

Chapter 13

LOVE - THE END RESULT

Dusty Springfield, a pop artist of 60s, recorded a song with the lyric – what the world needs now is love, sweet love. Truer words have never been spoken! Love is far more important than many would admit to. In fact, we are fooling ourselves if we think love is not important to us. The famous psychologist Sigmund Freud would argue that our drive for pleasure is what shapes our behavior, consciously and subconsciously. I believe there may be some truth to this for those only living for self, or another way to put it, for selfish people. For many there is a different force that drives them.

I will argue that for most of us our need for love is what shapes our behavior. I will make this argument based on the fact that we are made in God's image, meaning we will have similar attributes, and we were created in order to love God. Love and a desire to form relationships has far more to do with our actions than what we give it credit for.

Think about your own life. The people you enjoy being around most are probably people you feel care about you the most. We adapt our lives to fit in with our peer groups because it is important that we are accepted by whatever groups we identify ourselves with. Not being able to fit into any peer group can cause severe psychological damage. I believe the main reason many commit the ultimate act of despair, suicide, is because they feel they are not loved. Maybe it is the rejection of one person that triggers suicide or the feeling that no one loves them. For most people a lack of love will not cause them to take such drastic action as taking their own life, but it will cause depression, or at the very least it will rob them from enjoying life.

The problem we sometimes have with love is that we look in the wrong places for it or we don't seek the right type of love. The workaholic will sacrifice family because they may feel in order to be loved (admired) by their peers they have to be successful at what they do. Others obtain wealth and possessions to gain the admiration of others. There are others who put a great deal of importance on appearance because that is what they think will earn the love of others. What athlete doesn't feel great when their performance earns a roar of approval from the crowd? Scholars can work extremely hard to earn good grades because of desire for acceptance from their peers and family. All of us, in some form or another, desire approval (love?) from others.

Sometimes this desire for love and acceptance (before we can feel loved we need to at least feel accepted) gets us into trouble. Too often individuals engage in destructive lifestyles only because they are drawn to people who have no aspirations in life, the type of individual who only lives for the next high because they only care about now and they don't give tomorrow a thought. The reason they are attracted to these types of individuals – because they feel that at least these people will accept them. I believe this may be a reason why people who are in constant trouble with the law or other authority are such a magnet to so many others. There is tremendous pressure to fit into peer groups, especially in high school. It can be difficult to find new friends, especially with individuals full of pride for one reason or another (top athlete, wealthy, popular, etc.). So rather than having to prove themselves in order to make friends there are some who would just rather hang with those who easily accept them, and too often these may be individuals they should not be hanging with.

We are driven by love and this is why love is so important to God – the love He has for us, the love he wants us to have for others, and the love he desires from us. A primary change we should experience because of our spiritual growth will be an increase in our love of God and love

of others. In fact 2 Peter 1:5-7 gives us a natural progression to our faith. These verses state we should add to our faith goodness, then knowledge, followed by self-control, then perseverance, then godliness, then brotherly kindness, and finally – love.

What kind of love should you have? This is a very important question because love can mean different things to different people. For some love is used when they mean lust. For others love is an obsession with something – I love food, I love basketball, etc.. Love is often used to describe someone’s adoration of something or someone – I love the Lobos, I love sports cars, I love some actress, actor, or athlete. So we can be full of love but it needs to be the right kind of love. Scriptures often talk about love so it is important we understand God’s definition of love. The following verse gives that definition -

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Not having the right kind of love sets us up for disappointments and keeps us from understanding the type of love we should have. The two most common abuses of love are that we too often desire a self-seeking love and our love is usually conditional.

What is self-seeking love? This is the type of love that inflates our ego and those who seek this type of love can be very selfish individuals. Star athletes can easily suffer from this type of love because of all the attention they receive from their fans and the media. Entertainment and media celebrities often have huge egos for the same reasons. Everyone can suffer from this type of a love to some degree because of our competitive nature and the selfishness that results causes problems in relationships. It’s very easy for us when we accomplish anything in life to think, “just look at me and what I have done”. When we receive (or give) this type of “adoration” pride grows and the focus becomes on “self” instead of others.

