go to the **Discipleship** tab of our website. We hope you will take advantage of these materials.

Christ Is Life Ministries (CILM)

Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: cilm@christislifeministries.com

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Free To Love

(How Free Are You?)

Jesus sums up the whole law into two commandments: love God and love others. What I will be focusing on in this book is loving others. Freedom and love go hand in hand because if you are not free, you will not be free to love God, yourself or others.

We are going to be looking at the internal and external obstacles that restrict our freedom to love others and what it looks like to engage God to be set free from those obstacles.

We will be looking at the biblical answers to the following questions.

- * What is our greatest calling as Christians?
- * What are the obstacles to our freedom to love?
- * How can we be set free from these obstacles?
- * How do we love the unlovable people in our lives?
- * How do we love those close to us more deeply?

I trust the Lord will use this book to encourage you in your spiritual journey in loving others.



Bill Loveless is the founder of Christ is Life Ministries (CILM), a non-profit, non-denominational discipleship ministry. CILM's focus is teaching Christians that Christ is their only source for living the Christian life, what it looks like to be transformed into Christ-likeness, and how to be drawn into a deep relationship with Him. Bill finished his earthly journey in 2024 and is now with the Lord he loves.

For further information and to see other discipleship materials being offered, please go to our website: www.christislifeministries.com

