



## Love the Unlovable

Love.

What do you think of when you hear that word? What's your reaction? How do you feel when you say it, or when it's said to you?

It's a popular word in our culture. You might hear it used in ways like: "I *love* that dress!" or "Oh, I *love* lasagna." You might even catch yourself saying it to describe something you enjoy.

I wonder if it has reached the point where we could say it's so overused that it has lost its true meaning. Is the context now downplayed and dismissed to a simple feeling of joy or preference, missing the commitment element?

Let's spend some time studying this by journaling together. Anyone familiar with the Bible, knows that God has a lot to say about love. He defines what love is in 1 Corinthians 13.

### Life Reflection:

Read **1 Corinthians 13** and write out verses 4-7.

Another place where we can read about love in Scripture is **Mark 12:28-31**. Read also **Mathew 22:36-40**.

I read this with an image in my mind of someone feeling overwhelmed and in need of simplified instructions. "OK – so which rule should I focus on? Which is the *most* important?" I appreciate how Jesus responds giving His *two* most important commandments, not just one.

### Life Reflection:

What was Jesus' answer to that question? First, recognize that there is only one God. Second, love the Lord your God with everything. Read these verses:

**Romans 5:8**

**Romans 8:38-39**

**Psalms 109:21**

**Micah 7:18**  
**1 John 4:19**

*What verse(s) would you add to this list showing how good and easy to love, God is to us?*

Next, Jesus says to love your neighbor as yourself. Who is our “neighbor”? I don’t believe this is limited to our literal neighbors; those who live in close proximity to us. It means “others” in general. Love others as you love yourself. It’s interesting to me that He described how we should love God (with all your heart, soul, mind and strength), but there was no need to describe how to love ourselves. We’re good at that (for the most part). We tend to naturally prefer, take care of, trust, forgive, spoil, be kind to – ourselves.

Wait - *that* is the kind of love that we are to show others?

There are some people in my life that are easy to love and enjoy. And then – yes, there are people that just rub me the wrong way. They get on my nerves. They get under my skin. But then there are also people who have hurt me, who have been unkind and unfair to me, and who are not sorry for the pain they have caused me. God wants me to love *them* with the same love I pass out easily to myself and those that are easy to love. Whew – let that sink in.

### **Life Reflection:**

*Why? Why does God command this? Why did He say this carried the same weight as how much we love Him? Why can’t it be enough just to be civil, even tolerant with these kinds of people?*

*Let’s look at some examples of how God answers these questions throughout Scriptures. As you read each verse, take time to identify the “why” answer. Some may not seem obvious at first.*

**John 14:21**  
**1 John 4:21**  
**Matthew 5:43-48**  
**Galatians 5:19-24**  
**1 Peter 4:8**  
**Matthew 6:14-15**  
**Matthew 18:21-22**

Are you seeing what I’m seeing? It’s clear that it’s important to love everyone, even those that are hard to love. Perhaps loving them means first forgiving them?

But it’s hard.

As a young adult, after years of living with an abusive stepfather who had since passed away, I found myself at the altar after a service again. On my face, again. Broken and still not healed, again. I knew that I was not living like God wanted me to live, simply because I had so much hurt and harbored hatred in my heart.

Feeling justified in my inability to forgive, I poured out my heart and my hurt to God once again. I could feel God’s arms wrap around me. It’s as though He was holding me, rocking me and maybe even crying with me. After some time, feeling like there was no way God would expect me to forgive after all that I’d just recounted, I said **“He doesn’t deserve to be forgiven.”** At that moment I felt the sweet whisper of the Holy Ghost speak to my heart and say with so much love, **“Neither do you.”**

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He's right, you know. I don't deserve to be forgiven either. And yet He continues to offer it, setting the example that I need to continue to offer it. It seems like it might be more so for my sake than the ones I need to forgive.

### **Life Reflection:**

*How are we supposed to love the unlovable? What do I literally need to do? If you're like me, I need action points. Thankfully, God loves us so much that He doesn't leave us hanging, trying to figure it out on our own. He shows us how. Here's some examples from Scripture. Again, take time to see the answer to the question "How" in these verses:*

**John 13:34**

**Ephesians 4:32**

**1 John 3:18**

**Leviticus 19:17-18**

**Ephesians 4:2-3**

**Matthew 5:44**

Love; be kind; tenderhearted; forgiving. Don't hate; seek revenge; or hold a grudge. Be humble and meek, try to keep peace, bless them, do good to them and pray for them. Whew. It's a lot, but it's doable with God's help.

This message is reinforced in the story of Hosea and Gomer in the book of Hosea. Read **Hosea 1-3**.

In summary, the very first time God talks to Hosea at the beginning of his ministry, He tells him to marry a harlot. Hosea obeyed this outrageous request.

At first, their relationship seemed to be going well. After their first son was born, she strayed from their marriage and ended up getting pregnant two more times by different men. She was in and out of the commitment, saying she was sorry, returning to Hosea but then leaving again. Then, God told Hosea to go and get her. And he did! He paid the price of a slave to get her back. He said to her, **"You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you" (Hosea 3:3)**. He actually paid for her, brought her home, and eventually restored her to her position as his wife. Ultimately, he forgave her.

This whole relationship mirrors God's relationship with Israel and how Israel had been unfaithful to Him by worshipping other gods. But He forgave and continues to forgive. What a powerful reality.

Do you want to hear one more that is even more powerful?

**John 3:16** is likely a verse you're familiar with. If not, take a second to look it up. What did love drive God to do? Why?

Jesus died for our sins as the ultimate sacrifice so that we could live again. As He hung on the cross – with every reason to be angry, hurt and filled with hatred and bitterness for what had been done to Him, He chose love, instead.

Read **Luke 23:34** to find out how Jesus responded. By saying, "Father, forgive them."

He would have been justified to hold a grudge or just be tolerant or civil, but He chose love. He loves us enough to forgive us.

## **Life Response:**

So, after all of this – How do we follow His commandment and love like He wants us to love?

Forgive.

Even if they are not sorry. Love them and forgive them. Love them like we love ourselves. Love them like He loves us, and we love Him.

**This is not a one-time thing. Old feelings may try to keep coming up. People are hard. It's a continual choice. A commitment. A commandment.**

Take a second to reflect on the people in your life. Is there anyone that you're not loving like this? It's not too late.

If you can, listen to the song – *Forgiveness* by Matthew West. Listen to it, spend time with Jesus and start fresh.

Let's love the unlovable.

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