The love God wants us to have should not only be unselfish it should also be unconditional. Much of the love we receive and give is conditional. In other words it is based on what we do or what we have to offer. For example, an athlete is loved by their fans as long as he or she plays well and their team is winning. Many athletes can discover how conditional that love is as soon as they have a bad game. The love in relationships is too often conditional because it is often based on how much we earn, what we do for the other person, or what we look like. Because we so often receive only conditional love we only know how to love conditionally. We end up being part of the problem.

Unconditional love will always mean more to us than conditional love. Sure, it feels good to have earned love (or received acceptance), the love of a professor for good academic work, the love of a coach for good play, the love of an employer for good work, but it is even better when someone loves us for all our flaws and imperfections as well. The reason it is better is because we are all so imperfect and flawed, and the honest person understands this. We become freer to become ourselves. So it is better when we love others for all their imperfections and flaws.

This is why it is so important we understand God’s love for us is unconditional and He wants us to love others in the same way. He loves us for who we are and what we can be instead of what we do. He accepts us just the way we are.

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

We really need to think about what Romans 15:7 means. Many stay away from church or don't make much of an effort to grow spiritually because they feel they have not "earned" God's love and acceptance. We know how far we are from living the life God wants for us so we feel "unworthy" to pray, to have fellowship of other believers, and to learn more about God and His will for our lives. This topic was covered in the "Dealing with Failure" chapter so I will not spend any more time on it, but I hope you realize how important understanding God's unconditional love is. When we do it effects how we feel about God and it has a great impact on our relationship with Him.

God loves us and he wants us to love Him. This statement has been made before in this book and I am repeating it because it is so very important for us to understand. A one sided relationship is rarely beneficial to either party. If through our spiritual maturity we can understand how much God loves us, our love for Him will grow. I believe one of the biggest obstacles to having the love God wants us to have is our failure to really comprehend how much God loves us. When we finally "get it" we understand our purpose and why we were created - to love and have a relationship with God and his son Jesus. This will change our view of what is important and we won't be the center of our universe anymore. This will be what leads to a spiritual relationship that will make a tremendous impact on your life and the lives of others. This will be what makes the difference in getting you to love like God wants you to love.

Love is the backbone and the heart of Christianity. Love is what will make Christianity work for you and everyone else. Love is what makes Christianity real and not phony. Love is what gives Christianity power to make a difference. This is why Jesus gave the following answer when asked what was the greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:36,37 - "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

We should really give these scriptures a lot more thought than what we typically do. Think about what Jesus did not say. He didn't say obeying God was the greatest commandment or doing good deeds is the greatest commandment. He put love as the number one spiritual priority, without a question, yet we often make everything else more important in our lives.

When you love someone you want to know all you can about them, you want to be around them, you want to share with them, you call on them for help when needed, you consult with them, and you want to please them. Think about people in your life who have authority or influence over you and how you interact with them. Do you respond better toward those who you know care for you than someone who doesn't?

We are far more effective when we want to do something as opposed to when we feel we should do something. Do you do better in classes you want to take than classes you only take because you have to? Are you a better employee when you have a job you really want to have instead of one that you do just to pay the bills? Most people would answer yes to these questions. When you want a relationship you work harder at developing it.

Hopefully you do see that it is so very important we understand our motivation for wanting to know and obey God should come from our love of Him and not from fear, guilt, or an obligation. Chapter 6 (True Freedom) covered this point but it is a point worth making again. If you truly know God you will love him and you will want to know him even more, which is what spiritual growth is all about. You will also find the more you know him the easier it will be to obey God because of your desire to please him. The following scripture makes this point as well as the point

that our actions should be a good indicator of showing if we really know God or if we are just saying we do.

1 John 2:3-5 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him.

1 John 5:3 in a simpler way says the same thing – this is love for God, obey his commands and you will find his commands are not that tough. Obeying out of love is so much better than obeying out of fear or guilt. 1 John 4:18 tell us there is no fear in love and perfect love drives out fear. Fear can be a motivating factor. Some follow God mainly because of a fear of going to hell. We study sometimes because of a fear of failing, or do what coaches ask out of a fear of getting yelled at or disciplined. There are even scriptures that call on us to fear God and scriptures that tell us God disciplines those he loves. We learn from discipline and we learn from consequences just as rats in an experiment learn from shocks given for incorrect behavior. Learning from consequences can be a painful way to learn. When we love God we trust him and want to carry out his will for our lives. This means we will more likely do things right the first time instead of learning from consequences. This is a much better and less painful way to learn.

Demonstrating our love and appreciation of God is why heartfelt worship is so important, it is the purpose of our creation! Our lives are a resounding success according to God if we only do one thing well – if we love him and that love is reflected in our worship of him. Although we can and should worship God anywhere at anytime, Church should be a vital part of our lives as it is means of publicly demonstrating our love of God.

I believe there are far too many people who go to church just because they think it is a good thing to do or they go strictly out of a sense guilt, duty, or obligation. I admit I have been guilty of this far more times than I would like to admit to. Just going to Church because you think it is a good thing to do or out of a sense of obligation can be a waste of time! You are only a pew warmer and God doesn't need that. God wants our hearts!

Mark 7:6,7 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'

Church is a place of fellowship and a place where you can learn more about God and his will for your life but it is much more. Church is where you worship God and for worship to mean anything we have to understand what worship really is. It is not ego stroking in the way an athlete or a celebrity might enjoy the worship of their fans. It is not a show of power in the way a dictator would demand worship from his or her subjects. God doesn't need anyone to stroke his ego and his motive for intervening in our lives is out of love and not an abuse of power. Our worship of God should be an expression of love, reverence, and thankfulness (no one likes to be taken for granted, including God) toward him. We should go to church because we love God and we want to express and share this love with others. It should be enjoyable and uplifting for us to express our love just as it would be if we did the same to others in our lives that we sincerely care about.

One of the most satisfying feelings we could ever have is when we love someone and that someone loves us back. When this happens it only increases our desire to do whatever we can for that person because of how much we value that relationship. We should want to please God just

as he wants to satisfy us. This is the nature of God in us and understanding this will help us know why God desires our freely given praise and worship and why going to church out of an obligation is of little value to God as well as yourself. But church can be a place to start your spiritual relationship so even if you are not where you should be spiritually, attending church with an open heart toward God will lead toward a loving heart for him.

I John 4:19 states we love because God first loved us. Hopefully it is becoming clear that our love for God will grow the more we understand how much he loves us. Loving God will lead to loving others, the main point of this entire chapter, and loving others is what Christianity should be all about (Gal. 5:14). In fact, if all Christians actually loved others like God desires us to do, the world would be a much different place to live in. There would not be any hate because 1 John 4:20 states you cannot love God and at the same time hate your brother (we are all brothers).

We would not have had the horrible deeds committed during the Crusades or the Inquisitions. History would not be full of terrible acts committed by those who claimed to be Christians. The well-intentioned objectives of many missionaries would have been far more effective if non-Christians would have been exposed to more loving and caring individuals instead of being exposed to those who claimed to be Christians but were more concerned about their own selfish ambitions.

You may be thinking – how does he know what history would have been like? I admit I wasn't there (there are days I feel like I have been around since then) but I am assuming human nature has not changed that much. I am assuming there were Christians like many today – where Christianity is more of a cultural identification than a way of life based on the love of God. Cultural identification and pride explain why many cruel and heartless individuals lead lives far removed from how God wants us to live and yet they will still call themselves Christians. I assume there were also those who were Christians but like many today, made little effort to really know God or did what they thought was just enough to get into heaven without caring about having a real relationship with God.

I am also assuming there were those who knew what the love of God was all about. These were the individuals who did make a positive impact on the lives of others, just like the most effective missionaries today (we are all called to be missionaries) are the ones who have a genuine love for those they are trying to help.

The world has always been full of self-centered individuals with selfish ambitions or self-centered individuals with no ambitions. Those with no ambition, if they were to find any “religion” at all, will cling to religions that focus on finding your “inner self” and “tuning out” the world and these individuals will have little value to anyone else. Those with selfish ambitions will lie, cheat, steal, and do whatever it takes to achieve their goals, including stepping all over anyone who gets in the way. Doing what is right for these types is sacrificed and doing what is expedient is what matters. This is not how God wants us to live and the world these types of individuals have created is not the world God has envisioned for us.

I ask that you really think about what the world would be like if all those who claimed to be Christians really lived like God wanted them to live. John Lennon in his very popular song “Imagine” asked us to imagine a world with no heaven and no hell. Since he wanted us to imagine a better world he was like so many who think religion has done more harm than good. Maybe he wanted a world without moral constraints or maybe he was exposed to too many uncaring Christians who were all into dos and don'ts.

I am asking you to imagine a world where everyone lived out the many scriptures that call us to serve each other in love. Loving others is so important next to loving God that Jesus tells us,

in Matthew 22:39, the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus in John 13:34 tells us he is giving us a new command – to love one another as he loved us. 1 Peter 4:8 tells us more than anything else in life, we should love each other deeply, and if we do it makes up for a multitude of bad things we do. The following verse tells us we do have freedom as Christians but tells us how to use that freedom and sums up what God's laws are all about.

Galatians 5:13,14 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In 1 John 4:7-12 we are again told to love one another and love comes from God. These verses go on to state that God is love, and he showed his love by sending his son Jesus into the world so we can live through him. We are told if God lives in us his love will be complete, if we don't have love we don't really know God, which makes me wonder about many that profess to know God. So imagine a world where we understand what a relationship with God is all about. Imagine a world where we all care about each other because of our relationship with God. Would this be a world you would want to live in?

I have heard some Christians use 1 Peter 1:22 and 1 John 3:14 to rationalize that we are required only to love other believers because these verses tell us to love our "brothers" and the context of these verses implies brothers are other believers. Jesus was questioned about basically the same issue after He stated we were to love our neighbor. He was asked who is our neighbor and he replied with the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). To sum up this story it was a Samaritan who did all he could and more to help a man who was severely beaten by robbers. A Priest and a Levite passed by this beaten man and did nothing to help. Finally a Samaritan passes by and not only helps tend his wounds but offered financial help by paying for an innkeeper to look after the beaten man. What makes this story significant is that the Priest and Levite were considered to be very "religious" people, and they viewed Samaritans as cultural outcasts. It should be clear that our "neighbor" is far more than who we live close to, it is all of mankind, including those of different races, beliefs, or cultures.

If you are reflecting on whether you have the love of God in you be very honest with your evaluation. Most people love their friends and family but loving those you greatly disagree with over politics, lifestyle, and beliefs can be another story. Go a step further and ask yourself if you love those you know are out to hurt you in any way. Do you love someone if they are trying to take your spot on the team, trying to steal away your girlfriend or boyfriend, causing trouble for you at work, or talking bad about you to others simply because they don't like you?

Jesus tells us to take that extra step by telling us to even love our enemies. In Matthew 5:43-48 he tells us anyone can love those who love you and by doing that you are not doing anything different than what everyone else does, and what reward should you get for that? He goes on to say if you want to be perfect like God is perfect then love those who hate you and pray for those who are out to hurt you, and he is implying you will be rewarded for this. And maybe this reward is having a peace in your life no matter what anyone does to you because hating can really eat you up inside. Loving "enemies" totally goes against our nature so if you truly can love those who hate you and make trouble for you, then you will know God is taking control of your life and you are reaping the benefits of your spiritual relationship with him.

Keep in mind Jesus was telling us what to do to be perfect like God. Understand we cannot be perfect! Jesus was talking to the Pharisees who thought they could earn their way into heaven by obeying God's laws and Jesus was pointing out what it would really take to "earn" our way.

Never the less Jesus gives us a standard to aim for and loving enemies is very tough, maybe even an impossible (remember what is impossible with men is possible with God – Luke 18:27) standard to live up to. But just like all of God’s standards, the more we live up to them the better our lives will be in the long-term.

My own life makes it so clear the difficult challenge we have in loving like God wants us to love. I have an easy time loving college and high school students because I can relate to them like my own son and daughter. I can even love these students unconditionally which means I can love them deeply if they live lifestyles totally opposite to the lifestyles I would like to see them live. There again it is because I relate to my own children who I love even when they do things I strongly disapprove of. But there are others who I have a difficult time tolerating let alone loving them, and for petty reasons – like aggressive drivers who think they own the road or who think their time is more important than everyone else’s. I am ashamed to say I can think of all kind of people I would not use love as a description of how I feel about them.

But our goal should be to love all those we come in contact with. We can hate the sins of others but we must love the sinners. In other words we don’t have to agree with what they do or believe in, in fact we can even have a passionate dislike for what they do or believe in, but we still should love them as a person. When we love like God wants us to love, others will take notice because loving those we don’t know, especially those who live the type of lives we may not value, is not something most people do. I believe we all would rather be loved than judged, even when we deserve to be judged harshly, so when we can love like we should we will be a light in a world of darkness.

A logical question to then ask is – how can we really care more about others, including our “enemies”? It’s the same answer used to overcome unfulfilling identities, to overcome guilt, to become more obedient, to increase our trust in God, and to overcome our pride. It is spiritual growth that will lead us to have the love God wants us to have. Through this growth we will learn to die to self, because our focus will be on pleasing God and not so much on ourselves. When we become less important others will become more important to us. We will become less judgmental, more forgiving, and more understanding of others. When we can develop these qualities we will then have a much easier time loving those who we consider enemies for whatever reason.

If we think we have the love God wants us to have then the bible challenges us to prove it! Saying we love is a lot easier than demonstrating our love. The following scriptures ask us to prove or demonstrate our faith and the love of God we should have in us.

1 John 3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth

The 2nd chapter in the book of James points out our faith has to really mean something and if it does it will show in our actions. More specifically, James 2:16-18 gives us an example of what our faith should accomplish. These verses state if someone you know in need comes to you for help and you just tell that person you wish him or her well, and you actually have an opportunity to do more to help and you don’t, then your faith doesn’t really mean anything. In other words these verses are saying if we truly have faith we should care about others and if we did we would do more than just pay lip service to them. If we don’t care enough to help anyone we know in need then we have to ask ourselves if we really have faith in the first place, because our faith should produce love.

This is the same chapter in James that points out even the demons believe in one God (vs. 19), so just saying you believe God is meaningless if there is no evidence in your life that He is making a difference. Like demons, you can believe God exists but have no desire to serve him.

How we treat other people is a great indicator of how much our faith actually means to us. If our faith is to mean anything the love God wants us to have should show in how we interact with others. This interaction does not have to always involve material sacrifices. We can pray for others, we can encourage others, we can counsel others, we can be sympathetic and show understanding, and sometimes all we have to do to make a difference is just be nice to someone.

We often underestimate how such seemingly little actions can make such a big difference in a person's day. Proverbs 12:25 tells us an anxious heart weights a man down, but a kind word cheers him up. I will go further and state sometimes just a nice smile can make a difference. There have been many times I have been lifted up only from a nice smile from some student I don't even know when walking by them on campus.

Maybe we already think we do a lot for others. Maybe we donate a lot of money to homeless shelters if we have wealth, or donate a large portion of the little we have if we are poor (students!) to the homeless. Maybe we are active in our church or active in organizations that focus on helping others. Or occasionally we serve in food lines or perform some other service to help the poor. As much as we may be doing, what we may be doing may be for the wrong reasons. We might be doing our good deeds only out of a sense of obligation or to convince others or even ourselves that we are such a good person. If any of our good deeds are to mean anything we must do them out of love.

1 Corinthians 13:2,3 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 have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

These verses make it so obvious how important love is if our well-intentioned actions are to mean anything to us as well as those we are helping. If we do not have love for those we are helping we will get little joy or satisfaction from our actions. Whatever we are doing will seem like an unpleasant chore. The person or persons you are helping will not gain as much and neither will you. It is love that comes from our relationship with God that makes our good works complete. It is critical to understand this because it is not our good deeds that get us into heaven. Jesus made this point in John 6:28,29 when he tells us the work God requires is to believe in him. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8,9 we are saved by grace and not works. Grace or works has been an issue that has divided churches and provided fuel for critics of the bible because grace and works seems to be opposed to each other. Spiritual growth will help you understand grace, works, and love are integral to each other and all are needed to have the life God wants for us.

Out of all the things we could possibly do to help anyone, helping them to have a relationship with God is what will make the most positive impact on their lives. This is a very important purpose for us. This is a major part of what gives us a meaningful and winning life because we will do what is needed to really help others "win". Our spiritual growth should make a difference in our lives that others should notice and one of the easiest and most effective things we can do is share what our faith has meant to us.

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

You should now be able to understand our love will help us be more effective because we will be helping others because we want to and not because we feel we should. Love will come

naturally as our knowledge of God increases and others will see this love in us. 2 Peter 1:5-7 quoted in the beginning of this chapter gives us qualities that our spiritual growth should produce in us, including love. Verse 8 tells us if we possess these qualities in increasing measure, these qualities will help us be more effective and productive in giving us the knowledge of Jesus we need to help others.

There are traits in us that prevent us from being able to effectively share our faith. We often feel ashamed to share our faith because we feel guilty about how we lead our own so very imperfect lives. We think no one will listen to us because of our faults so we don't even try to share our faith. Many fail to share their faith because they feel there is so much they don't know and they are afraid of saying something wrong. Another obstacle to sharing our faith is our pride. We often fail to share our faith with others because we worry about what they will think of us – we are more worried about ourselves than others. The following scriptures tell us not to be ashamed or timid and in fact be bold about sharing our belief in Jesus and his message.

2 Timothy 1:7,8 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,

People respond to sincere love. They may not agree with you or want to hear what you have to say but they will at least listen to you if they think you care for them. You could have the whole bible memorized and have all kinds of theological credentials but all this knowledge will fall on deaf ears if the person you are trying to help thinks you don't care for them and you are only sharing your faith out of a sense of duty. If we have love for others we will have a desire to share our faith because we will know from our own lives how God can make such a positive difference.

Even more importantly our love for others can make a difference between them spending an eternal life in heaven instead of hell. If fact if we really believed there was a heaven and hell how could we not want to do what we can to save those we love from a place like hell? What kind of friend are we if we make no attempt to make sure those we care about know what it takes to get into heaven?

If you saw a friend standing in the street and a car was heading right at them would you do anything about it? Of course you would, yet we are afraid to talk to our friends about God and the eternal consequences of not knowing God are far worse than getting hit by a car. How selfish are we if we put our pride (we are too worried about what they may think of us) ahead of the eternal well being of those we love? I will be the first to admit I am as guilty as anyone of letting pride and fear stop me from sharing my faith and is something I have committed to overcome with God's help.

This leads to the question of how do we overcome our fears? The first thing we need to do is trust God will equip us to make a difference in the lives of those we care about and go to him in prayer for his help. Then we need to build up our knowledge and our faith through spiritual growth. Chapter 11, The Game Plan, will guide you on how to grow spiritually. Just as anytime in life we try to do something new, sharing our faith for the first time we may go through some very awkward experiences. Think of the first time you dated, tried a new sport, acted, played an instrument, or tried anything for the first time. We may have looked like total idiots at first. But our determination and love for what we were doing helped us get past those uncomfortable experiences and our love of God and the Holy Spirit will help us do the same when it comes to sharing our faith.

My understanding that my ability to make a difference is a learning process along with knowing God's promises, His love, and His power has been what keeps me going when I feel like giving up. And believe me, there are times when I feel like giving up. But there are so many I care for deeply. I so very much want to contribute to showing them how to have the content and fulfilled life God wants them to have. I know I have so many weaknesses and so much of what I want to do is so very difficult for me to do. I know I make many mistakes. I often try too hard, say the wrong things, or don't know what to say or do (I sometimes try to do too much on my own instead of relying on God). But I would much rather try too hard and make mistakes than not try hard enough which is what I have done most of my life. I would rather make a fool of myself and risk rejection than to not do anything to help the people I care about because of my love for God.

I know there is a God that loves even me. I may not know much but I absolutely know there is power in prayer. I know there is a Holy Spirit that will help me and help you. I know God forgives us for our mistakes and weaknesses and He uses our weaknesses to make us stronger. I know a strong spiritual relationship with Jesus brings satisfaction, contentment, and joy. And above all I know there is power in love. Knowing what God can do in our lives to make a difference in the lives of those we love can give us so much more satisfaction than living for self-indulgences. It will help complete our sense of purpose and will make us feel good about ourselves for the right reasons.

What value is there to the world when we live to see how many toys (grown up versions) we can accumulate? If living for our own pleasures is our goal and we died tomorrow what loss would there be to the world? We may contribute to the economy through our productivity and this helps produce more creature comforts but we also take resources as we are compensated for our productivity. This is great if this is what brings contentment and satisfies our "hunger and thirst".

By now from what you have read you should understand what really brings us contentment and satisfaction. Our love of God, His love for us, our love of others, and their love for us is what gives us life to the full, an abundant life, a winning life. Caring about others and having others care for us is what makes this world a better place to live in. If we had the love God wants us to have we wouldn't have wars, crimes against each other, substance abuse problems, and suicides. Relationships would top our list of what is important instead of possessions and status. The most important relationship would be with God and His son Jesus. Can you now understand why there are so many scriptures that clearly point out it is love that will make Christianity work and it is love that will make a positive difference in your life and the lives of others.

We know how to love as little children. We unlearn love as we get older and are exposed to people who do not care about us. I believe this is often why many good people can seem so uncaring – they just have been emotionally burned more often. We take a risk when we care about others because the more we love the more rejection can hurt. This is why it is important our love is the unselfish and unconditional love described in 1Corinthians 13:4-8.

Life is full of pressures and disappointments and we may be hesitant to risk more disappointments and pain because of caring about others. We build mental defense mechanisms to ease our pain and we can start to think the best way not to get hurt is to not care. This is a concern I have for many because there can be a real danger they can become hard hearted in order to deal with the many pressures they face.

If we can truly die to self, this will protect us from being hard hearted because we will stop thinking about ourselves so much. If we really think about what causes so much of our emotional pain we will conclude it is focusing too much on our own feelings. There is nothing wrong with desiring the love of others but we set ourselves up for pain when we expect it. This is a real

challenge for many of us, especially myself due to my “codependent” relationship with my daughter. If we are going to expect love from anyone then it should be from God because He does promise His unconditional love for us. We can always count on God to love us.

You will discover the more you develop the type of love God wants you to have the more insignificant your own problems and pressures will become. You will begin to enjoy the success of others more instead of feeling envy. This is a great truth I learned while going through a very painful crisis with my daughter. I discovered the more I tried to encourage and help others the less my own circumstances bothered me and the more I enjoyed other people’s success. Whenever I could have the unconditional love God wants me to have, without expecting anything in return, then I found I could enjoy life to the full.

Love will make a difference! To illustrate this point, think about the very popular television show “Touched by an Angel”. There have been many TV series about God but none have been anywhere as successful as “Touched by an Angel”. What distinguishes this series from any other with a religious theme is that this show emphasis God’s love.

Love doesn’t just happen. Knowing God and His love for you will be what cultivates your love. As your love grows you will begin to experience a joy and happiness you have not experienced before. You will know you are a winner according to God’s standards, and these are the only standards that really matter.

**All the colors of the rainbow
All the voices of the wind
Every dream that reaches out
That reaches out to find where love begins
Every word of every story
Every star in every sky
Every corner of creation lives to testify**

**For as long as I shall live
I will testify to love
I’ll be a witness in the silence
When words are not enough
With every breath I take
I will give thanks to God above
For as long as I shall live
I will testify to love**

**From the mountains to the valleys
From the rivers to the sea
Every hand that reaches out
Every hand that reaches out to offer peace
Every simple act of mercy
Every step to kingdom come
All the hope in every heart will speak
What love has done**

From the song “Testify to Love”, Performed by Wynonna as ‘Audrey’, On the 100th episode of “Touched by an Angel”